

Moving Youth Work Practice Forward:

Reflections on Autonomy and Authority



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THE NORTHSTAR FELLOWSHIP:

Origins and Issues

Several years ago, an informal group of Minnesotans began talking about ways to strengthen youth worker "voice" and support youth worker leadership roles here in our state. From those musings was born a unique fellowship focused on providing mid-career youth workers the opportunity over a period of about a year to reflect, debate, and deepen their understanding of issues facing the field. At the end of the year of study and reflection, they were asked to put their ideas in writing to share with others in the field.

Titled the *Walkabout Fellowship* in its pilot year, the initiative was renamed the *NorthStar Fellowship* as we began the second fellowship year. Nine fellows completed the first year and now 11 more have made it through to a final paper. Sponsorship for the fellowship comes from the Minnesota Department of Education, Youthprise and the Center for Democracy at Augsburg College, with assistance from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development.

The annual task of selecting a relevant and provocative issue always sparks lively debate among the fellows and the steering committee members. How wide or how narrow do we focus the issue? What issue is timely, forward-focused and relevant for youth workers as well as informative for researchers and policy makers who care about youth work? In 2013-14 we took our lead from youth workers in Europe who were exploring tensions of autonomy, authority and dependency for both youth workers and the larger field. The NorthStar Fellows prioritized "Authority and Autonomy in Youth Work" as their issue.

The articles in this volume approach the autonomy and authority issue in many different ways. Authority in the form of funding priorities, research and evaluation claims, supervision and management approaches, and institutional climate and traditions bump up against individual youth worker experience, putting youth needs and interests first, understanding cultural implications, and organizing youth programs for success. The articles draw on history, personal narratives, research findings, theories and conceptual frames from diverse fields, and critical analysis of the fellows' own experiences in the field. Read on if you too care about the issues of authority and autonomy in the field of youth development!

Carol Thomas and Joyce Walker

THE NORTHSTAR FELLOWSHIP

In 2011-12, nine intrepid youth workers took a leap of faith and participated in the newly established Walkabout Youth Worker Fellowship. The fellows wrestled with questions about youth work values, principles and ethics, as well as systems of accountability. The Fellowship intentionally targeted mid-career professionals—emerging youth work leaders—to provide them with the time and resources to be inquisitive and reflective, build or strengthen professional networks, and contribute their wisdom to the youth work field. The Fellowship was considered a great success. An evaluation of the Walkabout Fellowship found that “the fellows now have a greater network of peers, have developed stronger relationships within the field, and are more willing to express themselves.” And so, the decision was made to move forward with a second cohort.

Flash forward to 2013-14 and the Fellowship has a new name, a new topic to be explored, and several new faces. Renamed the NorthStar Youth Worker Fellowship to better reflect its Minnesota roots, 11 fellows have completed a year of learning and writing about autonomy and authority in the field of youth work.

In monthly meetings the NorthStar Fellows examined the balance between autonomy and authority and how it is played out in the field of youth work on multiple levels, as well as the impact it has on issues of ethics, integrity, and professionalism in youth work practice and professional development. Frequently at the root of these issues is a lack of agreement and a historical and lingering tension between “who decides?” and “who should decide?” The fellows were not shy about challenging themselves and each other as they grappled with the theme. The papers they produced reflect the knowledge, passion and insight they brought to each and every meeting.

As facilitators, we were able to bear witness as the fellows bonded and became more confident and expressive. But the fellows were not the only ones changed by the experience. As John Dewey wrote in *Experience and Education*, “It is absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group.” We also spent a year thinking and reading and reflecting and pondering. Spending time learning alongside the fellows and from the fellows has had a profound impact on the way we approach our work. It has helped us stay connected to why we do what we do and be mindful of how we do it. Being part of the NorthStar Fellowship has been a way for us to express and actualize our hopes for the field, the fellows, and the future of youth work in Minnesota.

We hope you find the ideas presented in these papers as stimulating and thought-provoking as we do.

Sheila Oehrlein, Janet Madzey-Akale, Marcus Pope, Erik Skold

COLLECTIVE IMPACT:

How Backbone organizations influence change without formal authority

By Kara Bixby

INTRODUCTION

Collective impact initiatives are playing an increasingly important role in the youth development field in Minnesota and across the nation. They offer an innovative approach to address complex social issues like the disparities in educational outcomes that fall along racial and socioeconomic lines. As education funding remains scarce and pressure to demonstrate results increases, collective impact initiatives are seen as a way to better utilize resources and identify effective practices.¹ Yet their role and influence in the field have yet to be fully investigated; research on collective impact models is in its infancy.

Collective impact initiatives are long-term commitments made by important cross-sector actors to a common agenda in order to solve a specific social issue.² John Kania and Mark Kramer, who first articulated the concept in 2011 in a Stanford Social Innovation Review article,³ describe the alternative to collective impact as isolated impact: thousands of competing nonprofits attempting to solve the same problem as if there is a single cure that must be discovered. Isolated impact requires exponentially more resources to solve social problems and may not result in a viable, scalable solution. Further, Kania and Kramer argue that major social problems are not caused by a single organization or entity and thus cannot be solved by one.⁴

It is important to note that collective impact does not simply imply more partnerships or collaborations. Kania and Kramer clarify that “it requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.”⁵ Collective impact moves beyond traditional modes of partnership and collaboration, as articulated in a follow-up Stanford Social Innovation Review article written by Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer. They contend that more people “have come to believe that collective impact is not just a fancy name for collaboration, but rather, represents a fundamentally different, more disciplined, and higher performing approach to achieving large-scale social impact.”⁶ A recent blog post by Anderson Williams, which examines the nature of truly effective collaborations, contends that this type of systemic approach is frequently lacking in collaborations. Williams argues that too often collaboration occurs after strategic decision making, i.e., after programs determine whom they will serve, how, when, where, etc. As he points out, “collaboration becomes a reactionary tactic attempting to overcome the lack of an actual integrated system.”⁷

In contrast, collective impact initiatives attempt to build an integrated system of cross-sector partners to address a social issue. In order to distinguish these initiatives from more traditional partnerships, it is important to understand the necessary components of collective impact. Using a variety of case studies, Kania and Kramer outline the specific elements necessary for this systemic approach. They identify five conditions present in successful collective impact initiatives shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1*Five Conditions for Collective Impact Success*

#1 Common Agenda	A shared vision and definition of the problem along with agreed upon goals.
#2 Shared Measurement System	An agreed upon way to measure and report on progress.
#3 Centralized Infrastructure	A backbone organization with staff who coordinate the initiative.
#4 Mutually Reinforcing Activities	The coordination of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
#5 Ongoing Communication	A consistent way for participating organizations to communicate and build relationships.

Adapted from Collective Impact, 2011.⁸

A successful example of collective impact on educational outcomes is seen in the Strive Partnership of the Greater-Cincinnati area. Initiated in 2006, the Strive Partnership includes leaders from nonprofit organizations, businesses, government, and education institutions as well as community and corporate funders. The partnership's focus is on preparing students cradle to career for school, postsecondary education and the workforce. The Strive Partnership demonstrates all five conditions outlined by Kania and Kramer and boasts significant progress toward its goals.⁹ The most recent results show improvement for nearly all success indicators since the baseline year.¹⁰ In fact, the partnership's success in Cincinnati has led to the development of a national network of cities called StriveTogether, which is implementing the same cradle-to-career collective impact framework.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Despite the recent rise of collective impact initiatives, there is limited research on how they most effectively achieve their goals. The majority of research has focused on defining and identifying the components of collective impact. While collective impact networks have the potential to increase educational outcomes, their success depends on how they are conceived, developed and implemented. When effective collaboration efforts take Williams' integrated approach—by co-creating collective strategy, goals, key roles, responsibilities and tactics—questions of authority come to the forefront. How and by whom are strategic goals determined? What are the requirements of participation? How are programs held accountable and by whom?

In a 2013 Stanford Social Innovation Review two-part online series, Turner, Errecart and Bhatt explain that a significant portion of collective impact work involves changing behaviors and attitudes.¹¹ In order to achieve the five conditions, the backbone entity needs participating organizations to build consensus around a common goal, agree on how progress will be measured, and coordinate activities to maximize results. However, the backbone entity has no formal authority over participating organizations. As a result, it must build its own authority to exert influence.

This paper will examine how backbone organizations effectively engage organizations and build authority to influence change. It will focus specifically on the field of education, examining three collective impact initiatives in the Twin Cities Metro Area. These questions are timely and relevant to the education field in Minnesota, where networks like Sprockets, the Tutoring Partnership, Generation Next, Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood and Ignite Afterschool are presently grappling with these issues. According to a survey conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2011, there are over 500 initiatives in the Twin Cities dedicated to closing the achievement gap.¹² The survey reveals that initiatives focused on the same goals often use different measures of success; in addition, they often lack formal mechanisms for identifying and scaling best practices. This environmental scan demonstrates the need for more effective collaboration and coordination, specifically the need for the type of integrated system that collective impact can offer.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how backbone organizations build authority to influence behaviors, this study will use a two-pronged approach. First, it will look at issues of authority from the perspective of the backbone organization. Second, it will attempt to better understand how participating organizations view collective impact networks. The two analyses will then be synthesized to share lessons learned.

There are numerous organizations using collective impact strategies in the education field in Minnesota. This study will investigate three networks in the Twin Cities Metro Area: Sprockets, Generation Next and the Tutoring Partnership. These three backbone organizations were selected because they have similar goals, yet implement different approaches in regard to issues of authority and autonomy. In addition, they are in varying stages of development. The paper will use case studies for each collective impact initiative to compare their approaches and highlight effective practices. Data for the case studies is derived from staff interviews at each organization as well as the collation of key historical documents (e.g., strategic plans, logic models, annual reports). One 90-minute staff interview was conducted for each organization. The criteria for interviewee selection included length of time at the organization, proximity to the coordination of collective impact activities, and decision-making capacity at the organization. Staff members with a longer tenure, close proximity to the activities and the ability to make decisions on behalf of the initiative were prioritized. Refer to the interview protocol in Appendix A for more detailed information.

The interview transcripts were coded for specific themes and then compared across the three backbone organizations. See Appendix B for an explanation of the coding process used. A two-page profile was created to serve as an overview of each case study. The similarities and differences between the three networks will be addressed in the analysis section of the paper.

To explore how participating organizations experience collective impact, a survey of youth program staff was conducted. The survey was conducted online and sent to all organizations that participate in the three networks, with total number of 158 recipients. A total of 50 people responded, resulting in a response rate of 32%. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix C. The majority of respondents provide academic support (86%), youth development (72%), and enrichment activities (58%) to students. In addition, their programming is focused primarily on K-12, with 74% serving grades K-5, 74% grades 6-8, and 70% grades 9-12. Only 28% of respondents serve students in pre-K.

The respondents primarily conduct programming in Saint Paul (90%) while about half (48%) conduct programming in Minneapolis; 12% conduct programming outside of the two cities. This geographical breakdown is expected since two of the networks (Sprockets and the Tutoring Partnership) take place solely in Saint Paul. Participation in the networks varies slightly, with 78% participating in Sprockets, 65% in the Tutoring Partnership, and 55% in Generation Next. In addition, the respondents identify other collective impact networks in which they participate, including Youthprise, Everybody's In, Northside Achievement Zone, Youth Intervention Programs Association, MACC Alliance of Connected Communities, and Minneapolis Coordinating Board. It is important to recognize the limitations of the survey sample. All of the respondents currently participate in at least one collective impact network, which potentially introduces selection bias. The survey was sent only to staff members that participate in one of the three highlighted initiatives. As a result, the findings do not reflect the perspectives of organizations that do not presently participate in collective impact in the Twin Cities.

The qualitative survey data was coded for specific themes, using the same coding system as the interview transcripts. The results of the survey are shared in the analysis section of the paper. In the Lessons Learned section, the highlights of the two data sets will be integrated, synthesizing the commonalities and discrepancies between the two perspectives.

CASE STUDIES

By conducting three case studies of collective impact networks in the Twin Cities Metro Area, this paper seeks to investigate how the backbone organization of a collective impact network can effectively engage organizations and influence change. Sprockets, Generation Next and the Tutoring Partnership are all collective impact networks working in the field of education in the Twin Cities. Although the scope of their work differs, they are all focused on improving youth outcomes. The mission statements of the three networks demonstrate the common focus on increasing outcomes for all youth (see case studies on the following pages).

The three mission statements include language that refers to all youth, students or children. Nevertheless, the scope of each initiative varies significantly. Sprockets is focused on out-of-school-time learning and the youth outcomes typically associated with after-school programs, including non-cognitive and social-emotional skills. Generation Next and the Tutoring Partnership, in comparison, seek to impact academic outcomes. Generation Next spans cradle to career, with academic goals from Kindergarten to career readiness. The Tutoring Partnership has a smaller scope, aiming to increase third grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency. The following case study profiles provide an overview of each collective impact initiative, including their goals, history, participation and accountability systems. In addition, they outline which of the five collective impact conditions are currently present.

CASE STUDY #1: SPROCKETS

Sprockets is Saint Paul's out-of-school time (OST) network that works to increase the access to and the quality of youth programs.

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

Year Founded: 2011

Location: Saint Paul

Network: 62 youth-serving organizations participate in the OST network

Mission: To improve the quality, availability and effectiveness of out-of-school-time learning for all youth in Saint Paul through the committed, collaborative and innovative efforts of community organizations, government, schools and other partners.

Goals: (1) Increase effective use of public and private OST resources, (2) Increase youth participation in youth programs, (3) Increase youth program effectiveness.

Organizational structure: Staff of 4 is a partnership of community-based agencies (i.e., Augsburg College, YWCA, and City of Saint Paul).

HISTORY

The start of the initiative can be traced back to the election of Mayor Chris Coleman in 2006. One of his priorities was improving the lives of young people in Saint Paul through education. At the time, there were several neighborhood collaboratives of youth programs, so he built on a tradition of collaboration. He created the Second Shift Commission, which included the school district; community organizations and activists; local non-profit, business and civic leaders; parents and youth; and public servants like police and libraries to provide recommendations regarding OST in Saint Paul. The commission received a boost in 2008 from a National League of Cities grant, which allowed it to learn about best practices in other cities across America.

The Second Shift Commission held listening sessions throughout the city with over 350 participants, ranging from corporations, businesses, parents, youth, community partners and schools, to create a vision for youth success. This process resulted in the Framework for Youth Success. Once the vision was solidified, the commission made three recommendations to achieve it: develop a city-wide data system, create a searchable website with program information, and provide resources that improve the quality of youth programs. A multi-year grant from the Wallace Foundation made it possible to implement these recommendations. In March 2011, Sprockets was launched as Saint Paul's OST network to take on these activities.

"Because the initiative was developed over a long period of time, the public will and political support required to build a successful network were in place."

— Erik Skold, Sprockets associate director

NETWORK PARTICIPATION

Participation in Sprockets is voluntary and programs come to participate in a variety of ways. Depending on how they participate, programs' levels of commitment vary. For example, there are options that entail limited requirements. A program can opt in to the program finder (a searchable website filled with program information for youth and families) as long as it serves young people. A program can also sign up for the Sprockets email list, receive information about trainings and attend them. In contrast, there are more intensive modes of participation, such as the Sprockets citywide data system, quality improvement project, and Survey of

Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO) project, which all have their own specific requirements. Some projects are selective; for example, the After School Accelerators project includes only five slots which were determined by a competitive application process. Ultimately, the goal is to get programs to participate in the way(s) most useful to them. This structure was influenced by the culture of the network which was present from the beginning. At the onset, organizations rallied around a shared vision and Sprockets recruited programs to participate by sharing the vision and offering useful tools and support.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STRATEGIES

Sprockets currently implements three of the five collective impact strategies fully; two of the five are presented as opportunities. Sprockets' shared vision serves as the common agenda: all of Saint Paul's youth will develop their abilities as learners, contributors, and navigators so they can recognize and achieve their greatest potential. Sprockets staff, which is a partnership of community-based agencies, provides the centralized infrastructure. The network also coordinates ongoing communication; it has a robust communication infrastructure that includes face-to-face, electronic and paper communication.

CURRENT STRATEGIES

- ☒ Common agenda
- ☐ Shared measurement system
- ☒ Centralized infrastructure
- ☐ Mutually reinforcing activities
- ☒ Ongoing communication

At this point, Sprockets provides opportunities for a shared measurement system and the coordination of mutually reinforcing activities. Sprockets does not directly facilitate partner activities; however, there are opportunities for network partners to share their work and collaborate. The network also encourages programs to collect and use data. Yet, programs are ultimately able to decide what data they collect. If programs want support from the network and want to align with Sprockets, the network offers specific tools related to its goals (e.g., Cityspan database, Scores Reporter).

ACCOUNTABILITY

Sprockets recently implemented a new accountability structure around improvement. Participating programs are held accountable to having an improvement plan. This structure was determined by Sprockets staff and approved by the network's various governing bodies. While the quality improvement process involves specific trainings and convenings, the formal accountability mechanism will be the creation of an annual improvement plan. In addition, there is an informal accountability structure embodied in the network's vision. Programs inspire each other to do better, the shared vision brings people together around common goals, and Sprockets provides resources for programs to improve. This allows for shared learning and organic forms of accountability.

SUCSESSES

- Garnering support for OST by demonstrating to stakeholders (e.g., funders, systems and organizations) the importance and power of OST.
- Developing resources that allow youth programs to use data for improvement.
- Providing youth workers opportunities to improve their practice, learn, and develop.

CHALLENGES

- Sustaining the work after current national funding ends.
- Staying useful and relevant to a broad array of organizations while being lean.
- Learning how to stay strong at core functions while being innovative and adaptable.

CASE STUDY #2: GENERATION NEXT

Generation Next is a coalition of civic, business and education leaders working to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for students of color in Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

Year Founded: 2012

Location: Minneapolis & Saint Paul

Network: 69 organizations participating in 3 action networks

Mission: To dramatically accelerate educational achievement of all children from early childhood through early career through an aligned partnership of community stakeholders.

Goals: (1) Kindergarten readiness, (2) third grade reading, (3) eighth grade math, (4) high school graduation and (5) college and career readiness.

Organizational Structure: Non-profit organization with 6 full-time staff members; official Emerging Network Member of the national StriveTogether network.

HISTORY

In 2011, Robert Jones, then a senior vice president of the University of Minnesota, read the Stanford Social Innovation Review article on collective impact and learned about the success that Cincinnati had in increasing its student outcomes. The article attributed Cincinnati's success to the collective impact initiative, the Strive Partnership, which was being replicated in other cities across the country. Robert Jones convened a group of local leaders who decided to invest in a Twin Cities Strive network. The initiative was started in early 2012 by a few high-level stakeholders, most of which were funders, e.g., University of Minnesota, Greater Twin Cities United Way, Target Corporation and General Mills. This Leadership Council decided to name the local initiative based on the StriveTogether national framework *Generation Next*. Greater Twin Cities United Way provided critical hosting support during the start-up phase, while Wilder Research offered expertise and support around data and measures. In February 2014, Generation Next went through the official StriveTogether review and received approval as a StriveTogether Emerging Network Member.

The initiative was started in early 2012 by a few high-level stakeholders, most of which were funders.

– Jonathan May, Generation Next director of Data & Research

NETWORK PARTICIPATION

Participation in Generation Next is voluntary and time-based. Organizations, whether they are funders, other networks or community organizations, opt in. Action networks, formed around each goal area, develop annual charters and action plans. Once these charters are complete, organizations have the opportunity to sign on to the charter and its action plan. No new members are allowed after the charter is solidified. One year later, the charter and action plan are revisited and organizations have another opportunity join. This one-year membership model is based on the national StriveTogether framework. The model was debated internally at Generation Next and staff decided that utilizing it was, in fact, the best approach to participation.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STRATEGIES

Generation Next attempts to use all of the collective impact strategies, and does so with varying levels of success. Looking at the organization overall, the five goal areas comprise the common agenda. Generation Next also convenes networks around each of these goal areas. For example, the Reading by Third Grade Action Network comes together to decide what it is going to take to get all students reading proficiently by third grade. The shared measurement system looks different for each goal area; each network decides on performance indicators and measurements for its goal area. The director of Data & Research identifies the most cost efficient data collection methods and systems; this is currently in progress for the three networks. Generation Next and its staff of six serve as the backbone organization, along with support from consultants. The monthly action network meetings provide the platform for ongoing communication in addition to an online secured site available to network participants. Mutually reinforcing activities are determined annually by the action networks when they create their charter and action plan and determine specific roles for participants.

CURRENT STRATEGIES

- ☑ Common agenda
- ☑ Shared measurement system
- ☑ Centralized infrastructure
- ☑ Mutually reinforcing activities
- ☑ Ongoing communication

ACCOUNTABILITY

The accountability mechanism for participation is a commitment to continuous improvement. Generation Next action networks are organized around the five goal areas. Once the networks solidify their one-year charter and action plan, organizations have the opportunity to sign on. Task forces are developed around each of the strategies selected in the action plan. For example, the college and career readiness network selected the strategy of providing all students with a caring adult who will help them complete a post-secondary plan. A task force has been formed of organizations that will work on this strategy over the next year. The programs that opt in to this task force will be held accountable to participate in ongoing meetings and commit to continuous quality improvement related to this strategy.

If an organization does not sign on to continuous improvement, this will be made public. Generation Next plans to share this information broadly. Based on the national StriveTogether model, the idea is focus on improvement and best practices, as opposed to lifting up one program over another. Generation Next does not want to pick winners and losers. However, if an organization does not want to change or improve, funders and other stakeholders will know. Conversely, Generation Next will use its relationship with funders to advocate for the organizations that commit to continuous quality improvement.

SUCSESSES

- Getting the broader community to agree on a shared agenda.
- Developing strong relationships with the two public school districts to build their capacity to collaborate and better serve students.
- Bringing important issues to the forefront in a new way, by taking asset-based approach to alter perceptions and garner support for education.

CHALLENGES

- Maintaining momentum to prevent the initiative from stalling.
 - Developing relationships with key players, e.g., funders, network partners, data partners.
 - Balancing the need for internal capacity and strategic partnerships to deliver on all of the goal areas and network convenings.
-

CASE STUDY #3: TUTORING PARTNERSHIP

The Tutoring Partnership is a collaborative of nonprofit community organizations that provide academic supports to students in Saint Paul.

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

Year Founded: 2007

Location: Saint Paul

Network: 20 community organizations participate in the Tutoring Partnership

Mission: To accelerate academic achievement for all students and close gaps for low-income students and students of color in Saint Paul Public Schools.

Goals: (1) Accelerate reading and math proficiency for students in Saint Paul, (2) Increase the quality of tutoring programs, (3) Provide a Saint Paul-wide learning community around tutoring.

Organizational Structure: Program of the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation with 2 full-time staff members and 2 AmeriCorps VISTA members dedicated to the network.

HISTORY

When the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation was restarted in 2006, its executive director and board members led discussions with school district staff (i.e., superintendent and administrative staff) to determine how the organization could best support its key partner. One request from the school district was to coordinate tutoring for Saint Paul Public School (SPPS) students. Although district staff were aware that tutoring was occurring throughout the city, they did not know whether it was impactful or high-quality. As a result, the school district asked the foundation to investigate effective tutoring practices and create a network around them.

The foundation undertook a feasibility assessment led by an external consultant, convening school district staff, foundation staff, board members, and community tutoring providers. The feasibility assessment included a literature review of tutoring best practices, an environmental scan of tutoring providers citywide, and a needs assessment to determine the support that would benefit tutoring organizations. The process of determining the need and subsequent role of the partnership was an inclusive, grass-roots endeavor. A group of six tutoring programs voluntarily agreed to inform the needs assessment. The Tutoring Partnership was created in response in order to serve as the bridge between community partners and the school district, helping them align their work around the research-informed best practices. Today, the Tutoring Partnership serves as a learning community, providing professional development for staff, training for tutors, volunteer recruitment and technical assistance to 20 community organizations.

The process of determining the need and subsequent role of the partnership was an inclusive, grass-roots endeavor.

– Nora Robinson, Tutoring Partnership manager

NETWORK PARTICIPATION

Participation in the Tutoring Partnership is voluntary. If an organization is interested, Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation staff initiate a process to determine if participation is in fact a good fit, which includes a site visit and program observation. Together, foundation and program staff decide whether the partnership is a good match for the program.

In order to participate in the Tutoring Partnership, an organization must sign a memorandum of agreement and meet the Tutoring Partnership

Requirements. There are four minimum requirements: measure implementation of best practices, conduct criminal background checks, provide orientation and training to tutors, and participate in the evaluation of tutoring. In addition, the organization must provide academic supports to students and become an authorized SPPS partner. The Tutoring Partnership Requirements were developed in 2011 by an advisory group, a self-selected group of Tutoring Partners, foundation and school district staff that convened to guide the development of the Tutoring Partnership. The requirements were initiated by Tutoring Partners who wanted to maintain the integrity and reputation of network participation.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STRATEGIES

The Tutoring Partnership utilizes four of the five collective impact strategies. The partnership has a common agenda to increase the quality of programs so that students who receive tutoring have better outcomes. There is also a shared measurement system, with common data points that are collected across all Tutoring Partners. While the Tutoring Partnership does not enforce what individual programs measure, it does require programs to collect certain types of data in order to measure the impact of tutoring on academic growth and proficiency. Foundation staff provide the centralized infrastructure. Ongoing communication is

another function of the Tutoring Partnership, providing opportunities for Tutoring Partners to regularly and informally communicate with each other at events and convenings. Additionally, the Tutoring Partnership facilitates sharing between partners, where one program learns from another. The only strategy the Tutoring Partnership does not implement is the coordination of mutually reinforcing activities. Foundation staff give insight and feedback on program activities, but it does not direct the activities organizations undertake. This may happen organically, but it is not a focus of the work at this point.

CURRENT STRATEGIES

- ☒ Common agenda
- ☒ Shared measurement system
- ☒ Centralized infrastructure
- ☐ Mutually reinforcing activities
- ☒ Ongoing communication

ACCOUNTABILITY

Tutoring Partners are held accountable to the Tutoring Partnership Requirements. This is the formal accountability system of the network. It was developed by an advisory group and driven primarily by Tutoring Partnership program staff. Programs are also informally held accountable through their relationship with the Foundation. The Tutoring Partnership builds and maintains strong relationships with each organization. As a result, Foundation staff discuss issues and improvement areas with program staff on a regular basis. The informal accountability structure based in strong personal relationships is staff-driven and directly tied to the Tutoring Partnership's philosophy of continuous quality improvement.

SUCSESSES

- Improving student outcomes; students who are tutored perform better than similar students who do not receive tutoring.
- Creating a collective impact initiative that provides program-by-program support.
- Developing a reputation as a strong, citywide initiative that is considered a thought leader by other key players.

CHALLENGES

- Expanding the work outside of Saint Paul while remaining a program of the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation, whose mission is focused on SPPS.
- Balancing collaborative relationship building with high expectations for accountability.
- Measuring student success, including both academic and non-academic outcomes, with the data and tools currently available.

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

The case studies reveal three important themes: philosophy, history and people. The philosophy that guides the collaboration affects participation, accountability and ultimately the influence the initiative can garner. Additionally, the founding story of the backbone organization shapes how people engage in the network. The history of the organization impacts the structural development of the network, creating varying spheres of influence. Lastly, the people who drive the decisions and activities play an important role in building relationships and cultivating authority.

PHILOSOPHY: WHAT THE WORK IS ABOUT

The philosophy of a collective impact initiative influences which organizations participate, how they participate, and how they are held accountable. The case studies reveal a shared focus on increasing youth outcomes by improving quality. The coding analysis highlights a common theme among all three networks, continuous quality improvement. All three networks utilize the philosophy of continuous improvement to hold programs accountable. For all three networks, this is clearly articulated as their formal accountability structure. Sprockets requires participating organizations to complete an annual improvement plan; Generation Next requires programs to commit to continuous quality improvement in the action network's charter; and the Tutoring Partnership requires an annual assessment of best practices. All three networks see continuous quality improvement as the mechanism to achieve better outcomes for youth. This philosophy is critical to developing the authority to generate change.

Synthesizing experiences from a variety of collective impact models, Education Northwest finds a similar trend. Its report, *Mobilizing Communities: Improving Northwest Education through Collective Impact*, explains how “a continuous improvement mindset drives these groups to learn from their peers, reflect on their own experience, and refine their strategies as the work evolves. These steps are critical in facilitating the adaptive change.”¹³ Research from the youth development and out-of-school-time fields supports this notion as well. As Wendy Surr of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time argues, a philosophy of continuous quality improvement acknowledges the central importance of quality, aligns outcomes with program practices, and utilizes self-assessment as a driver for change; as a result, accountability grounded in continuous quality improvement produces better results for after-school programs in the long run.¹⁴

For Sprockets and the Tutoring Partnership, continuous improvement is focused on program quality. These two networks strive to increase program quality by providing tools and resources to program staff, such as the Youth Program Quality Intervention. Generation Next does not have the same focus on programs. In fact, Generation Next intentionally refers to effective practices, as opposed to effective programs. Its philosophy, which is grounded in the national StriveTogether framework, is to identify effective practices that can be tested and scaled. Jeff Edmondson describes this approach in his blog post entitled “The Difference between Collaboration and Collective Impact.” He explains that data is used to identify effective practices across programs and systems, as opposed to simply scaling an individual program.¹⁵ Fundamentally, all three initiatives are striving to create a learning community among participating organizations. They are fostering positive relationships and trust so that participants share data and lessons learned, improving quality and scaling what works.

HISTORY: HOW THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

Referring back to Williams' concept of an integrated system, the start of a collective impact initiative plays a vital role in determining how organizations engage in the network. Williams describes effective collaboration as co-creating a collective strategy that guides decision making, roles, responsibilities and tactics.¹⁶ This type of integration must occur early on in the development of the initiative when strategic,

organizational and institutional decisions are made. The founding stories in each case study reveal some important similarities and differences that shape how they engage organizations and build their influence over time.

Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer outline three circumstances that must be in place before launching a collective impact initiative: an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change. They explain that “together, these preconditions create the opportunity and motivation necessary to bring people who have never before worked together into a collective impact initiative and hold them in place until the initiative’s own momentum takes over.”¹⁷ All three collective impact case studies started with an influential champion who helped acquire adequate resources and create a sense of urgency. Sprockets started with a call to action by the mayor of Saint Paul; Generation Next began when a vice president of the University of Minnesota came across compelling research on collective impact; the Tutoring Partnership was developed in response to a request from the school district. A key player with significant power recognized an opportunity and used his or her influence to make it happen.

Turner, Errecart and Bhatt identify six sources of influence that help collective impact initiatives change behaviors and attitudes: competence, commitment, objectivity, data and information, network and visibility.¹⁸ A powerful actor, like the mayor for example, helps the backbone organization build its network and visibility. Backbone organizations can build important relationships with cross-sector players and community members when they have a powerful actor at the forefront. As Turner, Errecart and Bhatt point out, endorsements from influential champions enhance visibility and people’s trust in the backbone organization. Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer similarly assert that “the most critical factor by far is an influential champion (or small group of champions) who commands the respect necessary to bring CEO-level cross-sector leaders together and keep their active engagement over time.”¹⁹

While the three networks were each initiated by a powerful actor, the subsequent stages of development diverge. The unique aspects of each network’s history highlight the different ways the networks engage organizations and build influence. All of the networks have voluntary participation, but organizations come to join them in a variety of ways.

The inception of Generation Next, which is still in the early stages of development, was led primarily by a few high-level stakeholders, most of which are funders. Generation Next initially attracted organizations seeking additional funding; the majority of people showing up to meetings were development staff members. This changed over time as the network started to narrow its scope around the five goals. Generation Next manages participation through its action networks, which are centered around each goal area. The goals were also determined by a leadership council made up of key funders. Additionally, a majority of the structural and strategic decisions are pre-determined because the initiative is based on a national collective impact framework. The action networks have annual membership opportunities, where programs can opt in and sign on to a year-long charter and action plan. Membership is closed once the charter and action plan are solidified; it is revisited on an annual basis when the charter and action plan are revised. This process was adopted as part of the national StriveTogether framework. Engagement in Generation Next mirrors the founding story of a network based on a national model that was started by a small group of powerful leaders.

