Youth Involvement & Engagement:

A Selected Bibliography

The Evidence Base for:

Participation of Young People in Systems Planning and Design
Youth Involvement & Engagement:
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Environments that foster empowerment lead to youth leadership development. Linking the concepts of empowerment and youth-adult partnerships, this article provides a context for youth professionals to reflect on their work. Empowerment is defined, its antecedents are identified, and a model of empowering practices for the context of youth-adult partnerships is posited. Five key practices that youth practitioners can implement to create an environment that fosters empowerment are presented, along with examples of empowering practices as a tool for reflecting on our practices.


The purpose of this study was to examine youths’ perceptions regarding their involvement on youth advisory boards in Cooperative Extension. A stratified, random sample of counties with active youth advisory boards was selected to ensure representation from all Extension districts in the state. A copy of the Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale was mailed to all participants. The findings indicate that youth feel good about their level of participation on their youth advisory board and that adult members of the board allow them to have an active voice in the activities of the board.


Despite increased focus on the effects of organized activities on youth development, there is currently no consensus about the best way to assess various dimensions of involvement. This article explores the complexities of assessing involvement and focuses specifically on the following organized activity dimensions: (a) breadth, (b) intensity, (c) duration/consistency, and (d) engagement. For each dimension, the article examines the theoretical underpinnings for why it is important to measure the dimension, presents measurement issues that have arisen in previous studies, describes how the dimension relates to developmental outcomes, and offers recommendations for assessing it in future use. A conceptual model is presented to describe issues that are important to consider when assessing various dimensions of organized activity involvement in future research.

A review of the literature reveals this to be an underdeveloped area of research both in New Zealand and overseas. However, there is a useful body of literature to support the opinion that children and young people not only know what they need from services but are also able to articulate those needs if given a supportive environment and the means to do so. A review of relevant Ministry of Health policy documents confirms an intention to improve the responsiveness of mental health services to consumers. There is growing recognition that mental health services need to value and empower service users as genuine and respected partners in all aspects of policy and workforce development, planning, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. Our consultation with major stakeholders showed that, although consumer advisors and representatives currently employed by child, adolescent and family mental health services (CAFMHS) fulfil a range of roles, there are significant differences in the extent to which these roles are used in individual services. The report concludes with a list of recommendations that can be readily implement by CAFMHS who are committed to developing effective and comprehensive consumer participation.


Youth activity involvement has been operationalized and analyzed using a wide range of approaches. Researchers face the challenges of distinguishing between the effects of involvement versus noninvolvement and intensity of involvement in a particular activity, accounting simultaneously for cumulative effects of involvement, and addressing multiple unique effects of individual activities. In the present work, we review and illustrate the conceptual and empirical implications of these issues using data from a study of activity involvement and successful development in early adolescence (N=537; M age=11.56, 52% female). An integrative solution is introduced based on a latent composite variable (LCV) model (Bollen & Lennox, 1991), which can be used to address all three issues simultaneously. Using this approach, we show that of the aggregate indices examined, breadth of involvement was uniquely and positively associated with multiple indices of successful development. Of the individual activities, a dichotomous score and residual frequency rating for involvement in out-of-school clubs were both uniquely associated with less positive development indicators. We concluded that an LCV approach provides a novel method for addressing several fundamental operational and analytic issues facing researchers who investigate youth activity involvement as a context for positive development.


Inclusive participation is a primary component of civil society. Yet opportunities and pathways for youth civic engagement remain limited for youth. This limitation has been significantly influenced by the daily segregation of youth from adults, negative public beliefs about adolescents, and stereotypes, both negative and overly romantic, about the capabilities of adolescents. However, this state of affairs is being challenged by youth and adults across the county. Five contemporary pathways for youth civic engagement are described: public policy/consultation, community coalition involvement, youth in organizational decision making, youth organizing and activism, and school-based service learning. Three overarching qualities
among these 5 pathways are also discussed: youth ownership, youth-adult partnership, and facilitative policies and structures.


Youth are an often untapped but potent resource for community change. To engage youth in community change coalitions requires more time, resources, and intentionality than many anticipate, making it imperative to base the work on well-established principles. Using outcome and process data from a multi-year initiative in seven communities, we describe beneficial results for youth, adults, and communities. The analysis of the most successful community-scale action finds that three implementation principles are critical: (1) asking the right strategic questions in the right order; (2) creating organizational structures and processes that integrate youth and adults into joint decision making; and (3) marshaling boundary-spanning community leaders with diverse skills and extensive networks. The research highlights how community development ideas can augment the predominant research emphasis on youth engagement methods and individual developmental outcomes, focusing attention on whether communities have the leadership and institutional capacity to nurture and sustain youth voice in public life.


