A COMPARISON OF YOUTH-DRIVEN AND ADULT-DRIVEN YOUTH PROGRAMS: BALANCING INPUTS FROM YOUTH AND ADULTS

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This article examines the unfolding of experiences in youth programs that differed in the degree of youth and adult influence over program activities. In-depth qualitative data were obtained over a three- to four-month cycle of activities in two "youth-driven" and two "adult-driven" programs for high-school–aged youth. All had been identified as high quality, and in all of the programs, the adults were sensitive and respectful to the youth. Rather than finding that one approach was categorically better than the other, our analyses suggested that each provided distinct developmental experiences, and that each presented somewhat different day-to-day challenges to the adults. In the youth-driven programs, the youth experienced a high degree of ownership and empowerment, and they reported development of leadership and planning skills. In the adult-driven programs, the adults crafted student-centered learning experiences that facilitated youth's development of specific talents. Across both approaches, youth also gained self-confidence and benefited from the adults' experience in other ways. The article highlights balancing techniques that adults in both programs used for keeping youth's work in the program on track while keeping youth invested. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Youth development programs differ along a continuum in how much input, daily decision-making, and authority is vested in the adult advisors versus the youth.[1] At one extreme are programs in which adults set the direction and run daily program activities, with little input from youth. At the other extreme are programs where adults play little role in structuring youth's activities, as happens in some teen drop-in centers. Research has suggested that neither of these extremes provides an effective model for the objective of facilitating youth development (Murray & Murphy, 2001; Stattin, Kerr, Mahoney, Persson, & Magnusson, in press).

Toward the middle region of this continuum, however, are approaches where, to the one side, adults exercise greater control over daily activities but obtain youth input, and to the other side, where youth exercise greater control but adults play supportive roles as mentors and facilitators. For lack of better terms, we will call these two "adult-driven" and "youth-driven" approaches, but readers are urged to remember that we are not referring to the extremes of this continuum (also that these labels are not precise; a program may vary in the balance of youth and adult input over different aspects of program activities, from setting directions to creating rules to running program sessions). Both of these middle approaches involve "youth participation" (Lansdown, 2001); both can have high-quality youth–adult relationships (Lewis-Charp, Yu, Sengouvanh, & Lacoe, 2003), and both can be youth sensitive and "youth centered" on most of the criteria laid out by McLaughlin (2000). However, they represent different frames for youth–adult interactions. We can expect these approaches to involve different day-to-day dynamics and to foster different developmental experiences for young people.

Whereas strong ideological arguments often are made for one model to the exclusion of the other, comparative research on what actually transpires in programs using these two approaches has been missing. This article aims to get beyond abstract postulates and ask how each model plays out in the daily life of youth programs. We examine the unfolding of youth–adult interactions and youth experiences over a three- to four-month period in four highly regarded programs, two representing the youth-driven approach and two the adult-driven approach. We ask, "What developmental experiences do youth have? What limits or risks are associated with each model? What strategies do the adults in the two approaches use to bring out the developmental potentials of that approach?" This is an exploratory study that is aimed not at providing final answers, but at generating hypotheses for more rigorous research, as well as raising issues and providing examples for practitioners to consider.

STRENGTHS AND POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS
OF THE TWO APPROACHES

The rationale for the adult-driven approach is that adults "know best," that adults' greater knowledge and experience position them to guide program activities. A primary objective of programs using this approach is often to teach specialized skills, and thus, it is particularly common in sports and performance arts, where there are specific technical skills that youth desire to learn. The foundation and guidelines for adults' exercise of authority in this approach have deep roots, not only in Western culture, but also in other worldwide educational traditions (Serpell & Hatano, 1997).

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[1]Others have described a similar continuum or spectrum in youth–adult relationships in the context of youth civic engagement (Hart, 1997; Lansdown, 2001).

Current literature advocating the adult-driven approach describes it in similar terms to authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1978) and student-centered teaching (Chall, 2000), emphasizing the importance of adult leadership that is sensitive and responsive to youth. Adults are encouraged to create a framework of rules, structures, and roles that gives youth latitude for exercising initiative within this framework (Opelt, 1991; Roberts & Treasure, 1992). Sports research documents that when coaches are trained to use youth-sensitive leadership techniques, young people's development of athletic skills improves (Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995) and they show decreased performance anxiety, increased motivation, and more positive feelings toward peers, relative to non-treatment controls (Smith & Smoll, 1990, 1997).

Authors from diverse points of view have suggested possible limits and liabilities to the adult-driven approach. From an educational perspective, Freire (1970) warned that when teachers are positioned as authorities, students' ownership, creativity, and authentic learning is undermined. Developmental psychologists have theorized that the asymmetry in knowledge and power between children and adults inhibits youth's development within youth–adult interactions because they defer to adults' authority (Piaget, 1965; Youniss, 1980). Transposed to youth programs, these arguments suggest that young people experiencing an adult-driven approach may be more likely to become disengaged.