The development of Sprockets, in contrast, involved a variety of stakeholders from funders and city officials to parents, youth and community members. To determine its vision, the network held community listening sessions receiving input from over 350 people including typically underrepresented groups like parents and youth. Participation in Sprockets reflects this flexible, grass-roots beginning. Organizations participating in the Sprockets network come to join in a variety of ways. Sprockets offers several modes of participation, and

the commitment differs depending on the mode. For example, a program can opt in to the program finder (a searchable website filled with program information for youth and families) as long as it serves young people. Yet, if a program wants to receive support around quality improvement, it must conduct a self-assessment of quality, participate in specific training sessions, and develop an improvement plan. Sprockets hopes that the resources and tools it offers incentivize deeper participation. As Associate Director Erik Skold explains, “While [programs] may have joined for one reason (e.g., the program finder), they stay engaged because they find the other resources valuable.”

The creation of the Tutoring Partnership falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum. The school district, Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation staff and board members played a key role in the development process; community organizations providing tutoring were also invited into the process to offer input and guidance. Yet, the foundation did not go as far as Sprockets to engage the broader community. The Tutoring Partnership, with its narrower focus on academic interventions, functions as a closed network with an application process for participation, outlining the requirements and benefits of joining the network. The Tutoring Partnership Requirements are the minimum standards that programs must achieve in order to receive the benefits of the network. While these requirements are implemented by foundation staff, they were initiated and developed by the programs themselves. Participating organizations viewed membership in the network as a “stamp of approval” from the school district and other stakeholders. As a result, they wanted to maintain the integrity of the partnership by implementing minimum requirements. This desire was also supported by foundation staff, who perceived requirements as a way to ensure a minimum level of quality. This type of self governance supported by staff aligns with the network’s founding story.

PEOPLE: WHO DRIVES THE WORK

The coding analysis also reveals that the people who drive the decisions and activities play an important role in building relationships and cultivating authority. The case study of Sprockets consistently highlights the engagement of external stakeholders. Throughout the history of Sprockets, an array of diverse stakeholders has shaped the vision and activities. Unlike the other two networks, Sprockets is not an organization. Rather, it is a partnership of community-based agencies. As a result, Sprockets has often turned to the community for input and guidance. In contrast, one of the key themes of the Generation Next case study was funders. Funders played a key role in the development of the initiative and they continue to shape the work moving forward. For the Tutoring Partnership, the central force behind the activities is foundation staff. Many of the key decisions and activities are staff-driven.

There are distinct advantages to each of these situations. For example, a network that continually seeks input from external stakeholders demonstrates objectivity, one of the key sources of influence identified by Turner, Errecart and Bhatt. They explain that “backbones are most influential when community constituents view them as honest brokers with no personal stake in the collaboration’s ultimate course of action and no competitive dynamic with those involved. In these situations, constituents trust that the backbone is motivated by the common good and not personal gain. Further, backbones that are inclusive demonstrate that all viewpoints are welcome. They create safe spaces for difficult conversations and represent the needs of others; this enables them to exercise influence by appealing to shared values.”²⁰ A key lesson learned from the Education Northwest case studies is the challenge of engaging typically underrepresented groups like parents and youth. The report states, “An unfortunate reality of collective impact is that the emphasis on engaging community leaders can often make it easy to overlook less ‘powerful’ voices in the conversation, especially those whom the project is designed to support.”²¹ Sprockets has intentionally reached out to parents and youth to provide opportunities for input and participation.

Because Sprockets has an inclusive, objective approach focused on its shared vision, it builds credibility within the community and with its partners.

As an entity with strong ties to funders, Generation Next is able to demonstrate the power of its network. It can use its “bully pulpit with funders to advocate for the organizations that commit to continuous quality improvement,” Jonathan May, the director of Data and Research at Generation Next articulates. In addition, the network receives substantial visibility. This is bolstered by its executive director, former Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, a public figure who is well-known throughout the Twin Cities. This can incentivize participation in the initiative, ultimately increasing the influence it can have in the field.

As a staff-driven initiative, the Tutoring Partnership experiences different advantages. Turner, Errecart and Bhatt emphasize the importance of staff who can build relationships. They contend that “when backbone staff has strong interpersonal skills, they are more influential, as constituents trust that the organization can help them work together effectively.”²² The Tutoring Partnership has relied on staff members to develop relationships with participating organizations in order to hold them accountable to the goals of the partnership. This approach has created trust in the partnership and its activities.

These three case studies demonstrate that collective impact initiatives with similar goals can in fact approach the work differently. While their philosophies of continuous improvement align, their history, engagement and drivers vary. These factors shape how the backbone organization builds its authority to exert influence over participating organizations.

ANALYSIS OF YOUTH PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES

Youth programs are the primary participants in the three collective impact initiatives. Moreover, they are the catalyst for change; backbone organizations attempt to change their behaviors and attitudes in order to achieve better outcomes for youth. As a result, their perspectives on participation, accountability and benefits are valuable and should inform how networks attempt to build influence.

First and foremost, the survey of youth program staff reveals a strong belief in collective impact’s capacity for change. Nearly all participants (94%) strongly agree or agree that collective impact networks can increase student outcomes in the Twin Cities. Six percent are neutral; no respondents disagree with the statement. This sentiment also applies to the networks’ effect on youth programs themselves. Again, 94% of respondents strongly agree or agree that collective impact networks can help their youth program better achieve its goals. Six percent are neutral; no respondents disagree with the statement.

The survey also reveals three key themes that provide insights into how backbone organizations can create change: participation, accountability and incentives. Backbone organizations should determine participation through the shared vision. Once expectations for participation are clear, the initiative should develop an accountability system focused on improvement. This will create a learning community where effective practices are identified. Finally, the backbone organization should provide support to programs that allows the learning community to flourish and scale lessons learned.

PARTICIPATION: CREATE A SHARED VISION

Respondents were asked what the most helpful role is that collective impact networks can play in increasing student outcomes. A key theme that emerges from the survey results is a shared vision. Youth programs value the common agenda that collective impact initiatives bring. Respondents repeatedly say that networks should determine common goals and outcomes and base participation on those shared goals. A majority of respondents (66%) think that collective impact networks should have requirements for participation. Only

10% disagree while 21% are neutral. When asked how participation should be determined, the major theme is a shared vision. Youth program staff generally want a shared vision—similar goals, target groups, and values—to determine participation.

One respondent maintains, “I believe that sharing a common goal is an important first step for collective impact networks. While we may not see immediate impacts of these networks, I think they will demonstrate long-term, sustained impact. The success of these networks depends on the clarity and alignment of their goals.” This finding relates directly to the first of Kania and Kramer’s five conditions, creating a common agenda. In their follow-up article, they break down the process of creating a common agenda into two steps: determining boundaries and developing a strategic action framework.²³ The survey results highlight the importance of the first step, determining boundaries. Respondents want clarity on the boundaries of the issue and the systems and organizations that should participate.

ACCOUNTABILITY: DEVELOP A LEARNING COMMUNITY FOCUSED ON IMPROVEMENT

The second theme emphasizes the desire for a learning community grounded in continuous quality improvement. Eighty-six percent of respondents see the learning community as a benefit of collective impact networks. When asked specifically to identify the most helpful role collective impact networks can play, the role of the network as a learning community also surfaces. Youth programs want to share resources, data and lessons learned to improve what they do and how they impact students. The survey asks youth program staff about accountability and data use in particular. Overwhelmingly, respondents think data should be used to improve programming and identify effective practices. The open-ended responses highlight a desire to share data in order to identify and scale proven practices. Yet, many feel that data should be shared only in the aggregate. Respondents also want accountability to be linked to improvement. They want to be held accountable to their commitment to continuous quality improvement. Several respondents suggest the specific requirement of developing a program improvement plan.

These responses underscore the importance of two additional conditions from Kania and Kramer, a shared measurement system and ongoing communication. As Kania and Kramer explain, the shared measurement system provides the basis for the learning community. When organizations have a common language, performance measures and evaluation tools, they are able to discover what works across programs and systems.²⁴ Yet they emphasize that “having shared measures is just the first step. Participants must gather regularly to share results, learn from each other, and refine their individual and collective work based on their learning. Many initiatives use standardized continuous improvement processes, such as General Electric’s Six Sigma process or the Model for Improvement.”²⁵ Continuous communication allows for relationship building, thus creating the trust and transparency to share data, align resources and learn from one another. The survey results do demonstrate some hesitancy in this area; several respondents think that data should be shared only in the aggregate. This stresses the tension between practices and programs and demonstrates a potential need to strengthen relationships.

INCENTIVES: PROVIDE SUPPORT TO PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The prevailing theme throughout the entire survey is support for participating programs, which is evident in both the quantitative and qualitative results. The survey asks respondents to identify the benefits of collective impact networks. Ninety percent of respondents identify training as a benefit; 84% evaluation resources; 74% funding; and 72% technical assistance. When respondents were asked the most helpful role collective impact networks can play in increasing student outcomes, the dominant theme was program support. Most frequently, respondents identify support for youth programs as the most helpful role collective impact networks can play. This includes providing training, resources, and technical assistance. Several responses comment on the cost effectiveness of support provided by collective impact networks. For

example, smaller organizations with limited resources are able to access professional development and training that would otherwise be cost prohibitive.

At the same time, respondents identify the greatest drawback to collective impact networks as the time commitment. For youth programs, time is a valuable resource. As many respondents articulate, collective impact is often slow and time-consuming, all the more so when done well. Therefore, incentives to participate are especially important. Program support, which can come in the form of funding or in-kind resources such as training and technical assistance, can serve as influential incentives. As the case studies from Education Northwest assert, maintaining engagement from a broad group of stakeholders over time is difficult. One interviewee explains, “First and foremost the work must benefit kids and families, but it also needs to benefit the partner organizations or they will stop participating.”²⁶

Overall, survey respondents believe that collective impact networks have the ability to impact youth outcomes positively. They view the networks as valuable resources, especially in regard to evaluation, data collection, training and best practices. These findings affirm that backbone organizations can influence behaviors without formal authority.

LESSONS LEARNED

While the five conditions provide a solid foundation for collective impact networks, these case studies together with the youth program survey demonstrate the need for an additional condition: program support. Youth programs want tangible resources and support; these benefits can be used to incentivize participation. The two quantitative survey questions asking about networks’ capacity for impact demonstrate this link. Almost all (94%) of respondents believe that collective impact networks can both increase student outcomes in the Twin Cities and help their youth program achieve its goals. They see the vision of the networks aligning with the goals of their programs.

Under the five conditions, successful collective impact initiatives identify effective practices through the common measurement system, implement mutually reinforcing activities that maximize outcomes, and scale what works across programs and systems. This all occurs within a continuous quality improvement framework. While the current conditions reveal what needs to be done, they do not necessitate the support to do it. In other words, collective impact networks limited to the five conditions are helping participating organizations identify the changes they should make without directly providing the support to make them. The findings from this paper suggest that collective impact networks should also serve as capacity builders for participating organizations.

The successes and challenges that the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati has faced reflect the need for this sixth condition. In the latest Partnership Report, the evaluation results stress the value of program support. The report states that “there is agreement on what Strive has done well to date, and how it has added value to community-level efforts. Most notably this has occurred when Strive has played the role of: convener, capacity builder, network weaver, and promoter of data-based decision-making.”²⁷ The identified areas for improvement show the importance of clarifying the support the network provides. The report draws attention to questions about the specific resources and support that Strive can offer to members. Stakeholders have differing perceptions about the benefits they expect to receive and do in fact receive from participation in the network.²⁸

In all three case studies in the Twin Cities, the networks provide some form of program support, although the level and intensity varies. The Tutoring Partnership provides the most intense level of individualized program support as its staff-to-partner ratio is the lowest. In 2013-2014, the partnership provided 77 hours

of training to tutors, 57 hours of professional development to program staff and 210 hours of technical assistance to 19 programs. It is important to note that the Tutoring Partnership functions as a close network with an application process; moreover, it has a defined focus on academic interventions. This narrow scope allows it to serve a comparatively smaller number of organizations deeply. Sprockets also offers a substantial amount of in-kind resources, including access to a citywide database, professional development for program staff, access to evaluation tools, external assessments, and coaching around quality and data use. Sprockets, however, is faced with a broader scope and scale, serving over 60 out-of-school-time organizations that provide a variety of youth programming. Since Generation Next is still in the initial phases of development, it is difficult to project the extent to which it will provide capacity building services. Based on the staff interview conducted for this paper, it is clear that Generation Next will help organizations share, understand and utilize data. The training and technical assistance related to continuous quality improvement will be determined as the initiative moves into its implementation phase.


In conclusion, capacity building is a crucial role that backbone organizations can and should play. The ways in which backbone organizations provide support will likely differ depending on the context, scope and internal capacity. For example, a lean backbone organization with minimal staff may opt to use consultants or external stakeholders to provide support. By providing support, backbone organizations will not only increase their influence over participating organizations, but they will be more likely to achieve the desired change.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The results from the youth program survey bring an important tension of collective impact to light, the tension between the desire for a shared vision and the desire for an inclusive, diverse group of organizations. Respondents warn against the danger of generalization. Collective impact networks seek to bring together diverse stakeholders around a shared vision. Sometimes this can lead to programs feeling pressured to divert resources when their activities do not align; in other cases, programs are excluded because they fall outside of the agreed upon goals. The survey results highlight this tension between a common agenda and inclusivity.

This tension is evident in the caution against high barriers to participation. The majority of respondents agree that there should be participation requirements, yet, they feel that the requirements should not be onerous. For example, many suggest regular attendance as the requirement for participation. Several respondents acknowledge that requirements may depend on the level of involvement. They are specifically concerned that high barriers to participation will result in exclusivity and a lack of diversity.

Education Northwest identifies a similar challenge in its report, explaining that “A crucial early hurdle is convening diverse, cross-sector partners and encouraging broad buy-in for the work. The collaborative structures of collective impact demand that stakeholders really understand, share, and invest in the core goals of the effort.”²⁹ Ongoing engagement is specifically challenging for community organizations. The report clarifies that “Community-based organizations (CBOs) are key partners in education-focused collective impact initiatives—providing critical supports that scaffold a student’s experience. It can be challenging, however, to continually engage them as the work evolves. Once the project identifies specific goals and transitions to implementing targeted programming or strategies, conversations can shift away from the broader youth or community issues that initially brought everyone together. This evolution can make it difficult to maintain close relationships with partners who may feel excluded by an initiative’s narrowed focus, since not everyone at the table will have a direct role in implementing the chosen strategies.”³⁰



It is critical that future research examine the dynamic between inclusivity and a common agenda. This is especially true for social issues like educational disparities that fall along racial and ethnic lines. Exclusion and over-generalization could exacerbate the issue and further disenfranchise underrepresented communities.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Interview Documentation

Organization:	
Interviewee Name:	
Interviewee Title:	
Interviewer:	
Date of Interview:	
Location:	
Documents Obtained:	

II. Introduction for Interview

Hi [insert name],

I have asked to speak with you today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about collective impact and your organization. The research project as a whole focuses on collective impact models and how they can effectively support youth programs. The study does not aim to evaluate you or your initiative; rather, it seeks to identify effective practices and approaches used by collective impact organizations.

During the interview today, I will take notes of our conversation. I have planned this interview to last no longer than ninety minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the questions. After the interview, I will type up my notes and email them to you. You will be able to verify that I captured your answers accurately and offer any necessary edits.

III. Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been at this organization?

IV. Interview Questions

1. Can you provide a brief description of your initiative?
2. Collective impact models utilize five strategies: a common agenda, an agreed upon measurement system, centralized infrastructure with a dedicated project staff, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communications among participants. Which of these strategies does your initiative use?
3. How was the initiative started?
 - a. Who was involved?
 - b. When did it start?
4. What are the goals of your initiative?
 - a. How were the goals decided?
 - b. Who was involved in the process of identifying the goals?
5. How is participation in the initiative determined?
 - a. Are there requirements for participation? If so, who determined the requirements?
 - b. Is participation voluntary? How was this decided?
 - c. Can programs be forced to leave?

APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

6. Is funding related to the initiative? (If yes) How is funding related to the initiative?
 - a. Is any funding contingent on participation?
 - b. Is data collected for the initiative used in funding decisions?
 - c. Does participation in the network influence funding decisions? If so, how?
7. What data is collected for the initiative?
 - a. What types of data (e.g., implementation data, outcome data)?
 - b. How are data collected (e.g., paper and pencil, etc)?
 - c. Who collects the data?
 - d. How is the data used?
 - e. Who participates in analyzing and interpreting the data?
 - f. How is the data shared? Is individual program data shared? If so, with whom?
8. Do you utilize an accountability structure, i.e., a way of holding programs accountable to your goals?
 - a. Who is responsible for holding programs accountable?
 - b. How was this accountability structure determined?
 - c. How do you measure whether you are achieving your goals?
 - d. What do you do if you are not achieving your goals?
9. Describe the impact your initiative has had on its goals so far.
 - a. What would you identify as your top three successes?
 - b. What would you identify as your top three challenges?
 - c. How do you deal with these challenges?

V. Interview Closing & Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your work. I will type up what I have recorded and email it to you for verification. I look forward to sharing my paper with you when it is completed.

APPENDIX B: CODING SCHEME

Code	Definition
Academic Success	A focus on academic achievement and school-related outcomes
Access	Increasing, measuring and understanding access to youth programs
All Youth	The emphasis on increasing outcomes for all youth or students
Charter	An agreement on goals, membership, measurements, etc. for the group
Citywide Data	An attempt to collect data across the city or cities
Collaboration	Multiple entities working together to achieve a goal
Cost Effectiveness	Prioritizing the efficiency, or cost effectiveness of a decision/intervention
Direct Influence	The ability to directly influence a decision or outcome
Formal Accountability	The formal mechanism for holding participating organizations accountable
Funders	Powerful actors that provide financial resources to organizations
Improvement	A philosophy of using data as reliable information to improve programming
Indirect Influence	The attempt to influence a decision or outcome, but indirectly
Informal Accountability	The more subtle, indirect ways that programs are held accountable
Learning Community	A group of individuals and/or organizations that convene to learn from one another
Multiple Stakeholders	The act of bringing together a variety of stakeholders to inform a decision
National Funding	Money and resources that come from national foundations, corporations, etc.
National Model	A national framework for collective impact that is applied to cities across the country
Engagement Opportunity	An opportunity for participating organizations to engage with the network (vs. requirement)
Powerful Actor(s)	People or organizations with a significant amount of power to make things happen
Program Discretion	An opportunity where participating organizations have the decision-making ability
Program Quality	The focus on implementing effective program practices with fidelity
Program Support	Any type of support (e.g., funding, training, technical assistance) offered to programs
Public Perception	A focus on changing how the public views something
Relationship Building	Creating trust and personal relationships between organizations
Requirements	Minimum standards or actions that need to happen to participate
Research	Using research to inform the work
Restricted Membership	Participation that is closed at a certain point
Scaling Effective Practices	The focus on spreading proven practices to other programs, sites, schools, etc.
Self-Governance	Network participants determine the rules of the network
Shared Vision	An agreed upon vision for the future, including goals and the problem being addressed
Staff-Driven	A process or decision that was determined primarily by backbone organization staff
Use	Focus on how useful or valuable resources or data will be; a utilization-focused approach
Voluntary	Not required or mandatory; programs opt in
Youth Success	A broader definition of success, including non-academic and academic outcomes

APPENDIX C: YOUTH PROGRAM SURVEY

I. Survey Introduction

Collective impact networks are long-term partnerships made by organizations to solve a specific social issue. The convening entity (the network) brings together organizations around a common agenda and utilizes a shared measurement system. In addition, network participants coordinate their activities and maintain ongoing communication. Some examples of collective impact networks in the Twin Cities include Generation Next, Sprockets and the Tutoring Partnership.

The purpose of this survey is to investigate how collective impact networks can most effectively support youth programs to achieve their goals. The survey is anonymous and confidential. Findings will be summarized in a paper that will be shared with local networks to improve and inform their work with programs.

II. Instructions

As a staff member at a youth program, your perspective can help inform local networks. Rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please note that student outcomes refer to both academic outcomes (e.g., reading, math, writing, and critical thinking skills, high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment, etc.) and non-academic outcomes (e.g., social-emotional development, leadership skills, cultural identity development, etc.).

III. Youth Program Perspectives

1. Collective impact networks can increase student outcomes in the Twin Cities.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Comments:

2. Collective impact networks can help my youth program better achieve its goals.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Comments:

3. The benefits of collective impact networks include (select all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Learning community	<input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Political clout	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy advocacy
<input type="checkbox"/> Networking opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to research	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication with other organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation resources

☐ Other (specify):

4. How should participation in collective impact networks be determined?

5. Collective impact networks should have requirements for participation.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Comments:

6. How should data (e.g., participation data, outcome data, program quality data) be used within collective impact networks to improve student outcomes?

APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)

7. How do you want your program to be held accountable by collective impact networks?
8. What is the most helpful role that collective impact networks can play to increase outcomes for students?
9. What are the greatest drawbacks to collective impact networks?
10. If you have any other comments or insights about collective impact networks, include them here.

IV. Program Information

11. My organization's youth programming occurs in the following locations (select all that apply):

☐ Minneapolis ☐ Saint Paul ☐ Other (specify):

12. Program focus (select all that apply):

☐ Academic support ☐ Enrichment ☐ Arts ☐ Athletics ☐ Music
☐ Youth development ☐ Other (specify):

13. Grades served (select all that apply):

☐ Pre-K ☐ K-5 ☐ 6-8 ☐ 9-12

14. My organization currently participates in the following networks (select all that apply):

☐ Generation Next ☐ Sprockets ☐ Tutoring Partnership ☐ Other (specify):

SEX EDUCATION IN YOUTH WORK:

Beyond preventing pregnancy & sexually transmitted infections

By Jamie Grilz

Sexuality is a part of who we are, a critical aspect of healthy youth development. It's everywhere we look, it's in the television shows and movies we watch, the magazines we read, and the websites we frequent. Ninety-five percent of Americans report that they engaged in sex before marriage, but nobody ever *talks* about it. This is the culture surrounding sex and sexuality in the United States. We live in a culture where sex is everywhere, but there is no discussion. This is reflected in the fact that sex education in schools has been a highly charged political issue for the past 50 years.

In 2010, \$110 million in federal funds were dedicated to support teen pregnancy prevention programming, resulting in the establishment of the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH). It was an exciting time in the field of youth development and sexual health because we finally had the federal government supporting and funding programs that were not abstinence-only education. Although this was certainly a step in the right direction for our field, the funding came with the requirement to faithfully replicate approved evidence-based interventions (EBIs). EBIs are models that have demonstrated impacts on key sexual behavioral outcomes that include reduction of teen pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and associated sexual risk behaviors. Eventually, a list of 28 evidence-based program models was produced for organizations to select from when applying for these federal funds.

The federal government currently funds the majority of sex education programming targeted to youth in the United States through the use of an approved list of EBIs that are based on two outcomes: pregnancy prevention and STI/HIV prevention. Sex education programs for youth need more comprehensive approaches and should be based on more than just pregnancy and STI prevention alone.

A NEEDED CULTURAL SHIFT

Every day in America 1000 teens contract a sexually transmitted infection. One in three females become pregnant in their teens. These represent obvious public health concerns that sexual health education programs can help address.

The U.S. has the highest teen birth rate in the industrialized world. The teen pregnancy rate is almost three times that of France and Germany, and over four times that of the Netherlands. Though there isn't as much data from Europe on STIs, data from the Netherlands showed that the rate of incidence is considerably higher in the United States. When measuring use of highly effective hormonal contraception, condoms, or both, researchers found that German, French and Dutch youth were significantly more likely to use protection than were their U.S. peers (Advocates for Youth, 2011).

In a country where religion plays a huge role in the culture, most young people in the U.S. are told to abstain from sexual intercourse until they are married. End of conversation. In fact, the federal government backed this message for decades prior to the introduction of the Office of Adolescent Health in 2010. There are obvious flaws in telling youth to abstain from sex until marriage. Given that on average a young person has sex for the first time at about the age of 17 and the average marrying age for women is 26.9 and for men it's

29.8 (Taylor et al., 2011) this leaves a young person with about a decade of time to either abstain or to try to prevent an unintended pregnancy or contract an STI before “settling down.” Another major flaw is the majority of the states in our country also have laws where many of our young people aren’t able to legally marry due to their sexual orientation.

The abstinence-only-until-marriage message leaves out important conversations that young people need to have not just about protecting themselves, but about how to develop healthy relationships, how to communicate about sex in those relationships, how to establish boundaries and self-advocacy skills, etc.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEX EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Dating back to 1981, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs were funded by conservative policymakers during the Reagan administrations making these programs the first tax-payer-funded sex education programs. Under the George W. Bush administration, funding for these programs grew exponentially despite the fact that an overwhelming body of research proved that these programs were ineffective and that the programs failed to reach their stated goals.

Minnesota’s federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage program called MN ENABL (Education Now and Babies Later) was administered to over 45,000 seventh and eighth graders. An evaluation during 1998-2002 found there was little impact of the curriculum on youth’s attitudes, sexual intentions, and behaviors after one year (Hauser, 2004). One significant quote from an author of the evaluation points out what all advocates for comprehensive sex education already knew “Based on the findings it appears that a comprehensive approach provides the most promising prevention of teen pregnancies and STDs” (Professional Data Analysts and Professional Evaluation Services, 2003). Advocates for comprehensive sex education programming finally had research to back up what they had known for years: abstinence-only education was not effective.

While the federal government had been supporting abstinence-only programs, growing evidence was emerging that more comprehensive approaches to sex education are effective in changing behavior and that broad support for these programs exist from not only medical and public health organizations, but also the majority of Americans, including parents and young people.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS ‘NEW ERA’ OF SEX EDUCATION

In 2010, the Obama Administration introduced a ‘new era’ of sex education into the United States. The administration eliminated two-thirds of the funding for the ineffective programs and provided \$190 million in funding that supported evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention and more comprehensive approaches to sex education. The Department of Health and Human Services launched the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) as a central focus of the newly established Office of Adolescent Health (OAH). The goals for the TPP program and its grantees involve implementation of the best prevention science available while also collecting new evidence for effective strategies. The TPP program has a strong emphasis on evaluation standards. Each grant applicant was required to:

1. Choose from the 28 evidence-based models.
2. Replicate them.
3. Use performance data to ensure fidelity to those program models.
4. Conduct rigorous evaluations.

Before awarding grants that replicated evidence-based programming, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) identified programs/curriculum that already existed that had proven positive impact on teen pregnancy and related factors. Given the desire to start funding programs quickly, HHS defined the evaluation standards necessary to be considered “effective based on rigorous evaluation” and reviewed literature on teen pregnancy, STIs, and sexual risk behaviors in a very short time period. This was the first time the federal government had released such a list and clearly defined the evidence base standards.

To determine this list of evidence-based program models, the Department of Health and Human Services contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Child Trends. Their review identifies, assesses, and rates the rigor of program impact studies and describes the strength of evidence supporting different program models. Currently 31 models are on the list that can be found on the OAH website.

Identifying teen pregnancy and STI prevention as the two outcomes for these programs is understandable. Pregnancy and STI prevention are concrete health outcomes. Pregnancy and STI prevention for teens saves taxpayers money. An analysis by the Brookings Institution shows that effective teen pregnancy prevention models, such as the evidence based programs the federal government is funding, are cost effective and more than pay for themselves.

Sexual health educators have a deep understanding of the implications a young person faces when experiencing an unplanned pregnancy or STI. However, teen pregnancy and STI prevention are intrinsic outcomes of quality youth development sex education programming.

There are a few EBIs on the federally approved list that have flexibility in their programs, but most of the curriculum focus on abstinence, refusal/negotiation skills, methods of protection, and STI prevention/treatment. Programs should include these skill-building practices, but the power of quality youth development is often missing from these programs.

LISTENING TO THE YOUTH WORKERS: PERSPECTIVES ON DELIVERING EBIS

I partnered with current NorthStar fellow and sexual health colleague, Emily Scribner-O’Pray, to conduct a focus group with eight sexual health workers who had experience implementing four different EBIs that are funded under federal grants. The purpose of the focus group was to gather information on how EBIs are being used in the field, the autonomy a youth worker feels when implementing the EBIs, and gathering perspectives of what is missing from the programs.

Though there was some positive feedback about the overall program they were using, there was a general consensus that the programs were outdated, that implementing the curriculum with fidelity was a struggle, and there was a strong desire to adapt the curriculum to better fit the needs of the actual young people they were serving.

OUTDATED PROGRAMS

“Nothing has changed since the original curriculum was written in 1979.”

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

“[School] Teachers always adapt their curriculums from year to year. It doesn’t make sense that we are using programs that haven’t been updated in 20 years.”

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

Information on sexual health and our approaches change over time. A few of the youth workers stated that some of the videos that they are using with their programs have incorrect information. Best practices for how sexual health workers approach topics of sexual violence and orientation have changed dramatically over the years. Some EBIs still contain outdated messages on refusal skills that could lead to victim-blaming tendencies in the realm of sexual violence.

ISSUES WITH FIDELITY

"If you are implementing the program with non-talkers, it keeps things moving. For students who have a lot they want to say it can be harder to stay on track and the program doesn't work as well."

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

"I feel bound to fidelity, but when the youth want to talk, I let them talk."

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

Facilitators implementing EBIs are required to track the fidelity of their programs and have very little room for adaptation for the youth that they are working with. Tracking fidelity can start to become the focus of the program instead of keeping the focus on the youth. Curriculum should be used as a guideline for facilitators versus a script. With the fear of losing funding for their programs, facilitators feel restricted to stick to the program.

EBIs don't always account for the real, live youth involved during the implementation phase. The structure and time-allotment for lessons misses valuable pieces of youth development including youth having time to 'check-in' and discuss day-to-day issues that have come up or a young person having a question that expands on the topic, but the question is outside of what the curriculum addresses. When discussing intimate topics of sexuality, it is especially important to build a safe and supportive environment. It is problematic when a facilitator feels like there is not time to go outside the curriculum to address the needs of the youth they are working with.

DESIRE TO ADAPT

"We want to give [the youth] all of the information. We want them to make good choices, but [the programs] are all very limiting—we stick to HIV, STIs and condom use."

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

"We are boxed into thinking about the physical outcomes like STI and pregnancy prevention. [I] wish that EBIs would integrate healthy sexuality and pleasure into the outcomes."

-Focus group comment, Minnesota sexual health worker

All youth workers implementing EBIs through a federal grant undergo training on the specific curriculum they will use. These trainings often cover the rules of fidelity and adaptation. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the general adaptation guidance for EBIs delivered at the trainings (ETR Associates, 2012).

TABLE 1***Adaptation guidance for EBIs***

Green Light Adaptations	Yellow Light Adaptations	Red Light Adaptations
Updating and/or customizing statistics and other reproductive health information	Changing session order or sequence of activities	Shortening a program
Customizing role-play scenarios (using wording more reflective of youth being served)	Adding activities to reinforce learning or to address additional risk and protective factors	Reducing or eliminating activities that allow youth to personalize risk or practice skills
Making activities more interactive, appealing to different learning styles	Modifying condom activities	Removing condom activities
Tailoring learning activities and instructional methods to youth culture, developmental stage, gender and orientation	Replacing videos (with other videos or activities) or replacing activities with videos	Contradicting, competing with, or diluting the program's goals
	Implementing a program with a different population or in a different setting	Minimizing or eliminating strategies built into the curriculum that promote effective classroom management
		Replacing interactive activities with lectures or individual work

A new or inexperienced youth worker may not see where a green light adaptation is needed or feel experienced enough to go into the yellow light adaptations. For even the experienced youth worker, adaptations to curriculum take time and energy to implement. Without the guidance from a trainer or manager, many needed adaptations to these EBIs may not take place. Having outdated statistics and scenarios that don't represent the culture/orientation/gender/etc. of the youth with whom you are working with can prove harmful.

When youth workers were asked what they would add or change in the EBI they were implementing, they all had the desire to make the program more comprehensive in nature. Supplemental topics mentioned were:

- Drug and alcohol information
- Team building
- Sexual orientation
- Respect & empathy
- Pornography
- Sexual violence
- Healthy relationships
- Sexual pressure
- Peer education
- Technology & communication
- Gender roles
- General sexuality
- Pleasure

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

With the introduction of this federal funding into our field we had a huge opportunity to implement youth development programming in a much larger capacity. Limiting this programming to the use of EBIs was a missed opportunity to create and deliver programming that included a more comprehensive, holistic approach.

I work at an organization that supports programs that require the use of an EBI and are funded through the use of both non-federal and federal funds. When facilitators of youth programs are adequately trained in the field of youth development and sexuality education, they are able to design and deliver programming targeted to the youth they are serving, and are able to deliver on more outcomes than reduction of teen pregnancy and STIs alone.

