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ABSTRACT

This paper details the efforts of four organizations that have been able to negotiate their environments effectively, in the hopes that the analysis provides insights into how organizations are able to establish valuable learning environments for youth in nonschool hours. The negotiation, the process of dealing with various layers of environments and systems, that contributes to the effectiveness of these organizations and their capacity to work successfully with youth. The 4 organizations were selected from 32 organizations in the San Francisco Bay area involved in a study of youth organizations and the learning environments they promote. The four organizations are: (1) a multiservice community center that offers youth of all ages opportunities to participate in a diverse array of programs; (2) a program to help high school youth develop action projects; (3) a community center that draws on community resources and cultural surroundings to run programs in local schools and the neighborhood; and (4) a Boys and Girls Club in a distressed neighborhood. These organizations have been successful in negotiating in external contexts because they have used the neighborhoods as learning resources, learned to work with the schools, and developed collaborative atmospheres in low-income areas. The four organizations look and are quite different, but they have all made choices about supporting youth and creating strong learning environments. The examples in this paper suggest some ways other organizations can make better or more effective choices to support youth development and learning. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Negotiation: How Four Youth Organizations Create Learning Environments

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Until recently, the educational system in the United States did little to recognize how community institutions could contribute to the process of learning. For most of the country's history, "education" has been the territory of schools and the formal policy system. In the last decade, however, two developments in particular, among a wide range of social and economic changes, contributed to a shift in thinking. The first was scholarship on youth development, which has paid explicit attention to how youth organizations contribute to developmental competencies (e.g., Pittman and Wright 1991, Gambone and Arbreton 1997, McLaughlin 2000, National Research Council 2002). The second shift was the recognition by the formal policy system that many community institutions, including schools, play a role in supporting youth's development and that partnerships between schools and community institutions could facilitate learning. This has manifested itself in various federal, state, and local policies, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, California's After-School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program, and the Beacon schools initiative implemented in cities such as New York and San Francisco.

More than a decade of research shows that community-based youth organizations do in fact play a vital role in youth development and education, particularly for urban youth whose families and schools are not able to meet their needs (McLaughlin 2000; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman 1993/2001; National Research Council 2002; Pittman & Wright 1991; Pittman, Ferber, & Irby 2000). Successful and effective youth organizations, ranging from innovative national affiliates, such as certain units of the Boys and Girls Clubs, to resourceful local grassroots agencies, create learning environments that allow youth to explore their interests, take on new challenges, and feel confident about their own abilities with the support of strong and caring adults. These youth-centered programs challenge traditional notions of what learning can be and

who can teach and forge new conceptions of what youth need in order to learn and grow. Learning in these community-based environments builds on youth's interests, incorporates youth-centered practices, and focuses more on the soft skills youth can use in the "real world," like entrepreneurship, leadership, social skills, and community involvement. Rather than being a secondary partner to the school system, youth organizations play a primary educational role for scores of youth.

Policymakers along with youth workers are still left with the puzzle of why there are not more of these strong youth organizations. Organizations that engage youth in a serious and meaningful ways are few and far between, though we know that they can have a significant impact on youth's lives. One of the reasons there are not more of these organizations—and one of the reasons that has been often neglected in this area of research—is the difficulty of negotiating and managing the many environments that these organizations exist in, including federal, state, and local policy contexts, funding environments, environments with other educational institutions, neighborhood contexts, family environments and so on. This article details the efforts of four organizations that have been able to negotiate their environments effectively, in the hopes that this analysis provides some insight into how organizations are able to establish valuable learning environments for youth in the non-school hours. Examining these external environments is crucial because it is not possible to understand what happens inside the organizations without understanding what happens outside them and vice versa. Instead, it is essential to understand organizations' *negotiation* of the factors in their internal and external environments and the choices they make when presented with these challenges, rather than just the environments themselves. It is this negotiation—the process of dealing with various layers

of environments and systems—that contributes to the effectiveness of these organizations and their capacity to work successfully with youth.

To understand the complex world that youth organizations in the Bay Area negotiate, our analysis addresses the multiple levels of their environment. We understand these youth organizations to be embedded within overlapping systems of influence that inform their work with youth. Factors and conditions within these systems act to enable and constrain youth organizations as they orient themselves within their contexts. For some organizations a given factor may present a constraint, while for others, the same factor may enable a practice. These factors not only limit or support the organization's outcomes, but also inform the process by which those outcomes are achieved (Friedland & Alford 1991).

External factors of influence include a range of conditions "outside" an organization that can affect the choices it makes and how it works with youth day to day. These factors may include, for example, federal, state, and local policies that affect youth organizations and youth or they may include influences attached to the types of funding the organization receives. The organizational conditions, which we broadly define as the organizational mission, governance structure, fiscal capacity, size of the organization, and staffing capacity including issues of leadership, are conceptualized as intermediate structures between the external factors and the practices most closely associated with providing meaningful opportunities to youth. While considering these conditions, we try to understand how a particular organization and its staff negotiate the relationship between external factors of influence and the practices that support positive youth development.

