Social Policy Report

Giving Child and Youth Development Knowledge Away

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Toward an Understanding of Youth in Community Governance: Policy Priorities and Research Directions

Shepherd Zeldin, Linda Camino, and Matthew Calvert

Summary

For more than a decade, many researchers and practitioners have endorsed a "positive youth development" approach, which views adolescents as active contributors to their own development and as assets to their communities. As part of this shift, youth are increasingly being invited to engage in community governance. In youth organizations, schools, community organizations, and public policy arenas, youth are making strong contributions to advisory boards and planning councils, and are integrally involved in key day-to-day functions such as program design, budgeting, outreach, public relations, training, and evaluation.

State and local policy-makers are also beginning to endorse the engagement of youth in community governance. This policy endorsement, however, has largely occurred independent of scholarship on adolescent development. In this *Social Policy Report*, our aim is to help bridge this gap. We discuss the cultural context for youth engagement, theoretical rationales and innovative models, empirical evidence, and priorities for policy and research.

Why involve youth in community governance? Three main theoretical rationales have been established: Ensuring social justice and youth representation, building civil society, and promoting youth development. Moreover, across the country, innovative models demonstrate that the theory can be effectively translated into policy. Finally, a strong research base supports the practice. When youth are engaged in meaningful decision-making—in families, schools, and youth organizations—research finds clear and consistent developmental benefits for the young people. An emerging body of research shows that organizations and communities also derive benefits when youth are engaged in governance.

Several directions need to be pursued for youth engagement to exert a maximum positive impact on young people and their communities. We recommend three areas for policy development. First, public awareness of the practice needs to be better established. Societal expectations for youth remain low and negative stereotypes remain entrenched in the mass media. Second, more stable funding is needed for youth engagement. It will be especially critical to support community-based youth organizations because these places are likely to remain the primary catalysts for youth engagement in the civic life of communities. Third, it is necessary to build local capacity by supporting outreach and training through cross-sector community coalitions and independent, nonprofit intermediary organizations. These entities are best positioned to convince stakeholder groups to chart, implement, and sustain youth engagement.

It is equally important to broaden the scientific context for youth engagement in community governance. Priorities for scholars are to focus research on understanding: the organizational and community outcomes that emanate from engaging youth in governance; the competencies that youth bring to governance; and how the practice of youth engagement can be sustained by communities.

Social Policy Report

Editor
Lonnie Sherrod, Ph.D.
sherrod@fordham.edu

Associate Editor
Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Ph.D.
brooks-gunn@columbia.edu

Director of SRCD Office for Policy and Communications
Mary Ann McCabe, Ph.D.
mmccabe@apa.org

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From the Editor

This issue addresses a topic about which I feel strongly: Providing youth with responsibilities for organizational governance. This topic is timely in at least two important ways.

First, in recent years, a new perspective has evolved to guide youth research and policy. After decades of studying and attempting to prevent problem behaviors in teens and youth, we have to come to realize that the most productive approach to both research and prevention is the promotion of positive development. This view recognizes that all youth have strengths. Youth differ not only in terms of individual qualities, including resiliency, but in the extent to which their strengths and their potential for healthy, positive development are being promoted by the naturally occurring resources – or developmental assets – in their environments, in the form of families, schools, and communities. Research and policy then focus on differences between environments rather than between individual teenagers. It asks not how we can prevent problems but how we can foster positive outcomes. This SPR, focusing on youth governance, is a direct expression of this positive youth development approach.

Second, there has been a considerable delay in the transition to adulthood in the modern world, at least in industrialized societies. Whereas teenagers are getting involved in risky adult behaviors, such as substance abuse or sexuality, at younger and younger ages, adults are not being afforded opportunities for serious adult responsibilities until later and later ages, usually mid-to-late twenties. Promoting among youth a role in governance reverses this trend. When young people undertake responsibilities, they enter a positive developmental path.

We have now had four issues on youth development: our inaugural issue on "What do Adolescents Need for Healthy Development (14:1)," by Roth and Brooks-Gunn; "Youth Civic Development (15:1)," by Flanagan and Faison; "Strategic Frame Analysis: Reframing America's Views of Youth (15:3)", by Gilliam and Bales; and "Adolescents as Adults in Court (15:4)," by Steinberg and Cauffman. This article on youth governance is then the fifth. This series of articles on youth development should demonstrate how the youth period is just as important to research and policy as early development.

The topic of youth participation is an area where policy is actually ahead of research, although scholarship has increased substantially in the last few years. We need more, careful and rigorous, scientific research on these efforts in order to determine what works, for whom, under what conditions. Such research can then guide the further refinement of policy and programs. We hope that this SPR contributes to promoting research while at the same time encouraging its wider use to inform policy.

Lonnie Sherrod, Ph.D.
Editor

Toward an Understanding of Youth Engagement in Community Governance: Policy Priorities and Research Directions

Shepherd Zeldin, Linda Camino, and Matthew Calvert
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Youth engagement in community governance[1] is currently being advanced as a policy priority for promoting youth development and building healthy communities. The practice and its assumptions, however, have not yet been connected to, or substantially informed by, scholarship on adolescent development. The purpose of this *Social Policy Report* is to bridge that gap. The analysis centers on four questions:

- What is the cultural and policy context for youth engagement in the United States?
- What are the theoretical rationales and innovative models for engaging youth?
- What is the empirical evidence in support of engaging youth in community governance?
- What are some directions for future policy and research?

The Context for Youth in Governance in the United States

Youth were critical to the economic and social vitality of their communities from the days of the early settlement of the United States to the second half of the nineteenth century. They worked with their parents and other adult laborers on farms and in mills, and interacted with them during local celebrations and rituals. This community context changed with the onset of the industrial revolution. As the need for youth labor diminished, and formal schooling became necessary for occupational success, youth became increasingly separated from adults and from the day-to-day lives of their communities. By the beginning of the 20th century, this isolation had been institutionalized through child labor and compulsory education laws (Bakan, 1971). Subsequently, the demands for labor in urban areas, and concurrently, the steady increase in schools' jurisdiction over the time of young people, led to increased physical distance between work settings and households and diminished opportunities for young people to have meaningful interactions with a variety of non-familial adults in the daily social and recreational lives of their communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Reese, 1995). The rapid increase in maternal employment has exacerbated these trends over the past thirty years, and has even distanced many young people from their own parents (Steinberg, 1991).