Youth participation strengthens personal and social development, provides expertise for children and youth programs and services, and promotes a more democratic society, but questions arise about its most fundamental phenomena. Lacking agreement on its basic content, however, youth participation as a field of practice and subject of study will be limited. This paper examines what we know about youth participation, general propositions which are substantiated by research or practice, and unanswered questions or unresolved issues which remain for future work. It draws upon various academic disciplines and professional fields, in order to contribute to knowledge development and advance the field.


Community organizing groups that have built coalitions for local change over the past few decades are now involving young people as leaders in efforts to improve quality of life. The current study explores a particularly effective youth organizing initiative through review of organizational documents and collection and analysis of qualitative data. The study finds that this model for youth organizing is effective at producing impacts at multiple levels because it weaves together youth development, community development, and social change into a unified organizing cycle. The initiative encourages participants by promoting psychological empowerment, leadership development, and sociopolitical development. Simultaneously, youth organizing produces community-level impacts, including new program implementation, policy change, and institution building. Social changes include intergenerational and multicultural collaboration in the exercise of power. This interplay between youth development, community
development, and social change is discussed in relation to the growing field of youth organizing and other efforts to engage youth in civil society.


This article presents a critical analysis of mentoring for social inclusion. It traces its dramatic international expansion as a tool of education policies in the 1990s, and identifies a new model, ‘engagement mentoring’, which seeks to re-engage ‘disaffected’ young people with the formal labour market, and to engage their commitment to dominant interests through shaping their dispositions in line with ‘employability’. Mentors are treated as vehicles for these objectives, their dispositions also subject to transformation according to gendered stereotypes of care. The model is illustrated by a case study of engagement mentoring, and feminist readings of Bourdieu and Marx are used to relocate it within the socio-economic context from which it is usually disembedded. The article concludes that engagement mentoring constructs the habitus of both mentor and mentee as a raw material subjected to an emotional labour process.


This study examines a cross-sectional structural equation model of participation in youth activities, neighborhood adult support, individual decision making skills, and delinquent behavior in urban middle school youths (n = 2611). Results indicate extracurricular activity participation had both direct and indirect associations with delinquent behavior. Breadth, but not intensity, of activity participation had a positive association with neighborhood adult support and higher levels of adult support were associated with higher levels of youth decision making skills. Higher levels of decision making skills were, in turn, associated with lower levels of delinquent behavior. A direct positive association between intensity of activity participation and delinquent behavior was noted, after accounting for other effects in the model. The specificity model revealed that this association was mostly due to participation in neighborhood clubs (as opposed to sports, school clubs, church, helping/volunteer, or music, art, or drama). Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.


Youth with serious mental health conditions (SMHC) face many obstacles as they mature into adulthood. For those who are involved with public systems, such as special education, child welfare, mental health, or juvenile justice, their journey is complicated by the separation of child and adult service systems, and insufficient services targeted at supporting their movement into mature adulthood (Davis & Sondheimer, 2005). The Center for Mental Health Services, of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, asked the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, through a contract with the American Institute of Research, to collaborate in examining Federal policies and programs that impact youth with SMHC as they transition from adolescence to
adulthood, and develop recommendations. With CMHS, these parties convened a meeting to obtain input from individuals whose personal or work lives were affected by these policies and programs. The goal of the meeting was to share the analyses of Federal programs and use the creativity of meeting participants to help develop recommendations, learn about additional programs that were previously unidentified, and to ensure that the recommendations that were developed were grounded in the real experiences of these individuals. This paper is a summary of that meeting.


We used meta-analysis to review 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth. Overall, findings provide evidence of only a modest or small benefit of program participation for the average youth. Program effects are enhanced significantly, however, when greater numbers of both theory-based and empirically based “best practices” are utilized and when strong relationship are formed between mentors and youth. Youth from backgrounds of environmental risk and disadvantage appear most likely to benefit from participation in mentoring programs. Outcomes for youth at-risk due to personal vulnerabilities have varied substantially in relation to program characteristics, with a noteworthy potential evident for poorly implemented programs to actually have an adverse effect on such youth. Recommendations include greater adherence to guidelines for the design and implementation of effective mentoring programs as well as more in-depth assessment of relationship and contextual factors in the evaluation of programs.


Focuses on the concerns of the Australian youth about the world and its future. Implications of the 'Spinning Tree' poems made by primary school students in Canberra; Moral confusion and contradiction of modern western culture; Effects of the rate and complexity of change; Lack of shared vision of society and its future; Link between modern western culture and the broader traits of modern youth.


The Youth Policy Framework addresses urgent issues for youth in the province while pointing out the need for the development of high-quality system of promotion, prevention, early support and intervention for youth. It outlines MCF’s approach to youth services and defines whom we serve; guides policy and program development; supports reviewing and realigning youth services and developing and implementing MCF’s Priority Plans related to Youth Services. While recognizing validity of regional differences, the need for consistency in policy and program development is emphasized.


