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Youth-Adult Partnerships in Decision Making: Disseminating and Implementing an Innovative Idea into Established Organizations and Communities

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Abstract The principles and processes for engaging youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP) in organizational and community decision making have often been articulated from developmental and social justice perspectives. A broad empirical foundation for Y-AP has been established. Y-AP remains an innovative idea in the United States, however. The belief that youth and adults can, and should, collaborate on issues of importance runs counter to prevailing policies, institutional structures, and community norms. 4-H Youth Development is one public system that is actively seeking to disseminate and implement Y-AP. 4-H Youth Development seeks to integrate Y-AP into its own governance structures as well as those of local government and community coalitions. Through qualitative analysis of the efforts in one Midwestern state, this study examines the contextual challenges faced by county staff—the providers of program support within 4-H Youth Development—and the ways in which county staff respond to these obstacles. This project identifies the goals, leverage points, and strategies through which county staff seek to integrate Y-AP into established forums of decision making. Implications for the dissemination and implementation of principle and process-based innovation are offered, with special attention to the role of the program support system.

Keywords Innovation · Youth development ·
Youth-adult partnership · Youth participation

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Introduction

It is difficult enough to disseminate model programs in ways that result in fidelity and quality implementation at the local level. A greater challenge may exist when the object of dissemination is not a self-standing program or curriculum that can be implemented to specification, but instead, is a strategy or method of practice—a set of principles, processes, and interpersonal relationships—designed for application across a broad range of programs and community settings.

The centrality of principles and processes to effective dissemination and implementation has become clear to the fields of prevention and youth development. There are three reasons for this centrality, and each has a set of challenges to disseminators of innovative practice. First, it is recognized that model programs and curriculum are not simply a coherent set of activities, but equally important, also encompass a coherent set of values, principles and processes. These latter aspects of practice are always open to differing interpretation. Consequently, there has been a push to provide stakeholders with more ownership and control over the adaptation of established programs and methods. The challenge is to help stakeholders reach consensus in the process of identifying and then implementing locally tailored enhancements that do not sacrifice the fidelity of the innovation (Blakely et al. 1987; Castro et al. 2004). Second, effective dissemination requires ongoing communication and shared perceptions among stakeholders regarding the core ideas that underlie innovative programs and practices (Rogers 1995; Zeldin et al. 2005). The challenge is to establish fidelity to a model's "causal mechanism" and "theory base"—it's purposes, values and assumptions—while concurrently ensuring that the values and principles of the model are congruent with

the prevailing ideology of an organization or community (Connell and Kubisch 1998; Glaser and Backer 1980; Miller and Shinn 2005). Third, the effectiveness of many promising models and practices is largely dependant on context. The challenge to providers of program support is to help implementers gain the ability to continuously apply and re-apply core principles and processes in response to changing local circumstances (Bauman et al. 1991; Schonkoff and Phillips 2000; Schorr 1997).

Despite the importance of principles and processes to the implementation of innovation, most research focuses almost exclusively on curriculum-based programs. There is scant research on the dissemination of principle and process-based methods that cut across programs, interventions and settings (Berliner 2002). Further, there are few studies that explore contextual influences on the adoption of new practices (Gray et al. 2003; Mayer and Davidson 2000). These gaps are salient, especially in light of the interactive systems framework, which urges that empirical knowledge be gained to inform the full range of dissemination and implementation: policies, programs, principles, and processes (Wandersman et al. 2008).

The present research addresses the above gaps. The project was designed to shed insight on how program support systems can overcome the challenges to disseminating and implementing principle and process-based practices. Our specific focus is on youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP) in decision making. For the purposes of this study, Y-AP is defined as an innovative method of practice that is firmly grounded in the principle that youth be engaged in the design and deliberation of policy and program decisions that directly influence them (Zeldin et al. 2005). It is also rooted in processes. At its core, the method aims to bring together diverse youth and adults with the aim of making key decisions, as a group, through the use of democratic and consensus processes.

The context for this study is 4-H Youth Development (4-HYD), a large public system administered by the Cooperative Extension Service. 4-HYD has been operating for over a century and has established research, program support and program delivery systems. Therefore, 4-HYD provides an ideal context for exploring how providers of program support integrate innovative principles and processes into previously institutionalized policies and structures of local delivery systems.

Youth-Adult Partnership in Decision Making

"Positive youth development" is being endorsed as an effective approach to prevention and youth programs. Fundamental to this approach is the creation of mechanisms that encourage youth to participate with adults in collective decision making and action (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine 2002). The rationale is straightforward: When youth are allowed entry into influential settings of decision making, they can become significant resources for creating the kinds of settings and communities that enable positive development for themselves and for others (Benson et al. 2006).

Over the past decade, scholars have amassed a broad body of empirical evidence demonstrating that participation in decision making promotes the social and academic development of youth. Studies conducted in schools and community-based youth organizations show that youth gain a stronger sense of self, increased critical thinking, teamwork, social capital, an enhanced sense of group belonging and commitment to service when they are actively involved in collaborative decision making (Independent Sector 2002; Scheve et al. 2006; Catalano et al. 1998). Research also highlights the key role of adults in helping youth make the most of these opportunities. Positive influences are most likely when youth are actively involved in the deliberations and when they form close relationships and instrumental "partnerships" with adults (Camino 2000; Mitra 2004; Steinberg 2001; Zeldin et al. 2005). The positive influences of these partnerships, moreover, can exist beyond the individual youth. There is an emerging body of research indicating that Y-AP may strengthen the culture, structure, and programming of youth organizations and schools (Cavet and Sloper 2004; Fielding 2001; Ginwright 2005; MacNeil and McLean 2006; Zeldin 2004).

Youth-adult partnership in decision making remains an innovative idea in the United States. The notion that youth and adults can collaborate on issues of importance runs counter to prevailing policies, institutional structures and community norms (Zeldin et al. 2003). It is fair to suggest that Hollingshead's (1949) observation of the United States holds as true today as it did over 55 years ago: "[Community policies] segregate children from the real world that adults know and function in. By trying to keep the maturing child ignorant of this world of conflict and contradiction, adults think that they are keeping him pure" (p.108). The isolation of youth is especially pronounced in civic and organizational forums of decision making. Consequently, youth roles in US society are institutionally limited to those of student, consumer and style-setter (Hine 1999; Sherrod et al. 2002).

Concurrent with the creation of an empirical foundation for Y-AP, youth participation emerged as an international issue of social justice. Sparked by 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child—which states that all youth have the right to be heard on matters affecting their lives, including policy matters, and to have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity—youth have been increasingly conceptualized as agents of social transformation (Ginwright et al. 2006). By

Fig. 1 Functions of Y-AP in organizations and communities

1998, all UN countries, except the United States and war-torn Somalia, had ratified the CRC. These signatories have expressed the belief that youth participation allows children to better protect themselves, contribute to democratic process and improve policy decisions (Lansdown 2001).