Because of the prolongation of adolescence and their seclusion from adults, youth have gradually lost access to many of society's roles and social networks. Indeed, youths' dominant roles have become limited to those of student, style setter, and consumer (Coleman, 1987; Hine, 1999). While this separation from community roles and responsibilities may offer benefits in terms of providing youth a period of psychosocial moratorium, there are also costs. Society loses the contributions that all youth could make to the well-being of communities, and many adolescents lose the adult guidance and the opportunities for personal development that emanate from taking on valued community roles and responsibilities.

The isolation between youth and adults and the delay in the assumption of adult responsibilities is especially pronounced in political and organizational forums of community decision-making (Sherrod, Flanagan & Youniss, 2002; Torney-Purta, Damon, Casey-Cannon, Gardner, Gonzalez, Moore & Wong, 2000). Even when youth are invited to participate in community governance, they are most often expected to conform to strictly prescribed parameters that have been set by adults (Schlegel & Barry, 1991; White & Wyn, 1998). This context is perpetuated, in part, by policy. There are few contemporary policy structures to support youth in community governance (Camino & Zeldin, 2002a; Flanagan & Faison, 2001).

Also contributing to the isolation is that much of the general public, including parents, does not perceive youth as having the values, motivation, or competence to contribute to civic life (Bostrom, 2000; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992; Zeldin, 2002a). For example, Zeldin and Topitzes (2002) found that less than 25 percent of urban adults had a great deal of confidence that adolescents could represent their community in front of the city council or serve as a voting member of a community organization. In a national study (Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain and colleagues, 2001), adults rated the relative importance of nineteen actions that communities could take on behalf of young people. Significant numbers reported it most important to teach shared values (80 percent), guide decision-making (76 percent) and report misbehavior (62 percent). In contrast, the two actions reflective of youth engagement received the lowest endorsement. Only 48 percent of adults believed it important to "seek young people's opinions when making decisions that affect them." An equivalent percentage reported it is important to "give young people lots of opportunities to make their communities better places." Youth are keenly aware of adult stereotypes and their societal roles, and this awareness negatively influences their own decisions to engage in civic affairs (Camino, 1995; Gilliam & Bales, 2001; Loader, Girling, & Sparks, 1998). As

one youth described her experience in community governance:

> "I was on a school district committee... We would participate in some board meetings. We would talk for half an hour. Then we would leave and they would clap for us. That shows that we weren't really part of the board. If we said anything intelligent, they would say 'ohhhh.' I mean, they wouldn't do that for anyone else on the committee. I think the schools are just doing it for PR so they can announce to the public that kids were involved in decisions." (Zeldin, 2003).

Increasing Policy Support for Youth Engagement

There are countervailing trends. The previous decade saw a noticeable shift in policy toward viewing youth as "community assets" rather than "problems to be prevented" (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002). As part of this shift, there appears to be an increasingly strong and widespread endorsement of state policies that seek to engage youth in community governance (Forum for Youth Investment, 2002). In setting forth principles of youth development, for example, The National Governor's Association urges that youth be involved in states' decision-making processes, and upwards of twenty states are actively promoting youth engagement in community governance as a fundamental strategy for strengthening their youth policies. Moreover, these states are bringing youth "to the table" to help establish the goals of youth policy. In Vermont, for example, the Agency of Human Services is creating Youth Councils across the state, has placed two student members on the State Board of Education, and is encouraging local school boards to do the same.

Youth engagement is also becoming a local priority. In one national survey, 34 percent of community organizations with a governing board reported that they had youth and young adults (age 15 to 29) serving on the board. Moreover, between 55 and 78 percent of the organizations reported that youth regularly attended meetings where important decisions were made, coordinated activities or events with other organizations, trained other volunteers or staff, gave presentations or speeches to constituencies, and planned or led fund-raisers (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1998). Private foundations and other funding sources are beginning to support such efforts (Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, 2002). The Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing provides direct grants to youth-led organizations and is establishing learning networks for young people engaged in community change (Sherman, 2002). The United Way of America has recently published a guidebook and training program on engaging youth in local governance. In Milwaukee, after engaging in a comprehensive community assessment, sponsored by the regional United Way, multiple stakeholders identified "youth in decision-making" as a central priority for new funding and programmatic initiatives (Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2002). Finally, there are indications that local officials and residents are endorsing youth engagement. The National 4-H Council recently sponsored "community conversations on youth development" to set priorities for Cooperative Extension. Across the country, youth involvement consistently emerged as a high priority. In Wisconsin, for illustration, the two highest priorities emerging from county conversations, involving 2,100 residents and public officials, were to "create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision-making and governance" and "encourage youth community service and civic involvement" (Zeldin, Camino, Calvert & Ivey, 2002).

Rationale and Models for Engaging Youth

Scholars have identified three dominant rationales for engaging youth in community governance: ensuring social justice and youth representation, building civil society, and promoting youth development. While the purposes overlap, they reflect fundamentally different emphases in their purposes and goals, and consequently, in their models and supporting policy structures.

Ensuring Social Justice and Youth Representation

The first rationale for youth engagement is that children are subjects with rights in addition to being recipients of adult protection. This social justice rationale, formally acknowledged in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been most fully developed outside the United States and reflects the more advanced political organization of young people in Europe, Australia and Latin America (Hart & Schwab, 1997).[2] Article 12 of the Convention emphasizes that young people are entitled to be active agents in their own lives. It specifically states that all children are capable of expressing a view, and have the right to: (a) articulate their views and express their views freely, (b) be heard in all matters affecting them, including policy matters, and (c) have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity. Engagement in community decision-making is not considered an end in itself. The Convention notes that "youth voice" allows children to protect themselves better, strengthens their commitment to, and understanding of, democracy, and leads to better policy decisions (Lansdown, 2001).

In the United States, the social justice rationale is evidenced in the representation of youth in forums of public policy deliberation. Most often, youth are offered consultative roles, whereby adults seek to find out about young people's experiences and concerns in order that legislation and

programming be better informed. For example, in Alaska, a core component of the state's Adolescent Health Plan is the promotion of youth representation on agency boards of directors, municipal commissions, foundations, state grant review panels, and school boards. In Missouri, the governor has recently created a 46 member Youth Cabinet charged with providing advice to every state agency from the Department of Economic Development to the Department of Homeland Security. In New Haven, Connecticut, high school students are elected by their peers to the Board of Young Adult Police Commissioners. These commissioners interview applicants as part of the hiring process for new police, and meet with administrators on a regular basis to make recommendations on safety-related policies.

