CHAPTER 19

Cultivating Adolescents' Motivation

REED W. LARSON and NICKKI PEARCE DAWES

ORGANIZED YOUTH PROGRAMS—INCLUDING arts, civic, technology, and leadership programs—occupy a unique place in the lives of American adolescents. They provide a valuable alternative to the educational model in schools, an alternative that is more consistent with positive psychology. In most U.S. secondary schools, learning is controlled by adults, students are positioned as recipients of knowledge, and grades given to individuals provide a principal incentive for motivating learning. In contrast, many youth programs are based on a philosophy of youth-driven learning. Participation is voluntary, youth often work together, and program staff encourage youth to exercise active control over learning activities. The learning objectives often go beyond youth's acquisition of content knowledge and include development of more holistic competencies emphasized by positive psychology, such as character and life skills (Roth & Brooks Gunn, 2003). Central to this philosophy is the belief that youth's learning can be enjoyable, engaging, and self-motivating.

This idea that learning—and human development—can be self-motivating has been advocated by a long line of progressive educators and positive psychologists, including Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Bruner, and Csikszentmihalyi. They argued that young people do not have to be forced to learn and grow, it is a natural process—learning can be "intrinsically motivating." Indeed, research shows that when youth experience learning in a given topic area to be intrinsically motivating, they, first, want to learn more on that topic, and second, their learning occurs at deeper levels—young people gain more knowledge, not just of facts, but of underlying concepts and thought processes associated with that topic area (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shernoff, 2013). Intrinsic motivation can be a powerful "engine of learning and development" (Larson & Rusk, 2011, p. 91).

Research also confirms that this powerful alternate model of learning is experienced by many or most youth in organized programs. In time-sampling studies, adolescents report much higher average levels of intrinsic motivation as well as comparable or higher levels of challenge and cognitive engagement when participating in organized programs than during school classes (Larson, 2000; Vandell

et al., 2006). And diverse findings suggest that youth's experience of this motivated engagement is associated with deeper learning experiences and positive developmental outcomes (Hansen & Larson, 2007; Mahoney, Parente, & Lord, 2007; Shernoff, 2013). For example, youth in arts, leadership, and other types of programs report developing deeper process skills, including techniques of the activity and skills for managing emotions, strategic thinking, responsibility, and teamwork (Halpern, 2009; Larson, 2011).

The question of this chapter is, how do professional staff who run programs support this intrinsically motivated learning? That is, what strategies do these program leaders employ that facilitate and sustain youth's intrinsic motivation in learning tasks? The findings, we believe, have relevance to teachers, coaches, and other youth professionals who aim to support positive development.

We must note at the outset, that young people's intrinsic motivation in learning tasks is not always automatic, and the efforts of youth professionals to cultivate and sustain it can meet obstacles. Many motivational theorists (and motivational speakers) would have us believe that motivation is simple. But attempts to motivate young people can backfire (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Intrinsic motivation is shaped by many factors (Eccles & Roeser, 2009) and is subject to ups and downs, as these factors change from day to day (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Urdan, 2003). Even in effective organized programs, the leaders report times when individual youth or the group are unmotivated and difficult to motivate (Larson & Walker, 2010). Very little research has been done on how program leaders—or other educators—facilitate young people's motivation; but preliminary evidence suggests that, to be effective, their motivational strategies must be adapted to the broad social-psycho-ecological context, including the immediate circumstances of the situation (Kaplan, Katz, & Flum, 2012; Turner, Warzon, & Christensen, 2011).

In this chapter, we analyze the expertise that experienced professional leaders employ to facilitate youth's intrinsically motivated learning. Our objective is to understand the motivational strategies used by these leaders, the situations in which they are used, and the underlying reasoning that makes these strategies effective. Because our focus is on facilitating and sustaining youth's self-motivation, our research draws on both leaders' and youth's accounts of their ongoing experiences in programs.

