

Trajectories of Trust Within the Youth Program Context

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Two topics commonly referenced within theories of Positive Youth Development (PYD) are supportive relationships with adults and the youth program context. This paper examines the trajectory of youth's trusting relationships with adults at project-based programs. High-school-age youth at 7 arts, leadership, and technology programs retrospectively constructed graphical representations of their trust in a youth program leader across time. When coupled with interview data, analysis of the 48 graphs that youth constructed provide a window into the arc of supportive relationships with nonfamilial adults through the words of youth making meaning of their trust in adult leaders over time. The study has theoretical implications for PYD and methodological implications for research on how aspects of PYD change over time.

Keywords: positive youth development, trust, youth–adult relationships, youth programs

The youth program space is a context in which adolescents can increase their supportive, trusting relationships with adults over time. Dialogues within and between developmental scientists and practice-oriented researchers over the last two decades have shifted how developmental research conceptualizes successful adolescent development. Today it is widely accepted that adolescent development should be more than just “problem-free”; instead it should be asset-based (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2011). Central to the early dialogues that facilitated this shift was a focus on leveraging the potential of the youth program context. Theories of Positive Youth Development (PYD) have always theorized that the youth program context has the potential to be a space where PYD outcomes can be facilitated, positive developmental processes can occur, and developmental assets can be gained (Benson & Saito, 2001; Larson, 2000; Lerner, 2000;

Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). A supportive relationship with a nonfamilial adult is an external developmental asset that could be examined when focusing on the youth program context. If an adolescent maintains participation in a youth program, the young person is likely to have an opportunity to identify trustworthy adults with whom to develop and sustain supportive relationships.

Supportive relationships with adults are critical features of youth programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Lerner, 2004). Trust is generally thought to be a core ingredient in such relationships. As a supportive relationship with an adult unfolds, it is likely that an adolescent's trust grows. Yet, there is little research on what happens within such relationships across the time of youth's participation in a program. What are the trajectory or trajectories by which youth experience trust in adults at youth programs across time?

The current study explores the trajectory of trust in the youth program context across time by incorporating the voices of adolescents regarding a relationship with an adult. Using a visual prompt, youth constructed a graphical representation of their trusting relationship with a program leader and retrospectively discussed the path of that relationship by explaining changes in trust. This paper describes the visual prompt, analysis of visual data from youth who trusted an adult in the program, and findings on patterns in trajectories of trust. This study has

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theoretical implications for PYD and methodological implications for research on how aspects of PYD change over time, particularly in the youth program setting.

Literature Review

Youth–Adult Relationships in Positive Youth Development Theory

The powerful role of a youth–adult relationship is a strand woven through many of the principles found across different theories of Positive Youth Development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2007). A supportive youth–adult relationship is considered to be a developmental asset and a key ingredient of positive youth development programs (Benson et al., 2007; Lerner, 2004). Within PYD-related models in the field of mentoring, it is theorized that youth’s relationships with nonfamilial adults are developmentally beneficial when the relationships are sustained across a substantial period of time (Rhodes, 2002, 2005). A positive youth development program context is considered to be effective if it includes structured activities occurring in tandem with supportive youth–adult relationships (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, Alberts, Jelacic, & Smith, 2006, p. 28). This makes youth programs promising contexts to explore the arc of a supportive youth–adult relationship over time because youth voluntarily participate in such programs across a sustained period of time and such programs prescribe to principles of PYD.

The Role of Trust in Youth Program Contexts

A key component of a supportive youth–adult relationship is interpersonal trust. Program participants value being able to trust youth program leaders (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000; Halpern, 2006; Hirsch et al., 2000; Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Strobel, Kirshner, O’Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). Research suggests that an adolescent’s trust in a program leader enhances the positive impact of experiences they have in the youth program context (Griffith & Larson, 2015). However, mentoring literature suggests forming trust in an adult and reaping the developmental benefits of that trust takes time (Rhodes, 2002). A frame-

work on what trusting, supportive relationships look like across time within the youth program context could be useful for practitioners at PYD programs.

The trajectory of a trusting relationship can be defined by where trust begins and how that trust evolves. Literature on trust development in adult workplaces includes varying theories on where trust begins. These theories propose trust begins at zero or at a low level; trust begins at a level based on an organization’s or trustee’s reputation; trust begins at a level based on a trustor’s “faith in humanity” (i.e., belief that people are generally trustworthy) and “trusting stance” (i.e., belief that trusting people is beneficial); or trust begins at a level calculated by a trustor weighing the benefits and costs of trusting the trustee (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Despite the variation, these theories all emphasize that a trustor’s perception of an individual or an organization has a significant influence on where trust begins. Trust evolves from this initial level over time. In the youth program context, trust development is tied to interactions with and observations of the leader that allow youth to deem the adult as trustworthy (Griffith, 2014). Workplace literature posits that trust grows based on a trustee’s qualities, the frequency of interactions, development of the ability to predict the trustee’s behavior, or the formation of an emotional connection (Lewicki et al., 2006). Trust development is largely based on experiences, but how can these be conceptualized in terms of a trajectory that changes and develops over time?

The Potential to Explore Youth–Adult Relationships and Trust With Interview Techniques

Quantitative measures have been used to look at ingredients of supportive youth–adult relationships and interpersonal trust in adolescence. A supportive relationship with an adult is viewed as a significant external developmental asset that can be measured in terms of quantity, as done in a tool designed by the Search Institute (Benson et al., 2007). A supportive relationship can also be conceptualized by considering the construct of connection, one of the domains assessed in quantitative measurements of PYD (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). Quanti-

tative measures are useful yet may lack insight on the processes within supportive relationships as they are sustained over time. Even quantitative studies with multiple time points may lack rich details to explain why variability occurs across time. In fact, an integrative review of positive youth development research has called for more research using qualitative methods and more research on the topic of youth–adult relationships (Barcelona & Quinn, 2011).

In bodies of literature outside of youth programs, the construct of trust in adolescence has been examined quantitatively using the technique of Trust Games within laboratory settings, through surveys when looking at educational contexts, as part of mentoring relationship assessments, and surveys used to uncover trends in adolescents' trust in people more generally (van den Bos, van Dijk, & Crone, 2012; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Nakkula & Harris, 2013). Trust research in disciplines that look at adults have an abundance of “snapshot [trust] studies . . . [providing] limited insight into the dynamic and nature of the growth and decline of trust within . . . relationships” (Lewicki et al., 2006, p. 992). Qualitative research may provide unique insight on relationship dynamics (Manning & Kunkel, 2014), such as the processes that lead to the development of trust, what types of experiences lead to changes across time, and the perceptions of those who are actually in the relationship. Qualitative research can also allow for a more in-depth look at less commonly experienced relationships.

Qualitative studies have explored supportive youth–adult relationships and trust formation in youth programs through observations, interviews, and case studies (e.g., Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Owens & Johnson, 2009). However, these studies have not captured the trajectory of trust formation within supportive relationships with program leaders. Integrating graphic elicitation methods within qualitative data collection may provide a novel way to create visual representations of such relationships over time from the perspective of participants.