While youth typically serve as consultants to adults, they may also organize within independent structures (Sullivan, 2000). In these self-advocacy models, the primary role of adults is to facilitate, not to lead, and to serve as advisers, administrators, and fund-raisers (Lansdown, 2001). For example, the Center for Young Women's Development in San Francisco provides outreach services to women living and working in the streets. The Center is primarily staffed by young adults under the age of 21, the majority of whom themselves grew up in highly difficult situations. Older adults serve on the board of directors but are not involved in day-to-day operations. Self-advocacy models are most prevalent in the arts and mass media. Across the country, young film makers, theater directors, and newspaper editors are creating pieces that highlight the rights of young people and local disenfranchised groups, and which aim to expose residents to alternative issues and points of view (Forum for Youth Investment, 2001; Lutton, 2002).

Youth Representation in Anti-Smoking Campaigns

Funded by the 1997 tobacco settlement, youth have taken significant roles in anti-smoking campaigns. For example, in each of Florida's 64 counties, youth comprise 25 percent of the voting members of local boards that make decisions about campaign priorities and fund allocations. Thousands of Florida youth have used the internet, print media, and direct action to advance the strategy of "teens talking to teens" (Students Working Against Tobacco, n.d.). Preliminary analyses from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that by the end of the first year of the media campaign, Florida youth had stronger anti-tobacco attitudes and were less likely to smoke than a comparison population (Sly, Heald, & Ray, 2001).

Other states are also implementing "truth" campaigns. Public health messages have typically emphasized the health risks of smoking. The new campaigns, reflecting the perspective of youth, deglamorize smoking. A student in New York, for example, created an advertising spoof on the famous Marlboro Man. Melissa Antonow's poster bears the heading, "Come to Where the Cancer Is." The drawing features a skeleton with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth riding on horseback through a graveyard with mountains in the background. This advertisement was displayed in every subway car in New York City (Youth Activism Project, 2003).

Building Civil Society

A second rationale for youth engagement focuses on civil society. The issue is not primarily one of ensuring youth rights. Instead, the purpose is to balance individual rights with responsibilities to contribute to the common good. The goal, therefore, is to create spaces of social experimentation and solidarity throughout communities so that all members, including youth, have legitimate opportunities to influence decisions made for collective groups (Etzioni, 1998; Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Scholars analyzing youth in governance from this perspective highlight research indicating that that communities work better when the voices and competencies of diverse stakeholders are involved in the identification, leveraging, and mobilization of community resources (Camino & Zeldin, 2002a; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Minkler & Wallerstein, 1997). Others note that citizens who volunteer time and resources as adults were most likely to begin their philanthropy as youth (Independent Sector, 2002).

Efforts to build civil society emphasize partnership models (Camino, 2000; Lansdown, 2001). These models are typically organized around adult-created institutional structures through which youth can influence outcomes in situations of equitable power with adults. The aim is to fashion structures where youth and adults can bring their often different and complementary views, experiences, and talents to collective issues (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert, 2000). For example, in 1997, voters in the City of Oakland established the Kids First! Public Fund which dedicates 2.5 percent of the city's annual unrestricted general fund revenues to youth programs. These funds are allocated by a board with 19 voting members, of whom at

least nine must be youth under the age of 21. "Youth philanthropy" may be the most prevalent illustration of partnership in the United States. Since the emergence of youth philanthropy in the mid-1980's, more than 250 youth philanthropy programs have been identified. Common to each model is that young people manage the grant-making process, with the funds ultimately invested in young "social entrepreneurs" who propose creative solutions to local issues. Adults serve as coaches by offering administrative support and guidance about accepted good practices of philanthropy, but it is the youth board that makes the operational decisions (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2003; Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, 2002).

Engaging youth in roles of community research is an increasingly utilized partnership model for engaging young people in building civil society. In this approach, youth identify a school or community issue to research, and then collect, analyze and interpret the data. Adults serve as technical assistance providers to youth on issues of methodology, and then offer guidance to the youth as they disseminate their conclusions and recommendations to the appropriate community forums (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002). Other approaches emphasize governance in youth organizations. In one model, youth and adults administer and analyze self-assessments of their organizations, typically on issues of youth voice and youth-adult relationships. Subsequently, after training in group facilitation, a core steering group of youth and staff lead their organizational peers through a presentation and interpretation of the data, and then work collectively to enact identified priorities (Camino, Zeldin & Sherman, 2003).

Youth-Adult Partnerships in City Government

Since 1990, Hampton, Virginia has infused youth into many aspects of policy-making, and, consequently, is creating a community culture with norms and structures that promote youth engagement. Some of the ways that youth are engaged include: 24 young people serve on a youth commission, youth are employed in city departments, the superintendent and all principals have youth advisory groups, there are youth-police partnerships in neighborhoods, and youth serve on almost all city boards, commissions, and committees. According to Cindy Carlson, director of the Hampton Coalition for Youth [a government office], "You can't do anything around here without asking for youth input." Critical to the success of Hampton are youth-adult partnerships. Youth are viewed as bringing unique perspectives and expertise to policy-making. To bring this potential to fruition, Hampton emphasizes the training and preparation of youth to ensure that all young people have the skills and confidence to effectively deliberate with public officials (Mason & Goll, 2000).

Promoting Youth Development

A third rationale for engaging youth in governance is that active participation in one's own learning is fundamental to healthy development. From this perspective, engagement primarily serves a socialization function, with the major purpose being to provide individual youth with structured and challenging experiences in the context of planning and taking action on behalf of others who are in a state of need. The expected outcomes for youth include identity development, group membership and responsibility, initiative, peer and adult relationships, and skill development (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000). Youth engagement is also viewed as a vehicle for the development of civic competence. As youth interact within democratic institutions, the expectation is that they will gain the full array of competencies that will allow them to promote their interests as adults (Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best & colleagues, 2002).