Youth development programming in sexual health should include pregnancy and STI prevention, but programs should also include outcomes that are based on, but not limited to:


- Promoting human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights
- Increasing pride and accountability of a young person
- Increasing confidence, empowerment, and engagement of a young person
- Increasing comfort communicating about sexuality with an adult (parents and/or caregivers), as well as peers and sexual partners
- Increasing opportunities for quality relationships with peers and adults
- More favorable attitudes towards use of condoms and contraception

MORE THAN PREGNANCY & STI PREVENTION

After numerous conversations in the field, the general consensus is that we need EBIs. There is a strong desire to have research and evidence to back up the work we are doing. We need this to convince policymakers and the American public so that we can continue providing a more comprehensive approach to sex education. A strong point in identifying that programs prevent pregnancy and STI prevention is the money it saves the taxpayer. Unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections cost Americans millions every year. It is much harder to sell policymakers and the American public on the idea that we need to base these programs on building healthy relationships/communities, building leadership and communication skills, etc. because it's harder to prove that these outcomes save money.

I also found that many people in the field share my views that we want more for our youth than just pregnancy and STI prevention. We want our youth to have healthy relationships and the ability to establish boundaries and speak up for themselves. We want our youth to become leaders and have all sexual health knowledge available to them in order to make empowered decisions. We need to trust our sexual health youth workers to adapt curriculum accordingly to the youth that they are working with on any given day, and we need more training for new sexual health youth workers and teachers providing sexual health education.

Youth workers in sexual health education that are not under the constraints of federal funds are more empowered, given the freedom and creativity they are able to put into their work. They have the flexibility in their programs to adapt curriculum to fit the needs of their audience. The facilitators of programs are given



a great amount of autonomy in their work by being able to adjust to the participants that they were working with from day to day, giving them the freedom to focus on a true youth development style of programming.

When you provide a young person with quality youth development programming, including a safe and supportive environment where they establish a sense of belonging and a connection to a trusted adult, pregnancy and STI prevention become intrinsic outcomes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie Grilz, is the community education manager at Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota. As a student at University of Minnesota Duluth, Jamie interned with the local Planned Parenthood, igniting her passion for working with youth and reproductive health. In her tenure at Planned Parenthood, Grilz has worked with over a dozen peer education programs and taught hundreds of sexuality education presentations in the community to diverse audiences. Grilz has been involved in establishing Planned Parenthood peer education programs in North Dakota and has most recently been involved with establishing education and parent-child programs in the St. Cloud area.

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THE LACK OF AGE-APPROPRIATE AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN ADOLESCENT REBELLIOUS BEHAVIOR

By William Kiadii

As an adolescent growing up in my native country Liberia, I was not permitted to associate with people older than me, except my peers. I was required to be in the company of my peers at all times including social gatherings. Ironically, I was assigned duties and expected to perform them as an adult. However, I was not given the autonomy or authority as an adult. I was not allowed to leave home for any reason without the knowledge of my parents, except when I was going to school. If for any reason I had to leave home, I was to tell them where I was going and when I would return. The only exception was if I were to be under the supervision of an approved adult.

In addition, I was not allowed to choose the clothes I wanted to wear, decide the haircut I preferred or determine or negotiate my bedtime. My room door was not allowed to be locked for any reason because my parents wanted access to the room. When I was angry with my parents or siblings, I was not allowed to withdraw to my bedroom. Expressing my emotion in this way is characteristic of a timid person. Therefore, I was to pretend as though nothing was wrong. My parents would quote an old parable, “the okra plant can never grow taller than the one who planted it.” In other words, a child, no matter what age, is answerable to its parents and needs to be nurtured and under control, and for this reason it is deemed unsafe to give autonomy and authority to adolescents. This did not deter me from contemplating one night to rebel and break my curfew rule. Why did I contemplate demonstrating rebellious behavior?

Based on my experiences as an adolescent and as an adult working with young people, I have strong feelings about the significance of supporting autonomy and authority in youth development, and I suspect the absence of appropriate autonomy can be a factor influencing adolescents to rebel against authority. This paper calls upon research, literature, my life experience, and the opinions of young people to explore this issue.

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH

Autonomy originates from two Greek words: *auto* meaning self and *nomos* meaning law or legal rule. This means that an autonomous person is able to decide, behave or think without relying on anyone. It also means personal freedom. Autonomy implies distancing oneself from others, being unique and separate (Chirkov, Kim, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2003). For the purpose of this paper, autonomy refers to the increasing desire of adolescents to think, feel, choose, act and make decisions on their own.

Authority comes from the Latin word *auctoritas* which literally means production, invention and cause. *Auctoritas* originates from *auctor* which means producer, father, progenitor, creator, maker, inventor, founder and so on. In the English language, the Latin words *auctor* and *auctoritas* have become corrupted to “author” and “authority.” In other words, to have authority means to have the right and permission to act. It comes from someone who has the right to author, create or make. The period of adolescence is a pivotal

developmental stage in which adolescents feel a powerful desire to “author” or “create” their life (Morselli & Passini, 2011).

There remains a debate as to whether the causes of rebellious behaviors in adolescents can be ascribed to the lack of autonomy and authority. Researchers and theorists have propounded various theories on the risk factors that contribute to rebellious behaviors in adolescents. Each theory is based on a different set of assumptions that attempt to explain the rebellious behaviors of adolescents. No one single theory claims to explain all aspects of why adolescents engage in rebellious behaviors. However, by examining the unique contributions from these different theories, one can more clearly see the multiple factors underlying a well-balanced understanding of the rebellious behaviors of adolescents. Because an exhaustive review of all known arguments and counterarguments is beyond the scope of this paper, I have chosen to highlight the four most common theories for discussion.

POSITION 1

Hutchinson (1993) hypothesized that adolescents who experience difficulty with school success and have poor self-esteem problems may express rebellious behavior. Sung Joon Jang (1998), an assistant professor of Sociology at Ohio State University, disagrees with Hutchinson that poor self-esteem may be blamed for rebellious behaviors of adolescents as is generally believed in the United States. I agree with Jang that poor self-esteem victims suffer from self-destructive and self-defeating behavior. But because those who lack self-esteem are critical about themselves, they may be less likely to express rebellious behaviors as Hutchinson stated. It is not clear to what degree the lack of self-esteem is a contributing factor to rebellious behaviors.

POSITION 2

Keilitz and Dunivant (1986) argue that adolescents’ inability to process all that is going on around them and to restrain themselves from giving in to impulse and temptation predispose them to rebellious behavior. Decision-making skills or abilities can be learned and must be practiced, but it does not mean that adolescents are incapable of making good decisions and are predisposed to rebellious behaviors. The brain differences of adults and adolescents don’t mean that adolescents cannot make good decisions or cannot distinguish between right and wrong. To imply this would mean they should not be held responsible for their actions.

POSITION 3

Nelson, Leone and Rutherford (2004) theorized that the predictors of rebellious behaviors in adolescents stem from racial disparity and socioeconomic problems in neighborhoods with substandard living conditions infested with drugs and alcohol. History is replete with accounts of adolescents of all races who migrate from poverty-stricken communities and drug-infested neighborhoods, and have endured without rebellious behavior. Impoverished countries around the world record lower adolescent crime rates than wealthy countries. Therefore I question whether race and poverty are the major factors that contribute to rebellious behaviors in adolescents.

POSITION 4

Brezina (2008) hypothesized that the strong demand of adolescents for autonomy and authority is a fundamental motivation for rebellious behavior. Given my own life experiences, I am inclined to agree with Brezina’s position that the adolescent search for autonomy and authority can be a major contributor to rebellious behavior in adolescents. One of the ways this is expressed is through chronic arguments with parents over dress code, household chores and curfew time. It is the process through which adolescents begin to express freedom and pull away from the norms of the society, and it is often rebellious. The search is often manifested through rebellion against parents and other authority. Rebellious behavior is often used

as a tool to express in unacceptable ways the way adolescents feel. When dealing with the rebellious behavior of adolescents, it is critical for parents to determine whether that behavior is an expression of a normal process of development or an indication of a serious problem. Some rebellious behavior can be a sign of depression or serious disorder that might require professional help.

EXPLORING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

Because Brezina's hypothesis makes the most sense to me, I set out to explore what meaning young people attach to the issue of authority and autonomy. Using a set of three questions, I collected responses from 20 adolescents in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. The youth ranged in age from 13 to 19 years of age and included both males and females. Using a content analysis method (Berelson, 1952), I determined the presence of concepts and certain words. This method, which examines the feedback from respondents to a set of questions, helped me to better understand the relationship between autonomy and authority and rebellious behaviors in adolescents from a youth perspective.

The three questions posed in my survey of 20 young people were as follows:

1. What is your understanding of autonomy and authority?
2. How important is autonomy and authority to you?
3. How do you react to the lack of autonomy and authority?

In the content analysis, I grouped the young people as follows: young teens (13-14 years of age), teenagers (15-17 years of age), and late adolescence (18-19 years of age). Each group consisted of males and females. The results (shown in Table 1) helped me to understand the relationship between autonomy and authority and rebellious behaviors of adolescents.

TABLE 1

Relationship between autonomy, authority and rebellious behaviors of adolescents at various ages.

Ages	Questions # 1 - Understanding	Question # 2 - Importance	Question # 3 – Reaction to Lack
Young Teens 13-14 years of age	Recognizing my needs	Listening	Break the rules
Teenagers 15-17 years of age	Empowerment	Respect my opinion	Disobey and Withdraw
Late adolescence 18-19	Having a voice in society	Making decisions	Rebel

The response to first question attested that adolescents perceive autonomy and authority as empowerment and having a voice. It is the ability and authority to personally choose and decide without interference. Strongly resonating in the response was the unwillingness of parents to share autonomy and authority with their adolescent children. The survey shows that empowering adolescents is good because it produces competence and minimizes the risk of rebellious behaviors. The responses concluded that an important task of adolescents is to develop a sense of who they are as an autonomous person.

Response to the second question on the importance of autonomy and authority indicated that it provides the opportunity for parents to listen and devote attention to what their adolescents have to say. Parents who do not take the time to listen deprive their adolescents of autonomy and authority. Being a good listener is a

way for a parent to demonstrate an environment supportive of autonomy and authority in which adolescents can grow and become independent. Listening is an investment strategy parents must practice to prevent their adolescents from acting rebellious. It affirms that adolescents have something important to say.

Some important observations from the survey pointed out that teenage adolescents view autonomy and authority simply as respect for the choices they make. On the other hand, older adolescents regard the importance of autonomy and authority as having the ability to make decisions. There is a thin line between what constitutes a decision versus a choice. However, younger and older adolescents underscored the importance of autonomy and authority to their success.

Finally, the response to the third question presented a significant theme in the analysis. It was associated with the reactions of adolescents to the lack of autonomy and authority. Adolescents reported that they break rules, disobey and rebel in protest against the lack of autonomy and authority. They attributed rebellion to the lack of the sense of autonomy and authority. The overall results hinted that autonomy and authority function as an important role in the behavior and actions of adolescents.

Overall this small but informative data collection process suggests that giving adolescents age-appropriate autonomy and authority motivates independence and confidence. The opposite is also true: adolescents who lack age-appropriate autonomy and authority may lack confidence. One of the ways to give adolescents age-appropriate autonomy is for parents to make decisions with them. A key to curbing rebellious behaviors in adolescents is to understand that those behaviors are driven by the idea that in order to grow, you must take more control over your life. Rebellious behavior is typically a search to establish autonomy and authority, which is a normal developmental process.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Adolescent rebellion is an important focus for parents and law enforcement. In response to recent serious rebellious behaviors of adolescents, techniques to prevent these and to intervene have received significant attention from parents and law enforcement. Intervening in the lives of adolescents is challenging. Youth work must always involve not just working with adolescents but also with their families, schools, and neighborhoods.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Even with adolescents, parents should participate in intervention programs when their young people display significant behavioral problems. Some parents contend that sharing autonomy and authority with their adolescents is synonymous to relinquishing control, supervision and parental roles. But this survey shows the opposite: that it is non-confrontational and motivational. A parent-focused curriculum that teaches family autonomy and authority is critical. The goal is to prevent rebellious behaviors. The essential core of parents giving or sharing autonomy and authority with their adolescents is the willingness to understand and appreciate them. Shared autonomy and authority is motivational, non-controlling, informational and supportive to the needs of adolescents.

AGE-APPROPRIATE AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY

Adolescence is a period of seeking increased autonomy and authority. During this time, adolescents do not want to be treated like children. To treat adolescents like children makes them to feel inferior, and embarrassed. Adolescents desire to be treated as neither children nor adults. Thus, giving them age-appropriate autonomy and authority helps to build both independence and confidence in them. Some parents allow too much autonomy and authority before the adolescent is ready to accept it. Other parents

cling too tightly, denying their adolescent children both the responsibilities they require to mature and the opportunities they need to make choices and accept their consequences. It is beneficial to encourage autonomy at all levels that are comfortable for your adolescent. Making decisions with adolescents help them to recognize that having autonomy and authority comes with responsibilities.

TRAINING OF YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers are critical to quality youth-serving agencies. They assist adolescents in developing the skills to make positive changes in their lives. Many programs attribute their success to effective youth workers. Training can enhance the skills of youth workers. The effectiveness and efficiency of youth workers is dependent upon the amount of knowledge and understanding they possess. The same is true with parents; the knowledge and understanding of adolescents will inspire parents and youth workers to use their skills to help their youth. The belief that adolescents participate in rebellious behavior because they intentionally and thoughtfully choose to do so undermines reaching out to them. Without understanding how and why adolescents develop rebellious behaviors parents and youth workers will function under a diminished capacity and make poor decisions. Rebellious behavior by adolescents is explainable as an attempt to meet or negotiate autonomy and authority needs.

The job of youth workers is to provide opportunities for adolescents to develop the competencies necessary to become successful contributing members of their communities. Allowing youth autonomy and authority is one of the most effective approaches for providing them with opportunities to develop competence. Therefore, this paper recommends that autonomy and authority be considered a core integral part of the training of youth workers. Training opportunities in the area of autonomy and authority will allow youth workers to develop “best practices,” which can then be incorporated in working with adolescents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this paper suggest important implications for future research. Future research is warranted to explore whether or not all adolescents are at risk because of the negative impact of the lack of autonomy and authority.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Kiadii is a native of Liberia and has lived in the United States since 2004, following a refugee resettlement program in Ghana. He has worked as a court appointed special advocate for children in the foster care system in Washington, DC and currently works at the Juvenile Supervision Center in Minneapolis as the overnight Lead Youth Specialist. His bicultural background and focus on community networks and collaboration has led him to earn his Bachelors in Theology and Masters in Public Administration. He and his wife Robertlyn Kiadii reside in Brooklyn Center.

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YOUTH WORKER VOICE MATTERS:

A case and framework for developing autonomous youth workers

By Ryan Kirk

Today's youth-serving organizations face a complicated, challenging, and oft-changing landscape. Many of these problems are considered typical of non-profit work. Funding is difficult to come by, especially in uncertain economic times. While there have been great strides made in identifying best practices, it is challenging to adapt and apply these best practices to the wide range of environments and situations that organizations work in. At the very heart of all of these tensions are the youth workers, responsible for the success of both the organization and the clients they serve. It is of paramount importance to recruit, train and support high-quality youth workers, but is also a significant challenge for many organizations.

To best serve both young people and organizations, youth-serving organizations must develop both the autonomy and authority of their youth workers. Doing so carries several benefits: organizations will be able to retain talented youth workers longer, they will benefit from more numerous and creative ideas and they will ultimately see better results for their youth. However, the process of providing greater autonomy to youth workers is one that requires commitment and a willingness to introduce change. It must be an intentional process to infuse autonomy and authority into the organization, not one seen as response to a lack of oversight.

A CASE FOR A NEW MANAGEMENT APPROACH

To create more autonomous youth workers organizations must commit to providing more *process* and *content* choices. These choices are often referred to in management literature as operational and strategic/administrative choices, respectively. Content (strategic/administrative) choices are the choices that shape and determine the goals of the program. Process (operational) choices are the means the organization uses to reach those goals.

Standard management philosophy states that autonomy increases as an employee climbs the organizational ladder (Raelin, 1989). A brand new employee may not have many choices, either process or content. In the least autonomous situation, familiar to many new employees, they are told not just what to do but how to do it. As they mature within an organization they may be given more freedom to decide how they will carry out their tasks, but their goals still come from employees above them in the management structure. Only once an employee has reached management do they traditionally have any significant authority to make content choices.

While a traditional structure does carry benefits to organizations, it is also weak in certain circumstances. Raelin (1989), in his examination of standard organizational autonomy, states that more autonomy is needed in fields where there is a high degree of innovation and client interaction. In the field of youth work, both of these factors are common, and the existence of those factors creates significant challenges for youth-serving organizations seeking to create systematic change.

CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATIONS DOING YOUTH WORK

Perhaps the most significant challenge to a traditional management structure in the field of youth work is the separation between decision-makers and the client. This can happen in any organization, but the

problem is of great import for youth-serving organizations. The youth worker who is spending hours every week working with students and families has a much more holistic view of clients and their needs than the manager higher up in the organization. The youth worker is more familiar with strategies and goals that have worked in the past. Within any youth-serving organization, it is the youth worker who has direct contact with the youth, and who best knows the needs and desires of the client. This is a tremendous challenge to a traditional framework of autonomy, and methods must be found which give youth workers a significant voice in the content choices which shape their organization's interactions and interventions with the youth.

The unique structure of non-profit funding exacerbates the problem. Youth-serving non-profits are unique in that their sources of funding are typically not the clients they serve. With money comes the power to influence decision-making. This is not a criticism of funding partners that act out of best intentions, but the role this plays in the ability of an organization to respond to the needs of their clients must be acknowledged.

A second challenge to traditional management structures is that youth workers rarely stay with a single organization long enough to advance to a position where they have the ability to make content choices. In a traditional structure, employees advance within an organization. While this certainly does occur in the field of youth work, it is more likely that youth workers will leave their current organization to pursue positions of more responsibility with a new organization. Because of this dynamic, those who make content choices often lack the institutional memory that can greatly aid in making wise decisions.

The final challenge of a traditional management structure is that it lacks the flexibility to adapt to rapid change. One of the unending challenges of the youth work field is how quickly situations develop and evolve. While working with highly-mobile families and youth who are going through significant life changes, the methods and practices that worked the year or month before may no longer be as effective. Traditional structures make it difficult to experiment and attempt new solutions to problems. By the time the decision has reached the appropriate level and trickled back down, it is too late.

A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

After having worked in the field of youth work for more than ten years as both a youth worker and a manager, I have seen firsthand the challenges that a traditional management structure creates. I have seen bright, eager youth workers with innovative ideas and approaches forced to follow a particular structure or to teach grant-mandated topics and activities that do not meet the students where they are. I've seen youth worker after youth worker move on to other organizations to find roles with greater responsibility. But I've also seen organizations that give tremendous voice to youth workers, and I've seen the success that is created in doing so.

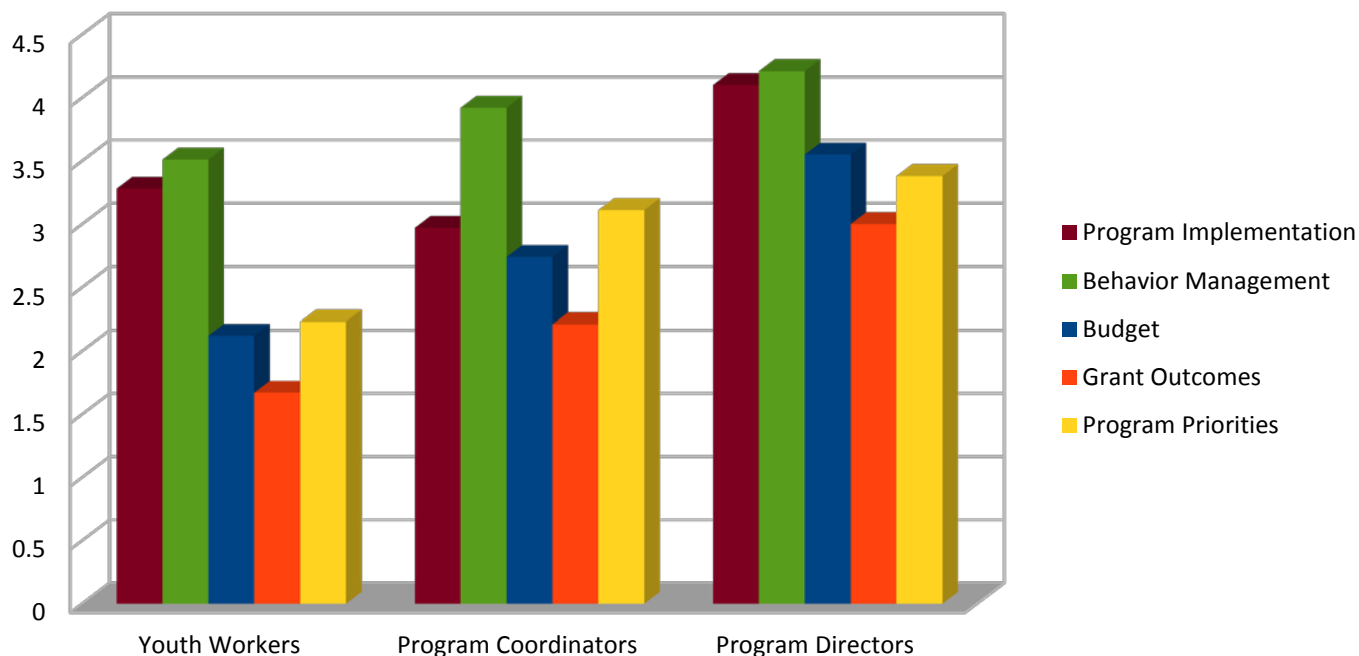
In an attempt to explore this topic in more depth, in the spring of 2014 I released a survey that investigated the feelings of autonomy and authority that individuals in the youth work field held. The results largely confirmed my initial working assumptions: there is cause for optimism, but there is also a lot of work that has yet to be done to create greater autonomy for employees.

The survey asked individuals in the field of youth work to identify their role in their organization and to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 their feelings related to their authority in five different areas: program implementation, behavior management, budgeting, grant outcomes and program priorities. I classified program implementation and behavior management as process choices. Grant outcomes and program priorities were content choices. Budgeting sits somewhere in the middle. In practice, budgeting often bridges the gap

between the process and content choices. I expected that as youth workers advanced to higher levels in the organization structure they would feel greater authority, as is typical in traditional management structures. Figure 1 shows the autonomy ratings for three different employee groups.

FIGURE 1

Autonomy ratings for three employee groups



One hundred ten youth workers responded to the survey. They were primarily based in the Twin Cities metro area, with some coming from other cities in Minnesota. The majority of respondents self-identified as youth workers and activity providers. The next greatest segment was program coordinators, with program directors making up just over a quarter of respondents. The results confirmed anecdotal evidence from the field.

Mirroring what one would expect in traditional management structures, the further up the ladder employees climb, the more authority they feel they possess. This was universally true among all factors except for one data point, program implementation; youth workers felt they had more control over program implementation on average than program coordinators. Besides that outlier, program coordinators felt like they had more authority across the board than youth workers, and program directors felt like they had more authority than coordinators.

The assumption that youth workers feel like they have very little control over budgeting, grant outcomes, and program priorities was confirmed. In a traditional management structure, none of this would be surprising. It might even be expected. But if the field is going to raise the level of its work, youth workers need to feel greater authority than they currently feel.

There is cause for optimism. Youth workers and activity providers felt that they possessed “moderate responsibility” in regard to program implementation and behavior management. This demonstrates that organizations are already doing work towards providing their youth workers process choices.

BENEFITS OF A NEW MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

After examining the results of the survey it is clear that the majority of youth-serving organizations do have a traditional management structure. It is also clear that there are significant challenges to maintaining a traditional management structure in the field of youth work. But to adopt any other system is a significant change that requires time, commitment and money. The benefits of the new system must be clearly articulated.

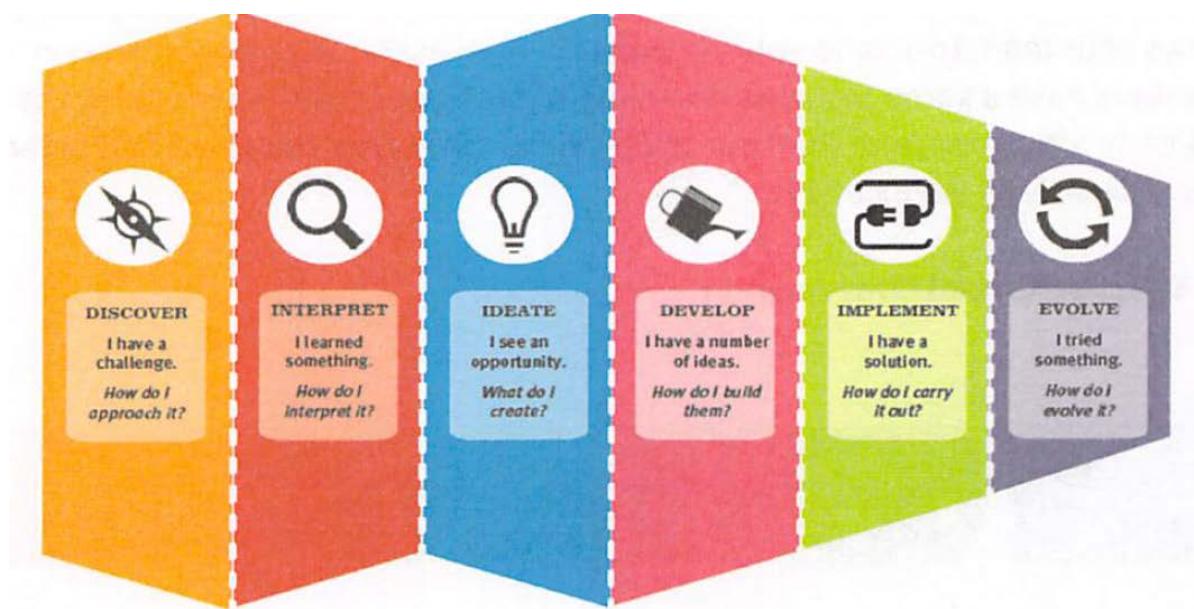
The primary benefit to providing youth workers with greater authority and autonomy is that it gives them the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills to the best of their abilities. Youth workers are responsible for the development of people, one of the most complex tasks that anyone can take on. While it is vital that every youth worker be well versed in the best practices in the field, it is also important that they recognize that not every youth will respond to the same intervention in the same way. Oftentimes youth workers feel constricted by the limitations imposed by their program.

By providing greater process and content choices to youth workers, organizations are acknowledging the truth that no one understands the youth better than those who work with them most closely. By making this explicit to their employees, it gives the employees much greater latitude to implement practices that work.

A second benefit to the strategy of providing youth workers more content and process choices is that it promotes design thinking. Design thinking epitomizes the “fail fast” philosophy. Its basic structure is illustrated in Figure 2. Through a process of researching, brainstorming, planning, implementing, and reviewing, it encourages individuals to try new approaches and solutions to problems and challenges. While many strategies may fail, it is also more likely that brilliant solutions may be found. By providing all youth workers with an environment that encourages them to try new strategies, organizations are much more likely to find new best practices that work for their students.

FIGURE 2

Design thinking



A further advantage to design thinking is that it is very flexible. As situations change and former best practices are no longer ideal, youth workers who are design-thinking oriented have a greater ability to move on and try new practices. It is a style of thinking focused on what demonstrably works. Due to the frequent reflection and examination of results, it allows for individuals and organizations to be much more flexible and adaptable.

The final advantage to creating more autonomous youth workers is that autonomy leads to commitment. It is an unfortunate truth that youth worker pay is not generally commensurate with the difficulty of the work. Average youth worker salary estimates hover between \$25,000 and \$28,000 per year. Salary is one of the major factors that leads to youth worker burn-out. While it is generally acknowledged that we need to generate more pay for employees, it is not always feasible given the current funding environment. If greater retention is a goal of an organization, alternative strategies must be found to keep their best employees.

Research has shown that when employees feel a greater sense of autonomy they are more likely to stay in their position (Liu, Zhang, Wang, & Lee, 2011). Autonomy leads to greater satisfaction with one's own contribution as well as a greater feeling of investment in the mission and outcomes of an organization. This was true in a study of high-performing teachers in low-income schools, which reported that "The freedom to engage in both individual and group decision making led to teachers feeling supported, trusted, and valued as professionals" (Gabriel, Day, & Allington, 2011, p. 4). This leads to a greater probability of retention over time, even if the organization is not able to extend significant financial incentives.

When an organization has solutions designed by the employees who know the students best, a flexible design environment and greater retention, better results will follow. An organization which is able to embrace the concepts of process and content choice will see the strategy pay off in the long run through greater results, higher employee satisfaction, and ultimately, a greater achievement of the mission of the organization.

COMMON CRITICISMS OF NEW MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Unfortunately, transitioning to a new management philosophy is not without its share of critics, many of whom voice justified concerns. While there would be tremendous benefits to incorporating these new content and process choices, there are challenges as well. It is possible that some organizations are not yet in a place to implement all of these changes, but it is a journey worth walking.

One criticism of this philosophy is that it succeeds only when the youth workers are of high quality. It is an unfortunate truth that not all youth workers are highly trained professionals. Many organizations are limited by their funding and cannot afford to hire the professionals that command higher salaries. If youth workers are not familiar or willing to work with and learn best practices, they are less likely to create meaningful contributions to the design-thinking process. There needs to be a base of excellent practice from which to innovate before effective innovation occurs.

Another criticism is that this management philosophy is ignorant of the real-world conditions in which youth-serving organizations exist. To truly embrace youth worker autonomy and accept youth worker voice, an organization must take a bold look at its operations including the sources of funding. This can be a difficult proposition for organizations that are used to a more traditional framework. It also means providing a greater level of trust and responsibility in the hands of youth workers.

A final criticism of this system is that youth-serving organizations do not have the capacity to make the changes to give youth workers meaningful process and content choices. Systems are notoriously difficult to

change. Implementing these practices would require a substantial amount of effort to both create and sustain. If an organization is seeing some success with its current philosophy, why should it make the extra effort?

There is truth and merit to each of these criticisms, but the benefits to an autonomous framework far outweigh the risks and challenges associated with it. It is vital to understand that the entire organization must support these changes and everyone from the front-line youth worker to the board chair must work to achieve them. It is not an easy process, but if done correctly, it will have great power.

STEPS TO MOVE THE ORGANIZATION FORWARD


There are several steps for an organization to take to initiate this change. Like all processes, creating an autonomous environment begins at the hiring process. One of the most powerful criticisms of providing youth workers with greater autonomy and authority is that not all youth workers are prepared to handle the additional responsibility. This is true, and it is why it is essential that hire youth workers who are capable of adopting and innovating on best practices. If new hires do not come to the organization with a high level of skills, the organization must commit to providing the training they need.

Another step that an organization must take is to develop a logic model. This device, which lists the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of an organization, is essential to providing youth workers with authority and autonomy. It may seem counterintuitive that an organization that seeks to support autonomy would focus on a device that creates more structure, but as many youth workers know, it is only through greater structure that greater freedom can exist. A logic model provides youth workers the knowledge of exactly what steps the organization is taking to solve the problem they face. It also provides a base from which to make changes and test for effectiveness.

Upon hire and at regular intervals, managers should go over the logic model with the staff. There may be pieces of the logic model that do not change, such as ongoing outcomes written into grants. However, there may also be pieces that can be changed or adapted. This is the benefit of a strong logic model; it provides a map that everyone can follow. During regular reviews, youth workers will have the opportunity to provide input on the logic model and discuss their own innovations. A strong recommendation is to have a comprehensive logic model review at least once every six months.

Having an environment with well-established methods of communication is another key component to creating an environment welcoming to autonomous employees. Communication is important to all organizations, but if an organization's youth workers are going to be more autonomous, there needs to be clear communication. Youth workers need to be able to keep their supervisors regularly updated on their progress, to run their ideas by them and check to see if they are missing anything. Managers also need to know what actions their employees are taking. Thanks to developments in technology, it is easily possible to create regular meetings, even if employees are off-site. At a minimum, there should be at least one touch point per week between managers and their direct reports.

