Chapter 15
Positive Youth Development in Organized Programs: How Teens Learn to Manage Emotions

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15.1 Introduction

Adults must be able to manage anger, anxiety, and other emotions in order to lead productive and healthy lives. The ability to manage emotions requires handling "hot" emotional situations as they occur, such as finding ways to express anger without lashing out or to regulate anxiety in order to concentrate on one's work (Gross and Thompson 2007). Managing emotions also involves the ability to make use of the functional properties of different feelings, for example, channeling excitement in order to motivate action or responding to guilt with reflection on one's actions (Izard 2009). Emotional management skills are linked to a variety of positive outcomes, and thus understanding the development of these skills is important for the study of positive youth development.

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But mature adult emotional functioning is by no means a given – it has to be achieved. As young people move into adolescence, they become able to think about emotions in a more conscious and analytic way (Harris et al. 1981). Although emotional development begins in infancy, much of this early development occurs outside of conscious awareness (Calkins and Leerkes 2010). Adolescents acquire new metacognitive and executive skills that allow them to reason deliberately about their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Kuhn 2009). They become able to consciously reflect on their experiences, draw conclusions, and create strategies for navigating complex situations. These new skills equip adolescents to develop and apply skills for recognizing, regulating, and benefiting from emotions as they arise in the diverse situations and contexts of daily life.

In this chapter we examine emotional learning as a focus for understanding positive youth development and how it can be supported. Research and theory indicate that positive development occurs when youth are *active producers* of their own development and learning, especially as they move into the teenage years (Larson 2011a; Lerner 2002). We examine emotional development in the specific context of organized programs (such as arts, technology, and leadership programs) – contexts that afford youth considerable freedom within an overarching, goal-directed structure.

Emotions often arise in organized programs as youth work towards goals. Encountering obstacles can trigger negative emotions, such as frustration and anger; achieving success can trigger positive emotions, such as pride and happiness. This makes organized youth programs a rich context for emotional learning. Indeed, survey research shows that youth report more experiences related to emotion learning in organized programs than in school classrooms (Larson et al. 2006).

This chapter examines youth's processes of emotional development within these contexts and the role of adult program leaders in facilitating this development. We first review the literature on youth programs as contexts for positive development. We then address the question of how adolescents apply their new metacognitive and executive skills to reflect on the puzzling, not-quite logical dynamics of emotional states. We examine how adolescents learn about managing these dynamics. We then examine the practices of program leaders that support youth's emotional development. This is not a simple question: If youth are active producers of their development, what role, if any, can adults play in facilitating this process? Program leaders have the unique opportunity to be present as youth encounter the frustration, excitement, and boredom that arise in their projects. How do they help youth mobilize their cognitive skills to understand and manage these emotional ups and downs in their work?

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15.2 Youth Programs as Contexts for Positive Development

15.2.1 Features of Effective Programs for Adolescents

High-quality youth programs support youth in developing life and career skills (Hirsch et al. 2011). Effective programs have a number of important features that make them conducive to positive development (Eccles and Gootman 2002; Mahoney et al. 2009). We call attention to three that we think particularly important.

First, effective programs engage youth as active participants in program activities (Durlak et al. 2010). In programs for adolescents, the activities often center on projects, such as creating an artwork or a website, conducting a science activity, or planning an event. Youth are given agency in working towards a project goal – they exercise choice in the direction and have a voice in decision-making (Kirshner et al. 2003). Program leaders emphasize to youth that it is "your project": they want youth to experience ownership over it.

A second important feature is that youth typically experience high intrinsic motivation and cognitive engagement in this work (Larson 2000; Vandell et al. 2006). Many adolescents become highly invested in the goals they are trying to achieve, particularly when they can see a connection to their future (Dawes and Larson 2011). As a result, they report being genuinely engaged with the challenges of their projects (Larson 2011b).

A third important feature of effective programs for adolescents is that projects engage youth in real world (or real-world-like) work (Heath 1998). Work on their projects typically confronts youth with complex, real-world demands and challenges. Programs engage youth in open-ended tasks without guarantees about how they will work out. The problems they must solve to reach their goals are often unstructured. Furthermore, youth often receive authentic feedback – they can see if their project has successfully met their goals. For example, when organizing a community event, they can see how many people attend and how the people respond to their work.