The developmental rationale for the youth-driven model is that young people become active participants and learners when they hold the reins. The goal of this approach—more common in community-based youth programs—is often empowerment and promoting youth development of leadership. In youth-driven programs, youth have more experiences with decision-making (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003), which can be expected to facilitate development of leadership skills. This approach often is used in programs where a primary goal is not just youth development, but community change (Ginwright & James, 2002; Sullivan, 2000). The theories of some developmental psychologists have suggested that young people might be most likely to learn with no adults present (e.g., Piaget, 1965). In organizational settings, however, adults need to retain bottom-line responsibility over safety and legal liability. Theories of empowerment also recognize a role that professionals can play as partners in facilitating growth and change (Freire, 1970; Rappaport, 1981). Thus, within youth programs, the youth-driven approach often takes the form of a partnership in which youth and adults may be contributing somewhat different things to the collaboration (Camino, 2000; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002). In the metaphor of Heath and Smyth (1999), "Adults might feed the horse and provide the stall, saddle, and other gear, but young people make decisions as to course, pace, riding companions, and manner of motivating the animal."

The youth-driven model also has potential limits and liabilities to consider. A frequent concern of adults is that youth do not have sufficient leadership and organizational experience to keep program activities on track and functioning effectively (Zeldin, 2004). Camino and Zeldin's research on youth–adult partnerships on community boards found that misunderstanding and conflict between youth and adults occurred readily, for example, when adults had hidden assumptions or exerted covert control and when youth strayed from agreements and responsibilities (Camino, 2000; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Lorens, 2001). As with the adult-driven model, however, we should not judge this approach based on average or inept implementations of it. Camino (2000) found that youth–adult partnerships were successful only after both youth and adults developed skills to work with each other.

A basic point for us is that both approaches for youth–adult relationships are likely to involve real-life challenges. It is easy to espouse a given philosophy, but it is quite another thing to make it work within the complex realities of daily life. How do high-quality programs negotiate these realities? Can the liabilities associated with each model be avoided? Under what conditions might one approach or the other be preferable?

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT FOUR YOUTH PROGRAMS

This research employs a case study method to explore these questions with four programs for high-school–aged youth. These programs were selected through a process similar to that used by McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994) for selecting high-quality programs. We first asked local youth-development professionals about programs they felt to be of high quality. We then visited those programs that had been named by at least two people to observe and talk with staff and participants. We selected those programs in which these visits confirmed that youth were enthusiastic and the program was youth-centered on most of McLaughlin's (2000) dimensions. In all cases, we focused on a single activity or cycle of activities within the program that extended over a three- to four-month period, and we focused on youth–adult interactions *within* daily program activities (not at the higher level of organizational governance). Of course, four programs is a very limited sample size, and we emphasize that these four cannot begin to represent the wide variations occurring among programs employing the two approaches. (In fact, the activities we studied within each program were not always representative of how other activities were run within the larger program or organization.) Our strategy here trades breadth for depth: We use in-depth investigation of what happened in these few programs to begin to examine the real-life dynamics of the two approaches and raise issues for further inquiry.

To get this in-depth picture, we obtained data at repeated points in time from multiple perspectives. In each program, we conducted biweekly qualitative interviews with a sample of 10 to 13 youth and one to two adult advisors, and we carried out participant observations on a similar schedule (see Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Larson, Jarrett et al., 2004). Across the four programs, we conducted a total of 279 youth interviews, 50 adult interviews, and 38 program observations. All interviews and observer notes were transcribed. These data were coded and analyzed using grounded theory procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Separate coding teams examined material related to different domains of development and to the actions of the adults in order to understand the processes occurring in each program. Our designation of the programs as youth-driven and adult-driven emerged from the data, and the contrasts can be seen in the following descriptions.

Youth-Driven Programs

Planning a Day Camp for 4th Graders. "A big part to the success is that it's theirs, they feel the ownership," explained Mr. Baker,[2] one of the two agriculture education teachers who advise the Clarkston FFA, a chapter of the National FFA Organization, located

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[2]All names of people and local programs have been changed to maintain anonymity.

in a nearly all-white rural high school. The mission of the national FFA is to develop young people's potential "for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education," and the advisors supported this priority on leadership development by encouraging a youth-driven approach. The 77 FFA members engaged in a variety of contests, service projects, and other activities over the year, in which the youth became accustomed to taking leadership. Our study focused on the small group of youth who planned a $2\frac{1}{2}$-day summer day camp for 4th-grade children. The youth's goal for this day camp was to teach the children about agriculture and to interest them in joining FFA when they reached high school.