This article reports on a pilot study of exemplary community-based youth initiatives in the United States in which young people are active participants in solving problems, planning programs,
and providing services at the community level. The article presents brief summaries of six initiatives illustrating a range of youth participation in the issues that affect their lives and their communities. These diverse initiatives exemplify a view of young people as resources and promote individual, organizational, and community development. They were selected on the basis of their commitment to youth involvement, capacity building, collaboration, cultural awareness, community-defined concerns, leadership development, continuity, and comprehensive and change-oriented practice. The initiatives provide lessons for practice and challenge social workers to build meaningful partnerships and practice approaches that challenge problem-oriented interventions and recognize young people as competent community builders.


Communities benefit from meaningful involvement by individuals of all ages, but adults don't always perceive youth as legitimate, crucial contributors to community decision-making processes. The purpose of the study reported here was to determine if adults who participated with youth in the Horizons program changed their attitudes, opinions, and behaviors when working with young people on community issues or projects. Results indicate a positive change in adult attitudes, opinions, and behaviors when working with youth following the Horizons program community conversations and leadership training.


Partnerships often yield greater ideas and bolder visions. In 2003, the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council and the City of Los Angeles Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), partnered to convene a Youth Engagement Taskforce. Our hope was that we could work together – along side with youth and people who care about youth – to create a movement and a new way of thinking. Our goal was to identify best practices and opportunities for a countywide youth engagement effort that would increase the number of youth actively engaged in civic and community life and in matters that affect them.


This article provides a critical perspective on the increasing involvement of young people in participatory evaluation as well as identifies the factors to consider when designing a youth-led evaluation project. Through this avenue, young people will increase their participation in organizational development and community change. Youth-led evaluation can be a powerful tool for supporting youth to move beyond socially determined roles to become active participants in evaluation and their own growth.

The history of determinants in Canada influenced both the direction of data gathering about population health and government policies designed to improve health. Two competing movements marked these changes. The idea of health promotion grew out of the 1974 Lalonde report, which recognized that determinants of health went beyond traditional public health and medical care, and argued for the importance of socioeconomic factors. Research on health inequalities was led by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research in the 1980s, which produced evidence of health inequalities along socioeconomic lines and argued for policy efforts in early child development. Both movements have shaped current information gathering and the policies that have come to be labeled “population health.” (Am J Public Health. 2003;93:388–392)


Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy is about the ability of young people to influence public policy in Canada and the barriers to their greater involvement. Despite the importance that most governments place on youth, young people are not normally associated with policy decision-making. Rather, they are treated as the “next generation” and imbued with all the rhetoric associated with being the “leaders of tomorrow.” This lens requires a “re-focusing” when one begins to examine the type of activism taking place within youth organisations today, and consider the value that youth participation could bring to the policy-making process. This report argues that policy-makers need to re-focus the way in which they look at youth participation. There are a variety of youth organisations and groups attempting to influence public policy at the local, provincial, national and international levels that have something important and unique to contribute. This need to re-focus, however, does not only apply to those who are currently in a position to shape policy. It also applies to youth themselves, whose lack of strategic thinking and political awareness has been a barrier to their own participation. Re-focusing the Lens is part one of a two-part project developed by the Ontario Secondary School Students’ Association (OSSSA) and the Institute On Governance (IOG). The project explores how youth succeed at influencing public policy and the type of barriers that stand in their way. This document will expose some of the reasons for success and failure, reveal the rich tapestry of youth involvement and innovation, and provide some important lessons about youth involvement in public policy.


This article examines how an experiential education opportunity affected leadership development of a young adult over a five-year time period. The individual participated in a series of authentic environmental leadership activities which emphasized direct experience, peer-to-peer mentoring, and youth-adult partnerships. We illustrate how sustainability educators and planners can engage youth in meaningful leadership activities and encourage long-term leadership cultivation. Challenges to facilitating environmental youth leadership are also addressed, including relating to and providing appropriate support for adolescents and young adults.
Recent policy frameworks for addressing the well-being of young people have increasingly adopted a prevention framework that emphasises age-relevant support, a social inclusion approach, targeted assistance for the most disadvantaged, and more avenues for the voices of young people. However, despite the increased policy commitments to youth consultation and participation, there is confusion about the operational implications of such commitments, and implementation across different program areas has been patchy. This paper provides a conceptual framework for understanding the various forms of youth participation, ranging from information exchange to more open and self-managed participation; and the associated rationales for various forms of participation. It is argued that there are three main rationales for greater voice and participation of young people across a variety of institutional settings and policy areas. First is the argument that young people have the right to be nurtured, protected and treated with respect, and where appropriate be involved and consulted. Secondly, it is argued that improvement of services for young people requires their views and interests to be well articulated and represented. Thirdly, it is asserted that there are developmental benefits arising from participation, for both the individuals themselves and for civil society as a whole.