These features of youth programs give rise to a range of emotional episodes that resemble those in adult work environments. Because youth are invested in their goals, when events are going well they can experience positive emotions such as excitement and satisfaction. But they also experience negative emotions when they encounter obstacles or things do not work out as they had hoped. Youth are not just learning about emotions, they are learning about the situations that lead to them, their dynamics over time, and how different responses lead to different outcomes. In an intensive case study of youth rehearsing for a high school theater production, Larson and Brown (2007) documented how youth consciously learned to better understand and manage these emotional episodes. This chapter builds on this work, exploring these processes in greater depth.

15.2.2 The Role of Program Leaders in Supporting Youth's Work

Effective program leaders play important roles in facilitating youth's work and learning. They help cultivate the program environment, helping youth feel physically and psychologically safe. Program leaders model and encourage youth to treat each other respectfully and foster collaboration. They also cultivate trust and a sense of belonging, which provide key foundations for youth participation and positive development (Eccles and Gootman 2002; Lerner et al. 2009). Effective youth program leaders often relate to youth in ways that bridge the role of friend, adult mentor, teacher, or parent (Walker 2011). This can provide an opening for youth to seek emotional support and guidance, sharing their personal feelings and asking for advice (Hirsch et al. 2011).

Leaders thus help create conditions that influence youth's emotional learning. In the study of a high school theater program, Larson and Brown (2007) found that the adult leaders cultivated high standards that contributed to youth experiencing certain types of emotional episodes, such as anxiety about performing before an audience and stress in preparation for the show. Yet the leaders also cultivated a program culture in which emotions were acknowledged and discussed. They modeled and provided youth with strategies for handling emotions. Here we delve more deeply into how effective leaders help youth learn more directly from the youth's experiences of emotional episodes.

15.3 A Study of Emotional Development in Four Youth Programs

In this chapter we examine youth's processes of emotional learning in four afterschool programs and how leaders support that learning. We draw on theory and empirical findings to build empirically grounded theory about how these processes play out.

The four programs in the current study all engage youth in projects where they are working toward goals. The programs involve a range of projects. At *Community House,*[1] youth engage in science learning and carry out technology projects, such as making their own web pages. At *The Station*, youth organize community events, such as music concerts. At the *Celina Boys and Girls Club*, youth plan and lead community service events. At *Unified Youth*, teens create public service announcements to disseminate ideas and information on important topics to other youth and to community members. The adult leaders in all four programs were experienced youth professionals.

We conducted structured individual interviews with adolescents and leaders in these four programs. Youth, ages 12–18, responded to questions about their experiences of

[1] All names of programs, youth, and leaders are pseudonyms.

anger, frustration, and other emotions in the program (e.g., "During the last month, was there a time you felt worried or nervous about your work in the program?"). For each emotional experience, they were asked what *caused* it, how it had *influenced* them, how they *handled* it, and what they had *learned*, if anything, from the experience. In separate interviews, the adult program leaders were asked to describe how they work with youth to support learning, including emotional learning. Data were analyzed using grounded theory and related techniques for qualitative data.

In the next section we examine youth's processes of emotional learning within these programs. In the following section, we analyze how leaders supported these processes.

15.4 Youth as Agents of Their Emotional Development

The youth in these four programs had many opportunities to experience and learn about emotions. Their work created conditions for emotions to occur. Youth at The Station, for example, really cared about music and wanted to put on the best shows possible. Across programs, youth were taking on complex open-ended tasks and trying to solve problems they had never encountered before (Salusky et al. 2012).

It is not surprising then, that the youth encountered a range of strong emotions while pursuing their goals. They experienced anxiety about how to proceed, frustration when peers were not helping out, and anger when someone interfered with their plans. These emotions can disrupt work, for example, by distracting concentration or provoking group conflict (Grawitch and Munz 2005). As in the study of the theater program (Larson and Brown 2007), youth also reported experiencing powerful positive emotions, including excitement about their work and satisfaction when completing a project successfully. But we are going to focus primarily on youth's learning about negative emotions, since these emotions tend to be more difficult to manage in ways that foster work and learning (Baumeister et al. 2001).

