The Art of Restraint: How Experienced Program Leaders Use Their Authority to Support Youth Agency

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The staff of youth development programs perform a delicate balancing act between supporting youth agency and exercising necessary authority. To understand this balancing in daily practice, we interviewed 25 experienced (*M* = 14 years) leaders of arts, leadership, and technology programs for high-school-aged youth. We obtained accounts of when, how, and why they gave advice, set limits, and "supported youth when disagreeing." Qualitative analysis found surprising similarities across leaders. They used authority to give advice and set limits, but did so with reasoned restraint. Maximizing youth's opportunities to learn from experience was central in their decision making. They described employing authority in intentional ways aimed at helping youth's work succeed, strengthening youth's agency, and building skills for agency (e.g., critical thinking, "clarifying intent").

- I'm sitting here, not necessarily biting my tongue, but trying to guide them so that their project turns out to be good. And maybe they'll eventually realize they need to scale it down. (Bill Lyons, Unified Youth)
- The struggle I have is to try *not* to be like, "No, you have to do it this way" or "This way makes much more sense." And let them maybe try and fail on their own. Or try and succeed on their own. (Lora Parks, High Definition)

The challenging situations faced by these two adult program leaders reflect a fundamental dilemma about the use of authority in youth practice. Bill Lyons supervises a leadership program in which Latino youth plan events in their rural community. Because he wants to support youth's agency and leadership, he sits back from the table at which youth plan, offering only occasional questions or advice. So despite concern that the event was becoming too big, he muted himself and did not step in as an authority figure to limit their plans. Lora Parks runs an urban program in which

ethnically diverse youth write articles for publication. As an experienced editor, she provides input on youth's ideas and writing, yet she worries that playing this authoritative role undermines youth's agency, ownership, and self-driven learning processes.

This practitioner dilemma—*how to balance support for youth agency with the exercise of adult authority*—is identified frequently in the literature on youth practice (Larson & Angus, 2011a; Mitra, Lewis, & Sanders, 2013; Ozer & Wright, 2012). It is a central tenet of youth practice (Jeffs & Banks, 2010) and positive youth development theory (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009) that youth work professionals should respect and support youth's agency (choice, empowerment, self-development) as a fundamental goal, and research substantiates that youth's experience of agency increases both their engagement and socioemotional learning in programs (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010; Vandell, Larson, Mahoney, & Watts, 2015). However, youth professionals typically have knowledge and skills (expertise in arts, videography, editing, running programs) that could facilitate youth's work, and research shows that educators' use of their authority to structure and guide can aid learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kirshner, 2015).

Navigating the horns of this dilemma appears to involve difficult trade-offs and challenges. Yielding

authority may compromise a staff members' prerogative to assert control later, as Bill Lyons experienced. Yet even modest assertion of authority —such as Lora Parks's editing youth's writing— could lead youth to devalue their ideas. In the youth development field, it is sometimes assumed that a strong inverse relationship is at play: that an increase in adults' exercise of authority necessarily reduces youth's agency (Gordon, 2007; Lansdown, 2001). But this may not always be the case. Some authors have suggested that, to be effective, leaders need to provide "directivity and freedom at the same time" (O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007, p. 982).

This dilemma and these questions about the use of authority, Jeffs and Banks (2010) argue, are "at the heart of youth work practice" (p. 118) and are in need of in-depth examination. That is our goal in this study: to investigate how youth professionals manage their use of authority in their daily work with youth. Although many studies have examined authority at the global level of program philosophy and design (e.g., youth-led vs. adult-led programs), few have examined it at the situational level. We focus on decision-making on the use of authority in daily situations because research demonstrates that leaders' actions at this level are critical to understanding effective youth practice (Hildreth & VeLure Roholt, 2013; Ross, 2013). Further, we focus on decision making by experienced professional leaders, because we wanted to understand the skills they have developed—what Eccles and Gootman (2002) refer to as *practitioner wisdom*. Research finds that in most cases daily practice helps practitioners improve their professional skills (Kahneman & Klein, 2009), and this has led to calls to document the daily practices of experienced youth professionals (Granger, 2010; Larson, Walker, Rusk, & Diaz, 2015). Our research responds to this call.

We sought to learn about the *why, when,* and *how* of experienced practitioners' decision making about yielding and asserting authority. What are the rationales, decision rules, and implementation strategies they employ in the complex, multidimensional situations of daily practice? For this article, we focused on leaders' use of authority to support youth's learning activities, setting aside instances in which they exercised authority to control off-task behavior and address violations of program rules. The findings show surprising consistency across leaders in how they think about and exercise this authority. They share a judicious approach we were led to call the *art of restraint*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Authority

Authority has traditionally been understood as a fixed hierarchical relationship in which one person dictates and others follow. Recent research in the field of education, however, has led to new conceptions of authority as *constructed* over time through daily practice (Burbules, 1995). As described by Pace and Hemmings (2007):

> The legitimacy of teachers as authority figures is not something that can be assumed, but rather is granted during the course of ongoing interactions with students. Classroom authority is … built, taken apart, and rebuilt by teachers and students. (p. 21)

Teachers' ability to exercise authority is found to depend on establishing the confidence and trust of students, and on teachers' exercising authority in ways that are responsive to students' expectations, needs, and goals (Kitzmiller, 2013). The construction process can also be influenced by a wide range of ecological factors, including the institutional and cultural context, student characteristics, and how a teacher frames and exercises authority across different types of situations (Metz, 1978; Pace & Hemmings, 2007).

The implication for youth practice is that leaders' ability to exercise authority effectively depends in part on their doing so in ways responsive to youth's expectations, needs, and goals across varying situations. Deutsch and Jones (2008, p. 669) demonstrate the importance of studying leaders' "enactments of authority" in their daily work with youth. They suggest that effective leaders need to earn youth's respect and trust, and maintain a balance between authority and youth autonomy in daily interactions that aligns with youth's expectations. The experienced leaders in our study were asked to describe why, when, and how they assert and yield authority in daily situations. We conceptualize their responses as a record of practices they had developed over time through their work with youth, a record of leader's decision making that had been—and was still being—constructed ("built, taken apart, and rebuilt") through leader–youth interactions.

Youth Programs as a Context for Practitioners' Exercise of Authority

Youth programs present distinct and generally favorable conditions for practitioners to cultivate

this type of constructed authority; they also present distinct challenges. First, as compared to schools, programs have fewer institutional rules and mandates that require unilateral adult control of youth (Deutsch & Jones, 2008). Second, leaders generally have greater time and space to develop positive relationships with youth (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Rhodes, 2004), and this can help them earn youth's respect for and trust in their professional authority (Griffith, 2014; O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007). Drawing on data from youth and leaders, Walker (2011) found that many experienced practitioners are able to successfully balance the roles of being both a friend and an authority figure in their relationships with youth. A third feature of programs shaping leaders' use of authority is the project-based learning model used in most programs for older youth. These projects, ranging from planning events to creating artwork or videos, are often at least partly youth-driven, and youth typically become highly engaged (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Their investment in the projects' success could help build their relationships with youth and legitimize the role of leaders in providing assistance (O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007).

