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Chapter 6

Processes of Positive Development: Classic Theories

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The youth had a great time at the Lawndale after-school recreation program. They wrote and produced a play, did other fun activities, and shared a great deal of hilarity. The young adult running the program, Julia Escobar, was skilled at organizing activities. She also had a special knack for making them enjoyable, and she instinctively felt that the smiles and laughter from the youth validated that she was doing things right. But Julia occasionally stopped herself and asked, is having fun enough? Is she making a long-term difference in these youths' lives? Are the youth growing from their experiences? Are they developing?

But what is development—or "positive development"—and how does it occur? The process of human change is not something any of us can readily observe, like we could watch a quilt being woven or a plant growing from a seed. It is an abstract process, unfolding over long periods of time, and partly occurring within the private thoughts and feelings of youth. We only catch glimpses. We are often only aware of development when a youth suddenly surprises us with a display of skill, wisdom, or maturity that we had not expected. For someone like Julia to facilitate development, however, it is helpful for her to have ideas about how it occurs. You need what is often called a "theory of change."

The academic field of human development has drawn on research to formulate theories of how children and adolescents grow. These theories provide concepts for thinking about the *processes* of developmental change: What happens inside youth, or in their interactions with others, that leads to this change? Each also suggests different ways of thinking about the role of program leaders, like Julia, in facilitating these processes. We are going to describe five of the most prominent "classic" theories and theoretical perspectives on human development. Each provides a useful set of ideas about how development takes place and how it can be fostered. For each theory we will present an example from our research that illustrates the applicability of the theory to what happens in youth development programs.

One of the messages of these theories is that young people have a tremendous potential for growth. Humans, especially children and adolescents, are highly motivated to develop. They have natural dispositions to learn and to grow. The enjoyment that Julia was so skilled at bringing out in the youth is related to these dispositions. The human capacity for enjoyment of challenging activities was probably shaped specifically for the purpose of helping us develop (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The theories we cover present development as a process in which these dispositions are activated. They describe the natural, positive dynamics of growth in young people. Indeed, the reason people in youth development sometimes add the word "positive" to development is to emphasize the goal of mobilizing these natural processes in youth (Larson, 2000).

Learning Theory: Teaching and Shaping

Many early ideas about human development, however, did not take this positive perspective. They saw development as something that adults do to young people. Adults have knowledge, which they teach to youth. Youth develop by faithfully learning what they are taught. When young people make mistakes, the teacher, parent, or coach steers them back on track. Learning is directed by a knowledgable authority.

The scientific foundation for this model is called *learning theory,* and early researchers who took this approach developed a robust science of how to shape behavior (Fester & Skinner, 1957; Hilgard & Bower, 1966). Much of this research was based on experiments with rats and pigeons, but the basic principals were found to work with humans as well. The key to learning in this model is the "reinforcements" that the teacher or trainer uses to shape behavior. If, in a specific situation, an experimental subject's behavior was followed by a reward, researchers found that the subject was likely to repeat that behavior again. If this connection between behavior and reward occurs over and over, the behavior becomes habituated—it becomes automatic in that situation.

A number of important and consistent findings emerged from this research. First, rewards are much more effective than punishment in shaping behavior. Sometimes punishment works, but other times it has unintended effects. A second finding is that progressive use of reinforcement along a sequence of steps permits the shaping of complex patterns of behavior. In the first step the learner is reinforced for performing one small component of the desired behavior, but through gradual rewards of additional components more complete behavioral sequences can be shaped. Third the teacher or trainer has to be alert that undesired behavior is not getting reinforced. For

example, when a youth gets peers to laugh by doing exactly the opposite of what an adult leader wants the youth to do, that youth may be experiencing positive reinforcement for this behavior from peers' laughter.

Early proponents of learning theory, such as B. F. Skinner, saw learning as a mechanistic process that occurs the same across humans and other animals. However, current advocates of *social learning theory,* such as Albert Bandura (1986), recognize that humans are conscious beings, and their conscious awareness of this process is important. For example, the reason punishment is not very effective is that it can make people feel inept—"I can't do anything right"—so they stop trying. Or it can make them angry and resentful, so they start thinking about how unfair the situation is, not about how they can perform the desired behavior. Bandura also showed that some of the most effective reinforcement occurs through modeling and watching others. When youth see someone else being rewarded for a behavior, they may say to themselves, "I'm going to do the same thing so that I can get that reward."