UNDERSTANDING PROGRAM LEADERS' MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN CONTEXT

Given the importance of understanding motivation in relation to social-psycho-ecological contexts, let us first provide more background about the institutional context of youth programs and what is known about the factors that influence young people's ongoing intrinsic motivation.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

American youth programs have a number of advantages over schools in the conditions they can provide for youth to be intrinsically motivated. Unlike with school, most teens in urban and suburban areas can choose from a wide selection of programs that interest them (run by public, nonprofit, for-profit, and religious organizations). In addition, programs are comparatively free of the kinds of government mandates and strictures that dictate what happens in school classrooms. As a result, programs can be more nimble in creating activities tailored to the interests of the group of youth they

attract. They are able to provide the kinds of hands-on and personally meaningful real-world activities that even research in schools shows are intrinsically motivating (Faircloth, 2009).

Most programs for high school–aged youth involve projects, such as arts, engineering, science, or community projects. In one of the art programs in our study, the leader had arranged for youth to paint murals that were mounted at a metro stop. In other programs, youth created videos, planned events for children, and lobbied the school board. Coaches of youth sports teams often encourage individual athletes and the team to think about the season as a project aimed at achieving defined goals. This "project method" of learning, first championed by John Dewey, aims to motivate youth to devote a cumulative effort working toward defined short- or long-term goals. It allows youth to learn from experiencing the authentic real-world consequences of their work (Heath, 1999). In Dewey's words, youth "learn from doing." They learned from deliberate trial and error.

Projects and real-world experiences generally elicit high motivation and youth often become highly invested in their work (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Hidi & Renninger, 2006). But they can also present hazards for sustaining youth's motivation. In contrast to carefully controlled school assignments, projects are more open-ended and can career in unexpected directions. The literature documents numerous instances when, for example, youth became bored with the drudgery of real-world tasks, the murals youth mounted on the metro stop were vandalized making youth angry and bitter (Larson & Walker, 2006), and the direction of youth's work crossed unstated boundaries and upset adult authorities, who then shut it down (Ozer et al., 2008). An educational model aimed at giving youth real-world experiences and allowing them to "learn from doing" demands flexibility from youth professionals. They need to be prepared to respond to diverse situations and motivational scenarios.

Factors That Influence Motivation

To understand the challenges that professionals face in facilitating youth's motivation, it is also helpful to know what basic motivational research says about the factors that influence it. An important conclusion of motivational researchers in recent years is that intrinsic motivation is influenced by a wide array of factors at many levels of analysis (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Shernoff & Bempechat, in press). To illustrate this diversity, we review factors at four levels, giving special attention to some of the factors that will be relevant later in the chapter.

One important level is *a person's immediate experience in an activity*. Csikszentmihalyi's (1984; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1990) theory of "flow" identifies factors in a person's immediate interactions that influence intrinsic motivation. These include experiencing clear goals in the activity, challenges that are matched to your skills, and accurate feedback on your progress toward those goals. When people experience these elements, they are more likely to experience a state of intrinsic motivation that Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow."

At another level, psychological research identifies *individual dispositions* that influence intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory posits that humans share three basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence), and people are most motivated when an activity serves one or more of these needs. Additional disposition-like factors that contribute to motivation include a person's sense of efficacy in the activity (Bandura, 1997) and whether the activity is congruent with the person's values, expectations, and goals (Eccles & Roesner, 2009).

At another level, people's *interpersonal experiences* in the setting are critical to motivation (Shernoff, 2013). Do youth feel like they belong? Do they feel the people are trustable and care about them? Intrinsic motivation is shaped by ongoing relationship, including the relationships that develop in working together on an activity in the setting (Meyer & Smithenry, 2014). Research also indicates that *culture* influences motivation: Many of the factors just mentioned—such as needs, expectations, goals, and the dynamics of relationships—are mediated by cultural norms and ways of thinking (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

Together, these, and additional levels and factors, form a complex puzzle. To make things more complicated, these factors may change from day to day (for example, as a function of how well a youth's project is going). Furthermore, the set of factors that are most influential may differ from one youth to another.

How Youth Professionals Facilitate Youth's Motivation

All of these different influences on motivation are a lot for program leaders to think about! This research suggests they need to consider the full puzzle—ranging from a youth's immediate experience in a specific situation, to their needs and goals, to interpersonal and cultural processes. How do experienced leaders navigate this social-psycho-ecological complexity?