There is a small but significant group of severely mentally ill people who have multiple, long-term needs and who cannot or do not wish to engage with services. Unless engagement is achieved and people in the group are provided with safe and effective services, they will continue to face social exclusion. Public confidence in services is determined partly by the adequacy of services for this group. The Review focused on the needs and aspirations of people who are not engaging with services and has examined how services can best address those needs. It has developed a core service model and a series of steps which need to be taken nationally and locally to enable systematic service development across the various agencies involved.

This article discusses youth engagement in local environmental action in a peripheral settlement in Lima, Peru. Urban local environmental action is analysed in terms of the so-called “brown agenda”, covering issues as the provision of drinking water and sanitation, waste collection, the paving of roads, adequate housing and the creation of green areas. The article describes how these brown agenda issues are mainly realised through adult collective action, with the notable exception of the creation of parks. Young people are intensively engaged in the creation of green areas and public spaces. This turned out to be a battle for physical as well as for social political space. Despite the fact that different youth groups were successful in creating parks and public space, adults tended to claim back these spaces once constructed. With the gradual consolidation of the neighbourhoods over time, the need for and interest in collective action dwindled, both among adults and among youth.

Concerns about the increasing involvement of many adolescents in high-risk behaviors have prompted a search for strategies and approaches that can guide youth away from unhealthy and unsafe practices and engage them in becoming productive members of society. This search has revealed many uncertainties in understanding how teenagers negotiate critical transitions, such as from school to work and from child to parent, the formation of self-identity, and the selection of life options. In situations in which communities must struggle with the problems of poverty, crime, drugs and other negative influences, some youth are able to connect with social and economic networks that can help them become successful and productive adults. Others never gain access to or turn away from such networks.


To create and sustain high quality youth development programs it is important to understand the challenging situations and dilemmas that emerge in program leaders’ daily work with youth. In this research the experiences of leaders in 12 programs were followed over a 2–9 month period, which led to the identification of 250 dilemma situations. Qualitative analyses identified 5 categories and 12 subcategories of dilemmas that reflected distinct types of considerations (e.g., youth’s personalities, relationships with the community). The analyses also found that the experienced leaders in the study typically responded to these dilemmas in ways that were youth-centered and that balanced multiple considerations. It is argued that researchers need to go beyond identifying features of high quality programs, and more fully examine how effective leaders create and sustain high quality in response to the challenging situations of practice.


The purpose of this study is to examine the factors involved in predicting successful development after an intensive exchange experience in adolescence. Specifically, we considered the eight positive features, as conceptualized by Eccles and Gootman (2002), as well as the amount of input youth had into their exchange experience as predictors of successful development after the exchange. In this short-term longitudinal study, 242 young, middle, and older adolescents, who participated in a national short-term exchanges program, completed surveys before and after completion of the program. Overall, we found that both the eight positive features and personal input were significantly related to overall successful development after an exchange, controlling for initial reports of successful development. This research contributes to an understanding of the importance of different qualities of activity experiences in overall youth development.

The goals of youth mentoring have broadened from redressing youth problems to promoting positive youth development. Yet, many of the principles associated with contemporary conceptualizations of development found in the positive youth development (PYD) and community psychology (CP) literature have yet to be fully integrated into mentoring research and practice. These approaches place greater emphasis on youth as assets to their communities and the promotion of positive development through the cultivation of these assets, often by fostering collaborative partnerships between youth and adults to effect social change. In this paper, we examine how bringing these systemic, asset-oriented approaches more fully to bear on the youth mentoring process creates opportunities that may both extend the reach and deepen the impact of youth mentoring through the promotion of community, social, and individual change.


Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy is about the ability of young people to influence public policy in Canada and the barriers to their greater involvement. Despite the importance that most governments place on youth, young people are not normally associated with policy decision-making. Rather, they are treated as the “next generation” and imbued with all the rhetoric associated with being the “leaders of tomorrow.” This lens requires a “re-focusing” when one begins to examine the type of activism taking place within youth organisations today, and consider the value that youth participation could bring to the policy-making process. This report argues that policy-makers need to re-focus the way in which they look at youth participation. There are a variety of youth organisations and groups attempting to influence public policy at the local, provincial, national and international levels that have something important and unique to contribute. This need to re-focus, however, does not only apply to those who are currently in a position to shape policy. It also applies to youth themselves, whose lack of strategic thinking and political awareness has been a barrier to their own participation. Re-focusing the Lens is part one of a two-part project developed by the Ontario Secondary School Students’ Association (OSSSA) and the Institute On Governance (IOG). The project explores how youth succeed at influencing public policy and the type of barriers that stand in their way. This document will expose some of the reasons for success and failure, reveal the rich tapestry of youth involvement and innovation, and provide some important lessons about youth involvement in public policy.