There are a number of graphic elicitation methods in which interviewers use visual tools that prompt interviewees to think across time and graphically represent some aspect of their experience. Visual data can be constructed by

both the interviewer and interviewee or visual data can be generated entirely by the interviewee (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). The advantages of graphic elicitation methods are that these methods allow for reflection, can lead to better recall, can triangulate data, and can prompt novel interviewee conceptualizations of the research topic (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Futch & Fine, 2014; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Calendar instruments have been used in various disciplines in order to “enhance autobiographical recall by providing the respondent with event cues” (such as holidays or personal events) and include a “graphical display of the time dimension” that will prompt the interviewee to recall experiences and the sequence of experiences (Glasner & van der Vaart, 2009, p. 335). These techniques have been used effectively to recall experiences in longer time periods (such as across one’s life) to smaller time periods (such as the period leading up to a diagnosis of an illness) (Axinn, Pearce, & Ghimire, 1999; Carter-Harris, 2015). Having an interviewee draw something visual can also be used to explore abstract concepts, emotions, and identity development (Bagnoli, 2009; Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Futch & Fine, 2014). Mapping techniques have been used to enable an interviewee to create hand-drawn illustrations that capture multiple layers of a person’s identity as it evolved across time and within different social spaces; these techniques have been particularly useful for interviewees who are not as comfortable with the language used in the interview protocol (Futch & Fine, 2014). Having interviewees generate timelines has allowed participants to reflect on significant events from their past that shape their identity (Bagnoli, 2009). In addition to generating rich data from interviewees, graphic elicitation methods can enhance data analysis by providing a visual “discursive tool” that speaks to other data collected from participants (Futch & Fine, 2014, p. 55).

The Current Study

Given the temporal nature of supportive youth–adult relationships and the abstract nature of trust, it could be particularly informative to use visual prompts to collect data on the trajectory of a supportive youth–adult relationship. This paper describes findings from a qual-

itative study on the trajectories of trust growth in seven high-quality project-based programs that were identified through graphical data constructed by interview participants. It focuses on trust growth trajectories because the paper is focused on the paths by which supportive relationships with adults are formed and maintained. Visual data analyzed shows the variability in the trajectories by which youth's trust in supportive adults in the youth program context changes over time.

Method

This study was conducted within the Pathways Project (see Griffith & Larson, 2015; Larson, Izenstark, Rodriguez, & Perry, 2015; youthdev.illinois.edu), a longitudinal mixed-methods study on developmental processes within youth programs serving high-school-age youth, within the family context, and where the two contexts intersect. One of the main questions in the Pathways Project was "How do program leaders' interactions with youth facilitate youth's work and learning?" This author nested a research question within the Pathways Project to study trust formation that asked: "How do youth's trust in a leader build within the youth-adult relationship in project-based youth programs?" During data collection, a subsidiary research question arose based on the visual data collected that is addressed in this paper: "What are the trajectory or trajectories by which youth experience trust in adults at youth programs across time?"

The Method section describes the research design of the trust formation study, how theoretical sampling introduced the graphical data discussed in this paper, and analytic strategies used to answer the subsidiary research question. This section concludes with a reflective statement on the role of the author.

Overview of the Study on Trust Formation

The trust formation study that produced data discussed in this paper sought to explicate a model of how adolescents' trust forms in the youth-program leader relationship. A constructivist grounded theory methodological approach was used to design the trust formation study because we sought to conceptualize the processes that promote trust increases from the

perspective of participants that could be useful for practitioners in youth program settings. Grounded theory research methodology was employed to explore and theorize about the phenomenon while remaining closely tied to the words of research participants (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As such, the study was designed to enable analysis to incorporate an iterative movement toward a model of trust formation through utilizing a number of core grounded theory techniques including theoretical sampling that led to the visual data.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the steps taken in the trust formation study with elements relevant to this paper shaded in gray. The first step of the study involved collecting and analyzing interview data from a set of youth in order to develop initial codes. The second step involved identifying promising concepts from initial data analysis. For example, some youth spontaneously mentioned their initial trust level or impression of the leader to tell the story of their increase in trust over time. In the third step interview procedures and questions were added to explore promising concepts identified during initial analysis that had not elicited a sufficient amount of data (i.e., theoretical sampling). One modification included prompting interviewees to construct graphs that represented their trusting relationship with an adult in the program over time to garner richer data on initial trust and the pace of trust growth. These graphs provided an unexpected set of visual data that proved to have its own theoretical value. This paper describes analyses of these data.

Sample

Forty-seven youth (25 male, 22 female; 11 Latino, 16 African American, 17 European American, 3 of Other Ethnicity, average age of 15.8) constructed graphs of their trust in a non-familial adult leader. Forty-five of these youth reported trusting at least one leader in the program. Youth came from a sample of seven programs in Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Central Illinois. The youth had participated in the programs an average of 1.8 years at the beginning of the Pathways Project. The programs included arts, leadership, and technology programs (See Table 1). Programs selected had low turnover of youth and staff.

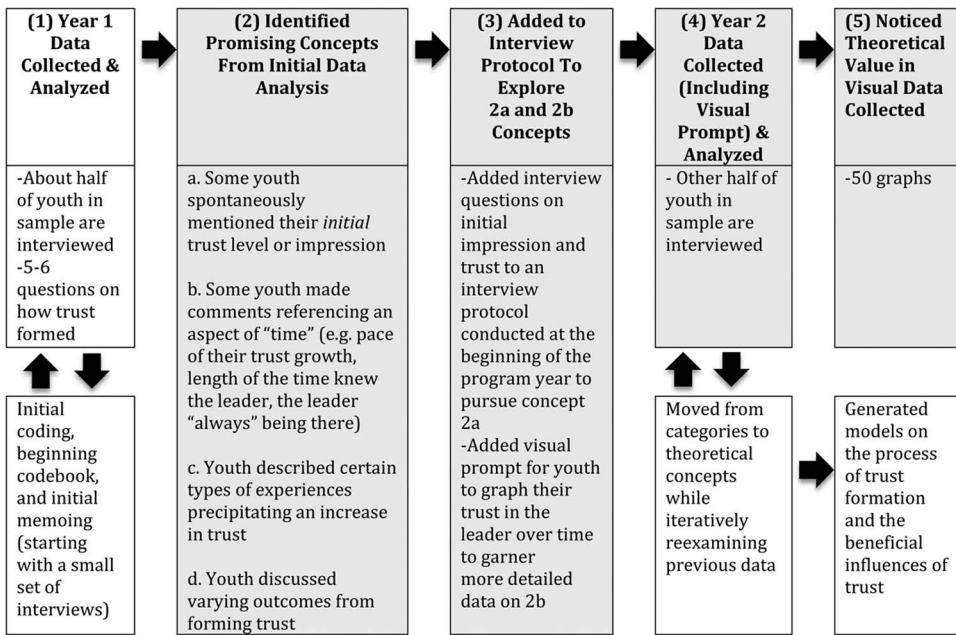


Figure 1. Trust Formation Study (data collection for current paper is shaded).

Data Collection

A set of trained interviewers used a protocol that first asked youth to identify the leader (if any) in the program that they trusted the most, and then asked why they trusted the leader. Using the visual prompt (see Figure 2), “Your Trust in the Adult Leader,” interviewers asked youth to draw a line representing how their trust in leaders changed over time, saying that the line may go up or down. The visual prompt was

an adaptation of a tool used in the Pathways Project with program leaders on a topic unrelated to the current study. On the y-axis of the prompt youth saw the labels: “no trust at all,” “in the middle,” and “very high trust.” On the x-axis youth saw the labels: “when you first worked with the adult leader in the program” or “when you first met the leader” and “Now” (i.e., time of the interview). This allowed youth to create a graph of their change in trust. If youth

Table 1
Programs Graphs Collected From

Pseudonym, location	Focal activities of the program	Graphs in sample
Emerson High School Drama Club, Central Illinois	Youth produce and act in plays and musicals.	13 graphs
Rising Leaders, Central Illinois	Youth organize school events and community service activities.	14 graphs
La Prensa, Chicago	Youth make news videos about the local Chicago neighborhood.	2 graphs
Toltecac Muralists, Chicago	Youth develop Graffiti art techniques and paint murals in city parks.	2 graphs
Urban Farmers, Chicago	Youth grow vegetables and sell them in the farmers market.	4 graphs
On Target, Minneapolis	Youth learn wildlife, fire arm and leadership skills.	6 graphs
Unity House, Minneapolis	Youth work on leadership activities, plan a service project, and work on their college readiness plan.	9 graphs

Your Trust in the Adult Leader

ID# _____

Very high trust	
In the middle	
No trust at all	
	<u>NOW</u>
<u>WHEN YOU FIRST WORKED WITH THE ADULT LEADER IN THE PROGRAM</u>	

Figure 2. Interview prompt.

created a graph where the beginning of the x-axis said “when you first met the leader,” the interviewer clarified whether the youth began working with the leader at the same time they met the leader and, if not, what the beginning of the graph was referencing because the current study was most interested in trust forming processes that occurred when the youth began working with the leader in the program.