The decision to create the day camp was made by the youth and they took responsibility for developing it. For the first part of this work, the adult advisors stepped back as the youth enthusiastically generated ideas and made plans for the camp. The youth came up with ideas for games, meals, field trips, and learning activities built around a separate theme for each day (chickens, plants, dogs). As one youth put it, "Rarely, rarely, rarely do the advisors just say, 'Here's how it's gonna go.'" Yet, as the weeks progressed, the youth's work stalled because they lacked the experience and planning skills for organizing a large event like this, and because youth's differing visions for the day camp came into conflict (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, in press). Attendance at meetings became inconsistent, responsibilities were neglected, and frustration ensued.

The group spun its wheels for about a month, then the adult advisors stepped up their level of input. A teen explained, "We kind of ran around like chickens with our heads cut off for a while, but they got us back in line." However, the advisors stepped in without taking over. The process remained youth-driven. The advisors offered constructive structures and strategies that allowed the youth to get themselves back on track. For example, they provided advice on constructing lesson plans and suggested deadlines for completing them. At a meeting with only three youth in attendance, Mr. Baker suggested that each take leadership for one of the committees organizing each day of the camp, and that they be responsible for contacting their other committee members.

The youth appreciated this adult input because it helped them resolve internal group tensions, regain control, and maintain their sense of ownership. As one reported, "The nice thing about Mr. Baker and Mr. Jensen is they don't do everything for us. They're willing to help us out, but they're not taking over every single task." In the end, partly because of the adults' judicious intervention to get them back on track, the youth ran a day camp that they (and we) felt was very successful. Furthermore, in the interviews we carried out over this sequence, we observed a process in which the youth's week-to-week experiences in planning the camp facilitated their development of leadership and strategic skills for working toward long-term goals. Because the camp was youth-driven—because they had responsibility for struggling with the challenges of the planning process—the youth gained fundamental insights on how to successfully organize their work, both individually and as a team (see Larson, Hansen, & Walker, in press).

Working for Social Justice. "You hear people say youth are our future, and I'm like, no, they are leaders today." This statement by Jason Massad, the adult organizer for Youth Action, expressed his commitment to helping urban young people fight injustices. Like many youth-activism programs, Youth Action's mission includes both youth development and achieving social change (Lahoud, 2003; Sullivan, 2000). The program is located in a diverse working-class immigrant neighborhood, and its participants are

Latino, African American, and biracial teens. Most join the program because it fulfills their 40-hour high-school service requirement, but many stay on well beyond the 40 hours because they become invested in fighting injustices that they have experienced in their lives (Pearce, 2004). Youth identify and research problems that directly impact their lives—most often in the city schools. Then they organize action campaigns to address them. The youth's prior success in getting their voices heard helps sustains their motivation. During the four months of our study, a core group of 20 to 25 youth organized several events, including rallies, meetings with city school-board members, and a Youth Summit where 300 youth from across the city took part in all-day, youth-led workshops.

Youth set the direction for activities at Youth Action, and then worked in partnership with Jason and other young adults to carry them out. The youth told us repeatedly that, "We decide what we're going to work on"—and in the words of one youth—because "these issues are affecting us; it's not affecting them [the adults] directly." For example, the youth came up with the idea of having the Youth Summit, identified the issues they wanted to address, and designed and executed the workshops. Yet the youth recognized that they benefited from adult support. As one said, "I probably wouldn't apply myself or been as dedicated unless I had someone with me, you know, helping me along the way." Jason provided training workshops for the youth during the summer and guided the youth's learning during the school year. He worked alongside them on their campaigns in ways that allowed the youth to experience ownership and inject their own style and creativity into the work (Larson & Hansen, in press).

As the youth's preparations for the Youth Summit progressed, Jason was involved in the work, and he never let it go to the stage of deadlock and declining morale that occurred for the FFA youth. He called members on the phone to get them to the meetings, provided rides, did computer analyses of survey data the youth had collected, and kept a calendar for the group's work. When a student drafted a letter inviting the city's superintendent of schools to the Summit, Jason provided advice on rewording the letter to maximize its effectiveness. As the date of the Summit approached, Jason was involved in all aspects of the preparation process and helped keep the youth on task. In his words,

> It's my job as the responsible adult to step back and say, "Okay, maybe we need to get serious. Three weeks before the Summit it was okay to goof around and blow off meetings, but now it's the night before, so we need to spend a solid hour being focused."

With this preparation, the Youth Summit itself was run almost entirely by the youth. Jason and other adults provided behind-the-scenes support. For example, when a group of college students entered the campus cafeteria where the Summit was being held, the adult hastily arranged to keep it from being disrupted. However, the youth ran all the sessions at the Summit, including a workshop on school funding and a panel with a state senator and a representative from the superintendent's office.