The focus of programs on projects also creates challenges for how leaders exercise their authority. Youth's work often takes them into territory that is novel and demanding. Young people working on projects encounter difficulties with unexpected obstacles, time management issues, and experiences of being overwhelmed by real-world complexities (Barron et al., 1998; Larson & Angus, 2011b). Youth's struggles—or the prospect of youth's struggles—can place demands on leaders to make decisions about steering youth's work, providing advice, setting limits, and other uses of their authority (Halpern, 2009; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Published case examples illustrate what can be at stake in leaders' use of their authority in these situations. When leaders are controlling or veto youth's decisions, youth can feel angry or humiliated and quit working or leave the program (Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Hogan, 2002; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Yet, when leaders yield authority and provide little input, youth can readily get off track and flounder in ways that compromise their motivation and learning (Kirshner, 2008; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005; Mitra et al., 2013).

Youth report that they often appreciate leaders' selective use of their knowledge and authority to help with their projects. In three intensive interview studies (with data from 25 programs), youth reported benefiting from leaders' direction and assistance "when we need it," for example, when leaders warned them that "ideas would not work," kept them from getting in over their heads, and helped keep their work on track (Griffith & Larson, 2015; Kirshner, 2003; Larson & Angus, 2011a). Yet youth are distrustful of adults who act unilaterally, without respect for their abilities and autonomy (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Noam, Malti, & Karcher, 2013; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2012). Knowing when and how to exercise authority can be challenging, especially for novices (Camino, 2005; Mitra et al., 2013).

This Study

This discovery research is aimed at understanding experienced leaders' skills for navigating these challenges in the situations of daily practice. Research finds that, across fields, effective practitioners have well-developed abilities to "read" daily situations, see them from multiple perspectives, and respond to them in ways that address diverse and competing considerations (Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 2000; Ross, Shafer, & Klein, 2006). They also are intentional: They have developed strategies that allow them to make decisions that align with the professional goals of their field and the needs and goals of the people they serve (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006). A preliminary study found these same general abilities among effective program leaders (Walker & Larson, 2012). We reasoned that these abilities for reading situations and responding with effective intentional strategies would be evident in experienced leaders' daily decisions about their use of authority. We wanted to learn from them.

To focus the study, we interviewed leaders about their use of three practices that represent differing degrees of asserting versus yielding authority. The goal was to learn when and how they employed stronger authority versus allowing youth free rein. What were the leaders' rationales and strategies for asserting, taking a middle ground, and yielding authority?

- First, we chose *setting limits* as an example of strong assertion of authority. It suggests leaders taking unilateral steps that constrain youth's freedom.
- Second, we selected *giving advice* as a leader practice that we viewed as representing a middle ground between asserting and yielding authority. It positions youth as actors and leaders as mentors providing knowledgeable input.

- Third, we chose *supporting youth even when you disagree* as a practice that would help us understand when why, when, and how leaders who are experienced yielded authority.

We do not claim that these three are perfect exemplars of the three levels of asserting versus yielding authority (we are not sure such exemplars could be defined). But we felt they would serve as useful *starting points* for initial descriptive and grounded theory building research.

METHODS

Sample of Programs and Leaders

Interviews were conducted with 25 program leaders as part of the Pathways Project (Proyecto Caminos), a mixed-methods longitudinal study of 13 programs for high-school-aged youth. Programs were selected that had experienced program leaders and appeared to have features of high quality. Following procedures used by McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994), we first obtained suggestions of high-quality programs from local youth development professionals. After visits with staff, we selected programs in which leaders had at least three years' experience working with youth and other features of program quality were evident (i.e., youth had active meaningful roles, low youth dropout rate, leaders described youth development as a priority).

Interviews were conducted with the 1–3 principal adult leaders at each program. The 25 leaders had an average of 14 years of youth work experience (range 3–42 years). Fifteen were paid full-time staff (5 part-time, 5 unpaid); 19 had college degrees (9 with master's degrees). The sample included 14 women and 11 men, with a median age of 35 (range 24–62). Sixteen were European Americans; 3 Latinos; 3 African Americans; and 3 of mixed ethnicity (Table 1).

Programs were recruited from three regions: Chicago ($N = 5$), Central Illinois ($N = 4$), and the Minneapolis-St. Paul area ($N = 4$). They included arts, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and leadership programs; 10 were community-based and three were in schools. We chose programs that met for at least 100 hr and that served working-class and low-income youth. The youth served were from diverse ethnic backgrounds (one-third each Latino, African American, and European American).

The larger study included four or more observations at each program, questionnaires administered to all youth, and interviews with a subsample of youth at four time points. Although not directly used for the analysis here, these data helped us understand leaders' accounts of their practices. It is notable that in a separate analysis of the youth interviews, nearly all youth named at least one program leader whom they trusted to a high degree Walker & Larson, 2012.

Interview Protocol and Procedures

The programs were studied over a full program cycle (in nearly all cases a school year). Leaders were asked questions about their use of authority at the second of four interviews, which was conducted approximately 40% of the way through the program cycle. The interview protocols contained structured sets of open-ended questions. Interviewers were instructed to ask all questions and to encourage leaders to provide full narrative accounts of their experiences in context, including examples of their thinking, decision making, and actions in specific situations. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and transcriptions checked.

As introduced above, leaders were asked about their use of three practices that represent differing degrees of leaders' assertion of authority. These were as follows: "make suggestions or give them advice," "support their decisions even when you disagree," and "set limits on what they can and can't do." For brevity, in subsequent sections, we refer to the first as simply "giving advice," which represents the practices leaders described; we shorten the label for the second practice to "supporting youth though disagreeing" and the third practice to "setting limits."

For each of the three practices, leaders were asked a set of questions about the when, how, and why of their use of that practice:

(a) When do you do it? When do you not do it? Can you give an example?
(b) Is there any special technique to how you do? [named strategy]
(c) Why do you do it—what are your goals? [Probe for what their goals were in the situation they just described in (a)]

Leaders were asked a fourth question about how well their use of the practice (as they described it) achieved the goals they identified for it, but as this question yielded limited new information (leaders typically said it worked "most of the time"), we have not reported those responses. In sum, our