Reflections from the Field are technical assistance products inspired by stories, questions, and needs of system of care communities. Each document in the series aims to educate the reader on a specific topic, providing insights, answers, and resources.

McDaid, S., Equality Studies Centre, School of Social Justice, University College Dublin (2006). Equal and Inclusive User
Involvement in the Mental Health Services in Ireland: Results from Participatory Action Research. User involvement is not always a means of empowerment. It is also a process which can disempower mental health service users (Croft & Beresford 1995). If, as is recommended in Ireland’s new policy document A Vision for Change (Department of Health and Children 2006), user involvement is to be extended to all levels of the mental health services, and if it is to go beyond the exceptional few, it is necessary to put in place a framework for equal and inclusive involvement. Service users want to participate in decision-making on how the mental health services are run and they feel capable of participating: “I think that they should wake up and see that there are service users all over this country who are quite capable of sitting on committees, quite capable of effecting change, and this fear that health care professionals have I think needs to be really seriously challenged.” (male leader aged 40) However, they face a range of disadvantages relative to the professionals on planning committees, including unequal access to economic, social, cultural, and physical and mental resources, lack of authority over decision-making, deficits of knowledge and skills, lack of respect and recognition both in Irish society and within the mental health services, and the need for emotional support.


Civic engagement—that is, community service, political activism, environmentalism, and other volunteer activities—provides needed services to community residents and psychological, social, and intellectual benefits to participants. A small but growing body of research suggests that giving young people opportunities to become engaged in civic activities increases the likelihood that they will become healthy, active citizens. This synthesis of civic programs for youths provides specific information on the role that civic engagement plays in helping young people develop a broad array of strengths and capacities. It focuses on youth outcomes in four domains: educational achievement and cognitive attainment, health and safety, social and emotional well-being, and self-sufficiency. Moreover, the synthesis seeks to address the following questions: What do civic engagement programs look like? What resources do civic engagement programs provide for promoting youth development? What impacts do civic engagement programs have on youth outcomes? What characteristics of the programs seem to constitute effective civic engagement? All of the programs in this synthesis have been evaluated, but not all of them with the same scientific rigor. Studies that use an experimental design to test the impact of programs are emphasized because only experimental studies can yield causal evidence about what works or does not work to promote desired youth outcomes. Few such studies exist, however, so rigorous quasi-experimental and nonexperimental studies are also included. Although they provide valuable insights into effective program practices, the results of quasi- and nonexperimental studies can only be considered suggestive. Therefore, they are referred to as “best bets” for programs. Experimental evaluations of the following programs are included: Across Ages, Quantum Opportunities Program, Teen Outreach. Quasi-experimental evaluations of the following programs are included: K-12 Service Learning in California, Kids Voting USA, Learn and Serve America. Non-experimental evaluations of the following programs are included: Appalachian Project, Community-Based Planning Project, Public Works Mapping Project.

School environments offer a particularly difficult setting for fostering youth-adult partnerships because of the sharp power and status distinctions among students, teachers, and administrators. Drawing on interview and observational data examining 13 student-voice initiatives in northern California, this research examines the type of supports that can enable the development of strong school-based youth-adult partnerships. The data demonstrate that efforts to reshape student roles face great resistance and require intentional effort on the part of adults and youth to sustain partnerships. Specifically, the institutional constraints of schools required extra attention to fostering more equitable relationships between youth and adults within school walls, establishing the legitimacy of these new relationships through the completion of specific and yet meaningful objectives established by the partnership, and finding sufficient time to engage in the work of building these partnerships.


The Campbell Collaboration (C2) was founded on the principle that systematic reviews on the effects of interventions will inform and help improve policy and services. C2 offers editorial and methodological support to review authors throughout the process of producing a systematic review. A number of C2's editors, librarians, methodologists and external peer-reviewers contribute.


This essay discusses the potential of narrative expression as a method of primary prevention to promote psychosocial resilience in young people. Conceptual perspectives from resilience research are examined as rationales for “zones of narrative safety,” defined as sites of expression, listening, and reflection in formal and informal activities structured to be supportive and caring. The role of narrative in integrative processes is highlighted, and practical strategies in schools and communities are used to illustrate how narrative formats are applied for the purpose of fostering competence in youths. Further study of such strategies is needed for design of effective prevention programs in different contexts.