What impressed us was that, in interviews conducted the next week, the students were very articulate about what they felt had gone right and wrong, and what they would do differently the next time (e.g., shorten sessions, include certain people on a panel). It was apparent that they had internalized an advanced level of strategic critical

thinking about how to plan and carry out a successful event like this. In their work in planning the Youth Summit and other events, we observed their development of a sophisticated set of strategic skills, including skills for using information strategically and developing complex plans that took contingencies into account (Larson & Hansen, in press).

In sum, the youth's central role in taking responsibility for and running the Youth Summit—with support from Jason and other adults—allowed the youth to develop their leadership and strategic skills. A key for us was that this adult support was provided in a way that helped the youth's work stay on track, but did not threaten youth ownership of the process. As one youth put it, "He's just there to like supply us with whatever we need. He'll be like a reference and we'll go to him for that, or like for rides. So like, he's just there to back us up." This statement, on the one hand, seems almost to dismiss Jason to the status of "support staff," and belies what we (and many youth) recognized to be his critical role in the youth's success. On the other hand, the fact that youth saw themselves rather than Jason as responsible for the Summit appeared to be a key in why they learned so much from the process. They were deeply invested.

Adult-Driven Programs

A High School Theater Production. "I can see things in people they can't see in themselves," said Ann, the Director of *Les Miserables* at Sycamore Valley High School. She believes that all youth have gifts, often unrecognized, that she can help them discover and bring to life. Ann is a piano teacher in town, and every spring she is hired to direct the school's locally renowned musical production. This year it enlisted 110 enthusiastic students as actors and crew—about one seventh of the students in this middle-class, white, small city high school. Half a dozen experienced adults worked with her, some in paid roles, assisting with set construction, costumes, choreography, and music. The head of the school's theater program served as Producer, handling the business end of the production, managing the crew, and taking on numerous other tasks.

It was understood by all youth and adults that Ann, as Director, was in charge. Although the school's theater program included several student-directed plays each year, the musical was adult-driven because of the large number of students involved, the short three-month production schedule, and the adults' goal of teaching youth theater skills. The key adults chose the musical and held several planning meetings weeks before any student was involved. At the first meeting with students, before auditions, Ann presented her vision for their production and passed out a contract with rules that students and parents had to sign for a student to participate. After the adults selected the cast, they set up a rehearsal schedule and Ann ran the rehearsals from the piano just below center stage. The language she used on set was often a language of authority: "You're going to . . ." and "Where is my Javert?" In the middle of a scene, she would sometimes shout "freeze," which stopped the action and allowed her to instruct actors on something she wanted them to do differently. The Director and Producer also controlled the thespian points students received, which determined students' admission into the school's honorary thespian society; they enforced rules, including dropping one member from the cast whose grades fell below the state high school scholastic requirements.

However, although the adults held control, they most often used it in ways that were responsive and supported students' active learning. The pre-audition meeting included a practice session in which Ann did everything possible to prepare students and ease fears, including telling a self-deprecating story about her own girlish anxiety at her first high school audition. Once the play had been cast, she provided positive encouragement for students to develop their individual roles. In early rehearsals, for example, she often had students improvise a scene, then let the scene's shape develop from the actors' and her critiques of what worked well. The observers also were struck by Ann's ability to maintain a friendly, respectful, and encouraging attitude at all times. She clapped enthusiastically when things went well and never lost her smile and humor, even when she had to repeatedly ask off-stage students to be quiet. The students praised the adults' almost infinite patience, and in the words of one youth, "There are times when I won't get a dance step and I'll have to go over it, over and over again. But they're understanding." Another student commented that the rehearsals were much less stressful and more enjoyable than at her previous high school, where the director emphasized that "These people are paying for tickets, we have to make sure to give them the best production they expect." In contrast, she said that at Sycamore the adults' attitude is, "This is a great experience. Let's give everyone an opportunity."

The adults' control allowed them to use their expertise in ways that created a rich and intentional learning environment for all students. They implemented the philosophy that every youth mattered; in Ann's words, "Whether you punch tickets or have a lead role, I consider what you do just as important." They included a student with special needs in the cast and were vigilant that a gay youth was not treated differently by other students. They tried to see that every youth was learning and being challenged at her or his level of ability. Ann often stayed late to work with individual students. To facilitate learning, the adults used good student-centered teaching methods. Ann employed theater games to help youth work on specific issues, such as practicing French accents. She used the domestic abuse portrayed in the play as an opportunity for the cast to discuss the reality of domestic violence in contemporary families. Given this environment, it is not surprising that the students reported learning numerous skills of theater and stagecraft, such as "how to yell," how to ad-lib, and sewing techniques, as well as fundamental communication skills. They also reported developing greater confidence in themselves and growth in other domains of social and emotional development.