This paper is based on two years of research in youth organizations in the Bay Area. We included thirty-two youth organizations—from small leadership academies, neighborhood after-school programs, and grassroots technology organizations to libraries, large boys and girls clubs, and community centers—in this study, based on their reputation for supporting positive youth development and learning in their programs. We interviewed the directors or staff of all of these organizations and did extensive observations in several. During the course of this work, we found many examples of youth organizations supporting their participants' learning and saw that one of the important reasons they were able to create exciting learning environments was their careful negotiation of the environments inside and outside their organizational boundaries. These vibrant learning environments are for us a proxy for the learning that is taking place in these organizations (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999; McLaughlin 2000).

Here we explore four examples of organizations engaging in this negotiation and what it takes for them to bridge their internal and external worlds for their youth. East Oakland Youth Development Center is a multi-service community center that offers youth of all ages opportunities to participate in a diverse array of programs including those focused on the arts, physical development and athletics, and more traditional educational enrichment activities. HOME empowers and supports high school youth to develop, plan, and put into action projects that will enhance the lives of youth and the overall community. Jamestown Community Center in San Francisco's Mission District draws on community resources and its cultural surroundings to run programs for elementary and middle school students in local schools and has other sports, tutoring, and leadership programs in the neighborhood. The Tenderloin Unit of Columbia Park Boys and Girls Club is a nationally affiliated Club located in low-income housing in one of the city's most distressed neighborhoods.

In-depth observations of these four organizations have provided insights into the kinds of institutional arrangements that encourage the development of learning environments for youth in non-school settings. In different ways, these organizations have forged new relationships with their communities, funders, schools, and other institutions, and they have been able to manage their environments in ways that enable their work with youth. While we know that youth organizations provide crucial support for urban youth, what we investigate here is *how* they are able to do this given the kinds of constraints and opportunities that exist in the urban landscape for youth. This is fundamentally an implementation problem, and we approach it as such.

We have seen how rare these strong learning environments are and how hard it is for organizations to maintain them. These learning environments do not just happen. They require many choices about focusing an organization around learning rather than "gym and swim" and subsequent choices about how best to support youth in the process of learning. To see how these four organizations have moved beyond the decision to support learning and into the implementation of learning environments, this paper first explores the concept of negotiation and its theoretical grounding and then analyzes the decisions and choices our case study organizations have made in their negotiation of surrounding environments.

Negotiation

Youth organizations' negotiation of internal and external environments is central to their ability to take advantage of opportunities and make challenges in their environments work for them. This negotiation is a dynamic process with choices and decisions being made by organizations continually—choices and decisions about factors in both internal and external environments. Youth development research suggests that there are conditions within

organizations that affect learning outcomes, while new policy initiatives suggest that factors, like funding and formal policy, outside organizations will have an impact on the learning that takes place in youth organizations. These recent developments that have led to increased awareness of the learning that happens in community institutions also suggest the need for a better understanding of how youth organizations mediate their environment in ways that benefit their work with youth.

Our analysis focuses on the organizations' institutional environments and how organizations make choices about implementation and so draw on concepts from institutional theory to understand the interaction between the organization and its external environments, including the policy system, funding, resources, and community conditions. While our intent is to highlight the relationship between youth organizations and their external environments, we acknowledge that the internal conditions in these organizations and the decisions surrounding those factors greatly influence the opportunities available to youth.

Three interrelated themes are helpful for understanding the relationship of nonprofit organizations and external environments: how local social and political contexts frame solutions for youth and for youth organizations, how attitudes toward and beliefs about youth and their needs, including issues of legitimacy, affect the possible range of organizations' activities and influence, and what organizations are able to actually do, given the many tensions they face, to address youth needs (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Scott 1995; Powell 1987; Hodgkinson et al. 1989; Powell and Clemens 1998). The way each of these plays out for an organization will have an impact on the kind of negotiation they can engage in.

First, the contexts in which youth organizations operate determine in part what youth organizations are able to do. The structure of funding, governance and resources, for instance,

will have an affect on youth organizations at an institutional level. Available funding streams—from various levels of government, private sources, or elsewhere—determine to a large extent what kind of institutional connections can be made (Schorr 1997). They signal in part what kinds of relationships are seen as worthwhile. Funding might also influence the level of interaction and structuration of organizations supporting education (DiMaggio 1983). The political and bureaucratic structures in place to support or constrain the work of youth organizations also determine what is possible and acceptable in terms of programs and organizational structure. Governance structures are the manifestation of the values a community holds and signal who a community wants to hold responsible for youth--schools, parents, the community, or other (Cibulka 1997). Creating vibrant learning environments for inner-city youth requires financial, material, and human resources that many low-income neighborhoods might not have access to (Schorr 1997). A community's level of access to and decisions about what to do with these resources determine in part how successful its support for youth will be. However, nonprofit organizations "are not passing targets for market or public sector interests but take active roles in shaping their environments and resource opportunities" (Gronbjerg 1998), and so their role as agents must also be considered.