Our approach to this question has entailed identifying effective professional program leaders and learning from them. What motivational strategies do they use and find useful in the daily situations of practice? Research in other professions substantiates that over time most practitioners learn a lot about how to do their jobs effectively. They develop strategies for dealing with the most salient and frequent challenges they face in their work (Kahneman & Klein, 2009). Of course, there is not a perfect correlation between years of experience and effectiveness. We did not expect this approach would identify the full variety of effective motivational strategies, nor that it would provide conclusive evidence on what works best in every situation. Nonetheless, tapping into the experiences of professionals judged to have expertise is a good place to start in understanding a profession, especially to understand how it is practiced in context, in relationship to day-to-day situations.

METHODS USED FOR STUDYING PRACTICE

We selected eight high-quality programs with experienced leaders. These were programs that were identified as high quality by other youth professionals and in which we observed that youth were generally quite motivated. They included arts, technology, and leadership programs for high-school–aged youth. All of the 14 leaders in the eight programs were paid professionals with at least 2 years of experience. The sample of 80 ethnically diverse young people included 8–12 representative members from each program.[1]

Because our goal was to obtain accounts grounded in the daily experience of youth's changing motivation, we conducted multiple interviews (plus observations) over the natural course of the programs. In the interviews, we asked the leaders'

[1] All these programs had a youth-centered philosophy. Six of the programs were urban and two rural. Data came from a total of 468 interviews with 80 youth (31 European American, 16 African American, 27 Latino American, 2 Asian American, 4 biracial), 110 interviews with 14 program advisors, and 136 site observations (Dawes, 2008). The text includes a few additional illustrations from a prior case study we wrote on one of the programs (Pearce [Dawes] & Larson, 2006), and from two additional programs that were in the full study (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

about their role in facilitating youth's motivation, encouraging them to provide specific examples. We asked youth open-ended questions about changes in their motivation and what influence the leaders had in those changes.

The objective of our analysis was to identify and understand the most salient motivational strategies used by the leaders. We employed systematic methods of grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Nickki Dawes first coded the youth's reports on how leaders supported their motivation. She then analyzed the leaders' interviews and found their reports to be remarkably consistent (Dawes, 2008). For this chapter, we conducted an additional step of theoretical analysis aimed at more fully situating the leaders' implementation of these motivational strategies within their social-psycho-ecological context. This step drew on broader sources of knowledge, including other published analyses from the same data set and other research on organized programs.

NURTURING YOUTH'S EXPERIENCE OF AGENCY AND OWNERSHIP: "YOU'RE NEVER TRULY FORCED"

Western culture is individualistic and its members see self-motivation as linked to the experience of personal freedom and agency (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). In order to be genuinely engaged, people must experience themselves to be the "origins" or agents of their actions (Deci, 1975). It is not surprising, then, that the first motivational strategy that we identified relates directly to this: Leaders supported youth's experience of agency in their activities.

When describing how leaders contributed their motivation, youth frequently identified *freedom and choice* as a primary factor. For example, one youth, who we will call Chris, said that when he joined Media Masters,[2] he had low expectations because he thought they would be doing "routine work." But his motivation climbed dramatically after the first few weeks because the leaders gave him "freedom to choose whatever I feel like doing … and that's what's getting me into it." Some youth made this point by making a contrast to school. Carlos said he became highly motivated in the program Art First because, "they let you do whatever you want, like everything." He then described how "My photography teacher at school, he just gives us the work, he never really motivates us; like: 'You have to do this and do that.'" Lori said she was motivated because "you're never truly forced to do something." This freedom appeared to be a remarkable new experience in a learning context, one that that really helped youth get engaged.

But it was not just the freedom. Youth reported that it was also the opportunity freedom provided for them to *choose activities that were personally meaningful*. Ernesto said the leader "encourages us to do whatever you feel you're passionate about." Leaders frequently repeated the same theme. In an agricultural program, leaders said they encouraged youth to explore different activities to find one fit to their interests. In other programs, leaders reported counseling youth to make choices that allowed them to "find their motivation," develop their own artistic style, or express their interests. The Media Masters leaders emphasized to youth that "This is not school: You should allow your own ideas to shape your project, not what you think adults want."

