CHAPTER 11

Participation in Social Change: Shifting Adolescents' Developmental Pathways

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Engaging youth in social change efforts yields demonstrable benefits to both young people and their communities (Hart, 1992; Irby, Ferber, Pittman, Tolman, & Yohalem 2001; Mitra, 2004; O'Donoghue & Kirshner, 2003; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert. 2001). Youth who are engaged in programs that address neighborhood, school, or community issues develop feelings of social responsibility, a sense of connectedness to their community, improved self-esteem, and an increased understanding of social issues (see Yates and Youniss, 1996). Despite emerging interest in such benefits, researchers have not sufficiently explored the full range of positive developmental outcomes. Rather than focus primarily on youths' civic development, it is important to consider the ways in which involvement in social change affects multiple areas of young people's lives, including academic, interpersonal, and civic domains. Additionally, the benefits to communities that result from youth engagement in reform efforts remain relatively unexamined.

Such broad-reaching outcomes are most important to consider for those youth and communities that have access to the fewest resources. Urban youth of color encounter obstacles depriving them of knowledge about their communities or access to opportunities to participate (Atkins & Hart, 1992; McLaughlin, 1993). In this chapter, we draw on the experiences of urban youth of color who are participating in an after-school community research and advocacy program. Through our analyses of this particular program, we identify multiple developmental shifts associated with youth participation. Although we are not testing a particular theory, our embedded case study approach allows us to unpack the concept of youth involvement in social

change so we can more effectively study, understand, and promote youth engagement.

Literature Review

The concept of social change appears to be subsumed into studies of civic engagement. Developmental psychologists present youth civic engagement as a task of adolescence involving elements of moral and cognitive development. Ideals of democratic citizenship and tenets of tolerance of and responsibility to others are examples of moral outcomes. Cognitive development in the civic engagement literature has often focused on the critical thinking and reasoning skills required in order to understand complex social issues as well as potential solutions (Larson & Hansen, 2004). Additionally, youth who participate in school and community reform learn how to analyze problems that they experience in their everyday lives (Ginwright & James, 2002).

While some researchers look for benefits associated with youth engagement, policy analysts and theorists focus on the costs of youth disengagement. Youth who are not interested in devising solutions to societal problems are likely to develop into adults who do not feel any sense of responsibility or obligation to the broader society (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Moreover, little exposure to social change efforts in youth limits the knowledge and skills that a young person can draw on upon reaching adulthood. In contrast, youth who participate in community-based youth organizations that train them in forms of social action are likely to feel more knowledgeable about and efficacious toward future efforts to bring about change in their community or society more generally (O'Donoghue & Kirshner, 2003; O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2003).

The way in which youth learn about social issues and their role in addressing those issues may be the critical link to broader developmental benefits. Therefore, the training context is an important focal point for understanding benefits derived from youth participation in social change. Programs that successfully motivate youth to pursue thoughtful strategies for social change may simultaneously empower youth to view themselves and their personal life trajectories differently. Learning contexts in which youth are granted a sense of autonomy, a sense of belonging, and a range of success experiences are more likely to maintain their interest in a topic and belief in their ability to constructively address the targeted social issue (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Eccles, 1983; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Goodenow, 1993; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Furthermore, contexts that allow youth to examine issues that impact their lives and implicate their developing conceptions of justice and equity may promote sustained engagement in a campaign.

In this chapter we draw upon data from an after-school program to explore the following questions:

What features of an after-school community research and advocacy program enable youth to engage effectively in social change?

What does such engagement look like?
How is youth engagement in social change related to youth development in other domains?

The Research Site

An after-school program operating in two communities, the Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) program provides the context for this paper. In YELL, cohorts of 15 to 20 youth are trained to use social science research techniques to study an issue of concern to them and to use their findings to formulate policy recommendations. YELL is based at a high school in West Oakland, California, and a middle school in Redwood City, California. The high school site serves a population of primarily African American and Asian American youth from low-income families who would be classified as living in high poverty, and the middle school site serves a population of primarily Mexican American students from low-income families who would be classified as working poor.