A final recommendation is to allow youth workers to create and manage their own budget. As mentioned earlier, budgeting is the one area where content and process choices really meet. It is the place where an employee claims both their content and how they are going to implement it. It is the financial expression of both the goals and the methods. It is, in a sense, the ultimate expression of autonomy and authority. Youth workers may need guidance and support on budgeting, but it is essential that there is a mechanism for youth worker voice in the consideration of financial matters. This expression of trust and responsibility allows youth workers to communicate clearly their goals for future years.



Creating an autonomous management structure for youth workers is not a task to be undertaken lightly, but it does carry incredible benefits. Traditional management philosophy is simply not sufficient for such a dynamic field. Youth workers with process and content choices are better able to make choices focused on the youth they serve, practice design thinking and stay in their jobs longer than those peers who do not enjoy an autonomous framework. In the long run this will translate into stronger mission focus and success for the organization as well as better experiences for the youth in the program. There will be challenges, but by taking a few intentional steps an organization can be well on its way to creating an autonomous framework.

Ultimately, those who benefit most from a new management system are the youth. They will have the opportunity to build longer relationships with caring adults as well as experience a program that is focused on their needs. If we are genuine about our desire to provide our youth the services they need to succeed, we need to provide more voice and more support to those who work with them every day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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WILL I BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND MY MENTEE?

Examining the potential risk of the dominant culture mentoring marginalized youth

By Jennifer Lindwall

"Will I be able to understand her?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"My mentee, will I be able to understand her? Last time I was a mentor and had a little African American girl, sometimes when she talked I couldn't understand what she was saying."

This exchange between a potential mentor and a mentoring program staff was reported to me as a semi-typical interaction that occurs when someone is seeking to mentor in her program. When the program staff sat silent after the statement above, the women leaned forward and said, "You know" and gave a nod. Though it could seem harmless on the surface, it illustrates a chasm that exists within many mentoring programs between those seeking to be caring adult mentors and the young people whom programs are seeking to support in these relationships. It is estimated that 5,000 mentoring programs serve 3,000,000 youth in the United States alone (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). In many of these programs, a majority of the mentors are being matched with a mentee who comes from a culture and community they are not a part of.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Most people would agree they want to live in a world where every child has what it needs to thrive and grow into a healthy and productive adult. However, there are many indicators that the communities where this is happening are few and far between. Opportunity gaps, poverty, unemployment, failing schools, homelessness, gun violence, and many other epidemics are indicators that as a global community, we are not collectively meeting the needs of each child. And while some children are provided the opportunities and resources to learn, thrive, and grow, others are not and struggle as a result. What is even more concerning is that many of these disparities can be drawn along lines of race and class. It isn't merely that not all kids are given what they need to be successful, but that consistently, kids of specific racial groups and socio-economic classes are at an unfair disadvantage. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race for Results policy report concluded "the odds are stacked against many children of color, who along with their families, disproportionately lack those resources. By nearly every measure in the Race for Results Index, [these] kids face some of the biggest obstacles on the pathway to opportunity" (2014, p. 2).

Organizations focusing their efforts to overcome these disparities have been widespread; starting with 4-H in the early 20th century, youth development organizations were created to promote the positive, healthy development of young people (Walker & Dunham, n.d.). In the youth development field, it is widely accepted that a key to this "positive, healthy development" is one or more adults who nurture, encourage, and support young people (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002) and so organizations frequently seek to provide caring adults for the young people they work with through "mentoring."

There are many possibilities for caring adults in the life of a child. The concept of mentoring began in relationships occurring naturally in communities with known and trusted people such as neighbors,

relatives, and coaches. However, within many communities numerous issues such as low graduation rates, low post-secondary completion rates, high unemployment, gun violence and a myriad of other things began to surface, and people became increasingly concerned that kids were not finding the mentors they needed naturally. A Child Trends Research Brief stated, “Such [adult] involvement may be especially important for at-risk youth, that is, young people from poor, struggling, often single-parent families who live in neighborhoods that offer few positive outlets and a limited number of positive role models” (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002, p. 1).

This perceived community deficit of supportive, available adult mentors resulted in increased programmatic efforts to create these relationships, recruiting and training mentors to be matched up with youth in these communities (Hayashi & O'Donnell). In many cases, these programs utilized outside resources and people to form these relationships and were by their very nature, formed out of a deficit ideology. Paul Gorski writes that, “We comply [with a deficit ideology] by attempting to redress the socioeconomic achievement gap by offering parenting classes and mentors to low-income families and students, measures that assume the chief problems to be what low-income communities lack” (2010, p. 6).

MY STANCE AND INTENT

I have been in the mentoring field for seven years. During the time I have been a practitioner in a one-on-one, site-based mentoring program for 225 adolescents ranging in age from 12 to 18 for four years. Currently I work in a capacity-building organization that seeks to provide training and support to mentoring programs in the state of Minnesota and the Midwestern region. In this time I have had the chance to work with brilliant, committed, creative people who are driven to be a part of the solution to the problems communities face. However, many of these people, like me, come from a position of privilege and power and are working within communities they were not raised in. In fact, only a small percentage of the program staff I know is a part, physically or culturally, of the communities their mentoring programs serve. This is also true for mentors volunteering in our affiliate programs, many of whom are from outside the communities where their mentees live. They represent the race and class in power and are a part of the dominant culture of society—in the context of my work and research, this refers to middle-class and upper-class European Americans. However, I will be referring to this group as the dominant culture throughout much of my paper.

Many communities in which the mentees live are largely made up of individuals of color and members of lower socio-economic classes, classified by some as “high risk.” I will refer to these groups as marginalized cultures or groups throughout my paper. Historically, outside assistance has not always been favorable to these groups and many have experienced significant inequitable practices in schools, government housing policies and the justice system.

Although the historical foundations are well documented, it is almost impossible to overstate the role that slavery, forcible removal of American Indians from their land, Jim Crow laws and discriminatory immigration policies have played in shaping the life trajectories for tens of millions of Americans. American history is littered with an incalculable number of local, state and federal policies—as well as business practices—that set up racial barriers negatively affecting children of color today. (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).

The impact of history on how these groups perceive support and assistance from institutions and organizations that are outside their communities cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the creation and implementation of mentoring programs for people within marginalized communities by those from outside these communities poses a significant problem.

Community perception of outside support combined with an outsider's limited ability to understand the community's unique culture and experiences creates a barrier we must further examine. In this paper, I will seek to provide sufficient evidence that mentoring relationships in which an individual from the dominate culture is mentoring a young person from a marginalized culture or population may negatively impact the young person, specifically in regard to their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development.

This paper is not an attempt to critique or diminish the work being done by thousands of caring and committed practitioners in the field from the dominant culture. I am not seeking to prove that a person from outside a community cannot effectively support and empower those from in a marginalized group. As a white, middle class woman and lifelong member of the dominant culture, I believe that we all have a significant role in addressing injustice and inequity where it exists, even in communities where we might be considered outsiders. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues who are committed to supporting young people and have opened themselves up to significant amounts of personal learning and growth, even in the midst of their own innate privilege. I am also fully aware that my ability to speak on this subject is impacted by my own place of power in our society and that my ability to ask provocative questions comes with less significant risks, in part because of the privilege afforded to me by my race and class.

My hope is to further a conversation about how these dynamics impact young people within marginalized communities and call for greater examination how we are designing and implementing mentoring programs so that we can ensure that all kids have what they need to grow up healthy and whole.

BUT MENTORING IS WORKING, RIGHT?

I know many would disagree with the claim that any caring and supportive adult, even if from the dominant culture, could negatively impact a kid they are mentoring. There has been a significant amount of research done in the mentoring field to assess the effectiveness of mentoring programs. It is widely accepted that mentoring is a valuable youth development strategy and provides needed support to young people (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Many mentoring programs, even when designed and implemented by outsiders, have seen significant positive youth outcomes in a wide range of things.

In addition, the viewpoint that race, class and privilege still pose significant issues in our society is not shared by all people. The election of the first black U.S. president in 2008 fueled the belief held by many that we live in a post-racial society. A commentator on CNN said that night, "The politics of racial grievance die today," and another said, "We don't take excuses from anybody who says the deck is stacked, I can't do anything, there is so much [injustice] built into this or that." The claim that, in the present day, certain racial or socio-economic groups do not have access to the resources that others do is not accepted by everyone. We live in a democratic nation where many accept that we can all drink from the same drinking fountains, attend the same schools, work for the same organizations, and meet our personal goals if we set our minds to it.

We have several public examples of people who were born into very difficult circumstances, living in impoverished communities, but who, with hard work and determination, were able to achieve their wildest dreams and be extremely successful by society's standards. Often times their stories of achieving the American Dream involve a mentor from outside their community who gave them the foot up they needed to get out of poverty. One might ask, don't struggling communities need outsiders who are successful to come in and provide assistance and support so they are able to break through barriers and be successful? Isn't giving these kids the opportunity to be with people from the dominant culture exactly what they need to understand how to reach their goals in the midst of a nation dominated by middle class European American values?

Furthermore, many program staff would confirm that there have been large-scale attempts to recruit mentors from within these marginalized communities but without success. This is especially true for black male mentors. “There is a national crisis for African American male youth seeking mentors because of the challenges involving recruitment and retention of adult African American mentors” (Miller, 2008, p. 4). So, some might say, if we focus on having mentors who are culturally congruent or come from within these communities, we wouldn’t have enough mentors for kids who need them. After all, kids are better off with a caring adult in their lives than none at all. And there is not conclusive research to show that cross-cultural matches are less successful than same-race or same-culture matches (Liang & West, 2006).

I would argue that though there is evidence that mentoring relationships are having an impact on kids, the above claims do not provide sufficient evidence that mentors from the dominate culture pose no risk of harming youth from marginalized cultures, most notably when we consider their identity development. The notion that all kids are better off with a caring adult, no matter their experience or background, is not consistent with research in the field. Numerous researchers have looked at the harm done in relationships and concluded that mentoring relationships can do more harm than good in certain situations (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006). Because mentoring relationships can be so formational in the development of a young person, the right match at the right time is crucial. And when we consider youth outcomes, we must recognize that success in one desired outcome, such as school attendance or post secondary completion, does not negate potential harm in other areas. To broaden our perspective, we must ask ourselves difficult questions about how we best support young people in their continued growth and ensure they have the opportunity to explore their own identity in healthy, supportive relationships.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will seek to summarize my research and provide ample support of the potential risk that can occur when matching up kids from marginalized cultures with mentors from the dominant culture. My primary research included seven one-on-one interviews with experienced youth workers, most who currently work at a community or site-based mentoring program. The programs vary in structure and focus on things such as health and wellness, academic success and leadership skill development. Three of the seven individuals run culturally specific programs requiring cultural congruency between mentors and students. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were qualitative in nature. In addition, I conducted four focus groups with youth workers in Minneapolis totaling 65 people. The groups lasted only 20-30 minutes each and approximately 25 group members participated verbally. These individuals work with youth in a variety of settings such as schools, afterschool programs, and community centers. Lastly, I conducted two focus groups with a total of 12 young people, all who were African American adolescents males ranging in age from 17-19. I relied most heavily on the one-on-one interviews as they were the most in-depth and provided more opportunities for clarification and in-depth explanations. Though I will broadly use the term “marginalized cultures,” it should be noted that a majority of my conversations focused on those within black communities. There was also feedback from people representing other racial or ethnic backgrounds including Latino, Asian, American Indian, and biracial. I recognize these groups cannot easily be lumped into one broader category when so much of their cultural identities and experiences have been so different. However, I rely on the themes that were consistent throughout my conversations and I will do my best to avoid making sweeping generalizations regarding whole groups from a perspective held by an individual.

IF YOU CAN SEE IT, YOU CAN BE IT

In my interview with David Wilmes, interim executive director at St Paul Youth Services, he said “Racial identity tends to be built on concrete examples.” In other words, young people must have examples of people to look up to who look like them and have similar life experience, in order to imagine future possibilities for themselves. David told a story of one of his African American staff who grew up in a black community in New Orleans. “Everyone around him was black; all of his teachers were black, his dentist, his doctor. He told me ‘I had all kinds of different identity options for what it means to be black. Then I came to Minnesota; all the teachers are white, all the doctors are white.’ A black kid growing up on the east side of St. Paul who is trying to figure out what it means to be an African American male, is not being exposed to the identity options that this staff had in New Orleans.”

In his book, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, Jawanza Kunjufu concluded that a majority of African American males can spend an entire career in the public schools and have very little interaction with an African American male teacher, counselor, or administrator (2004). It is estimated that 84% of educators in the United States are white (Stockslager, 2013). In almost all of my seven interviews, my two student focus groups, and in three of the four youth worker focus groups, it was referenced that young people of color do not see people who look like them in positions of power and authority on a regular basis. One youth worker said, “In so many cases, in the justice system and in schools and outside of social places, our children of color are surrounded by white people and not by professionals that look like them.” Many others expressed a similar sentiment.

In one focus group, a youth worker told a story of a young black boy at her school. “He had been having some behavioral issues. And one day he went to a colleague of mine and said. ‘Do you know that my new teacher is black?’ And he was so excited and the look on his face was like a whole new door opened to him. He has never had that and now he can identify with that position.” At another interview I heard a story of two girls who discovered that there had been an African American Miss Minnesota some years ago. “We had ones of those?!?” they exclaimed to this staff, giddy and elated.

Another African American youth worker spoke of her own life:

Growing up I had strong people who looked like me and who affirmed me in my race and affirmed me in my culture. Because I was affirmed early, it was easier for me to understand different facets of that as I grew older. How else do you define who you are if you don't have those people around you?

This leads to the question, should all kids from marginalized cultures be in a culturally congruent match? I asked each group and individual if this was their preference and their reason behind their response. In almost every interview, people replied that in most cases, same-race matches for kids of color are preferred, for a variety of reasons, but the most frequently mentioned reason was so kids could have a concrete example of a person who looked like them in a position of power and could help them navigate the unique challenges that many kids of color face. In my interview with Neda Kellog, founder of Project Diva, she said, “We are trying to build up kids of color to be able to sustain themselves and bring themselves back, we are trying to build a community. Who can better build than those who understand the community? [Black people] don't need to go and build the white community, you have all that situated, you have your doctors, your bankers. You can go to each other and never touch a black person. We don't. Who can better teach them than their own people?”

When I asked the youth this question, some said they were open to a mentor of any race as “long as he was respectable,” while a few threw out that if they could pick, they would want a black mentor. As the responses continued, there seemed to be increasing consensus that a black mentor would be best because, as one stated, “then he can relate to what I have been through.” Another chimed in, “Where I am from, all I see is guys sagging their pants, ya know? For me to see, like, African Americans acting totally different would have an impact on me.” In addition, several youth who responded specified that they would want a mentor who had a good understanding of their background and had overcome some challenges in life so they could relate to their life and experiences.

Many youth workers wanted same-race matches to support them as they learn to navigate a world where the color of their skin plays a significant role in how people see and interact with them. The reality of racism in the world requires much reflection and exploration with someone who understands it, preferably firsthand. When I interviewed adults of color, each one stated how acutely aware of their race they were at all times. One said, “I am constantly on high alert and aware of my race and the perception others have of me because I am black. I live with this every moment of every day and so do the black young men I work with.” I heard stories of being followed around in stores, pulled over without reason, and targeted in various situations simply because of skin color. My ability to empathize with this experience is limited by the reality that as a member of the perceived dominant culture, I can choose to address issues of race and privilege when I want to. Not so for the young people of color I spoke with who said they could “just tell” when a person was looking down on them because of their race and that it happened every day, everywhere.

There were some key considerations that people said must be looked at to determine the best type of cultural match for young person. There was significant consensus that a young person’s ability to benefit from a cross-race match was directly tied to the amount of caring and supportive adults they had in their life that looked like them. One said that he wouldn’t match up a “highly vulnerable” African American boy with a white mentor but said that if a young black man had a couple black male role models in his community, then being paired up with a white mentor could benefit him because it would give him a chance to see a different perspective. Others suggested that sometimes background and experience trumps race, so an African American man who grew up in an affluent family in a suburb might be less successful supporting a kid than a white male who grew up in North Minneapolis with a single Mom. Though we can’t conclude that all young people of color are better off in same-race matches, some key factors need to be considered before making a mentoring match. Presently, in many of the mentoring programs in these communities, these factors are not assessed prior to the match and are not factors in the matching process.

Healthy racial, cultural, and ethnic identity development is crucial for young people and requires greater access to concrete identity examples for kids from marginalized groups. We must consider the possible risk of placing an additional person of the dominant culture in a structured relationship where there is an innate power dynamic between mentor and mentee and consider how this might inhibit the healthy development of their identity. Though there is significant complexity involved in taking race, class, and ethnicity into account when making mentoring matches, these youth and youth worker perspectives further reveal the need for intentional, individualized efforts.

THE ASSEMBLY LINE APPROACH

“Mentoring programs are another stop on the assembly line to rid the world of blackness and make everyone white.” I have thought of this statement, made during one of my interviews by an African American youth worker, often and with increasing concern since we talked several months ago. As someone from the perceived dominant culture, the loud and clear message that there is only one right way to speak, act, dress,

and behave goes unnoticed to me many days because it aligns with my personal cultural experience. This is not the case for many individuals from marginalized cultures, who are consistently confronted with a status quo that deems their own cultural heritage and values inferior to another. Nathan Palmer (2013) writes that white supremacy is an ideology which encourages us to value white people, white culture, and everything associated with whiteness above the people, culture, and everything associated with people of color. We see this ideology in action everywhere, because the dominant culture cannot help but perpetuate a culture in which the values and attributes of white culture are seen as greater than others. In his book, *Brainwashed: Challenging the myth of Black Inferiority* Tom Burrell stated that “The marketing of black inferiority and white superiority as building blocks for the founding of America is a chick that has finally come home to roost” (2010). Many people of color are constantly subjected, often subconsciously, to societal messages that elevate the dominant culture’s values and cultural identity, while dismissing their own as ineffective, “less than”, or nonsensical.

We talk often about wanting kids to be “successful.” Even in the context of this paper, I found myself wanting to use the word repeatedly saying things like “The goal is successful kids” and “We all want kids to succeed.” But what does this mean and how do we define success? Is success a series of life events or accomplishments? Is it a job title or an income bracket? I fear that our society’s understanding of success for young people is often times merely a reflection of the dominant culture’s beliefs, values, and cultural experience. Instead of looking broadly at what is best for each individual, we end up focused on helping kids accomplish predetermined goals within a structure of society where success looks one specific way. This is painfully obvious in schools where kids from marginalized cultures are consistently shown the predetermined path for success. Elizabeth Stockslager (2013) states, “The groundwork for the structures to guarantee equality in the American education system stems from this case and reflects the country’s dominant culture. Even with the Court’s intention [in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*] to neutralize overt racism, our schools operate within a system that perpetuates the assumed dominance of White culture” (p. 3).

As a result, schools can be a confusing and unwelcoming learning environment for young people who are not members of the dominant culture and the impact is great. In my interviews and focus groups I heard stories of young people of color who were disciplined by hall monitors for walking in the hall in a group when a group of white students had just walked past and the hall monitor said nothing. Others told stories of low expectations for young students of color in classrooms everywhere and gave concrete examples, one woman saying “I have seen different standards in school. Any non-white kids are pushed into a special education class and given a lower standard of work much faster than the white kids.” In her article, *Confronting the Racism of Low Expectations*, Julie Landsman (2004) speaks of a white teacher who was overtly dumbing down questions for her students of color and upon being confronted was stunned. “She realized it was true and admitted, ‘I just assumed you didn’t know the answers and I didn’t want to embarrass you.’” Landsman goes on to say “This assumption—that black or Latino students could not possibly know the answer to deep or complex questions—is at the crux of the racism still embedded in many teachers’ belief systems. This racism is so subtly expressed that students often cannot put into words what they clearly sense is wrong” (2004, p. 29). Another Native youth worker echoed this, saying that Native kids know that teachers look at them differently, “These kids are not stupid. They are actually smarter than us and they know what is going on” (youth worker interview).

A young black man from the North Minneapolis told me of the numerous times he had been pulled over by police, he believed because of his race, for things such as biking in the middle of the street or driving with a light out. On one occasion, he was pulled over and after being given his license and registration back, which would usually end the interaction, the police proceeded to ask him questions about what he was doing,

where he was going and then demanded a to search his car. I have lived in the same community as this young man for almost 10 years. I bike down the middle of the street ever day on my commute to work and have driven around for a full year with a taillight out, it strikes me that I have not been pulled over or questioned once for either of these things. This further illustrates that people are frequently targeted because of their cultural identity and are repeatedly reminded that they must either adapt to the dominant culture or continue to be targeted.

When young people are not regularly in environments where they are able to develop a healthy sense of race, class, or ethnicity, they often develop inferiority complexes that can become internalized racism. This is extremely dangerous as it perpetuates self hatred that will limit their future choices and success. I talked with a college-aged African American woman working at a youth development organization who told me that as a teenager, she hated her blackness so much and feared she was “dirty.” “I would scrub my skin until I bled trying to become clean.” When I asked her why she felt this way she said, the only black people I really saw were my family, and I didn’t like how they acted so I thought to be black meant to be like them.” She refused to list her race when filling out paperwork and would recoil if anyone called her “black.” It wasn’t until her sophomore year of college she began to unpack these things when she was given the opportunity to talk about them in a safe space with other students and staff of color.

I would argue that our immobile and predetermined view of success has no place in the youth development field. Of course things such as high school graduation, college and career readiness, and lack of contact with the justice system are desirable outcomes for all young people. But thinking only of short term goals can inhibit us considering the greater goal of the healthy identity needed for a person’s continued growth and sustained success in life and relationships.

Though mentors of any race can support identity development, continually subjecting kids of marginalized cultures to relationships where their race and culture are not understood or validated by someone can perpetuate this sense of inferiority. Though most mentors would not make overtly racist comments, the damage occurs when a relationship perpetuates the assumption that there is a cultural identity that is “right” and “superior” and that all other groups must conform to it. As an example of this, in one interview I heard a story of a mentor who was recently matched with an African American 11-year-old girl from North Minneapolis. Right away, the mentor was very adamant about taking the young girl to her country club in a suburban community and emphasized that this was a priority. She said she was going “to teach her how to act, show her how to speak properly, and teach her how to look people in the eye.” In this, we see an example of a well meaning and caring adult, putting this young girl’s cultural identity development at risk by seeing her role as the one to show her mentee the “right way” to live. This sometimes subtle, yet damaging mindset mentors can bring into their relationship, can have a very negative impact on their mentee’s perception of their race and culture.

Gayle Smaller, the founder and Executive Director of a culturally congruent mentoring program said in our interview that these mentoring relationships can “increase the racial inferiority complex of young boys of color. If I start to view the functionality and attributes of my mentor as characteristics of whiteness, this further pounds home the idea of racial inferiority.” As a result, young people are left with even fewer tools to help them understand their identity and can respond in a couple different ways. First, Smaller pointed out that the youth can see their only shot at success is to become like their mentor, to assimilate into the dominant culture and abandon any personal sense of their ethnicity or racial identity out of fear that it will keep them from succeeding. Another youth worker pointed out that this can result in irreversible damage where a young person abandons their culture and ethnicity for “success” and then loses all connections with family and community members, no longer having a place to call “home.” An alternative reaction to the

cultural abandonment that Smaller describes is to do the opposite. A young person may choose to reject all things that could be perceived as part of the dominant culture so as not to sell out or “become white” as people described it. This reaction, one youth worker said, leaves them with very few options, limiting their ability to set goals, because they often can see themselves only as “gang bangers or athletes.” If we don’t proceed carefully, a mentoring relationship has the potential to further perpetuate a young person’s misunderstanding and misgivings about their culture, creating an environment where cultural abandonment or rejection of all acculturation seem like the only viable options.

Instead, we must cultivate in young people from marginalized groups a strong sense of self so they can choose how to integrate the different aspects of their own cultural and ethnic identities with that of the dominant culture into their lives and relationships. Neda Kellog from Project Diva said, “It is the oppressor and the oppressed, you just make it work. You just do what you can to get to a point where you can determine how you assimilate.” Learning to do this well takes guidance and support from someone who understands this delicate balance and how to complete this process without losing one’s cultural heritage. In several conversations with individuals of color we discussed the importance of “being in the driver’s seat” when it comes to acculturation. Smaller spoke of his own process of figuring out how to navigate the dominant culture, learning how to speak differently and act differently depending on where he was and who he was with. “As a black man, I constantly have to adapt what I say and how I say it depending on who I am with. If my Northside friends were here today and overheard us, they wouldn’t even recognize my voice. Same if you found me with them on the Northside. The reason I am comfortable doing what I do is that I look at it with equality. I am purposely making adjustments not because I think my culture is inferior, but to move my life forward in the way I want to. I am taking the best of both and making the decisions for myself.” When I asked him how and where he learned to do that, he talked of mentors, both black and white, who helped him in that process.

We must work to support young people on a journey of self discovery, as they recognize their worth and potential, figure out what they want from life, and consider how they might go about reaching their goals. Writer and theologian Frederick Buechner once said, “Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world’s greatest need.” To me, this speaks of real success and our hope for each young person who grows up in this world.

If this becomes our shared vision, our strategies to provide mentoring relationships remain crucial but may differ for each individual. It cannot be seen as a one-size-fits-all approach that will yield similar results for each mentee. Adolescence holds many crucial steps along the path of true self discovery and we know that healthy racial and ethnic identity development is central in healthy identity development, especially for those who find themselves in marginalized populations (Renn, 2012) . We cannot underestimate the possible significance of a mentor’s role, either in supporting or inhibiting, this development in kids who are part of marginalized cultures.

MENTORS NAVIGATING ISSUES OF RACE, CLASS, AND PRIVILEGE

In a recent coffee shop visit, I was reading Jawanza Kunjufu’s book, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. A man sitting nearby was struck by the title and began a conversation me, stating that he was well educated, progressive, open, and the parent of three successful children all of whom had completed PhDs. He went on to tell me of the numerous mentoring and tutoring positions he had held working with young black boys. Each time he used the words “African American” he would lean forward and whisper it, as if it was a secret or something we weren’t supposed to say out loud. Some of his experience had been on the north side of Minneapolis, at a high school about five blocks from where I live. He said, after years living

in Plymouth, it was obvious that the Minneapolis Public Schools were a “total train wreck” and he suggested that we just “bulldoze most of the city of Minneapolis and start over.” He also spoke of an African American boy he had mentored in his job last summer, whom the man sensed he had helped significantly. This boy had never been told about college and he stated, “he wasn’t going get it from anyone in his family or community so I had to be the one to tell him.” He said that “these kids must enter the school system and incrementally succeed in the areas of academics, athletics, and personal leadership development, in that order, like my kids did, if they want to have a chance of making it.”

I relay this conversation not to demonize this gentleman. He seemed well meaning, interested in my work, and I believe he really saw himself as a helpful and supportive adult for kids in the communities he worked in. But the questions must be asked; Did he state any of these viewpoints in his interviews for these positions? Or to the kids? What type of training did he receive and was anyone monitoring his relationships with these young people? As well meaning and caring as this gentlemen might be, his bold assertions about the supremacy of his own cultural identity over those of others, indicates that there is much potential harm that could come from pairing him up with a young person who does not have a strong sense of his or her own racial, cultural, or ethnic identity. Though we can assume that most mentors are much more culturally aware, I still believe that this and other anecdotes provided in my conversations with practitioners raise red flags regarding the ability of many mentors to navigate complex issues such as race, class, culture and privilege in their mentoring relationships in a productive and healthy way.

Because of the complexity of these issues in these relationships, we must avoid matching up mentors who are not equipped to navigate and provide intentional space to discuss the dynamics at play. Many see mentor training as a key way to address this concern. However, we know program staff have limited time to train new mentors and within these training sessions must cover a lot of content including program rules, basic mentor requirements, mandatory reporting laws, and other important aspects regarding how to engage with youth effectively. There is evidence that many programs are incorporating training around cultural competency into these sessions, but it isn’t enough to ensure mentors from the dominant culture are prepared. In fact, the training and reflection needed for a person to effectively navigate issues of race, class and privilege with a young person, far exceed what most programs are currently able to provide.

I talked with one program staff at a program where a majority of the pairs are white mentors from affluent communities matched with kids of color from urban communities; she said that cultural competency is not a significant part of training and hardly mentioned because they have so many other items to cover. Other programs said they do a very thorough job of covering this topic in their initial mentor training but often find it difficult to get their mentors to attend follow-up sessions, read materials, or report back on their experiences and reflections to ensure they are integrating what they learned into their mentoring relationship. It takes a highly skilled, trained, reflective and humble individual to do this effectively. We must proceed with caution, recognizing the damage that could be done if we match up a well meaning adult with a vulnerable young person who is ill-equipped to navigate these topics in their mentoring relationship.

SORRY, BUT THOSE ARE THE RULES

Many of the youth development programs that were founded and implemented by people of the perceived dominant culture represent their values and cultural experience. Some are mystified by the struggle to recruit mentors from marginalized communities and attribute it to lack of interest or availability. Yet in my interviews with youth workers, it was clear that the mentoring field as a whole, is seen by many marginalized people as yet another institution that is designed by and for people who represent the dominant culture, requiring adaptation from those in marginalized cultures. This is very relevant

information when we consider that one of the main reasons we continually match young people up with those from outside their community is a perceived lack of mentors from within their neighborhoods and cultural groups. One program staff described the process of being a black woman seeking volunteer opportunities in an environment dominated by white culture as yet another place she has to adapt and adjust how she talks and looks and acts which requires so much of her energy already, it exhausted her to think about navigating it as a volunteer. Some of the youth workers I talked to clearly articulated that some programs seem to require volunteers to talk and act in a certain way and that people of color don't want to have to adapt in those ways to prove they can be an effective mentor. Some pointed out crucial barriers to people volunteering as mentors including things like the screening process, time commitment, organizational culture, and other programmatic elements that discourage or disable mentors who are not part of the dominant culture from participating. We must take into consideration the systematic ways in which we may be excluding specific groups of people from being mentors, even unintentionally.

When many think of desired mentor characteristics, things like good communication skills, timeliness, and a willingness to follow program rules often come to mind. On one hand, these things make sense. However, they are all based on one's personal definition of what these things mean, which is relative to a person's cultural experience. Elizabeth Stocklager states that some cultures "may also recognize or define values such as civility, kindness, and honesty differently from the dominant culture" (2013, p. 9). When we define desired mentor characteristics looking through the lenses of the dominant culture, we risk creating environments where people feel out of place, excluded, and forced to act out a specific cultural identity to appear competent. A young woman recently commented that in college she had her first black teacher and got one of her first A's ever, doing so well in the class that she even surprised herself. When I asked her why, she said "Because right when I saw my teacher, and she looked liked me, I knew that I could just be myself. I didn't have to talk a certain way or pretend to be a certain thing to be legit." This young person is the kind of person we need as a mentor, but we must not create programs where she feels forced to "talk or act in a certain way" or we run this risk of her not being willing or able to participate.

In addition, many programs have rules that create barriers for involvement for some individuals. For example, many programs require mentors to have a driver's license and have their own car, excluding recent immigrants and others who are unable or unwilling to drive or own a vehicle from participating. Others do not allow mentors to have contact with their students outside of on-site supervised programming. One staff of color pointed out how culturally incongruent this policy is for his black families in Saint Paul who don't trust anyone that they cannot see outside of a school environment. Many programs require mentors to demonstrate a certain proficiency in writing through lengthy applications. These program rules were created with good reason and make sense in many cases. However, we must think about the possible community members we could miss if people have the impression they need to write or speak in a specific way to get into a program. I am not suggesting that we do away with applications or online communication, or that we don't ask a mentor to have a car, but if we aren't considering the possible exclusive nature of these rules and coming up with exceptions when needed, then we aren't moving towards increasing access for kids in marginalized communities to adults from within their cultural groups.

As an example of this dynamic, a program staff told me a story of a mentor of color working in her program. Her mentee had a cousin in need of a mentor and the woman's husband was able and willing to step in and fulfill the role. The four of them met and hit it off; the couple was so excited about the opportunity to mentor side-by-side with these kids. The program staff was elated at the opportunity to match these two youth in culturally congruent matches. However, when the staff went to make the match official in the program, she ran into some barriers. First of all, the mentor didn't have a high school diploma, which was required by the program. Also, the program activities were very focused and the husband didn't sense these

activities would be the best way to build trust with his mentee. In the end, the program decided that because he did not have the required characteristics or fit into the program structure, he would not be allowed to mentor this young boy.