A key concept the leaders used to describe this motivational strategy was *youth ownership*. Across programs, it was used like a mantra. Starting from the first day, leaders would tell youth, "It is your program," and "It is your project." A leader overseeing youth's creation of a video at the program Harambee said he helped motivate

[2] All names of youth and programs are pseudonyms.

them by making sure they had input at every step in the production process. Leaders reported that they encouraged youth to express their ideas and provide input. In some programs youth had primary responsibility for their work from beginning to end (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005).

This strategy of supporting youth's agency is congruent with motivational research and theory. Ryan and Deci (2000) have identified autonomy—which they define as experience of agency and ownership—as a universal psychological need and a primary contributor to intrinsic motivation (although, as noted above, individual agency is more highly valued in Western culture; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). In Ryan and Deci's (2000) motivational theory, what these leaders were doing was providing youth with "autonomy support."

In our concluding theoretical analysis, it was apparent that use of this strategy required a great deal of judgment and skill from leaders. They were *not* simply turning things over to youth with a hope and a prayer that that would make them motivated. They were active in nurturing youth's experiences of agency. First, in all programs, *leaders provided some degree of initial structure* for youth's projects—general goals, models of how the work might unfold, and sometimes deadlines—so there was a track for youth to follow. This kind of "appropriate structure" is important to motivation in many theories; in situations without any structure, motivation is often short-lived (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Second, as youth's work progressed, the *leaders provided judicious input on youth's work*. Youth reported drawing on leaders for advice on their work; and leaders sometimes offered advice or direction without being asked. Leaders tried to allow youth wide latitude for agency and for learning from experience. But they interjected input for a consistent set of reasons: Youth got over their heads, got stuck, lost motivation, or were headed in a direction that was unlikely to succeed. Leaders' input helped youth get back on track, move forward, and get remotivated (Larson & Angus, 2011a, 2011b). Across the programs we studied, this input improved youth's motivation because it helped them regain a sense of agency and control over their work (Larson & Angus, 2011a).

In sum, this motivational strategy was clearly not one of giving youth total freedom. It rather was nurturing youth's *experience of* agency—at a level the youth could manage and that kept projects moving forward.[3] This strategy of nurturing youth's agency involved a challenging *balancing act* in which leaders supported youth's decision making, but at the same time provided initial structures for youth's work, then monitored and provided advice when needed to keep youth on track. This requires leaders to make ongoing decisions about whether, when, and how they should provide input that sustains the forward motion of youth's work without compromising their experience of ownership (Larson & Angus, 2011a, 2011b).

SUPPORTING YOUTH'S SENSE OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY: ADDRESSING DOUBT

Carrying out a project often involves going into the unknown: Youth are trying things they have not done before—a large work of art, taking on a bigger role, speaking up in meetings with youth or adults whom they don't know. Research shows that exploring

[3] From the perspective of flow theory, they were helping youth stay or get back into a "flow channel" where they experienced challenges that were matched to their skills (Larson & Walker, 2006).

things that are novel can be intrinsically motivating (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Yet it comes with risks—including the vertigo of self-doubt. Bandura (1997) and others have consistently found that having a sense of individual or collective efficacy ("I can do it," "We can do it") is important to sustained motivation. Supporting and stabilizing youth's sense of efficacy was the second salient motivational strategy used by the leaders in our study.

Youth reported multiple experiences of self-doubt. With each turn of events, their expectations for the success of their projects could swing from the grandiose to the catastrophic. Doubt could cascade across all the unknowns in their plans, leading to their questioning the whole enterprise. Youth reported that leaders facilitated their motivation by providing encouragement, especially at low points. They said leaders believed in them. Alan in the agricultural program said "they're always there to fire you up when you're down." Paula at The Studio described how she got despondent when she compared her skills to her peers. But the leader's repeated encouragements ("See, you can do it!") bucked up her sense of efficacy: "I was very proud of my little ideas. As little as they may be, she supported me." Research on mastery substantiates that this is an important motivational strategy of effective teachers: To shift a student's focus of attention from comparing him- or herself to others to moving upward from his or her own current level of skills (Dweck, 1999). Whereas the leaders' first strategy, providing autonomy support, entailed managing the challenges in youth's work, this set of strategies supported youth's perceptions of their skills for meeting these challenges.