In addition to demographic differences between the two programs sites, Redwood City and West Oakland differ in terms of their political contexts and social change processes. Ethnic and class stratification is easy to observe in Redwood City's neighborhoods and schools. Low-income Mexican American families live on one side of the city, and their children account for 61% of public school students. Issues of documentation status and second-language learning limit educational and career options for both youth and adults. Stratification is magnified among elected officials. As of 2001, only 5% of political leaders in Redwood City were Latino. Change in Redwood City happens from the top of the system down, facilitated by various bureaucratic structures, but historically, Latinos in Redwood City have not participated in the political structures within the community.

In contrast, West Oakland is a predominantly African American community steeped in a long tradition of grassroots social change. However, the residents of West Oakland are currently confronting the challenges of decades of severe poverty. Joblessness and displacement plague the adults, and youth are actively disengaged from underresourced schools. Among youth and adults alike, a sense of powerlessness dominates. In both communities the YELL program takes the youth through the same fundamental steps of identifying a problem, collecting data about key stakeholders' opinions, and developing recommendations, nevertheless the political conditions of the community have the potential to create very different experiences in nearly every step of the process.

Methodology: Data Sources

Data for this study come from multiple sources including field notes, interviews, and school record data. Field notes document the activities that transpired in each of the 90-minute YELL sessions, attending particularly to

participant engagement and interactions. Notes were taken by trained participant observers and were supplemented by program directors. Interviews were conducted with all YELL participants and program directors. Youth were asked about their experiences in their school, community, and the after-school program. They were also asked to share their future goals and describe their personal role in addressing community issues.

Over the past four years, 62 youth have participated in the YELL program in Redwood City, and in the past three years, 53 youth have been involved with YELL in West Oakland. For the purpose of this paper we selected 4 youth who represent the experiences of typical youth who remain involved in the program beyond their first year of participation. The youth we selected for this paper joined YELL in different years—therefore, our data for some youth span up to four years, while our data for other youth is limited to a little over one year. For all of the youth we describe in this paper, we have a minimum of two interviews. During their first year of involvement in YELL, the participants were interviewed once in the fall as they entered the program and once in the spring after YELL sessions ended. Returning youth are interviewed once each year.

The program directors were asked to describe the case study youth with regard to any personal, social, or academic changes they had noticed. They were also asked to share their insights about these youths' school experiences, home environments, and social networks.

In the next section we begin with an analysis of YELL as a context designed to train youth to participate in social change. We then describe trends we noticed among the youth most engaged in this program—that is, their tendency to adopt one of three different approaches to social change. As we discuss these approaches, we link them to opportunities afforded by the core program structures of YELL. Finally, we use four case-study youth to illustrate these findings, and to explore the developmental shifts experienced by youth in YELL who demonstrate a sustained commitment to school and community reform.

Promoting Participation in Social Change

Core Program Structures

By design, the YELL program continually makes adjustments according to school, community, and youth needs. Nevertheless, a number of core program structures exemplify YELL's innovative context for learning and development. Youth-led research accompanied by an action focus, a connection to host schools and opportunities for prolonged involvement in the program and in the community all contribute to the distinct opportunities YELL affords.

Youth-Led Research. YELL is a youth-led program insofar as the youth choose the issue to explore, the research methods they will use, and the forms their recommendations will take. In past years, participants have developed campaigns around such issues as school safety, the media's negative portrayal of youth from a particularly stigmatized community, and the affordability of bus

passes for students who depend on public transportation to get to school. Because YELL youth are often concerned by the inequities they confront in their schools and communities and because the YELL curriculum encourages them to talk and think about these challenges, they tend to target issues of social justice in their campaigns. The decision-making power youth are granted in YELL affords them a sense of ownership of the program.

The Action Focus. YELL uses an empowerment framework to engage young people in learning about their communities and sharing what they have learned. Although YELL does not train youth in direct action, it is an action-oriented program in that it involves participants in seeking and producing knowledge about a particular social problem or issue that interests them. Each year, depending on the campaign topic pursued, the youth have opportunities to share their ideas with relevant audiences. For example, in both communities, youth have presented their research-based recommendations to their school faculties. In addition, they have been invited to conversations with City Council members in Redwood City and have organized community forums in West Oakland. The different audiences and action strategies that youth develop reflect the traditional change processes in their respective communities.