The youth development rationale builds from Vgyotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, with the emphasis on providing young people with progressively more complex roles in schools, communities, and adult society. This requires that programming be fashioned to create a goodness-of-fit between the opportunities provided and the developmental needs and interests of a given youth (Eccles, J., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C., Flanagan, C. & MacIver, D., 1993). As youth succeed in one governance function or decision-making activity, they are subsequently given opportunities to engage in other roles that necessitate higher-order skill or responsibility. Because the goal is to provide all youth with decision-making opportunities, programs seek to "infuse" youth into all decision-making forums within a community, thus allowing a maximum amount of options for creating a fit for young people (Zeldin et al., 2000).

Creating Structural Change to Support Youth Engagement

Wendy Wheeler, Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development

At the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, it has become clear to us that, in order for youth-adult collaboration in leadership to succeed, organizations need to go beyond inviting young people to leadership; they need to change fundamental structures to support that invitation. Each structural change addresses a fundamental shift in assumptions about adult privilege and youth responsibility, a shift that must occur in order for youth to participate genuinely in leadership and civic engagement.

We've found that organizations need to shift structures for communication, meeting planning, executive leadership and even in some cases meeting times to support the full participation of young people in decision-making processes. One prominent example of such a structural shift is the National 4H Council. The Council's work centers around support for 4-H and the Cooperative Extension System, and as such its primary connection and responsibility is to Extension youth workers. In 1998, the Council's national board added ten youth members, bringing the total to twelve people age twelve to twenty-two on a 36-member board. In that case, the board undertook a careful exploration of its own dynamics, and made the decision to create a leadership position of Vice Chair for Mission and Board Performance. Having made that decision, the 4-H Council board wrote into the governance policy that the new position must be filled with a youth member. As a result of not only the inclusion of youth on the board, but in significant leadership positions, the board has developed a more complete set of perspectives, enabling it to better serve its primary constituency.

Structural changes can address the stereotypes and power issues identified by Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert in this *Social Policy Report*. As they point out, adults are not accustomed to sharing power with young people, nor are young people accustomed to sharing power with adults. We have found that this dynamic requires that communication structures must be created and clearly defined such that both youth and adults are comfortable making use of them. Adults are often not as familiar with email and the Internet, for example, as their youth colleagues, who move in a world in which such communication is more common, and more culturally important, than the telephone. A thoughtful look at meeting times and process is also crucial to the effective integration of youth and adults in decision-making. If young people are in school, meeting times must accommodate their school and homework schedules, as well work or extracurricular activities, along with the schedules of adults. Likewise, some organizations have opted for a process that intentionally creates room for young people to speak before adults. At the Coalition for Asian and Pacific American Youth in Boston, for example, adult leaders don't weigh in on any decisions until the youth board has finished their discussion.

Empirical Support for Youth Engagement in Governance

Despite endorsements and the strong theoretical rationale, the practice of youth engagement remains unfamiliar to most policy makers and local leaders, and their collective experience is limited (Zeldin, 2003). Moreover, they have questions, the most fundamental being: What are the benefits of youth engagement to young people and to communities? Research on this question has been slow in coming (Torney-Purta, 1990), but the trend may be reversing, with a multi-disciplinary body of research beginning to accumulate (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998).

Decision-Making in Families

There are extensive data showing that adolescent development is promoted when parents encourage young people to develop and express their own opinions and beliefs, in a context of warmth and firmness (Steinberg, 2001). Eccles et al., (1993), for example, report positive associations between the extent of adolescents' participation in family decision-making with school motivation, self-esteem, and adjustment during the elementary to junior high school transition. Grotevant and Cooper (1986) similarly found that adolescents who are allowed to assert themselves and participate in family discussions within a context of mutuality—that is, parents and adolescents acknowledge each others' viewpoints—are most likely to score higher on measures of identity and role-taking skills than parents and adolescents who do not acknowledge one another's views. The associations are particularly strong when adolescents are afforded the chance to define and reflect on the parameters of a given issue (Olson, Cromwell & Klein, 1975; Smetana, 1988). Participating in family decision-making through action, not only deliberation, also appears to benefit adolescent development. Jarrett's (1995) literature review concludes that the assignment of early family responsibilities, when properly managed, encourages mastery, enhances self-esteem, and facilitates family cohesion. Among children from low-income families, for example, the review found that the most "successful" youth had parents who intentionally challenged them to use their skills and competencies in the home, such as assisting in and executing domestic and childcare responsibilities.

Diverse Options for Engagement Sponsored by a Youth Organization

The philosophy of the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) in San Francisco is that all youth have the competence to engage in community governance and deserve the opportunity to participate. To that end, YLI creates diverse options for engagement. For example, 60 young people serve on eight community philanthropy boards and grant out $200,000 annually to youth-led projects. Other youth serve on training teams and provide workshops on issues such as youth governance, public policy, and youth-adult partnerships. Youth and adult staff worked together to develop survey tools and methodologies which are now used to help YLI evaluate its own programs and those of other organizations (Zeldin et al., 2000).

Critical to YLI's success is that they seek to match the changing interests and abilities of youth by presenting them with different options. This occurs in two ways. First, youth can progress to more complex and responsible roles within the organization. For example, a young person who learned and excelled in the planning of several community projects now serves on YLI's board of directors and is a trainer for the organization. Other youth transition from engagement in highly structured opportunities to taking leadership in more autonomous projects. For example, one young person started out as a grant decision-maker on a philanthropy board. After that role was mastered, he engaged in the more challenging roles of conference presenter and reviewer of training materials (Rosen, 2003).

Decision-Making in Schools

Efforts to elicit the voice of students in decision-making are often constrained by schools' focus on academic performance and by the risk of losing order (Fullan, 2001). When youth are given the opportunity to participate, however, positive outcomes are observed, especially when teachers engage them in shared inquiry and service learning in the context of a collective purpose (Andersen, 1997; Melchior, 1997; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Newmann and Associates (1996), for example, found that positive academic outcomes were facilitated in secondary schools when teachers engaged students in the construction of knowledge and where a norm existed that valued community connections as well as academic learning. In addition, academic test performance and SES academic inequity were found to be diminished in schools which used these authentic instructional strategies (Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1997).