Another significant barrier for many people is the screening process which almost always includes a background check. Good screening keeps kids safe from harm and it is our job to ensure that we consider any and all pertinent information about someone's background before we put them into a relationship with a vulnerable youth. As a result, many programs have policies that exclude anyone with a criminal background of any kind from serving in their program. There is some good rationale in this. On the other hand we know there are inequities in the justice system's processes that disproportionately impact people of color. A recent local report concluded that in Minnesota young people of color are more than three times more likely to be arrested for a delinquency offense than whites. Black teens, in particular, are more than six times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts (Swayze & Buskov, 2012). As a result more adults of color find themselves with recorded offenses than those of the perceived dominant culture. This means that systematic inequities in the justice system could be playing a role in making it more difficult for certain individuals to mentor than their counterparts from the dominant culture.

If we are committed to the healthy identity development of young people, then we must work as hard as possible to create supportive mentoring matches where they can be validated, encouraged, and guided in their journey. We must ensure that the culture of mentoring programs, as well as the specific program practices and rules, are as inclusive as possible so that we don't risk the systematic exclusion of mentors from marginalized populations and limit the mentors available to the young people we seek to support.

THE RISK OF SPEAKING UP

It would be incorrect to say that there is not representation of people from all types of cultural backgrounds in the mentoring field who are actively dialoging about these issues. However, in my interviews and focus groups, it struck me that there seem to be some limitations on the conversations about race, class and privilege. Several of the youth workers I interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of depth of these conversations and how infrequently they seemed to occur given the potential severity of the issues at hand. It appears to me that some practitioners of color don't feel comfortable saying what they truly think to the broader field, despite how strongly they feel about it, for fear of diminishing their credibility. Any time multiple members of a group feel unsafe to speak their truth, we must take a closer look at the forces, voices, or pressures contributing to that perceived lack of safety.

To illustrate this reality, a few people I interviewed weren't comfortable being directly quoted about what they said. Regarding a couple of the most provocative statements that were made, I was asked not to quote people. This seemed to be for fear of the impact it could have on their reputation and their work. It seemed some were carefully calculating what they said and how they said it, afraid that if they were too straightforward about their view of the impact of the perceived dominant culture mentoring youth from marginalized cultures, they might put their work at risk. Another was grateful that the paper was moving forward because "If I said it, it would just be chalked up to 'angry black man syndrome.'" At least two others shared this sentiment regarding why they hesitated to bring these issues to the public sphere.

To me, this point might be the most important and was one of the most significant personal discoveries of this experience. In every single interview that I conducted with a youth worker of color, the lack of attention to, research in, and conversation regarding this topic signified an inequitable representation of the person's experience and cultural identity in the mentoring field on some level. This is my final appeal, even to those who would disagree with the claims in this paper: that we create a broader and safer space to talk about this

so that all voices can be heard and valued. Youth workers from marginalized communities are some of the best resources we have to learn and grow as a field. If these voices are not being elevated and given safe spaces to speak as candidly and truthfully as possible, we are missing out on the key information that we need to move forward and increase the effectiveness of our work.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?


My intent in this paper has been to provide significant evidence that mentoring relationships in which an individual from the dominant culture is mentoring a young person from a marginalized culture may negatively impact the young person, specifically in regard to their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development. By exploring youth worker and youth perspectives on this topic, I hope to have called attention to the importance of considering this further as the field continues to deepen mentoring efforts and adapt mentoring strategies in our work with young people.

I would like to offer a few potential next steps as we move forward. First, we must do more research on these relationships, facilitate conversations where we can foster greater understanding of these dynamics, and seriously consider how our program practices could be putting young people from marginalized cultures at risk. Given that so many mentors are from the dominant culture and they are being matched with mostly young people coming from marginalized cultural groups, this cannot be put on the back burner. I recognize this creates anxiety for the field because it challenges the infrastructure of many programs and creates uncertainty about how we best move ahead. Despite this, we cannot continue to build and sustain these programs without further consideration.

Second, programs need to put a significant amount of time and energy into discussing how these dynamics impact mentor relationships within their program structure. They must work within their current contexts and be willing to deeply examine what is needed to best equip mentors to have conversations about race, culture, ethnicity and other related topics in their mentoring relationships. I believe that with intentional program practices, ongoing dialogue, and a commitment to incorporate new learnings and discoveries into program practices these programs can do much to help a young person form a healthy racial and cultural identity. There must be an acknowledgement of the cultural chasm, openness to dialogue, and a commitment to staying in the conversation, even when it is uncomfortable for those involved. As Gayle Smaller put it, “You can be white and be a good mentor to a young person of color. You just have to validate your mentee’s race, teach them how to hold on to it, and help them navigate systems that are going to require them to behave in a specific way to be successful.” This takes a program’s willingness to continually learn and adapt screening, training, and ongoing support processes of their mentors.

Third, people of the dominant culture must be open to giving up power so that the view of those in marginalized groups can be elevated. This will require a willingness to cease dominating the conversation and a commitment to listen with the intent to understand, instead of respond. As Paulo Freire said in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “The solution is not to integrate [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression, but to transform the structure so that they can become beings for themselves.” To do this well, those who currently hold the power, must lay it down and allow others to step in and share their beliefs, experiences and ideas for the benefit of all.

To close, I bring us back to a core question I asked earlier in this paper in regard to our greatest hope for young people. What do we dream for all children? We want kids to find where the world’s greatest need intersects with their greatest passion. We want to provide the best group of supportive and caring adults possible to help them grow up knowing where they came from and who they can be in the world. To do this we must be willing to have difficult discussions about how best to support kids from marginalized cultures




in mentoring relationships. In this, we are best able to use these relationships to create a world where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and whole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Lindwall has been the Director of Training and Quality Assurance at the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota since February 2013. Prior to that time, Jen collaborated with a team to create and implement a mentoring program for over 200 youth in a local faith community. She graduated from Northwestern College where she studied cross-cultural communication in ministry. She would like to thank all the committed individuals working to empower and support young people in their work. She is especially grateful for those who took time to courageously share their perspectives and experiences with her during this fellowship.

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HAVING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS REGARDING LATINO YOUTH IN MINNESOTA

By Chris Ochocki

We are losing the minds of young people. We are losing their talents, their potential and their economic impact. We are losing our future citizens and quite possibly our hope. We need to change. If I spoke to a large group of white citizens in any school district in Minnesota and stated that just over fifty percent of white young people at their high schools are graduating, we would probably have an uproar at the state capitol, a riot in the streets, a call for heads to roll and an immediate development of a multi-point plan on to how to fix this problem. There would be feelings of anger and terms like epidemic, problem and outrage would flood the airwaves of our state's media. I would not need a megaphone to ignite this upheaval and arouse a concerned citizenry to create a change, I would need only to utter the facts, softly, to adult listeners and the wheels of change would be rolling.

REFLECTING ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I come to this subject matter after working with youth for over sixteen years, the past eleven as a therapist working with youth and families at several dozen Minnesota schools. Early in this work I began to hear stories from Latino youth about challenging experiences with school staff, peers and administration. I developed relationships within the school and supported staff in discussing youth populations that they reported as having difficulties. Over the course of eleven years, I heard system-wide discussions on how to change things for certain populations in order to draw these youth into the school system and I supported individual youth and families in challenging the status quo of educational institutions. I sat with young Latinos who shared stories with me about how challenging it is for them to feel connected to their school's community and how angry they feel about being left out.

Much of what I have experienced has frustrated and angered me. Proposed solutions decided upon to help this group of young people still seem to be white-centered. Decisions are sometimes made without the full inclusion or direction of the communities impacted by these choices. The larger community is often disengaged about wanting to create solutions to identified challenges. We are not providing the appropriate opportunities for all children to learn and be successful, and we continue to treat education as a one-size-fits-all model. Too often programs, models and ideas that support disadvantaged youth best are seen as added-value educational ideas, subject to budgetary discretion, instead of recognized as what may be required for young people from different walks of life to be able to grow. Most importantly, I have discovered through the years, through the patience of young people and their families and through the guidance of other youth workers who are in the know, that I am white, that schools are largely white institutions and that this leaves some, like myself, in a place of privilege. This is my battle cry: to leverage my privilege so that we can make changes in order that all children can succeed in the state of Minnesota.

THE SEARCH FOR BETTER ANSWERS

The NorthStar Fellowship provided the time and opportunity for me to study the data, read the literature, visit successful programs and talk to people with expertise who, like me, are committed to leveraging their power and privilege to make changes in the schools. This paper is organized around a four-point plan to

begin the change that is needed. This plan begins with recognition of the systemic problems of white power and privilege and the commitment to create educational environments based on a model of equity. It moves to assure culturally appropriate supports for Latino youth and families and endorses free expression by Latinos in our schools.

Using the provisional data from the U.S. Department of Education for the year 2010-2011, one can see that in Minnesota Latinos have a four-year graduation rate of 51%, as compared with their white peers' graduation rate of 84% (United States Department of Education, 2012). This is the lowest percentage rate of graduation for Latinos reported by the Department of Education for the entire United States. This disparity is staggering and means that almost one in two Latino youth may not have the opportunity to walk across the stage at graduation or attend a higher learning institution. Alongside this information, Pew research reports that currently Latinos make up about 20-25% of the student body in the schools in U.S. and that overall, Latinos are the largest minority group in the nation, "making up more than 50 million people" (Fry & Lopez, 2011).

In conjunction with this data HACER (Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research) published a position paper in 2012 discussing the Latino population and its impact on Minnesota. The authors began by sharing that the Latino population is "the fastest growing and ... second largest minority population in Minnesota" (Shurilla, Ebinger, Deal-Marquez, & Gutierrez, 2012). Using Minnesota census data the report goes on to say that as Minnesota's population ages over the next twenty-five years the 65-plus demographic will double. Meanwhile the number of people under 65 years will grow by only 10% in that same twenty-five year period, and this under-65 population will be the future of our state's economy and be providing for our aging "Boomer" population. The authors explain that Latinos will be the fastest growing population within this supportive generation. I believe these data show that we have a looming crisis in Minnesota.

We have the fastest growing population in our state failing in our schools at a rate of almost 50 percent and yet we need this population to be educated and engaged productively in the workforce to support the aging population. It seems that we are on course currently to diminish the returns on our youth. It means that youth of Latino decent will be ill-equipped to be a part of our educated work force, which will be needed to support the economics of Minnesota in the future.

How do we allow this unjust and unproductive educational environment for this sub-population of students in our schools? What barriers keep young people of Latino decent from developing into successful students and in turn, into financially successful adults? What needs to be done to bring about change?

Let us begin by working backwards with the issue and then see what changes can be made. In 1973 Gisela Konopka laid out her ideas for creating healthy adolescents. She discussed in that paper conditions that should be in place in order to provide opportunities for all young people to develop as citizens and become responsible members of our communities. She stated that healthy development of youth should contain opportunities to "participate as citizens...gain experience in decision making...experiment with their own identity...to reflect on self in relation to others and discover self by looking outward as well as inward" (Konopka, 1973). This, to me, seems to be what schools can create for young people. An environment where they have the chance to succeed, develop and grow safely. Taking from Konopka's work of healthy youth development and in the context of our current failure rate of Latino students in our schools, I propose that schools, communities and society are charged to create educational environments that:

1. Face the realities that white power and privilege impose on schools and the lives of those who are educated there.

2. Work actively to create educational environments that engage Latino youth and families where they are, basing this work on models of equity.
3. Selectively direct resources to assure that culturally appropriate supports and opportunities engage the Latino community and address the power of institutions.
4. Encourage and create mechanisms that allow for Latino free-expression as part of the school.

Focusing on these four principles will help us to change the current direction for Latinos in our schools. In order to move in this direction, we need to understand some basic things about our school system as it currently presents itself.

THE REALITY OF WHITE POWER AND PRIVILEGE IN SCHOOLS

Our American educational system is based upon the principles of a single-minded delivery model of learning, constructed by people of privilege, and does not take into consideration the changing nature of our diverse populations. It supports the families of white students best and is based on the assumption that all students and families have the same resources to engage in learning environments and do so in the same manner. Formal education began in this country as a privilege for white, wealthy people in order for them to continue the economic leadership for the future. Overall, our education system was designed by white people, to create advantages for white people, while also delivering information that would help assimilate and cement a common cultural experience and common workforce. If one looks at the history and uses of education in this country, one can see many examples of how whiteness tries to maintain the authority of these educational institutions and how our educational institutions use power to create pathways for assimilation and patriotism within our culture.

It is not difficult to find the threads of how schools have been tools to create an American ideal under the authority of those in privileged positions. As one administrator pointedly said during an interview, “Schools are a microcosm of society, everything plays out with racism in schools.” In saying this, I think the administrator means that schools are an extension of the society and the racial and authoritarian challenges of each generation are present within the walls of the schools.

Just think about a few of the following examples of how this power has been used: the use of boarding schools for Native people’s forced assimilation; Brown vs. Board of Education and its impact and challenges regarding desegregation of schools; white flight and its impact on inner city schools and resources; standardized testing that was based on experiences and exposures related to white culture; the use of American history textbooks to create an idealized and whitewashed history of America, as shared in the book, *White Lies My Teacher Told Me*; requiring the Pledge of Allegiance in schools; and on and on.

White privilege in our educational institutions is a fundamental barrier to the success of Latino youth. It is the concept that if acknowledged, understood and addressed by our schools and communities, will allow some of the other more practical solutions to come to light, and will create communities that will have a desire to develop a significant, inclusive and long-lasting response to its shortfalls. White privilege in schools means that I can assume that the persons in power will reflect me, the curriculum will be based on my cultural upbringing and the supports, financially and within the construct of school and community culture, will be sustained and supported with my own interest in mind. It is a challenge because white people are generally the persons in power who have a large voice in the funding streams of education and often shape the policies decided upon for our youth in schools. For the demographic shift occurring now and in the future, this white way of thinking will need to be addressed and changed so that we can meet the needs of the growing Latino population and reap the benefits of their education in this state.

Before one can create solutions to a problem, one must acknowledge that a problem exists. In terms of white privilege and school systems, one must come to terms with the fact that “race-and thus racism, in both individual and institutional forms—whether acknowledged or unacknowledged—plays a primary role in student’s struggle to achieve at high levels” (Singleton and Linton, 2006, p. 2). Or as Ryan Vernosh, 2010 Minnesota Teacher of the Year stated, “Racial inequality is fundamental to the achievement gap and needs to be addressed head-on” (Koumpilova, 2013). I do not propose many specific solutions as to how to reduce these privileges, but offer some examples of steps certain communities have made to create equity. There are much smarter people than I who have developed programs that address privilege and racism. If you would like to begin a better understanding of these concepts and how they impact education see Singleton and Linton’s book, *Courageous Conversations about Race* (2006). I do hope that we can acknowledge and learn about our privilege and agree to create a working lens that acknowledges our educational system is steeped in white privilege and therefore hinders the healthy development of all students of color, including Latino students.

Singleton and Linton (2006) explain that youth are already responding to the inequity in schools through means of anger, failing, truancy and outright refusal of school expectations. It is foolish to think that our continuation of doing more of the same to solve the problem will produce any better results. Cornell West wrote that “White Americans expect that people of color should be ‘integrated into White society and culture’ and become ‘worthy of acceptance by the White way of life’ and establish Whiteness as the acceptable standard” (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This principle that “white is right” is surely outdated, and if the demographics continue as projected it will leave many people outside of the fold of education in its current form. It is far past time to change how educators and our system engage the student of color and join in creating equity in the educational field for all students.

Whiteness and white pride in our schools is pervasive, from the posters on the wall, to how subjects are taught and who and what those subjects focus on. It controls the social gatherings related to the school experience and it controls the discipline process. It seems few schools embrace the fact that there are many cultures that make up this America and many cultural experiences reflected in the students. Walking through many schools, as I have, it is hard to see the value of those cultures when they are not represented on the walls, in the books and not seen in the faces of those who are teaching and administrating. A student shared one example of this lack of appropriate cultural expression in response to a school’s scheduled cultural event saying, “Taco night is not a Latino cultural event.” This lack of cultural understanding and expression must be acknowledged, addressed and changed on some level before we can see real and genuine Latino student engagement and success in our schools. Furthermore, this change is needed to create the healthy development necessary to shape our economy for the next generation.

Racism exists in schools in many forms. One needs only to look at the research based on discipline referrals and school responses in this country to see that skin color has an impact in the school environment. One administrator shared the challenges of racism in schools when he said, “Staff see non-white as ‘less than’ and we have to work on this.” One Latina student shared her experience in school saying, “Teachers take away my phone, but let the other white kids have theirs out.” She was angered by the number of times she was sent to the office because of her phone being out and the lack of the same disciplinary response occurring for the other white students. As Singleton and Linton (2006) explain, equality is based on the assumptions that all students “have the same opportunities and experiences.” They believe, and I agree, that opportunities are not the same for all people, and in our schools, race can impact many of the opportunities available to a student. It is true that things need to be fair for all, but equality does not take into consideration that things are not fair currently, nor historically. I would argue that equality and fairness cannot exist until we create equity. We cannot assume equality and turn a blind eye on the fact that

the system is inequitable. Equality cannot exist until all things are on the same playing field. Instead, when we focus on changing the Latino educational experience, we must look through the lens of creating equity.

Equity is a different principle than equality; it is a general condition characterized by justice, fairness, and impartiality. Singleton and Linton explain that educationally, equity means narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest performing students and eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest categories (2006). They further explain that equity means that all students will have the opportunities and resources to succeed. They do not state that the resources available will be the same for all students, saying instead that each student will have resources and opportunities. If we look at the principle of equality versus equity, equity is much more important in terms of the educational process. We need to develop our understanding of white privilege in order to realize that the current system is unjust, and historically education has been unjust. Once we create an understanding of the injustice, we can more easily create equity within the system to improve fairness. Justice also means that developing and enacting extra supports and programs for Latinos, although on its face may look unjust, is an important step toward balancing the system. For example, if we were to have Latino youth, families and supporters design and implement specific supports and tools in order for them to achieve school success, on its face it would look as if we are creating an unfair system that allows for more resources given to one population over another. This is true only if we do not recognize that the system has given unfair advantage to white people throughout the course of educational history. Equity means that we find appropriate ways for Latino families and students to engage in the educational process. Equity also means that in order to build this kind of relationship, we must provide appropriate resources to help engage in these productive relationships. It may mean that we need to give more resources, staff and energy toward helping to understand the Latino community and engage in a way that this community will bring forth constructive ideas to change the education system and raise the effective level of the students from this community.

CREATE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT MODEL EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

A great example of creating equity within the educational system, is The TORCH program in Northfield, Minnesota. TORCH (Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes) came out of a response to the dismal graduation rates and high dropout levels of for Latinos in the Northfield public schools. It was a collaborative effort to find ways to connect Latino students with more resources to tackle their specific academic and social challenges, help them maintain their education and connect them to possibilities after high school. In the short time the program has been in place, they have seen the graduation rate for Latino students go from about 36% to almost 90%. One youth I spoke with, who was in the TORCH program when living in Northfield, described the positive impact she experienced by participating in a school that understood her culture and provided many more supports and opportunities. She reported she had access to several Latino mentors, each serving a different role in her life and education and each having access to the resources and understanding needed to assist her when challenges in her life came up, educationally, or in her community life. The program was meeting many of her developmental needs.

She shared a specific example of the school meeting these needs with a story about how she sometimes missed the bus because she needed to stay up late to care for her siblings so her mother could work extra hours to keep the family afloat financially. She reported that while enrolled in Northfield and the TORCH program she was always “able to call a support person and they picked me up” when she overslept. “I usually only missed the first period of class.” She shared how her grades were much better in that supportive environment and because of the familial aspects of the program, her mother would participate in some of the school functions when she could, knowing she could connect with other Latino families and get

resources for the things her family needed at times. The youth reported that the success and academic progress she achieved while enrolled in that program had not translated well since her move to her new community and new school. She felt that the supports were not available to her in the new school in the same way; she felt disconnected and was failing her classes without that extra support. Now when she misses the bus, which still happens often because of the care she feels she needs to provide for her siblings, she said she ends up missing the whole day of school because she does not have a mentor who is able to give her a ride or a support person in the school who understands. She shared that her current school's response to her absences is to meet with the administrative team and file truancy instead of discussing possible ways to address her challenges within her family and community. "There is no way I can catch up and no one seems to understand the challenges my family and I face." She shared through tears that this depresses her and leaves her less motivated for school. She was on the honor roll while enrolled in the TORCH program in Northfield and she dreamed of doing positive things with her life, including college. She failed the majority of her classes last semester, mostly because of attendance issues, and her mother is not engaged in any social and resource supports or the school because she is unsure how to connect with them within this current community.

It seems by this example alone, one can see the value of having specified programming for disadvantaged youth to address specific needs and reduce the obstacles to education. What seems most distressing about this example is that this program providing equity within the school has shown a great rate of success in implementing solutions for Latino youth, but is entirely funded, so their website states "by grants and donations." That means that we are treating an effective educational program, one that reduces barriers to education and supports the healthy development of youth, as an extra-curricular activity, instead of seeing this as a necessary program for our students' success and our future economy. We need to think about what our communities and districts are willing to do to truly address the hurdles students have and sustainably support solutions that have a greater ability of being effective at developing our future generations.

DIRECT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO MEET SPECIFIC COMMUNITY NEEDS

One can see the power of creating programs that are designed specifically for community needs. I don't think that allowing for the creation of programs that benefit a specific group of students, such as Latinos, who are stuck in an unjust system, is that much of a difficulty when white privilege and racism are understood and addressed. Genuine equity, such as the TORCH program demonstrates, takes into account that the educational experiences and advantages given to whites and not granted to Latinos, as is the current model, can be changed. It requires a significant boost in supports and programming that is tailored to level the playing field for Latino students. It also requires a community of citizenry to care enough about the healthy development of all youth. Both of these requirements were present in order for the TORCH program succeed. This is justice and the reason equity is more important than equality. Equity acknowledges through the community and school system's growth, and through their own introspective look at the historical nature of the problem, that things did not begin from the place of all being equal, and it tries to repair that through catch-up programs and changing the system to benefit all youth. In this instance this was accomplished by paying particular attention to creating opportunities for the Latino youth whom the system was failing.

TRY NEW APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

One of the other barriers to Latino success that came up during this project was the impact of language. Language can be a large barrier for Latino students for several reasons. Latino youth may come to school with some dual-language experiences. It can be the case that at home they may speak Spanish and at school

they are taught English. This language barrier can create many challenges for schools and families, and few school opportunities seem to address this challenge and utilize this potential resource as a strength. Many of the students in our state who are raised in Spanish-speaking households, or recently arrived from Spanish-speaking countries, begin their education in English Language Learning (ELL) classes where students can learn the English language in order to integrate themselves into the larger system of education. Although I believe it is important to assist the students to develop the language of the dominant culture in order for them to attain long-term success, I think this ELL-only process may be shortsighted, and it negates a skill that these students already have. It can also continue to devalue the youth's experience and further create a feeling of "less than" in not giving significance to their own cultural origins. One interviewee, a Latino support worker, related this feeling when he said "focusing only on English language development takes away from them having pride in their native tongue and diminished respect for their own cultural experiences." Many of the first-generational interviewees spoke of feeling embarrassed at their parents' inability to speak English and their own embarrassment about their native language and outright refusal to speak their native tongue when in school. One of the interviewees, who is an adult now, spoke of how she spent most of her adult life trying to regain what she had lost in her ability to communicate and understand Spanish because of her shame about her Latino heritage when she was a child in school. I believe our ELL-only focus in education for newly arrived students, may do a disservice by further creating this shame.

It is important for us to look at how we can utilize a student's native language skills to help them create a stronger global skill set in language fluency in both their primary and secondary languages. How does it shape school for dual-language learners if we tailor our educational process to allow for these students to develop their English skills in conjunction with developing their primary language skills, resulting in the students becoming dual-language fluent faster and easier than their white counterparts? There is a program offered at one high school that teaches a Spanish language class only for native speakers, instead of basing the assumption that all students are at the same skill level in this language. I believe this accomplishes several tasks at once. First it allows native speakers a better learning environment to build off of skills that these students already possess. It takes these students out of the traditional Spanish 1, Spanish 2 sequence, knowing that this process may not meet their true needs with respect to the language, and takes into account that students with prior knowledge may be bored in a class that is beneath them in content.

Secondly, this class design does not assume that all of the language skills are equal among all of the Latino students and instead teaches the members of the class the skills that each needs to develop individually based on initial and follow-up testing of skills. It is individualized learning at its core with a cohort of students who share some of the basic language skills. This means that one class member may be able to maintain a high level of communication verbally but may lack written skills in the language and thus the learning would focus on that student becoming proficient in writing and literacy. Another student may be able to read and write well, but have challenges with the conversational pieces of communication. The important point is the individual students have different plans based on need within the classroom setting. It really meets the needs of the students where they are.

Thirdly, it allows a whole segment of the Latino student body to build and promote positive cultural connections amongst their Latino peers. We know that language is the tool used to create connection. Having these students be connected through learning the same language together while acknowledging and supporting their previous knowledge about the subject matter can help to foster a better connection within the school and within their community. It helps to build connections within the group of Latino students and gets them working together to learn very specific material related to their culture and language. HACER identifies research showing how Latino students are influenced by their social relationships at home, school and community and the impact those relationships can have when they are intertwined within

positive settings (Shurilla et al., 2012). This model of learning allows for Latino students to benefit from building these significant and important relationships with peers in the safety of the school.

One of the other key points in this example is that this class was designed and is taught by a teacher who is also a native speaker and immigrant. The importance of this is that it allows the students to have the opportunity to form a positive connection with an adult in the building who may be seen by the students as being more like themselves. This piece may begin to assist in addressing a difficult problem that the HACER report points out in schools. The report says, “Latino teachers and administrators are underrepresented in schools, depriving Latino students of access to staff that could serve as language and cultural interpreters and positive role-models” (Shurilla et al., 2012, p. 15). Requiring the teacher to be a native speaker and to have gone through the process of immigration allows for the opportunity to build an open relationship with the students. This model of using instruction in this way for dual-language learners directly results in the students having time to build a positive relationship with one teacher who may be seen as a positive role model from their community.

The ability to speak Spanish certainly seems to be a skill that has real economic value in our global society and may be an untapped resource for our state and for our young people. This principle of bicultural experiences and fluency is so important that even corporations in Minnesota see the value of bicultural individuals, referring to foreign-born immigrants as an asset for their “divergent and complementary cultures that support out-of-the-box thinking and innovation” (Minnesota Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2012). Furthermore, they seem to see the value not only in development of a positive skilled labor force of problem-solvers, but also see immigrants as potentially having social connections to their home country that may further the growth and development of our own state’s economy in the long run.

Many of the interviewees shared stories of how language was the primary impact on the student development and identified how language becomes the building block for school connectedness. One school support person explained, “Language allows a space for families to feel connected.” She recalled that at the beginning of the year the school held a welcome back night to explain expectations and begin building connections with families, but they only gave the welcoming presentation in English. She reminded me that “Fifty percent of the student body is identified as being Latino.” She explained how this seemed to show that the school was not interested in truly building connections with families and seemed to create a feeling of disconnection that has resonated throughout the year for her Latino families. She further explained that most of the time, in her experience, schools rely on the students themselves to be the interpreters of the information. She explained how this places the youth in an oftentimes, uncomfortable place and she is concerned that young people are leaving out important information. She shared that this creates a barrier in working with the family because it leaves the young person with having too much power in the family-school connection. It makes it challenging for a parent to do the difficult tasks of parenting if the gate-keeper of the educational information is the child. She further shared how parents can feel helpless in not understanding the language and without significant increase in interpreter access, “parents just turn off.”

One support person, who arrived in the U.S. as a high school student discussed how interpreters are good to have, but sometimes the communication can be lost in only providing interpretative services versus having someone who is in constant contact with families in order to develop positive working relationships within the school. She expressed the real need for schools to have cultural liaisons within the school structure to develop relationships with Latino families. I think these thoughts shared by the interviewees reflect the importance of having more supports for the Latino population in schools. Again it speaks to the lack of connectedness discussed in the HACER report and the under-representative nature of schools for minorities (Shurilla et al., 2012). Having cultural support people can assist with the language and cultural challenges


families have with school and can help to build positive connections for all. It may help engage students further in the system and provide resources and opportunities for families to engage more. It certainly helped the young person in the TORCH program and seems to assist overall with the positive results of an increased graduation rate for Northfield.

ENCOURAGE FREE EXPRESSION BY LATINO YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Another example of this idea of having cultural support was shared when an interviewee reported that schools do not seem to understand that most Latino families would not just open up to school supports about things that are going on within the home. She reports that “culturally, we do not air our dirty laundry.” She went on to share that Latinos would feel more comfortable talking with other Latinos, and the lack of Latino professionals in the building makes it difficult for the families and the youth to connect genuinely with educators and the educational process. She explained it can take much longer for Latino families to open to white people because there is always a fear of rejection based on the family’s history of prejudice. We know that parent involvement is one of the keys to student success overall and that family involvement is important culturally for Latinos. As cited in HACER “Lee and Brown found that involvement at school occurred more often for parents whose culture and lifestyle were more congruent with the school’s culture” (Shurilla et al., 2012, p. 15). We all want to be connected to places where people look like us and understand our experiences. There are few schools in Minnesota where the school makes a point to provide the necessary programs and staff available for Latino students and families to be engaged. When they do, like the case of the TORCH program in Northfield Minnesota, there seems to be a rise in success and graduation.

Columbia Heights is another example of a community having the foresight for equity and perseverance for developing programs for the benefit of all students. One of the interviewees I met with used to be a part of this school and talked about the programs created in this district. The schools and community realized they had a high Latino population and wanted to meet the needs of the students attending the schools. She reported the school engaged in after-school programs, as well as in-class instruction, to engage in cultural understanding and learning. She reported that the school would help set the curriculum to focus on Latino cultural experiences and history and teachers would find ways to weave Latino culture into the common core standards needed to be learned by all students in Minnesota. She shared how they would choose books such as *Enrique’s Journey* to read in English class that would focus on specific Latino subjects, to both connect the students to Latino culture as well as provide places for students to grow and share about their own experiences.

This interviewee also shared that the school understood the importance of building relationships with families. Together with community supports the school arranged many family nights that included cooking traditional foods, cultural dances, and other things relevant to these families. She said that it was amazing to see how it helped to build relationships with families beyond just talking about grades. She reported that the initiative invited the school to be a part of its community and that relationships were built that then could also be leveraged when things got difficult for a student, or a behavior needed to be addressed. She reported that these family nights did not focus only on the Latino community— all students and families in the school were encouraged to participate. This allowed the other non-Latino students a chance to learn about new cultures and gave the Latino students a chance to show their knowledge and teach things, like dances, to the other students and families. The Latino students “became the experts during the events and took pride in them. There was real value in this.” This interviewee happened to have also spent a few years teaching and working in Mexico and she noted that this is how things were done in Mexico. “There were school presentations for everything in Mexico, constant cultural engagements. Whole towns would come to the school to participate in them. In the U.S., there is a disconnect between most schools and the families



they serve, and this does not help the Latino youth.” She explained that a lot of this disconnect occurs because of the lack of relationship-building time and appropriate resources offered to families through school experiences.

There are many ways that schools can change to better meet the needs of our students. The examples provided here are just a few of the many ideas generated out there in order to better the success rate for Latino students, which in turn betters the overall experience for all our students. When I think about the cultural influences that some of these programs created within their own schools, I cannot help but think about how those programs and ideas not only assisted with Latino students’ development, but allowed an opportunity for white students and the communities at large to have global exposure that more readily expresses the world we live in. I truly believe that a rising tide will lift all boats. I believe that we can create equity for one student and in so doing help create equity for all students. I think the examples and words above reflect this thinking. It is a difficult first step, but we need to recognize racism, privilege and its impact on our current system. We need to develop the courage to have these conversations because through them, we can create action and resources necessary to ensure justice for all of Minnesota’s youth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Ochocki works as a therapist at Headway Emotional Health Services and is co-located in a suburban high school. He wishes to thank his employer for allowing him the opportunity to engage in this fellowship. As well, he owes a special debt of gratitude to Veronica Ramos for all the enlightening conversations regarding Latino youth, privilege and racism and for really educating and encouraging him. He also would like to thank all the young people and support workers who made themselves available for interviews and discussions.