The Connection to School. Because YELL is housed at school sites, academic support can easily be integrated into the program's operations. For instance, in West Oakland, the program director asks to see students' report cards each quarter, and she also provides after-school tutoring when YELL is not in session. In addition, she has arranged college visits for the students. In Redwood City, program directors have set aside YELL sessions to familiarize students with the requirements for college admission, and they have sat in on suspension hearings and meetings with school guidance counselors.

Additionally, the YELL directors have gradually become integral members of their host school faculties. Because the project is physically located at the school, and the YELL directors spend their working days primarily at the school, youth have the opportunity to stop by, seeking academic advice or personal support. Familiarity with the school context allows the adult YELL staff to better understand the school-related issues of concern to individual youth participants. Moreover, YELL directors' regular interaction with teachers means that the school faculty better understand the range of impacts the YELL program can have on specific youth as well as the school in general.

Opportunities for Continued Involvement. YELL is designed to support youth involvement over multiple years through a "ladder of opportunity." In Redwood City, returning youth can "graduate" from researchers to mentors. As mentors they facilitate discussions, offer insights based on their experiences in the program, and help support the new cohort of researchers. Mentors also

help the program staff to build a cohesive and supportive group culture in which leadership is distributed and collective efforts take center stage. West Oakland youth have somewhat parallel opportunities, but are referred to as youth staff, demarcating their role as session leaders. Adult staff in West Oakland provide support to their youth staff through preparatory meetings and postsession debriefings; however, during the actual sessions, the youth are in charge.

Young people in both communities also have the option of becoming YELL ambassadors, who participate on panels or help to plan and lead workshops at local as well as national conferences. As mentors, youth staff, or ambassadors, the youth serve as resources, sharing their expertise and knowledge with others—be they younger students or adults.

YELL directors at both sites frequently apprise the youth of other opportunities to become involved in effecting social change, to represent the youth perspective, or to cultivate leadership skills. For instance, in Redwood City, at the behest of a past program director, some YELL participants joined the city's Teen Advisory Board, and they have since returned to YELL each year to recruit new members. In West Oakland, the high school that houses YELL has developed a leadership council of teachers, administrators, and students, and one or two seats each year are reserved for YELL participants.

The introduction to social change that YELL provides and the deliberate links YELL staff have forged with other youth development organizations and opportunities work together to inspire and enable many of the participants to continue to serve as committed civic actors in a variety of capacities.

A Typology of Youth Involvement in Social Change

As students developed within the context of YELL, we noticed significant differences in their interpretations of their tasks and in their contributions as agents of change. The combination of young people's descriptions of themselves, their activity choices, and comments from program directors directed our attention to a range of approaches to social change that youth participating in YELL tend to adopt. Based on this data, we have constructed a typology of three roles in approaches to social change: advocate, activist, and educator.

The Advocate. An advocate is distinguished by her commitment to a particular cause. While many youth articulate a vague interest in "making the world a better place," an advocate demonstrates her commitment to a specific issue. An advocate may devote herself to creating a safer school or to protecting her community from environmental pollution and degradation.

The youth-led research component of YELL may contribute to youth's commitment to the advocacy approach. Having the opportunities to select a campaign topic and to research that topic from the perspectives of different stakeholders exposes youth to a relatively broad conceptualization of an issue,

its root causes, and possible solutions. Rather than mobilizing youth to rally for an assigned cause, the program gives them a chance to identify problems, concerns, or issues that matter to them. Many young people continue to care about these issues even after their YELL campaign concludes.

The Activist. Where an advocate has a cause and is focused on the ends, the activist is more interested in the means. Rather than attach himself to a particular issue, an activist seeks to take action as frequently as possible with the general goal of helping his school or community. Some activists may align themselves with a particular strategy, such as picketing, while others are satisfied with any form of direct action.