Involvement in extracurricular activities, which often gives youth a chance for decision-making in a structured setting, may also contribute to positive youth outcomes (Mahoney & Cairnes, 1997). Rutter, Maugham, Mortimer, & Ouston (1979) found that schools in which a high proportion of students held some position of responsibility, such as student government or taking active roles in student assemblies had better outcomes in behavior and academic achievement. Similarly, Eccles and Barber (1999) conclude that participation may promote academic achievement and prevent involvement in risky behaviors, especially when involvement entails "prosocial activities" and "performing arts." Participation in school activities has also been found to contribute to esteem building and positive school attachment, which in turn, contributes to a wide range of achievement and favorable behavioral outcomes (Finn, 1989; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Decision-Making in Youth Organizations

There is accumulating evidence that youth benefit when given the opportunity to make, and act on, decisions for the common good in youth organizations and programs. The American Youth Policy Forum (1999, p.iv), for example, after synthesizing 18 evaluations of effective programs, concluded that a common aspect was that "youth not only receive services, but provide them. In this way, they change from participants into partners, from being cared for, into key resources for their communities. This change in approach helps build youth resiliency and protective factors in powerful ways." Other reviews of youth development programs indicate the following to be common across effective programs: the opportunity to develop self-efficacy, to contribute to others, to participate actively in real challenges, and to produce a recognizable program or achievement (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray and Foster (1998). Similarly, Hattie, Neill, & Richards (1997) conclude from their meta-analysis of adventure programs that the positive effects on youth development stem from the experience of actively participating in challenging group problem-solving and decision-making situations.

Recent studies have sought to identify the full range of outcomes that youth perceive that they gain from their engagement. For many Chilean student researchers, for example, the dominant outcome was a positive feeling that they had contributed to "a better society in which everyone was committed to the rights, duties and responsibilities of democratic living" (Prieto, 2001:88). Larson, Hansen & Walker (2002) describe the learning outcomes of high school youth in a Future Farmers of America chapter as they engaged in planning a summer camp for 4th graders. Two domains of learning processes were identified in most of the students' accounts of their experiences: learning instrumentality, or setting a goal and working to accomplish it, and teamwork. Zeldin (2003), found that a majority of youth involved in organizational governance were led to explore their identity and acquired community connections, both instrumental and emotional. Illustrative examples include:

> Bad experiences in the system gave me a poor self-image. If asked to describe myself before, I would say "I'm Jenine [not her real name] and I've been locked up this many times." Working here helped me reconstruct who I am so I'm able to speak and not be afraid of people. I can debate ideas and not be afraid of myself.

> I have a totally different outlook on my community. Before I thought, what can I possibly do? Why would adults want to listen to me? But working here showed me that adults are willing to listen and take you seriously. Before I thought there was nothing here but school and jobs, but now I'm more politically aware of what's going on.

Influences of Youth Engagement on Community Settings

There are numerous case examples that illustrate the ways that youth can have positive effects on their environments, but there is scant empirical research. Insight may be gained from research on families. During adolescence, parent-child relationships undergo transformations in roles and responsibilities, with a significant shift toward mutuality in decision-making. These shifts are dramatic, but still reflect continuity with the past (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). It is likely that youth may impact social organizations through similar negotiation processes. Sabo (in press), for example, observed that organizational transformations occurred as youth moved from peripheral roles to roles of full participation. Youth brought their own understandings and expectations to institutional roles, which, in turn, led the organization to conceptualize the roles in new ways. Similarly, when youth are engaged as researchers in schools and communities, studies indicate that the culture and content of decision-making undergoes incremental, yet noteworthy, changes and that youth interests are more keenly reflected in deliberations (Kirshner, Fernandez, & Strobel, 2002; Mitra, 2001).

As changes in organizational context occur, policy modifications are also enacted. Fielding's (2001) four year study of youth as educational researchers, for example, showed that, after initial resistance, the engagement of youth contributed to improvements in curriculum and classroom practice. Similarly, Zeldin (2003) found that adult leaders in youth organizations reported making better decisions with

Age Segregation and the Rights of Children

Felton Earls, Harvard University

A strong presumption of this commentary on youth civic engagement is that adults in our society view adolescents in generally negative terms. If this is true, then it means that the practice of fostering youth engagement must overcome significant barriers of stigma and prejudice directed to young people. But, might this presumption be overstated? The results of a Search Institute study are referenced by Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert; in this study, about one half of adults were in favor of providing some form of guided participation in civic engagement for adolescents. Only half, however, appeared to be comfortable in proactively seeking their thoughts and suggestions. How does one interpret such results? Is the glass half empty or half full? With the reservation of wanting to know more about the cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample, I would assert that these results reflect the ambiguous attitudes of adults towards adolescents.

This ambiguity is in no doubt a response to age segregation. But, the resistance towards youth participation is only partially determined by the segregation and negative stereotyping of adolescents. Potentially of equal or greater relevance is the functional status of our democracy. It is not fair to expect that youth should be more engaged in civic concerns and local politics than are adults? Since we cannot compare voting behavior between the two age groups, the comparison has to be made on the basis of participation in civic activities and public deliberation in the matters of direct concern. It is at this level that one should maintain an empirical and open-minded stance. How do the concerns of youth, age 14 to 17, on matters of school policy compare to the concerns of young adults on matters of taxation?

Yet, asking the question this way pinpoints the underlying problem. The finding that the majority of adults are interested in supporting the opinions and decisions of adolescents is good news. But, what activities and structures support such adult to child partnership in civic engagement? More importantly, what principles, frameworks and guidelines do we possess to achieve such partnerships? The problem is only partly due to self-segregation. Segregation by default is just as powerful.

There are two solutions. First, as is the case for adults, youth engagement requires youth leadership. By leadership, I mean persons who are willing to take political and social initiative and commit themselves to the pursuit of an issue. Although youth leaders may be discovered just as spontaneously as adult leaders, more attention is needed in the education and training of youth leaders as in part of school and community based politics. This issue was addressed, but it merits even greater emphasis. Just as leaders are trained in parliamentary rules, training is also desirable in procedural ethics, such as those delineated in Habermas' theory of communicative action.