A notable finding was that this strategy sometimes entailed helping youth envision where their work was headed. Camille, at *Les Misérables*, reported being energized and motivated to keep working because the leaders "very much encourage us to look to the future and think about, like, 'This is where we are now, but tomorrow night we're gonna work really hard and we're gonna try to get this to this point.'" Youth's confidence was greater when they had a tangible vision of the path ahead. One Media Masters leader said youth's motivation depended on "those things that make them feel what they are doing good; that they are getting it; the vision in their heads. What they created from words is now coming to life." In a recent article, Bandura (2006) describes how forethought is crucial to both guiding and motivating effective work toward difficult goals. Knowing where one is going and envisioning how to reach it reduces uncertainty and increases sense of efficacy.

Theory suggests, however, that implementing this strategy in context present challenges. The danger of supporting youth's sense of efficacy is making sure that it does not inflate youth's expectations. Critics argue that a whole generation of American youth has been made insecure and risk-averse by a post-Spock culture of indiscriminate praise and support for their self-esteem (e.g., Dweck, 1999). But these experienced leaders used encouragement and praise selectively to try to reinforce effort and help youth get through bad spots (Larson & Angus, 2011b). Helping youth envision the trajectory of their work is an adroit way to reduce uncertainty and thus support youth's sense of efficacy.

In a new study, Griffith, Larson, Johnson, and Silver, (2013) found that experienced program leaders provided encouragement balanced with realism and honest feedback. The youth in that study reported that they valued straightforward feedback—and that it *increased* their motivation—because it helped them learn and do better in their projects. As with the other motivational strategies we describe, executing this strategy required leaders' discrimination and balancing of competing considerations.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS: FACILITATING BELONGING, CAMARADERIE, AND COLLECTIVE FLOW

The third leader motivational strategy that we identified was cultivating positive relationships. Research on school motivation has often concluded, put comically by Wly: "It's the relationships, stupid!" School motivation is influenced by students' experience of interpersonal safety, belonging, and emotional closeness to teachers and peers (Wentzel, 2009). Likewise, research in programs shows that positive relationships are important to youth's engagement (Hirsch, 2005).

Many youth described their relationship with the leaders as important to their motivation because leaders cared about them as people. Angela in the program El Concilio recounted a time when she was going through a rough patch in her life: "Robin like called me and she was just wondering how I was doing. And when I saw her concern, it motivated me, like, 'Okay, I see somebody does care.'" Similarly, Susana at Art First described the leaders' attentiveness as a critical factor in her motivation in program activities: "She's a very kind person who's showed so much interest in all of us, and she makes us feel very much appreciated, which is something that doesn't always happen with teachers at school."

Leaders also cultivated positive relationships *among* program members. At the beginning of the year, they created icebreaking activities and asked veteran youth to be welcoming to new members. As the year went on, youth said leaders encouraged them to help each other, work together, and see themselves as part of a team. Leaders described actively encouraging peer collaboration and camaraderie. Indeed many youth reported being motivated because they experienced a collective connection to their projects (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Pearce [Dawes] & Larson, 2006). Theory and research on intrinsic motivation often focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis, yet motivation can be a group experience (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Working together toward a shared goal, youth often appeared to have collective flow experiences.

Humans are social creatures, so it makes sense that leaders' cultivation of positive relationships contributes to youth's motivation. In Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, "relatedness" is a basic psychological need that contributes to intrinsic motivation. Collaborative work is found to promote learning, partly because it increases motivation (Rogoff, 1998).

Yet implementing this strategy of cultivating positive relationships can be challenging. Because of the importance of adolescent autonomy in American culture, many youth view adults with suspicion (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Many leaders overcame this distrust by relating to youth as friends; but this created the challenge of navigating the tension between being a friend *and* being the adult who has ultimate responsibility in the setting. They had to balance relating to youth in personal ways that contributed to youth's motivation yet maintain needed professional boundaries (Walker, 2011; Walker & Larson, 2006). In cultivating positive peer–peer relationships, leaders navigated a murky boundary between facilitating peer interactions that helped engage youth in the work while dampening peer dynamics that distracted youth from it (Larson & Angus, 2011b; Pearce [Dawes] & Larson, 2006).