YELL does not train youth in direct action, yet it attracts youth who seek to take action. The program's emphasis on community knowledge and research, coupled with the ladder of opportunities, encourages youth to consider strategic action. In both West Oakland and Redwood City, the programs have responded to participants' interest in taking action by piloting new opportunities for YELL graduates to focus on the strategies for addressing the policy responses they had recommended. Yet, YELL still distinguishes itself by permitting youth to craft their own social change strategies.

The Educator. Where an activist concentrates on certain tasks or strategies, an educator concentrates on certain people. In our model, an educator assumes responsibility for supporting, helping, mentoring, or empowering a particular population—typically a marginalized group.

According to our typology, an educator does not necessarily need to work directly with others. Instead, it is possible to identify with the empowerment goals of an educator but look to a program or institution as the content provider. In the role of indirect educators, youth believe wholeheartedly in a program or an organization that empowers others, and the educators strive to ensure its continuation. They may serve as key players in the daily running of the program, or they may assume a backstage role, championing the program to others. Because YELL encourages participants to return after their first year in the program to serve as mentors or youth staff, there is a natural overlap between the direct, interactive educator and the indirect educator role of institutional supporter.

By placing youth in visible leadership roles within the program, YELL directors encourage youth to think of themselves as resources to one another. Opportunities to serve as mentors, youth staff, and ambassadors explicitly position youth as educators. For some youth, accepting the responsibility of educating others may seem overwhelming or beyond their reach. Before they see their individual potential to educate, some youth tend to focus on supporting and defending the caring and meaningful context that the program has created.

Profiles of Youth Committed to Social Change

The four young people discussed in this section were chosen because they represent different cohorts, communities, and personal histories (see Table 11.2). Most important, they are representative of YELL youth who have demonstrated a commitment to the program. Although there certainly are members of YELL who do not develop a strong attachment to the program, we chose to study these four cases because they provide useful illustrations of the processes by which youth can become engaged and invested in social change efforts. In this section we introduce the youth, describe their participation in the YELL, note their particular approach to social change, and consider evidence of developmental shifts. More specifically, for each youth we explore changes in their participation in YELL over time, in their academic performance and goals, and in their social interactions with their peers and with adults. For a topology of youth involvement in social change, see Table 11.1.

Julia. A guidance counselor at the Redwood City school site referred Julia, then an 8th-grader, to YELL. The counselor feared that Julia was on the path toward teen pregnancy and gang involvement. A Chicana, Julia lived with her single mother in a particularly dangerous part of town. Her grades were poor, and she seemed to have little sense of connection to school. After her first year of involvement in YELL, Julia returned to the program to serve as a mentor during her freshman year in high school. As a youth ambassador, she also attended and spoke at conferences. She continued in these capacities

Table 11.1 A Typology of Youth Involvement in Social Change

Social Change Approach	Distinguishing Commitment	Program Feature
Advocate	To a cause	Youth-led: youth-driven campaign
Activist	To the process of making a change	Action-oriented: youth-defined action strategy Ladder of opportunities: multiple venues for action
Educator	To the goal of empowering others	Youth-led: decision-making, facilitation Ladder of opportunities: mentor and youth staff position youth as resources

Note: We noticed a few distinct trends in the formation of these approaches within YELL. Some youth came in with no real commitment to or understanding of either social change efforts or their potential role therein. Other youth came in with a certain belief system or track record that aligned them with a particular approach to social change. While the youth without prior commitments to an approach could come to acquire one, the youth with baseline commitments could either further develop this approach, or construct additional or alternative approaches. In the next section we focus our attention on four youth who have demonstrated their commitment to social change in order to illustrate patterns of participation as well as accompanying developmental shifts.

Table 11.2 Description of Youth Cases

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade Entered YELL	Length of Involement*	Community
Julia	Female	Mexican American	8th	4 years	Redwood City
Desiree	Female	Mexican American	8th	3 years	Redwood City
Jason	Male	Cambodian American	11th	2 years	West Oakland
Maya	Female	African American	9th	2 years	West Oakland

**Note:* All of the case study youth are committed to YELL for another academic year.

as a sophomore, but as a junior, she became more involved in facilitating a transition-to-high-school workshop and a Latina support group—both offshoots of YELL that she had helped to create. For her senior year of high school she planned to return to her role as a mentor.