Second, the beliefs a community holds about reform and even about its youth will influence how it goes about supporting learning outside of schools as well. Even more telling are the choices a community makes about whose beliefs matter—youth's, adults', policymakers', and so on. The cultural beliefs and symbols shared in a community have an influence on the behavior and structure of people and organizations and so would be central to the work of youth organizations; in a field like that of youth organizations that does not have many formal or structural controls, a shared cultural understanding of what is needed for these efforts might

replace formally encoded controls (Scott 1991). This kind of understanding can signal to youth organizations what kind of work is acceptable and legitimate. It might be that one community honors the work of street outreach programs while another favors boys and girls clubs. Legitimate youth-related initiatives might be only those which take place inside schools or in juvenile courts or they might refer to all types of youth-related supports available in a community. When youth are seen as threats, as they often are in urban areas, this belief will drive a community to allocate resources toward programs that deal with youth as problems rather than assets. Another issue of legitimacy concerns who should be involved in the process of youth development—schools, community organizations, parents, the public, and so on (see Scott 1995). Communities can also convey to their youth shared ideas about what kind of adults they want youth to become: college students, good parents, involved citizens, or the like.

Third, in terms of negotiating these external influences, the tension between structure and agency helps determine the kinds of action that organizations and individuals might take action. For example, Friedland and Alford (1991) suggest that structure (schemas, rules, and resources) exists in a dialectical relationship with action and must be in tension for organizational change to occur. In relationships with their broader environments, youth organizations often encounter this tension, which becomes a crucial part of the negotiating process. What matters is how the organizations are able to manage this tension and whether they can do this for the benefit of the youth they work with. Funding, resources, and community beliefs establish a frame in which organizations may act, but acting within this frame is an evolving and changing process (Giddens 1979), so it must be seen as a continual negotiation in which responses will differ with various structures and institutions.

This conceptualization of negotiation and the framing and construction of tensions in organizations' contexts allows us to examine the complex environments youth organizations negotiate. To illustrate this, we now turn to four cases of youth organizations in the Bay Area, first describing the organizations, then analyzing how they have negotiated the multiple conditions that influence their capacity to provide youth with opportunities to learn.

Four Youth Organizations in the Bay Area

The following are four of the organizations we worked with over the course of our study.[1] They represent a range of organizations from grassroots to local affiliates and from large comprehensive organizations to organizations more narrow in focus. They also work with a range of other institutions: schools, other neighborhood organizations, government. What they all have in common is the desire and the ability to implement learning environments in ways that are working for the youth they serve.

HOME

HOME began in 1996 in Alameda with the support of Alternatives in Action, a non-profit organization committed to enhancing the quality of education and community life for youth. Leslie Medine, the executive director, and eighteen high school youth embarked on the process of developing an organization that encouraged youth to become effective citizens and to make a difference in their community. Youth working closely with adult coaches constructed the infrastructure and vision for HOME and they wrote the following mission statement to guide the organization's purpose: "We are the gateway for the future. We discover ourselves, our commitment to each other, our organization, and the world outside searching to find ways to

improve, reflect, and adjust. We do this by any means possible and impossible. We uphold a process of understanding and community, passion for ourselves as individuals, as a group and then through a ripple effect, we reach out to give and impact the community. We do this anywhere, everyday, in the world. We rest and refocus in a space called HOME."

With this vision in place, HOME continues to provide resources and opportunities to over 100 youth as they generate, design, implement and assess project ideas and participate in constructing the governance and operating structure of HOME. Through this process, the youth of HOME have initiated community projects including *Work for Alameda Youth.* the city's only youth employment agency; *Home Sweet Home,* a youth-run child care center; and *Cityview Skatepark,* a skate park built and maintained by HOME youth in collaboration with over 800 community volunteers. During this past year, HOME youth—through a series of meetings with the city council, the board of supervisors, and the economic development commission—convinced the city of Alameda to allow them to build HOMEstead, a youth zone, in a vacant building located on Alameda Point. The vision is that HOMEstead will provide youth a central location in which they can develop and implement their youth-run projects. The youth of HOME expect the youth zone to enable their efforts to create change in the community and to make Alameda a city that empowers youth to become effective citizens.

East Oakland Youth Development Center

In 1971, the Clorox Company formalized its relationship with the community of East Oakland by creating the Program of Social Action, an attempt to improve the opportunities for the residents of East Oakland. In collaboration with community members and under the guidance of former Clorox CEO Robert B. Shetterly, the Clorox management proposed a youth

[1] Data are current as of the end of the study in late 2001.

center to target the particular needs of East Oakland's youth and in 1978, East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC) opened its doors. EOYDC has served the youth of East Oakland for over 20 years with programs that focus on employment and training, physical development, and the creative arts.

In 1983, the East Oakland Youth Development Foundation fund was established with a $1.5 million grant from the Clorox Company, which was followed by the company's two $1 million matching grant challenges that EOYDC met. Today the fund totals $7 million and approximately 45% of EOYDC's operating budget comes from the interest generated by the endowment. With this stable financial support, EOYDC has been able to invest consistently in the following three core departments: Job Opportunities for Youth (JOY), physical development, and the Kuumba After-School Arts program. The executive director touches on the benefits of having an endowment: "Our endowment has really helped us be more self-sufficient so we can focus on the work of developing programs and interacting with youth." The three departments continue to provide the foundation for all the activities in place for youth thus structuring youth's involvement and providing multiple avenues through which youth can participate in EOYDC.