Buttressed by empirical research and principles of social justice, a broad movement is underway to integrate youth into public decision making (Forum for Youth Investment 2001). As indicated by Fig. 1, the practice of Y-AP in decision making is central to engaging youth in a wide range organizational and community activities. The most focused policy attention has been on increasing the role of youth in the governance and decision making of public systems. For illustration, public sector agencies in the United Kingdom are mandated to adopt specific policies on how they will involve young people in their decision making (Cutler and Taylor 2003). In the state of New Mexico, the Governor's Children's Cabinet is required to solicit youth views on a regular basis, and youth–adult teams are charged with providing consultation to state representatives (New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community 2006). In the city of Hampton, Virginia, legislation mandates that the mayor, department heads, and school principals consult regularly with youth advisory boards. Full voting rights have been established for youth on Hampton city boards, commissions, and committees (Goll 2003).

It is important not to over-romanticize the movement toward Y-AP in decision making. In her review of efforts in the UK, Sinclair (2004) concludes that progress has been made in terms of making youth participation a meaningful activity for young people. More research and experimentation, however, is necessary to ensure that youth have legitimate opportunities to impact organizations and policies. Additionally, Sinclair (2004, p. 116) asserts: "The challenge for the next decade will be to learn how to move beyond one-off or isolated consultations to a position where children's participation is firmly embedded with organizational cultures and structures for decision making."

Scholars in the United States concur. While exemplary models exist, implementation of Y-AP in decision making is spotty. There has been little theoretical or empirical attention on how to bring the practice to scale (Sherrod et al. 2002; Yee and Sherman 2006; Zeldin et al. 2003).

Disseminating and Implementing Y-AP Through 4-HYD

4-H Youth Development (4-HYD), a program area of Cooperative Extension, is a public system that is actively seeking to promote Y-AP and the benefits of integrating young people into organizational and community decision making. Established by Congress in 1914, 4-HYD began as a program for rural youth to learn about the latest agricultural technologies being developed at the land-grant university. Subsequently, the 4-HYD program expanded its scope. In the thirties and forties, camping and citizenship programs became part of 4-HYD's approach (Wessel and Wessel 1982). More recently, as 4-HYD extended to urban settings, programming broadened to include after after-school programming, service learning, and leadership programming. As part of that effort, Y-AP has become a cross-cutting priority for all 4-HYD programs (Kress 2005). Over the past decade, three national initiatives—"Youth At the Table," "National Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century" and "Youth in Governance"—have been sponsored by the National 4-H Council, the non-profit arm of National Cooperative Extension, to enhance the visibility and priority of Y-AP, and to strengthen the capacity of the system to promote the practice.

Structurally, dissemination and implementation of 4-HYD programming is through a decentralized system of state, county and community stakeholders (Fig. 2). Within the state office(located in the land-grant university), a program leader and state specialists provide policy and regulatory leadership to the local staff who live in, and work within, counties across the state. State staff do not dictate specific programs or activities at the county level. Rather, they establish priorities and direction by sponsoring and supporting small grant programs, conferences and convenings, curriculum and program development, and demonstration projects on new initiatives, such as Y-AP in decision making, that are perceived as advancing the mission of 4-HYD. The state office also manages the research system. State staff collaborate with university professors to conduct, synthesize and translate research findings on adolescent development and youth programming. This information is then disseminated by county staff to educate policymakers and to promote implementation of research-based practices by community providers.

Fig. 2 Linking program delivery, support, and research within 4-HYD
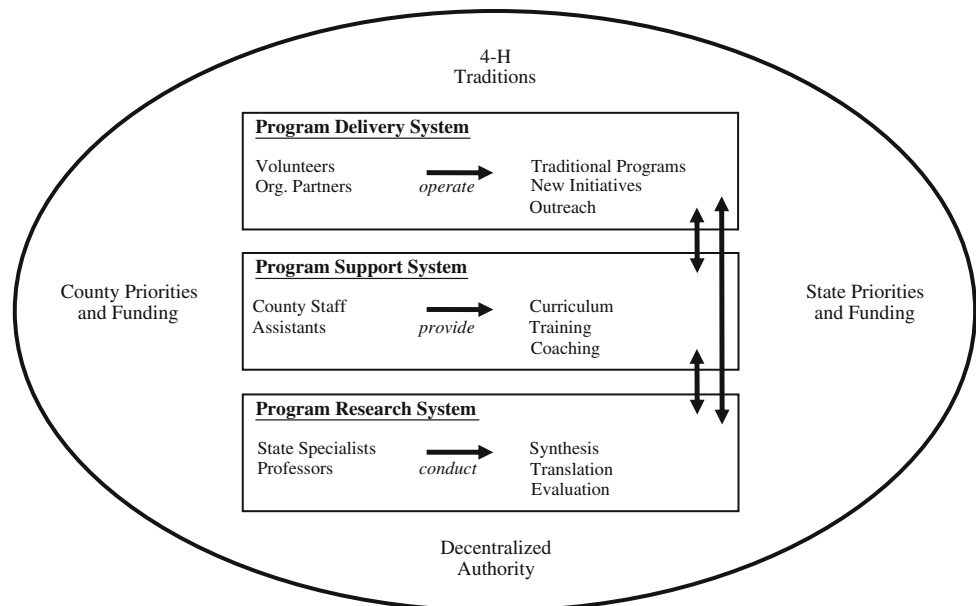
The Program Support System as Managed by County Staff

County staff (with formal titles of "agent," "advisor," or "educator") serve as the intermediaries between the state office and the community-based policy makers and service providers. The primary responsibility of county staff is to manage the program support system within their county.[1] County staff are granted a significant degree of autonomy in responding to local needs within the parameters of state priorities and regulations. With regards to building local capacity for an innovation such as Y-AP, county staff seek to maximize the utilization of the research system, often by conducting local needs assessments and communicating best practices. They strive to be a functional and motivational resource to those in the local program delivery system. When 4-HYD is working at its best, county staff are providing a range of program support services—structured training, mentoring, resource acquisition, logistical support—to the build the capacity of the adult volunteer networks. They are not deeply involved in providing direct services to young people.

There are two features of the 4-HYD program support system that are central to understanding the dissemination and implementation of innovative practices such as Y-AP. First, county staff are funded through a mix of state and county monies. County staff are ultimately accountable to their county legislators, who may or may not share state priorities. While the state may offer "carrots" to county

staff, county legislators hold the "stick." They have the authority to remove county staff from their positions. Balancing local and state expectations, therefore, is an ongoing challenge for county staff as they engage in program support activities. Second, it is vital to emphasize 4-HYD is dependent on adult volunteers. In Wisconsin, there is roughly one adult volunteer for every three youth participants. (In contrast, there is one county staff person for every 460 participants.) Not only do county staff have to balance the agendas of state and local constituencies, but concurrently, they must also address the priorities of and provide program support to a wide array of diverse volunteers. If volunteers choose not to work with county staff, the program delivery system can crumble. In such a context, it is not surprising that county staff show caution when asked by the state to disseminate research and implement programs based on an innovative idea, such as Y-AP, that challenges social norms and existing structures.

Research Questions

Given the context of 4-HYD, the primary concern of the present study is this: How does a public system, one that is highly dependent on participation by adult volunteers and the endorsement of county legislators within the program delivery system, disseminate and implement the innovative practice of Y-AP? Our specific focus is on how county staff fulfill and perceive the efficacy of their program support responsibilities. Two sets of questions guide this inquiry:

- What are the challenges to the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP that exist within the traditions

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[1] In keeping with the language of 4-H Youth Development, we refer to youth development programs instead of prevention programs. In this article, "program" delivery, support and research will be used in place of "prevention" delivery, support and research systems.

and structure of 4-HYD? How do county staff respond to these challenges when orienting their work to create conditions that are favorable to Y-AP in organizational and community decision making?

