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This chapter provides case studies and discussion about the ways that youth-led research and evaluation can help link youth and community development goals and outcomes.

Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development

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It is a deceptively simple formula: "youth contributing to communities—communities supporting youth" (Irby and others, 2001). The mutual and intergenerational interdependence is appealing, so why in most communities is this vision a dream largely deferred, if not outright denied? What are the pressures that keep them separate? Why have the realizations that youth and community development are inextricably linked—that youth are essential partners in community building, and that community building can provide developmental opportunities for youth—not been enough to make linking the two common practices? We contend that for support practitioners to do this type of work, they will need concrete models of practice in which youth play leadership roles in addressing community issues and communities learn to align themselves to better support their youth. There are excellent models of practice, as profiled by the Urban Strategies Council (1999), McLaughlin (2000), and elsewhere. In this chapter, we present an approach developed by Youth In Focus, a nonprofit intermediary organization dedicated to youth empowerment through youth-led research, evaluation, and planning.

Youth-led Research, Evaluation, and Planning (Youth REP), the approach developed by Youth In Focus, is a unique and powerful resource for those seeking to link community and youth development (Youth In Focus, 2002; Zimmerman and London, forthcoming). In particular, Youth REP is a means of promoting positive youth development and youth empowerment and for generating powerful learning for program, organizational,

and community improvement. Youth REP projects are based on an evaluation training method that offers youth meaningful leadership opportunities and addresses critical issues of power and social inequity. Youth In Focus offers this method as one way to address the profound challenges of linking youth and community development described in the opening paragraph.

We begin by discussing the implications of not linking youth and community development and follow with a brief description of Youth In Focus's Youth REP method of training and supporting youth to play leadership roles in research and evaluation projects and of training adults and communities to share decision-making power with youth. We then present some case studies of successful Youth REP projects. We examine each case for its lessons on the linkages between youth and community development and how youth-led evaluation can provide benefits for both processes.

Implications of Not Linking Youth and Community Development

On the fields of war, to divide is often to conquer. So, too, in the fields of youth and community development. When youth and community development are conceived of and practiced in isolation (or even in opposition), neither cause is fully achievable, and the status quo reigns. Popular images of youth as "superpredators" terrorizing communities are the flip side of traditional models of social service and educational training that "rescue" youth from dysfunctional environments—communities that terrorize youth. In contrast, the goals of authentic youth and community development are to heal this divide and to empower community members of all ages and background to create a healthy, sustainable, and just society and environment.

When isolated from community (and organizational) development, youth development efforts are stunted in their ability to cultivate young people's individual growth, their membership in communities, and their ability to effect institutional and community change. Youth are "developed" through a set of controlled activities rather than as active participants in real-world experiences and projects. At best, this objectifying model deprives youth of valuable learning opportunities and relationships; at worst, it leads to young people's alienation and resentment of the implied low expectations and the cultural and political disconnect from their communities. This model assumes that youth can be developed separate from their communities and in organizations devoid of community members. It fails to acknowledge that organizational and community development activities—researching issues and needs, planning initiatives, organizing projects and campaigns, securing resources, facilitating groups, and evaluating success—are often powerful development opportunities for youth (and all community members). It also fails to address the context in which most young people live, that is, a context in which they must respond to multiple forms of institutional oppression and develop new skills and models that

promote their communities' survival and well-being (Ginwright and Cammarota, forthcoming). As a result, young people are denied their right to learn how to be critical and constructive stewards of their community and agents of community change.

Separated from youth involvement, community development initiatives also suffer. In the absence of youth leadership, programs, organizations, and communities fail to reflect young people's needs and aspirations, and development processes lose young people's energy and knowledge. Young people's needs are often indicators of the most critical issues facing the community at large. In addition, without authentic interaction between adults and youth, negative media stereotypes of young people dominate and alienate community relationships (Gilliam and Bales, 2000). Not only does this model fail young people, it fragments the whole community and saps the vitality required for successful development that meets the long-term interests of community members. By not integrating youth at all levels, development processes can actually jeopardize the life and future of the community itself.