The adults' effectiveness in fostering students' development was illustrated in the first rehearsal session for the song "One Day More." Ann gathered the actors for this song around the piano and asked them to sing it through. However, the first bars they sang were off key and the students stopped, groaned, and asked to work on only one part at a time. Ann, however, just laughed and said, "We're going to keep plugging through it." After a few more bars, a student said, "We can't plug this." However, another countered that they had successfully plugged through a song like this with Ann before. Once they reached the end, Ann had them work on individual parts. She also discussed with them the contrasting emotional states of Javert and Valjean, and the irony in the lyrics: "This is a nuts song. It is so hard... Now, Cosette, you have 3 notes up here in the middle of nowhere [plays notes]. It's a cry of help really." Ann provided repeated encouragement as they worked, "Okay, everyone look at me [and say], 'I've got hope.'" Indeed, they were starting to sound better, and the students and Ann continued to practice and discuss what they did right and what could be improved.

After only 15 minutes, the students asked to sing it through one more time, and the observer reported "an inspired coordination of voices, with each singer coming in on cue with their 'one day more' in a beautiful cascade of distinct voices and characters." The students were elated at what they had accomplished and all clapped at the end. "That's amazing," several had said. In this short amount of time, Ann had demonstrated remarkable success in bringing out the "gifts" of these youth.

Career Training in the Arts. "Creating programs that are educational but really exciting and not boring for kids" is part of the goal that Rebecca, the energetic lead organizer, held for programs she developed and led at Art-First. The organization's mission is to provide urban "underserved youth" with exciting instructive opportunities to develop and improve their skills in a variety of art mediums, from painting to photography. It has the resources to employ professional artists to serve as teachers and to equip classes with high-quality materials. Although the organization has a youth board that provided input on courses, Rebecca set up programs and she and other adults led them. We studied youth participating in Art-First's two-part summer career-training program. The first six-week session was a career-development class in which youth participated in hands-on training activities. In the second six-week session, 16 youth were placed in internships and worked on a group project that involved painting a set of murals that were mounted on the local train platform. The youth we followed were Hispanic, European-American, Asian, and biracial.

Rebecca designed the career-training program to provide experiential learning opportunities for the youth. She exerted leadership over the program because she wanted to insure that all youth learned. She went to great lengths, including drawing on the organization's numerous contacts in the arts community, to see that students had professional arts experiences. Rules and procedures in the program were shaped to match those encountered in real-world work settings, including a strict policy on attendance. During the first six-week session, Rebecca had the students develop resumes and art portfolios, then do mock interviews with professionals in the art world. She arranged for the students to do the murals in the second six-week session so that they would experience both the constraints and rewards of doing public art.

The youth reported gaining valuable knowledge and skills from these experiences. These included learning new art techniques from the mural project, such as how to plan a large painting, paint layers, and add texture. From the internships, they reported the experience of having professional art worlds opened up to them; they relished gaining inside knowledge on how these settings functioned and learned "how to interact in a professional setting." Occasionally, the youth reacted adversely to the constraints associated with these experiences. For the murals, one student said, "I had all these ideas about what I was going to do, and then they had all these rules." (Each student was required to do a realistic portrait of her- or himself working in a different art form.) However, the students adjusted to these constraints and reported learning from them. As one stated, "There will always be rules you have to follow, and you're just going to have to come up with ways to approach it differently so you enjoy it."

Therefore, although the program was adult-driven, the adults kept the developmental needs of the youth in focus. Shortly after the murals were mounted on the train platform, they were severely vandalized. They were slashed with a sharp object and the eyes in some of the self-portraits were gouged out. This was traumatic for both the youth and adults, but Rebecca had the idea of organizing a class on art restoration in which they would repair the paintings. She called all the youth to get their opinions;

most were interested, so she developed a curriculum that included visits to art-restoration sites in the city and a film about the restoration of Michelangelo's frescos in the Sistine Chapel, as well as restoring the murals. When we interviewed students on the last day of this class, they reported having gained a lot by repairing their paintings, not only valuable skills for restoring damaged art, but a greater capacity for personal resiliency. "No matter where you get in life, you get to those points where life is horrible," said one youth. However, he reported learning from this experience that, "You always get past it. There's always ways to fix anything that goes wrong, regardless of what it is" (Walker & Larson, 2004).

ANALYSES

All four of these programs appeared to us to be excellent. They are programs from which much can be learned. Of course, each was unique, existing within a distinct organizational setting and community ecology. The features we observed in these programs cannot be readily abstracted out of context and cut and pasted into a program with a different population of youth, different organizational goals, etc. Nonetheless, our analyses of the data led us to beginning hypotheses about the ongoing dynamics of the youth-driven and adult-driven approaches. First, the analyses suggested that there were different trade-offs associated with each approach: distinct developmental benefits they appeared to provide youth, and distinct risks of problems that can emerge in the unfolding of the program. Second, the analyses suggested techniques used by the adults in each framework that maximized its benefits and reduced its liabilities.