- What are the goals and leverage points that guide county staff as they seek to disseminate and implement Y-AP in decision making? What leverage points are activated by county staff? What strategies are perceived as most effective?

Subsequent to analysis of these questions, we further explored the data from the vantage point of the interactive systems framework (Wandersman et al. 2008) that provides a grounding for this volume. We address the following question:

- How does the lived experience of county staff within 4-HYD further explicate the interactive systems framework, particularly in terms of understanding the role of the program support system in disseminating and implementing principle and process-based innovation?

Method

Study Participants

To explore the research questions, the investigative team sought a purposive sample of 4-HYD county staff in Wisconsin, who through nomination from their peers and from state staff, were identified as being accomplished in their jobs, particularly in terms of working with adult volunteers to integrate new programs and processes into the public system. The additional criterion was that staff be actively involved in disseminating and implementing strategies that involved youth in at least one program or community forum of decision making. The aim of this purposive sampling procedure was to intentionally select "critical cases" at the extreme of a distribution (e.g., accomplished staff who also have a commitment to youth participation). The lived experience and perceptions of such persons, it is assumed, are most likely to contribute to theory building, especially when the concepts represent a new area for investigation and when the study aim is to detect predominant patterns across a diverse range of settings (LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Wolcott 1995).

Eighteen county staff met the criteria, and each agreed to participate in the study. For the purposes of this study, we asked each staff to identify one current project for primary analysis. Nine staff chose to focus on their efforts to promote Y-AP within the 4-HYD governance structure (e.g., 4-H Executive Board, Leaders Board, Fair Board); five staff focused on their work within local government

structures (e.g., Board of Supervisors, City Council, City Youth Advisory Board); and four staff discussed the integration of Y-AP into the leadership of community-wide coalitions on youth issues. Self report was used to classify each project by implementation phase: five were start-ups, ten were in a growth phrase, and three were working on sustainability. This variability ensured that our sample is diverse in terms of Y-AP projects occurring in a variety of contexts and over varying lengths of time.

Three county staff granted us permission to conduct case studies in their counties. These counties were chosen because stakeholders were actively implementing Y-AP projects across at least two of the three settings (4-HYD governance, local government and community coalitions). The rationale was that more could be learned about effective strategies from counties that were engaged in shared governance with youth as compared to those that were not (Patton 1997). Each county was visited twice during the course of the study. Across the three counties, personal interviews were held with three county staff, three program assistants, 24 adult stakeholders (e.g., adult volunteers, public officials, community leaders). Six focus groups with held with a total of 12 youth and 19 adults, and five observations were made of three deliberative bodies.

Procedures

Data from the county staff were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In addition to eliciting detailed answers to the study questions, the protocol was designed to allow respondents to raise new avenues for the interview as well as for context-appropriate probes by the interviewers. The interviews and focus groups during the case studies were designed to garner data on the perspectives of the various stakeholders on the processes of dissemination, the meanings and purposes they attached to Y-AP, barriers and resources existing within the complex environments in which Y-AP took place, and the mediating processes influencing implementation. The observations provided the investigative team a common experience with the stakeholders that served as a foundation for the interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Memos were written on the observations.

The study team consisted of a professor of youth development, a social anthropologist, a state leader for 4-HYD in a state outside of Wisconsin, a Wisconsin state specialist (with a degree in educational policy) and an advanced graduate student with extensive experience directing youth development programs. This diversity ensured that multiple perspectives were considered throughout the analysis process. To ensure consistent data collection, the interview

protocols and data documentation forms were designed with input from the entire research team. A comprehensive training session was conducted on the interview and recording techniques to be used in the study. To further enhance reliability, the majority (72%) of the interviews, focus groups, and observations were administered jointly by two members of the study team.

Subsequent to each interview and focus group, and on a regular basis throughout data collection, the researchers discussed their interview notes (which were documented on analysis templates for consistency across data sources), with a primary focus on articulating insights on the research questions, identifying emerging themes and extracting illustrative quotes. When the interviewer worked alone, the principal investigator facilitated a debriefing process with the researcher. Detailed memos and reports were prepared on each interview and focus group, which during data analysis, were used to help interpret findings emerging from analysis of the transcripts.
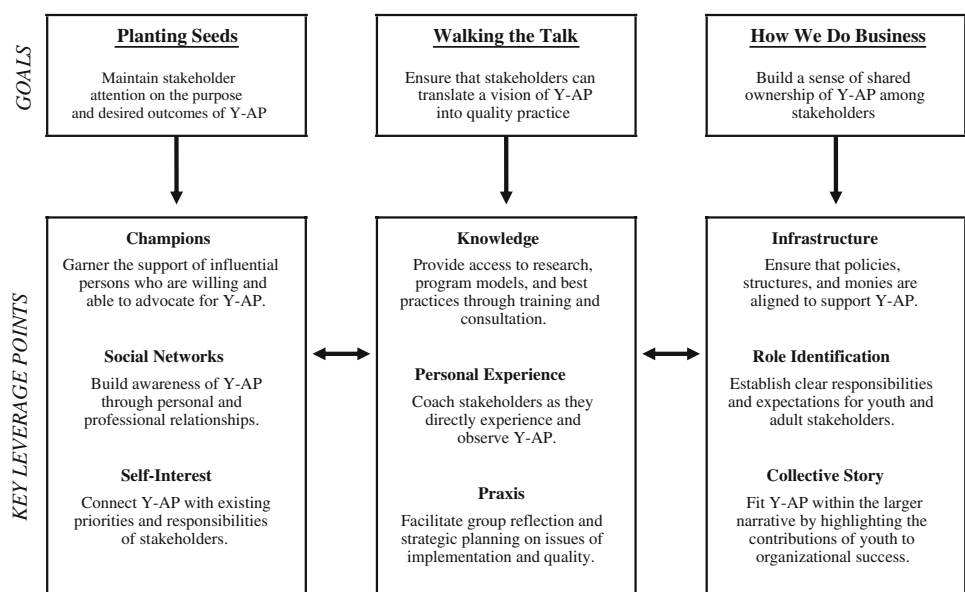
Data Analysis

A structured analytic approach, conducted through three sequential phases, was employed to maximize data comparability across sources and researchers and to triangulate on specific research questions (Maxwell 1996). As outlined below, the research team employed accepted analysis strategies throughout the three phases of analysis: coding of individual interviews with county staff to create categories and identify themes; contextualizing strategies (via the interviews, observations, and focus groups during the case studies) to garner diverse perspective on the study questions and categories; memos and field notes to help interpret textual data and to facilitate analytic insight; and validation strategies to ensure accuracy of the findings from multiple standpoints.

The personal interviews were analyzed during the first phase of analysis, using grounded theory techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Two researchers inspected the data records and engaged in open coding to identify the primary challenges existing within the 4-HYD public system and to identify the goals and leverage points which guided implementation. The researchers examined and compared the responses across study participants until a parsimonious list of conceptual domains, and associated themes, could be articulated. Subsequently, the research team met to reach consensus. These domains were then given the labels that are presented in the "Results" section (see Fig. 3). Reliability was established on these domains by reviewing selected text from the interview record. One hundred percent agreement was reached in identifying the three cross-cutting barriers to dissemination and implementation. A high level of agreement (97%) was also calculated for identification of the primary management goals within each record. Reliability was then established on identifying the primary leverage points utilized by county staff. Reliability was somewhat lower (86%) in this area, reflecting the conceptual overlap that exists among the different leverage points that can be accessed to promote dissemination and implementation.