For many of the youth of East Oakland, EOYDC is a place of hope and a second family where they are challenged and supported but not judged. The neighborhood surrounding EOYDC is one of Oakland's poorest and one in which the problem of unemployment is particularly acute. One third of the adults in East Oakland do not have a high school diploma or equivalency degree. The dropout rate at the local high school is over 50 percent while the average grade point average hovers around 1.28 (D). In the midst of these conditions, EOYDC provides an effective learning environment in which youth explore their interests, develop their talents, and achieve their goals both as individuals and as members of a community.

Jamestown Community Center

Jamestown Community Center's ties to its neighborhood run deep. It was founded in—and named for—the St. James parish in San Francisco's Mission district in the early 1970s. After the founding agency, Catholic Youth Organization, encountered financial problems in the 1980s, Jamestown neighbors rallied around the community center to keep Jamestown open for all neighborhood youth. Not only did they get youth out on the streets with petitions, write letters to the mayor, and picket, but they took youth into their homes for after-school programs when the center could not. In 1994, the neighbors received a grant from San Francisco's Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Their Families to re-start Jamestown programs, and Edison Elementary gave them space to run these programs in.

Many of the neighbors who organized these efforts are still on the Jamestown board today and see their efforts as part of "a neighborhood raising its children." Jamestown is committed to serving youth in the Mission and in Mission schools and addressing issues of concern to the neighborhood, like gentrification, California's Proposition 21, and gang violence, through its programs. Its elementary-school and middle-school programs, which cover art, dance, theater, science, youth leadership, tutoring, recreation and more, operate in local schools. Teens can be part of Youth in Charge or serve as teaching apprentices in the other programs. Jamestown serves about 130 young people a year through its elementary-school, middle-school, and tutoring programs. In addition, there are several sports teams and a summer program. Jamestown operates on an annual budget of $410,000.

Jamestown negotiates not only the neighborhood environment but also, since many of its programs are located in neighborhood schools, school and district environments. It does all this

with a focus on what balance will work best for its youth: how Jamestown can best negotiate involvement in the neighborhood and external pressures on the organizations to serve youth in a dynamic urban setting.

Columbia Park Boys and Girls Club—Tenderloin Unit

The Tenderloin Unit of Columbia Park Boys and Girls Club (CPBGC) is one of five units in San Francisco. It is located in a neighborhood in which liquor stores, adult movie theaters, and drug deals have dominated the landscape. Over the past ten years, though, the neighborhood has been engaged in many efforts to improve conditions for youth, and the Tenderloin Unit has been part of this.

The Unit is located in an attractive and relatively new low-income housing development in the heart of the neighborhood. It uses a storefront space as well as another room for its learning center, and it shares some of the multi-purpose rooms in the building. There is also a CPBGC computer lab across the street from the apartment complex. A majority of the Tenderloin club members live in the housing development where the unit is located or in the surrounding blocks. The Tenderloin unit serves about 40 to 50 youth a day between the ages of 6 and 18. Most of the youth are Southeast Asian with some African-American and Filipino youth.

The Tenderloin Unit runs arts, drama, and music programs, a martial arts class, a gardening program, and leadership activities, as well as more traditional homework help. In an area where there has been little for youth to do and where housing is severely overcrowded, the Club provides a safe and supportive environment. The Unit also tries to act as a liaison between parents and schools because parents in the neighborhood have a difficult time getting to their

children's school and even a difficult time communicating with teachers and school staff, so the Tenderloin Unit has hosted parent-teacher conferences in its space.

The Tenderloin Unit has also been instrumental in community change efforts in its neighborhood, participating in several community networks focused on youth and a variety of issues from safety to after-school programs. They have been part of efforts to clean up a neighborhood park, improve relationships between police and youth in the neighborhood, and several others. Their involvement is crucial to their learning environments because it not only helps the community as a whole but it helps the club members learn what it means to be a part of these efforts and learn how to go about improving their community.

Negotiation between the youth organization and external contexts

These organizations stand out in their field because of the success they have had in implementing youth development programs and in their negotiation of various environments to do so—even when these environments were often working against them. Here we use examples from these four organizations to highlight how they have used the interrelated themes of context, beliefs, and structure to negotiate their worlds. They have been able to support youth's learning and development through their decisions about how to work with other organizations, policy streams, community beliefs, capacity issues, neighborhood challenges, and more.

CONTEXT

Using the neighborhood as a learning resource

One way that Jamestown has negotiated its external environment for youth is through its use of neighborhood conditions as learning resources. There are three examples of this: the

community mapping project of Youth in Charge, the activities of Youth Power, and the mural work it has done in the community.

The Fair Oaks community in the Mission was the original support network for Jamestown. It is where Jamestown was founded and where neighbors banded together to ensure Jamestown's survival. In recent years, though, the Fair Oaks neighborhood has undergone significant turnover and gentrification. Jamestown's Youth in Charge, a group of teenagers who help the staff understand what participants want and who represent the organization to the community, decided that they wanted to reconnect with these neighbors and update them about Jamestown. Last fall, they went door-to-door surveying residents about the neighborhood and Jamestown and letting them know about the upcoming Halloween street fair. Through activities like this, Jamestown keeps youth connected to the neighborhood and gives them a venue for community building. As they engage in these activities, youth are learning about their own community and pressing neighborhood conditions like gentrification and displacement and what impact that might have on the organization and on their own lives.