15.4.1 Learning to Regulate Emotions

Most discussions of emotional development emphasize the importance of acquiring abilities to control negative emotions (Izard et al. 2008). Youth programs provide opportunities for adolescents to develop strategies for regulating emotions in the context of meaningful projects. Let us provide an example. Debra Napolez, a teen at Unified Youth, was preparing a presentation for a big audience of people from a community organization, and she experienced episodes of anxiety. This was a large and novel task for her, and she was worried that people in the audience "weren't going to listen, that they weren't going to get anything out of it."

Adolescents are at an age when they have the potential to understand abstract psychological phenomena, like the pernicious dynamics of worry. Feelings of anxiety and worry can fuel ruminative brooding on negative thoughts and feelings

(Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008). But Debra gained experience dealing with these dynamics. As she worked on the presentation, she reported learning to "just stay focused on the topic. I don't go off thinking 'what if, what if that, what if this.'" When asked how she learned not to focus on what might go wrong, she explained, "I guess by doing it so many times that I just figured that that wasn't the right thing. That's what made me worried, thinking that." She had figured out a way to avoid the self-perpetuating cycle of worry. As a result of this strategy, she was able to keep on task and contribute to a successful presentation. Other youth reported similar process of observing and learning strategies for regulating anxiety. For example, Adeline Tamsin at The Station described learning to get started on a task rather than "sit around freaking out about it."

Anger is another emotion that can run out of control. It can be even more problematic than anxiety, because anger can lead to verbal or physical aggression. Youth in these programs described experiences learning to regulate anger and the related emotion of frustration that arose in their work.

Madelyn Brooks described feeling angry because other youth were not helping with a project: "The other members weren't focusing so we can get it done. I was just totally out of patience … I was about to yell some things." But rather than yelling, she stopped to reflect:

> I had to keep in mind where I was, who I was around, and who my peers were. So then I'm like, "Okay, what if we do this?" So I bring up ideas and try to get everybody back on task. It worked, because eventually we got back on task and got to work.

Madelyn and other teens in our research describe learning to brainstorm potential alternatives for dealing with negative emotions. Rather than letting her anger get the best of her, Madelyn thought about what might help get her teammates back on board, tried it, and noticed that it worked.

Alexis Roscoe at the Celina Boys and Girls Club described a different lesson about regulating anger. She became angry at herself when she had ideas for improving her project at the last minute – when it was too late to make changes. She wanted to act on her anger by yelling and giving up. But Alexis described handling it in a way that would not interfere with her work. She recalled, "I learned that you gotta kinda tone it down, keep it modest, keep it within, and just kinda let it mellow itself out until you can find somebody to talk to about the situation." She was learning new ways of managing her feelings.

The teens in our research described numerous similar situations in which they experienced anxiety and anger. They noticed the urge to yell or respond reflexively to these emotions – what emotion researchers describe as "felt action tendencies" (Fridja 1986). Yet, many youth were able to resist the felt urge and to try different strategies for managing the dynamics of anger and anxiety. They were able to recognize and accept negative emotions, breaking the self-perpetuating cycles by addressing the cause, and considering alternative ways to handle them.

We have found that teens in programs learn to regulate emotions through repeated experiences of trial, error, and reflection. They are active in deliberately experimenting with different strategies.

15.4.2 Learning to Use Emotions

Much discussion of emotional learning stops here. This is especially true when discussing the emotions of adolescents. Current adolescent scholars portray emotions as troublesome internal forces that "hijack" young people's thought processes; the message is that youth need to learn to control emotions (Dahl 2004; Steinberg 2007). But, as noted earlier, emotions have adaptive functions. Some youth spoke not only of learning to regulate negative emotions, but also of *learning to use these emotions in constructive ways*. Most salient in youth's accounts was learning to use the motivational and attentional functions of emotions.

15.4.2.1 Motivational Function

Within the current study, youth reported noticing how emotions influenced their motivation. For example, a youth explained how she was motivated by the worry she experienced in her work at the Celina Boys and Girls Club:

> Well I don't like being worried. If I can figure something out and I am worried about it, I just like plan harder. It's just something that goes on in my head. Something just clicks, "Try harder, don't give up."

Her observation fits with the concept that a key function of emotions is to motivate thoughts and behaviors related to one's goals (Izard 2009).

Another youth on a sports team in the same program described how negative emotions motivated him to learn:

> I was mad because I knew we could get to the playoffs, or the championship, if we do better. And I was scared because I didn't think we would get better. [So] I started practicing. I would practice more by myself so I could get better and release frustration. It made me practice harder.