The first recommendation of Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert addresses the Convention on the rights of children. The participatory rights of the CRC (articles 12 to 15) are the most radical of its claims. These rights have been accepted by the entire world, with the exception of Somalia and the United States. Would matters be any different for American adolescents if our Congress had ratified the CRC? Whatever is the answer to this question, the United States stands apart from the global community. There is a great deal of learning and sharing of practices from which to benefit. The analysis of where American youth stand with regard to the civic life of their communities and schools should benefit from insights gleaned through international experiences. We should be as ready to learn through "reverse transfer" as we are to sell others on American ideals. The CRC represents a new and radical departure from previous manuscripts on the nature of childhood. It deserves to be a centerpiece for reflection and critical evaluation if its virtues are ever to be fully realized. The practice of democracy and the recognition of citizenship are not reserved for persons over 18. Youth participation needs to be sufficiently political to be deemed genuine and legitimate.

increased confidence as they became more connected with youth through the processes of shared governance. Additionally, youth engagement led some organizations to reflect on issues of representation, which led to improved outreach to, and more appropriate programming for, diverse constituencies. There were ripple effects throughout the community. As some of the organizations gained visibility through their youth engagement and community outreach efforts, they established new standards for other organizations and local foundations.

Students as Educational Researchers

Since 1996, Sharnbrook Upper School in Bedfordshire, England, has partnered with Michael Fielding of Cambridge University to engage students as educational researchers. Each year, about 30 students and four staff receive training in research methods and ethics. Work groups are formed to identify issues of importance to the shared goal of school improvement. Data are then gathered and analyzed. Interpretation occurs in an intentional context of collegiality between students and teachers. Many changes in school policy have resulted, for example: "trainee teachers" are better supervised, curriculum governance structures now include youth as members, the school's assessment and profiling system has been improved, and greater responsibilities and institutional support have been granted to the student council (Fielding, 2001).

After initial faculty resistance, the program is now institutionalized within the school. This is because the school nurtured the process. The school deliberately expanded the scope and depth of involvement of the program over time. The student role progressed incrementally from data source to active respondents and then to their current status as co- and independent researchers. Consequently, teachers developed an appreciation for research-based student feedback. The knowledge that research is taken seriously, and the modeling of the youth-adult teams, has created an ethos of respect that sustains the engagement of students and faculty (Crane, 2001).

Policy Priorities

Over 50 years ago, Hollingshead (1949, p. 108) observed that United States' policy tends to "segregate children from the real world that adults know and function in. By trying to keep the maturing child ignorant of this world of conflict and contradictions, adults think they are keeping him pure." It is fair to conclude that this analysis holds true today. The notion that youth should, or even can, be engaged in community governance is not embedded within the United States culture or policy. At the same time, it is also evident that the practice of engaging youth in governance, at its best[3], has reached a level of sophistication and quality that is deserving of policy support. Within this context, we recommend three major areas for strengthening policy and practice. We also identify three major directions for future research.

Establish a Vision and Maximize Public Awareness of Youth Engagement

It is most critical that policy analysts and scholars work with policy-makers to create a solid public awareness of youth engagement in community governance. Putting forth youth in governance as a public idea, or as a vision of what is possible and desirable, represents a fundamental step in garnering broad based support for the practice. In Britain, for illustration, the Children's Rights Alliance has brought together close to 200 organizations committed to promoting children's rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Canada has included children at the provincial and local levels in developing their required national plan of action in response to the Convention (UNICEF, 2002). The Convention, or similar proclamations, could provide a context for policy education and a focal point for mobilization in the United States as well (Cutler & Frost, 2001; Hart & Schwab, 1997). One example is the city of Hampton, Virginia, which in 1993, officially adopted and widely disseminated a vision for youth engagement which has subsequently directed the city's policy and programming for over a decade (Goll, 2003):

> All young people are entitled to be heard and respected as citizens of the community. They deserve to be prepared, active participants, based on their level of maturity, in community service, government, public policy, or other decision-making which affects their well-being.

Policy-makers, of course, are confronted with competing agendas. Until a more diverse array of constituency groups endorse youth engagement as critical to their interests, it is unlikely that a critical mass of support will emerge to garner sustained policy support. To that end, it will be necessary to shift societal expectations for youth, especially given that

Making the Point: The Future of Research on Youth Participation[1]

Richard M. Lerner and Sarah M. Hertzog, Tufts University

The publication of a *Social Policy Report* devoted to youth participation reflects the *zeitgeist* within the research and practitioner communities to focus on the means through which positive development may be promoted among young people. This focus on bases of positive youth development (PYD) constitutes nothing short of a paradigm shift within the youth serving community, a change from viewing, through a deficit lens, young people as problems to be managed to, in current basic and applied scholarship, conceiving of all youth as having strengths and thus as resources to be developed (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, & Foster, 1998). Youth who are actively engaged in making positive contributions to civil society are seen as reflecting one or more of the "Five Cs" of PYD (i.e., competence, confidence, character, social connection, and caring/compassion). Indeed, youth participation and leadership are often noted to be key features of programs that are effective in enhancing these features of PYD (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, in press; Roth, et al., 1998).

Moreover, youth participation, especially in community leadership roles, has been conceptualized as potentially reflecting the integration of moral and civic dimensions of identity in adolescence (Lerner, et al., in press). When such identity is fostered in communities rich in assets that constitute the essential developmental "nutrients" for positive development (Benson, 1997), exemplary positive development – thriving – is believed to occur (Lerner, et al., in press).

Accordingly, there is a considerable burden placed on youth participation in models of PYD and, as well, practitioners stress that the promotion of youth participation will enhance the probability of successful outcomes of their programs. However, as made clear in the present *Social Policy Report*, considerable additional data need to be collected before certain specification can be made of the precise impact of youth participation on the quality of institutional and community life and, in turn, on the characteristics of PYD. What is needed empirically is theoretically-predicated longitudinal data that identifies (1) what operationalizations of youth participation; (2) have what (expected) impacts; on (3) what organizations or facets of community life; and on (4) what features of youth development; for (5) what youth (e.g., youth varying along dimensions of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and family structure); living in (6) what sorts of communities (e.g., communities varying in regard to socioeconomic status, geographic location, and rural versus urban location).

We are in a scientific era wherein theory predicated on the systemic bases of plasticity in human development legitimates a vocabulary of strength and optimism for health in depicting the development of young people. Such theory accounts for developmental change by focusing on relations among diverse levels of organization within the ecology of human development, and stresses the diversity of developmental outcomes that may be derived from the relations among levels of the developmental system (Lerner, 2002). These theoretical ideas underscore the need to develop policies and program that capitalize on the plasticity of development in manners sensitive to this diversity. Applied developmental scientists must act now to couple such ideas with methodologically rigorous, multivariate longitudinal and change-sensitive research to ascertain if there exists a goodness of fit between the theoretical bases of PYD and empirically enhancing youth development through promoting participation and leadership in civic life.