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Reclaiming the Traditions of My People

By Arlana Lame Omaha

I am a Rosebud Sioux Leech Lake Ojibwe woman born into the urban Native community and blessed to connect with older generations that were willing to share with me their experiences. I have had the privilege to work with the youth of today and to hear their dreams and plans as well as their pains and troubles. I strongly believe that Native cultures' practices and traditions have been systematically stripped away, and young people today are estranged from them. It is important for Native youth workers like me to reclaim our heritage and traditions for ourselves and to create opportunities for the Native youth that we work with to reclaim them as well. In addressing this topic, I will rely heavily upon old stories and lessons from my maternal grandmother, Gladys, collected through interviews and writings that she left for us. For more recent history, I will draw upon the memories of my mother Barbara which I carry with me. I will also be guided by surveys of the youth that I work with today as well as my own life experiences.

RECOGNIZING THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF U.S. POLICIES

In the urban Native community it is important that we recognize the U.S. government policies that changed our life ways and separated us from our traditional models. It is important that we understand the genocidal policies levied upon us—all tribes, as a people—that have led to the historical and generational trauma that we are experiencing today. We need to be familiar with the tools that were used such as treaties, land allotments, boarding schools, foster care and adoption systems and alcohol and their effect on the generations, past, present and future, before we can we embrace our autonomy and learn to utilize self-determination as a format to be successful in our communities, families, and lives.

Many generations of urban Natives are suffering from the effects of drugs and alcohol originating from governmental policies. It has a trickle-down effect from generation to generation. The farther we move from our traditional roots, the deeper the problems take hold. Most of this suffering can be traced directly to the experiences of many in boarding schools. The U.S. government operated over 100 boarding schools both on and off the reservations. Understanding the background and impact these institutions and their actions had on Native Americans is vital to understanding how Native Americans both on and off the reservation survive today.

What happened to the children of previous generations? If they were raised in the government boarding schools, they would return home unable to communicate with their parents as they were nearly always punished for speaking their native language. They were often times abused sexually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. When they returned from the boarding schools they were ashamed and did not know how to share their experiences with their parents or other members of their family.

These schools began this campaign of genocide as reservations began and lasted through the 1960's. In that short amount of time the trauma that was perpetuated upon these generations has rippled through to the generations today. But unless today's generations understand the suffering of previous generations, there can only be blame and hurt when what is needed is healing. Generations today need to be aware of what previous generations were subjected to in the case of alcohol and drug abuse as well.

Our young people have been led to believe that drinking is an acceptable way of life, almost expected of them rather than seeing the truth of it. Drinking was a method of escaping from a new reality, the reality of being placed on reservations. The women in the first generation to live on reservations were able to continue

with their same basic tasks to care for their families. But it was intended that the men be taught a trade or to farm. Their ways of caring for their families were taken from them, causing humiliation and frustration. This was the beginning of a downward spiral into alcoholism and spousal abuse. Within a generation this downward spiral would break the spirits of women as well as they struggled to keep families together.

War has been another cause for the trauma that causes societal ills. Native American men (and now women) have always volunteered for the armed forces at a greater percentage than any other race. Yet, when they come home, they have gained nothing for their bravery. They are left to deal with no jobs, post-traumatic stress disorder and other physical ailments. Women have lost husbands and sons; yet life never improves.

The foster care system has also rent the fabric of our society. Beginning in the 1950s through the 1980s, Indian children were removed from their homes and adopted out to non-native families. Now those brown children being raised in American homes have abandonment struggles and feel lost from their own culture and their own people. By the same token over the years, they have not always been welcomed back into their birthright by some. The parents and children of the foster care system suffer from the same missed opportunities to know their biological families. This is a loss to our Native society as a whole as well. Autonomy and self-determination cannot take hold until each generation can appreciate the suffering of other generations.

FIND HEALING IN THE LESSONS AND STORIES OF THE PAST

I feel it is imperative to promote healing within our community. Without the healing, we can never grow to stand on our own or take command of our own destiny. While I was raised in an urban community, I have had access to and experience with our traditional ways and I feel that healing will come when we base our community actions on those traditional ways. The stories about three generations of women in my family inspire me: my great grandmother Esther, my grandmother Gladys and my mother Barbara. In the stories that follow, you will see Native wisdom in many forms. The first is an interview with my maternal grandmother before her death. I am fortunate to have this type of information available to me for my research and for personal guidance.

MY GRANDMOTHER GLADYS AND HER STORY

Gladys Cain, an Ojibwe Elder from Cass Lake, Minnesota had a vast knowledge of traditional Ojibwe teachings, which she shared with me on occasion. She was a keeper of a pipe and she knew songs and shared teachings with her children and grandchildren. The following is an interview she did with a program. They choose her because of her knowledge and background. She advocated for her community and she was highly intelligent and well respected. In response to interview questions, my grandmother Gladys shared these things.

I was born in Cass Lake, Minnesota out in the country. My mother Esther was born and raised in Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Wisconsin. She stayed there till the age of fifteen. My father was born and raised in Beaulieu, Minnesota on the White Earth Indian Reservation. My grandfather was from White Earth on both his fathering and mothering sides. And my grandmother was from Lac Courte Oreilles just like my mother.

I don't remember knowing my father's parents growing up. I only remember my mothers' side my grandmother and my grandfather. My grandmother lived with us growing up but my

grandparents were not together, my grandfather was always traveling. He was into tribal politics concerning the tribe. I recall that my grandmother only spoke the Ojibwe language.

I came from a large family of ten children. Me, I was the second to the last. Well I guess being the youngest I was teased a lot from my older siblings. But it was a way of them showing how much they care about one another. They all had chores to do. My older sisters learned how to cook from my mother and my grandmother.

What I saw was we planted gardens and took care of gardens—that was everyone’s job, to get out there—and until it was time to eat it, it was hard. My grandmother picked food; she seemed to know what we could eat and what we couldn’t. Since we were a large family, planting gardens was everyone’s job to get. Then until everything was ready to eat, we had to take care of the garden and wait out there for things to ripen. It was hard, sometimes we didn’t always have something to eat so my grandma had to go out to the woods and find stuff to make soup. She made a soup that was delicious—with spices and seasonings. She found a plant that was like celery. We were poor, and we always had people living with us, coming and going.

From what I remember, I was one of the healthiest children. I never had all the childhood sickness, and when I got sick my grandmother always knew how to doctor us. I never went to a clinic my grandmother always seemed to know how to doctor us. I was 7 or 8 when I saw my first doctor. My mother always talked to us a lot. Now thinking back, I think it was a form of psychology. She said if you don’t do this, then this would happen. It was real effective. We listened. We minded her.

I was five years old when I first started school. I had to walk two miles one way. We only had one teacher and [the school] went up to grade eight. The teacher, who was not an Indian teacher, cooked all the meals. I went up to the ninth grade, then I went to Pipestone. It was real hard discipline; we had to line up like a military. When we were punished we had to stand for hours; there was marks put against us we had to work off. Everyone knew this and everyone listened because they didn’t want to stand for hours. We did not get to practice Indian ways at boarding school. No, we were discouraged against it and anyone that came that did speak the language had to get placed separately until they learned English. Then they could rejoin us. I don’t remember corporal punishment if we spoke Ojibwe, but now I remember my sister telling me she witnessed that.

When I finished school, I started my own family. All the schooling that we got from the boarding school was teaching us how to keep house, how to wash dishes cook, clean and be housewives, sew. It was kind of like teaching you to be just a mother and housewife. Girls weren’t encouraged to go into business or have a career. As far as I know they were trained to be housewives.

The religion I remember as a child was the Ojibwe religion. My mother and my father turned to the Catholic religion so that’s the way I was raised. I was baptized when I was a baby so yeah, we went

to church. We did go whenever we could. I still know about the Ojibwe religion and see some similarities with Catholicism.

GRANDMOTHER'S THOUGHTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

I think that the children today they are losing a lot of things that should have had handed down to them. I feel that I have gotten a lot of learning things from my grandparents and my grandmother. I think that is kind of fading away; the kids are not getting that. And to me, I think that they are losing, they are losing a lot by not looking and trying to find a grandmother to listen to, and somebody to be their teacher. Because that is what grandmothers are: you know mine was one of my best teachers.

Young people are losing a lot today because from what I observe of families, the children now are not fully respecting their elders and to me that's a sad thing that is starting to happen to me. I think that the kids are lost—they are lost when they don't have that respect. They have not been taught to respect.

What I would share with them today comes from what my life experiences have been. A lot of mistakes were made, and through making these mistakes I have learned by them. I think that one of the best things children should learn from is their own mistakes, and don't be afraid to make them because that's what we learn from. I am glad to be sitting talking and giving a message, and if I can help anybody today that is what I would like to do.

The preceding words come from my grandmother Gladys Cain who is now in the spirit world. I also have access to more recent historical events through the memories shared by my mother.

MEMORIES FROM MY MOTHER BARBARA

My mother Barbara came of age in a time when Native Americans were again free to learn and practice their spiritual rituals (The American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 1978). She is Ojibwe from Leech Lake, Minnesota. She was born in the 1940s and raised on Mission Corner. She said she did not go to boarding school, as she was lucky, but she recalls running and hiding from a group of recruiters who would come to town in Cass Lake to place little Indian kids in boarding schools back in the 1950s. They would just take these children off the streets and bring them to schools far away from their home. My mother would run and hide in the woods until the missionaries were gone.

Barbara was raised by her grandmother Esther, who taught her sewing, cooking and other domestic skills that Esther had learned while attending boarding school. But she also remembers going out into the woods with her grandmother and picking herbs and medicine. She recalls her grandmother going over to a few of her relative's houses and doctoring them. She would give them tea or the brew that had she made for them. She recalls her grandmother being called to go to the home of her grandmother's cousin, who was blind at the time, and giving her medicine to regain her sight. And the cousin did get her sight back all the way until she passed on to the spirit world. Now, thinking back, she said that her grandmother was a medicine woman, a healing woman.

Barbara had eight children, seven from her first marriage to another Ojibwe from Red Lake Reservation. Then she remarried a man who is a Sicangu Lakota from Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. He was in Minneapolis because he had just got back from serving in the military and he was looking for a better life off the reservation. He is a fluent speaker of his tribal language. He was lucky enough to have also been born and raised by his grandparents who taught him songs, stories, and for that reason he was immersed in his culture and religion.

That quality impacted my mother and sparked her interest when he took her home to the reservation to meet his grandmother, aunt, and the rest of his family. She enjoyed the rich culture and traditions she was feeling, and the warm welcome and the deep connections that the Sioux had to their families and community. While she was never a heavy drinker, my mother gave up alcohol in 1975. She felt the need to get involved in the recovery process and a 12-step community so she, along with her mother (Grandma Gladys), started AA/NA, and Al Anon and Alateen meetings at the Little Earth of United Tribes and even hosted meetings in her home, if no other space was available.

These stories can show today's youth that they are not alone in their struggles. It can show them where the struggles began, as well. It can offer them hope and a road map to their future. There are people who care and are trying to heal our community. They will see that it is up to them to carry on the work started by those who came before. This will be a tie to the past and show them how to do the same for those who will come after. This is our Native way.

With these stories and the vast amount of historical data—both recent history such as the struggles of the civil rights movements of the 1960's and 70's and older history, the ways of the native people before reservations, that are available to us—as well as the ideas and hopes of today's youth, I feel that we can weave a banner to pull the generations together for the benefit and strength of the community.

At a recent youth summit, a survey of 30 youth showed that they enjoyed and felt connected to the workshop that shared traditional roles and teachings. This tells me that the hope for healing is strong in today's youth and it makes me question why we hold on to so much hurt, pain and anger, for self-pity only holds us back and down from accomplishing our victories. We need to connect the generations through use of our traditional ways to heal. It is important that organizations and programs bear this in mind when planning for the urban Native community. We must educate each other and draw strength from our traditions to heal before we can move forward to our autonomy and self-determination.

The loss of access to stories, interviews, and traditions is vital. It's real and it is happening. If we don't continue to respect our elders, understand our teachings and restore our ways, we will lose them. In order to thrive, heal, and move past the past we must find a way to learn, educate, and understand that we have to find our knowledge and we have to hold it close in our hearts, our minds, and on that paper and pen. If we have to utilize technology and urban techniques, then that is what we must do in our effort to keep our ancestors fully in our hearts, and pass on their stories, wisdom and creations. This is what we must do for our next generations to come—the next seven generations to come.

Wopila Miigwech for allowing me the outlet to share stories from four generations. Let us continue this fire and keep it lit for others to find the way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arlana Lane Omaha was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is a Sicangu Lakota from Rosebud, South Dakota on her dad's side and Ojibwe from Leech Lake Tribe on her mom's side. Arlana takes pride and holds high honor on her culture and history, but she also chooses not to forget the stories, visions, and dreams of her Grandmothers by keeping their teachings close to her heart. She strongly believes in the healing process from the impact of boarding schools. She knows that through self-determination (autonomy) her people will learn how to build a healthy relationship with authority by keeping our stories alive. We are determined to heal, thrive, and teach within our communities. We Are All Related. Wolakota Miigwech



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HONORING THE EXPERIENCE:

Towards a Youth Staff Model for Youth Programs

By Phil Rooney

For the past seven years I have worked with and supervised a staff of passionate and engaged young people who are taking control of their lives, actively engaging participants in their program, and contributing to the wellbeing of their community. While I have seen the potential and impact of working with a staff of young people, there have been many practical and philosophical challenges. I wondered by what authority I should be telling these young people what this program should look like, when they have been participants for the past five or even 10 years. However, I often saw that though these young people had a vision for their program, they didn't necessarily have the skills to implement it. My most challenging moments as a youth worker and as a supervisor have been when their vision of the program and their expectations of their position were different from mine. The specifics would change, but I kept confronting these two questions: How can I, as a youth worker, better support young people to effectively run their own program? How can I use the authority of my position to support the development of their autonomy as effective youth workers? This past year I have had the opportunity through the NorthStar Fellowship to engage more deeply with these questions of authority and autonomy and to draw from the experience and knowledge of our field.

My primary frame for youth work and the NorthStar Fellowship has been my experience with Youth Farm. Youth Farm is where I began as a youth worker, and the relationships I have developed there impact me every day. It is where I continue to pour my passion for democratic and experiential education. Youth Farm is a youth development non-profit that engages young people ages nine to 24 in five neighborhoods of Minneapolis and St. Paul to grow food, grow community, and grow leaders. Our participants develop skill mastery as cooks and farmers, learn how to cooperate to accomplish shared goals, build relationships with peers and adults, and contribute to their community by growing, distributing, and cooking food. As participants become more experienced and capable they take on greater leadership roles within the program and community. Once participants are of legally employable age they can apply for a youth staff position, referred to as Project LEAD, where they co-facilitate programs. These youth staff members also partner with adults to make decisions for how Youth Farm should engage our community. In addition to supervising Project LEAD, I've managed a programmatic expansion to include former Project LEAD participants who are now between the ages of 18 and 24. These young adults work part time throughout the year as program facilitators, farm managers, and organizational leaders.

I also worked with the St. Paul Youth Commission in the City's Department of Parks and Recreation to establish The Canvas, an arts center run for and by teens. Establishing the Canvas gave me a lens to understand how larger institutions can partner with young people. There were challenges along the way, including convincing recreation staff that young people were capable of running their own space without destroying it. I knew from my work at Youth Farm that engaging young people as partners was possible. I knew that youth staff members were capable of much more than they were given credit for. I didn't know why more programs did not employ youth staff.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Employing young people as program staff can have strong benefits to program participants, youth serving organizations, and the youth work field. Yet it is a model that is not widely documented, and youth staff

programs struggle to find adequate funding. Youth staff programs can be implemented poorly, and supervisors often lack sufficient support. I had very little training outside of my own experience when I became a Program Director at Youth Farm with the responsibility to supervise a youth staff cohort. I had a vision for the work based on a few summers spent in a different neighborhood, but this vision didn't always match that of my new youth staff. I struggled to hold newly appointed youth staff accountable to basic employment expectations, like staying on the job site. The experienced youth staff struggled to adapt to different ideas coming from a boss whom they didn't know well. We weren't working in partnership, and I didn't know where to turn for help.

Thankfully we all loved the space at Youth Farm so much that we stuck with each other. Even when we struggled with each other we still saw the benefits of our work together, especially in comparison to programs that had no youth staff. Over time we grew to support each other through our strengths and challenges. I began to understand my work with youth staff in a new light. My role wasn't to oversee young people delivering a predetermined program model, complete with defined spaces for youth voice. Instead I saw that my role should be to engage young people as capable youth workers with real responsibilities that carry high expectations. I should use my position of authority to develop a space for youth staff to adapt our program model to meet the needs of young people in our community. I have clarified my understanding of what my role should be and what this work should look like through conversations with professional youth workers and other members of the NorthStar Fellowship.

In this paper I will argue for the necessity of a youth staff model, identify elements of an effective model, share specific strategies for supporting youth staff drawn from the stories and wisdom of professional youth workers, and recognize the model's challenges. For the purposes of this paper "professional youth worker" refers to adults who are employed by youth serving organizations to manage youth programs and supervise program staff, "youth staff" refers to young people between the ages of 14 and 22 who are employed by youth programs to work directly with program participants, and "participants" refers to young people who are not employed by the program but who attend program offerings.

Establishing a model for employing young people as program staff has several important repercussions for the youth development field. This model represents a way for youth-serving organizations and professional youth workers to empower and engage young people in creating change. Recruiting past participants to be youth workers will help grow the youth work field and make it more representative of our young people. By recruiting from their own ranks, youth-serving organizations have the opportunity to develop internal leadership and make more youth-centered decisions. Youth programs have the opportunity to engender a greater sense of community ownership, pride, and respect. Monica McDaniel (personal communication, February 12, 2014), a former Beacons participant who now supervises a cohort of young people in Youth Farm, identified that "having spaces where teens can be themselves and have ownership over their lives and the direction of their community is very powerful, and adults in the community can see that."

Youth staff members develop professionally as well as personally. The youth worker skill set they gain is valuable not only within the youth work field but also within other settings. These young people engage in planning, facilitation, relationship building, public speaking, and so much more. They learn employment skills and will be better prepared for the workforce. Beyond improving on specific skills, the youth staff role creates opportunities to grow as healthy and competent young people. This is apparent as youth staff experience belonging, make decisions, engage in reflection, experience accountability and contribute to their community. One example from my work includes a young person I have worked with over the last five years. When I first met him he was a new youth staff member who was too shy to say more than one or two

sentences in a two-hour staff meeting. Today he is recognized as a community leader who is comfortable speaking in front of large groups of parents, and when he speaks he encourages participants to join him.

There are many ways to engage young people in decision-making and to support this sort of professional and personal development. The model outlined in this paper may not work for all programs, but it can work for many more than are currently employing it. Several movements within the youth work field have introduced young people into spaces that have previously been reserved for adults, such as youth-adult partnerships (National 4-H Council, 2007). Creating a model for how to effectively employ young people as youth workers within their own programs can deepen and improve our youth work and has the potential to have a great impact in our field.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE MODEL

There are program strategies and supervisory practices that can help youth staff be better youth workers and strengthen the impact of their work. I had already learned the importance of some of the practices through my own supervision, and I was well versed in the Youth Farm model. I was surprised to hear how many of my colleagues had come to similar conclusions and to see commonalities in our programs. Several elements of an effective youth staff model were clear: a) recruiting from program participants, b) a pre-employment training period for participants, c) peer mentorship within a group cohort of youth staff, and d) specific supervisory practices. These youth workers were engaged in programs at Youth Farm, the Kitty Anderson Youth Science Center at the Science Museum of Minnesota, and the City of Burnsville's all-ages music venue The Garage. Additionally, the Youth Development Institute's 2009 series, *Practices to Keep in After-School and Youth Programs* provides a wealth of information on the Beacons program and its supervisory practices.

I focused on models that employ young people from the age of 14 to as high as 24. This is a wide age range that creates opportunities for mentorship within a group cohort of young people. While 14 may seem too young by societal standards for the set of responsibilities of youth work, a youth staff member that was previously a participant will be able to begin contributing at a much higher level than their age might suggest. Furthermore, setting expectations of any person solely based on his or her age is a totally inadequate way to support and supervise no matter whether young or old.

Through their earlier participation, youth have essentially been trained into the basics of the program structure and have ready examples and models for how to do youth work. Many are readily able to step in from their first day to contribute to the culture of the organization and experience of participants. Youth staff members already know many of the participants from years of being in the program together and have established relationships to draw upon in their position as mentors, role models, and youth workers. Participants benefit from having staff that better understand their specific strengths and challenges and who can provide youth voice in a staff decision-making capacity. Participants feel a greater sense of belonging, develop relationships with role models and mentors who have similar life experiences and share their cultural background, and develop a positive self-identity. Young people may also feel more comfortable sharing personal issues with someone they identify more closely as a peer before sharing with an adult.

Furthermore, participants aspire to be staff and take on greater leadership roles to give themselves the greater opportunity to be hired. I have seen participants make deep and concerted efforts within the program and with their peers for this reason. It is always a pleasure to tell these young people they have been appointed youth staff. One young person was so surprised she told me that no one had ever recognized her as a positive role model before. Now she is one of the most focused and dedicated members of our youth staff and often holds others accountable when they don't meet group expectations.

Youth staff programs primarily hired young people who had participated in a pre-employment training program with the organization. These training programs most often focus on young people between the ages of 12 and 15 and create a pathway for employment. How these programs can best train and prepare young people is itself something that should be further explored and developed and lies outside of the specific context of this paper. That being said, young people within this role should have opportunities to practice some of the necessary skills to be effective program staff and to discover whether this is something that interests them. This also assists professional youth workers in determining a young person's suitability as a program staff member and creates a relationship based on trust and support that can be leveraged when the young person becomes a youth staff member. This period of pre-employment training can serve as a vetting process for discovering whether a young person is ready to be responsible to the program and participants. It is a space for learning communication skills, accountability, and how to be a positive role model. This period can also separate out young people who are only interested in having a job from the people who are passionate for doing the work because they love it.

Youth staff programs created a stronger support system by hiring a group cohort. While it is also possible to employ young people individually to be youth workers, the greatest impact comes from developing a group context for youth staff. Benefits to a group context include the ability for peers to give feedback, hold each other accountable, create collective expectations, and create a network of support. The group cohort creates avenues for the Beacons approach to supervision through social group work (Reilly, Supervision at the Beacons, 2009). At the Beacons, "this process of group development is the primary vehicle through which youth staff are taught and trained to supervise" (p.8). A group cohort creates space for each youth staff member to develop his or her individual style and strengths without the pressure of succeeding in everything. Youth staff members are able to support and be supported through each other's strengths and challenges, and this likewise teaches them how to support participants. Youth employees benefit from feedback not just from their supervisor but also from their peers and they often hear and respond to this constructive peer feedback more positively. Youth staff members also learn how to be better youth workers through the process of giving feedback to their peers. The ability to hire young people throughout the range of ages 14 to 24 is an added benefit. Within a cohort there are preexisting mentorship relationships between youth staff that can shift from participant-staff towards a peer-to-peer and mentorship support system. The group cohort also has benefits for participants, as McDaniel identifies, "having a bigger group allows [participants] to connect to a lot of different personalities" (personal communication, February 12, 2014).

LEARNING TO BE YOUTH WORKERS

Clear expectations for youth staff lay the groundwork for a successful transition from program participant to youth staff member, and are an important element in the continued supervision of youth staff. New youth staff will be more effective if they understand that their role as an employee requires a greater contribution than what is expected of a participant. The aforementioned pre-employment training period begins the development of a staff lens, but is inadequate without clearly defined expectations. The most important role for the professional youth worker is helping to develop well defined expectations through communicating organizational policies and facilitating a space of reflective democratic process. Youth staff will be more effective if professional youth workers are able to hold young people accountable to these expectations.

The professional youth workers I interviewed argued that engaging young people in democratic process to generate these expectations sets a tone of greater ownership of their role. This is not so different a process from how I would generate a set of group expectations with participants. Participants may focus on "no swearing" as a key expectation, and it is my role as a staff member to introduce the importance of cleaning up our space or checking out before leaving, for example. Yet somehow the set of organizational policies as

they applied to youth staff seemed beyond this process, perhaps due to how I believed a supervisor should act. There was supposed to be a hierarchy of decision making because I felt ultimately responsible for the program. But the necessity for professional expectations shouldn't stop adults from engaging young people in the democratic process. The professional youth worker can add additional expectations in a democratic discussion without any necessity for being authoritarian. Part of this discussion should include professional requirements of the organization, such as policies and procedures, emergency protocols, attendance requirements, etc. Including these elements takes nothing away from the process becoming a collective set of expectations. Rather than my being singularly responsible for the program, we create a collective responsibility.

Through reflecting on their own experience youth staff members are capable of recognizing most of the skills and practices of an effective youth worker. Reflection on experience is essential as youth transition to staff and develop their role. John Dewey (1938) established reflection as a hallmark of experiential education. Youth staff have a host of experience in youth programs, and through facilitated reflection they create new layers of meaning from their time as participants. Reflection helps youth staff to recognize their areas of expertise and honors their knowledge. Through reflection they learn to identify elements of youth work practice they have experienced and begin to develop a concept of youth work. From this concept they begin to critically examine their own practice to learn how to improve their work. Multiple opportunities for reflection with many different people are essential to the youth staff model. Youth staff will be more effective if they reflect with participants, with their peer cohort, and with their supervisors. These reflections are more effective if they take place on a regular basis and take many forms, from quarterly self-evaluations to daily check-ins with peers and immediate supervisors on group dynamics.

A youth staff member's ability to recognize the elements of effective youth work practice is strengthened by his or her past participation in the program, as noted within the Beacons program: "When they transition to the Counselor-in-Training program, these young people begin to practice the group work skills they have absorbed over the years" (Onserud, Brockway, & Mancell, 2009). Youth staff members have essentially been trained into being youth workers by their years of participation within programs. They know the games, and now they develop the skills to lead the games. They know the conflict mediation process, and now they develop the skills to create a holistic approach to behavior management. The expertise of youth staff enhances youth programs, just as adults bring their own experience as professional youth workers.

SUPERVISING YOUTH STAFF

There are many tools we use when youth staff struggle to be effective youth workers. Youth staff can lean on their group cohort for feedback, can step back from challenging responsibilities to more comfortable roles, can be coached and mentored, and can see effective practice modeled. Specific expectations for the performance and responsibilities of a young person should grow and shift over time. There is a learning curve as young people develop their skill sets in facilitation, mentorship, and program planning. When supervisors acknowledge what Gerison Lansdown (2005) referred to as the "evolving capacities" of our young people, youth staff are able to take on greater roles in running programs. As youth workers we are able to draw upon our relationships with these young people to support them as they grow and push them through the discomfort of attempting a new role or skill, as noted by Beth Ringer of Youth Farm:

I think another thing that makes it successful is using that authentic and positive relationship in order to provide clear structure and guidance and appropriate roles. So balancing—if a youth is not comfortable facilitating a game, you don't just throw them in there and they go and do it and you don't help at all. [The adult role is] finding appropriate balance and ways to guide and support.

—Beth Ringer, personal communication, February 12, 2014

Most young people will encounter periods of struggle. The transition to program staff carries greater expectations, and youth staff will be challenged to adapt new skills in a rapidly shifting environment. When supported effectively, most young people will find these challenges are surmountable and this process will support their healthy development.

Youth staff members also learn how to do youth work based on the example set by their supervisor. If we model trust, honor their expertise, and create a democratic space, then our youth staff will be more autonomous youth workers. If we accept ambiguity and are adaptable within our authority, then our youth staff will have more confidence to tap their expertise and develop their vision. We create more flexible and democratic space when we accept the limits of our knowledge and acknowledge the mistakes we make. Eric Billiet, formerly of The Garage, described the working relationship:

I know more about how to make a budget. I know more about how to plan something. I don't have knowledge about what its like to be Latino. I don't know what its like to be a 14-year-old girl. You teach me your expertise. I'll teach you some of mine. And that's how we're going to work as a team. At the same time sometimes I'm the boss and we have to work on job skills like being on time. But that's pretty age-irrelevant too.

— Eric Billiet, personal communication, March 20, 2014

The youth staff model does entail a shift in focus on the part of the professional youth worker. In our work that has meant less time spent facilitating programming and in direct contact with participants and more time spent managing programs and staff.

Accountability is one of this model's greatest challenges. As supervisors we struggle to hold youth staff accountable without enabling their negative behaviors. We so dearly care for these young people whom we have seen grow into their staff roles, and we want to see them succeed. Many youth staff members do not have a developed employment skill set that includes being on time, showing up when scheduled, and communicating absences and tardiness. Supervisors' greatest challenges within this model are recognizing when they have been enabling a young person to take advantage of their situation and making the decision to remove a young person from their position in the organization. Supervisors must balance personal feelings with the long-term benefits to the young people.

UNDERSTANDING ADULTISM

There are several extrinsic challenges to the youth staff model, and they have the potential to be overcome. To my initial surprise and befuddlement, the most common barrier I heard from youth workers was adultism. It didn't make sense to me that youth programs, which are spaces for the empowerment of young people, would be victim of something so insidious. I wanted the barrier to be something tangible that I could work to overcome. After several hard interviews and lots of digging, I began to understand how adultism influences adults to undermine youth staff and how it creates structural barriers, both legal and financial.

John Bell (1995) defines adultism as, “behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement” (p.1). Adultism creates a societal belief that young people are not qualified to take on adult roles such as being a youth worker and are incapable of making appropriate decisions for their programs and for themselves. Ruthanne Kurth-Schai (1988) argues that our societal perception of young people underestimates their potential power and ability entirely, “contemporary images of childhood are united in their failure to acknowledge the potential of young people to contribute to the social order” (p.116). Young people are primarily assigned menial tasks in the workplace, reflecting a lack of expectation to contribute to community. When society carries expectations of young people it is through their potential as adults-in-the-making or as future leaders.

Legal restrictions based in the social construction of youth are significant barriers to hiring and empowering youth staff. Many programs require the presence of a staff person over the age of 18, regardless of other qualifications. However, a responsible 16-year-old youth staff member who was a participant could be better qualified to care for a group of children than a recent college graduate who has little youth work experience. Recognizing the potential for youth staff under 18 challenges the credentialing movement, which would presumably restrict these young people from becoming youth workers. The legal barrier doesn't preclude the youth staff model if we include young people through the age of 24. These young adults can take on mentorship roles with newly appointed youth staff, have scheduling availability during the school day, and can take on additional responsibilities within the program setting.

Effective implementation requires organizations to invest in funding youth staff and supporting professional youth workers. Paying young people for doing real work requires financial resources. The Beacons argue that the narrow restrictions and requirements of funders are a significant barrier to securing adequate funding (Reilly, From membership to leadership, 2009,). This is also prevalent at Youth Farm where the organization is unable to offer more than a limited stipend during the school year. By paying youth staff we respect the real value of their work, thereby creating a greater sense of pride and investment in the program. Payment also creates a motivating factor among youth staff and participants who aspire to be youth staff.

Youth programs and professional youth workers who employ youth staff will be more effective if they authentically believe that young people are capable of running an effective youth program. Neither the opinions of young people nor of adults should be put on a pedestal. Soliciting the opinion of young people without dialogue, teaching, or mentorship reeks of tokenism. Likewise, adults, even youth workers, can too easily focus on the perception of young people's incapacities and inabilities and may invalidate the opinions or methods of youth staff. All youth workers must guard against approaching young people as vessels that must be filled with teaching in ways that we as adults validate. Shared goals are more likely to be accomplished if professional youth workers use their authority to work in partnership. There are many ways to be an effective youth worker, and youth staff will have many methods and opinions. Young people are less likely than adult staff to have a fully developed youth work tool kit, and their expectations may not be the same as a professional youth worker's. Seeing youth staff struggle and make mistakes is a challenge for supervisors, and sometimes these mistakes have repercussions on program participants. These moments can carry great weight in learning and development. Professional youth workers can support youth staff by setting them up for success and mentoring them through failure. The positive outcomes of youth staff outweigh the mistakes they make.

CALL TO ACTION

This paper is a small window into a model that is insufficiently researched and supported. There are more programs doing this work and each has its own successes and challenges. More research should be done to document how youth workers are approaching this work. Many of the youth workers I interviewed felt a lack of support and were largely unaware of other youth staff programs. Youth-serving organizations and youth work networks could support these youth workers by creating professional development opportunities specific to supervising youth staff.