We observed this developmental approach being used by a choral director, Diane, as she taught her show choir a new song. She gathers the youth at the piano and has them start singing. But they are tentative and lifeless. Diane interrupts to ask, "What'd you forget?" One youth offers, "Take a breath?" Diane has something else in mind. Several other youth offer incorrect guesses. Unable to reward someone for the right answer, Diane finally exclaims, "TO ACT!" They go through the song again, this time with more animation and arm movement. Diane praises their improvement. Then she sings a line, "Go tell it on the mountain," and nods to the youth to repeat. Diane continues, "Over the hills and everywhere," and the youth repeat again. Diane has the youth sing the two lines together, and this time youth sway to the music, and Diane praises them again. A few moments later she interrupts and instructs them not to lock their knees, and that to avoid fainting they should stand with knees slightly bent with their feet shoulder's length apart. They continue until Diane calls out two girls who are talking and sternly says their names, then "Hi!" in a sarcastic tone as if to say, "Pay attention!" The girls get back on track, and in the end, all the youth are dancing, clapping, and strolling with arms linked while singing with spirit.

This rehearsal is successful in that the youth were engaged and learning from the instruction. In a short period of time they were singing and expressing themselves much more effectively. They had also gained valuable technical knowledge from Diane, such as how to stand. Learning theory suggests that Diane was successful because she made learning rewarding. She corrected mistakes; but she used praise rather than punishment to influence the youths' behavior. The one exception was her sarcastic reproach of the two girls, which may or may not have helped them pay attention. All and all, the

youth appeared to have been reinforced by the satisfaction of pleasing Diane, as well as by the enjoyment they experienced in mastering the song.

Learning theory is useful for youth development because it helps us think about what rewards youth are getting and the influence of these rewards. This approach can be a valuable means for adults to pass on knowledge and to shape youth's behavior. But it also has limits. Regardless of how positive adults are, youth are reliant on them for direction. The noted Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1970), argued that learners in this situation are in a passive and dependent role. They do not have ownership of the learning process, which can make them alienated and unmotivated—as happens all too often in schools. Further, they are not learning to learn on their own; they are not learning to be reflective and make decisions for themselves. By just trying to mimic or to produce what Diane wanted, these youth had limited opportunity to develop their creativity and a broad range of other skills for self-direction. Across his career Bandura became more appreciative of the importance of the active role of learners in their own development. But to best understand this active process it is helpful to turn to other theories of human development.

Constructivist Theory: Youth as Producers of Their Own Development

At the same time that Skinner and Bandura were developing their theories, other scholars were developing theories that saw young people not as passive clay to be molded, but as active clay that molded itself. Some of these scholars based their ideas on basic biology, and their theoretical approach is sometimes called the *organismic model* (Lerner, 2002). They observed that organisms creatively adapt to their environment, and that humans are particularly good at this. Humans are able to adapt by actively learning and figuring things out. Learning is as fundamental to our species as eating and breathing (Mayr, 2001; Piaget, 1967). In other words, you do not need to make young people learn, they are highly motivated to do it.

The most influential of these theorists, Jean Piaget, provided extensive observations showing how intelligent, creative, and motivated young people are as learners. Piaget believed that infants start with no knowledge at all; they do not even understand that an object exits when it is out of sight. But they learn through an active process of experimentation and making deductions from what they experience. Thus, by 6 to 8 months most infants figure out that objects continue to exist, even when hidden from view (Piaget, 1936). As this process of experimentation and discovery continues through

childhood, they gradually develop a complex understanding of themselves and the world. In adolescence, they develop abstract concepts like density, mass, the self, and how social groups function (Piaget, 1965; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Piaget is sometimes called a *constructivist,* because in his theory children and youth mentally "construct" these concepts through this process of active experimentation and reasoning. He saw humans as highly motivated to organize the experiences they have into concepts and theories of how the world works. One of the implications of Piaget's ideas is that young people learn best on their own or with peers—knowledge that is taught to them lacks the depth of understanding that comes from this process of figuring things out. This implies that perhaps adults should get out of the way!