TABLE 1
Program Leaders in the Research

Program Pseudonym and Descriptions	Leader Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Employment Status in Program/ Organization	Years Working With Youth	Years with Current Program	Highest Level of Education	Field of Study
The Station Leadership	Cliff Sullivan	Male	39	White	Full-Time (Paid)	16	13	Grad or Prof Degree	Youth Development Leadership MEd.
	Mary Kate Hayes	Female	25	White	Part-Time (Paid)	9	7	Some College	N/A
	Danielle Gibson	Female	24	White	Part-Time (Paid)	6	2	Grad or Prof Degree	Social Work
Voces Unidas, Arts	Silvano Ochoa	Male	58	Latino	Full-Time (Paid)	7	11	Some College	Technical Degree in Agricultural Drafting and Electrical Maintenance
	Nicole Lehmann	Female	24	White	Full-Time (Paid)	4.5	2	Bachelor's	Communication
	Jason Barnes	Male	26	White	Full-Time (Paid)	5.5	2	Bachelor's	Political Science
High Definition, STEM/ Journalism	Lora Parks	Female	33	White	Full-Time (Paid)	5	2.5	Grad or Prof Degree	Bachelor's in Latin American Studies, M.A. in Journalism
Reel Makers, Video Arts	Tyler Bates	Male	29	White	Full-Time (Paid)	5	5	Grad or Prof Degree	Bachelor's in Media Studies, Green Architecture
	Jade Goodman	Female	24	Black	Full-Time (Paid)	4	1	Bachelor's	Communication
Unified Youth, Leadership	Bill Lyons	Male	53	White	Full-Time (Paid)	6	6	Bachelor's	Agriculture
	Juanita Estrada	Female	51	Mexican and White	Part-Time (Volunteer)	27	5	Grad or Prof Degree	Master's Degree in Education (Counseling)
Nutrition Rocks, Leadership (run camp for children)	Nancy Adams	Female	35	White	Full-Time (Paid)	15	10	Grad or Prof Degree	Bachelor's in HDFS and Graduate/Professional Degree in Public Administration
Urban Farmers, Agriculture	Pamela West	Female	53	Black	Full-Time (Paid)	40	30	Some College	N/A
	Melissa Vaughn	Female	41	Black	Full-Time (Paid)	6	4	Some College	N/A
	Chase Pembrook	Male	26	White	Full-Time (Paid)	4	2	Bachelor's	Communication
La Prensa, Journalism	Enrique Ceballos	Male	31	Latino	Part-Time (Paid)	3	0.5	Tech or Voc Degree	Independent Films
Toltecat Muralists, Arts	Desiree Bustamante	Female	29	Latino	Part-Time (Paid)	8	1	Some College	N/A
	Tony Barrios	Male	36	Mexican and Filipino	Full-Time (Paid)	10	1.5	Grad or Prof Degree	M.A. in Teaching
On Target, 4-H Shooting Sports	Carol Taylor	Female	62	White	Part-Time (Volunteer)	42	20	Some Grad or Prof School	Bachelor's in Education; Grad Degree N/A
	Larry Peterson	Male	49	White	Part-Time (Volunteer)	20	15	Some College	N/A
Unity House, Leadership	Jenna Frank	Female	24	White	Full-Time (Paid)	6	4	Bachelor's	Social Work, Political Science
Rising Leaders, Leadership Program in a School	David Dunn	Male	37	Black and White	Full-Time (Volunteer)	13	2	Grad or Prof Degree	M.A. in Teaching and M.A. in School Leadership
	Sadie Jansen	Female	27	White	Full-Time (Volunteer)	8	2	Grad or Prof Degree	Reading Speciality
Emerson High School Drama Club	Linda Williams	Female	56	White	Full-Time (Paid)	40	22	Some Grad or Prof School	English and Theatre Education
	Harold Williams	Male	53	White	Part-Time (Paid)	40	25	Bachelor's	MFA in Theatre

data can be thought of in terms of a three-by-three matrix: Leaders provided responses for all three questions (when, how, and why) for each of the three practices.

Analyses

Analyses were aimed at understanding the patterns in the 25 leaders' exercise of authority in using the three practices. We sought to identify leaders' most frequent responses in when and how the practices were used and to understand leaders' thought processes and goals (the why) behind these consistencies. The analyses involved multiple stages:

- *Identifying all data addressed to why, when, and how for each of the three practices*. First, two coauthors (Izenstark and Rodriguez) separately coded passages in the transcripts into categories for why, when, and how. Then, they employed methods of consensual coding to reach agreement (including talking through their different perspectives, reading adjacent text to understand the context, and reviewing coding decisions with a third person [Larson] (Hill et al., 2005). This stage identified the pool of data for each cell in the three-by-three matrix. These pools were not mutually exclusive because, regardless of the question asked, leaders' narratives often combined accounts of when and how, and especially why they used a specific practice.
- *Narrowing focus*. After this stage, we made the decision to focus on leaders' accounts of their exercise of authority in relation to youth's program activities and learning, excluding the limited number of accounts when, for example, leaders provided advice on youth's outside lives or set and enforced limits on youth's off-task behavior.
- *Identification of themes*. Next, we conducted open coding to identify the major themes in leaders' accounts of the why, when, and how for each of the three practices, again using procedures of consensual coding. From these initial themes, we developed second-level coding categories, created operational definitions for each, and coded passages according to these themes. We then evaluated the pool of passages in each category for conceptual integrity, and in many cases this led us to revise the operational definitions and repeat the process of coding and category evaluation to increase that integrity.
- *Theoretical analysis*. Finally, we conducted theoretical analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to com-

pare leaders' rationales, decision-making rules, and techniques across the coding for the cells of the matrix. This was an iterative process that led to the identification of consistencies across cells, underlying tensions and trade-offs in leaders' decision making, and crosscutting themes. This analysis led us to coordinate our conceptual language across cells. It also was used to formulate theoretical conclusions to characterize key elements in leaders' decision making for each of the three practices. At this stage, we also decided to first present the data on why (below), because leaders often used their goals to explain their answers for the when and how (i.e., they described being intentional in their decision making about authority).

The final results from the coding and analysis for each cell in the three-by-three matrix are summarized in Figure 1 and described more fully in the Results section. In describing the findings, we sought to provide a theoretical integration of the findings, while maintaining the authenticity of leaders' decision making in complex situations using illustrative examples and using leaders' language as much as possible (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002).

RESULTS

Giving Advice

Leaders in the 13 programs reported making suggestions and giving youth advice on tasks as varied as editing digital videos, preparing a garden bed for planting, and teaching nutrition to young children. Their advice was provided to individuals, to work groups, and to the group of youth as a whole. In some cases, they gave advice when youth asked for it, but often they listened or walked around the room, providing input when they identified a need.

On the surface, it seemed simple. Tyler Bates at Reel Makers said he gave advice "whenever I can." But he then went on to describe numerous circumstances in which he holds back with his advice giving. All leaders in the study described nuanced considerations shaping why, when, and how they asserted and restrained their professional authority in helping youth with their projects.