The interview protocol included questions about the graph youth drew. With regard to each line segment or change that showed an increase or decrease in trust, interviewers asked:

- Now I want to understand what happened to change your trust. [Point to each line segment or change that shows an increase in trust] What happened that made you trust them more?
 - Probe: Were there any events or situations (that increased your trust)?
 - Probe: What did the leader say or do (that made you trust them more)?

[Repeat question for each upward line segment or change]

- [If there’s a point where the line goes down, ask]: Can you explain what happened here?

Some interviewers engaged in impromptu probing that provided substantial detail on what was occurring in the graph. Interviewers then asked youth a number of questions on what happened to make their trust grow and if that trust had any influence on them. Interview data informed the larger trust formation study, provided a context for the graph that youth constructed, and occasionally provided descriptive accounts that explained the nature of the graphs that youth constructed. Interview questions described above were asked 3 to 9 months after data collection for the larger Pathways Project began.

At an earlier time point at the beginning of data collection, youth were asked the following questions that frequently produced data relevant to their graphs:

- Who are the main adult leaders you have contact with in the program?
- Can you describe your *first* impression of the leader?
- At that time, did the leader seem like someone you could trust? Why or why not?

Integrating interview data made the visual data that were collected more meaningful.

Youth who reported trusting at least one leader in the program created a total of 48 graphs. Three youth created two graphs because they wanted to describe their relationship with more than one leader. Of these 48 graphs, two graphs were thrown out because the youth completed the graph incorrectly or created a second graph to replace the first. Of these 48 graphs, 46 graphs were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The goal of the analyses was to explore differences in how youth recalled trust growth across time. The graphs showed overarching trajectories that visually communicated how relationships over time changed from the perspective of participants, and interview data provided insight about these graphs. I employed a data analysis plan heavily guided by the approach of thematic analysis that also incorporated grounded theory analytic techniques like constant comparison and memoing (Boeijs, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006). Analyses occurred through three overarching stages. I describe each stage and include memos referenced in the [Appendix](#).

Stage one. Examining the shapes of the graphs both qualitatively and quantitatively to develop an initial set of codes. In accordance with Thematic Analysis, I first familiarized myself with the data and then generated codes on distinct elements of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Excerpts from memos documenting this stage can be found in the [Appendix](#). After taping a small set of graphs on my wall and taking detailed notes, I noted that many graphs started at no or low trust yet ended at high or higher trust, and that there was variability in the shape the graphs took before reaching that high level of trust.

To generate an initial set of codes, I recorded the defining characteristics of each graph in a table including the shape, the initial level of trust, and the ending level of trust. I described

the shapes of graphs qualitatively such as noting that a graph had a “steady increase with a slight curve that goes off the chart.” I assigned numbers (0–5) to represent the level of trust at the beginning and end of the line (e.g., “in the middle” = 3). I also recorded the numerical difference between the ending and beginning level of trust. In order to develop succinct codes, I compared defining characteristics between graphs, and collapsed similar descriptions to develop a set of initial focused codes. For example, by grouping descriptors like “gradual increase,” “steady increase,” and “straight line,” I constructed a code called “gradual trust growth.”

Stage two. Constructing conceptually meaningful categories and themes by collating codes. To develop themes around the visual data, I noted conceptually meaningful differences by collating codes and comparing data across codes. An early memo written during this stage can be found in the [Appendix](#). I categorized graphs based on initial trust and ending level trust with the categories of “no trust,” “low trust,” “medium trust,” “high trust,” and “very high trust.” To refine my categories of graphical shapes conceptually—similar to the process of thematic mapping—I organized the physical graphs into groupings based on codes, and continued to collapse these groupings into meaningful categories. For example, I initially had the groupings of “low trust with gradual trust growth” and “medium trust with gradual trust growth” by connecting the initial trust level codes and the shape codes. However, I later collapsed these two groups when noting that the steadiness versus lack of steadiness of trust growth appeared to be a more meaningful visual difference among the trajectories. I identified three visually meaningful categories of shapes: steady trust growth, critical points that spur trust growth, and trust dips along the way or levels off.

At the end of this stage, I noted two themes around the graphical pathways of trust. First, far more graphs began the path of trust development at no or low trust than began at medium trust, and none of the graphs began at high trust. Second, the majority of graphs indicated that trust grew steadily across time. These themes prompted two questions:

1. What led most graphs to begin at no or low trust, and a few to begin at medium trust?
2. What types of experiences influenced youth to draw a gradual steady line of trust increase versus those who did not?

Stage three. Integrating interview data to refine the themes. To address the guiding questions that emerged from these themes, I collated youth's interview data with the graphs they drew with a goal of identifying patterns associated with these data. I then placed both the visual data and corresponding interview data into documents that corresponded to the category of interest. At this stage I noted the ways youth referred to the beginning of their relationship with the adult, to their trajectory or pathway, to what was occurring across time, or to why their graph looked a certain way. During this stage, I took a close look at the interview data associated with graphs in the much less frequently described trajectories because cases that are less frequent in data that arise through constant comparison can provide insight for theorizing about processes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 102). This process revealed patterns within categories and the complexity of individual categories.

Interview data indicated that the lower levels of initial trust versus medium levels of trust differed based on three elements that were largely unrelated to the leader. The differing shapes of trajectories were based on the types of interactions youth recalled having with the leader over time. In the Results section below I utilize youth's accounts to give meaning to the visual data.

The Role of the Researcher

The interviews and graphs collected were conducted by an ethnically diverse set of interviewers (including the author) who were trained to ask youth about various topics. The various other topics in the interview protocol may have provided time for the interviewers to build a rapport with the youth. However, it should be acknowledged that some youth may have been more forthcoming than others because of the topic or their perception of the interviewer.

The researcher who analyzed the graphical data is an African American female who is a

former middle-school teacher. As such, the researcher may have been particularly attuned to how youth discussed the program leaders, especially when they contrasted their relationships with the ones they generally had with teachers. Knowledge of the more constrained school context may have also prompted the author to consider the role of the youth program in terms of a unique educational context.

Results

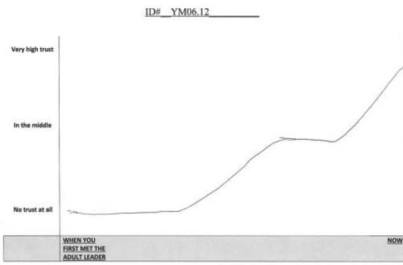
The findings describe the trajectories of trust development identified in three steps. I first describe variation related to where youth's trusting relationships *began* and the bases for this variation. I then describe the *paths* that were traveled to experience changes in trust. I conclude by describing four trajectories. All names—programs, youth, and leaders—are pseudonyms.

Three Elements That Influence Where Trust Trajectories Begin

The majority of youth graphically represented their trust trajectory beginning fairly low. Thirty-four of 46 trajectories indicated that youth initially had no trust in the leader ($n = 20$) or low trust in the leader ($n = 14$). However, about a quarter of the graphs showed that there were youth who initially had a *medium* level of trust ($n = 12$). Interview data associated with graphs that began at no or low initial trust were compared with interview data associated with graphs that began at medium level trust to answer the question, how did variation in initial trust level happen? Initial trust level was based on three elements.