This was exactly the philosophy of Mr. Baker, one of the adult advisors at a Future Farmers of America (FFA) program that we studied. He believed that youth learn by doing, including learning from their mistakes. During our research, the youth planned a day camp for fourth graders, and the mantra of Mr. Baker and his colleague, Mr. Jensen, was, "It's their day camp." So they turned all the planning over to the youth. The adults provided support, but the youth ran the meetings, generated ideas for activities, and did the grunt work. After an initial idea-generating stage, we observed the youth struggling quite a bit. They spun their wheels, and sometimes locked horns with each other. "They're driving me nuts," one girl said of her peers. But by the end, the youth reported having developed some powerful concepts about how to work on a project like this. These included insights on organizing effort, managing one's emotions, and working as a group (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005).

Piaget would say that this type of development is superior because it was derived from active experience. The concepts were not simply taught and mindlessly memorized. Consistent with Piaget's theory, our analysis suggested that the FFA youth's new concepts emerged directly from the challenges they had struggled with in their work (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005). Thus, the conflicts they experienced with other group members appeared to lead to fundamental insights about working as a group: that you cannot always have it your way, you need to pay attention to others. One girl reported learning that "everybody's gotta give and everybody's just gotta hold back a little bit." The youth's statements reflect a significant developmental change: a shift from an egocentric way of viewing the group to one that takes into account the perspective of other members and the dynamics of group functioning. The discovery of this change is consistent with Piaget's (1965) thesis that peer-to-peer interactions provide the most fruitful context for development of concepts about group processes and morality.

Constructivist theories, then, help us to think about the powerful natural tendencies of youth to develop and to organize their experiences into

understanding. Research using this approach can also help us to think about what level of concepts youth are ready for at different developmental stages. But there are also limits to this theory. The youth in the FFA program struggled in the middle phase of their work. Their motivation fell and some youth stopped coming, so never benefited from the learning experience. It could also be argued that they wasted a lot of time in a state of paralysis, and the day camp was successful in the end only because the adults began to take a more active role in providing structure and direction (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005). Research shows that when people lack expertise in a domain, they easily get stuck or flounder in peripheral details (Rogoff, 1998), as happened here. It is possible that giving youth a lot of freedom may be helpful for learning concepts related to working with others. But it is likely to be less effective for learning, say, athletic, artistic, or other technical skills. You might have to wait a long time for them to discover these skills on their own.

So, if a shortcoming of learning theory was that it risked undercutting youth's ownership of the learning process, a risk of this model is that when learning is entirely turned over to youth they may flounder and spin their wheels. Is there a middle ground that allows knowledgeable leaders to help guide youth in an active process of learning? Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and his successors conceived of developmental processes in ways that conceptualize adults and youth as partners.

Collaborative Learning: Guided Participation

A key idea for Vygotsky was that we should stop thinking of development as something that happens inside a young person's mind. While Piaget pictured development as coming from the child, Vygotsky (1962, 1978) saw it as coming from interactions between a child and other people. To understand development, he argued, our focus should not be the solitary individual, but rather on this shared interaction. Yes, children and adolescents gradually internalize what they gain from these interactions, but learning starts with the interactions, not the individual. Development is a collaborative process.

In this theoretical perspective, youth are still active producers of their development—we are not headed back to the mechanistic adult-driven theories of Skinner. But they are active in cooperation with others. In some cases these others are peers at the same level of knowledge and experience. A youth may work with peers to solve a problem and learn. We are going to concentrate on the situation where the other is an adult or an older, more experienced peer—someone in a position to provide guidance. Interestingly,

adherents of this theoretical approach now often describe this guidance as taking the form of "scaffolding." Thus, while Piaget saw young people as "constructing" development on their own, this model recognizes that this construction process often benefits from scaffolds. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this is not fixed and rigid scaffolding; it is creatively adapted in response to the learner.

An experienced adult or guide can provide scaffolding for a youth's learning in multiple ways (Rogoff, 1998; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). The guide may direct the youth's attention to important clues or help to simplify a task. The guide may model a behavior for a youth to learn or provide words that help lead the youth to key concepts. The guide may also provide motivational support by offering encouragement, challenging youth to stretch, or steering them away from situations that will create high frustration. This interaction between the learner and guide is a mutual process. It includes the guide making use of cues from the learner to determine what scaffolding (if any) is needed. It also includes youth requesting help from the guide when he or she wants it.