The second phase of analysis explored patterns between management goals and leverage points. It began with axial coding to identify primary associations (Straus and Corbin 1990). The case studies and memos were then brought to bear on these associations. Triangulating on the findings established from the interviews, the research team reviewed the interview and focus group records, and the associated

Fig. 3 Dissemination and implementation of innovative programming: goals and leverage points

GOALS

Planting Seeds	**Walking the Talk**	**How We Do Business**
Maintain stakeholder attention on the purpose and desired outcomes of Y-AP	Ensure that stakeholders can translate a vision of Y-AP into quality practice	Build a sense of shared ownership of Y-AP among stakeholders

KEY LEVERAGE POINTS

Champions — Garner the support of influential persons who are willing and able to advocate for Y-AP.	**Knowledge** — Provide access to research, program models, and best practices through training and consultation.	**Infrastructure** — Ensure that policies, structures, and monies are aligned to support Y-AP.
Social Networks — Build awareness of Y-AP through personal and professional relationships.	**Personal Experience** — Coach stakeholders as they directly experience and observe Y-AP.	**Role Identification** — Establish clear responsibilities and expectations for youth and adult stakeholders.
Self-Interest — Connect Y-AP with existing priorities and responsibilities of stakeholders.	**Praxis** — Facilitate group reflection and strategic planning on issues of implementation and quality.	**Collective Story** — Fit Y-AP within the larger narrative by highlighting the contributions of youth to organizational success.

memos, to explore relative emphasis, implicit assertions and emotional urgency displayed during the interviews (Yin 1989). That is, our interpretation moved beyond simple counts, with the analytic task being to broadly identify regularities and patterns among and across domains from the perspective of the county agents. Our aim was to understand what goals and leverage points were judged to be the most effective in supporting change, and why. The case study interviews and focus groups were similarly analyzed, with a focus on gaining the perspective of diverse community stakeholders on the same issues. The case studies provided additional insight as the research team was able to observe, and take both descriptive and reflective notes (Bogdan and Biklen 1992) on the interactions among key stakeholders and on the deliberations of the Y-AP projects. Subsequently, the full research team continuously cycled through these sources of data until we were certain that saturation had been achieved, the evidence was consistent, and the primary associations could be verified (see Fig. 3).

The third phase of analysis focused on validation and credibility. First, the research team reviewed the complete analysis and conclusions. We drew on the diversity of the study team to ensure that our empirically derived conclusions accurately reflected the different perspectives, assumptions, and language of those working in the program support and program delivery systems (Bernard 1988). Validation was also elicited through the feedback method by checking the data with three state managers and four county staff who were actively promoting Y-AP through California 4-HYD (Maxwell 1996). This method helped ensure that our primary findings were comparable to the public system as it operated outside Wisconsin. For a similar reason, we used the interview protocol with seven staff from two grassroots organizations that were disseminating Y-AP, and checked the results to help ensure that our findings were not idiosyncratic to public systems. Lastly, we conducted informant checks with the three county staff who were the focus of the case studies to ensure that the primary findings, as presented in this manuscript, were consistent with their perspective (Moustakas 1994). Each of these validation methods confirmed our analysis. Relatively minor changes in interpretation were made to accommodate divergent findings.

Results

Contextual Challenges to Integrating Y-AP into a Public System

The first set of research questions led to analyses aimed at identifying the primary contextual challenges to disseminating and implementing Y-AP in decision making, with a focus on understanding how county staff respond to them. Through interviews with county staff, it quickly became evident that the challenges were embedded within the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the 4-HYD system. 4-HYD, like any public system, has long established traditions and programs, and a set of shared values that support them. The core values of 4-HYD, according to all sources of data, include a belief in the efficacy of "research-based programming." Programs and curriculum that have been formally vetted by national researchers and administrators within 4-HYD are most esteemed and promoted within the system. To orient programming, the system firmly endorses and promotes curriculum that employs "hands on," experiential learning in real world settings—be it a farm, music stage, or town hall—especially that which supports the ability of youth to be "leaders" and "contribute to their communities." The phrase "positive family environment" is commonly used to emphasize that 4-HYD programming is offered through "clubs," which are staffed by networks of volunteers, all of whom live in the communities where services are provided.

This configuration of values, structures, and networks has served 4-HYD well. 4-HYD has become institutionalized across the country. The 4-HYD traditions offer continuity and shared understandings which define "quality" and which clearly specify what is expected from the youth participants and adult leaders. Loyalty to 4-HYD is strong. Adults often describe their volunteer position as "a job." Even when local budgets are tight, 4-HYD tends to do relatively well in comparison with other human services. According to staff, this is because many county legislators participated in 4-HYD as youth. Moreover, many of the legislators' constituents are 4-HYD volunteer leaders or attend 4-HYD events.

At the same time, the cultural and structural context of 4-HYD offers significant challenges to the dissemination and implementation of new programs and practices. These challenges may be heightened when the object of dissemination is an innovation, such as Y-AP in decision making. Specifically, as discussed below, we find that county staff must make three significant changes in their day-to-day work in order to successfully integrate Y-AP into the established system of 4-HYD. They must take new risks to move out of traditional programming, broaden their roles and responsibilities, and confront pressing issues of time.

Pushing Traditional Boundaries

Over the past few decades, a myriad of demographic and policy pressures have encouraged 4-HYD to expand beyond its traditional programming and adult volunteer

networks. Illustrative of this shift is Wisconsin 4-HYD's vision statement, which in 2001 was changed to read, "To be a catalyst for community youth development." Implicit in this vision is the goal of reaching new stakeholders—youth and adults—through collaboration with existing service providers and community coalitions. The emphasis on Y-AP in decision making is a central aspect of this transition.

Traditions and structures change at a slower pace than mission statements. Consequently, the emphasis on disseminating and implementing Y-AP has brought a certain loss of organizational predictability to the 4-HYD system. A dominant theme in the interviews with county staff was that, with its focus on core principles and practices that need to be adapted to specific settings, Y-AP pushes 4-HYD away from its reliance on model programs and vetted curriculum. Further, because Y-AP focuses on shared governance and planning, the practice challenges 4-HYD to adapt their decision-making structures and processes. And, finally, power becomes more dispersed. Y-AP requires county staff to broaden their community networks beyond that of long-term volunteers and participating families. As 4-HYD programming expands out of the traditional structures in order to implement Y-AP, other adults—non-profit leaders, business owners, and county officials—become key players within the system. One staff explains:

> It's a very traditional program, so we can be very easily burdened with carrying on with the traditional cycle of events so that when we want to do something new and different, the time isn't there, the resources are not there. So sometimes it means shifting away from something that someone in the county holds near and dear. …you end up with the tradition of 4-H as being very positive, in terms of keeping the organization moving and giving direction and so on, but it's also a little bit of baggage.