Basis one: Negative versus positive gut feelings influenced initial trust. A difference between youth who had lower initial trust and those with medium level trust was the type of gut feelings they had about the leader. Naomi at Unity House (see Figure 3), who had no initial trust, said "I just felt like I couldn't trust him." Youth with initial medium level trust, in contrast, tended to have more positive gut feelings about the leader. Samantha at Emerson High School Drama Club (see Figure 3) described her first impression of the director, saying that she "just has this atmosphere [laughs] of trust, I mean you go next to her and just, 'That's like

Naomi at Unity House (No Initial Trust)



Samantha at Emerson Drama Club (Medium Initial Trust)

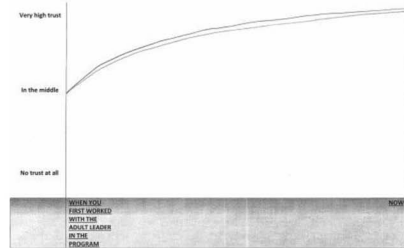


Figure 3. Negative versus positive gut feelings influence initial trust level.

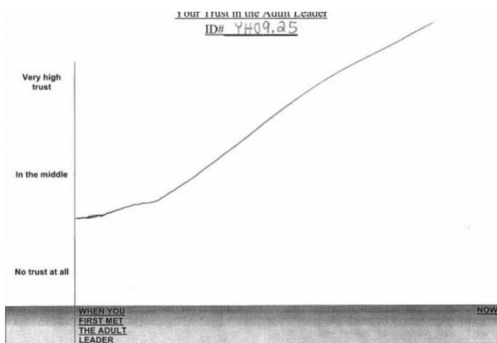
someone I can trust.” Thus, how youth thought the leader “looked” or how youth felt around the leader was an important basis for one’s initial trust.

Basis two: Degree of a trusting demeanor influenced initial trust. A similar yet less discussed element that determined one’s initial trust was whether youth saw themselves as trusting. Alonzo at Urban Farmers explained why he began his graph at low trust (see Figure 4), rather than no trust at all, saying: “I was raised—it was ‘Respect your elders.’ And you know, she’s a grown up, an adult, so I came in respecting her just because she’s an adult. Just with the respect came trust.” Ethan at Rising Leaders, who began with a little above medium level trust, explained (see Figure 4): “Because I’m a very trusting person, so this is before I really knew him—it was about here-ish and then we started in the program.” Youth who

described this basis of initial trust tied their demeanor to their own personality, philosophy, or upbringing; all of which can influence one’s initial perception of an individual.

Basis three: Absence versus presence of previous knowledge influenced initial trust. The absence versus presence of previous knowledge about the leader played a distinct role in youth’s initial trust. Many youth said that *not* knowing the leader made a difference. Eduardo at La Prensa (see Figure 5) stated, “At first I didn’t really trust him. He was a stranger at the moment.” Eduardo’s use of the word “stranger” is similar to how many youth mentioned that *not knowing* a leader made them have low or no initial trust. In contrast, some youth reported medium level initial trust because they *did* know the leader—either from a previous context like school or learning about the leader through second-hand knowledge from relatives.

Alonzo at Urban Farmers (Low Initial Trust)



Ethan at Rising Leaders (Medium Initial Trust)

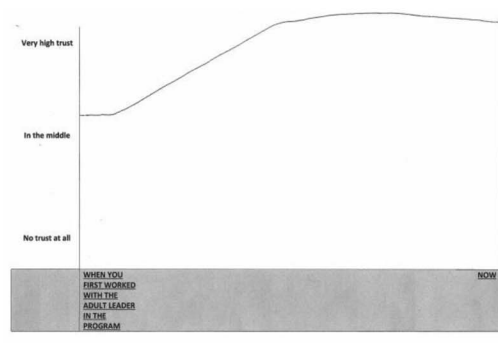


Figure 4. Degree of a trusting demeanor influences initial trust level.

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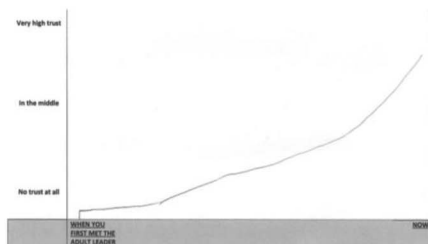
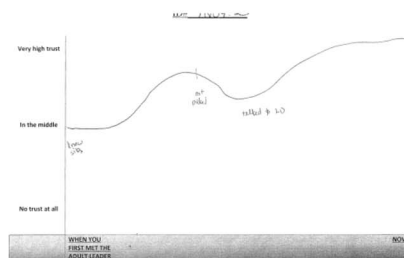
Eduardo at La Prensa (No Initial Trust)**Farid at Emerson Drama Club (Medium Initial Trust)**

Figure 5. Absence versus presence of previous knowledge influences initial trust.

Particularly noteworthy was the power of second-hand knowledge. Farid at Emerson High School Drama Club (see Figure 5) explained how his older siblings previously worked with the theater director: “So I already kind of knew her and they’ve told me to trust her and stuff like that. So I already kind of trusted her, I just didn’t know her very well.” The presence of previous knowledge—first-hand from a context or second-hand from a relative—countered the not knowing element.

A few youth also described how early events on the first day or toward the beginning of the program influenced their initial level of trust. Although early events are important, the three previously described elements are significant because they were commonly mentioned bases, and they were outside of the leaders’ control.

It is significant that—unlike early events—these three commonly mentioned bases for initial trust are largely unrelated to leaders’ actions. Affective responses based on how a youth feels around someone, one’s “faith in humanity” (i.e., belief that people are generally trustworthy), one’s “trusting stance” (i.e., belief that trusting people is beneficial), and one’s propensity to trust is likely to be undetected by program leaders (Lewicki et al., 2006; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McKnight et al., 1998). For adults, even “incidental emotions” can have an impact on trust if they are not familiar with the person (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005); one would surmise that this could be relevant for adolescents as well. More cognitive responses in which youth’s trust is connected to what youth believe the leader’s reputation is from another context or family member is also largely out of the control of leaders (Lewicki et

al., 2006; McKnight et al., 1998). Where trust began had little to do with the leader, but the paths traveled as youth experienced growths in trust largely involved interactions with the leader over time.

Of the 46 trajectories analyzed, 43 (93%) indicated that youth had high ($n = 8$), very high ($n = 23$), or higher than very high trust in the leader ($n = 12$) at the time of the interview. The others included two trajectories that ended at medium level trust and one trajectory that ended at a low level of trust. Youth had been in their respective programs from a few months to four years at the time of the interview ($M = 1.8$ at the beginning of the study). What were the paths of the trajectories between where trust began and where it was at the time of the interview?

Three Categories of Trajectories

For the great majority of youth, time mediated trust formation through a trajectory of steady growth in trust. Thirty-three (72%) graphs collected showed youth had a steady growth in trust over time. Although the most common trajectory was steady trust growth over time, there were 13 graphs (28%) in which youth did not construct a steady growth in trust. Analysis of these unique graphs led to the identification of two categories of unique trajectories: critical point(s) that spur trust growth ($n = 8$) and trust growth that dips or flattens ($n = 5$).

The steady trust growth trajectory. For the great majority of youth, time mediated trust formation through a trajectory of steady growth in trust. Most frequently these trajectories were straight lines, however, a few others were bumpy

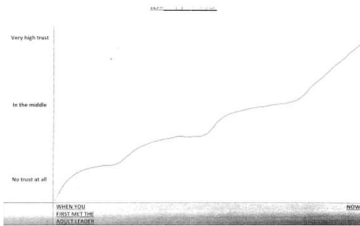
lines or slightly curved (see Figure 6). What influenced these youth to draw a steady line of trust increase? Interview data associated with graphs showing steady trust growth indicate that consistency was crucial but that the level of continuity and valence of interactions varied.