Trade-Offs Associated With Each Approach

Youth-Driven. Consistent with the literature discussed at the outset of this article, the benefits we observed in the youth-driven approach appeared to derive from the teens' experience of ownership over the direction of program activities. Participants in the FFA program and Youth Action saw the activities they planned as their own and they were highly invested in the outcome of their work. Their daily experiences in the two programs were those of taking on the multifaceted challenges of planning the day camp and organizing the Youth Summit. Because of these experiences, they reported developing leadership and strategic skills for working toward long-term goals. In other articles, we have documented more fully how youth in these programs learned to plan, work as a team, and communicate information effectively. Their experiences also led them to feel more empowered—more competent and motivated to strive toward distant goals. Importantly, a number of youth reported that these new competencies carried over to other parts of their lives (Larson & Hansen, in press; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, in press; Pearce, 2003).

   Youth's experience of empowerment in these programs also appeared to propel their growth in wider development areas. They became active agents of their own development. As a result of working together, students in the FFA reported developing greater empathy with youth from other peer crowds (Watkins, 2003), and members of Youth Action reported developing understanding of and comfort with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth and youth from other ethnic groups (Larson, Jarrett, et al., 2004). Many reported developing a greater commitment to school and college as a direct result of their experiences in these programs.

While the benefits of the youth-driven approach derived from youth's experience of control, the principal liability we saw lay in conditions where this control broke down and took things in directions that youth and adults viewed as off track. This was most evident in the preparations for the FFA Day Camp, where the youth's work was stalled because of their inexperience with this large a project. Of course, youth learn from mistakes, but the FFA youth's prolonged wheel spinning created declines in motivation and ownership, which were reversed only when the adult advisors began to take a more active role. Jason, the Youth Action adult organizer, played a more engaged role as a partner throughout, being willing to fill in when the youth were unable or failed to carry out a critical step. Thus, we did not see the same dip in youth's morale in that program. However, we also saw that Jason was stretched thin, making phone calls to youth who did not show up, doing computer analyses, and filling in on numerous occasions when youth could not or did not do something.

Adult-Driven. The special benefits of the two adult-driven programs derived from the adults' ability to craft specially designed learning experiences and pass on their knowledge. In both programs, the adults often created student-centered experiential learning activities where youth learned through doing. In *Les Miserables*, students were coached and given exercises that developed technical theater skills—from developing a character to creating a set and costumes. At Art-First, the adults provided high-quality teaching of painting techniques, and the adults shared knowledge and social capital that opened viable careers in the art world to them (Jarrett et al., 2005). As one student said, "It's about gaining experience, and they [the adults] have the experience."

In addition to artistic knowledge, youth in the adult-driven programs described development in other broader domains, not unlike those reported in the youth-driven programs. Youth in *Les Miserables* reported developing self-confidence ("I have become not so uptight around strangers"), interpersonal skills ("how to tolerate and get along with other people"), and a sense of responsibility (Wood, Larson, & Tyler, 2004). A girl who plans to be a teacher reported that Ann was providing an important model to her about patience and being willing to stop and attend to students' needs. At Art-First, youth reported gaining a range of personal and interpersonal knowledge from the adults, including the lesson about resiliency that came with restoring the murals. One youth said, "They don't just teach you about art, they teach you about life." Adults in these two programs (indeed, in all four programs) served as role models of adults to emulate and knowledgeable mentors who shared their experiences.

The clearest liability we saw in the adult-driven approach was the threat of adults' control undermining youth's ownership. The Producer at *Les Miserables* reported intermittent concerns about raising students' ownership, for example, when students chatted when they were supposed to be practicing lines or working on the set. At Art-First, we saw some disassociation from the murals when students learned of the constraints and rules, although all then reported adapting to these constraints. On most occasions, however, students reported being invested in the goal of the program (producing a good musical and good murals), and particularly their piece of the work. We think the high engagement of youth in the adult-driven programs was due partly to the skills of the adults, which we will describe in a moment.

Both types of programs, then, steered a course between youth ownership and keeping program activities on track. However, they appeared to do so at different balance points. The youth-driven programs (particularly Youth Action) appeared to benefit from strong youth ownership over the direction of program activities, which

led to youth's taking greater initiative and learning leadership skills. However, youth's inexperience could create a greater risk of program activities getting off track or stalling. The adult-driven approach allowed adults to create a track for participation and learning, but risked diminished youth ownership, which could undermine engagement in the crafted learning experiences. The promising practices that stood out for us in each approach were those the adults used that addressed the liabilities of that approach.

Balancing Techniques Employed by the Adults

The adult advisors in these four programs did many similar things. They were sensitive to the youth, and all cultivated a concept of the program as a caring "family." All challenged the youth, but also made sure that work was broken up with fun. All were intentional in trying to create the many features of positive youth programs that are identified in the literature (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002). However, as we have just said, the strategies that caught our attention were the things they did to counteract or counterbalance the liabilities of each approach.