Jamestown also uses the neighborhood as a learning resource through its curricula and as part of its emphasis on political activism and community involvement. The neighborhood-centered nature of Jamestown's work strengthens its learning environments by providing students with rich sources of learning materials as well as relevant and contextualized knowledge. The cornerstone of this work for Jamestown is Youth Power, a group of middle-school students whose purpose is to "learn about community organizing, leadership, group work and their ethnic history." As a group they choose a community problem they want to work on and figure out a solution. They have talked about ways to help students and teachers respect each other more and are trying to improve the food in the cafeteria. For the latter, they have

brought teachers and staff to the lunchroom to show them how bad their food is, have held a lunch-time rally, and have created a petition. Working on these neighborhood and school community issues is structured to be a privileged and important assignment. There is an application process to get into Youth Power. Students have to write an essay and then some are picked to interview with current Youth Power participants. Students in the program get paid a stipend for the school year and also get paid if they participate in summer workshops. This stipend acknowledges that the work the youth do is more than participation in an after-school program, and it fosters a sense of loyalty to the program. By using knowledge about the neighborhood and working on problems affecting the neighborhood and the young people's community, Youth Power strengthens the kind of learning that takes place through Jamestown and gives these middle-school students an opportunity they would not otherwise have.

Finally, Jamestown negotiates neighborhood conditions through the mural work and other artwork they do in the neighborhood. One issue youth have tackled through art is the neighborhood's high rate of gang violence. During one Summer Voyage environmental action program, youth at a neighborhood elementary school painted a mural addressing local violence. One boy working on the mural said, "We can't live our whole lives looking behind our backs; we gotta talk to gang members" (New Mission News 2000), and they did their talking through their artwork. More recently, a middle-school art class painted a mural about "pride, culture, and unity." Each youth picked a subject for the mural that related the theme to their own lives. Many youth reflected that their participation in the painting was "helping the community" or making "the community look more beautiful." By getting youth into the community to do this kind of work, Jamestown enhances the relevance of its programs to the lives of youth and gives

them a new vision of their neighborhoods and how they can take action to address neighborhood problems.

Location in the community: Work with schools

Jamestown's programs are located predominantly in neighborhood schools: one elementary school and one middle school. In a recent school year, though, the elementary programs were held in neighborhood organizations for a semester as Jamestown transitioned from one local school to another. The Jamestown board originally chose to run its programs in schools because they found that large spaces were not readily available in the neighborhood, and one elementary school offered its support and space early on. The location of these programs has an influence on how youth experience Jamestown and its sense of place. Establishing this sense of place is one of the ways that the organization must negotiate external resources, since they are scarce and space is limited in the Mission.

In these schools, Jamestown has ready access to a number of children. In its middle school programs, 100% of Jamestown youth come from the school. In the elementary school, 30% come from the school, with that number increasing to 60%. In this situation, though, the organizations cannot necessarily serve all the youth it wants to because it has to draw so heavily on the school population. Jamestown is negotiating with the middle school to allow more neighborhood youth to attend, particularly those who have already gone through Jamestown's elementary-school programs. While schools do have real concerns about who is using their space after school and while there are hundreds of students at these schools who might miss out on Jamestown services, these are community institutions that Jamestown believes should be open to more youth not attending the schools.

The choice of which schools to be in is also crucial. At Jamestown's middle school location, the staff have been around for a long time and many live in the neighborhood and are engaged in the politics and culture there. They are also knowledgeable about other CBOs in the neighborhood and can make use of these resources. They are generally accepting of Jamestown programs, but not a whole lot of teachers are involved on a day-to-day basis. At Jamestown's new elementary school site, unlike many other schools, the administration and teachers accept the CBOs who run programs at the school. This is a significant benefit to working there because Jamestown is not fighting against a culture in which CBOs are seen as inferior educators. To begin working at this school, Jamestown also had to go through a rigorous approval process, which indicated to them that the school takes after-school learning seriously and that they care about the programs in the school.

Jamestown is heavily involved in the management of after-school programs in both schools. The directors are part of collaboratives at both places and are advocates for the nonprofits in their buildings. Unlike other organizations at these schools, however, Jamestown has chosen not to get funding from the two main sources of public after-school dollars at these schools. This strategic decision gives them flexibility to do what they want to but leaves them without the requirements that come with this kind of funding. By providing free services that could not be replaced with these funds, Jamestown also holds a unique position at the schools and can use this position to call attention to what their programs and other after-school programs need.

In both places Jamestown has negotiated the school environment to create a sense of place to the extent that it can, given that they are using other people's space and that they are necessarily outside the school culture to some extent. For example, youth will often say that they

are "in art class" rather than "in Jamestown" at the school sites. There is not always a strong identification with Jamestown as a separate entity, and some parents don't even realize that it is a separate organization. If the youth are happy, though, the directors do not care what they call it.

On the other hand, interaction with schools has been a challenge for the Tenderloin Unit of CPBGC. In the Tenderloin, interactions are mostly negative--if a student is in trouble, for instance. One of the club members was cutting school but coming to the club, so the club worked with the school counselor to get her back in school. One middle school has tried to work with the club about Tenderloin gang issues, but they have not been good at communicating or collaborating. Teachers do come to the club once in a while to have parent meetings, which is very helpful because parents are more comfortable on their "home turf" and with the club staff.