Youth who constructed these graphs used phrases in their interviews that indicated they valued consistency on the part of the adult leader. Phrases used by these youth included: “every time,” “never led me in the wrong direction,” “he would *always* tell me” and “she *always* motivated the group.” Youth’s words emphasize the importance of the leader being consistent. Similar to conceptualizations of caring, it appears that trust may be tied to leaders’ constancy in that these were ways that showed youth that the adults were not “haphazard and unreliable” (Rauner, 2000, p. 23).

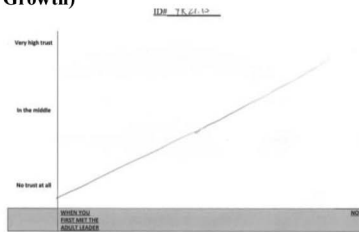
Although consistency was valued, there was a great deal of variation in how this consistency evolved. Visually, graphs varied in steepness. Most indicated gradual or slow trust growth. A few indicated faster pace trust growth. Some

trajectories appeared to be straight lines with slopes of one (i.e., the length of time increased by the same quantity as the level of trust increased). Interview data indicated there was also variation in the continuity of trust growth with one youth saying of her gradual, straight line that trust “didn’t increase constantly. Sometimes it would just stop. But after that it would just continue.” This comment suggests that even if a trajectory appears to be a straight line, this does not mean trust increased the same amount in regular intervals. Similarly, a steady line did not mean that interactions with the adult were entirely positive at all times. One youth (featured as an exemplar) stated of the steady graph he constructed that: “there were times I didn’t like her [the leader], I was mad at her for something or whatever. But I don’t think I distrusted her.” The domain of trust, hence, was maintained despite other issues that may have occurred in the relationship. For some of the youth who constructed graphs of steady trust growth, it appears that trust was a deeper,

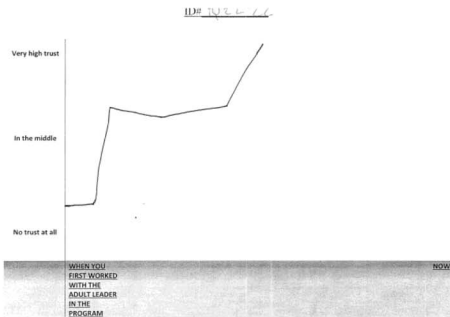
Emma at Rising Leaders (Example of Steady Trust Growth)



Imani at Toltec Muralists (Example of Steady Trust Growth)



Prashant at Emerson Drama Club (Example of Critical Points That Spur Trust Growth)



Donny at Urban Farmers (Example of Trust Dips or Levels Off)

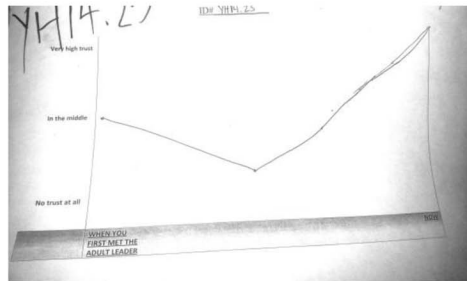


Figure 6. Examples of categories of trajectories.

longer-term construct that endured distinct from day-to-day ups and downs in the relationship (e.g., changes in liking, confiding in, or feeling close to the adult) despite ultimately being built from a consistent accumulation of experiences and interactions with the leader.

The fact that so many graphs fit into the category of steady trust growth is telling in that most young people who constructed a trajectory recalled that their trust grew steadily over time. A closer look does suggest that steady trust growth hinged on the consistency in the leader's behavior, had a great deal of variation in pace of trust growth, and could occur within more complex relationship dynamics.

The critical point(s) that spur trust growth trajectory. One exception to the pattern of steady trust growth were the graphs that showed youth had critical events that spurred trust growth at a much faster pace at one or more points in their trajectory. These were moments or sets of experiences that were turning points or times when youth's trust rose drastically in comparison with other sections of their graph. For some, this was one critical point, but for others it included a set of experiences at different times that made their graphs look similar to steps. Examples of situations youth described that increased trust at a faster pace at some points included: the leader remembered a youth's birthday even when the youth's family forgot it; after confiding in the leader about something, "he didn't tell anybody;" and after crying in the leader's office and benefitting from an empathetic ear, "that's kinda what shot it [trust] up."

The trust dips or levels off along the way trajectory. The second exception to steady trust growth was when there were dips in trust across time or trust growth leveled off below high trust. Dips could be tied to the program. For instance, two youth at a theater program drew graphs with dips to indicate a time the director did not cast them in a role they believed they deserved. In another case the dip occurred because of other personal challenges the youth was facing that made him connect less with many people, including the leader. Youth also spoke of how trust recovered from dips by talking to the leader or experiencing the leader's confidence in them.

Trust Trajectories of Four Youth

Identifying defining characteristics of where trust begins and the path by which it unfolds is informative. However, what does the arc of such a relationship actually look like and how does it inform our understanding of youth-adult relationships? I present trajectories from four youth to illustrate how trusting, supportive relationships evolve.

Jamie: The typical steady trust growth trajectory. Jamie at Urban Farmers drew a graph most typical of the pace and shape of growth found in graphs that indicated steady trust growth (see Figure 7). Urban Farmers was a program in which youth grew vegetables, sold vegetables at markets, and led cooking demonstrations. Jamie started her graph at no initial trust because of gut feelings about the leader of Urban Farmers, Melissa Vaughn:

At first I thought she looked like she was mean, so I was like, "Oh, she look like she mean." As days passed, you know, I realized Melissa was not a mean person. I could trust her, I could talk to her.

Over the next few months in the program (by the time of the interview) Jamie explained that "The more we talked, the more I was like, 'Oh I trust her, she's cool.'" It appears that Jamie constructed a trajectory to reflect various interactions with the leader over time. This does not mean that there were not specific interactions that were more meaningful to her than others—in fact, Jamie did emphasize how much she appreciated the leader's emotional support while the youth's cousin was in the hospital. Despite this, Jamie's graph represents an accumulation of experiences and interactions, rather than one particular interaction. Jamie described how "our conversations always made me trust her." The young lady recalled that there were times when:

I would have a problem, she would ask me, "What's wrong?" And I'm like, "Nothing," and she's like, "I know something's wrong, what's wrong Jamie?" and then I'd talk to her and she would give me her thoughts on what I should do.

Jamie appreciated that the leader was acutely aware that Jamie was upset whenever the youth "would have a problem." Melissa Vaughn's detection of some visual or verbal cue that Jamie was upset suggests she was highly attuned to Jamie, something key to high quality mentoring