We observed this process of collaborative learning in a media arts program when the youth were starting to film their first videos. Each youth has developed a storyboard and recruited others to be the cameraperson and actors as they direct their piece. Hector is first, and has planned an animated scene in which two actors will quarrel, leaving one in tears. The youth have a lot of energy, but on the first take the filming is chaotic and actors are confused. Janna, the adult leader, steps in and asks Hector to explain the scene. When the cameraperson is confused, she refocuses him to correctly capture the progression of events. She also positions Hector next to the cameraperson so that he can see how the picture will appear in the film. For the second take, Hector is able to better direct the actors and crew on his own. When the next youth have their turns directing their videos, Janna continues to provide occasional input, but it is clear that they have learned from watching Hector and Janna's interactions. They demonstrate progressively greater abilities to think about camera angles, sound, and the development of a story. The youth had internalized the guidance they had received from Janna.

Janna provided multiple forms of scaffolding in this and other interactions with the youth. She sometimes broke a complex problem down into simpler pieces that were easier for youth to solve. Often her scaffolding took the form of posing questions. For example, she would ask, "Do you want her voice to be heard?" If the answer was yes, then, "The mic is not going to pick up from this far away. So what's the solution?" This led the youth to troubleshoot, zooming in and out, moving the camera closer and further, trying to determine what combination of lens angle and distance would optimize the

desired visual and audio effects. She also provided motivational scaffolding. As one youth said, "She gives us a little inspiration."

What is notable is that Janna supported the youth's active process of learning *at the same time* that she intervened to keep the filming and the learning process on track. Unlike the show choir conductor, she was not trying to shape the youth, indeed the youth described the process as one of giving them "freedom." Unlike the FFA advisors, she intervened in ways that kept the youth's learning from getting stalled.

Maintaining the right balance of supporting youth ownership and intervention, we have found, is by no means easy (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005; Larson, Walker & Pearce, 2005). When do you stand back? When do you provide scaffolding? This balance may also differ according to the situation, the age of youth, and the subject matter. Research suggests that in some domains, like moral development, youth appear to grasp concepts more effectively through interactions with peers, without adults (Rogoff, 1998). Perhaps that is what we observed with the FFA's youth learning about teamwork. But for other domains of learning and development, adult assistance can facilitate youth's learning (Rogoff, 1998). We suspect that some measured degree of scaffolding from adults is helpful for most domains, especially with younger youth.

When we are talking about youth-adult relationships as a vehicle of learning, there is an additional theoretical perspective that it is critical to include. Theories of collaborative learning conceptualize support as mainly an instrumental and cognitive process. But the feelings and emotions that occur in these relationships are also important to the process of human development.

Relationship Theories: Caring Connections as a Base for Development

Humans are needy and emotional creatures. Behind our public faces, we harbor strong drives, longings, and insecurities. It often takes little to make humans—especially children and youth—feel distressed, angry, or crushed. This portrait of the human condition is the starting point for psychoanalysis (Freud, 1953, 1961) and derivative theories, such as attachment theory, object relations theory, and self-psychology (Bowlby, 1969; Kohut & Wolf, 1978; Winnicott, 1975).

These theories see close relationships with caring adults as essential to human development. Starting in infancy, the child who is fortunate has a stable parent figure (or figures) who helps her or him to manage this internal cauldron of strong drives and feelings. The stability these children get from

caring relationships helps them to feel secure enough to take on new challenges. The relationship provides a secure base for development (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975). In addition, children develop through the process of experiencing need or distress and being helped to address it. Over the course of many, many cycles of distress followed by patient assistance from parent figures, these youth gradually develop greater self-confidence and greater ability to regulate internal states. These children learn to do on their own what their parent figures have been doing for them. They internalize a "working model" of the caring they received.

Some children, however, do not get this consistent emotional support—or get it only sporadically. Because they cannot count on support, these children are more vulnerable to panic and careening emotions. They do not have a trusted safe base to fall back on. Furthermore, without experiencing the cycles of distress followed by comforting support, they are less likely to develop healthy means to regulate their internal drives and feelings (Benedek, 1959). They are likely to have a less effective working model that helps them to regulate emotions—or they have a dysfunctional model (Magai, 1999). For these youth and even for those who did get this consistent support in childhood, early adolescence can be a time of new emotional challenges and threats to self-esteem. It is often also a time of greater autonomy from parents, which increases the value for adolescents to have this type of caring, safe, and stable relationship outside the family.