The why: Leaders' goals in giving advice. We identified three primary goals that guided leaders' advice giving, goals that were sometimes in conflict

FIGURE 1

Leaders' descriptions of why, when, and how they used each practice: Categories derived from the analyses. Arrows show theoretical links between why, when, and how

Leader Practices	Why (and Why not): Rationales	When (and When not): Situations	How: Techniques and Strategies
Giving Advice	Goal 1: Helping youth succeed ↗ ↗	• At the beginning of the program or a new activity: More advice-giving • Technical learning situations: More advice-giving ↗	• For technical situations: Often give more directive advice
	Goal 2: Supporting youth's agency ↗	• Open-ended learning situations: Less advice-giving ↗	• For open-ended situations: ○ Present advice as options ○ Use guiding questions ○ Provide advice within two-way conversations that include listening • Sometimes give more assertive advice to help youth clarify intent
	Goal 3: Helping youth learn executive skills ↗		
Supporting Youth Though Disagreeing	Goals 2 & 3: Maximizing latitude for youth-led learning of exec skills ↗ ↗	• Support whenever possible ↗ • Support despite pragmatic concerns if: youth are trustworthy, invested, have thought through a plan ↗	• If few concerns, encourage them to "go for it" • If less serious concerns, communicate them; provide ongoing advice
	Goal 4: Addressing pragmatic concerns (Why not) ↗	• Not support when there are serious pragmatic concerns (e.g., physical, emotional, monetary, safety)	
Setting Limits	Goals 2 & 3: Maximizing latitude ↗	• Try to limit limit-setting ↗	
	Goal 4: Addressing pragmatic concerns ↗	• Limit setting when: serious pragmatic concerns (includes limiting to avoid scenarios that youth would not anticipate) ↗	• Firm limit settings for serious safety concerns, or when a plan wouldn't work
	Goal 1: Helping youth succeed ↗	• To facilitate youth's work (e.g., in situations with a high risk of youth having difficulty getting started; getting bogged down; a film will look amateurish) ↗	• Softer limit-setting when goal is helping youth succeed ○ Point out freedom within constraints, guide them to options ○ Help steer youth around or through potential problems

with each other. At a basic level, leaders described much advice giving aimed at *helping youth succeed* in their projects (Goal 1). Leaders wanted youth to learn skills and make good decisions, so projects would turn out well and youth would gain a sense of accomplishment. So leaders shared their knowledge. Asked why she gave advice, Lora Parks at High Definition said, "My goals are to have a really good final product, to have them feel good about what they've written."

Leaders' second goal—in some tension with the first—was for youth to *experience agency* in their work (Goal 2). Leaders said they wanted youth to be making decisions, to "feel like they have that power," and to experience ownership over their work. They wanted youth to be engaged in processes of thinking, discovering, and learning on their own. This goal often motivated leaders to *restrain* whether and how they gave advice. Chase Pembrook at Urban Farmers, a trained horticulturist, had much knowledge he could share, but he said

> I want them to have a little bit of agency and feel like I'm not just telling them, "This is how you have to do it." I just want to make the suggestion, and then *they* can decide for themselves like: "Yes, this is how I want to do it."

Leaders often avoided adopting the role of an authority figure with privileged knowledge. They wanted youth to succeed in their projects, but they tempered that goal against the objective of supporting youth's agency and independent decision making.

The leaders' third goal for advice giving adds a further layer of complexity. They wanted youth to *learn executive skills that strengthened their exercise of agency* (Goal 3). Leaders described advice-giving aimed at helping youth learn skills to evaluate strategic choices, think critically, solve problems, learn on their own, and "see the bigger picture of their potential decisions and actions." For example, David Dunn at Rising Leaders described wanting youth to think critically and learn about the connections between their actions and long-term goals: "I always want them to think of purpose: 'Why, what are we doing this for, what are we going to achieve when we walk away?'" So at the same time as leaders wanted to restrain their advice giving—to allow youth experience of agency—they also wanted to use their authority and give advice aimed at cultivating youth's executive skills for exercising agency more effectively.

All three of these goals—helping youth succeed, supporting their agency, and helping them learn executive skills—were developmental: They were all concerned with youth's empowerment and learning. Each goal, we found, came into play according to the situation, as leaders made decisions about when and how to provide advice.

When leaders gave advice. The leaders' accounts included numerous factors influencing when they gave advice, including youth's skill levels, the type of task, timing, and group dynamics. Within these accounts, we identified three situational contexts, mentioned by a majority of leaders, in which they did (and did not) provide advice. First, many leaders said they were more likely to give advice at the beginning of the program. They wanted to communicate expectations and help youth gain knowledge that would help them succeed in their projects.

Second, most leaders reported providing advice when youth needed to learn specialized technical information or techniques. For example, members of Voces Unidas were making mosaics and the leader, Silvano Ochoa, explained:

> There's certain technical aspects . . . "How big is the spacing between your glass? You can do anywhere from an one eighth inch to maybe three eighths, but you don't want to get a half inch spacing, because now you have a grout that is bigger than your glass."

Silvano did not think it worthwhile for youth to learn these grout margins on their own. It would be costly in time and money—besides there are established technical guidelines. Classroom studies show that providing students immediate, direct feedback on technical skills is an effective step to helping them progress to learning more complex process skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). These veteran leaders followed this approach. The need to prepare youth for subsequent work was a situation where helping youth succeed often took precedence.

But for situations when youth were working on open-ended tasks, with no established "correct" way to do things, leaders were more often restrained. Silvano had much experience as a visual artist, but reported being judicious in advising youth on artistic decisions with the mosaics. Leaders described these more open-ended tasks (e.g., requiring creative, leadership, or other nontechnical decisions) as situations when the goals of

supporting youth's agency and allowing them to learn through experience were a higher priority. Sadie Jansen at Rising Leaders said that sometimes, "I will let them struggle until they ask for help and then I'll give them a little bit, but I'll let them struggle." Similarly, Pamela West at Nutrition Rocks sometimes reflected youth's questions back to youth because she wanted them to learn to solve problems on their own.

Some leaders built this restraint into the schedule, providing specific times when youth worked alone and when they obtained feedback. At Reel Makers, youth learned videography by working on increasingly challenging video assignments. Tyler Bates said he and his coleader checked in with youth's work at the beginning of the day, "Then we'll say, 'everybody work for 10 minutes, half an hour or an hour, and then we're going to check back in with you.'" During these periods, leaders were available if needed, but youth could work on their own and develop their ideas without leaders hanging over them. Classroom research finds that delayed feedback is most effective for complex tasks; delay allows students to try out different approaches and then obtain input on the *processes* they went through (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Indeed, much of the advice leaders provided involved discussing youth's processes in their work.

How leaders gave advice. Leaders also used restraint in how they gave advice. Asked about advice-giving techniques, leaders often started by describing an act of preemptive, unilateral authority ("You really should do this"; "I don't think that looks good") as examples of how *not* to give advice. Enrique Ceballos at La Prensa recalled having quickly learned that

> [It] is a very sensitive issue when you tell someone, "I'm right and that's wrong."... They never say anything, but you can see it in their faces, like they hate me, and I lose credibility with them. I lose them.

How leaders *did* give advice differed for technical and open-ended learning situations.

Technical learning situations. For situations when youth needed to learn established technical skills, leaders often described giving advice in ways that entailed asserting authority. Nicole Berman, who supervised video projects at Voces Unidas, reported being quite directive:

On the more technical things—cameras, editing, and whatnot—because youth are still pretty new to it, there is a lot of hand-on-hand, "Okay, now go over there, click on that." Really leading them through.

For helping youth learn technical skill, the need for instruction often trumped youth agency.