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negative stereotypes remain entrenched in the mass media (Gilliam & Bales, 2001). One strategy, outlined by Bogenschneider (2002), is to regularly sponsor nonpolitical forums among scholars, policy-makers, agency staff. In such forums, scholars could provide relevant research and examples of youth engagement, and agency staff and practitioners could offer examples to legitimize the research. Ultimately, however, it will be necessary to engage in grassroots outreach. Lansdown (2001, p.15), in summarizing lessons from international experience, concludes that policy change occurs through relationships, particularly when scholars and policy analysts "invest time in working with adults in key positions of power, for example, head teachers, the police, local politicians, to persuade them of the benefits of a more open and democratic relationship with children and young people."

Provide Stable Funding for Places that Engage Youth

There currently exist five major pathways for youth participation in the United States: (a) public policy consultation, (b) community coalition involvement, (c) youth in organizational decision-making, (d) youth organizing, and (e) school-based service-learning. Of these, the only one with significant policy support is service-learning, and this itself is relatively new (Camino & Zeldin, 2002a). For each pathway, however, there are innovative models that can be replicated (see Endnote 3). The challenge to policy-makers is to provide financial resources for these pathways and models. It is most critical to support community-based youth organizations since these places are likely to remain the primary catalysts for youth engagement in the civic life of communities. They deserve stable sources of public support, but funding, such as has been experienced by service-learning, remains elusive (Finance Project, no date).

Build Local Capacity To Engage Youth

It will also be necessary to build local capacity by supporting cross-sector community coalitions and independent, nonprofit intermediary organizations. These entities convene stakeholder groups with the aim being to chart, implement and sustain youth development (Camino, 1998; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2001), and therefore have the potential to effectively promote youth engagement in governance (Sherman, 2002). For example, they can describe youth engagement for the community, in the context of disseminating exemplary national models and local success stories. Another fundamental role is the provision of training for adults and youth. Examining attitudes, building youth-adult partnerships, and clearly articulating the purposes of youth engagement are all important in building local capacity to carry out successful endeavors (Sherrod, Flanagan & Youniss, 2002).

Research Directions

Research and practice have made almost independent contributions to our understanding of youth engagement. Building theory through the integration of research and practice will likely maximize our knowledge base of positive adolescent effects, while at the same time, demonstrating how to promote such effects. The challenge is for scholars to connect their agendas with the innovative practice that is occurring in the field of youth development (Zeldin, 2000).

Focus Research on the Adolescent Effects on Communities

It will be necessary for scholars to explore the full range of outcomes that may arise from engaging youth. Examining the influences that youth have on adult and organizational development—as well as their own growth—will likely have a significant influence on policy deliberations, especially in the current environment of heightened accountability. Such studies will also have relevance for theory-building. Youth are both products and producers of the settings in which they engage, and these reciprocal processes provide a basis for their own development as well as for others. Available research, however, focuses primarily on the "child effects" of young children. Researching "adolescent effects," especially as they may occur in youth organizations, would advance our knowledge of development since such settings stand out, relative to others in the United States, as places where youth can be purposeful agents of their own development (Larson, 2000; Zeldin, 2003).

Identify the Competencies that Youth Bring to Governance

Counter to public beliefs, many youth, by the age of 15, can contribute substantially to community governance. They can identify a set of alternative courses of action, assess alternatives by criteria, evaluate contingencies, summarize information about alternatives, and evaluate decision-making processes. Many can also assess risks, sometimes more accurately than young adults (Mann, Harmoni & Power, 1989; Millstein & Halpern-Felsher, 2002). Nonetheless, negative assumptions about youth competencies continue to impact policy development. Scholars should strengthen policy by disseminating research-based portrayals of the developmental strengths and limitations that youth bring to governance at different ages. In addition to informing policy, delineating the capabilities of youth, especially in terms of how these competencies are displayed in naturalistic collective decision-making settings, would enhance our scientific understanding of the cognitive, affective, and social competencies of young people.[4]

Understand how to Sustain the Innovative Practice of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is an emerging and innovative practice in the United States. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners have made progress in describing its models and best practices. It is important to continue this research, while concurrently broadening the focus to examine how innovative practices are sustained in larger systems, such as organizations and communities. Unfortunately, there is little research on the diffusion of innovation in the field of youth development generally (Granger, 2002; Light, 1998), and we are not aware of any research that specifically addresses youth engagement. Practical data on the diffusion and sustainability of youth engagement in community governance will be critical to inform future policy-making.

Conclusions

"Adolescence is, among other things, an organized set of expectations closely tied to the structure of adult society" (Modell & Goodman, 1990, p. 93). Other scholars have made similar observations (Hollingshead, 1949; Schlegel & Barry, 1991; Steinberg, 1991). The scholarship reviewed here demonstrates that policy structures, places, and adult expectations can be refashioned to support youth engagement[5], and additionally, that such conditions may facilitate a range of benefits for youth and their communities. Further, as we move into the 21st century, the scholarship indicates that momentum is building to integrate youth into the civic life of their communities and to increase adult expectations for the participation of youth.

What does the theory and research discussed here mean for such a shift? First, it means that youth should be afforded more authentic opportunities to engage in civic life. It is important to emphasize, however, that community decision-making is a collective construct, not an individual one, emanating from social interactions within a group. Simply put, youth cannot learn civic decision-making in programs that focus only on individual values and outcomes. Second, when communities provide an adequate degree of support, youth are capable of far more than society currently expects. As the case examples and research here indicate, youth can often accomplish extraordinary things with competence, energy, and compassion. The key, however, is the phrase "an adequate degree of support." Adroitness in collective decision-making and governance is neither an intrinsic talent nor a set of skills per se; learning to do so requires a blend of engagement, participation, and support. Without adequate support, youth are at risk of falling well below their full potential.