The Tenderloin unit tries to reach out to schools by notifying schools when one of their students is a CPBGC Youth of the Month. This has been "hit or miss" though. One of the problems with their relationship with schools is that schools see them as rec centers and not as learning centers. They are trying to change the stereotype of after-school programs, but the BGCA might have more trouble with this than other organizations because of its long history and established reputation.

Location in low-income housing: collaborative atmosphere

The founding of the Tenderloin unit is a prime example of the collaboration that exists there. The housing complex where the unit is located contacted the executive director of CPBGC to ask whether they could work together to support the youth in the building. The building gave CPBGC space to run a club and in return agreed to give membership priority to youth who live in the building. The balance of youth from the building and from outside the

building is about even now. CPBGC uses many different parts of the building—its club room as well as some multi-purpose rooms—as well as a storefront on the next block for the computer lab.

The Unit director thinks their location in low-income housing is "great." Not only does this allow the Club to be closer to families and convenient for youth, but it gives them opportunities to teach respect and behavior. They have a very small shared space and have to follow building rules and respect building staff and the residents. At the new member orientations, the staff conveys this special arrangement to the kids and emphasizes that they all need to work together to make use of the shared space. Sometimes, though, the youth will forget or try to test the staff by playing with balls in the courtyard, for instance, so they have opportunities to reinforce respect for the space and for other people.

She described this arrangement as a family environment for the youth. Not only do most of the youth live in the building or the surrounding buildings, but there are adults in different capacities in the building and at the club who are supporting the youth as an extended family. The building and the club also work together to support families.

STRUCTURE-AGENCY

Being large and feeling small

Organizations that serve large numbers of youth daily run the risk of falling into the trap of "herd" programming in which the needs and interests of the specific youth participating often are not addressed. While these organizations may provide a safe place for youth to spend time in the non-school hours, their capacity to incorporate youth development practices and outcomes into their program activities is difficult to achieve. EOYDC has structured its organization in

ways that allow it to serve large numbers of youth without compromising its ability to develop programs and activities that relate to youth's multiple needs and interests. Since opening its doors in 1978, EOYDC has served more than 22,000 children, adolescents, young adults, and parents throughout Oakland. From the outside, EOYDC's large size would suggest to a skeptic that it must provide herd programming. However, the departmental structure organized around the three core programs of physical development, arts, and Job Opportunities for Youth (JOY) is one of the many factors that make it feel like a small organization with the ability to focus on individual youth. Each individual department has a program director focused on developing meaningful opportunities for youth that align with the overall mission of the organization to help youth and young adults develop the skills and training necessary to become responsible citizens and to help them be stronger people, equipped to handle life's challenges.

The three departments at EOYDC provide activities that allow youth to follow their own interests and skills. EOYDC's philosophy is that if an organization does not provide specific ways for youth to "do something that is of themselves, that can be celebrated," they will walk away. A simple list of the activities available at EOYDC is evidence of its effort to incorporate youth's diverse interests and talents into its programs. A youth can participate in steel pans class, African dance, culinary arts, basketball, track, GED courses, SAT preparation, computer classes and much more. Equally important, many of the activities in EOYDC's department adapt to incorporate multiple skill levels, depending on the youth interested in participating. For instance, the age range of youth involved in the African Dance troupe extends from four to over twenty years old, and the expectations for practice and expertise are appropriately matched for participants according to age, experience, and talent.

Linking to educational structures: legitimacy versus independence

HOME began small. In September of 1996, a diverse group of eighteen youth and the executive director joined together to start the organization and provide youth in Alameda an opportunity to become effective citizens. With the support of the Superintendent of Schools, HOME developed relationships with Alameda high schools and established its programs as a 4th period elective called Effective Citizenry for which youth received school credit. In addition, HOME received facility space from the school district and until June 2000 organized its various in-school and after-school programs in the three rooms connected to Alameda High School. Unlike many youth organizations that depend on the generosity of individual teachers for after-school space, HOME had designated space that they could use both during and after school.

In 1998, HOME recruited three teachers to work as staff with the participating youth. Their involvement ranged from providing independent study for some youth to working with a small group of youth to create HOME's public relations video. For the most part, teachers' involvement in HOME has been peripheral and the executive directors has made clear decisions to focus HOME's efforts in other areas and states, "I have no hope for changing the way teachers behave unless you get them in the door before they become institutionalized teachers. The weight of the high school institution is so heavy especially with accountability. Working with teachers and schools is not worth our time." However, she recognized the importance of the district support: "We couldn't do what we're doing without the schools and if the Super goes away, HOME is finished. He supports us and youth development."[2]

[2] Since the time of this research, the superintendent of the Alameda School District has changed. Despite the director's fear, HOME has continued to thrive and in fact, has moved to its new facility which to a certain extent provides it with even greater independence from the schools. Participating youth continue to receive credit for their involvement in HOME projects.

The institutional support of the district allowing youth to receive high school credit for their participation in HOME has been an important factor in establishing the organization as a legitimate program for Alameda youth. As one youth reflected, "I was a little bit skeptical and my parents were too...but I let them know we're still getting school credit and they kind of understood. I liked the idea of being able to set up our own curriculum and, um, do something that would have to do with what we'd had an interest in our future careers instead of being forced to take the same regular classes that we might not ever need or have no interest in." Other youth acknowledged that they initially joined the HOME project in order to avoid some of their school classes and to receive elective or community service credits. While this may have provided the initial impetus for joining HOME, the youth agree that they continue to participate because of what they are able to do.