Larry Peterson provides an example of how, even for technical skills, leaders can provide advice in ways that prioritize youth agency. He coached archery at On Target and said that novice youth's shooting is often erratic because "they keep moving their feet every time." So:

> I'll give them a suggestion like, "You know, I have these broken arrows back here, do you mind if we put one in front of your feet?... Could we try that and see what happens?" You know, let the child come to his own conclusion.

Even though Larry had knowledge to convey, rather than telling youth what to do he makes a suggestion that helped them discover the value of consistent foot placement. He said youth were often frustrated because they preferred direct instruction. But he saw this as a situation that was not just about conveying technical skills; it was an opportunity to help youth develop skills for learning on their own. He said this restrained, indirect approach had helped youth discover other knowledge, like "how much sleep, caffeine, sugar—all kinds of different things—can affect how well you shoot." Larry's technique fits Meyer and Smithenry's (2014) definition of *instructional scaffolding*. It is temporary, restrained support aimed at helping shift responsibility for learning back to the learner.

Open-ended learning situations. As reported above, leaders often stood back when youth were working away on open-ended tasks. When they did provide advice, we found they usually did so in ways that prioritized supporting youth's agency. They crafted soft touch strategies—adapted to the youth and situation—aimed at providing assistance without undermining youth's ownership of their work. Our analysis unfolded in two stages.

In the open coding analysis stage, we identified two techniques described by a majority of leaders. First, when giving advice, they *presented it as options*. For example, they told youth "you can take it or leave it" or "I try to give them options so they can choose which one appeals to them." Second,

leaders' advice-giving frequently involved *asking questions* that helped frame issues youth were struggling with, directed youth's attention to concerns, or served other guiding functions, yet left agency for responding to the question in the youth's hands. Leaders' questions also model modes of critical thinking that youth internalize (Heath, 1998). These techniques provide leader input while supporting youth's agency and development of executive skills.

In the next stage of analysis, we began to recognize that these advice-giving techniques were rarely described as single actions. They were embedded in *two-way conversations*. Advice-giving often involved discussions in which leaders both talked and listened. From one speech turn to another, leaders shifted between providing input and deferring to youth's agency and decision making. Asked for an example of advice giving, Pamela West described conversations she had with youth aimed at preparing them each day for the summer camp they ran for children:

> What I do is always start out with, "What do you think we need to do today?" So that allows them to tell me what they think they need to do. And if they leave out something, then I can add to it. I want them to remember that they're in control. And then they'll come to me with a question and I'll throw it back, "What do you think you need to do?" So, without telling them, get them to think about it.

In this account, Pamela weaves together interjecting her authoritative input with supporting youth's agency. She starts with a question that guides youth to think about planning, and then she listens and then may insert a suggestion. Like other leaders, Pamela's accounts of advice-giving conversations included many "if-thens." Her advice was adapted to the situation. If youth did not mention something important, she brought it up. If they asked her a question, she might see it as a learning opportunity and throw it back to them.

In most cases, the advice in these conversations was delivered with restrained authority—aimed at supporting youth's agency. But sometimes leaders were more assertive—because they saw an opportunity to facilitate youth's learning executive skills. A strategy reported in these conversations was to engage youth with the reasoning in their work: to meet them where they are at, but sometimes to work with them to scrutinize and elevate their thinking. Nicole Berman reported that at Voces Unidas: "A lot of times it is just kind of walking them through the logic of what youth are saying." She described helping youth critique plans for interviews they were conducting: "If you ask that question, what kind of an answer are we going to get? Would it be better if we asked it in a different way?" She was scaffolding youth's strategic thinking about different choices they could make. Jade Goodman at Reel Makers described times when she was assertive suggesting a possible change in a youth's video (e.g., eliminating the music). But she did this with the goal of provoking youth's reasoning: getting them to "talk out" and "argue" why the music was important. She used her authority to help foster youth's exercise of independent critical analysis skills, to clarify their goals, and to think strategically.

Conclusion: Reconciling divergent goals. These experienced leaders were practitioners of what we called an *art of restraint*. They had authoritative knowledge regarding the work youth were doing. But they shared it judiciously so as to support youth-driven processes, shifting between the three goals according to the situation. Sometimes they gave advice directly (e.g., to be expedient in conveying technical knowledge), because they wanted youth to succeed in their projects (Goal 1). But even for these situations, they were cautious to not assert their authority too strongly. Telling youth that they did something "wrong" could risk alienating them, suppressing their sense of agency. When youth were working on more open-ended tasks, leaders would often hold back. Or they would use softer touch advice-giving techniques (such as suggesting options or asking questions) in ways that provided input but were worded to reinforce youth's experience of agency and ownership of their work (Goal 2). Often this input was embedded in conversations, and within the conversations leaders sometimes played a more authoritative, teaching role. They would engage with youth's thought processes, with the aim of expanding youth's executive skills—and ultimately their capacities for agency (Goal 3). Advice was provided as instructional scaffolding, as a temporary support aimed at sustaining youth-driven processes.

Supporting Youth Even When You Disagree

Supporting youth though disagreeing is a leader action that maximizes youth's opportunities for

agency. We chose to ask about this practice because it defines a scenario in which leaders decide to cede authority despite thinking youth may be headed in a problematic direction. Nearly all leaders described times when they did this. As individuals or a group, youth were planning a work of art, a video, or a significant event (e.g., a concert, an activity for children). They were setting out for a day, a week, or longer in a direction they had chosen, but leaders foresaw concerns, risks, or possibilities of failure.

The why: Leaders' goals in supporting youth though disagreeing. The goals guiding leaders' decision making in this scenario included both reasons for supporting youth and reasons for caution. The principal reason for support, voiced by most leaders, was to allow youth to learn through direct experience. They wanted youth to have latitude, so they could learn from thinking things through, trying ideas, making mistakes, and observing the outcomes. Enrique Ceballos at La Prensa said: "my work is based on mistakes." He wanted youth to experiment with ideas and learn what was possible with a camera. Danielle Gibson at The Station said: "Ultimately they have to run their lives; I want them to have practice." The leaders' objectives were a synthesis of the second and third goals we identified for advice giving: They believed that youth's exercise of agency in trying things out was a valuable way for them to develop executive skills.

Several leaders stressed that it was youth's cumulative experiences of trying out varied iterations that helped them learn. Nutrition Rocks was designed so that youth had dozens of opportunities to try out games they designed to teach children about nutrition. These iterations included adapting each game for use with younger and older children. Pamela West said:

> My goal was to let them see that it might fail. One week it didn't work out. And then the other week, it worked. They learned that it was certain kids that they could do this with; and there were kids that they couldn't.

These repeated experiences of trial and error provided youth rich opportunities to learn to adapt their teaching strategies to different groups of children.

Leaders' reasons for caution in supporting youth when disagreeing involved pragmatic concerns. They foresaw ways in which the youth's plan for a project would not work—and most leaders valued having youth experience success. Leaders also described situations in which they anticipated other pragmatic considerations (safety, cost, unintended consequences).