In summary, an effective youth staff model includes recruiting previous participants, a pre-employment program, and a group cohort with peer mentorship. Youth staff will transition more effectively through reflecting on their experience as a participant. Professional youth workers can support this transition and the autonomy of youth staff by facilitating a democratic space that sets well-defined expectations, and by holding youth staff accountable. Youth staff can learn how to do effective youth work through the modeling of their supervisors. Adultism creates legal and financial barriers that are surmountable and can interfere with authentic partnership between adults and young people.

This model is capable of being expanded beyond its current settings. Youth programs looking for ways to engage alumni and young people as volunteers should examine whether they can achieve greater outcomes by implementing a youth staff model. Youth programs will require the support of funders and organizational leaders. Supervisors of youth staff should examine their practice and question whether their youth staff members are being adequately supported and challenged as real youth workers. In some cases, this may require getting youth staff out from behind desks at drop-in sites and stopping adults from giving them menial tasks. Hashep Seka of Youth Farm recognized the difference as:

Our [youth] staff are able to create the programs that they want to see. And they're able to contribute their ideas and passions into making it come to reality. When I look at [other youth staff], they have no opportunity to contribute where they're going to be placed. ... they're sitting behind a desk or they're dealing with these kids they've never met before and telling them to be quiet.

-Hashep Seka, personal communication, February 12, 2014

The journey to establish a clearer model for my work has been both disquieting and inspirational. I have had to come to terms with not having easy answers for challenges like how to get some young people to show up to work on time. I have had to critically examine my work to ensure the decisions I make are in partnership with young people. I have had to come to terms with times when adultism played a larger role. The NorthStar Fellowship has inspired me to reshape my work to become more adaptable and trusting, and my youth staff has noticed the shift. Our program has never felt so strong.

Seeing the success of Youth Farm and these other youth staff programs gives me hope that more spaces can implement this model. Our youth staff members were trained into youth work based on their experience as participants; now they are experiencing how to democratically supervise this program model. Our field would do well to tap their expertise.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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BEYOND EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION

By Emily Scribner-O'Pray

While evidence-based interventions (EBIs) have brought some important improvements to the field of adolescent sexual health, significant concerns must be addressed. As the field and funders have embraced EBIs as a way to improve outcomes and program efficacy we must be clear about the concerns related to and limitations of the adoption of EBIs as the primary method through which teen pregnancy prevention, sexuality education and adolescent reproductive health programs are provided.

To better understand these concerns, I interviewed experts in adolescent reproductive health and teen pregnancy prevention, gathered data from a focus group of youth workers who currently implement EBIs and drew from my own extensive experience in the adolescent reproductive health field and my experience as a program manager for a county-wide, evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program in Minnesota. This paper will examine how we came to embrace EBIs in the field of adolescent sexual health; whether or not this approach is effective in meeting the needs of adolescents, especially those at high risk for teen pregnancy; concerns related to the widespread implementation of EBIs; and identify issues which must be resolved as we move forward.

“Evidence-based intervention” or “evidence-based practice” is a concept that started in the medical field and has increasingly become a focus in the fields of social work, chemical dependency, youth work, and adolescent health. An evidence-based intervention is “a prevention service (program, policy, or practice) that has been proven to positively change the problem being targeted. In general, there needs to be evidence that the intervention has been effective at achieving outcomes through some form of evaluation” (Baudry, 2013). Randomized control trials are typically considered the gold standard in ascertaining whether or not a program is “evidence-based.”

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In the field of adolescent sexual health, EBIs evolved for a reason. Historically in the United States the topic of adolescent sexuality has been fraught with religious, moral, political and ideological controversy. In the wake of the HIV crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and also due to the creation of the Adolescent Family Life Act in 1981 (Dailard, 2001), sex education in public schools became a political lightning rod. Conflicts erupted between those who believed that young people deserved comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education and those that believed sex education should be left to families at home, or that abstinence-only-until-marriage education was the only acceptable sex education for teenagers. Advocates for Youth defines abstinence-only-until-marriage programs as those that “teach abstinence as the only *morally correct option* of sexual expression for teenagers. They usually censor information about contraception and condoms for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy” (Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, 2008). This battle was waged among politicians, school boards, policy makers and the public. Federal funding for abstinence-only education (which had existed since the 1980s as part of welfare reform) grew exponentially in the 1990s (Howell, 2007). It was argued by supporters of this funding that it was, in part to balance federal family planning funding, which provided contraceptive services to poor women of all ages. However no significant federal funding for comprehensive sexuality education existed.

In response to this situation, advocates for adolescent rights began to focus on “programs that work,” with the argument that abstinence-only programs did not effectively delay the onset of sexual activity, or prevent teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). At the time there was very little rigorous evaluation of sex education programs and there were no formalized structures for promoting evidence-based practice. Yet advocates for comprehensive sex education pointed to the fact that in many European countries sex education was wide-ranging and ongoing over the lifespan, family planning was readily accessible, and parents and children had more comfort with the topic of sexuality. In France, Germany and the Netherlands among other countries, teen pregnancy and STI rates were significantly lower than in the United States. In fact, the U.S. had (and still has) one of the highest teen birth rates of all developed nations (Alford & Hauser, 2011).

Evaluation of sex education programs became a priority, and teen pregnancy and STIs, along with age of sexual debut (the age at which a young person first becomes sexually active) were outcomes that were most easily measured. While some experts in the field promoted what was referred to as a “youth development approach to pregnancy prevention,” the focus was still on the prevention of teen pregnancy. Less concrete outcomes like healthy relationships, body image, comfort seeking sexual health services, positive sense of sexual identity, communication and negotiations skills, awareness of gender identity and roles were less easily measured, and were pushed to the side when it came to research. Even wider youth development outcomes of a sense of belonging, mastery, school success, leadership skills, positive contribution, connection to caring adults and a capacity to enjoy life were also not widely measured, though it is well known that these outcomes are interconnected with outcomes of pregnancy prevention (Gavin, Catalano, & Markham, 2010). Preventing teen pregnancy was, however, a compelling argument for government investment (federal, state and local), as an economic argument could be made that preventing teen pregnancy saved taxpayers money.

Additionally, focusing on “programs that work” was a way that institutions, particularly public institutions, could avoid the controversy brought about by the idea of teens having sex, and provided justification for implementing programs that gave young people medically accurate, comprehensive information about sex, including topics like contraception, condoms, and access to reproductive health services. It gave schools and other institutions backing for decisions to include such controversial topics in health curriculums and youth programs. It was a way to ensure that young people had a right to access information and services to protect their health.

In 2010, the federal Department of Health and Human Services offered funding via the Office of Adolescent Health for programs to prevent teen pregnancy. Under tier I of the funding, \$75 million was allocated for the implementation of EBIs, and applicants could apply to implement one or two programs from a list of 28 that were evaluated and shown to be effective for teen pregnancy prevention. (Under tier II of the funding, another \$25 million was allocated for promising programs or to implement EBIs with a significant adaptation. All of tier II programs were required to include a randomized control trial.) This funding was important for truly putting EBIs on the map, as many smaller funders follow the lead of the federal government funding streams. Such a large source of funding solely for EBIs truly changed the landscape of adolescent sexual health programming.

DO EBIs WORK?

Now, four years into the first large-scale funding for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs, we should ask ourselves how this approach is working. There were clearly problems with the old model. Before the widespread use of EBIs, many organizations provided one-time classroom presentations which

provided a positive conversation, a chance for clinics to have a “friendly face” in the community, and a chance for youth to have a neutral, knowledgeable adult to provide information, but not much chance for relationship building or youth involvement or youth development. There was also no evidence that these “one-shot” presentations effectively led to behavior change on the part of the adolescents who participated in them. Schools were haphazard at best with their approach to sex ed, often providing excellent sexuality education in one classroom and poor programming or even nothing in the class next door, with no consistency across districts or states. Youth-serving agencies ranged widely in their approach to working with young people around the topic of sexuality. Little evaluation was conducted, not for lack of interest, but for lack of resources and capacity. Evidence-based programs implemented with a plan to focus on programs that work and on populations most affected by the problems of teen pregnancy and STIs were an important step towards improving the situation.

It is right and reasonable that we expect that programs in general, and particularly those funded by public money, be effective. The use of EBIs has been a big step forward for the field in many ways. The implementation of programs that have been “proven to be effective” prevents controversy, encourages government investment, and as the data show, improves outcomes for young people in some very key areas. Youth workers like knowing that what they are doing “works” and that their efforts make a difference. Communities benefit from lower teen pregnancy rates and funding for programs that may not otherwise have been available.

However, implementing EBIs with strict fidelity to the program model poses its own challenges. Fidelity here means not changing anything from the original program, especially those program elements considered core components that contributed to the outcomes measured in the evaluation. We must not ignore these concerns and must continue to move forward in making sure that programs meet the needs of all youth and especially those who have the poorest outcomes.

CONCERNS TO ADDRESS

One concern is the use of randomized control trials (RCTs) as the only acceptable option for evaluation when considering which programs are effective. RCTs are the gold standard for evaluation in order for a program to be considered an EBI. However, because RCTs are expensive and typically take place over several years, many programs deemed to be effective are decades old. Much has changed in the last 20 years. Technology, how teens relate to each other and the world, how they interact with schools and clinics, medical protocols and information, school environments and policies all affect how programs are integrated into young people’s lives. Everything from No Child Left Behind to cell phones and the internet to how to treat pelvic inflammatory disease has vastly changed or is new since the time many of these programs were developed. As one focus group participant noted:

I think there’s good stuff there and frameworks and good lessons. There are also missing lessons, and some topics have really bad lessons. For example, everything in the curriculum says ‘make a list’. That’s not very interactive. Nothing has changed since the original curriculum was written in 1979. We need to modify scenarios to include technology, etc.

Another concern relates to the experience of young people who participate in EBIs. Much research on youth development has been conducted in recent decades, and there is a growing awareness of the way in which trauma affects young people’s health status, education, decision-making and life trajectory. Many EBIs incorporate significant abstinence components, advocating abstinence as the “best choice” for young people

and utilizing cautionary language about STIs and pregnancy to educate youth about potential harmful consequences of sexual activity. They emphasize that abstinence is the most responsible choice for those who have future goals, want to finish school and want to have successful careers. These messages may be effective for youth who are not yet sexually active, but could be off-putting or even harmful to young people who are currently sexually active, are teen parents, have a history of STIs, are GLBTQ, have been sexually trafficked or have experienced sexual trauma. Even the notion that sex is a choice a person can make and not one that is forced on them may be foreign to some adolescents. It must be noted that these same groups of young people are among those most at risk for the negative outcomes that adolescent sexual health programs seek to prevent.

Although some evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs do incorporate youth engagement with the curriculum, implementing a program developed by someone in another part of the country with an entirely different group of youth in an entirely different decade and sticking with the original program curriculum makes it potentially difficult to engage youth authentically. Often these programs are delivered to youth and not with youth. Youth participants have little to no say in how the program is structured and in how, when, where and what learning happens. Some program models do incorporate a youth development framework in the EBI, like the Teen Outreach Program (TOP), which in addition to weekly lessons over nine months includes a service-learning component where youth identify a community need and respond to it by designing a service-learning project. Many programs however, offer a set number of educational sessions which must be offered in sequence and with little to no variation from the curriculum script. This leaves very little room for young people to truly engage the topics and ideas related to a very core part of their identity as human beings: their sexuality.

In addition to inhibiting youth voice, EBIs also can limit the autonomy, creativity and innovation of youth workers. One can assume that there are many things that “work” that we have not yet discovered. Yet if we do only what we already know works, we will not discover them. There must be a mechanism to experiment and learn new things, not only for our field, but to keep the youth worker engaged and effective. In focus groups, many youth workers identified that the repetitive nature of the EBI that they implement can become tedious. One youth worker noted, “The curriculum can be really repetitive. I like having a structure, but the youth can tell that I’m following a curriculum. I wish there was more flexibility in the order of lessons and how much was covered at once.” We know that program effectiveness relies solidly on the effectiveness of the facilitator, and burn-out is a genuine concern.

Many youth workers who are now implementing EBIs have already had education and work experience with a wider array of programming for youth, and draw on those skills and that knowledge to provide quality programming for youth. Everything that happens in a classroom doesn’t always follow a script, and youth workers need to be able to respond effectively to questions, behavior and concerns that arise in the implementation of EBIs. One youth worker noted:

Part of following an EBI and making it effective is to know what’s in the back of the patient’s mind—if you haven’t had a lot of previous experience working with youth with a program that allowed full flexibility, you may not really understand that and couldn’t draw it out using the confines of the EBI.

In other words, this youth worker felt that her broader experience and training in sexuality education and youth development have been essential to truly understanding how youth think about sexuality and what concerns they may have. She feels that if she hadn’t had the experience that allowed her to truly engage

young people on their own terms around the topic of sex and sexuality, she would not be as effective working within the confines of the EBI. Another youth worker noted that “It would be difficult to do my EBI without the support of the team and without the background in sexual health.”

EBIs also require a great deal of oversight, training and technical assistance to ensure that they are being implemented with fidelity to the program model and that the programs are high quality. Even with this oversight, it is nearly impossible to truly exactly replicate an EBI, as much of the adaptation is in response to barriers in any given setting. Efforts to replicate an evidence-based program in real-world settings bring into sharp focus the tension between adherence to the core elements of the program (fidelity) and adaptation in response to implementation challenges (Kelsey & Layzer, 2014). Program oversight utilizes many resources by both the funder and the grantees. Licensing and training fees paid to program developers are often quite high and prohibitive for smaller agencies which may want to provide services related to adolescent sexual health. Agencies that have the capacity to manage large government grants can incorporate those costs into their larger grant applications, but for agencies that need to be more flexible and agile due to their small size and budgets this can be a barrier to the implementation of EBIs. This is particularly concerning when smaller funders follow suit with the federal government, requiring the implementation of EBIs, but don’t offer funding that can cover the full cost of such implementation.

CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD

These problems are not unrecognized by agencies that fund EBIs. The Centers for Disease Control recently made a switch from advocacy for EBIs to advocacy for what they are calling “Exemplary Sexual Health Education” (ESHE), defined by the Centers for Disease Control as:

A systematic, evidence-informed approach to sexual health education that includes the use of grade-specific, evidence-based interventions, but also emphasizes sequential learning across elementary, middle, and high school grade levels. ESHE provides adolescents the essential knowledge and critical skills needed to avoid HIV, other STD, and unintended pregnancy. ESHE is delivered by well-qualified and trained teachers, uses strategies that are relevant and engaging, and consists of elements that are medically accurate, developmentally and culturally appropriate, and consistent with the scientific research on effective sexual health education

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013

It seems that this is an attempt to recognize that EBIs by themselves may not be adequate. All along the Office of Adolescent Health demonstrated their understanding of the need for program innovation by offering the tier II funding stream dedicated to promising approaches to teen pregnancy prevention. Additionally the Office of Adolescent Health, which originally interpreted the idea of “fidelity” quite narrowly, allowing very few adaptations, seems to have learned over the course of the first round of funding that real-world implementation often makes adaptation necessary for programs to be feasible and responsive in a diverse array of environments. The Office of Adolescent Health seems to be focusing on an approach of allowing some adaptations to address barriers to implementation with consistent and ongoing oversight to ensure that core components of programs remain intact.

The field of adolescent health and its funders must begin to utilize other means of demonstrating effectiveness that do not rely solely on randomized control trials. While extremely valuable in validating our work, RCTs are expensive, require having a control group that does not receive services, take a long time to

conduct and analyze, focus on problem prevention not positive youth development outcomes, and can lead to programs being outdated before they can be scaled up. Additionally, RCTs are often conducted by expert evaluators who have little if any experience as direct practitioners of youth work. Combining outcome-based evaluation with other forms of evaluation that include the voices and perspectives of youth and youth workers would be especially valuable. Additionally, expanding evaluation to include youth development outcomes is imperative if we truly want programs to encourage more holistic notions of sexual health.

We must also consider the people who implement EBIs. Programs are only as effective as the youth workers who facilitate them. Youth workers delivering EBIs must have access to support, training, technical assistance, opportunities for reflection and chances to participate in evaluation and have their perspectives and voices included. Having a community of other youth workers implementing similar programs was noted as particularly helpful by the focus group participants.

Finally, funding for the development, implementation and evaluation of innovative programs is necessary in order to ensure that the field continues to grow. Programs that are inclusive and responsive to diverse groups of youth; relevant to youth who have experienced trauma; youth who are marginalized and are most at risk for teen pregnancy are vital to ensure that we reach all young people. Programs must reflect the reality of the real world in which young people live today—and not the world in which they lived 20 years ago. This can happen only if there are mechanisms for innovation and creativity and young people are included in the development and evaluation of programs that serve them. Current EBIs must also continue to be reviewed and updated by program developers, youth workers and youth all taking part in assuring that programs are relevant.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Scribner-O'Pray is a 25-year youth work veteran and experienced program manager. She has expertise in youth development, adolescent sexual health, parent education, creating adolescent-friendly clinic environments and building youth-adult partnerships. Emily has worked primarily with urban youth in a variety of settings including a runaway shelter, schools, street outreach, clinics, after-school and leadership programs. Her most recent work includes partnering with 18 clinics in Hennepin County to implement a community-wide, evidence-based teen pregnancy program. Additionally, Emily is the proud mom of two great teenagers.

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YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION:

Promoting College Success for Minnesota's Young People

By: Maggie Whitman

INTRODUCTION

As the college graduation gap widens, it is increasingly difficult for first-generation college students and people from low-income backgrounds to attend college, graduate, and climb the socioeconomic ladder. This issue calls into question our nation's highly valued meritocracy and forces us to ask difficult questions about access and equity in education. Youths' autonomy is severely limited by the lack of access to college education and to the careers made available to post-secondary degree-holders. Multiple factors contribute to this lack of access and I believe it is the responsibility of schools, out-of-school-time organizations, post-secondary institutions, and students alike to address these issues. Youth work professionals who maintain positive youth-adult relationships based on mutual respect are well-positioned to prepare young people socially, emotionally, and culturally for success at higher education institutions. Youth development organizations and youth workers who engage young people of all ages should intentionally support the development of skills proven to contribute to youths' persistence and success in college.

OUR PROBLEM

In Minnesota and throughout the United States, a post-secondary degree is an increasingly necessary requirement for obtaining a job. A study released by the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce (2010) found that Minnesota will lead the nation in job growth in fields that require post-secondary degrees. The study estimates that by 2018, 70% of all jobs in Minnesota will require a college education (Carnevale, 2010, p. 57).

For all people, a quality education is the gateway to a wider range of higher-paying, safer, more fulfilling career options. For those living in poverty, the stakes are even higher. It is predicted that a college education will continue to be the main avenue into the middle and upper class. According to a New York Times article by Paul Tough (2014), author of the groundbreaking book, *How Children Succeed*, "the most powerful instrument of economic mobility for low-income Americans is a four-year college degree. If a child is born into a family in the lowest economic quintile...and she doesn't get a college degree, she has only a 14 percent chance of winding up in one of the top two quintiles, and she has a 45 percent chance of never making it out of that bottom bracket," (para. 62).

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Low-income and first-generation college students face complex, intersecting barriers to obtaining a college degree. According to a White House Report, "Low-income students often lack the guidance and support they need to prepare for college, apply to the best-fit schools, apply for financial aid, enroll and persist in their studies, and ultimately graduate" (The Executive Office of the President, 2014, p. 2). University of St. Thomas Professor Buffy Smith, who researches racial and class disparities in higher education, writes that,

in addition to our nation's socioeconomic college gap, "There are also significant racial disparities in college graduation rates" (2013, p. xii). For example, in 2010 only 19.4% of black students and 13.5% of Hispanic students graduated with a bachelor's degree, compared to their white peers at 38.6%.

It is heartening to know that, despite the financial and logistical barriers to college admission, students from all income brackets are entering American colleges and universities in record numbers. In 2013, 21.8 million students attended college, about 6.5 million more than in the fall of 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In Minnesota, the efforts of out-of-school-time organizations such as College Possible, TRiO, and Breakthrough Twin Cities, along with increased college access support within schools have paid off for low-income students. College admission rates for Minnesota's low-income youth increased from 26% in 1972 to 54% in 2007 (Fergus et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, though college acceptance is certainly an accomplishment to be celebrated, college admission has little to do with student persistence and success in the college environment. According to a special report issued by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (2010), about 60 percent of first-year college students have not been adequately prepared for the academic challenges of post-secondary education. Lack of academic preparation isn't the only reason students are not persisting in higher education; Smith (2013) writes, "Many scholars have tried to explain these educational inequities by examining students' family background characteristics, their lack of academic preparation, lack of parental support, lack of financial resources, and lack of institutional support at schools," (p. xii). My research and my personal experiences have shown me that these factors do indeed determine aspects of student success, but what I have been interested in throughout my fellowship research are the social, emotional, and cultural factors and the personal characteristics that determine success in higher education.

As a youth worker, I'm interested in how the field of youth development can contribute to young people's success in higher education. It is my goal to educate other youth workers about the factors that contribute to student success in higher education, and that in turn, youth work professionals incorporate this knowledge into their youth work practice with programming that develops these skills. To best support youth in their pursuit of a college diploma, it is also necessary for youth development organizations to continue to be sources of support for young people while they pursue post-secondary degrees, and for colleges to step in with targeted support programs rooted in youth development principles for low-income and first-generation students.

MY EXPERIENCE

I have worked as the College and Career Access Coordinator at the Science Museum of Minnesota's Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center (KAYSC) for the past two years. The KAYSC is a youth development organization that engages middle school, high school, and alumni/post-high school youth in informal science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and leadership development programming. Our mission is to empower youth to change our world through science. The KAYSC works toward a future in which young women and people of color represent a percentage of the researchers, policy makers, educators, innovators and leaders in STEM fields commensurate with their numbers in the general population, concurrent with a shift toward innovations that support community development and social justice. All KAYSC programs target youth from communities historically underrepresented in STEM fields, including: women, people of color, and people from low-income backgrounds. The majority of KAYSC's youth participants will be the first in their family to earn a college degree.

During my time in the KAYSC, I've established a series of workshops and events with the goal of increasing our youth participants' interest in, and readiness for, post-secondary education. I have been honored to get to know many intelligent, competent, motivated young people who happen to come from low-income backgrounds and from racial and ethnic groups that are not well-represented at our nation's colleges. Before I knew these young people, the staggering statistics about the inequity in our education system were upsetting to me. I was affected by this information as I am affected by many other social justice problems our nation is facing. But deeply caring about individuals who are on the losing end of every educational statistic has intensely magnified my passion for making change. It is embarrassing to face a group of students and encourage them to attend college while knowing that the world of academia will not be fair to them.

Their college experiences will not be like mine. I was academically prepared, financially secure, actively supported by professors, and surrounded by a community of my peers with whom I effortlessly fit in. I was sought out for special research opportunities and encouraged to participate in campus clubs and campaigns. I never had to hold a job during the school year. My experience was darkened only by looming deadlines and a full schedule.

In the KAYSC, I have talked with our program alumni who are often ashamed and disheartened after they drop out of their college program. Since 2011, about 50% of our program alumni who attended college directly after high school have dropped out before they earned a degree. The majority of first-generation college students in the United States face unique logistical, financial, and psychological barriers when pursuing a college diploma. Too often, the burden of responsibility to gain access to, and graduate from post-secondary institutions lies solely with the student and the families involved. This is a systemic issue that is easily masked as a personal, private problem.

I propose a different scenario, where youth workers are part of a community of support for the college-bound. Youth workers can prepare young people of all ages socially, emotionally, and culturally for the college environment and continue to engage young people in youth development throughout their college years. If our society educates and supports all of our youth, we are setting ourselves up to access their potential contributions. In an age when there are many problems demanding our attention, youth workers are uniquely positioned to nurture this population's full potential to innovate, collaborate, and be civically engaged.

SOLUTIONS

As I've researched the experiences of first-generation and low-income college students, I've learned about several ways to support their social, emotional, and cultural well-being while in the college environment. From the methods discussed below, we can extract a set of "college-ready" skills that will ease the transition to higher education and make the college experience more positive for students from underrepresented populations. All of these solutions have ties to core youth development principles and could be intentionally worked into the programming of youth-serving organizations. Among the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets (2007), many of these skills fit under the internal assets and "Positive Identity," including belief in personal power and self-esteem.

EXPERIMENTATION WITH SUPPORT AND REFLECTION

Attending college is a great risk for young people. It's a huge investment of time and money into something that you hope, without guarantee, will pay off later. Often times, going to college means leaving some of your community of support behind—leaving home, parting from high school friends, moving out of your

neighborhood. As Gisela Konopka, youth development pioneer, wrote in her foundational *Requirements For Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth*, (1973) “Experimentation involves risks...adolescence should be a period in which youth can experiment without suffering disastrous consequences when they fail or make mistakes” (p. 10). If we think of attending college as an experiment with great risks, we should be conscious of the fact that youth do suffer disastrous consequences when they fail or make mistakes in college. What does it mean to get an “F” on a paper? What if you don’t pass a class? Many first-generation students think of these setbacks as evidence that they do not deserve to be in college (Tough, 2014). And what happens when youth drop out of college? The consequences are indeed disastrous—youth can become disheartened or begin to think of themselves as failures. This label, failure, is not conducive to trying again.

College is not an environment with much tolerance for mistakes, but youth workers can offer a tool to act as a shield against disastrous consequences – that is, reflection. We can use setbacks as times for learning. Organizations could facilitate reflection circles for first-time students. Youth workers can encourage students to seek out on-campus resources to support their academic success. “Every attempt at experimentation...is new and very intense. If the outcome is negative it is exceedingly painful because youth do not have a ‘bank’ of positive experiences to draw from when defeats occur” (Konopka, 1973, p. 8). Youth workers must recognize that young people are taking big risks by attending college. We must allow youth to struggle and grow, while also being intentional about mitigating harmful experiences.

ANXIETIES, DOUBTS, BELONGING AND ABILITY

Tough (2014) discusses efforts at The University of Texas at Austin (U.T.) aimed at addressing the anxieties of low-income and first-generation college students. Researchers found that the presence of certain fears, anxieties and doubts about their ability often blocked students from living up to their potential.

These feelings were especially virulent at moments of educational transition—like the freshman year of high school or the freshman year of college. And they seemed to be particularly debilitating among members of groups that felt themselves to be under some special threat or scrutiny: women in engineering programs, first-generation college students, African-Americans in the Ivy League.

-Paul Tough, 2014, para. 33

Student confidence was found to be most affected by doubts about belonging and ability. To help students overcome these fears, researchers designed several interventions, each lasting only 30-60 minutes. Tough reported that at U.T., successful interventions included messages that appealed to social norms (“everyone feels this way at some point”), solutions that youth believed they discovered autonomously, and information was internalized when students were given opportunities to teach others what they had learned.

In one study, incoming college freshman read stories written by older students about their first few months on campus. These essays contained simple but effective messages, such as, “When I got here, I thought I was the only one who felt left out. But then I found out that everyone feels that way at first, and everyone gets over it. I got over it too” (Tough, 2014, para. 36). Participants in the intervention then wrote essays to future incoming freshman, giving them advice for their first months on campus. This particular intervention had an enormous impact on African-American students. “Compared with a control group, the experiment tripled the percentage of black students who earned grade-point averages in the top quarter of their class, and it cut in half the black-white achievement gap in GPA. It even had an impact on students’ health—the black students who received the belonging message had significantly fewer doctor visits three years after the intervention” (Tough, 2014, para. 36).

Another anxiety which affects the academic potential of first-year students is their belief in the “theory of intelligence,” that their intelligence is fixed and that no effort on their part will improve their ability to succeed in college (Tough, 2014). Stanford University researchers designed an intervention to address this belief among community college students placed in remedial courses. Students who participated in this intervention and read a scientific article that disproved the theory of intelligence were less than half as likely to drop out of college (Tough, 2014).

This research proves that one-time, 30-60 minute interventions that cost almost nothing can have great effects on the success of students at risk of dropping out. In other words, social and emotional factors matter. Many of the efforts at U.T. are similar to the practices of youth development organizations, such as: positive identity development, service to community, validating youth experience/perspective, team/cohort building, and leadership skill development. Youth workers could mimic the interventions occurring at universities like U.T. with their college-bound youth participants to build social and emotional readiness or use a higher education focus in programming that already exists.

ASK FOR HELP. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

During my research, I had the privilege of speaking with Melissa Hinderscheit, Assistant Director of the TRiO McNair Scholars Program at St. Olaf College. The McNair Scholars programs are designed to help low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented college students prepare for and navigate the path toward graduate school. Hinderscheit is a TRiO alum and familiar with the obstacles that students from these demographics face. She indicated that the educational, financial, and social obstacles are often systemic and cyclical. In addition, these obstacles greatly impact students’ confidence and create feelings of isolation in higher education. I asked Hinderscheit what the most useful skills for low-income and first-generation students to develop would be, and she said, “To learn how to access resources, find the people that will help you be successful, and know that you don’t have to do everything alone” (personal communication, June 5, 2014).

Indeed, the ability to seek help and feel supported can make all the difference for first-time college students. Thinking back on my own experiences with the registrar and the financial aid office, I know that the ability to make allies in large, bureaucratic institutions can make or break your college experience. Hinderscheit also mentioned that for many first-generation students it is taboo to share their experiences with others or to ask for help. This contributes to a feeling of isolation and loneliness. She said her program encourages first-generation students to own their experiences and talk about them with others. In this way, youth learn to be proud of their background, value their resiliency, and see their motivation and perseverance as an asset, rather than be ashamed (personal communication, June 5, 2014).

Youth workers should encourage young people to develop the college-ready skills of accessing resources, finding the people that will help them be successful, and finding support in community during their middle and high school years, so they have experience with these skills by the time they enter college. For example, we should empower youth to seek out free tutoring centers, build relationships with teachers or with adult mentors, and build strong networks of peers and supportive adults.

Youth workers can be more intentional about calling out the college-ready skills they see in youth, such as the ability to network, navigate systems, solve problems, and self-advocate. We can help youth see these skills as transferable. For example, a young person who has helped his or her family navigate social services has had practice navigating bureaucracies, which is useful in higher education.

CODE SWITCHING

Every social group has a set of norms and values that govern social interaction within that group. These rules are often unspoken, but knowing them is crucial for positive interactions within that social group. Sociologists refer to this as social capital. For example, in Wisconsin where I'm from, if someone offers you something, you are initially supposed to deny the offer. Then a little skit plays out where the person continues to offer and you continue to say "no thank you" a few more times until you finally accept and everyone is happy. Any other interaction is considered rude. Nobody ever sat me down and told me this was how I was supposed to behave; it was just something I learned through my socialization into white, European-American, Midwestern culture.

I am privileged in that I have been raised to have powerful social capital in white European-American culture, and most of our society's institutions operate under these same rules. My social capital made my transition to higher education fairly seamless. For many low-income and first-generation youth, the social capital that affords them success in their communities does not align with the social capital that governs higher education. These young people do not have the vocabulary or experiences of the dominant college-going culture and this can make the college environment overwhelmingly foreign. It is my hope that higher education institutions will shift to be more inclusive of students from all backgrounds, but until then it will continue to be necessary for students to learn how to adapt to the social capital of the college environment.

Code switching is a term that describes the ability to have social capital in more than one social group and change one's behavior to fit in. For example, young people do not write texts in the same way they would write a paper for school. There are consequences for not understanding when to use each style of writing. In order to code switch, individuals must have a solid understanding of the social capital of another group. People that code switch well are able to straddle more than one culture and transition between social groups more easily. I know from my personal relationships that youth and people from marginalized groups are code switching all the time, and it's exhausting to be constantly conscious of which self you need to present.

Youth workers can help young people develop their ability to code switch, or recognize that they already have this skill and learn how to apply it to the college environment. Buffy Smith writes, "It is unrealistic to expect underserved students to begin college with all the essential skills needed to navigate the cultural learning environment of predominantly white middle class institutions" (2013, p. 3). But who is responsible for teaching youth these skills?

In a discussion I had with Smith, we talked about code switching and whether this skill should be taught to youth. This could be a potentially harmful topic, and youth could easily interpret the teachings as, "You need to change who you are to be successful in college. You need to act white." However, I believe that youth workers who value mutual sharing of information, and who respect young people are well-positioned to promote code switching and teaching tools for adaptation without devaluing youths' cultural backgrounds. In this way, youth workers can teach young people the tips and tricks for engaging with professors or participating in class discussions while simultaneously validating the knowledge and the social capital of youth. Youth workers who have experienced higher education can act as cultural liaisons, relaying potentially useful information. Youth workers should identify code switching as a "college ready" skill and point out when young people are utilizing it. We can help youth learn how to apply code switching to the college environment, as well as to other large institutions they will encounter.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Code switching and the hidden curriculum are two sides of the same issue. "Code switching is the individual's responsibility, but it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure everyone who enters the

institution knows the rules” (B. Smith, personal communication, April 1, 2014). By “knowing the rules,” Smith was referring to making the hidden curriculum explicit to everyone in the classroom.