Benefits of Linking Youth and Community Development

In contrast, when thought of and practiced together, youth, organizational, and community development can exponentially improve all community efforts. In fact, these processes can fruitfully be conceived of as three streams within a broader current of social change. Connecting youth, organizational, and community development can produce generative and self-sustaining processes that serve to address key social issues and revitalize communities and the organizations and individuals within them. In partnership, these modes of development can create ladders of responsibility and support that draw youth into progressively higher levels of organizational and community leadership, laying the foundation for indigenous community leadership. This model is similar to many other innovative models of education (for example, experiential education, popular education, service learning) and community organizing, which integrate youth into community building, problem solving, activism, and stewardship over time. This synthesis can also build common cause between groups typically divided (by race, class, gender, sexual orientation) between organizations, places, and disciplinary fields.

Recent research on the nexus between youth and community development (Armistead and Wexler, 1997) and assessments of promising practices, such as Cutler and Edwards (2002) on the Ford Foundation's Community Youth Development Initiative, Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2001) on the Ford and Kellogg Foundation's Lifting New Voices, and Urban Strategies Council (1999) on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative, have highlighted a set of principles for

linking youth and community development. For example, Cutler and Edwards (2002) note that "[c]ommunities that are actively engaged in dialogue with youth are more likely to obtain positive responses from youth" (p. 22). Similarly, they note that efforts to transform adult perceptions of youth from problems to resources and allies are critical. The Urban Strategies Council (1999) recommends the support of organizations that "bind youth and community," including those that provide youth development opportunities that address community concerns. The Forum for Youth Investment (2002) observed that successful community and youth development efforts tend to foster youth awareness and responsibility toward their communities, increase youth leadership capacity, and create opportunities for social action. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2001) challenge youth development to rise to the importance of community and social justice. "Through authentic youth participation, youth development can be a vehicle for social justice—but its capacity requires a shift from business as usual in thinking and practice. Youth development methods must view young people as competent citizens with rights—to participate, to express themselves, and to engage in efforts to create socially just communities" (p. 37). Ginwright and Cammarota (forthcoming) take this a step further and argue that without a social- and community-justice lens, youth development efforts systematically fail youth of color and low-income youth.

Although the conceptual basis for linking community and youth development is well accepted in research circles, putting this into practice is a missing component of the field. Irby and others (2001) note that "opportunity exists to build on the growing interest in youth among community development organizations. . . . As yet, it is unclear how easily this interest in youth can be translated into a commitment to youth action, but cautious optimism and careful investment is warranted" (p. 39).

Youth In Focus Model

Youth In Focus's approach to participatory evaluation is a practical method to catalyze interest into action and is, therefore, worthy of this "careful investment." In particular, our work promises to provide what Irby and others (2001) call on "funders and advocates" to do, namely, "continue to support applied research and documentation that both strengthens the evidence base that youth action makes a difference while expanding best practice knowledge on effective strategies" (p. 40). Furthermore, Youth REP goes beyond this call by engaging youth in the documentation, research, and action processes themselves and ultimately in the process of knowledge production that shapes these fields. Youth-led evaluation requires the participation of multiple parties (youth, organizational staff, and community members), draws on their perspectives and expertise, creates opportunities for new partnerships, and ideally, provides a range of development benefits.

In sum, we argue that youth-led research and evaluation offers the conceptual and practical means to make good on the promise inferred in the hyphenated phrase, community-youth development. But, what does this look like?

Benefits of Youth REP for Youth, Organizations, and Communities

Youth REP, as supported by Youth In Focus, involves training and coaching on multiple levels: youth participants, on-site project facilitators, and executive leadership. The Youth REP process also includes planning for the implementation of the youth-produced recommendations and exploration of community-engagement strategies to best put the youth "voice" into the community ear and ultimately into action. Youth In Focus works to build the capacity of youth, youth-serving organizations, and communities to conduct, support, and sustain youth-led evaluation as an ongoing process of critical inquiry and improvement. Working on all of these levels is critical from a standpoint of community development and social justice. Too often, youth development focuses exclusively on building the capacity of young people to participate in adult-led settings. By also investing in the development of organizations, communities, and adult allies, Youth REP helps to shift the power imbalances that marginalize youth in decision-making arenas. Thus, the process provides benefits to the individual youth participants, the organization, and the broader community. These benefits are summarized in Table 3.1.