When leaders supported youth though disagreeing. Our analysis of when leaders did and did not support youth when disagreeing identified three categories of responses. First, a number of leaders reported that it was a matter of principle to go along with what youth wanted to do. Nicole Berman at Voces Unidas said, "A huge part of our program is that it is led by youth. We're just there to support; what we do is support their choice." Jenna Frank at Unity House said, "I support them regardless." Nancy Adams, Pamela West's coleader at Nutrition Rocks, reported that going along with youth's plans had become "second nature" to her, "It's their program. I want them to have ownership." For these leaders, it was an established component of the program philosophy that youth should be given abundant opportunities to try things out and learn from experience.

Second, these and other leaders identified situations in which they *would not* go along with youth's plan because of pragmatic concerns. They foresaw a probability of significant problems that justified asserting their authority to veto it. Bill Lyons, who often said, "let them run with it," described a situation in which the youth wanted to take on an ambitious plan that he did not think would succeed. He envisioned how two months down the line youth would be asking him, "Bill, could you, you know, organize this?" and he told us, "I don't want that to happen anymore—not from a selfishness stand point, but from their—I want *them* to be able accomplish it." Cliff Sullivan at The Station was also a strong advocate of youth learning from experiences, including failures. But he felt it vital to be truthful with youth, and he would urge them to reconsider a plan that he thought could lead to a disaster or quagmire: "I wouldn't be dishonest and say, 'Oh, that's a great idea.' And then roll my eyes later."

So, although most leaders had a principled belief in supporting youth's decisions, they sometimes anticipated serious pragmatic problems in youth's plans that youth did not appear to foresee. Research in other fields of practice shows that experienced practitioners develop capacities for foresight—abilities to mentally simulate how a course of action in their field will unfold (Ross et al., 2006). These leaders described this kind of

forecasting and using it as a rationale for asserting authority to veto or strongly discourage a plan.

Yet, third, some leaders identified conditions when they would support youth despite significant concerns. They were more likely to be supportive if they trusted youth, "if youth have good reasoning," and they were willing to put in the time and take responsibility for the work. Lora Parks at High Definition supported youth despite concerns: "If they give me a reasonable argument why they want to do it that way. If they don't have anything to back it up, I tend to not go along." But Lora does go along when: "I have that relationship with them, and I had enough experience with them that I know I can trust their decisions; they thought it through." Leaders felt these conditions predicted how likely youth were to avoid problems.

In sum, in deciding when to support youth despite disagreeing, leaders weighed projected trade-offs. Most placed a high value on letting youth learn from doing, so they were hesitant to veto a youth plan. But they shared a common set of considerations; Cliff Sullivan described these in his checklist. He would support youth when disagreeing if he had time to deal with possible fallout and if "it's not gonna cause us to go broke, it's not gonna cause anyone to be unsafe. If it is safe financially, physically and emotionally, then it's worth a shot."

How leaders supported youth when disagreeing. This calculus of trade-offs also influenced *how* leaders supported youth despite concerns. Their approaches ranged from giving youth free rein to remaining engaged with youth's work in order to influence how it unfolded. This difference between laissez-faire and more engaged approach was related to leaders' philosophies and to the circumstances.

In many instances, leaders' approach was to stand aside and let youth try out their ideas—with confidence that youth will learn. They told youth: "It is up to you" or "Go for it, see you later." Enrique Ceballos said that in situations where there were no risks, "my technique is just patience." He reported that often "they think they know what they're doing ... like doing with the camera." So he let them try "the experiment." Rising Leaders had an established procedure in which planning an event began with a "think tank" of youth who thought things through, including trying to anticipate problems. Sadie Jansen described a think tank in which she and David Dunn confidently: "just sat there and listened, and they will realize that the activity won't work in the space provided. We're going to let them come to that realization."

In some situations, leaders communicated their concerns before youth set out on their plan. They asked youth to explain the plan, posed questions, and discussed scenarios that could be problematic. Cliff Sullivan at The Station had a strong philosophy of supporting both youth agency and youth accountability, and he made sure they heard his concerns. He described a situation when youth wanted to plan a hip hop concert and he did not think it would be successful. But it did not pose any of the risks on his checklist (above) that would cause him to veto it. So he told youth, "These are some of the things that could happen. Be prepared, but give it a try and see what happens." Cliff's prediction about the hip hop concert, he said, was accurate: It was not very successful. But "they gave it a try and learned the hard way."

In other instances, however, leaders remained engaged, providing input on youth's work as it proceeded. They had ongoing conversations with youth in which they provided advice, constructive criticism, or steering. Silvano Ochoa said: "If there is something that's gonna derail our project, then I keep affirming what I am recommending." Another leader said, "If we see things getting out of bounds, we'll bring them back in-bounds."

Tyler Bates at Reel Makers said that when he disagreed, he became involved, using authority more assertively. He saw disagreements about youth's plans for a video as a good opportunity to help develop their skills and their agency as a filmmaker:

> If I feel the student is saying, "I hear that you disagree, but I really want to do this," I really push them for an explanation. One of the things we try to accomplish is helping young people to really think clearly about their intent. That it's not enough to just say, "This is my work and it's this way because that's the way I made it." But to feel, for the decisions they're making, that they know the reasons behind them, they considered their options, and they made their choice stylistically, artistically, or otherwise. And that they can articulate why they made that choice, as opposed to other options.

Rather than letting a youth learn from doing a film that Tyler anticipates will be mediocre, he seizes the chance to "push" youth to think critically and "think clearly about intent." Rather than supporting unconditional agency, he uses his authority

toward the aim of helping youth develop executive skills for becoming more intentional as artists.

In line with the goals of helping youth learn executive skills, leaders described making sure, at the conclusion of youth's projects, that youth reflected critically on how their actions worked out. They wanted to be certain that youth learned from their experiences—to evaluate how their decisions and processes shaped the outcomes. Nicole Berman said,

> We hold a review session at the end so they can say, "Oh, that didn't really work." And we can go back to, "What was the decision to get to that and why didn't that work and how can we make that better next time?"

Pamela West described holding similar reflective sessions at the end of each day of their camp. As described by Priest and Gass (2005), effective leaders encourage reflective processes that help youth "deepen the experiential process" (p. 147) and "discover their own learning" (p. 192).

Conclusion: Maximizing opportunities. These leaders placed a high priority on maximizing youth's latitude for learning from trying out their ideas and from the authentic outcomes of their work. Indeed, research suggests that opportunities in educational contexts to learn through experimenting and taking risks are valuable to adolescents' development of their new capabilities for executive thinking (Blakemore & Mills, 2014; Larson & Angus, 2011a). At the same time, leaders weighed costs and benefits, based on their predictions of how youth's plans were likely to unfold. Might the plan lead to situations in which physical or emotional safety was compromised? How prepared were youth to avoid major problems? Sometimes leaders felt the risk of problems justified their use of authority to veto or dissuade youth from a plan. Yet, all leaders reported times when they gave youth a green light, in some cases accompanied by coaching over the course of youth's work to prevent problems or facilitate youth's learning.