Youth development programs are one place where young people form connections with caring adults that serve this function. Mentoring programs, which pair youth with mature adults, are often designed to provide specifically this kind of supportive relationship. Research suggests that a long-term relationship with a mentor can help youth, especially younger adolescents, by providing empathy, acceptance, and help with learning to regulate emotions and threats to self-esteem (Rhodes, 2002). In other types of youth development and recreational programs, adults cannot have this type of close one-on-one relationship with all youth. But they can provide a stable and caring environment that serves some of the same functions. They can cultivate an emotionally safe setting that provides youth the security to take on new challenges and grow (Rhodes, 2004).

The role of program leaders in providing this supportive environment is most apparent when something happens that triggers youth's emotional insecurities. In a girls' basketball team that we studied, the girls became upset and fearful when they learned that one of their members had been briefly taken in by the police for assaulting another youth. Melissa, the co-captain, was a close friend of this girl, but said that she was afraid that the girl would become angry and "beat me up." Melissa reported that rumors were flying

and people's fears were getting "cranked up." No one could focus at their next practice.

The coach, Sara, responded by canceling everything else on her schedule so she could deal with this situation. She talked with the assailant's mother and decided that the girl should not be excluded from team practices. Sara, who many described as like a second mother, also made herself available to team members. Melissa had a long talk with her in which she was able to express her fears and get support. This talk, Melissa said, had a "huge" role in helping her get a hold on her fear: "I was like, 'Hello, news flash, there is no reason to be afraid of her.'" When the assailant—her friend—came to the next practice, Melissa walked up to her and gave her a hug, then "I just let her talk to me and spill her guts out and tell me her side of the story." Melissa said it still took days to fully get control of her feelings, to stop "pretending it didn't happen, accept it, and move on." But she described it as a valuable learning experience, "a taste of what real life is going to be like." She reported that the experience, including the support she received from her coach, had helped her "mature as a person."

The coach, Sara, had developed strong trusting relationships with the girls that facilitated their ability to mange and learn about emotions. Over the course of the season the youth praised her patience and commented that "She's really here for us." We were repeatedly impressed by Sara's abilities to create a caring stable environment that minimized the rivalries and strong negative emotions that frequently emerge in competitive activities. Because of this environment, the youth often seemed able to handle potentially threatening situations in very mature ways. They reported learning about their own and others' emotions. They came to recognize emotions as part of human relationships and learned to conceal, express, or "vent" them according to the situation.

The importance of these relationship theories for youth development is in helping us to think about how important relationships can be for young people. Many adherents to these theories believe that a child's core patterns of emotional regulation are laid down in the first five years of life, and one cannot expect relationships in adolescence to easily reshape them. Nonetheless, secure relationships with adults outside the family can make a significant difference in youth's development, including leading to improvements in their relationships with their parents (Rhodes, 2002, 2004).

We are also not suggesting that every program leader has to be as emotion-attuned as Sara. Indeed some researchers have downplayed this emotional dimension of program leaders' relationships with youth. Darling, Hamilton, and Shaver (2003) argued that when adult youth leaders are less emotionally engaged it makes it easier for youth to experiment and find out

what works for them. And some older youth report that they have grown by learning to work with an adult whom they do not like (Dworkin, Larson & Hansen, 2003). In many cases providing a stable context for youth to work toward some goal may best address many youth's emotional needs (Darling, Hamilton & Shaver, 2003; Halpren, 2005). But even in this type of matter-of-fact relationship, the adult plays an important, indirect role in creating a psychologically safe environment that facilitates youth to engage in positive development.

We shift now from thinking about a broader level of human relationships. Theories of human development are not solely the providence of the psychologists we have covered thus far. Sociologists also have useful ideas about young people come of age within a wider arena.

Sociological Theories: Learning Norms and Acquiring Social Capital

Sociologists see humans as social creatures. Development for sociologists is a process of coming to take your place within social groups and society. Thus, development includes learning the general rules, meanings, and ways of acting for being an American or a Filipino, for example. It can also include figuring out how to act and think as a member of a given religious faith, a member of a medical profession, or a participant in a specific youth program. Whether the social group is the entire society, a community of some type, or a small group, development takes the form of learning to follow or navigate the "norms" of that group. As part of this process, one also develops a social identity as a member of that group.