Most county staff expressed apprehension about integrating Y-AP in decision making into the public system. They were "going out of 4-H" by promoting Y-AP, and this transition put them at risk. Two themes dominated the interviews. First, staff feared that they would be perceived negatively by the 4-HYD adult volunteers and county legislatures, and would be viewed as not "doing enough" or "providing enough support" for the traditional 4-H programs. It is widely understood that the most passionate supporters of 4-HYD "honor the clover" and "bleed green" (the trademarked logo and color of 4-HYD). Staff emphasized that they had to creatively disseminate Y-AP in ways that demonstrated respect for these metaphors if they wished to retain the support of volunteers. The second theme was that county staff feared that they would be

intruding on the turf or agendas of other service providers, such as after-school programs, community coalitions, or city councils. County staff were comfortable offering "educational services," the hallmark function of 4-HYD. They perceived that "promoting" or "advocating" a new practice such as Y-AP, one that cuts across community forums of decision making, as risky and somewhat outside their traditional mandate.

Broadening Staff Role and Responsibility

It is not simply that county staff bump up against tradition. Promotion of Y-AP also demands that staff take on a new set of roles and responsibilities. Two themes emerged within this category from the interviews. First, because Y-AP is an innovative practice, one that is new to many stakeholders, county staff have had to become effective marketers, or as one commented, "a cheerleader and an advocate." Whereas the benefits of 4-HYD's traditional programs are generally understood by stakeholders, county staff found themselves in the position of having to convince volunteers to do something different, to take a leap of faith by adopting the somewhat ambiguous set of principles and practices of Y-AP. It is not only adult volunteers who need to be convinced of the potential benefits of Y-AP. County staff often find it necessary to convince their own administrators, as well as the county legislators who monitor 4-HYD, that the implementation of Y-AP is a good use of their time. Additionally, a few county staff have had to overcome turf issues by convincing non-profit leaders that 4-HYD was the appropriate organization through which to promote Y-AP in the county.

The second theme across the interviews was that Y-AP requires county staff to become infrastructure builders. In some cases, they create new structures. One county staff person, for example, created a youth philanthropy board to integrate youth voice into local deliberations and funding priorities. In another county, staff worked with the mayor to create a new youth advisory board for the city council. Most frequently, however, county staff work to integrate youth into existing decision-making forums. Almost all staff, for example, are seeking to transform "adult only" 4-H Leaders Associations into governing bodies that include young people. It is important to stress that infrastructure building always requires planning and a new set of logistics. Regarding the aforementioned city council youth advisory boards, for example, the county staff not only worked to create the new structure, she then found it necessary to recruit and train youth, orient the mayor and his staff, create monthly agendas, and establish "gentle ways" of providing feedback on issues of program quality to the participants.

Allocating Time

Like many community-based organizations, 4-HYD has experienced substantial budget cuts over the past decade. Staff perceive that they are being required to do more with less resources. Within this context, all staff emphasized that Y-AP is labor intensive. Because dissemination and implementation depends, in large part, on creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships, staff noted that Y-AP is "high touch." Specifically, staff have to find the time to form relationships with new adult stakeholders, while concurrently, helping these stakeholders form relationships with youth. In brief, staff report that they have to allocate time to be "hands on" and one-on-one" in their coaching and training with the 4-HYD volunteer leaders and the community leaders. Because Y-AP is an innovation, this guidance becomes an ongoing time commitment, as one staff commented:

> I think the most difficult thing about the 4-H program, given that its volunteer driven, is that there is always going to be turnover. So thinking about ways that we can institutionalize it is probably the hardest. You get one group trained, and they buy in, and you think 'oh I can relax now' and then there's a whole new group of people. I do believe sometimes you have to use bylaws or laws or whatever to at least get it going … and then once you have the law, that sort of institutionalizes it, but that's only a first step. Beyond that it's a constant education.

Carving out time for Y-AP is an ongoing challenge. Y-AP is too labor intensive to be "added on" to existing roles and responsibilities. County staff responded in two ways. First, they struggled to find ways to step back from the most labor intensive aspects of their jobs (i.e., supporting the Community Club or County Fair), typically by working to make the volunteer networks more self-sufficient. Second, staff worked to convince their County Legislative Boards or secured external monies themselves to hire assistants to implement traditional 4-HYD programming, thus "freeing up" staff to devote more of their own time to Y-AP.

Promoting Y-AP: Management Goals and Leverage Points

The second set of research questions led to exploration of the strategies through which county staff disseminate and implement Y-AP into the 4-HYD governance structure, local government bodies and community coalitions. Analyses revealed significant parallels in the approaches used by county staff. Specifically, it appears that staff share three overarching *management goals* when seeking to integrate Y-AP into forums of decision making (Fig. 3). In the parlance of county staff, the goals are "planting seeds," "walking the talk," and "how we do business." Analysis of the meaning of these phrases indicates that effective dissemination and implementation requires that staff consistently seek to: (1) maintain stakeholder attention on the purpose and expected outcomes of Y-AP; (2) ensure that stakeholders can translate this vision of Y-AP into quality practice; and (3) build a sense of shared ownership of Y-AP among the stakeholders.

These management goals, the data indicate, orient the work of county staff when promoting innovation over the long term. For example, county staff must consistently "plant seeds" and focus stakeholder attention on the purposes and outcomes of Y-AP regardless of whether they are launching a new project or sustaining an established effort. This is because, over time, stakeholders cycle in and out of projects, and consequently, the conceptualization of Y-AP is constantly being negotiated. The role of county staff is to "keep the vision." For similar reasons, county staff consistently work with stakeholders to translate the vision of Y-AP into quality practice. From start-up to sustainability phases of Y-AP, local stakeholders look to county staff to help them identify and implement the promising practices that are most appropriate given the immediate context. And, finally, county staff consistently focus on building shared ownership. Staff recognize that projects cannot be sustained if they are the primary person promoting the idea that Y-AP is central to the mission of the group. A critical mass of engaged stakeholders needs to be mobilized over time.

Analysis further indicates that county staff realize these management goals by attending to *leverage points* for dissemination and implementation. Nine leverage points emerged as being most critical to the integration of Y-AP into decision making bodies (Fig. 3): self interest, social networks, champions, knowledge, personal experience, praxis, infrastructure, role identification, and collective story. Attention to these leverage points, we find, allows the astute staff person to harness the collective will and expertise of stakeholders. Selecting which leverage point to invest one's time and capital in can be a risky task. As county staff noted, for example, a potential "champion" must be well cultivated, lest he or she loses interest, or in the worst case, becomes an opponent of the project. Infrastructure must be created to support Y-AP, but efforts to change policies can be met with passive resistance by some stakeholders, according to staff. Under certain conditions, efforts to change infrastructure to support Y-AP man actually serve to mobilize active opposition to the practice. It is not surprising, therefore, that county staff emphasize that they are always deliberate in their approach to disseminating and implementing Y-AP, taking into account local personalities and events.

Within this context of risk and opportunity, the analysis further indicates consistent patterns between the management goals and leverage points that are activated to disseminate and implement Y-AP. These patterns are discussed below.

Maintaining Attention on the Purpose and Outcome of Y-AP

All staff emphasize that the practice of Y-AP is new to most and threatening to many. In response, staff seek to "plant seeds" among stakeholders, with the goal being to build consensus around the purposes and expected outcomes of Y-AP. With such agreement, staff noted that they are best able to secure initial buy in for the effort. Over time, this clarity in purpose also provides stakeholders with guideposts for implementation.