Setting Limits on Youth's Work

We asked leaders about the practice of "setting limits" to understand their use of unilateral authority. We found that nearly all described setting limits. Although leaders placed a high priority on youth agency, there were certain situations in which they felt justified using their authority to set parameters, strongly discourage, or block directions in youth's projects.

The why: Leaders' goals in setting limits. In the last section, we found that "supporting though disagreeing" was aimed at fostering wide latitude for youth to learn from exercising agency. Leaders' aims in limit setting were to place needed or helpful boundaries on this agency. In addition to keeping youth safe and avoiding pragmatic problems (discussed above), leaders described setting limits to *facilitate youth's work and learning*. Leaders sometimes set boundaries on youth's work that helped channel it in ways they believed benefited youth's learning experiences.

Leaders' forecasting of possible scenarios played a central role in their decisions to set limits. What became evident in our analysis was that this foresight was based on their prior experiences. These veteran leaders consistently explained the limits by describing occasions in previous years when they had been more laissez-faire and problems had occurred—or youth's work was not as successful as it now was with the imposed boundaries. Their use of unilateral authority was justified by their conclusions from their personal history of trying things and reflection on how they worked.

When leaders set limits. Asked when they set limits, many leaders emphasized that they did it as little as possible. Nancy Adams said, "We try to be very limited in our limits." Leaders of arts programs cited artistic freedom as a limit on limit setting.

But an array of anticipated concerns trumped this priority, leaders felt. First, they set limits (often well in advance) to *prevent* anticipated pragmatic problems or risks (e.g., threats to safety or program finances). This included setting limits to address program-level concerns (e.g., limiting how revealing youth's costumes were for a play; requiring parental consent for a trip).

This preventative limit setting often appeared to be based on leaders' perception of blind spots in youth's abilities for foresight in certain kinds of situations. Leaders had prior experiences that led them to preempt undesired scenarios which they had discovered youth did not anticipate. Several leaders cited specific situations in which youth's emotions can get carried away. Linda Williams, at Emerson Drama Club, provided the example of rehearsing fight scenes:

Fighting. There's a very fine line, especially with young men. They want to go further, they want to push the envelope more, they want to be more real, more realistic and people get hurt then. When we did *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt gets into a confrontation with Mercutio. And, these two young men were very intense. The young man who was Tybalt got so into the character, he spit into Mercutio's face.

As a result of this and other experiences, Linda now limited when and how students rehearsed fight scenes. Rather than allowing students to explore the violent feelings of their character in the moment, she said: "the fights are choreographed, very carefully choreographed."

Second, leaders described setting limits when they felt it could *facilitate* youth's work. One leader explained: "When I set limits, I see that as helping students to plan for projects that they could see through to completion." Again, leaders felt justified in using their authority, because—based on their experiences—they believed they could foresee scenarios in youth's work that youth were not likely to foresee. Lora Parks, at High Definition, described learning to set a limit to help youth bypass difficulties they encounter in the early stages of writing articles:

In the beginning I was all about everything being collaborative and not giving them any limits and so we spent forever on research and forever discussing our topics and all of this stuff. So I think I spent too long on that in the front end.

To help youth get to the important later stages in their work, Lora restricted youth's topic choices to Chicago neighborhoods. She concluded from prior experiences that the benefits of limiting youth's choices justified using her authority. She and other leaders set limits when they felt it helped youth succeed in their work and have fuller learning experiences.

How leaders set limits. Leaders' strategies for setting limits ranged from imposing hard authority, when they foresaw a serious risk, to a softer use of authority when their goal was facilitating youth's work. When there were serious concerns, such as safety, leaders set firm limits from the outset. Harold Williams, who oversaw set construction at Emerson Drama Club, said that with some tools,

"like putting in screws with a drill. You can let 'em flounder a little bit and get frustrated, and then say 'Try it this way.'" But with power saws, he had to set absolute limits on who could use them and on the steps youth had to go through to prove they could use saws safely on their own.

Leaders used softer authority when their goal was to facilitate youth's work. This limit setting took the form of leader-initiated conversations, but with space for youth input, and leaders helped youth recognize the freedom they had within the constraints. Leaders discussed their concerns with youth. They told them about similar directions taken by youth in the past that had led to difficulties and "talked it through." When Lora Parks limited youth's articles to Chicago neighborhoods, she had conversations with youth about the different kinds of interesting choices they could make within this topic area.

Tyler Bates described employing a similar positive approach with youth who wanted to film a scene that he anticipated would come out badly. When someone wanted to stage a scene with domestic violence, he had learned to be firm in discouraging youth, because with untrained actors "it looked like slapstick comedy." But he took a softer approach for filming drug use, which also risked looking amateurish,

I try to help students think it through: Is drug use important? How to portray that usage realistically so that the overall impact is not diminished? I won't say "No you can't have that character smoking a joint," but I will definitely try to work with the students to help determine, "How can we most effectively portray the character and the substance use without making the entire scene look like some type of parody?"

Rather than setting a firm limit, he steers youth in ways that support their agency. He appeals to youth's goal of portraying actions effectively and coaches them in how to best achieve this goal.

Conclusion: Using past experience to anticipate the future. Given these leaders' strong investment in supporting youth's agency, we expected that limit setting—a more assertive (less restrained) act of authority—might be difficult for them. Yet they described being quite deliberate in when and how they set limits. Nancy Adams, for whom supporting youth agency was "second nature," explained:

"I want them to have ownership, so I need to know when it's important for me to have my way and when it's theirs." But she and others were confident in imposing limits when they thought it was needed.

Their repeated explanation for this confidence came from their past experiences. Like the youth, they were learning from reflection on their successes and failures: from youth getting stuck in their work or actors losing control in rehearsal. Research across fields of practice has shown that "Professional craft knowledge is ... accumulated by doing the work over time and having opportunities to reflect on practice" (Ross, 2013, p. 270). Because of their accumulated experiences, leaders were confident they could foresee scenarios that youth would not and thus asserted their authority to prevent them, or steer youth through them in constructive ways.

DISCUSSION

In the youth development field, youth agency and adult authority are sometimes viewed as mutually exclusive. This view can create anxiety for novice practitioners that *any* act of authority will undermine youth's agency (Camino, 2005; Jeffs & Banks, 2010). The 25 veteran leaders in this study recounted experiencing—and enacting—a more nuanced relationship in which youth agency and adult authority were *not* always at odds. They limited their use of authority, but they also employed it in intentional ways aimed at *strengthening* youth's agency and development of skills for agency. They practiced what we describe as an *art of restraint* in which they used their knowledge and authority deliberately—according to the situation— and in ways adapted to their perceptions of youth's needs, goals, and learning potentials in those situations. We discuss implications for practice, supporting practitioners, and research.