There exists on the edge of Irish society a group of people whose predicament is a cause of great concern. The group are young and vulnerable and often involved in high-risk behaviour, including stealing, joyriding, assault, under-age drinking and drug misuse. Some of these young people suffer from depression, with others involved in self-harm behaviours. A large proportion of these young people have had long-term involvement with care and welfare services and / or the juvenile justice system. Yet regular contact with these systems has done little to solve the problems presented by the young people or prevent the recurrence of their risk behaviours. Negative experiences of and outcomes from education and training systems are also often a feature of the group, with many having already left school early without qualifications. In essence, this group of young people are marginalised from society. Because of their needs and behaviours, they exist outside the normal processes and patterns of teenage life.
The label ‘out-of-control’ is often used to describe the group, reflecting both the failure of natural support networks and State intervention to meet their needs. For many years, institutionalisation or incarceration were the main State responses to this group. Even today, a lack of suitable accommodation means people as young as fourteen are sent on remand to adult prisons simply because there is nowhere else for them to go. A lack of alternatives to corrective institutionalisation for young people with behavioural problems or psychiatric difficulties has been characteristic of the system for decades. As society has rejected them, they too reject society and the formal structures and responsibilities it imposes. Yet, society recognises that the needs of this group must be met, for young people themselves and for its greater good. The challenge is to achieve a level of reintegration to mainstream society, characterised by positive behaviours such as attendance at schools or training centres, building and maintaining good relationships with family and avoiding anti-social behaviours.

Over the last decade or so, community-based preventive approaches have become a key part of State and Western Health Board (WHB) responses to meet the needs of this group. Mandated since 1991 to provide family support services under the Child Care Act of that year, the WHB has also pursued this strategy in responding to the Children Act, 2001, which obliged it to put in place measures for young people whose behaviour places them at the intersection of child care and juvenile justice systems, on the verge of being placed out of their own homes and away from their families.


In the field of positive youth development programs, “empowerment” is used interchangeably with youth activism, leadership, civic participation and self-efficacy. However, few studies have captured what empowerment means to young people in diverse contexts. This article explores how youth define and experience empowerment in youth-led organizations characterized by social justice goals: high school Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). Through focus group interviews, fifteen youth leaders of GSAs from different regions of California explain what they think empowerment means and how they became empowered through their involvement with the GSA. Youth describe three inter-related dimensions of empowerment: personal empowerment, relational empowerment, and strategic empowerment through having and using knowledge. When these three dimensions are experienced in combination, GSA leaders have the potential for individual and collective empowerment as agents of social change at school. By understanding these youth’s perspectives on the meanings of empowerment, this article clarifies the conceptual arena for future studies of socially marginalized youth and of positive youth development.


A number of best practices are recommended by researchers and professionals in the field of transition to improve postschool outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities. This study analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 to examine whether best practices are predictive of postschool outcomes. The combination of five best practices was found to significantly predict employment, postsecondary education, and enjoyment of life.
outcomes after controlling for characteristics. In these analyses, parent expectations for employment and postsecondary education were some of the strongest predictors of postschool success. Although this study had several limitations, these findings suggest that best practices may be predictive of postschool success and highlight the importance of having high expectations for all youth.


In this chapter, the author reflects on 40 years of changes in approaches to working with and for marginalized young people. Despite the progress we have achieved during this time, the author reminds us that young people must not only have access to resources and opportunities, but also must become active in sharing and exercising power if we are to achieve our vision.


In 2000, Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, and Calvert published a seminal report on a study of youth involvement in organizational decision making, which they identified as the first to examine the effects of youth involvement in organizational decision making on organizations and adults. Youth involvement in organizational decision making occurs when youth work, usually in collaboration with adults, to set the policy direction of the organizations. Examples of such involvement include program planning or delivery, advocacy, and membership on advisory teams. Zeldin et al. (2000) argued that although organizations had done much to integrate youth into decision-making practices in organizations and institutions, research had not kept up with practice.


Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents in many industrialized countries. We report evidence from a mediation model linking greater youth activity engagement, spanning behavioral and psychological components, with lower suicide risk through five hypothesized intrapersonal and interpersonal mediating factors. Self-report survey data (15% French, 85% English) were gathered from a community sample of 5,015 Canadian adolescents participating in a mental health promotion program. Youth (M age = 15.77, SD = 1.42, 50% female) were from two urban centers in southern Ontario, Canada. Youth engagement (youth’s most important type of activity, frequency of involvement, and psychological engagement), suicide risk predictive factors (self-esteem, current concerns, depressive symptoms, coping ability, and connections with others), and suicide risk (ideation and attempts) were assessed. Consistent with the hypothesized mediation model, enjoyment and stress in youth’s most important activity and various activity types were associated with the various hypothesized suicide risk predictive factors, which in turn were related to suicide risk. Implications for conceptualizations of youth engagement as a multidimensional construct and for suicide risk prevention efforts are discussed.
Youth civic spaces are environments in which youth participation in civic action is fostered—the pathways, structures, and vehicles that provide opportunities for young people to engage in critical discussion, dialogue, and action. The concept of youth civic space includes the formal and informal places in which youth civic engagement can occur and how the lived experience of those places contributes to young people's development as civic actors. It extends discussions regarding the physical locations of youth civic engagement to include the activities, perceptions, and interactions within them. Drawing on archival materials from 2 multiyear projects, this article explores the role of community-based organizations in mediating youth civic action and understanding the characteristics and qualities of the organizations that facilitate youth engagement in community action and social change. We use this analysis of empirical examples to develop a conceptual framework for strengthening practice.