By taking advantage of the entire gamut of opportunities offered through YELL, Julia appeared to be experimenting with different approaches to social change. At the end of her first year in YELL, Julia showed characteristics of an advocate dedicating her efforts to the specific issue of equity in education. During her first three years of high school she invested her extracurricular time in activities related to the educational futures of low-income Latino youth.

Over time, Julia also seemed to develop into an educator because she focused on enabling a specific population of Latino youth to recognize their potential. For example, she played an integral role in creating a workshop for 8th-grade youth with the goal of impressing upon the students the importance of graduation and college eligibility requirements. She sees herself as a teacher, as someone who can share her own experiences with younger students, offering them guidance as well as support. In explaining why she decided to return to YELL as a mentor, Julia said,

> It would help me, 'cause then I'll feel good with myself in knowing that I helped them be what they are or, you know, helped them. Just like, it's some kind of a way to lead them to something good. I just feel good about it.

As Julia continued in YELL she experienced a dramatic shift in her academic performance. She began 8th grade on the verge of dropping out of school, and over the course of her first year of participation in the project, her grades improved significantly. Julia credits her academic success to the opportunity that YELL provided her—namely, the opportunity to think about the problems in her community and how important it was for her to contribute to the

solutions. At the end of her 8th-grade year, we asked Julia, "Are there ways you've changed since you joined YELL?" She replied,

> Yes. [Now] I'm a serious person . . . when I got in YELL, I started to think a little bit better about who I am and what I want. . . . [E]verything used to be like all blank. I just acted . . . I didn't even know what I was doing. And I used to get in a lot of trouble. And one day [my science teacher said to the principal], I want to show you the star of my class. And [the principal] just looked at me and he said, "Oh, wow!"

While YELL did not help Julia with her schoolwork directly, the experience seemed to contribute to her sense of commitment to her education as well as her belief in her ability to succeed academically.

Julia's emergent commitment to education prompted not only her teachers but also her peers to see and treat her differently. In her sophomore year of high school, Julia again credited YELL with helping her to effect this transition in her academic and social domains:

> If I didn't keep going to YELL I would be a totally different person right now. My 6th-grade year I was a little troublemaker in school, I would always be in fights with other people—all through 6th and 7th grade. Girls and guys too; I got in a fight with this guy, he pushed me and I slapped him in the face.

As a junior she again observed that YELL helped her to recognize and navigate a different life trajectory, and she contrasts herself with her friends from middle school. "I have a lot of friends who are in jail, some of my friends are pregnant and they have babies, some are married already." These were the life courses Julia's middle school guidance counselor foresaw when she first steered Julia toward YELL.

Over the years, Julia has learned to trust in her strengths as well as the messages conveyed through her multiple leadership experiences. She has had opportunities to advise on citywide grant-making decisions, consult with university professors, teach middle school students, make presentations to college students, and plan programs side-by-side with her old teachers from middle school. It seems that through those experiences (and many more like them), she has learned that she is a valuable resource to the community, and she seems to enjoy the process of watching adults now come to that same realization.

Desiree. When she joined the Redwood City YELL as an 8th-grader, Desiree's loud appearance, pink hair, and dramatic accessories clashed with her quiet demeanor. YELL marked her first extracurricular involvement, and she was content initially to assume a backseat role in the group, whispering her ideas and comments to her small group of friends in the program. During her freshman year in high school, Desiree returned to YELL as a mentor. She also

participated in some of YELL's satellite programs, such as the transition-to-high-school workshop. In her sophomore year, Desiree again served as a mentor, but she now assumed the role of a very active, visible, and vocal member of the YELL community. As a sophomore, she also became involved with the same Latina support group Julia had joined, and with other social change programs in her community.

According to our typology, by her third year in YELL, Desiree would be considered an activist. As she made clear in an application she wrote for a leadership class, she now believes strongly in the importance of taking action:

> When I think of a leader not only do important legendary figures come to mind, but also normal everyday people like you or me. Everyone complains, but only a handful of people do anything about their complaints. I have decided that I will be one of those in the handful.