He and other youth recognized that even if an emotion felt unpleasant, it could motivate them into positive action.

Youth also described learning about motivational aspects of positive emotions. One of the youth said she learned that if you want to have the feeling of being really satisfied you, need to keep up with your work and accomplish your goals. Similarly, in the previous study of a theater program, youth learned to use excitement to sustain their motivation in rehearsals (Larson and Brown 2007).

15.4.2.2 Attentional Function

Emotion theorists have also described the role of emotions in arousing and focusing attention. Cannon (1932) stressed their role in directing attention to basic survival needs, while more recent theorists recognize that emotions can also focus attention to higher-order goals (Gross and Thompson 2007). Teens in the four programs

described learning to use these attentional functions from their work on their projects.

Alexis described learning about how the aroused state of anger can have positive functions:

> Sometimes when you're heated, at your hottest moment or your most mad moments, you come up with some stuff you wouldn't have thought of if you were just calm and mellow. Because when you get mad you see things that you didn't see: certain different things come to your mind, and you look at things differently.

She decided instead of giving up to focus on what she could do differently next time. In line with this way of thinking, Alexis's advice to others was: "Don't get angry, as angry as you normally would. Don't let it affect your work after that point. Take that being mad and turn it into something great." This ability to reflect on one's emotions and respond in constructive ways can be considered a useful and sophisticated emotional skill (Izard et al. 2008).

Other youth describe similar learning about worry. A teen who had a writing deadline for the program newsletter said that feeling worried made him "more focused." Some of the youth observed that these beneficial aspects of emotions were experienced when they felt the emotion but not too strongly. One noted that worry "shows that I actually care about doing things right, but I don't think it has to go to the extent that I feel it." This observation is consistent with research showing that a moderate level of emotional arousal fosters adaptive responding (Bradley 2000).

These adolescents were learning to *harness* the attentional and motivational properties of emotions. The youth's descriptions reflect understanding of and utilization of a core principle in affective science: that emotions have functional value and, if managed effectively, can inform and motivate progress towards goals (Baumeister et al. 2007; Schwarz and Clore 2007).

15.4.3 Conclusions: Youth's Learning Process

These youth's accounts suggest teens are not simply pawns of emotions, but can learn to stand back and consider alternative responses. They can learn to manage anger and worry in ways that allow them to focus attention on the task at hand, and work effectively with others. Even when they feel like yelling at teammates out of anger or giving up out of fear of failing, they can consider alternative possibilities and choose an approach that keeps them working towards their goals.

Of course not all youth in our research realized this potential of learning to reflect on emotions. For some, their main strategy was suppression trying not to think about what they were feeling. Some expressed difficulty managing their emotions in positive ways. For example, one youth said, "When I'm angry or frustrated, I tend to procrastinate."

Yet many were actively developing these skills. Because they were devoted to their projects, they were invested in managing their emotions in ways that would

help them achieve their goals. Youth, such as Madelyn, realized that attacking others out of anger would interfere with the goals they were seeking to accomplish. They were learning to stop, analyze, and choose a constructive response. Some learned to *use* the functional properties of emotions. Through processing multiple experiences of emotion, teens are able to apply their new metacognitive potentials to develop sophisticated skills for managing emotions.

15.5 The Role of Program Leaders in Supporting Youth's Emotional Development

How can program leaders help youth with the conscious developmental processes just described? Emotional learning requires understanding abstract and complex yet powerful "felt tendencies." If youth learn through their own experience, what role can leaders play? In the analysis of our data we found that program leaders play a key role by *coaching* youth in situations in which emotions arise.

The concept of "emotion coaching" was identified in research on how parents help young children learn about emotions (Gottman et al. 1996, 1997). Emotion coaching is defined as providing supportive guidance for understanding and handling emotions. A distinguishing feature of emotion coaching is viewing negative emotions as opportunities for connection and learning, rather than as problems to be avoided. Research has shown that children and adolescents whose parents provide emotion coaching become better able to regulate anger and experience greater psychological adjustment (e.g., Katz and Hunter 2007; Stocker et al. 2007).

The research on emotion coaching to date has focused on parents. In the current study, we identified three types of emotion coaching leaders provided to youth: fostering awareness and reflection, suggesting strategies, and encouraging problem solving.