HOME's relationship with the district and its ability to provide youth with elective credits is an important external condition of its work with youth. On the other hand, HOME's day-to-day independence from the individual high schools and individual teachers allows the organization to negotiate its work with youth in a way that maintains the organization's goal of being youth-focused and -run. Some youth organizations working closely with schools have to provide educational enrichment activities which are often narrowly defined as providing youth with homework tutoring regardless of youths' interests or needs. With their recent re-location to the Alameda Naval Base, HOME clearly decided to detach further from individual school sites. Prior to moving, the director noted, "I can't wait to get out; our primary identification is with the community, not with the school." While HOME hopes to continue its relationship at the district level by establishing a charter school, it views connections to individual schools and its efforts to work with teachers as a one-way relationship that provides little benefit to its work with youth.

Outside pressure to change: Organizational size and staff

Organizations often struggle with the choice of whether to expand their services to reach more youth or to focus on the youth they already serve and build stronger connections to their communities. Jamestown has faced this problem, with many funders suggesting to them that because of their success they should try to grow. They have also seen an increase in demand for their services.

Jamestown, though, has chosen to remain a smaller neighborhood-based organization. Their mission is to serve youth from the Mission and at Mission schools and "to mobilize the resources of families, neighborhood residents, and other community members" to help them do this. Jamestown is intentionally staying small to remain "grassroots."

The implications of this are twofold: the directors are less connected to outside channels but they are more connected to day-to-day operations and have been able to build a strong internal community and learning environment. While the directors may be able to spend less time with funders, doing public relations, or connecting with politicians, the staff, the board, and the parents appreciate their involvement in program activities, and they can see first-hand and on a regular basis what youth are doing and learning. These closer ties between management and staff have helped them shape programs with Jamestown teachers and have made their relationships with youth deeper.

A smaller size and the accompanying closer knit staff mean that Jamestown can create a flat organization, in an effort to focus the organization on youth and their activities and learning. There are three full-time people who coordinate programs and 35 part-time staff who work 8-20 hours a week. Twenty-five of these part-timers are teachers and ten are high school students

who assist teachers. There are also 17 volunteer tutors who work with students once a week. To encourage retention as well as innovative activities, they try to offer people new responsibilities and opportunities, and they build in a lot of flexibility and room to grow. They can let teachers try out new classes, as they recently did with a Claymation class. The staff's relatively small size also allows them to create more intimate team-building work around youth development and learning. They do staff training at the beginning of each year for everyone, and they have whole staff events and celebrations so that they can enjoy each other's company and accomplishments. Outside of Jamestown, staff also socialize on their own, which makes the community even stronger. Most of the staff buy into the way Jamestown works with youth and accept youth development principals in their programs; the ones who do not usually do not last at the organization.

BELIEFS

Beliefs about organizational capacity: balancing youth-run programs and community demands

The building of the skate park is a defining moment in the history of HOME. Up until that time, many of the projects the youth of HOME had designed and implemented were realized with the support and consultation of a few adults and minimal collaboration with community institutions. In many respects this was HOME's initial experience of engaging the broader community in one of the organization's projects. During the ten-day construction of the skate park, 900 community members volunteered supplies, time and energy. The building of the skate park demanded intense collaboration between HOME and other organizations within the community, and as a result, HOME began to interpret itself as more than a self-contained organization. The director captured the importance of the skate park project to the identity of the

organization: "With the skate park it became clear that we couldn't have done it without the city council and other organizations in Alameda. It was the first time we experienced true collaboration, and by collaboration I mean that we needed other people to make some thing happen. With the skate park we succeeded but were stretched to the limit."

The success of the skate park set the stage for HOME's most recent venture—creating a Youth Zone located on the abandoned Alameda naval base and in important ways has informed the process of how HOME is incorporating adults, other organizations, and community members into the process of realizing a project idea. An understanding that collaboration with the community will be essential to the success of the Youth Zone has meant that during this planning period youth have structured opportunities for city officials, potential corporate supporters, and funders to participate in the initial stages of development. However, by collaborating with the broader community a tension has developed between what community members consider feasible and what the youth themselves consider feasible.

This tension rose to the surface as a result of the youth's meeting with officials, funders, and community members. The feedback from many of these adults emphasized their concern with the logistical and practical aspects of implementing a plan as large as a Youth Zone, and they were reluctant to offer their support without more tangible information regarding the exact course of action. For example, one funder commented, "I have a lot of concerns, and I can't say what I'll contribute until I have some of my questions answered. We need to have more of a dialogue. We may renew our grant [next year], but we need to have more in-depth information." Another funder added, "We've given a one year planning grant of sorts. It's hard to commit to a second year since the plans for that year are so unclear." In many regards, the feedback during this meeting suggested that HOME abandon its plan of a Youth Zone, as the initial support from

the adult community was tenuous at best. HOME's response, however, was to learn from the meeting, consider the concerns of the adults, perhaps recognize the limitations of collaboration at this stage, and adapt their process. This is the point at which HOME balances community involvement and youth development.