Although cultivating good relationships may seem obvious as a way to motivate youth, adults' navigation of the dynamics of these relationships can present complex challenges (Camino, 2005; Pace & Hemmings, 2007). Effective youth practitioners have skills to develop healthy relationships with youth that recognize boundaries while providing support for youth to grow as persons.

BALANCING SERIOUS WORK WITH FUN: NOT PUSHING TOO HARD

The fourth motivational strategy we identified was balancing serious work with fun. Fun is a powerful word in American adolescents' vocabulary (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). If an activity gets too serious, it can become associated with the dull and dubious world of adults. Youth programs are a relatively rare context in which youth typically enjoy getting immersed in serious challenging activities.

Many youth attributed their motivation to leaders' efforts to make the program lighthearted, pleasant, and fun. For example, Tanya described how her motivation at Art First could wane: "Sometimes I get really discouraged or lazy, because we have to write so much, and since I write so much in school already …. But Rebecca tries to move away from that and make it fun."

Similarly, Krista, in the production of *Les Misérables*, described how the director, Ann, was successful in balancing serious work with fun by modeling an attitude:

> She's very into it …. She becomes one of us …. It makes the productions more enjoyable. And it makes you feel more at home, it makes you feel like this is a place where you can maybe not forget your obligations, but it's a place where you can put your homework on hold and enjoy yourself.

Our observers also reported that Ann cultivated humor and playfulness in rehearsal: Mistakes were met with laugher and gentle banter, followed by Ann gently turning youth back into working on a song. Note that both Tanya and Krista contrasted this approach to school. Youth felt that leaders' attention to keeping it fun (as compared to their more serious and dreary experiences in school) was important to supporting their motivation.

The leaders also described this strategy of balancing seriousness and fun. They were intentional in the selection, presentation, and monitoring of program elements to keep the light side in and avoid getting too serious. One Media Masters leader, Janna, said that her motivation role included "to make them laugh, to make them enjoy it." When nerves got frayed, the agricultural program leader suggested a break to play basketball. Neisha, a leader at The Studio, described trying to keep the youth "upbeat" in their projects: "It's hard work and it's a lot to take in. So I just try to keep making it fun … instead of like, 'Oh we gotta do all this work.'" Again, it appeared that judgment and skill was required to implement this strategy.

THE ART OF CULTIVATING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsic motivation is a powerful engine of learning and positive human development. When youth are self-motivated—when they are "psyched," "in love with," or "turned on"—by an activity, their attention is more deeply engaged in learning. But, whether you are a teacher, coach, program leader, or other youth professional, cultivating motivation in young people can be challenging. Intrinsic motivation can be fragile or fade. Youth professionals can inadvertently undercut intrinsic motivation by monopolizing conversation, giving students answers without giving them a chance to determine answers for themselves, using "should" too often, or having a temper tantrum that undermines their relationships with youth (Dworkin & Larson, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2008).

In the programs we studied, the *structured but open-ended* nature of youth's projects appeared to provide a key affordance for the experience of intrinsic motivation. Leaders created structures for youth's projects (e.g., schedules, standards, examples of

good work) that imposed parameters, constraints, and direction on youth's activities; and they simultaneously provided opportunities for youth's experiences of the agency, competency, and positive relationships that are important to this motivation. In a media arts program, for example, the leaders structured a sequence of assignments that each required use of different software to create a product. Within each project there were specific points at which youth obtained leader and peer feedback on their work. But youth had latitude for artistic expression within each assignment and they experienced competency in creating the product, aided in part by the feedback. Furthermore, the leaders fostered a program culture that emphasized mutual respect and assistance (Larson, 2007). This culture helped youth feel safe in forming positive collaborative relationships, which created conditions for youth to experience collective intrinsic motivation.

These leaders understood factors, such as sense of agency, clear feedback, and positive relationships, that research has identified as important influences on youth's motivation. They are central to the leaders' motivational strategies. Being an effective leader, however, involves more than knowing these factors, it involves translating and implementing them in complex and dynamic situations. The leaders in our research often had to *balance* these principles with psychological, social, pragmatic, and other situational contingencies. When and how long do you let youth continue with a project that is exciting to them but unlikely to succeed? Where do you draw the line between being a friend to youth and being firm in maintaining a safe and structured environment? How do you sustain the different factors that support intrinsic motivation without youth perceiving you as manipulative?