Youth REP Benefits Evaluation Practices

Participatory action research (PAR) is based on the epistemological and political value of local knowledge. That is, PAR holds that inquiry that minimizes or, better, removes the distance between subject and object is a more reliable representation of reality. PAR also supports the empowerment and self-determination of its participants (Hall, 1992; Whyte, 1991). A similar position is proposed by those pointing to the practical and empowerment benefits of self-evaluation (Fetterman, 2001; Wallerstein, 1999, 2000). The argument here is that what is lost in "objectivity"—the presumed value of an outside, dispassionate, and therefore *distant* observer—is gained manifold in validity of the data generated by those *closer* to the topic at hand (Williams, 1996). In the case of researching or evaluating youth programs or issues that affect youth, it follows that those with the greatest local knowledge about youth are youth themselves (Matysik, 2000; Shaw, 1996; Wallerstein, 1988). Like many disenfranchised groups, young people often suffer from misinformed decisions and policies that are made without their input. Youth-led evaluation empowers young people by providing them with the tools to develop and validate

Table 3.1. Youth REP (Youth-led Research, Evaluation, and Planning) Benefits

Benefit	To Youth Participants	To Organizations	To Communities
Skill or knowledge building	Develop strong research, analytical, and writing skills applicable to academic performance and advancement and community organizing Gain employment experience, job-readiness skills, and valuable networks of professional contacts Learn about institutional context and community history Learn the process and tools of knowledge production and community change	Develop staff and institutional capacity to support youth-led evaluation and planning within organizations Improve program, campaign, service effectiveness, and organizational culture through incorporating youth perspectives and analyses of organizations Develop a new understanding of community issues and increase the relevancy of organizational activities	Gain understanding of local challenges and assess strategies to creatively address youth and broader community needs Increase capacity to support intergenerational partnerships and youth leadership
Leadership development	Obtain civic leadership experience, transferable to a variety of community settings Hone public communication, outreach, organizing, and advocacy abilities Gain opportunities to mentor other youth evaluators	Create a ladder of leadership development to draw a pool of new and future staff and leaders trained in program evaluation and planning and knowledgeable about CBO operations and community-organizing strategies Benefit from youth serving as organization problem solvers, developers, and visionaries	Build social capital through a new generation with civic responsibility, analytical skills, organizing skills, and empowerment to address the challenges of the community Develop new models for engaging all members in decision making and leadership
Relationship development	Build mutually caring and respectful relationships with peers and adult facilitators Enhance mentoring relationships with professional researchers, evaluators, and community leaders	Enhance partnerships between CBOs and youth participants Engage youth who might otherwise remain on the margins or outside the organization Strengthen relationships with and engage a broad range of community members	Improve intergenerational communication, respect, and collaboration

Table 3.1. (Continued)

Benefit	To Youth Participants	To Organizations	To Communities
Identity formation	Empowered by serving as evaluators, planners, and organizers instead of passive recipients of services Enhance critical consciousness of social factors shaping their lives and how they can address them Achieve a sense of pride and empowerment from experiencing their ideas translated into action	Develop an organizational culture of reflective inquiry and adaptive learning Enhance the youth-centered or intergenerational character of the organization Build an organizational culture that is respectful and celebratory of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual-orientation difference and proactive in dealing with related issues	Promote a proactive and creative approach to community building Build community culture that is respectful and celebratory of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual-orientation difference and proactive in dealing with related issues

Note: CBO refers to community-based organization.

knowledge and to direct the development of the programs and policies designed to serve their needs. Thus, it is a reasonable proposition that youth-led evaluation—whether used as a sole method or as a complement to adult-led evaluation—should form an important part of the evaluation of youth programs and of community interventions on issues that affect youth.

Youth-led evaluation can be a powerful complement to other models of evaluation and assessment. It provides information and perspectives that professional and adult-led planning and evaluation cannot. Youth-led evaluation complements other processes by highlighting those issues and questions most important to young people. Evaluators with whom Youth In Focus has collaborated (including Harder and Company, JMPT Consulting, and University of California at Berkeley's Center for the Study of Social Change) have consistently been impressed and surprised by the innovation and insight of Youth REP evaluators. Specifically, they have observed that youth evaluators contribute the following to broader evaluation processes:

Central evaluation questions focused on local youth experience and youth needs
Youth-friendly data collection instruments
Researcher-subject relationships characterized by trust and respect
Data analysis and interpretation informed by experts in local youth culture
Findings and recommendations that focus organizational and community change on youth experience and youth needs
Creative reporting that speaks to broad youth and community audiences

A cadre of young people who are educated and committed to take the next
   step of action: advocacy and implementation

These benefits to the evaluation process and product of youth engage-
ment can be seen in a sample of projects facilitated by Youth In Focus.