HOME balances its desire to involve the community with its commitment to remaining youth-centered. In the example of the Youth Zone, the youth of HOME and the adult coaches suspended their timeline commitments with funders and potential corporate sponsors, relaxed their own target dates and goals, and created the opportunity to learn from the dialogue with community members and reconsider their own commitment to the project idea as presently conceived. This opportunity for the youth to re-conceptualize the project, considering the feedback they had received allowed the project to remain youth-centered and youth-driven.

Beliefs about youth: Program structures addressing the needs of teenagers

All four case organizations believe in their youth and believe in the possibilities and necessities of positive youth development. One group of youth that has been notoriously difficult for youth organizations to serve and that needs a particular kind of positive support is the teen population. Jamestown has managed to hold onto teens through their program structure that addresses the special needs of teens in the after-school hours.

The structure and culture of Jamestown programs allow for different learning styles and different kinds of interests, and the organization promotes "unconditional acceptance" of youth, regardless of where they are in their development, what they have done in the past, or what their strengths are. One part of this acceptance is providing many different entry points into Jamestown. A youth might be interested in theater, art, community building, dance, or sports,

and find a place to "belong" at Jamestown. Within each of these interests, there are again many different ways to get involved. In the middle-school Claymation class, for instance, students can work on characters, sets, lighting, camera work, or be general support.

Older youth have several options for participation. They can be part of Youth in Charge, assist the Youth Power facilitators, or act as TAs in the Learning Clubs. Youth in Charge is a group of long-term Jamestown participants who act as liaisons between the directors and youth and between the organization and the community. They give the director feedback about what youth want and what programs are or are not working and have input on the budget, giving suggestions about where to spend more or less depending on what is working for youth. They also act as Jamestown's representatives in the community and in the city. They have visited city hall to talk to the Board of Supervisors about the needs of youth in San Francisco, they have rallied for a bike lane on a busy local street, and they regularly participate in Jamestown's community events, acting as security for the Halloween street fair and as waiters for a poetry-reading benefit. Teens can also serve as Youth Power assistant trainers. These are youth who have gone through the programs already. They attend Youth Power meetings and help the facilitators during class. In this way, youth who want to remain actively engaged in political issues in the Mission have a vehicle for doing so that does not exist for youth many other places. Finally, Jamestown has created the Teaching Apprentices Program for high school youth. Again, these youth have usually been participants in Jamestown and want a way to continue their involvement with the organization and with youth. They assist teachers in one class and help them work with youth on projects, help with snacks, answer questions, and act as role models for the elementary-school participants.

Jamestown is able to retain teens because of their knowledge of and beliefs about teens and their efforts to carve out a special place for teens that is separate from but connected to programs for younger participants. They have found ways to keep teen interested, in line with teens' concerns about finding employment, having age-appropriate activities, and developing relationships around particular interests.

Implications and conclusion

These examples of negotiation and the choices youth organizations need to make about their environments indicate how difficult it is to support youth in their development and how important attention to these environments is. Understanding these choices is essential to understanding how organizations support youth. Choices about how organizations work with schools, where they are located in the community, how they structure their programs, and how they respond to outside pressure to change are just some of the difficult situations organizations must manage.

It is not possible to predict the specific problems or challenges organizations will face in their environments, but it is possible to identify the general areas of implementation issues. From these examples, it is clear that organizations have to face issues of what programs to fund and how, how to involve youth in these programs, how to respond to changes in the policy environment, and how to create relationships or collaborations around programs.

What the four organizations profiled here have done is to make decisions about these implementation issues in order to create learning environments for youth in the non-school hours that are appropriate to the youth they are serving. HOME has decided to link to the local high schools so its participants can get credit for their work, but it has also maintained its

independence from school sites so the youth of HOME can create their own identity and structure. Jamestown has chosen to work with schools in part because of the access schools give them to youth, but they maintain a strong voice within schools to advocate for community-based programs and they keep their flexibility in part by not using federal after-school funds—a hard decision that forces them to get grants elsewhere. The Tenderloin Unit seized the opportunity to operate in a low-income housing development to maintain ties to families and support learning through these ties, including the chance to meet teachers on families' home turf. EOYDC has realized that strong learning environments mean serving youth's individual needs and so structures its programs to feel small even though the organization itself is quite large.

These organizations and the structures they put in place sit in between external environments and youth development practices that support learning. The decisions about funding, program structure, location, relationships, and so on make it possible for these organizations to build programs and individual relationships with youth around positive development. The organizations make choices that are right for their purposes; all four would not make the same decisions about funding or about how to work with schools. But all of them do understand the impact that their choices at an organizational level have on youth, and this drives their negotiation of external environments.

These four organizations look and are quite different, but they have all made choices about supporting youth and creating strong learning environments. These examples suggest some ways that other organizations can make better or more effective choices to support youth development and learning. They can develop missions based on serving the interests and needs of youth and supporting them in their development, and focus their decisions on this mission. They can make choices based on what is in the best interest of youth rather than on where

funding will come from or what foundations are interested in funding. They can also support youth in developmental tasks rather than provide them with activities that do not have much thought or meaning behind them. Though these are all potentially difficult decisions to make, when youth are the focal point of organizational work, the choices about external conditions become clearer.

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