15.5.1 Fostering Awareness and Reflection

The ability to label and differentiate emotions is fundamental to developing emotion competence (Izard et al. 2008; Brackett et al. 2011). We found, first, that leaders coached youth to identify emotions and the situations that triggered them. Leaders monitored youth's emotions and called attention to them before problems erupted. Vanessa Walker, a leader at the Celina Boys and Girls Club, described how she notices when youth look upset and asks if something is troubling them. "I ask them 'Well, what happened? You're usually this way in this situation, and [today] you was down low. Talk to me. What's going on? Because I've seen that you just wasn't in it today." She said youth often responded by explaining what has been troubling them, such as a problem with friends or family. By asking youth to talk about how

they are feeling and what situations caused them to feel that way, leaders helped youth learn to apply their ability for self-reflection to understanding emotional episodes.

Youth confirmed that leaders played this role of encouraging them to talk about whatever was bothering them. For example, a teen described how she learned from the leaders to ask others for help when she was feeling worried about her work on a community service event. "I learned not to keep it to myself and to talk about how I am feeling." She explained that the leaders "are the ones that influence me to not keep everything to myself all the time."

Rather than minimizing youth's troubles or simply telling them to cheer up, the leaders encouraged them to talk about negative emotions and interpret what caused them. These conversations helped youth learn to verbally label emotions and reflect on what may have triggered the emotions. This process is key because emotions are in many ways abstract phenomena, involving diverse visceral cues and behavioral urges, which can be difficult to recognize. Identifying the contributing causes of emotions—ranging from physical factors (such as lack of sleep) to social interactions, environmental conditions, and recalled experiences—is also a complex skill, for which coaching can be helpful.

15.5.2 Suggesting Strategies

The second approach leaders used was coaching youth to consider and apply adaptive strategies for managing emotions. Coaching on strategies was most common for anger and frustration. For example, a teen described how a competing debate team was being disrespectful and made her and her teammates angry. She explained that she learned ways to handle her anger by listening to the leaders coach another youth. "It was when another student got mad; so they just told [the student] to leave, calm down, walk around the building, come back with a better attitude and overlook what the other person says, just don't listen to them." By recommending strategies for handling anger, leaders help youth learn to consciously reflect on emotion and consider alternative responses.

A program leader at the Community House explained how she attends to youth's level of frustration and then provides various alternative strategies:

> Any time they are feeling frustrated I try to keep tabs on that and keep track of what level of frustration they are at. I mean, if they are hugely frustrated, I will tell them to go take a break or start doing something else for a little while. Or I'll sit with them and try to work through it, or pair them up with a mentor, someone who is more experienced who can help them work through it.

This leader emphasized that learning to deal with frustration is "a huge skill." Thus, she suggests a set of strategies to help youth work through their feelings of frustration.

A teen in the theater program, studied by Larson and Brown (2007), described learning from one of the leaders to deal with his frustration by "channeling it through my singing and acting." Rather than allowing frustration to get in the way of progress, the leader coached the youth to harness the motivational aspect of frustration into constructive activity. This type of coaching can contribute to youth's ability to use emotions as motivation for working towards their goals.

15.5.3 Encouraging Problem Solving

The third way that leaders coached youth was by providing encouragement to problem solve and persist in emotionally challenging situations. Leaders prompted youth to work through frustration and anxiety rather than giving up.

Ana Guzmán, a teen at Community House, described being challenged by the program leader to deal with her fear of writing:

> When [the leader] told us that we're gonna do a magazine – I hate writing, I hate it, I hate it, I hate it – and I'm like, "Oh I don't think I'm gonna be able to do the program. Because you know I've just never been good at writing and I don't think I'll make a good enough article for this." And she's like, "No, you could try, you could try."… She told me, "You just need to get away from your fear. Maybe you're not afraid of writing, but you're just stuck on the fact, 'Oh no, I suck at writing, I suck at writing,' so that's why you're scared of doing the project." That's what kind of got me excited. And then once I started working on it and looking into the topic and interviewing people, that's when I got more excited and I want to finish and everything.

Ana actually became *excited* about dealing with the fear. The leader helped transform her appraisal of the situation from a threat to a challenge. The distinction between threat and challenge appraisals has been studied in research on emotion and motivation for learning – the same situation can trigger different emotional and physiological responses depending on how it is viewed by the individual (Blascovich 2008). Challenge appraisals are associated with mastery and growth while threat appraisals are associated with fear of failure and avoidance (McGregor and Elliot 2002).