When Desiree entered YELL, she was a fair student, but she was frequently teased and bullied by peers. Upon transitioning to high school, her grades dropped, and her struggle to fit in socially intensified. Since then, Desiree has rebounded and has put herself squarely on a path toward college. It was during her third year of participation in YELL that Desiree first voiced her goal to attend a "good college." As the first to go to college in her family, she admitted to being scared and torn about going far away from her family and from the community that she has worked hard to improve, but she also expressed determination to make the most of her educational opportunities.

Participating in YELL and related activities has allowed Desiree not only to imagine new possibilities for her future, but also to keep negative possible selves at bay. Desiree explains,

> I like keeping myself busy because . . . I have this idea that I think that people just do drugs or just illegal stuff because they're bored and they just have nothing to do. So they just go drink. And then I think it kind of helps me because then I'm just like, "Oh, I have to do this, I have to do that"—so, it's just keeping busy—and I just don't have extra time to go and cause trouble somewhere.

Like Julia, Desiree observes that her involvement in YELL has casued adults to see her differently. She feels that adults respect her for her efforts on behalf of her community. During a panel presentation, she comments, "Teachers will listen to someone that does their work." She also recalls an incident in which she was complimented by a teacher: "Yeah, . . . I ran into an old teacher and he said that I had all grown up, but I didn't think that he knew me, but I guess because of YELL. . . ." YELL enabled Desiree to experiment with a new identity, that of leader and social reformer. In embracing this identity, Desiree began to recognize new opportunities for herself academically and socially.

Jason. Jason's early experiences in school with teasing and bullying run somewhat parallel to those of Desiree. An Asian American youth of Cambodian descent, Jason initially saw the West Oakland YELL as a refuge or safe haven. He joined the program as a high school junior. Shy and easily flustered, he struggled to express himself verbally; however, he loved to write, and he was involved with the school's journalism program. As a senior, Jason returned to YELL to assume the role of youth staff member. After graduating from high school the following year, Jason continued to remain involved in the program as a staff member.

Over his time in YELL, Jason accepted the mantle of educator. After his first year in YELL, he was asked, "In your future, do you think you'll want to be involved in any community related work?" He responded enthusiastically, "Oh, yeah! I will still volunteer to work with youth and others because I want to help out, teach them what I've learned and teach them what they can do for their future." The following year, when he returned as a youth staff member, he was asked about this role. He explained that he saw his main charge as trying "to help support the youth leaders to be engaged," and he considered it his responsibility "to maintain a good purpose for the leaders and the youth [in this]." Jason's continued involvement in YELL, even after high school, reflects his interest in supporting, teaching, and sharing his experience and insights with younger youth.

Early in his involvement with YELL, Jason was frequently discouraged and frustrated by his performance in classes. Nonetheless, he took his schoolwork seriously, and he frequently attended the after-school tutoring sessions offered by the YELL director. Upon his graduation from high school, Jason credited YELL for his academic progress. He attributed his success to the structure and explicit support for academics he received in YELL. When asked how he would have been different had he not been involved in YELL, Jason recalls,

> The way I think about it, if I didn't join YELL, I probably wouldn't graduate from high school.
> Why?
> They also have a tutoring program, so yeah, thank God for that.
> What else about YELL made you graduate?
> Set a timeline to do what you've got to do for your work. A timeline to schedule your time to know when you're going to do this and when you're going to do that.

Jason had always wanted to follow in his sister's footsteps by attending college. YELL served as an alternative learning space in which he could work toward this important academic goal, and Jason is now enrolled in a local community college.

Socially, YELL also provided an important sense of belonging for Jason. He describes YELL as his "special place." In his second year, when asked why he

has returned, he says, "It just feels like home. Just, I get to have someone to talk to and spend time with." In response to a question about what he is most proud of in YELL, he comments, "To have everyone who understands me in YELL, glad to have friends in YELL . . . yeah, that's it." The director of YELL observed that at first Jason sought YELL as a refuge; in school he had been teased by some and ignored by others. Gradually he learned not only to work with, but to trust, his peers. The YELL director reflected,

I think he just developed a stronger . . . he wasn't so alienated and isolated in school any more. I think he felt like he was really on the outside for a long time, and I think that he started to feel a definite connection to YELL, and being someone in YELL, and then how that kind of translated back to being a [West Oakland] student.