Youth-Driven. In the youth-driven programs, these were techniques to help keep program activities on track while keeping ownership for these activities in the hands of the youth (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, in press; Larson, Jarrett, et al., 2004). The FFA advisors were adept at *posing guiding questions* that raised practical issues, but kept responsibility for addressing the question with the youth. At early stages, they periodically interjected clarifying and filtering questions that challenged youth to think through how feasible an idea was or what steps would be necessary to carry it through. At later stages, they posed what they called "debugging questions," aimed at helping the youth think about any problems that might occur.

Another technique for helping youth stay on track was *providing intermediate structures*, when needed. These structures did not encompass the entire project, but provided a helpful scaffolding that broke down a task to a manageable level. This technique was used when youth appeared to be stuck or might potentially be stuck. At Youth Action, Jason often created the agenda for youth-driven meetings to help ensure that important issues were addressed. A related technique was *monitoring to keep youth on track*, which involved checking up on youth and providing direction or filling in as they felt necessary.

An important finding was that youth internalized these techniques. At the FFA, one student reported understanding the advisors' questioning technique and we saw others beginning to use it. We suspect this happened at Youth Action as well. The youth were developing strategies to better keep *themselves* on track [see Larson, Hansen, and Walker (in press) and Larson, Jarrett, et al. (in press) for greater elaboration of these techniques].

Adult-Driven. The principal strength of the adult-driven approach was the latitude it gave the adults to craft learning experiences, and we have already documented some of the numerous ways in which these leaders created effective student-centered learning experiences. Given that a prime liability of the adult-driven approach is loss of youth ownership, the techniques that we feel are most important to highlight were those used that stayed student-centered and kept youth ownership and engagement high.

First, adults in the two adult-driven programs put great emphasis on *listening to and obtaining feedback from youth.* "You do a lot of listening," Ann said, "and if you are not perceptive, you will lose half your kids." Rebecca reported that she always obtains both oral and written evaluations from youth for every Art-First program: "They walk away knowing that their ideas count. I really try to draw out over and over again their ideas, what they're interested in." A frequent risk when adults hold control is that they become out of touch and project their own beliefs about what youth need onto the program (Dworkin & Larson, 2004; Roach et al., 1999). What the adults view as "on track" can easily diverge from the youth's view. Listening is a critical check and balance to keep this from happening.

A second technique, which we witnessed most often at *Les Miserables*, involved *acts of humility.* Ann said,

> The number one thing to be an effective leader is for me to be a servant, being willing to get down and get dirty, to get in there and do the sweat, do the work, do the listening, be tired when other people are tired, "can I do this for you?" when you're exhausted yourself. I think that makes a great leader because then I have validity. They know that I'm genuine, that I'm not just trying to get something out of them.

In the words of a student, Ann is "the kind of person who will stand on stage and jump up and down and scream and yell and just make a fool out of herself." Freire (1970) argued that humility is essential to effective teaching, and Ann's self-deprecation, laughter, and occasional crying with students helped students see her as a fellow human being and collaborator, even when she was exercising authority.

A third technique involved *cultivating a culture of fairness and opportunity for youth.* In a focus group study, we found that teens in youth programs are very sensitive about unfairness (Dworkin & Larson, 2004), and theater, with its unavoidable differentiations between lead and secondary roles, is a breeding ground for bruised egos and resentment. Yet, the *Les Miserables* leaders went out of their way to act fairly and, like good authoritative parents, to explain their decision-making processes so that students understood it. For example, although a school flu epidemic impaired many youth's ability to sing for the auditions, Ann explained that six adults (including the school music teachers who knew the students) were providing input on the casting, so that even those with laryngitis would have a fair opportunity to be cast. At Art-First, staff cultivated an ethos of respecting everyone's views and creating a safe space where all students could develop their artistic abilities.

These techniques permitted the youth in *Les Miserables* and Art-First to have a strong identification with the program: to feel ownership and sustain active engagement in the program's agenda. The adults in the adult-driven programs, then, used their authority on the youths' behalf. Although students may not have had the level of ownership evident in the youth-driven programs, the adults created learning experiences within which youth became active learners. A critic might label this "paternalism," and the negative connotations of this term are surely deserved in adult-driven programs when adults are condescending, disrespectful, and undermine the youth's sense of agency. However, in the case of these two programs, paternalism or, rather, "maternalism" (youth in both identified the adults as mother figures) was exercised with checks and balances that kept youth ownership high and the best interests of the youth at the center.