When asked to explain how they maintain a collective focus on purpose and outcome, three themes emerged across the interviews with county staff and community stakeholders. The first is the importance of *champions*. Champions are individuals, typically with a strong degree of institutional power, who are willing to harness their capital and resources to move Y-AP forward in significant ways. Almost every staff person identified a specific person who was instrumental to the success of the Y-AP project. Some staff identified government officials, organizational directors, school administrators and business leaders. Others identified county Extension committee members and 4-HYD board officers as champions within the 4-HYD system. Regardless of position, the champions were seen as influential because they could effectively harness the attention of others on the "big ideas" of the project. The champions who we interviewed during the case studies were most comfortable with this role. In the main, they were not involved in project design or with the daily logistics of implementation. Instead, they saw themselves as advocates and teachers of Y-AP, with a focus on establishing a clear purpose and direction for Y-AP over the long term. The mayor of one small city observed, for example, that his job was to look to the future, and to consistently build consensus for the idea that youth must be partners in municipal governance.

The second theme within this category of management goals was the importance of *social networks* as a leverage point. The active involvement of individual champions is not sufficient to disseminate an innovative practice. Consequently, county staff report investing a significant amount of time in building or activating community and organizational partnerships. This is particularly important for county staff who are seeking to integrate Y-AP outside of 4-HYD and into local government structures and community coalitions. For these staff, social networks became the vehicle through which entry was gained onto the agendas of these organizations. During one case study, for example, a staff person noted how she was invited to present to the library board because of her professional connections. Her presentation included a focus on the purpose and expected outcomes of Y-AP, buttressed with a research rationale. Subsequently, when interviewing members of the board, it became clear that the decision to adopt Y-AP came only after members contacted others within the city's professional network who had worked with the staff person around issues of Y-AP.

The third leverage point for maintaining stakeholder attention on Y-AP is *self-interest*. Be it with champions or social networks, county staff emphasized that they had to connect the purposes of Y-AP with the immediate priorities and interests of potential stakeholders. Every staff person we interviewed stressed the importance of a strong "pitch" that helped stakeholders see that Y-AP would further their own professional goals or that of their organization. Indeed, staff were often most passionate during the interviews when talking about how they tailored their pitch to different audiences. For example, when disseminating the idea of Y-AP to 4-HYD volunteers, staff typically spoke to the developmental benefits to individual youth. Communications to local government bodies, in contrast, most often focused on how Y-AP could cultivate youth as active and informed citizens, the next generation of community leaders. During the case studies, local stakeholders often spoke of how they appreciated the tailored communications of the county staff. One county staff explains how she and her champions constantly repeated the main messages of their pitch, in different settings and forums, until community-wide attention and support was garnered:

> It spreads the efficacy when people at the library, the parks and rec board, even the gentleman from the airport board say 'This is important for us to have young people here so that they become active when they are adults and know how to run city government.' The advocacy is growing from people who have experienced the power of young people being a part of decision making.

Translating a Vision of Y-AP into Quality Practice

While potential implementers of Y-AP may be supportive of the purposes and expected benefits of Y-AP, they are generally unsure how to transform the principles and processes into quality practice. Y-AP remains an abstract idea for these adults. To help stakeholders make the transition from theory to practice, all county staff highlighted the

importance of stakeholders learning how to "walk the talk." Indeed, of the three management goals, county staff indicated that they spent the most time in pursing this aim. Analysis further indicated that three leverage points were activated in support of this goal: knowledge, personal experience and praxis.

Being a part of the state university, 4-HYD self-identifies as an educational program. As educators, that county staff focused on building the *knowledge* of stakeholders. All county staff offered trainings and workshops on Y-AP throughout the course of their projects. These educational events always focused on the principles and research rationale for Y-AP. Staff and local stakeholders agreed, however, that dissemination of "success stories" and "real-life models" were most useful for they helped stakeholders visualize the practice. For similar reasons, county staff almost always provided stakeholders with printed materials used by similar projects in other counties or nationally, including: sample policies, handbooks, application forms, curricula, lists of best practices and the like. Again, staff emphasize the importance of context. They see it as their primary responsibility to review these materials and selectively disseminate the resources that they believe speak most directly to the specific needs and interests of their community.

Content-based teaching is necessary but not sufficient in terms of helping stakeholders learn how to "walk the talk." Staff consistently noted that adults learn from *personal experience*, and that it is experience that leads to the confidence and skill to implement Y-AP in a quality way. For this reason, all staff seek to create experiential learning opportunities for the adults. One staff person observes:

> You can help people be aware of their own biases, you can help people understand what the obstacles are, you can help them to see what the gifts are, but until people see and experience [Y-AP] in a successful way, it's not likely to happen. It's only when they've had that experience.

For adults who are new to Y-AP, experiences may be offered as part of a collaborative meeting with youth in the form of an ice-breaker or a small group problem solving activity. The aim is to give adults structured experiences, "small wins," which give stakeholders a chance to gain confidence in their ability to work collaboratively with young people. As a sense of mastery and skill develops, county staff support the Y-AP in working more independently and without coaching—be it on a sub-committee or community project—to help adults directly experience what it means to "walk the talk."

Modeling is frequently used to complement direct experience. Almost every staff person spoke about how they engage youth as partners in settings where they

participate themselves. During meetings, staff strive to demonstrate good practice by making sure that youth are seated at the table alongside adults, asking youth for their opinion, and encouraging youth to report out on the work of subcommittees. County staff also arrange site visits so that stakeholders can observe Y-AP in action and talk with their colleagues about the practice. This type of experience, according to staff, helps build the confidence of stakeholders while concurrently providing instrumental tips on how to address the logistical challenges of implementation.

The third leverage point that emerged from the analysis as critical to effective dissemination and implementation is *praxis.* County staff work to balance opportunities for experimentation with opportunities for reflective practice. Given the emergent and innovative nature of Y-AP, consensus around issues of "quality" and "best practice" have yet to be firmly established, especially among volunteers and public officials. Praxis provides a strategy to reach consensus, as one long-term adult volunteer explained:

> One thing that helped a lot, we had a couple of retreats. We actually took time and sat down and evaluated where we though we were coming from, where the young people were coming from. And it put things on paper and you had a chance to really see how everybody felt. We never had a time when we were at a meeting where we could sit down and say 'Where are we going?' And we needed that … it changed some of our opinions about where we were going.

Staff emphasized that governance bodies do not typically allocate time for retreats or do not fully understand the value of reflection. Activating the praxis leverage point, therefore, requires that staff foster a collaborative culture of reflective practice by less obvious means than a formal weekend retreat. For example, almost all staff spoke about how they inserted opportunities for shared inquiry into the agendas of governance bodies. Through mini-lectures, self evaluations, and focused small group work, staff sought to promote a value on reflection, while concurrently, using the time to discuss best practices or introduce emerging implementation issues. They create opportunities for adults and youth to get to know each other in a personal way. A spirit of exploration was invoked. One staff person noted, for example, that she seeks to put stakeholders at ease by regularly noting that "We are all in this mode of discovery. I am on the journey too."