Jamie at Urban Farmers

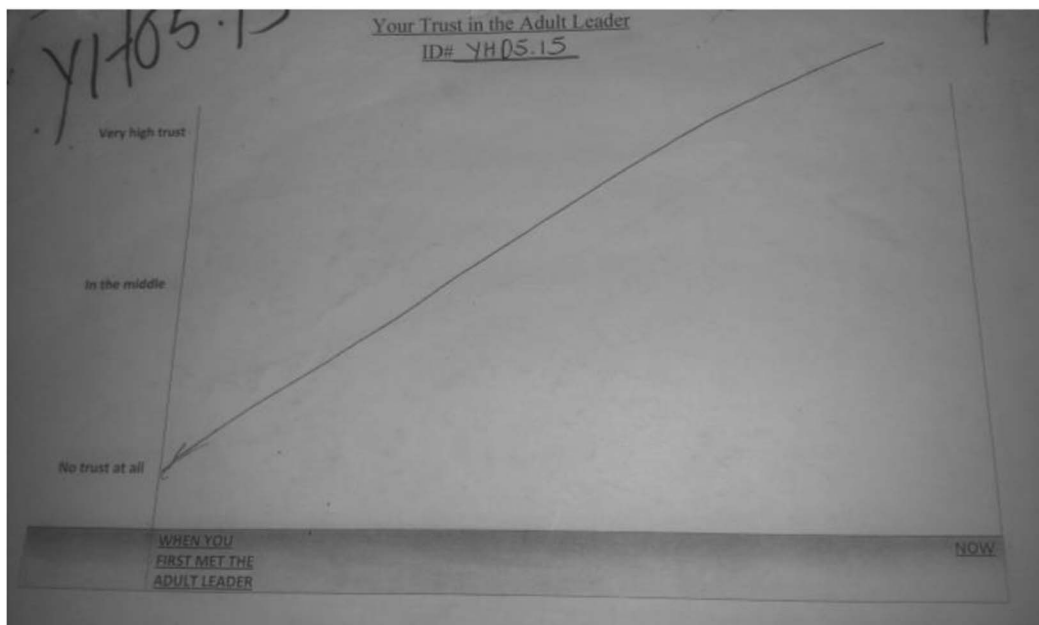


Figure 7. A typical steady trust growth trajectory.

relationships (Pryce, 2012). Jamie also appreciated that at these times, Melissa would pursue what was troubling her in a way that Jamie was comfortable with, suggesting the leader had a high degree of attentiveness, what Rauner (2000) identified as part of the construct of caring. Rauner (2000) defines attentiveness as “actively seeking awareness of others and their needs and points of view” (p. 7). Jamie discusses these types of interactions with the highly attuned and attentive program leader as being a regular aspect of their relationship and, as a result, contributing to her steady trust growth. Along with her chart, Jamie used phrases in her interview like “whenever I would . . .,” “always,” and “as days passed” which all suggest a similar trajectory to the graph that she drew.

Nadir: Steady trust growth in the midst of complex relationship dynamics. Nadir at Emerson High School Drama Club constructed a graph of steady growth from low trust to higher than very high trust in the director Linda Williams (see Figure 8). He explained that he drew his trust as low initially based on his knowledge of the leader:

I was a freshman, so I didn’t really know her. But she’s a teacher, so I mean there has to be a little bit of trust. And just over the years, I’ve grown with her. I’ve grown as a person and she’s been there along the way to help, and she’s really awesome.

It is noteworthy that Nadir perceives someone in the role of a teacher as automatically deserving of a “little bit of trust,” given that it is likely that some adolescents perceive that the role of a teacher calls for no trust at all or even a degree of mistrust (Yeager et al., 2014).

Although Nadir drew a graph of steady trust growth, he stated that during the four years he participated in the program: “there were times I didn’t like her, I was mad at her for something or whatever. But I don’t think I distrusted her.” Nadir went on to recount how there were times when he would be “talkative” and “goofy” and the director would “snap on me or whatever. . . . And I’ll be mad at her for the remainder of the day or the next day or whatever.” Nadir also recalled times when the leader got upset with him.

The young man theorized that these situations may have made his trust grow stronger, stating:

Nadir at Emerson Drama Club

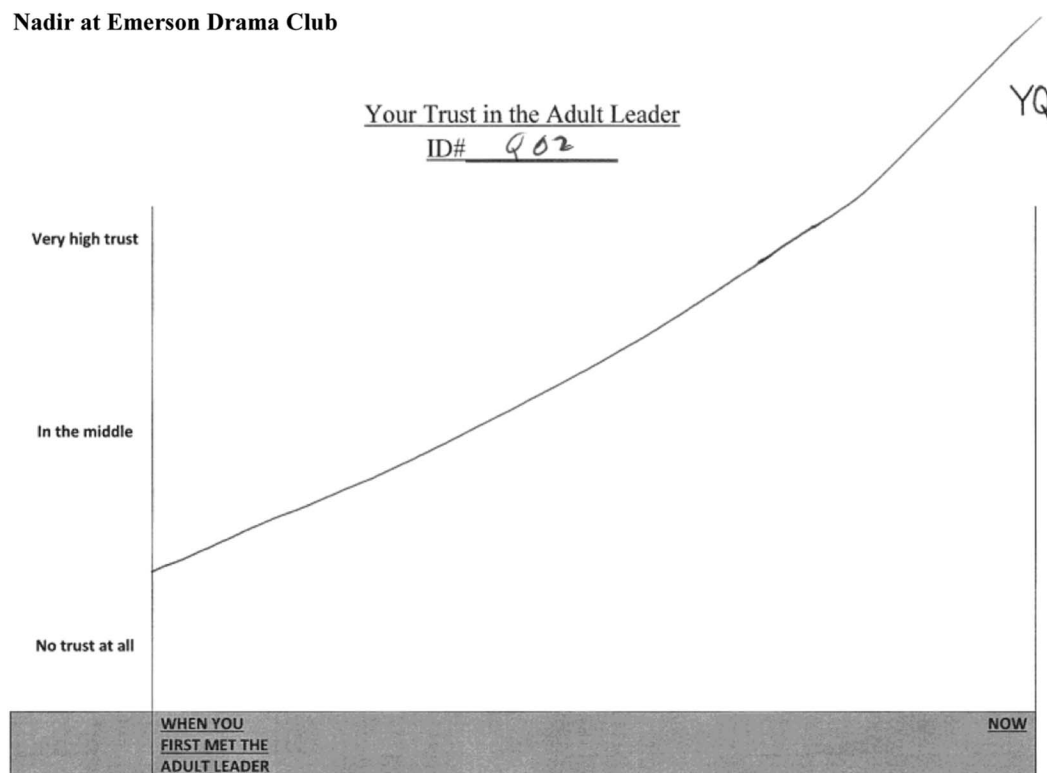


Figure 8. Steady trust growth in the midst of complex relationship dynamics.

I think that's what makes me trust her more. Is that after coming out of it. . . . Sometimes, there are some occasions where we need to talk about it. I need to talk to her, I need to apologize or something like that. . . . Actually say that what I did was wrong. Or why I didn't feel, I didn't like what she did or something like that. And other times it's just, maybe it was not as big and you just kinda, you just kinda get over it. You just wake up the next day I guess and you're like, "Eh, whatever. It wasn't that big of a deal."

Even though there were times that Nadir may not have "liked" the adult he trusted most, the way in which their relationship played out maintained the steady growth in trust that he drew. Nadir may have actually maintained steady trust growth because of his repeated interactions with the director. One study that used Trust Games repeatedly with their sample of participants has suggested that for adolescents more so than children (and less so than adults), one's "level of trust becomes (a) more dependent on the total history of interactions instead of just the most recent ones, and (b) becomes more resistant to violations in trust" (van den

Bos et al., 2011, p. 11). Nadir, who worked on plays with the director across four years, certainly had a relationship context that provided many interactions over time.