San Francisco Juvenile Justice Evaluation Project

The Juvenile Justice Evaluation was a project of Rising Youth for Social
Equity in conjunction with Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth,
Delancey Street Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Change, and
Youth In Focus. Youth In Focus helped a team of twenty youth researchers,
many of whom had experience in the juvenile justice system, to evaluate the
effects of San Francisco's new Juvenile Justice Action Plan, which was
designed to reform the city's juvenile justice system by diverting funds to
alternatives to incarceration. Youth evaluators researched the needs of
young people in target neighborhoods and developed indicators for mea-
suring the success of the action plan's projects. The team worked alongside
adult evaluators, policymakers, and advocates. As a result of their work, the
team made recommendations that influenced both juvenile justice programs
and city policies. The team's findings supported ongoing citywide youth-
organizing efforts aimed at transforming the juvenile justice system. As
stated in the introduction to the youth evaluators' report: "One of the goals
of this project is to ensure young people are given a voice in designing and
evaluating the very programs designed to reach them. Young people will be
treated not simply as targets of service but as agents of change. The Youth
Evaluation Team aims to ensure that the views of all groups involved in the
project are equally represented" (San Francisco Juvenile Justice System
Youth Evaluation and Research Report, 1997).

The youth-led character of the project contributed much to the ultimate
quality and effects of the evaluation. First, having youth evaluators with per-
sonal experience with the juvenile justice system added greatly to the "local
knowledge" of the research team and to the team's ability to uncover infor-
mation from their peers that evaluators without an insider's perspective
might either neglect or have more difficulty accessing. Second, policymak-
ers picked up on the youth research team's identification of "respect" (that
is, describing a humanistic and dignified treatment within the system) as an
indicator of positive interventions. The fact that the adult evaluation team at
first discounted respect as an indicator because of the difficulty of defining
it made the youth team's contribution all the more important. In general,
both adult and youth participants described the experience as transforma-
tive. They experienced new ways of being in intergenerational relationships
and new confidence in their ability to affect city-level issues. The team mem-
bers stayed involved in community leadership positions as mapping experts,
program and organization directors, community organizers, and advocates.

The San Francisco Juvenile Justice Evaluation Project illustrates the connections between youth and community development in a number of ways. First, the project promoted a citywide dialogue—informed by youth voices—about youth needs and experiences in the juvenile justice system. Second, it developed deep and lasting relationships between professional researchers, youth leaders, and youth-advocacy organizations. These relationships have helped build a new component of social capital that has proved valuable in the ongoing organizing efforts to reform the juvenile justice system in a thoughtful and effective fashion. Third, the project's skill-building and leadership development components helped build youth capacity for ongoing civic engagement. Finally, the project reached out to a population of youth who are typically marginalized in policymaking—in this case, low-income youth of color—many of whom themselves had prior experiences with or within the juvenile justice system.

Youth IMPACT

Youth IMPACT is a program of the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and their Families (DCYF) to implement youth-led evaluation of community-based organizations funded by the department. In 2000–01, Youth In Focus worked with Youth IMPACT facilitators to train and support a group of ten high school-aged youth evaluators to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of forty community-based organizations. The youth published their methods, findings, and recommendations in a final report entitled *Youth Voices Inspiring Creative Change: Youth IMPACT Youth-Led Evaluation* (2001), which was distributed to community-based organizations (CBOs), departments, foundations, and professional evaluators across the San Francisco Bay Area. Like the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Project, Youth IMPACT contributed to the understanding of youth-serving institutions in ways distinct from earlier adult-led processes. The youth team's selection of the notion of "trust" as a fundamental indicator of a successful youth-serving organization (embodied in their research question: "What makes a CBO trustworthy to youth?") had never been considered by the department. Similarly, their emphasis on the involvement of families and community members in CBOs and their finding that the reach of many CBOs ends at their own walls provided DCYF with a compelling policy recommendation to increase community involvement by the organizations they fund. The Youth IMPACT final report itself, with its urban and colorful design full of photographs taken by the youth team, is strikingly different from standard evaluation report formats and has become a hot item among area CBOs and foundations. The voices of some of the youth team members, excerpted from their report, best speak to the power of the project:

> The things I learned will be beneficial in life because they will help me further my skills as a person and as a worker doing evaluations in the future.