Finally, while research has been conducted that contributes to supporting the practice and policy of youth engagement, there are more directions to pursue. Future directions should build logically on the current foundations. Focusing more sharply on the effects that adolescent engagement can exert on communities, and identifying the competencies that youth bring to governance are two examples of needed directions. Also still open is the question of scale: how can states and local communities garner the will and capacity to create and sustain the structures and spaces that bring out and promote youth voice and competencies? Scholars and policy analysts need to tackle this question more squarely. As they do so, the practice and policy of youth engagement will increasingly be able to ensure youth representation for all youth, build a strong civil society, and promote a full range of developmental outcomes.

Endnotes

[1]As in any emerging area of research and practice, a consensus on conceptualization and language does not yet exist. By "engagement in community governance," we refer to those places and forums within local organizations and public systems where youth are meaningfully involved in significant decisions regarding the goals, design, and implementation of the community's work. We use the word "youth" to generally include young people between the ages of 14 to 21. This choice reflects common usage among practitioners who are engaging young people in the highest levels of community governance, such as sitting on boards of directors or influential advisory groups (Zeldin et al., 2000). It also reflects the awareness that the developmental tasks facing older adolescents may be theoretically and programmatically distinct from their younger adolescent peers and from young adults (Arnett, 2000). We do stress, however, that younger adolescents can, and often do, contribute to the equally important day-to-day decision-making lives of organizations and of families (see Endnote 3).

[2]The United States is one of only two countries that has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[3]Youth policy, research, training, and advocacy organizations have begun to assemble program descriptions and listings of "best practices" on youth engagement in community governance. Useful web sites include: Activism 2000 Project (www.youthactivism.com); Children's Rights Alliance for England (www.crights.org.uk), Forum for Youth Investment (www.forumforyouthinvestment.org) Innovation Center for

Community and Youth Development (www.theinnovationcenter.org); John Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities (gardnercenter.stanford.edu), UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (www.unicef-icdc.org); What Kids Can Do (www.whatkidscando.org); and Youth on Board (www.youthonboard.org).

[4]We are not suggesting that youth are naturally adept at decision-making. Almost all youth (and many adults) lack extensive experience in collaborative decision-making groups. However, policy analysts and practitioners have often observed that most young people, with experience and support, can quickly enhance their performance and make better use of their cognitive capacities, such as understanding future time and planning sequential tasks, over the long-term. It is unfortunate that there are few studies that examine decision-making among youth in collaboration with adults.

[5]We do not wish to underestimate the challenges of implementing high quality youth engagement strategies. As scholars, we have previously identified the challenges facing organizations. As practitioners, we have directly experienced them. It is beyond the scope of this Report to discuss these issues. We note, however, that creating organizational conditions to promote youth engagement involves a myriad of tasks, ranging from changing norms and structures, to providing quality training to staff and youth, to addressing issues of institutional and personal power (Camino, 2000; Camino & Zeldin, 2002b; Camino, Zeldin, & Sherman, 2003; Zeldin, 2002b; Zeldin et al., 2000; see also Fine, 1989; Hogan, 2002; McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Endnote 3).

About the Authors

Shepherd Zeldin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Community Development Specialist with Wisconsin Extension, 4H/Youth Development. His program of work, "Positive Adolescent Effects on Communities," examines the ways in which adolescents are producers of their own development as well as contributors to the development of adults and communities. This scholarship integrates field demonstrations of model programs, such as youth philanthropy and youth-adult partnerships for organizational change, with scientific research and strategic dissemination of knowledge to policy-makers. For 15 years before entering academia, Zeldin held senior positions with the National Academy of Sciences, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, and the Virginia State Legislature.

Linda Camino is Senior Scientist, School of Human Ecology, University of Madison-Wisconsin, and a research and evaluation consultant who provides services to foundations, community coalitions, intermediary organizations and youth organizations. Her work focuses on youth civic and community engagement, and youth-adult partnerships in diverse communities. Her special interests are in promoting the voices of young people, and understanding the ways that youth and adults can use research to act on behalf of self and others for the improvement of, and sustainable action for, community. She has been bridging research, practice, and policy for 16 years to push the youth development field forward. Currently, she is a leader of a multi-site Youth as Evaluators Initiative, and is evaluating Wisconsin's 4-H/Youth Development statewide Youth in Governance Initiative.

Matthew Calvert is a doctoral candidate in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research focuses on the context and impact of student decision-making on high school reform, and on the effects of engaging youth as researchers. He previously worked for six years organizing youth development programs with Michigan State University Extension.

About the Authors—Continued

Dr. Felton Earls is a Professor of Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Human Behavior and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health. His publication record includes studies on behavioral problems in preschool children, mental health of children of alcoholic parents, risk factors for violence and HIV infection in adolescents and young adults, the social organization of urban neighborhoods, and international aspects of child and adolescent mental health. Dr. Earls is the Scientific Director of "The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods," a major, interdisciplinary study aimed at deepening society's understanding of the causes and pathways of juvenile delinquency, adult crime, substance abuse, and violence. He is currently studying community level impacts of HIV/AIDS on child health in Tanzania. Among his many awards are the Blanche F. Ittleson Award from the American Psychiatric Association and an Honorary Doctor of Science from Northwestern University. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences and a member of the Board of Directors of Physicians for Human Rights.

Sarah M. Hertzog is a graduate student in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University. She is conducting research on the role of youth participation in community-based programs in positive youth development and is collaborating with a team of faculty and students in ADSI in developing an undergraduate and graduate curriculum for the training of community youth development professionals.

Richard M. Lerner is the Bergstrom Chair in Applied Developmental Science and the Director of the Applied Developmental Science Institute (ADSI) in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University. Lerner is the author or editor of 55 books and more than 360 scholarly articles and chapters. He is known for his theory of, and research about, relations between life-span human development and contextual or ecological change and the study of public policies and community-based programs aimed at the promotion of positive youth development.

President of the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, Wendy Wheeler leads the Center's efforts to seek, develop, and promote bold and creative practices that achieve positive development for youth and communities, and a just and equitable society. The Center works in partnership with community-based non-profits, universities, and other organizations nationally and internationally to address issues of youth civic engagement. A former director of training for the Girl Scouts of the USA and Senior Vice President of the National 4-H Council, Wendy is nationally recognized across a range of disciplines, including youth development, organizational development, fund development, and community relations. She serves on numerous Advisory Boards for Academic institutions and non-profit organizations. She also serves on the Editorial Board for the journal of Applied Developmental Science and is an International Fellow in Applied Developmental Science at Tufts University.

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