Smith (2013) defines the formal curriculum as “a set of written requirements, rules, policies, and practices that serve as the official guidelines for how to engage with individuals and evaluate their quality of work” (p. 48). In other words, the formal curriculum is what is intentionally taught in the classroom. Contrastingly, “the hidden curriculum represents the unwritten norms, values, and expectations that unofficially govern the interactions among students, faculty, professional staff, and administrators” (p. xiv). An example of the hidden curriculum in higher education is the expectation that students contact their professors or teaching assistants to find out how they can catch up if they miss class due to illness. This is not a requirement on most syllabi, but in my experience professors appreciate this type communication, and it is better than simply skipping class.

But how do people learn the rules of the hidden curriculum? According to Smith (2013), “The hidden curriculum is revealed to students who possess the institutional cultural capital and social capital that is rewarded in higher education. Institutional cultural capital refers to the information and knowledge that individuals use to decode, interpret, understand, and navigate the culture of school” (p. xiv). That is to say, people that have been socialized to be successful in predominantly white, middle class institutions already understand the hidden curriculum and its rules. Because these rules are unspoken and understood as common sense by many, the hidden curriculum is not often discussed or taught. This has negative consequences for students who do not have social capital in middle class, white institutions such as higher education.

It should be the responsibility of all educators to examine how the hidden curriculum functions in their classrooms, and to make the rules clear for all students. But before this happens, youth workers can again act as cultural liaisons, shedding light on the hidden curriculum. Buffy Smith’s book, *Mentoring At-Risk Students through the Hidden Curriculum of Higher Education* details ways in which caring adults can mentor students with the intentional purpose of making the hidden curriculum known. As youth build relationships with people who have been successful in higher education and have conversations about the hidden curriculum and code switching, they will increase their social capital in higher education institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Initially, I thought the best way to better prepare youth socially, emotionally, and culturally for the post-secondary environment was to drastically change college preparation methods and college access curricula. One idea was to expand college access programming to include teachings during high school that would build self-confidence, self-efficacy, leadership skills, and networking skills, these college-ready skills I’ve discussed. I thought there must be a way for college access organizations to continue doing important work around college admission and academic preparedness while also having conversations about cultural code shifting, seeking out resources, etc. I recognize that many college access organizations are responsible for reporting numbers to their funders, such as ACT test scores and GPA. It would be difficult to remain loyal to the goal of improving test scores while also adding new programming that may not immediately impact academic performance.

I also struggled with ways to fit this all into junior and senior year programming, just in time for youth to graduate. At this time, I imagined youth would leave their youth development programs and be stamped “college ready”—fully developed individuals by the age of 18. How could youth workers and college access

professionals possibly arm youth with all the tools and knowledge they need to be successful in college in such a short period of time?

As a result of the engaging and enlightening conversations I've had with other youth work professionals during my fellowship research, I came to realize that my thinking was too small, too "inside the box." Of course all the skills I was learning about could not be internalized in the last two years of high school. What this amounts to is a need for the focus on college-ready skills to begin earlier than high school, and for youth development to continue during the post-secondary years.

Many youth development organizations focus on the teen years as being the most critical to growth. Youth often "graduate" from youth development programs at the age of 18, losing the support of youth workers at the same time they lose the support of high school staff, their high school peer group, and their family and community if they move away to college. But we know from neuroscientists that young people's brains are not fully developed until the age of 25. Youth should not be deemed too old for youth development at the age of 18. Self-efficacy, personal identity development, and reflection should all continue during the college years with the support of caring adults.

I know most youth workers will say that they're doing the best they can with the resources they have. I completely understand this point. Out-of-school-time hours are limited, funds are limited, and we use all the time we have to create college buy-in, increase academic readiness, and navigate financial aid and the application process. In my own program at the Science Museum, I have experimented with different activities and workshops to determine which combination of preparation will be the most helpful for young people. I am keenly aware that a day spent talking about time management means less time spent applying for scholarships or meeting with parents. But as the research out of the University of Texas shows, supporting social, emotional, and cultural readiness might not take as much time or as many resources as we think.

This paper and the culmination of my research is a call for the field of youth development to act quickly to figure out how we can continue to offer youth development programming to students in higher education. Whether it is the responsibility of youth development organizations to extend their upper age limits or for colleges and universities to step in where youth workers leave off will have to be decided. But it is clear that youth development should not end at the age of 18 and that young people, specifically those from low-income and first-generation backgrounds need our continued support as they navigate higher education institutions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie Whitman is a youth worker who currently serves as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at the Science Museum of Minnesota. She got her start in youth development as a volunteer with Youth Farm's after-school cooking and gardening program in 2009. Maggie holds a B.S. in Sociology and Gender and Women's Studies from Northland College.

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REDEFINING SUPERVISION IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH WORK

Jocelyn S. Wiedow

High-quality youth programs are important contributors to positive outcomes for youth (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009). For this fellowship I focus on answering the question, “What management practices best support youth workers in providing high-quality programs for youth?” Since we know there are best practices for providing growth opportunities for young people, I wanted to look at those same practices in developing youth workers. To answer this question I reviewed literature around adult learning and management practices. Early in the paper I review the intersection of adult learning and high-quality youth work in terms of human development and define supervision including reflective practice.

In addition to reflecting on my own experience and reading the literature, I felt it was important to tap into the rich knowledge and experiences of youth workers and supervisors currently working in the field. In order to provide a snapshot of current practices, I collected data through an electronic survey that went out to youth workers in Sprockets, Saint Paul’s out-of-school-time network; Minneapolis Beacons Network; Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board; and Ignite Afterschool, Minnesota’s after-school network. Of the 109 individuals that responded, 12 provided their email for additional conversation. To follow up, I personally interviewed seven youth workers. Throughout the paper I include quotes from youth workers from both the electronic survey as well as personal interviews.

From my own experience, discussions with colleagues, and reviewing research I have determined that youth workers supported by supervisors who include intentional reflection as part of their supervision practice become stronger youth workers. To strengthen understanding of reflection the paper outlines a supervisor’s role in reflection as well as the benefits and barriers to reflection. This practice parallels what we see good youth workers do with youth. When a supervisor models reflection and a youth worker experiences the process, the staff is better equipped to provide higher quality opportunities for youth. The process of reflection shifts power from the supervisor to the youth worker who then directs their own learning and growth. The paper concludes with what supervisors must do to include intentional reflection as part of their supervisory practice. The three key elements: build trust, embed as part of a routine, and train supervisors each contain an example from the field that highlights what other youth work programs are doing to achieve that component of the practice.

MY CONTEXT

Sprockets is the out-of-school time network in Saint Paul, Minnesota that works to improve the quality, availability and effectiveness of out-of-school-time learning for all youth in the community through the committed, collaborative and innovative efforts of community organizations, government, schools and other partners. As the Network and Quality Coordinator for Sprockets, my role is to support youth programs in continuous quality improvement. To strengthen my ability to perform this role I have studied the nationally recognized Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) process. YPQI improves the quality of staff instruction through continuous improvement practices. These practices include standardized assessment of instruction, planning for improvement, coaching from a manager, and training for specific instructional methods (Smith et al., 2012).

Over the years I have played multiple roles in the field of youth work serving both directly as a youth worker and as a youth work supervisor. My work has spanned enrichment and prevention programs as well as intervention work with young people involved in corrections. My experience has been that regardless of the context, when supervisors operate in a hierarchical way and do not engage staff in reflection, staff are less invested, less motivated and less prepared to provide quality opportunities for youth.

THE PROBLEM

After spending time reflecting how I as a trainer, facilitator, youth worker, and colleague can support youth workers to improve program quality for youth, I had my moment of truth. No matter how much support Sprockets as a network provides through discussion and training, youth workers need to have a platform within their organization to revisit the information and apply it within their youth work practice.

I get sent to great trainings but then come back to my site and nothing happens. We don't talk about the content or bring the information into what we do. I feel like if we were able to get together as a staff even just once a week we could actually do something with what we learned.

-Saint Paul youth worker

This isn't unique to the youth development world. Peter Senge (1990) notes that management practices often involve sending staff to trainings for professional development without offering support within the organization to apply the learning.

Support to connect learnings from trainings to practice isn't the only need for youth workers. People I know who work with youth do so because they want to make an impact in the lives of young people. However, the amount of experience, education or preparation for the role of youth worker varies immensely. There are youth workers in the field with degrees in education, social work or youth studies. I have also worked alongside full-time, salaried youth workers who had little or no formal education beyond high school. Others are college graduates with degrees not related to youth, but in subjects ranging from English to business to biology. There are many part-time, direct-service youth workers who evolved into their roles after being engaged in programming as a participant. Regardless of the level of preparation for the role, working with youth is complex and stressful. I do not believe that any amount of formal training fully prepares a youth worker for the unexpected moments and high stress of day-to-day programming. Staff need to have a process for connecting training to their practice, but they also need a way to address complex issues that arise when working with youth.

I don't have all of the answers and sometimes I need to debrief. No matter where you are in the field, there is burnout. Having support and trust of a supervisor is important to making me want to come to work every day.

-Saint Paul youth worker

So the question becomes, "How do supervisors support continued learning and application within their organization?"

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Much of what we know about high-quality youth work overlaps the concepts of adult learning. For example, the following are commonly agreed upon quality youth program components.

- Physical and emotional safety
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to connect
- Making connections to learning
- Opportunities for building skills
- Decision making and planning
- Reflection
- Support for self-efficacy

When looking at the components of youth development, it is easy to make the jump to realizing that those practices that are best for nurturing healthy, capable youth are also the components for developing capable adult youth workers. It isn't so much about youth development or adult learning; it is about the process of human development. "Every person wants to be significant. The developmental process is never-ending. In it we see the totality of human life. No developmental stage is static. Each stage is related to other stages and builds towards other stages. Each stage is seen as having its own significant aspect" (Konopka, 1973). The process to self-actualization is never-ending and must continue to be supported. As a person moves through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood the rate of development is likely accelerated when an individual is surrounded by those who foster one's thinking and increased responsibilities (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). We know this is true when youth have adults in their lives with the goal of providing that support. It is then imperative that supervisors model this same value in a parallel process as youth workers do with youth. It is a supervisor's responsibility to create a culture for staff to reach self-actualization. A discipline of personal growth and learning leads to self-mastery (Senge, 1990).

A traditional management model is for the manager to be in control, provide leadership by dictating goals, and advocating with staff as the way to create buy-in. This practice doesn't promote productivity, innovation or actual buy-in from staff. In youth work, that may look like supervisors dictating process, content, and expectations of youth-adult interactions within the program. The goal of the manager is to create conditions where staff can learn, grow, and develop as staff and individuals. Senge (1990) refers to this as "personal mastery" which is grounded in competence and skills, but strives to continually clarify what is important and reflect on current reality. For this to happen there needs to be a change in practice. This practice includes reflection.

I reviewed research on staff development methods and roles of supervisors and compared it to quality youth development practices, and I determined that when supervisors include intentional reflection as part of their management practice, staff become stronger youth workers who are better equipped to provide higher quality opportunities for youth.

SUPERVISION AND REFLECTION

In the field of youth work there are many supervisors, but do they actually practice supervision? As I reference supervision in this paper, I do so with Hilary Jenkinson's (2010) definition in mind: A worker meeting with a supervisor on a regular basis in order to talk through issues arising for them in the course of their work. This type of supervision is often practiced in social work or counseling professions where it is viewed not just as good practice, but as an ethical obligation. Yet this is far from the experience of many youth work practitioners (Jenkinson, 2010). Traditional youth work supervisor roles often entail program

coordination, budgeting and administrative tasks like signing time sheets. These roles do not support the development of the youth worker.

Jenkinson (2010) defines four different supervision models:

1. Individual managerial supervision – where supervisor and supervisee meet together to help improve the effectiveness of the supervisee in their role.
2. Group supervision – where supervisor meets with multiple youth workers at the same time.
3. Peer supervision – where youth workers meet together and process their work in a way that provides mutual support, and where no one person is in a supervisory role.
4. External supervision – where a non-managerial supervisor is from an external source. This may be the case when a non-supervisor is a project, collaborative or contracted lead.

While all four supervision models are valuable, to achieve a culture of learning within the organization I believe a supervisor must be actively engaging their staff in reflective supervision. For this paper I reference intentional reflection as individual and group reflective supervision.

Reflection is a key strategy in youth work for young people to make meaning of experiences. Youth workers use reflection as a way to check in with young people to see how they are feeling and build connections. It is used after ice breakers and team builders to make connections to what was felt, experienced and learned. Reflection is used during and after projects or planning to help young people consider the how things went and how they would do things differently in the future. Reflection is a powerful tool, but not just for working with youth. Reflection is a critical tool for all people to learn and develop.

A SNAPSHOT OF REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION PRACTICE

I was curious about how often youth workers are on the participation rather than facilitation end of these practices. In discussions with other youth workers, it became clear that although youth organizations have broadly accepted the YPQI framework to help guide youth to grow and develop, youth workers are not consistently getting that same support in their work. To get a sense of what the current experience of reflective supervision is in the state of Minnesota, I surveyed 109 individuals involved in out-of-school time. Respondents self-identified as youth worker (46), site coordinator (35) and administrator (28). In the survey, I defined reflective practice as, “An intentional act where a supervisor actively listens and provides thoughtful questions that allow staff to analyze and evaluate their own work as well as identify areas or ideas for improved practice.” The survey asked respondents to rate the frequency of which they engage with their supervisor in this way both individually and as a staff team.

I believe that for supervisors to achieve a culture of learning within their organization that staff value and respond to, reflection must be intentionally embedded into their practice. I also recognize that depending on the context of the work and youth worker, there is a range of frequency needs. For this reason, I categorized survey responses in the following manner:

- Inadequate – Receives intentional reflection with a supervisor never, annually, or semi-annually
- Adequate – Receives intentional reflection with a supervisor monthly, weekly, or daily

I was excited to see that nearly 50% of youth workers were engaging in intentional reflection with their supervisor both individually and as a staff team (see Table 1). I think this is likely reflective of much of the YPQI work that had been going on not only in Saint Paul, but also regionally.

TABLE 1*Survey results*

Received inadequate reflective supervision individually or as a staff team	28%
Received adequate reflective supervision either individually or as a staff team	23%
Received adequate reflective supervision both individually and as a staff team	49%

When I first saw that another 23% were receiving intentional reflection with their supervisor in some form, I was pleased, thinking that made 72% of the respondents engaged in some type of reflective supervision. I was a bit disheartened, however, when I read the descriptions of what that looks like for those individuals. These narratives suggest that 23% is a bit inflated, as some of the descriptions do not mirror what I feel are intentionally scheduled meetings that include reflection. For example, respondents wrote:

At our regular (monthly) check-ins this happens a bit.

We check in occasionally, as needed. Typically only when challenges arise.

My supervisor does not offer such opportunities even though we have meetings twice a month.

At the end of the day, the staff meets to discuss concerns, successes, and problems. However, seldom do we have input on solutions and decision-making. That comes from top-down.

The survey shows that of 109 individuals, 28% were not receiving any intentional reflection to improve practice at all. That is 30 people who are not getting the support they need to improve their work and self-mastery skills. Research would say this also means they are less satisfied with their work and not reaching their full potential. Most importantly, that means that there are 30 youth workers that are not able to provide the highest quality opportunities possible for young people. Narratives for this group included the following comments:

We occasionally debrief things that happen during staff meetings, but it is usually rushed and meetings are more about business and funders.

This is not one of my supervisor's skills. And from what I can tell she rarely thinks about the development of me as a professional or of the program I oversee.

The director of my program does not practice any sort of reflection or effective supervision practice with the staff.

SUPERVISOR ROLE IN REFLECTION

True reflection requires the supervisor to set aside their managerial roles and power and create a staff-centered dialogue where staff determines the focus of the reflection. Reflection that includes inquiry focuses on divergent questions as a tool to engage staff in their thoughts and possibilities (Knowles, Holton, &

Swanson, 2005). National Helpers Network, Inc. (1998) and Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) provide key strategies for supervisors implementing reflection with staff:

1. Create and dedicate time to the process.
2. Be reliable, trustworthy and genuine.
3. Listen and don't focus on creating or providing the answers.
4. Focus on coaching for staff to create their own solutions and provide support accordingly.
5. Don't judge ideas, encourage staff to be critical thinkers in their own right.
6. Avoid one right answer, encourage many possibilities of action.

In interviews with youth workers in Minnesota, youth workers identified key components that they value in supervision meetings and which components they do not value (Table 2).

TABLE 2

What youth workers value and do not value when meeting with their supervisor

What youth workers value	What youth workers do not value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a supervisor listens • Enough time to talk through work since last meeting • An agenda or objectives, including things (the staff) want to talk about • Absence of judgment • High expectations with high support • Trust in (staff) ability • Talking through scenarios • Upcoming programming details/planning opportunities • Having someone to bounce ideas off of/ help thinking through different approaches • Walking away with more knowledge, ideas, information or solutions • Clarity of expectations • Honest and straightforward conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time spent only assigning new tasks or added responsibilities • Empty validation – acknowledging concerns but not supporting action; say they will “pass on” concerns but never provide feedback • Not taking staff or concerns seriously • Frequently canceling or rescheduling • Mismanaging the time • Focus on “fighting fires” • Waste of time – no reason to have the meeting or things that could go out in an email • Supervisors talks the whole time or interrupts when staff is talking • Answers their own questions • Critical • When they have no idea what staff does and don't try to learn

BENEFITS OF REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION

There are multiple benefits to reflective supervision for all involved, the youth worker, supervisor, agency and youth.

Benefits to the youth worker. When youth workers participate in reflective supervision, it enables them to participate in their own learning in an active way. This happens through self-examination, relating theory to practice, testing knowledge, exploring what else needs to be explored. Reflection leads to performing at higher levels (National Helpers Network, Inc., 1998). “Youth workers who participate in reflective supervision not only continue to grow, learn and become better at their job, they also feel more confident, report higher job satisfaction and find that they are able to contribute more to the organization (Jenkinson, 2010). Senge (1990) notes similar sentiment in that individuals who are committed to personal growth are more committed to their work, take more initiative, and learn faster. Reflective supervision is not only beneficial for young or new youth workers. When Senge talks about those individuals who have a high level of personal mastery he does not mean to say they are masters of their craft. The term is a bit misleading as

it insinuates an end to development. In fact, those who achieve personal mastery are those most aware of their need to continue to grow. Their self-confidence comes in their awareness that they can navigate the process of continual learning. So reflection is important for staff at all stages of their career.

Benefits to the supervisor. It isn't just the staff members who benefit from reflective supervision. Supervisors value being aware of what work is going on, their individual staff members' experiences and creating a partnership between staff and supervisor. This increased connection with staff builds confidence in their roles as supervisors and the decision making of staff. "As a supervisor of multiple site coordinators, [intentional reflection] has made my team more self-sufficient, from the site coordinators to the instructional staff" (Deb Campobasso, director of SPPS 21st CCLC, personal communications, June 16, 2014). In Jenkinson's (2010) project, she also found that when supervisors held regular meetings they felt less stressed in their jobs and there was an increase in efficiency and productivity. In her project staff reported better communication within the organization, greater sense of solidarity among staff and improved overall atmosphere and morale. This is true even in staffing situations where there may be personality clashes among staff. Senge (1990) found that conversations between staff and supervisors that are grounded in reflection are more open and reliable despite the presence of these differences.

Benefits to the agency. An organization grows stronger when it has a commitment to the personal growth of the employees (Senge, 1990). Much of this growing is attributed to higher retention of staff. Hartje, Evans, Killian and Brown (2008) examined direct-service youth workers' sense of competency in implementing features of positive youth development and their intent to continue working in youth development. Staff who felt they were a part of an organization where supervisors provided support and allowed staff voice in decision-making indicated intention to continue working with youth. Reflective supervision creates that space and the supportive work environment that will retain staff. When there is inadequate support and supervision, staff turnover is higher and supervisors must continue to hire and train new staff.

Benefits to the youth. It is difficult to measure direct connections between reflective supervision and positive outcomes for youth, but there is research that states that higher quality programs lead to better outcomes for youth (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009). Since we know that staff participating in reflective supervision with their supervisors become better at their jobs, it is not a great leap to see the connection between competent, capable staff and quality programs that lead to better outcomes for youth. In Jenkinson's (2010) project, staff reported that they felt that the improved atmosphere and sense of teamwork contributed to better quality programs. Youth workers need to feel competent in their abilities to implement quality program features that improve program quality (Hartje et al., 2008).

BARRIERS TO REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION

There is a lot of information available about supervision, reflective supervision, and adult learning in general. So why isn't more reflective supervision happening in the field of youth work? It is important to acknowledge the barriers so that supervisors can plan for and make accommodations to overcome those barriers. These barriers include trust, time, organizational culture and understanding.

Trust. Youth workers find it difficult to be honest about their struggles and weaknesses with their supervisor when they feel there is a direct connection to their future reviews or employment. Supervisors hold power in their managerial roles that must balance with the need for reflective supervision.

Time. Time is often seen as a barrier for scheduling regular reflective supervision with staff. Supervisors and youth workers both feel stretched across multiple work responsibilities. Finding a regularly schedule time can be difficult, and is often a low priority. Meetings are seen more as engagement when there is a

problem. One youth worker I talked to noted that she had coworkers who were hesitant to start meeting with their supervisor because they saw it as an added requirement:

If they haven't experienced the value of meeting with their supervisor they see it as an add-on to their day, something extra they have to do. It needs to be built into the job. For example, if supervisors keep their staff fifteen minutes at the end of the day, their schedule should reflect that time as well so there is an understanding that their day isn't done until after the meeting, not just after the kids go home.

Organization culture. An organization's current culture can be a barrier to effective reflective supervision. The manager's action sets the tone for the organization. Even when managers have the time, they go from strategy to strategy without taking time themselves to examine why it is failing or reflect on what exactly they hoped to accomplish. When managers don't practice reflection themselves, they are their own stumbling block to becoming a learning organization (Senge, 1990). In the survey information I collected, of the 28 individuals who self-identified as administrators or program directors, only 10 reported individual reflections as part of their practice. Upon closer examination of their narratives that support their ranking, only six of those actually meant reflection with their supervisor as opposed interaction with staff. This reinforces that many managers are also not taking the time they need, which directly affects the culture of reflection within the organization. Despite how supervisors are getting support for their own work, that doesn't mean that there aren't some supervisors out there using some form of reflective supervision. The survey reflected more than 50% of respondents were participating in some type of reflective supervision that included their supervisor. It is not enough to create a learning organization with one supervisor effectively using reflective supervision. It is helpful for the staff in that department or program in the short term, but unless it is embedded in the culture of an organization it is difficult to maintain high quality across supervisor turnover. In the words of one youth worker:

Due to staff turnover, this isn't happening nearly as often as it used to. I used to have individual staff check-ins weekly where I could reflect on the work I do. My new supervisor will only schedule monthly meetings which are task-oriented and are often canceled due to a variety of reasons. It is definitely something that is done well by some and not so great by others.

Understanding. As stated previously, the definition of supervision is often misunderstood. Many supervisors and supervisees lack understanding of what good supervision entails. This can create lack of motivation for both parties when there is lack of purpose and support through the process (Jenkinson, 2010). Supervisors need to understand and honor the standard practices of reflection creating a safe, non-punitive, staff-centered environment; asking open-ended questions and making space for staff to generate their own solutions. This requires practice and willingness to let go of and share power. This may be difficult for supervisors who have had negative experiences with staff in the past. There might also be negative connections for staff based on previous experience of supervision. When supervision becomes a platform for criticizing work and a one-way conversation about what needs to be done, staff disengage. When staff members are used to environments where they act only when directed and not provided the freedom to offer what they know, it can be difficult to change the mindset to thinking innovatively. It is understandable then that staff would have reservations about supervisor support in future positions.

WHAT MUST SUPERVISORS DO?

Youth workers supported by supervisors who include intentional reflection as part of their supervision practice become stronger youth workers. For this to happen supervisors must a) build trust, b) embed reflection as part of their routine, and c) ensure that they are receiving the training and support they need to be effective, reflective supervisors. In this final section I elaborate on these three components and share case examples to illustrate what that might look like in practice. After personal interviews with youth workers I determined that Youth Express, Saint Paul Urban Tennis, and Saint Paul Public Schools Community Education all had great examples of what these components look like within their organizations. The following information includes examples from the field that highlight what these programs do to support staff in providing high-quality youth programs. Of course all organizations are unique, and these examples are just some of the ways supervisors could consider implementation.

BUILD TRUST

Just as in good youth work practice, supervisors must create a safe environment. Youth workers need a supportive and collaborative environment with a sense of value. It is the role of the supervisor to create an environment where the youth worker feels heard, valued and trusted to be able to do their role and create solutions (Jenkinson, 2010). Building trust can happen through the same techniques as good youth development. One youth worker shared with me that in her staff team they found commonalities that bond them through both structured sharing and simple conversation: “I like meeting as a staff team. There are more perspectives to think about what to do. But it takes time; a culture needs to be created where people trust each other and feel safe to contribute ideas.” Trust is also about putting yourself and ideas out there even if it is different than the norms. Supervisors must create an atmosphere where staff can share ideas that are genuinely considered and create a space where it is safe to fail. Senge (1990) states that in an environment where challenging the status quo is accepted and encouraged, personal mastery can be strengthened. This happens because it reinforces the value of personal growth and provides training directly connected to the day-to-day reality of the work.

From the field. Youth Express, a program of Keystone Community Services, has a history of encouraging personal growth through an entrepreneurial lens where trust in questioning new ideas is a best practice to ensure sustainability in their social enterprises. Youth Express creates a safe place to question how things are done as part of their entrepreneurial model. As a social enterprise it operates as a traditional business that also serves behind the scenes as a “lab” where youth learn positive work skills and all aspects of how a small business operates.

Sharing power. From the beginning Youth Express operated a model of shared power. Founder Jim Kelly recognized the importance of leveraging the strength of others to build the organization to what it is today. Chris Ohland, Education Director (personal communication, May 29th, 2014) shared that while that may not have been an intentional strategy, Jim’s instinct of leadership provided a foundation of how Youth Express still operates today.

Challenging the norm. When exploring any business model staff and apprentices are taught to practice analyzing ideas critically. This practice allows staff and participants to generate ideas and ask questions that help determine if the idea is worth pursuing. This concept is standard practice and doesn’t reflect judgment, but promotes critical thinking and analysis. This doesn’t happen right away. Often staff (both adult and youth) come into an employment position with Youth Express from other school, home, or work environments where they are used to being told what to do and what the answers are, but never really why. “It is a journey to get to the point where you have comfort and trust in the people around you. [In traditional roles or environments] there is fear that if you say something in dissent, you won’t be seen as part of the

team” (C. Ohland, personal communication, May 29th, 2014). Youth Express doesn’t want to implement reflection as just a token step they take:

[Reflection] is good as part of a lesson plan, curriculum, or supervisor practice, but the goal should be to have it become a mental habit; to frequently stop and reflect about what you don’t know or whether or not something went ok so that next time isn’t just different, but better. Because of our leadership it happens organically but it takes a long time to build a culture.

—Chris Ohland, personal communication, May 29, 2014

EMBED REFLECTION AS PART OF A ROUTINE

Trust is hard to build if it isn’t intentionally and regularly addressed. When reflection happens only haphazardly, its value is undermined. For reflection to be most effective it must have a recognized and consistent appearance within the organization. Regular practice of reflective supervision creates a norm where staff are supported in questioning their current practice and creating their own possible solutions to improving their work. This doesn’t have to be an intensive time commitment. Programs can use their context to figure out what works best for them. Reflection can be as simple as a 15-minute end-of-the-shift staff huddle, weekly scheduled staff meetings or monthly reflective staff meetings. As long as the supervisor is engaged in some form of regular, intentional reflection with their staff the quality of youth programming will be increased due to the increased learning and development of staff.

From the field. Saint Paul Urban Tennis (SPUT) realized reflection was a needed part of their staff development. On their second year of embedding reflection into their routine, they are finding a fit that is right for them.

SPUT learned the value of embedding reflective supervision with summer coaches. SPUT provides intensive spring training to get their large staff team ready for the summer. Once summer starts the SPUT teams of coaches disperse to their different sites, only to reconvene again at the end of the summer celebration. At the end of the 2012 summer session the director, Becky Cantellano (personal communication, June 3rd, 2014) learned that there was a site where kids had a great time, but hadn’t learned all of the tennis skills that were expected as part of the program. Staff were great at responding to the participants’ interests by focusing on the group games, but this interfered with them spending the time incorporating all of the tennis skills that are foundations of their program. The kids were happy and engaged, but the goals of the program were not being met. While pre-summer training was strong, staff needed to connect throughout the summer to problem solve at the intersection of where the training met the reality of the summer.

Routines. In 2013 SPUT implemented weekly meetings for staff from each of the sites to share what they see and what they experience. This allows them to plan for the week ahead, reflect on how things are going, and create action for improvements. When staff are struggling with balancing the objectives of the programs and the voices of the participants, they get the support to think through different solutions. Becky had confidence that the well trained staff were also receiving the support they needed to be empowered to problem solve the situations that arose throughout the summer. Routines do need to be balanced though. Realizing the mandatory weekly meetings became a bit much for the context of their program, this summer they are scheduled to meet every other week.

TRAIN SUPERVISORS

Great youth workers often end up promoted within their organizations. More often than not, this comes with little or no training on what it means to be a supervisor. The change in role can be overwhelming as supervisors have a lot of new duties to juggle. It hasn't been common practice to wear your youth work "hat" as a supervisor, so they adapt to the role of supervisor that they experienced. For supervisors transitioning from other fields this is also true. They too are familiar with the traditional power models of supervision. Without the background in quality youth work practices it can be an even more discouraging relationship. Supervisors may feel they need to prove themselves in their new role so they hold it as a traditional role of power. Through Jenkinson's (2010) work providing training for youth work organizations, she found that it was most helpful to supervisors to examine the nature and content of supervision. This allows supervisors to better understand the elements of supervision and provide a framework on which to base their practice.

From the field. Saint Paul Public Schools 21st Century Community Learning Centers (SPPS 21st CCLC) have been working hard the past few years to implement strategies around quality improvement. In the fall of 2013, staff began to learn about the power of coaching and the use of open-ended questions. "We believe coaching gets a lot more buy-in from the instructional staff because it allows them to solve their own challenges" (Deb Campobasso, director of SPPS 21st CCLC, personal communications, June 16, 2014).

Coaching for quality improvement. One step in their process was participation in the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, Quality Coaching training. This training is based on three main concepts of respect, observation and support (cypq.org). The model allows the staff to direct the conversation and create their own ideas and solutions. A main component of quality coaching is asking open-ended questions. Attending training isn't enough to successfully implement quality coaching. Staff need opportunities to practice.

Authenticity circle. An authenticity circle is a model where members help each other as peer coaches. For the 21st CCLC team that means groups of three or four site coordinators getting together monthly for an hour and a half, during which time one supervisor presents a real challenge they are facing and the other supervisors ask open-ended questions to help the presenter create useful solutions. Not only does this process help support the supervisors, it allows the supervisors valuable practice to strengthen their coaching skills. "Asking questions as a coach isn't a natural instinct for supervisors. We are often problem solvers and want to provide solutions, which isn't as effective. Supervisors need to practice asking open-ended questions to become good at it" (D. Campobasso, personal communication, June 16, 2014). This process has also strengthened trust and built community with supervisors across sites.

Different perspectives. In addition to their own supervisors, site coordinators from two other SPPS after-school sites and from YMCA and YWCA school-based afterschool sites were invited to join the circles as well. "Our staff found it valuable to have outside organizations involved. It provided a more rich experience to include other perspectives" (D. Campobasso, personal communication, June 16, 2014).

SUMMARY

Youth serving organizations want to provide high-quality programs for youth. To do this staff must be supported by their supervisors through intentional reflection. This promotes continued learning that builds staff ability to be empowered problem solvers. The supervisor role is critical and must include building a community of trust with staff. Supervision within organizations needs to be redefined to include reflection on a regular basis. Finally, supervisors must receive training and support in facilitating reflection that is staff-centered and staff-driven.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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