Youth activity involvement has received increasing research and theoretical attention and should be of particular interest to social development investigators. Involvement has been correlated with a wide range of positive developmental indices, although not for all activities nor for all children. However, our ability to interpret such findings has been restricted by measurement and design limitations. Greater attention needs to be given to assessment issues and to determining the unique effects of psychological vs. behavioral engagement, as well as to capturing the dynamic nature of engagement and the moderating role of individual differences. ‘Big picture’ models of the entire engagement process (such as the one presented here) will help identify gaps in our research knowledge and will integrate existing evidence and theory.


Participation in youth programming fosters positive developmental outcomes for youth, yet recruitment and retention are ongoing challenges. Given the imbalance in rates of participation of ethnic minority youth, compared with White youth, it is important to gain a greater understanding of the contextual factors that promote or inhibit participation. In this study, the authors considered whether elements of positive youth programming, specifically youth voice and supportive relationships, would reduce potential barriers to continued program participation. Consistent with the extant literature, supportive relationships reduced potential barriers to continuing participation. The key finding from the study, however, showed that youth voice increased potential barriers to participation for ethnic minority youth but not for White youth. The implications for research and practice are discussed.


Youth-serving organizations are increasingly interested in the participation of youth as partners in addressing issues relevant to young people. This paper adds new insights by sharing young
people’s perspectives on how to enhance youth participation in organizational settings. We conducted in-depth focus group interviews with 31 young people and seven adults from six youth development programs in California where youth collaborate with adults to take on leadership and decision-making roles. Findings suggest that organizations need to incorporate peer processes into their change strategies, discuss the role of relationships in the program and organizational sphere, and embrace mutual learning and meaningful community impact.


Adolescents benefit from contact with high-resource community adults, but intergenerational obstacles make these interactions difficult, fragile, and rare. This qualitative research investigated the success of seven, primarily urban, leadership, and arts programs that attempted to facilitate these interactions within their programming. Program advisors and 71 ethnically diverse program youth (mean age = 16.5) were interviewed biweekly over 3 to 4 months. Analyses indicated that programs were effective in facilitating these interactions through organizing activities that entailed structured, meaningful youth-adult role relationships. Substantial brokering efforts appeared to be required of advisors. Although these contacts involved one-time interactions or, at best, longer-term superficial relationships, youth described obtaining valuable information, skills, and access to adult worlds. The findings illuminate the challenges, limits, and benefits of attempts to bridge youth and adult worlds.


Extracurricular activities provide a key context for youth development, and participation has been linked with positive developmental outcomes. Using data from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD), this study explored how the intentional self regulation ability of youth interacted with participation in extracurricular activities to affect PYD among adolescents living in neighborhoods with relatively low ecological assets. In total, 545 youth were included in the study (50.3% female). Most of the youth were European American (41%) or Latino (37%; African American, 10%; Asian American, 7%; Native American, 4%; and other, 1%). In general, youth with the greatest capacity to self regulate benefitted the most, as compared to their peers with less capacity to self regulate, from involvement in extracurricular activities. Consistent with a developmental systems perspective, and specifically with bioecological theory, the findings from this study confirmed that, within lower asset settings, children with the most positive person-level factors (intentional self regulation) benefit the most from proximal processes such as extracurricular activity involvement.


Our communities will only reach their potential as vibrant and healthy places when youth are welcomed as full participating members. Supportive adults, young people, and community associations often ask: How do we build the quality relationships that are the foundation for youth inclusion? What roles should we each take? How do we make the process fun, rewarding
and sustainable? How can communities and youth work together to effect change? A paradigm shift occurring in youth development practices can help answer these questions. The principles and practices of Community Youth Development (CYD) are taking hold in a wide range of settings, from inner city youth centres where young people are key decision-makers, to school-based youth groups that motivate educational reform, to youth-led conservation groups working to preserve the ecological balance (Burgess 2000; Tolman & Pittman 2001). CYD is an approach that espouses the principle that when youth are enlisted as active agents of community building, it contributes positively to both youth development and community development. CYD assumes the involvement of young people in their own development and that of the community (Curran & Hughes 2000). Though a powerful and transformative public idea, CYD is challenging to put into practice. It calls for changing entrenched attitudes, behaviour patterns and cultural norms.


The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project is an afterschool empowerment program and research project for underserved early adolescents. Central to YES! is an empowerment intervention that provides early adolescents with opportunities for civic engagement with other youth around issues of shared concern in their schools and neighborhoods. This article specifically focuses on the use of Photovoice as a promising way to engage youth in social change as they take photos capturing strengths and issues in their environment and use these as the basis of critical dialogue and collective action plans. Adding to a growing body of information on using Photovoice, this article reports how early adolescents in the YES! afterschool program experienced the Photovoice process, moving from photography and writing to initiate group-designed social action projects. Recommendations are offered for others engaged in empowerment work with early adolescents.