Katie: A critical point that spurs trust growth. Katie, who had been in Rising Leaders for nearly a year at the time of the interview, drew a graph (see Figure 9) that began with her not knowing the leader, David Dunn, and, hence having no trust in him. Rising Leaders was a leadership program in which the youth organized an array of activities including community service activities and activities for the school. A team-building event in which participants engaged in triggered a sharp growth in this youth's trust. At the event staff shared their stories, including a story from the program leader that Katie felt was "touching." This event made her feel like she could relate to others and the leader. She mentioned how this became the first of many times that she confided in the leader which increased trust:

Katie at Rising Leaders

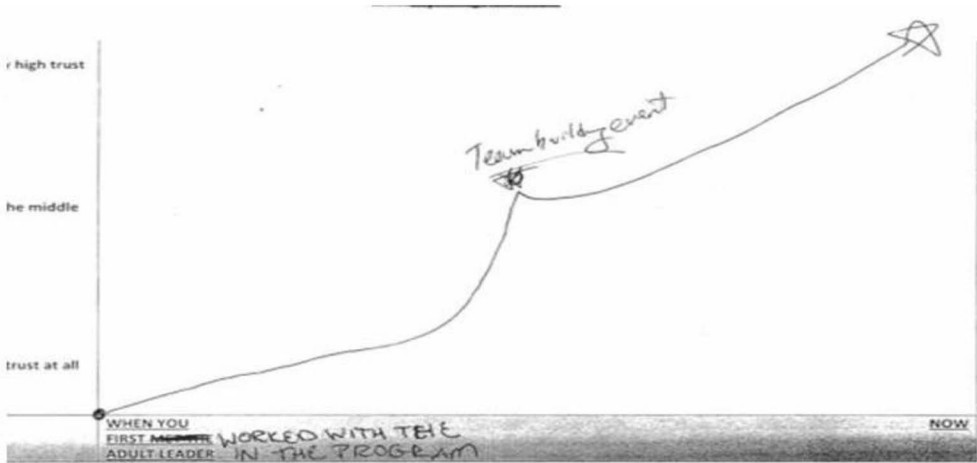


Figure 9. Example of critical point/s that spur trust growth.

I opened up to him about stuff and then you know after that he'd always tell me like "I'm here for you. If you need to talk, you can come talk to me." And I think that just kinda led to it [my trust] going up.

She also stated, "after the teambuilding and I opened up to him, I think it just became so much easier to open up to him and talk and stuff." The critical turning point of the event not only led to a sharp increase in Katie's trust, it also facilitated the types of future interactions that would then continue gradually increasing her trust.

Adalyn: Trust dips along the way. Adalyn had participated in Emerson High School Drama Club for four years at the time of her interview. She drew a graph (see Figure 10) with dips to indicate a time that the director, Linda Williams, did not cast her in a role. Although her trust began "in the middle," it dipped when she did not get a particular part one season. However, her trust increased again when the leader chose her to play a character that needed to be filled midseason. Adalyn described why her trust increased after the dip, explaining that she was surprised the leader chose her—a sophomore rather than a senior—to play a character saying, "I think that that decision and her just laying all this on me really showed that she trusted me. And so I had to give that back to her."

The utility of the visual method in capturing the trajectory of a supportive youth–adult rela-

tionship is most clear when contrasting Adalyn's graph with Nadir's (see Figure 8). Both youth attended Emerson High School Drama Club. The two participants have similar trusting relationships with the director that grew over the four years they participated in the program through various types of interactions. However, only through graphical data do we see empirically how two similar trusting relationships can simultaneously be very distinct when considered as a whole across a time period. When complementing the visual data with interview data, it is clear how these constructions are largely driven by the perception of the youth over time. As a whole, Jamie, Nadir, Katie, and Adalyn created varying trajectories of trust with adults that suggest implications for PYD.

Discussion

Implications for Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development's focus on youth-context interaction over time (Benson, 2007; Masten, 2014) privileges the youth program context as a space where youth can undergo PYD and form sustained, supportive, and trusting relationships with adults. PYD also privileges the perspective of youth regarding

Adalyn at Emerson Drama Club

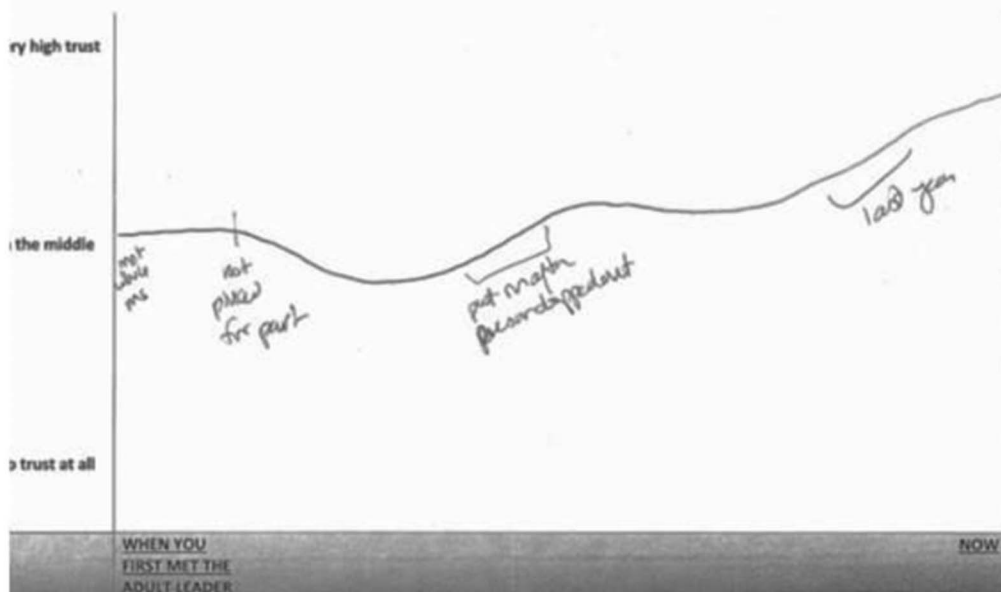


Figure 10. Example of trust dips along the way or levels off.

their experiences and interactions with the environments they navigate. The findings of the current study suggest a number of points that have implications for Positive Youth Development practice, theory, and methodology in the youth program context.

First, youth and adults working together in a youth program should expect a degree of variability in how youth–adult relationships form. In this study, even steady trust growth over time was experienced differently for individual youth within the same context working with the same adult. It was also found that a more unique trust trajectory can still lead to the same level of trust as time passed, including the trajectory of dips along the way.

Second, this study suggests there are *typical* trajectories of trust that most youth experience as they participate in a program. In a typical trajectory, a youth's trust starts fairly low and grows steadily over time. Time allows for an accumulation of experiences and proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) on a microscopic level that is similar to PYD's "pile-up hypothesis" (Benson et al., 2007, p. 921). Rather than a pile-up of numerous developmental assets across contexts leading to

greater positive outcomes, in the current study's sample the pile-up of these experiences of positive interactions with leaders across multiple time points led to an increase in trust. This pile-up may also be occurring for the adults in supportive youth–adult relationships. Time may allow for an accumulation of reflections about the young person that enables the adult to become more attuned to the uniqueness of a particular youth. A more attuned adult is more likely to be able to be supportive in a way that is appropriate to a particular youth. Although this is the most typical trajectory, it is important to also understand less common trajectories.

Third, PYD theory should consider to what extent a youth's initial trust will vary across youth–adult relationships. In this study fewer youth began their trust at medium trust than low or no initial trust. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model may be helpful for theories of PYD to conceptualize the nature of potentially supportive relationships in the beginning of a relationship. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) emphasize the importance of how youth *experience* a context, in contrast to what the context is objectively assumed to be. In this study's sample, youth's initial trust was frequently experienced

through their gut feelings, previous knowledge, and trusting demeanor, all of which are beyond the leader's control. Relationship histories in various microsystems that the youth traverses may influence how they experience the relationship in the beginning. Second-hand knowledge gathered about the adult as a consequence of various mesosystems may be more likely to occur in smaller communities. Dynamics of the macrosystem, especially stereotypes produced by inequality, may lead some youth to be mistrustful of adults in educational contexts (Cohen & Steele, 2002), rather than perceiving that a teacher automatically deserves "a little bit of trust." Where relationships begin is influenced by a number of factors, however, as time passes, proximal processes that occur in the context of reciprocal interactions in a relationship may change the level of trust a youth has in an adult over time.