Promoting Shared Ownership for Y-AP

The third management goal discussed by all (except one) of the county staff is building a sense of shared ownership for

the idea and practice of Y-AP. Staff employ the phrase "how we do business" to communicate their goal of transitioning Y-AP from an innovative idea that may be perceived as originating from the "outside" to one that is collectively owned by local stakeholders. This transition can be challenging. The analysis indicates that this goal of dissemination and implementation is promoted through attention to the leverage points of infrastructure, collective story, and praxis.

Infrastructure building was a dominant theme during the interviews with county staff. Staff emphasized that infrastructure building is an ongoing task. In one county, for example, a staff person began by providing the board of supervisors with research information and models. Subsequently, the board passed a resolution to create youth positions on the board. The staff then worked with the board to develop a recruitment and training process for youth. She secured funds to provide a per diem for the youth board members until the board could include it in the county budget the following year. Finally, she also assisted the board chair, a champion, to make the symbolic changes that reinforced the newly created infrastructure for Y-AP.

> The chair was able to arrange for additional big back board chairs to be purchased so that our young people are sitting among the adults in the same types of chairs rather than being relegated to a different part of the room. They [the board] actually reconfigured their seating so that the three youth were incorporated within them. The youth have the name plaques in front of them … and they are listed in our county board website under the list of county board supervisors.

Shared ownership requires more than granting youth a legitimate seat at the governance table. During interviews and focus groups, the leverage point of *role identification* consistently came to the fore. Indeed, sorting out the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders may be the most challenging implementation task facing staff. In some counties, for example, the majority of adult stakeholders began the process assuming that youth should be involved in all aspects of decision making. In other counties, the weight of stakeholder judgment was that youth take on more limited roles. Additionally, the youth themselves were not always in agreement with their adult partners about the appropriate nature and scope of their roles. Ultimately, it was up to the county staff to facilitate processes for teasing out these conflicting, and often controversial, expectations. The time spent was typically productive, however. Staff emphasized that shared ownership emerged from this process of gaining clarity in roles and responsibilities. With such clarity, youth and adult stakeholders know how they are expected to participate and

what they are expected to achieve. Role identification promotes a sense of stability and collegiality among stakeholders.

The third theme emerging from the data was the importance of *collective story* in promoting shared ownership. This leverage point became most evident during the case studies. It was not unusual to hear diverse stakeholders, with varying levels of direct involvement with the Y-AP, relate the same stories to illustrate the dissemination and implementation of their project. For example, in the county where youth are involved in city council committees, government officials, city staff and adult volunteers all consistently gave examples that emphasize the "citizenship" benefits of Y-AP. They described Y-AP as an opportunity to extend participation to a marginalized voice in the community while at the same time fostering the civic competence of "future leaders." In other counties, where the group was focused on making decisions around youth-specific issues, stakeholders told similar stories about how Y-AP resulted in more effective and engaging youth programming. These narratives, it appears, serve as a point of reference, a rallying point, through which stakeholders can express their hopes and aspirations, articulate standards of quality, and share successes. Within this context, the contributions of youth are most often communicated through collective stories.

Staff noted that during the early stage of a Y-AP initiative, it is they who create and communicate the collective stories. These stories convey the message that "[we] can be successful at this." Over time, collective stories are seen as integral to sustainability of the effort, and serve to reinforce infrastructure building. For those staff who have reached this sustainability stage, the existence of collective stories indicates that Y-AP is being integrated into community structures and identity. Y-AP is no longer the "flavor of the month" or perceived as distinct from the overall mission of the decision making group. One staff person who has worked over time to integrate youth into a 4-HYD board, concludes:

> Initially, back when we started this process in 1991, there were board members who said 'I don't think this is going to work. Why do we have young people here? We know what they need.' I think it has been 5 to 8 years since I heard a comment like that from a board member. It has truly been a shift from 'Could we have youth here?' to 'We want to have youth here!' The adults value their opinion, they want to know what their needs are – they want youth input. My goal is to make sure that it [Y-AP] becomes so much a part of how the board operates, part of its foundation, that when I leave it will continue because youth and adults see it as their role.

Conclusions

The logic for engaging youth and adults as partners in democratic decision-making processes has long been articulated. The scope of dissemination and implementation, however, has never been commensurate the scope of the innovative idea (Dewey 1938; Lakes 1996; National Commission on Resources for Youth 1974; Zeldin et al. 2003). As part of a policy shift toward positive youth development as a dominant approach to youth programming, advocates, foundations and scholars are again championing principles and processes that engage youth in shared decision making and action with adults (Forum for Youth Investment 2001; Sherman 2002; Sherrod et al. 2002). 4-HYD, a national public system, has responded to the challenge of integrating Y-AP into organizational and community decision making. Our analysis of this system aimed to understand the nature of this challenge, with an emphasis on describing how county staff work to ensure effective dissemination and implementation of the practice.

Responding to the Contextual Challenges of Social Innovation

Because public systems tend to mirror the more traditional values of a given society, it is often said that innovative change in public systems is an oxymoron. From this perspective, the efforts of 4-HYD are admirable: The United States isolates youth from forums of decision making and 4-HYD is seeking to change the status quo. 4-HYD is not seeking to disseminate and implement a new curriculum or model program. Instead, they are seeking to modify the dominant principles and processes through which decisions about youth policy and community programs are made. They are seeking to integrate an innovation into established systems.

Our analysis indicates that the contextual challenges are significant. County staff must confront existing traditions within 4-HYD, some of which have existed for 150 years. While the traditional structures, programs, and values offer much value to the public system in terms of providing guidance and continuity to stakeholders, they become barriers when it comes to changing the processes through which decisions are made. Disseminating and implementing Y-AP, therefore, demands that county staff respect and respond to organizational traditions and to the community networks and local legislators who embody these traditions. At the same time, the promotion of Y-AP requires county staff to push stakeholders out of their individual and collective comfort zones. This is an intimidating balancing act, one with inherent risks.

Given this context of ambiguity and risk, it is impressive that some county staff garner the motivation to take on the challenges of dissemination and implementation. Staff intentionally broaden their job descriptions by taking on new roles and responsibilities. They address the concerns of the long-term volunteers, while concurrently, reaching out to new constituencies. To create new spaces and structures for Y-AP, county staff scan their environments to identify people, groups, and places that might be amendable to integrating Y-AP into their decision making. New relationships have to be formed. Finally, staff must become vocal cheerleaders and "behind the scenes" advocates for Y-AP, thus adding to their traditional roles as teachers, trainers, and technical assistance providers of new practices. All of this takes time, which is an increasingly scarce commodity among community workers. It is a significant challenge to county staff simply to allocate the time necessary for quality dissemination and implementation of the practice. Yet, by changing their priorities and working to secure additional funds, county staff are able to allocate time for Y-AP.

Managing Ideas to Disseminate and Implement Innovative Practice

Changing principles and processes within organized groups is an often chaotic endeavor. This may be especially true in large public systems. As Fixsen et al. (2005, p. 58) observe:

> …large human service organizations are characterized by multiple and often conflicting goals, unclear and uncertain technologies for realizing these goals, and fluid participation and inconsistent attentiveness of principal actors. It is in this field that efforts to import research findings and practice take place.