Again, we want to stress that there was much that leaders of the two types of programs did that was similar. The central commonality across programs was the adults' intentionality in how they related to the youth (see Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Bordon, in press). Whether the program was youth- or adult-driven, the adults had well-developed philosophies about what their goals were and how to work toward them. In all of the programs, there were week-to-week challenges, setbacks, and dilemmas, and the adults were attentive in anticipating and thinking about how to respond in ways that were sensitive to the youth. Indeed, a constant across programs was that the adults worked their tails off for the youth, playing multiple roles (teacher, friend, and sometimes parent) and trying to always keep themselves one step ahead. They were intentional not only in balancing youth ownership and keeping things on track, but in addressing numerous other objectives regarding the youth and the program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We suspect that the underlying questions of when and how adults should control or provide support for youth are ones that parents, teachers, and "elders" have struggled with across history and cultures. Our limited data cannot provide a definitive answer on what approach of youth–adult relationship should be used across situations. Indeed, we concluded that trying to judge one approach to be "better or worse" is the wrong objective. Different frameworks for youth–adult relationships may be suited for different situations. Adult control would be incompatible with Youth Action's mission of empowering youth to change their communities. Yet, experienced adult leadership appeared to be nearly essential for managing *Les Miserables*, with its cast and crew of 110 youth. Rather than picking a preferred approach, we think it important to understand the distinct dynamics associated with the two approaches and evaluate what approach, or meld, is suited to given objectives and contexts.

For an organization or practitioner thinking about what approach to use, a first question is, what are your goals for youth development. Data from this study suggest that good youth-driven programs can provide young people rich opportunities to experience leadership responsibility and develop strategic and teamwork skills. Given that adolescents have limited opportunities for these experiences in other parts of their lives (Larson, 2000), we think it important that all youth have abundant chances to participate in this type of program. Nonetheless, there are other competencies, such as developing artistic or other talents, that might be better learned in high-quality adult-led programs in which adults use their expertise to shape student-centered learning experiences.

The development of an approach for a given program also might be influenced by situational and human factors. At *Les Miserables* and Art-First, the long-term sustainability of the programs depended in part on the final products (the musical and the murals), impressing program stakeholders. Thus, a higher level of adult direction—to ensure high quality—may have been important. The orientation and temperament of the adults are another factor. Effective implementation of the youth-driven approach requires forbearance from adults and a willingness to let youth do things their own way. At the Clarkston FFA, Mr. Baker had a higher comfort level with this, so he was the primary advisor for the day camp, whereas Mr. Jensen often played a more primary role in activities framed to permit greater adult input.

Another vital set of factors to consider is who the youth are, what they are ready for, and what they want. Cultures differ in the frameworks they provide for adult authority (Serpell & Hatano, 1997), and thus youth from different groups may enter programs with much different working models for youth–adult relationships. Older youth are likely to be more developmentally ready for a youth-driven approach, and more likely to be wary of a program with high adult control. Although we have not focused on it here, we found the personalities and prior experiences of individual youth influenced how they responded in different situations, and the adult leaders often adjusted the types of supports they provided to these individual differences. In sum, imposing either an adult-driven or a youth-driven approach could be unsuccessful if it is not fitted to the youth's cultural framework, developmental levels, preferences, and other group and individual factors.

The two approaches, we stress, should not be seen as mutually exclusive choices. We have kept them distinct in order to highlight differences, but many programs (or activities within a program) may successfully combine elements of the two. Depending on circumstances, youth and adults may have different roles or may share different domains of decision making, for example, in who chooses program goals, who sets expectations and rules, and who runs program sessions. More in-depth research is needed to examine how different programs structure youth–adult interactions at these different domains and what dynamics and outcomes are associated with alternate structures. We also have observed that some organizations provide a gradual progression for youth to move from adult-driven to youth-driven activities as they develop the necessary skills. In addition, some youth-driven programs start with a period of training in which adults teach youth leadership skills to use as adults step back into a supportive role (e.g., Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005).

What is important in our view is that there be consistency, transparency, and intentionality in the approach that is being used. The shared understanding about how youth and adults collaborate within a program can be seen as a contract (Murray & Murphy, 2001). Lansdown (2001) stressed that the "ground rules" for youth and adult input need to be clear. Although there is some room for adjusting these ground rules, Camino's (2000) work showed that youth can feel confused, betrayed, and humiliated when adults suddenly change the arrangement. We suspect that creation of this contract requires more discussion and effort in new programs. In the established programs we studied, there were well-developed "cultures" that articulated and justified the roles of youth and adults. However, even in these high-quality programs, the adults constantly were engaged in nurturing the contract. The balancing techniques we identified were means to respond to week-to-week contingencies and bring out the potentialities of each approach.

Our goal for this article has been not to provide definitive answers, but to stimulate further questioning—by administrators designing programs, practitioners thinking about day-to-day program activities, and researchers who want to contribute to this practice. We have suggested some of the conditions under which different approaches might be preferred, but there is much more to be asked about when, where, and how these approaches should be implemented. We have identified a small set of techniques used by practitioners to balance ownership with keeping youth on track, but keen attention and further research are needed to ask when these should be used and what other techniques are effective to achieve a fuller range of objectives across diverse situations.

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