Implications for Practice: The Art of Restraint

This study suggests preliminary theory on this "art," based on the convergent accounts of these experienced professional leaders. We synthesized key finding into five propositions:

1 *The art of restraint is rooted in a strong commitment to supporting youth's agency.* Leaders limited how they gave advice and when they set limits. Nearly all reported times they supported youth despite concerns about a direction in youth's

work. They had seen that unilateral acts of authority could undermine youth's experience of agency, so they employed techniques for giving advice (e.g., suggesting options, asking questions) that allowed them to provide input while reinforcing youth's agency. Even when setting hard limits, leaders helped youth recognize the freedoms within them. Leaders' central rationale for supporting youth's agency was a strong belief in the power of youth's learning from taking responsibility for decision making and learning from direct experience, a belief supported by research (Larson & Angus, 2011a).

2 *The art of restraint, however, includes leaders' judicious use of authority for situations where they have learned it is helpful.* We identified a common set of such situations. When youth need to learn specialized technical knowledge (e.g., grout margins, initial computer skills), leaders often provided directive advice to expedite this learning. When youth could benefit from help when working on more open-ended problems, leaders provided less directive scaffolding (e.g., helping youth narrow a topic or consider alternative strategies). Leaders also used their authority to set limits or steer youth around situations they had learned could be problematic. In addition, research on youth–adult partnerships in community service activities suggests that it can be judicious for adults to take lead roles for steps in collaborative work that draw on their connections to adult institutions and involve high stakes (Kirshner, 2015; Zeldin et al., 2012). In effective youth programs—as in these community youth–adult partnerships—cross-generational relationships are grounded in the principle that youth and adults have *different* perspectives and experiences to contribute to common goals (Zeldin et al., 2012).

3 *An important component in the art of restraint is knowledge of when and how to scaffold youth's learning executive skills (e.g., skills for planning, "clarifying intent," learning how to learn).* This required situational decision making. In some cases, especially when youth had thought work through, leaders stepped back, judging that youth would best learn executive skills from direct experiences. In other cases, leaders judged it helpful to provide knowledgeable input through two-way conversations in which they affirmed youth's intent for their work, while helping youth critically examine their logic for achieving that intent. Kirshner (2015) adds the insight that adults can be quite helpful in offering frame-

works that assist youth in seeing deeper underlying issues (e.g., racial injustice) or that identify criteria for evaluating success in the steps of youth's work. In both cases, leaders often helped youth learn through critical, retrospective reflection on the actions and processes that influenced their work's outcomes.

4 *Leaders' prior experiences play a valuable role in their knowing how to shape these and use authority in ways that supported youth's ongoing experience of agency.* Prior experience helped leaders foresee problems that youth might not anticipate, and it helped them assess when a group of youth was capable of taking on a course of action that had risks. It had taught them not to communicate, "I'm right and that's wrong," along with knowing when they needed to be firm. Like Schön (1983), we too found that the situations encountered in practice "talk back" to practitioners. Effective practitioners engage in ongoing experimentation and learning from situations that help them develop new and more nuanced strategies (Kahneman & Klein, 2009).

5 *The art of restraint, we suggest, is ultimately aimed at cultivating a responsive developmental space for youth that maximizes and supports their opportunities for agency and learning.* These veteran leaders were using their authority not just to "balance" but to deliberately *combine* youth agency with restrained practitioner guidance and structure, as warranted. Leaders' judicious advice giving and limit setting were often aimed at providing the type of assistance that youth report is helpful: keeping their work on track, providing advice when needed, and helping youth feel safe in taking risks (Griffith & Larson, 2015; Kirshner, 2003). Youth doing projects are often heading into unfamiliar territory, attempting to achieve things they have not done before. Effective leaders, we believe, create rich *learning spaces* in which youth see daylight and feel confidence for the work ahead (Larson & Dawes, 2015).

These propositions, it is essential to emphasize, oversimplify what is required of practitioners. The situations and strategies of practice are often more complex. Along with balancing authority and youth agency, effective leaders must cultivate caring relationships with youth (Deutsch & Jones, 2008) and attend to numerous concerns (Larson et al., 2015). Further, in youth development, as in other fields of practice (Billett, 2001), there are often alternative frameworks or schools of thought to consider, and different programs may diverge in the gamut of pragmatic concerns leaders must navigate. Program may also diverge in the goals they prioritize. In some programs, the priority given to youth agency may be tempered by the goal of having youth learn sophisticated skills within a field or by a high priority placed on the outcomes of the work (e.g., achieving community change; Kirshner, 2015). This complexity means there may not always be consensus on one "right" way to exercise one's authority in a given situation. What leaders must acquire to be effective, we suggest, is not dictums to follow, but skills for evaluating situations and for drawing from a wide repertoire of strategies, according to the situation.

Implications for Supporting Youth Practitioners

These findings suggest that members of the field of youth development (including administrators, program designers, and researchers) should respect and support the skills and active learning processes of front-line staff. Youth organizations need to acknowledge the complex challenges staff face in their jobs and provide opportunities for reflective learning. Programs should be rich learning spaces for staff (not just youth) that support leaders' active, creative, and holistic learning processes (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2013; Webster-Wright, 2009). Likewise, training programs should provide experiences aimed at sharpening students' skills for appraisal of situations, decision making, and use of one's authority as a staff member in ways that support youth's development and agency. Given the nuanced contextual nature of the *art of restraint*, such training would benefit from discussion and analysis of real-life dilemma situations in practice (e.g., from trainees' decision-making experiences in the field; or vignettes chosen to represent the variety of types of situations described here; see Larson et al., 2015; Ross, Capra, Carpenter, Hubbell, & Walker, 2016).

Implications for Research

In this study, we elected to focus on accounts from program leaders because we wanted to understand the challenges and skills of practice from their perspective. A strength of the findings is that leaders in widely differing programs provided a coherent collective picture. A limitation, of course, is that the findings provide only this one perspective. Leaders' accounts may have been influenced by shared assumptions, a common desire to describe oneself in positive light, and other frequent human

informational biases (Kahneman & Klein, 2009). Schön (1983) also pointed out that some practitioners may not learn because they do not experiment or they allow hypotheses to become self-fulfilling prophecies. A next step is multi-informant research that includes youth's, leaders', and observers' concurrent perspectives. Important questions include the following:

- What are youth's roles in the coconstruction of leaders' authority? Or in resisting it?
- How do these youth–leader dynamics unfold for youth of different ages, from different identity groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, language, gender, sexual orientation), and with differing assets, temperaments, and needs? It is notable that "the same type of authority can be read, and reacted to, differently by individual[s]" (Deutsch & Jones, 2008, p. 669).
- How do these leader–youth dynamics play out for leaders with different styles of leadership, for example, more youth-led versus adult-led philosophies?
- How is leaders' decision making influenced by the ecology of power across youth, staff, administrators, funders, and other stakeholders (Kwon, 2013)?

Researchers can make important contributions to practice with *use-inspired* research (Tseng, 2012) that sheds light on the challenges of practice and the strategies of effective practitioners. It should aim to support leaders' active and creative learning processes, including supporting their development of nuanced and flexible skills for adapting their decision making to diverse situations and youth (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2013; Larson et al., 2015).

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