> I like doing the evaluation. It made me more aware and more interested in politics and things that go [on] in the city so it can help me in the future.

> I believe this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for youth to genuinely improve the programs of San Francisco.

Youth IMPACT helped promote a synthesis of community and youth development in both the youth-led evaluation project itself and its applications within the DCYF. Youth IMPACT offered a powerful youth-development opportunity for the participants in the form of skill building (for example, public communication, critical thinking, qualitative and quantitative analysis, writing, job readiness), leadership development, and cross-ethnic and neighborhood teamwork and peer relationships. The project provided youth with an inside view on the workings of city government and an appreciation of the budgeting process, constituency accountability, and the complexity of policy development. From the perspective of the city government, Youth IMPACT set a precedent for meaningful youth involvement in city funding and policymaking. Based on her experience with Youth IMPACT, former DCYF Director Alvarez-Rodriguez stated, "It is imperative that any organization with a primary mission of serving youth have youth-led evaluation as a cornerstone of their work." Youth IMPACT findings will serve as a basis for future funding, program development, and technical assistance activities by DCYF and, according to Alvarez-Rodriguez, as a broader precedent for "the way the city does business." Indeed, DCYF now distributes the Youth IMPACT book to bidders for department contracts as an indication of the department's youth-development criteria. Youth from Youth IMPACT have also become engaged in the city's ongoing needs assessment and allocation process of youth funding.

Serving Our Youth and Communities

Youth In Focus designed and coached a youth-led needs assessment of youth opportunities and resources in the South of Market neighborhood of San Francisco on behalf of a collaboration of local youth-serving organizations called SOYAC (Serving Our Youth and Community). The SOYAC youth team produced a detailed analysis of the needs of South of Market youth and proactive recommendations in a written report, a videotape entitled "Realism" (available through Oasis, a group whose mission is to inspire girls and young women to better their communities and enrich their lives through arts, education, and leadership, [415] 701–7991), and Web-site format (SOYAC, 2002). The team will use these products to advocate for South of Market youth neighborhood development and investment priorities to the city's board of supervisors, the redevelopment agency, neighborhood networks, and funders. Youth leaders from around the Bay Area and as far away as Harlem and Seattle have viewed the video as an inspiration for their own

activities. Many of the youth team's recommendations speak to the connections between youth and community development that their action research project uncovered. One example is the following:

> One of the major issues identified during the 1992 assessment was the lack of a large neighborhood park. This need still has not been fulfilled by the City. [Our data show] that out of the 194 youth surveyed, 100 stated that they would like to see a new park. . . . The need for a neighborhood park is essential in the South of Market neighborhood since 53% of the youth stated that their housing lacks a play area. . . . South of Market youth and families are forced to travel outside the neighborhood to find a space for outdoor family functions. It is essential that there be a green or open space for the well-being of the neighborhood.

Ly Nguyen, Executive Director of Oasis and facilitator of the project, affirmed the value of Youth REP: "It can make a huge impact on an entire community. For us, the process impacted SOYAC and our members along with the community. One of the community impacts is that it gives a reason for organizations to lend their resources to a youth-led process. In a sense, it is safe to say that the Youth REP process can be completed not only by an organization but also by a neighborhood network" (Youth In Focus, 2002, p. 26).

Like the juvenile justice system and Youth IMPACT projects, the SOMA project helped build community capacity in the form of upcoming youth leaders. Its topical focus examined community vitality and well-being issues from a youth perspective and provided a unique data set to city government and community leaders. Through its research and evaluation, the SOYAC youth collective was able to give voice to perspectives of young people in a neighborhood that has historically been shaped by outside commercial and civic forces.

Conclusion

We opened this chapter with the puzzle of why the mutually supportive relationship between youth and community development is so clear in concept and difficult in practice. We have proposed youth-led research and evaluation as one approach to bringing youth and community development together and summarized its benefits to youth participants, organizations, communities, and the quality of the research itself. We hope that our examples might inspire others. In our experience, youth-led research and evaluation has the potential to link youth and community development in ways that can shift and heal the relationships between youth and adults, foster the growth of young people and community members as community stewards, and support the ongoing development of sustainable and just communities.

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