The leaders we studied were skilled in performing these balancing acts. Our analyses, based on youth's and leaders' accounts, identified frequent strategies that these leaders employed that involved balancing the motivational factors with situational considerations:

1. They used "youth ownership" as a mantra to help youth experience freedom, agency, and meaning in their work, which fueled their motivation. Yet they also provided input and advice as needed to help keep youth's projects on course.
2. They supported youth's sense of individual and collective efficacy, as youth went through the ups and downs in the work. Yet they tried to keep youth grounded in a realistic vision of where their work was headed.
3. They balanced relating to youth in personal ways that created conditions of social connection, trust, and friendship—which is important to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000)—while also maintaining professional boundaries that allowed them to exercise authority.
4. They encouraged peer camaraderie, yet sometimes had to address peer dynamics that distracted youth from their work.
5. They encouraged youth's engagement with serious real-world challenges (e.g., lobbying the school board, bringing the musical *Les Misérables* to life). But they also maintained a sense of fun and good humor.

These were the most frequent strategies that we found, but they are by no means a complete list. Furthermore, in addition to being attuned to youth's motivation, these leaders were also balancing other important professional mandates of their job, including keeping youth safe, teaching subject matter skills, enforcing rules, and keeping their funders happy (Larson & Walker, 2010). Leaders often mixed and matched different strategies, depending on the circumstances.

In sum, the leaders were ambidextrous in juggling multiple professional goals and applying them to varied situations. Future research is needed to further understand the guidelines and mental models that experienced leaders used to navigate different motivational scenarios (e.g., youth are overwhelmed by choices, bored with tedious work, frustrated by hitting dead ends, burned out because they set expectations too high for themselves). Research is also needed to understand how youth learn to manage these different scenarios on their own—and how youth professionals help facilitate this learning. In educational research, Hidi and Renninger (2006) identified stages in students' development of interest in a topic area, stages that are accompanied by increasing skills for self-regulation of motivation; and they observed that educators adapted their motivational strategies to students at each stage. The applicability of this model across different youth development settings also needs to be investigated.

CONCLUSION

This ability to balance and adapt to the different goals and considerations of daily practice, we suggest, is a critical component of youth professionals' expertise. Research across diverse fields of practice—including education, health professions, and engineering—shows that skills to identify and balance multiple considerations is a consistent characteristic of practitioner expertise (Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 2000; Ross, Shafer, & Klein, 2006; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). In preliminary research, Walker and Larson (2012) replicated this important finding with leaders of youth programs. They compared how novices and experts appraised and formulated responses to vignettes of prototypical situations in youth practice. They found that the experts identified significantly more considerations in situations and formulated responses that addressed a wider array of these considerations. The experts' responses were often multipronged: They did not just "balance" different considerations—in the sense of counterweighing trade-offs—they often found win-win solutions that seemingly addressed competing considerations simultaneously. The experts' responses also included more "if/thens" that involved shaping the response to situational contingencies.

We believe that preparatory and in-service training for youth professionals should be aimed at helping them develop skills for appraising the complex, multileveled situations of youth practice and developing their repertoire of nuanced strategies for responding to these situations. Researchers can contribute by continuing to learn from experienced youth professionals and from studying how developmental and motivational theory might be pertinent to understanding the complex, dynamic situations they navigate in daily practice.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Intrinsic motivation can be a powerful "engine" of learning and positive development. It is associated both with sustained participation and deeper engagement.
- However, young people's intrinsic motivation in learning tasks is not automatic, and cultivating it is not always easy. Motivation is influenced by many factors at multiple levels, including in the activity, in relationships, and in the dispositions and goals that youth bring to a setting.
- The ability of professionals to cultivate young people's motivation depends on their development of knowledge and skills for appraising situations and executing strategies these multiple levels of factors.

- Our research identified four frequent strategies that were effective in cultivating motivation in ways that were adapted to specific youth and situations: (1) Nurturing youth's experience of agency and ownership; (2) supporting youth's sense of individual and collective efficacy, including by helping them envision where their work is headed; (3) supporting positive and caring youth–adult and youth–youth relationships; and (4) balancing serious work with fun.

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