Research suggests that increasing egalitarian relations between young people and adults is optimal for healthy development; however, the empirical assessment of shared control in youth-adult partnerships is emerging, and the field still requires careful observation, identification, categorization and labeling. Thus, our objective is to offer a conceptual typology that identifies degrees of youth-adult participation while considering the development potential within each type. We use an empowerment framework, rooted in evidence-based findings, to identify five types of youth participation: (1) Vessel, (2) Symbolic, (3) Pluralistic, (4) Independent and (5) Autonomous. The typology is constructed as a heuristic device to provide researchers, practitioners and policy-makers with a common language for articulating degrees of youth participation for optimal child and adolescent health promotion.

Youth policy in the United States reflects the public assumption that adolescence is a time of storm and stress and that youth are therefore in need of protection and control from their communities. These and other beliefs about youth distance adults from youth in their communities and, equally important, distract attention and debate from the full range of policy responses available to address youth violence. The purpose of this policy analysis is to explore youth engagement in community decision-making as a public response to violence. A broad body of research indicates that youth engagement reduces the likelihood of interpersonal violence and delinquency, while concurrently promoting community membership and the development of positive youth competencies and emotional well being. Given that youth engagement is a viable policy option, the challenge will be to integrate youth into their communities as contributing citizens rather than regard them as objects of concern. Towards that end, the analysis offers six policy directions.


Youth engagement in community governance is currently being advanced as a policy priority for promoting youth development and building healthy communities. The practice and its assumptions, however, have not yet been connected to, or substantially informed by, scholarship on adolescent development. The purpose of this Social Policy Report is to bridge that gap. The analysis centers on four questions: What is the cultural and policy context for youth engagement in the United States? What are the theoretical rationales and innovative models for engaging youth? What is the empirical evidence in support of engaging youth in community governance? What are some directions for future policy and research?


Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) has become a phenomenon of interest to scholars and practitioners. Despite the potential of Y-AP to promote positive youth development, increase civic engagement, and support community change, the practice remains unfamiliar to many. Although research has increased over the past decade, the construct remains vague with an insufficient grounding in developmental theory and community practice. This article seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing data and insights from the historical foundations of Y-AP, community based research, and case study. We propose Y-AP as a unifying concept, distinct from other forms of youth-adult relationships, with four core elements: authentic decision making, natural mentors, reciprocity, and community connectedness. We conclude that Y-AP functions as an active ingredient and fundamental practice for positive youth development and civic engagement. Directions for future research are offered.


This manual is designed to help all those committed to youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP) acquire core knowledge, establish and communicate a point of view about Y-AP, and build consensus on key issues regarding Y-AP.

In its work with community collaborations, the ACT for Youth initiative elevated youth engagement as one of its core outcomes and primary strategies. In this study by the Center for Nonprofits at University of Wisconsin - Madison, the authors explore how the ACT for Youth communities responded to the challenges of youth engagement.


In conflicted societies and in societies that have glossed over major historical abuses, civic cultures often become characterised by sensitive issues being conscientiously avoided. This avoidance contributes to separations and inequalities among residents and communities, and prevents the establishment of policies that build trust and promote integration across lines of separation. In such societies young people are seen as problems, not assets, in public discourse. Such mental models disable a reconstructive, future oriented policy climate where young people experience being of value. This special issue argues for policies and practices that challenge this pessimistic common sense about what young people can contribute. It stresses the importance of restorative and intergenerational practices in the building of just societies. The articles further emphasize the importance of adopting principles of respect and inclusivity as cornerstones of policy, promoting youth-adult partnership and other devolved models of leadership in civic life, all within the larger context of explicitly working to secure more open, shared and interdependent societies.


This article describes the development and evaluation of an after-school curriculum designed to prepare adolescents to prevent violence through community change. This curriculum, part of the Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities (YES) program, is guided by empowerment and ecological theories within a positive youth development context. YES is designed to enhance the capacity of adolescents and adults to work together to plan and implement community change projects. The youth curriculum is organized around six themed units: (a) Youth as Leaders, (b) Learning about Our Community, (c) Improving Our Community, (d) Building Intergenerational Partnerships, (e) Planning for Change, and (f) Action and Reflection. The curriculum was developed through an iterative process. Initially, program staff members documented their activities with youth. These outlines were formalized as curriculum sessions. Each session was reviewed by the program and research staff and revised based on underlying theory and practical application. The curriculum process evaluation includes staff and youth feedback. This theoretically based, field-tested curriculum is designed to be easily adapted and implemented in a diverse range of communities.