Maya. An African American, Maya joined the West Oakland YELL program as a freshman, with a range of other leadership experiences already under her belt. An eager, passionate contributor, she was also engaged in other aspects of school life, including cheerleading and her school's equivalent of student council. However, Maya struggled academically, and her social life was marked by the reputation of some of her family members as among the most notorious street fighters in the city. Maya eventually left her home, and has since bounced back and forth between group homes and foster care placements. Amid all of these changes in her home life, her involvement in YELL has remained steady. She returned to the program as a sophomore, and has served as a committed youth staff member. She also plans to remain actively involved in YELL now that she is a junior.

Her initial record of involvement in YELL, and in her school, positions Maya as the quintessential activist. When asked what she usually does when something in her school or community bothers her, she responds that she either tries to fix it or tries "to find something else that I can change that would help that other thing in the long run." Maya plans to continue to be involved in YELL because "I felt like I got a lot accomplished and I'm saying, if I can get all that done in one year, I'm just trying to imagine what I can do in four." She regards YELL as a program that "show[s] the youth that, you know, change starts with us."

Though she joined YELL with a general interest in "fixing things," over the two years of her involvement, Maya seems to have gradually become focused on a cause. Currently, she might be characterized as an emerging advocate. Toward the end of her second year of participation, Maya took interest in the topic of youth voice in politics. She has been researching the topic and decided to participate in a trip to Washington State to register young voters.

While Maya joined YELL as a freshman with a desire to attend college and become a lawyer, it wasn't until her second year in the program that she began to take her schoolwork seriously. She came into the program every Monday and Wednesday to do her homework and she concentrated on developing

better study skills. At the beginning of her second year in the program, she set the goal of attaining a 4.0, and she worked assiduously toward it.

YELL has also helped Maya to see herself in a positive light, offering an alternative social identity to the one that her siblings have followed and that she felt many of her peers expected of her. Like Desiree and Julia, who used YELL as an alternative to getting into trouble, Maya explained that YELL is, "just like something positive to do basically so I won't have time to be out on the streets or anywhere." At one point in her sophomore year, Maya was challenged to a fight. Rather than engage, Maya went to YELL, where she received support from both peers and adults for her decision to walk away. As it was for Jason, YELL became a sort of social safe haven for Maya, a place where she could develop the inner resources and the social supports necessary for successfully navigating the pressures of her social world.

As the above profiles illustrate, these young people sought YELL for a range of reasons, and they entered with various attitudes, beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. Nonetheless, all were able to find something in the program with which they could connect, something that prompted them to return for another year, something that served as a platform from which they could discover or grow into themselves.

Summary of Developmental Shifts Associated with Participation in YELL

Among the case study youth, we observed shifts in their descriptions of themselves academically as well as socially. Academically, some of the youth began to improve their grades and their performance, while others showed more dramatic shifts in their general attitudes toward their education and their educational goals. Socially, all of the youth discuss a shift in their peer group, their opinions about how they are perceived by adults, and their attitudes toward their spare time. It is interesting to note that the developmental shifts do not seem to be correlated with a specific social change approach. Instead, it seems that these shifts are possible as long as youth are committed to one approach to social change. Although we did not study the experiences of YELL youth who did not develop strong commitments to social change, we surmised from conversations with YELL staff that these youth did not experience similarly profound shifts in academic or social domains. The patterns we noted are correlational, rather than causal, but these young people's own words suggest a powerful synergy exists between forming a commitment to a social change approach and experiencing personal change along other dimensions.

Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that there are concomitant advantages to developing a commitment to a particular social change approach. As youth emerge on the community stage as advocates, activists, or educators, they may come to see

themselves differently in other venues as well—for instance, at school and among peers. Furthermore, because each of these approaches is associated with a certain kind of civic action, at the same time that the youth benefit personally, socially, or scholastically from their newfound sense of self their communities also profit from their efforts and accomplishments. In Redwood City, for instance, a youth educator is working to support and encourage her peers to stay in school. In West Oakland, an advocate met with her district superintendent to argue against the closure of her school and to propose ideas for improving the quality of the education it offers. By exploring the various ripple effects of social change commitments, we have identified implications for practice, policy, and research that can serve as channel markers for future efforts to realize the benefits to individuals and to communities that surface when youth are supported in effecting social change.