The dynamics of established systems, the reviewers conclude, can overwhelm individual efforts. How is it that county staff do not get overwhelmed? Or asked more affirmatively, what strategies do staff employ to disseminate and implement Y-AP into forums of organizational and community decision making? In decentralized systems, one cannot mandate or regulate change. Consequently, our analysis indicates that county staff primarily worked to create conditions where others—volunteers, community leaders, public officials, youth—had the opportunity to learn about Y-AP and to construct their own reasons for engaging in the dissemination and implementation of the practice. Toward this end, staff sought to communicate and manage ideas. Consistent with previous research (Faber 2002; Van de Ven 1986), we find that maintaining a central focus on the meaning of innovative ideas and principles can be an

influential strategy through which innovators—in this case, county staff—can bring together the agendas and actions of otherwise isolated stakeholders as collaborators for change.

Cutting across our sample were three management goals that guided the efforts of county staff when seeking to disseminate and implement Y-AP. Staff sought to maintain stakeholder attention on the purposes of expected outcomes of Y-AP; they helped stakeholders translate the somewhat abstract principles and processes of Y-AP into quality practice; and they aimed to build a sense of shared ownership for Y-AP among diverse stakeholders. County staff concurred that progress in achieving these management goals, in collaboration with their community stakeholders, was an effective strategy for integrating the idea and practice of Y-AP into public systems.

The analysis also revealed consistent patterns among management goals and leverage points for change. As represented in Fig. 3, for example, county staff maintained stakeholder attention, or "planted seeds," by garnering the support of champions and social networks who brought legitimacy and exposure to Y-AP. To gain this support, county staff focused on the leverage point of self-interest. Through formal presentations and informal conversation, staff connected the benefits of Y-AP to the priorities of these champions and networks. A different set of leverage points was activated when county staff sought to help stakeholders translate the vision of Y-AP into quality practice, or phrased differently, "to walk the talk." Through training, coaching, and on-site consultation, county staff sought to build the knowledge of stakeholders, and equally important, to provide them with positive, personal experiences with Y-AP. Praxis was used to reflect on these experiences, to establish consensus around best practices, and to engage in strategic planning. The third management goal, building shared ownership for Y-AP, was primarily associated with three additional leverage points. County staff recognized that in order to make Y-AP "how [we] do business," it was necessary, as ongoing activities, to create supportive policies, clarify roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, and ensure that positive stories and narratives about Y-AP were embedded within community discourse.

Implications for the Program Support System

The interactive systems framework (Wandersman et al. 2008) identifies three systems—research, support, and service delivery—that facilitate the dissemination and implementation of innovations. The authors assert that dissemination and implementation is enhanced when these three systems are interacting in quality ways. The present study supports this assertion. Our analysis of county staff, the intermediary for 4-HYD, clearly demonstrates the connections among the three systems. Staff themselves were explicit about the overlap. While they focus on the program support functions in their jurisdictions, all county staff emphasized that effectiveness also depended on their ability to actively engage within the research and service delivery systems. For example, county staff worked closely with state staff to bring research synthesis and promising models to their counties. Ultimately, however, it was the responsibility of county staff to translate and communicate this research-based material to the specific concerns of the local stakeholders. Similarly, county staff found it necessary to work directly within the service delivery system. Many would have preferred to limit their capacity-building efforts to traditional educational strategies, such as training and technical assistance. The nature of innovation, specifically one such as Y-AP that is outside societal structures and norms, however, required staff to directly model practices to stakeholders in the field, to provide on-site coaching, and to handle logistics. In brief, county staff were not only the link between and among the research, support, and delivery systems: They were critical players in all three arenas.

This study also sheds light on the complex role of program support in the dissemination and implementation of innovation. What it highlights, foremost, is that program support involves much more than being a short-term intermediary between the research and delivery systems. Rather, this study indicates that the dissemination and implementation of principle and process-based practice requires program support staff to be actively engaged over the long term. Further, program support is much more that the simple transfer of technical knowledge and strategies. Dissemination and implementation appears to be enhanced when program support staff have a deep familiarity of the communities and key stakeholders in which they work. Mirroring the findings of Schon (1983) and Dearing et al. (1994), we find that this familiarity allows program support staff to engage in meaning making, to bring together that which is known from extant scholarship with that which is known "in action" by the community stakeholders. Knowledge of local contexts provides program support staff with the necessary foundation from which to assist stakeholders as they engage in praxis, strategic planning, and reflective action.

The foundation for good results, in any realm of society, is an institutional framework that that encourages them. The sustained implementation of innovative practice, over the long term, ultimately requires institutional support in the form of policies, roles, and places (Rogers 1995; Wolf 1994). Findings from this study suggest that, from the perspective of those providing program support, the creation of a "human infrastructure" is as important as the creation of institutional frameworks, especially for a principle and process-based innovation. The data suggest that in recognition of this need

to balance relationships with structures, county staff devoted significant time to being a cheerleader, marketer, and promoter of the innovation. They understood that it was endorsement of the intangibles—the idea, vision, and long-term promise of Y-AP—that motivated stakeholders to implement the practice. The quickest way to flawed implementation, we observed, is when county staff attempted to bring others along through a sole reliance on top-down strategies. More successful were management styles that included a philosophy of connect and collaborate. Community networks, we find, extended the reach of 4-HYD beyond the traditional pool of volunteers, and moreover, can also contribute to the development of a new set of shared values. In three of the counties in this study, for example, staff attention to building a human infrastructure for Y-AP was beginning create a demand for Y-AP in settings not yet working with 4-HYD. In effect, county staff, in their role of providing program support, had begun to infuse new values, not only structures, of participatory decision making into their counties.

Implications for Further Research

Our primary conclusion is the principle and process-based method of Y-AP can be integrated into public systems when county staff have the ability to effectively manage ideas among diverse individuals and groups. They can maintain the attention of stakeholders on the promise of Y-AP, help stakeholders translate the idea of Y-AP into quality practice, and build a sense of shared ownership for the principles and practices of Y-AP. As stakeholders rally around the new idea and practice, a human infrastructure arises, one which can provide a foundation for sustainability over the long term. It is important to stress, however, that this inquiry focuses one public system. While validation of the findings was gained through feedback from staff in other settings, the extent to which the present pattern of findings would transfer to other programs and systems is unknown. Additional research is warranted. Similarly, this inquiry focuses one type of Y-AP, specifically governance and policy making. Future research could explore the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP in other decision making forums, such as organizing and advocacy, planning and evaluation, and training and outreach.

In analyzing the lived experience of county staff—those who are responsible for managing the program support system on a day-to-day basis—we find that effectiveness in managing ideas for effective dissemination an implementation stems from a range of attributes. Innovators within a public system require technical, communication, and teaching skills. They need the ability to create contexts for collaborative deliberation and reflection. But, most importantly perhaps, this study indicates that they need to

be risk takers who are comfortable within ambiguous situations, with the ability to "read" and respond to their stakeholders. Our findings suggest that these attributes allow county staff to do the work of innovation: to be a cheerleader for innovation, to push stakeholders out of their comfort zones, to help groups reach consensus around difficult ideas, and to motivate others to adapt their own agendas. It is unknown, however, to what extent these findings transfer to other system intermediaries. Additional research focusing on key staff within program support systems is certainly warranted. As scholars better understand the attributes and strategies of these staff, it will become possible to more effectively inform the dissemination and implementation of future innovations.

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