Leaders also encouraged youth to work through emotionally challenging interpersonal situations. A leader described an example of a teen, Jake, who had been elected president of the program, but wanted to give up when his friends were being disrespectful in a meeting. Jake was fearful of losing his friendships if he asserted his role. Based on encouragement from the program leader, he figured out a way to persuade his teammates to focus on getting work accomplished during the meetings. This type of coaching through difficult situations can help so that the next time youth experience frustration or fear, they may be more likely to see these emotions as a sign to problem solve rather than a sign to give up.

15.5.4 Conclusion: Leaders' Role in Youth's Learning Process

Emotions have complex, surreal effects that even emotion researchers struggle to understand; for example, they distort perception, thought, and behavior (Ochsner and Gross 2007). For this reason it may be hard for adults to directly teach young people about emotions and how to manage them. But program leaders appear to be effective in helping youth learn through their emotional experiences. Supportive leaders play the role of "guide on the side": rather than telling youth what to do, they coach. They notice and ask youth what they are feeling and why. They help youth problem-solve and develop options for how to handle emotional situations. Leaders also encourage youth to take emotional risks, for example, trying out new and thus uncertain directions in their projects, which fosters learning goals (Kaplan and Maehr 2007). These processes involve helping adolescents use their developing cognitive abilities to understand and learn from emotional episodes. As a whole, these different forms of coaching help youth understand the types of situations that trigger different emotions, interpret the complex signals and surreal effects of emotions, and develop strategies for managing them.

15.6 Conclusion

The adult "real world" that young people eventually enter requires managing complex situations. High-quality programs provide a supportive context for adolescents to develop skill sets for dealing with this complexity – including cultural competencies for working with people from diverse backgrounds (Cooper 2011) and strategic thinking skills for making plans and anticipating contingencies (Larson 2011a).

Managing emotions is one of these complex skill sets. Emotions, such as anger, frustration, worry, and excitement, arise as youth work towards their goals. These emotions bring with them their own complexities. For example, anger can disrupt work and trigger aggressive behavior. Yet these emotions can also be functional: they provide information and can help focus on attention on important problems.

Effective youth programs provide supportive environments for young people to actively engage in learning to manage these complex dynamics. Programs provide a context in which the nuanced causes and effects of emotions can be observed and discussed. We have found that youth learn about emotions through repeated experiences. They observe recurrent patterns in how their emotions change over time. They experiment with strategies, such as managing worry by concentrating on the task at hand. Repeated observation and experimentation help them learn to use the effects of emotions in constructive ways, for example, to channel frustration from setbacks into motivation to work harder.

Although youth are active agents of these learning processes, our findings suggest that effective program leaders play important roles in supporting youth's learning from emotional experiences. Leaders help youth use their developing capacity

for reflection to notice how emotions influence their thoughts and behavior. They encourage youth to consider alternative strategies, to problem solve difficult situations, and to view emotions in relation to the future horizon of their work. In short, experienced leaders help support youth's agency, but they also coach youth in navigating the complexity of emotional situations.

The current study builds on previous research indicating that organized programs are valuable contexts for youth to develop social-emotional skills (Durlak et al. 2010). Yet many questions remain. How might youth's learning processes differ for other emotions, such as boredom, jealousy, and excitement? Are there certain types of emotional dynamics (e.g., those involving egocentric bias) that are difficult for young people to learn solely from direct experience? How might learning through a structured curriculum complement learning about managing emotions through coached experience? What types of professional skills and training enable leaders to effectively coach youth through emotionally challenging situations?

Understanding adolescents' development of skills for navigating a complex world is a complex task. We think it is crucial to examine how these skills develop within nuanced real-world contexts. For our topic of emotional development, we believe it important to understand how emotions are embedded in dynamic episodes. It is also essential to recognize that emotions have deep roots in early life experiences and that they are shaped by interactions with family member, peers, teachers, and other aspects of youth's lives. Future research needs to examine how these different levels of complexity influence what youth can learn in a youth development program and how they can learn it. A central point we have sought to make is that researchers – as well as program leaders and youth policy makers – should not underestimate the capacities of young people as active learners. All need to appreciate the abilities of adolescents to observe and learn from experiences in complex environments – and the important role that skilled youth professionals can play in facilitating their learning.

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