Fourth, the trajectories suggest that PYD should explore the role conflict may play in the arc of a supportive youth–adult relationship. It appears that trust can be maintained or grow even when a youth and a program leader have the type of disagreements that can arise within educational contexts. Behavioral issues or miscommunication are likely to arise in a group context in which youth and adults work on challenging projects. What was noteworthy in the limited data the current study had on conflict was that challenging relationship dynamics may or may not influence trust trajectories. Challenging relationship dynamics can lead to dips in trust or it could still remain as steady growth in trust. Conflict research itself has many caveats on the types of conflicts that are beneficial for relationships, including whether a conflict is constructive, whether it is part of a relationship with moderate conflict on a whole, and the nature of the conflict (Laursen & Hafen, 2010). With regard to typical disagreements in educational contexts, practitioners and youth should be aware that what may be most significant for trust increase or trust repair after a dip is the way a conflict is resolved.

Finally, the adult's consistency across time may be most influential in the path of trust growth. Overall, the visual displays suggest one reason why PYD finds that a supportive relationship with an adult is developmentally beneficial when fostered and sustained across time. Regardless of the shape of the graphs, time

spent in the program gave youth the opportunity to change their initial trust level, which also means that the adult who formed a relationship was consistently there. This was something that could occur in this sample because the study included a sample of youth programs with low youth and staff turnover. However, given that many youth programs frequently have high staff turnover, the lack of consistency possible in such an environment would hinder the types of trust growth trajectories found in the current study. Addressing such turnover will require the youth development field as a whole to increase pay, establish career ladders, and provide more professional development support for practitioners working directly with youth (Yohalem & Pittman, 2006).

Methodological Implications for Research on Change Over Time in PYD

The strengths of qualitative research methodologies in incorporating the voice of individuals, documenting processes, and embedding oneself within a context places researchers in a unique position to examine how aspects of developmental assets change over time. Collecting visuals that show change over time within the context of case studies, ethnographies, and grounded theory research could allow qualitative researchers to explore change related to PYD outcomes, nuances of commonly agreed developmental assets, and how multiple assets work together across time. Interviewees could create visual displays retrospectively or longitudinally that show how they conceptualize the change in a developmental asset. Researchers conducting observations across intervals could visually track change across time around one developmental asset by contrasting observations. Similar to quantitative latent trajectory analysis, qualitative researchers can contribute to visual displays of data that illustrate change over time. This would provide information on processes that inform theories of PYD as the field moves forward and focuses more on trajectories of positive youth development.

Conclusion

This paper sought to demystify what occurs in sustained, trusting, and supportive relationships with adults, a key external developmental

asset in PYD, by describing a study on trust trajectories in youth programs. This study was able to take a step toward capturing the arc of supportive relationships by focusing in on the core ingredient of trust across time in the youth program context.

Limitations and Future Research

The visual prompt that was introduced through a larger study's use of theoretical sampling provided a novel way to conceptualize change visually and incorporate the voice of youth who were making meaning of such relationships as they constructed graphs. However, the visual prompt and data collected had limitations. In the future, collecting integrated visual and interview data could be more intentional. First, the visual prompt could be improved by adding space for youth to write on the *x*-axis a detailed timeline of their relationship and on the graph where situations occurred. Additionally, the interview protocol could be improved by including more probes regarding the shape of the graphs. In the current study some interviewers engaged in more impromptu probing than other interviewers. For instance, some interviewers asked: "so where would you say that event happened on this line? And "oh, in the middle it's very high, so when is this moment, is this kind of a turning point?" Other interviewers stayed fairly close to the interview protocol and, as such, may have missed opportunities for the youth to repeatedly reflect on their graph. Indeed, it has been suggested that visual data are less effective when there are not enough data to contextualize it (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). Finally, having participants simultaneously create graphs in real time could strengthen the study. Comparing real time with retrospective qualitative data could validate the retrospective data (Hayman, Polman, & Taylor, 2012); or it could provide insight into whether a youth's perception of an individual after knowing them for an extended amount of time influences their retrospective account of the trajectory of trust growth.

There were also limitations with respect to the sample. The accounts in the current study were retrospective self-report data from youth who maintained program participation. Future research could widen to a sample that includes youth who dropped out of the program, provid-

ing greater variability and potentially providing data on low trust growth trajectories or even trajectories of distrust. This would allow one to tease out characteristics of relationships that do and do not have an increase in trust over time. Additionally, the sample included youth who had attended the programs in a varying of different time frames. Hence, some trajectories accounted for a year of participation whereas others accounted for two years. It could also be informative to include the perspective of the adult leaders on their relationship with the youth.

Contributions

Despite the limitations described above, this study contributes to research in the field of PYD by providing an empirical study of how youth make meaning of developing and sustaining a trusting relationship with a supportive adult across time. The methodological tool is also a contribution, as it can add to qualitative research in terms of gathering interview data on youth-adult relationships and provide a method for triangulating such data.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Memo Excerpts

Memo Excerpts From Stage One (Examining the shapes of the graphs both qualitatively and quantitatively to develop an initial set of codes)

(a) . . . I taped all the trajectories on my wall to see what might be some of the defining characteristics that emerged visually. I looked at the wall and took notes of what was some patterns I saw. These included that:

- Everyone was at a higher trust level at the point of the interview than when they first began the program or first met the adult leader.
- Many ended at very high trust, higher than very high trust, or high trust.
- The shape of the slope or trajectory across time varied. Some were bumpy, some had sharp changes, some flattened out. Some had a gradual increase.

(b) . . . I first brainstormed descriptors based on what I observed on my wall just to guide me as to the type of stuff I might write down (Gradual increase; bumpy with some dips; flattens out; sharp changes/turning points were some ideas for descriptors). I looked at each trajectory chart and wrote a description for each one. For example some descriptions included: “Steady increase with a slight curve that goes off the chart!”; “sharp increase in beginning with leveling off;” “slow but steady increase;” and “bumpy, squiggly line up until 3/4s of way when starts having increase.” I then looked for phrasing that was repeated frequently

and wrote them down and then categorized similar types of phrasing to figure out the type of categories I may be able to say are there within the trajectories . . .



(c) Phrases or words that appeared often in my descriptions of the trajectories are below. I have grouped the descriptors in ways that I feel are related in order to begin to categorize trajectory shapes. Ideas that I feel are related but I did not have in my written descriptions are in italics. These are on the left hand side. I am hoping that the continued analysis of this can add to my “Time as a Facilitator” text. I am brainstorming categories right now.

(Appendix continues)

Descriptors	Category
-gradual increase -steady increase -straight line - <i>Rate of change = 1</i>	“Gradual trust growth” One category could be some youth who had a gradual and steady increase in trust. Often the rate of change of trust seemed to be a 1.
-sharp increase -sharp and steady increase	“Swift trust growth” Another category is youth who had a sharp increase in trust that was steady and indicates that their trust increased faster much more.
-flattens/leveling out -flat -extremely steady	“Slow trust growth” This category is for those who had very little trust growth and there also some who may have a trust growth but then it flattens out
-bumpy -squiggly -dips	“Ups and downs trust” Another group had a much more complex trust growth that sometimes even involved a decrease in trust.
-critical points/turning points - <i>the rate of trust changes across different time points</i>	“Critical points for trust growth” These were groups of people who had quick increases in trust growth at some point.

Memo Excerpt From Stage Two (Constructing conceptually meaningful categories)

(a) . . . it certainly seems most meaningful to know that some are more steady and gradual whereas some have more ups and downs. I think the ones where trust went down at some point are interesting. So maybe what is interesting

more so is the steadiness of the trust growth. So you have ones with this steady trust growth (the pace may differ from slow to gradual to swift but all are fairly steady) lines. Then you have the ones who have critical moments identified as significant to trust change. And then you have ones with a more bumpy trajectory in their trust change. And then you have ones that have a leveling off at some point.

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