These norms and identities are acquired through social interactions. Early sociological theories saw young people as passive learners of these norms, being "socialized" into society (Wrong, 1961). In this case, young people learn from watching others, being reinforced for following norms, and sometimes from being sanctioned for doing something wrong. More recent sociological theorists stress that people are often active in this socialization process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Of course, when a young person enters society, many rules, norms, and ways of thinking are already in place. But youth may create new meanings for old norms. Or they make create new norms, as when a recent generation of youth started downloading music from the Internet rather than buying it at a store. As youth come to accept norms, new or old, they also become active in enforcing those norms.

These sociological processes happen within youth programs. While adults may try to set the norms for the program, youth do not automatically

follow them. They may modify them, adhere to them selectively, as well as create some of their own norms. Youth also have norms from the world of their peers, their families, and their families' cultures that they bring into a youth program. For example, youth from different cultural backgrounds have different frameworks for how youth and adults relate (Serpell & Hatano, 1997), which can shape their expectations for relationships with adult leaders (Villarreal, Perkins, Borden & Keith, 2003). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development (which draws heavily on sociology) elucidates how different domains of young people's lives can influence each other.

In an urban arts program, Art-First, we saw a process in which youth were socialized into the world of adult artists. Many of the teachers in this program were practicing artists, and through their teaching they invited the youth into their way of thinking and doing art. One youth, Marco, explained that artists "like looking at things at a deeper perspective," and he described having adopted that way of looking himself, along with a colorful style of dressing. Marco was learning and coming to follow the iconoclastic norms of artists. Other youth mentioned the openness they had discovered in the arts world. Several said that participation in Art-First had "opened me up" or brought "me out of my shell." In fact they were sometimes now impatient with peers at school whom they perceived as having a closed way of thinking. This process of development and change was an active process in which youth acquired insider knowledge about the art world and began to place themselves in it. Through their classes each youth was also developing his or her own artistic style, which started to give them a distinct artistic identity.

Usually the norms youth learn in a program are positive. Youth acquire norms to function effectively within a community, and they develop group norms for mutual respect and responsibility. Youth at Art-First developed skills to function in the art world and learned about viable career paths in the arts. But sometimes youth bring negative norms into a program from elsewhere in their lives, and these can propagate within the program. Researchers found that Swedish youth centers were a context in which the antisocial behavior of some youth was being reinforced and passed on to other youth (Mahoney, Stattin & Magnusson, 2001). Several studies have suggested that teen boys in sports programs get socialized by other youth into alcohol use (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In neither instance is it likely that the adults in these recreational contexts directly supported these negative norms, but the ineffectiveness of the adults in promoting alternative norms may have been a factor. Although adult leaders cannot force positive norms onto a group, they can play a major role in cultivating an organizational culture that supports prosocial behavior (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Another useful idea from sociology is that taking one's place in society involves not only learning things but also forming relationships of exchange. To successfully enter society you need not just the competencies stressed by psychologists, but a social network. It is helpful to know people! Connections to people provide information, assistance, and connections to yet other people—what is sometimes called *social capital* (Bordieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988). For older youth, knowing the right people can help them get a job, learn about different college choices, or chose a career.

Urban youth, like those at Art-First, often know few people that provide this type of social capital (Loury, 1977; Wilson, 1987). But the adult leaders were very deliberate about connecting youth with adults who could provide it, through special events and an internship program. Indeed as the youth had ideas about going to college or pursuing arts careers, they drew on adults they had met through the program for advice and connections (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005).

Conclusion: Theories as Tools

It should be clear by now that none of these theories is the "right" one. Rather, each may be appropriate for different youth, situations, and developmental goals. The purpose of developmental theory is to help us to think creatively about how young people develop (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). These theories (and others we have not covered) provide tools for understanding the processes of growth and what our role can be in facilitating these processes. Of course, theory alone is not enough to make you a good practitioner. Your toolbox needs to include the type of knowledge, intuition, and rules of thumb that come only from experience. But theory plays an important role in helping you think about the abstract, hard-to-see processes of change in youth.