Implications for Practice

The attention that YELL directors and staff pay to the whole person may have facilitated the academic and social shifts we noted above. In other words, because practitioners in YELL keep abreast of participants' performance and engagement in school, because they offer after-school tutoring sessions, and because they make efforts to get to know participants' families and friends, they know the youth well. This personal knowledge of youth, in conjunction with YELL's youth-led structure, creates a distinct developmental space for youth. Similar to the "free spaces" and "counterpublics" that O'Donoghue describes (Evans & Boyte, 1992, and Fraser, 1992, respectively; both cited in O'Donoghue, this volume), YELL has become a space in which marginalized urban youth have input, ownership, and control. Within the program, participants are able to revise their image of themselves as "at-risk youth" into new identities as valuable civic actors. If they are to help marginalized youth achieve valued developmental outcomes, practitioners should work to create spaces dedicated to repositioning youth as active agents in their own lives and in their surrounding contexts.

In addition to being mindful of the various contexts participants negotiate, practitioners profit from awareness of the range of opportunities that exist in the community for youth involvement in social change work. This knowledge will enable them to steer youth toward appropriate spaces for either exploring alternative approaches or developing a nascent social change commitment more fully. In YELL, program staff take interested youth to rallies and to conferences, where the youth can experiment with activist and educator approaches. The program directors also forge partnerships with other youth programs and community organizations, such as a City Teen Advisory Board and a grassroots advocacy organization, which they encourage YELL participants to join. Learning about these opportunities allows youth to become more knowledgeable about the myriad ways in which they can contribute to

their communities and also enables them to find a "fit" based on their talents and affinities.

Implications for Policy

The benefits to youth described in this paper came about when social criticism was connected to active and constructive problem solving. Through participation in YELL, youth become increasingly aware of issues of inequity and injustice in their communities. Divorced from the YELL context, critical awareness alone has the potential to frustrate youth and contribute to a sense of alienation and powerlessness. However when young people explore and engage in strategic action, those who have been most marginalized by public institutions and social systems begin to view themselves as effective participants and thoughtful contributors to the civic life of their communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). By introducing youth to different avenues for enacting change, the YELL program grants youth multiple opportunities to engage in social action and actively shift their developmental pathways.

Bridging after-school programs and school sites also appears to be a promising strategy for realizing the range of benefits of such programs to both youth and their communities. Schools occupy an important position in the community as nexuses in which diverse resources and opportunities for positive youth development can be concentrated. When such supports and services are clustered, communication can occur across groups. Counselors, teachers, parents, and program directors can all share their concerns about and hopes for individual youth. Such opportunities for sharing perspectives and strategies will enable adults not only to have a richer, fuller understanding of the youth with whom they work, but also to communicate clear and consistent messages to these youth about their assets and their potential.

Implications for Research

Although we believe that the typology we sketched will hold true across social change efforts, we suspect that the social, academic, and personal changes we noticed in the youth we studied may have been a function of the particular program sites and communities in which we based our inquiry. Future research could usefully attend to the mechanisms that enable such transfers of agency from one domain to another. In particular, the interplay between individual and contextual factors needs further examination. Participants' educational backgrounds, connection to particular campaign topics, relationships with program adults and peers, and family situations may all have a hand in determining which social change approach, if any, they adopt. Similarly, community demographics, political processes, problems, and opportunities may also influence the choices young people make and the trajectories they follow.

A particularly rich area for further inquiry, we believe, addresses the role of mentoring and modeling. As youth develop a commitment to social change,

to what extent are they emulating or seeking to please the adults who have supported and inspired them? And at what point do these youth come to recognize themselves as mentors and role models to others? How do such realizations shape their commitment to a cause, a strategy, a population, a task, or a program? Exploring such questions will help us further understand the processes by which youth develop as agents of social change and as successful, efficacious young people.

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