A common theme across these theories (except early learning theory) is that development occurs through a process in which youth are active agents of their own growth. They drive development. They are not pigeons or rats who can easily be shaped by others. Rather they think, feel, and react. They pay attention to what the rewards are in a situation and they learn behaviors that help them obtain rewards that they want (Bandura, social learning theory). They actively try to figure things out by experimenting, observing, and drawing conclusions (Piaget, constructivist theory). They willingly enter into partnership with adults who can help guide their learning (Vygotsky, collaborative learning) and who provide a safe environment that allows them to take on challenges (relationship theories). They are also active members of social groups who contribute to the creation and reinforcement of social norms (sociological theories). Human growth is a natural, positive process.

A central message, then, is that development is not something that proceeds one-way from adults to youth. Adults will rarely be successful if they do not think about what youth are thinking, feeling, and relating to others. To unlock youth's natural processes of development, program designers and leaders need to listen and be attentive. They need to think about mobilizing young people's natural dispositions for growth—their eagerness to figure things out, their motivation to participate in relationships and social groups. When someone like Julia Escobar is able to facilitate youth's enjoyment of challenging activities, she goes a long way toward activating young people's potential for development.

Youth practitioners also need to think about creating a fit between what happens in the program and young people's developmental levels and needs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). For example, some youth—particular younger ones—may have greater need for emotional support from adults, whereas other, older youth may place more importance on access to adults who can provide social capital or the type of technical guidance that Janna provides in the media arts program. In optimal situations, skilled practitioners are able to adapt a program to individual youth's motivations and developmental levels. They find a "hook" that motivates the youth, or help shape goals that allow the youth to excel (Larson, Hansen & Walker, 2005; Roberts, Treasure & Kavussanu, 1997).

A second theme, however, is that this active process of development is not easy and automatic. Piaget had a very optimistic view of young people as organisms who are highly motivated and able to grow. But other theories draw our attention to obstacles that can stand in the way of these natural processes. The collaborative learning model recognizes that youth don't have X-ray vision. They are not always able to figure out what they need to learn and how best to learn it. They can easily get off track or have their motivation stalled. Relationship theories describe how strong emotions and insecurities can easily shut down the developmental process. Sociological theories call our attention to the norms, identities, and cultural orientations that youth bring into the program from other parts of their lives, which can be opportunities or obstacles for development.

Knowledge of these obstacles helps us to think about the roles that practitioners can play. Most of the theories suggest ways in which adults can help youth navigate this obstacle course. In collaborative learning, adults are guides who provide scaffolding in the form of clues, breaking down tasks, or supporting motivation. In relationship theories, adults can provide a caring, safe, and stable emotional base that quells youths' insecurity and allows them to explore. In sociological theories, adults might play a role in cultivating norms and helping youth to develop social capital. Across all these theories, adults need to find a balance between providing guidance around obstacles and keeping youth involved as critical actors in their own development. When youth are engaged, experience ownership, and can see an unobstructed path ahead, their energy for positive development is unfurled.

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Chapter 7

Resiliency, Protective Processes, Promotion, and Community Youth Development[1]

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In Chapter 1, we identified a shift in the way youth development has been conceptualized—from thinking of youth as problems to be fixed to thinking of them as resources to be nourished and engaged in community life. This line of thinking spawned a great deal of thought and attention about how to prevent problem behaviors, while at the same time thinking about how to promote positive development, a perspective evident in many of the chapters in this book.

One question we have not yet addressed is, "How do some youth who live and develop in less than ideal circumstances mature into responsible adolescents and adults, while others succumb to the pressures in their high-risk environments and get into trouble with the police or participate regularly in unhealthy and unproductive behaviors?" The purpose of this chapter is to examine more closely some important concepts related to understanding how youth are affected by and respond to their everyday life situations. The main concepts important to this chapter are *resiliency*, *protective factors*, *prevention*, and *promotion*. After introducing these concepts, we turn to a discussion of how youth development programs in communities can contribute to prevention and promotion efforts through an overall framework called *community youth development.*

Resiliency

In the last 25 years, service providers and social scientists have increasingly explored the concept of youth resiliency, reducing their focus on vulnerability and maladjustment. Several scholars—Werner and Smith (1992), Rutter (1985), Masten (2001), and Luthar and her colleagues (e.g., Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000)—have been champions of this approach and have devoted considerable time to studying resiliency. This shift in focus means that although it is still important to conduct programs and research that focus