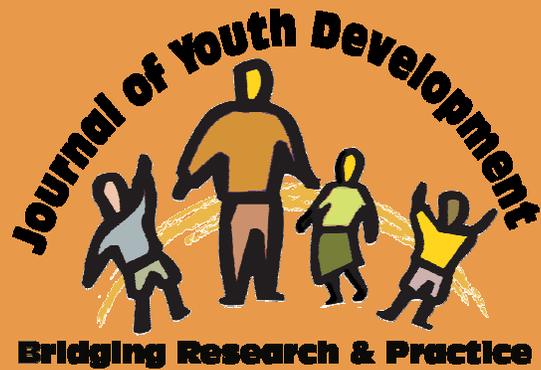


# Journal of Youth Development

Bridging Research & Practice

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**Volume 5 Number 3**

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### **Editor's Comments:**

Our Fall Issue brings readers an overview of several innovative youth development programs and evaluation techniques. Examples include: "Weaving Evaluation into the Fabric of Youth Development," and innovative empowerment evaluation process which youth professionals may consider replicating for similar programs. Readers will also learn about the use of community-based programming to increase family social support, methods to enhance youth career aspirations and implementation of a whole-school youth development approach. Community engagement, program evaluation and resources addressing the values of teens and tweens are also addressed in the Fall Issue.

Manuscripts for the Summer thru Winter 2011 Issues are now being accepted. The Publication Committee has increased the word count for manuscripts as noted below:

- **Feature Articles** ~ informational, explanatory, or critical analysis and interpretation of major trends or comprehensive reviews. Include clear implications for youth development practice and programming. 2,000-5,000 words
- **Program Articles** ~ discuss programs and outcomes or describe promising programs and pilot projects that have clear implications for youth development research, practice and programming. 1,500-4,000 words
- **Research and Evaluation Strategies** ~ describe innovative methodologies and strategies in the collection and analysis of quantitative or qualitative research and evaluation data. 1,500-4,500 words
- **Resource Reviews** ~ present analyses of materials, such as books, curricula or videos. 300-800 words

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*Geiser, Kristin; O'Guinn, Christina*

Middle schools have the opportunity to positively impact the full development of young adolescents. Yet, initiatives that promote schools' rigorous attention to specific academic outcomes can make it difficult to attend to other important and interconnected domains of adolescent development. How might middle schools intentionally situate academics within the broader frame of youth development? Youth in the Middle (YiM), a partnership between John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University and Kennedy Middle School in Redwood City, California, has pursued four areas of work that are central to developing a whole-school youth development approach. This article describes these work areas and offers preliminary evidence of progress.

**Preparing the Next Generation of After-School Educators: College Students' Perceived Learning and Civic Engagement Associated with the CASE Program**

**[Article 100503FA002]**

*Hinga, Briana M.; Mahoney, Joseph L.*

First-year evaluation findings from the University of California, Irvine Department of Education's Certificate in After-School Education (CASE) program are reported in this paper. The goal of CASE is to promote positive youth development in diverse learners through education and training of the after-school workforce. CASE blends instruction across five, 10-week long courses with 70+ hours of fieldwork in local after-school programs (ASPs). CASE course and fieldwork enrollment, perceived understanding of course material, multicultural education, and civic interests and engagement were measured through student surveys. Students in CASE courses report higher levels of perceived course understanding ( $p < .01$ ), civic responsibility ( $p < .01$ ) and empowerment ( $p < .05$ ) than students in the non-CASE courses. Students enrolled in CASE courses requiring fieldwork report greater perceived course understanding ( $p < .01$ ) and academic engagement ( $p < .01$ ) than CASE students without fieldwork. The findings suggest the program is achieving several of its early goals.

**Weaving Evaluation into the Fabric of Youth Development [Article 100503FA003]**

*Silliman, Ben; Shutt, Gene*

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### **Positive Youth Development in the Midst of Coping with Parental Cancer: Implications for Youth Development Research and Practice [Article 100503FA004]**

*Ashurst, Kerri L.; Hans, Jason D.; Smith, Donna R.; Jones, Kenneth R.*

Four implications for youth development research and practice resulted from a qualitative study on psychosocial developmental experiences of late adolescents coping with parental cancer during late adolescence. The study employed a developmental systems framework and grounded theory methods. Results suggest three primary psychosocial developmental influences, including multilevel influences (individual, familial, and extrafamilial risk and protective factors), coping strategies to maintain control, and responses to uncertainty and anticipatory grief. The particular combination of risk and protective factors present in participants' lives resulted in positive outcomes; resilience was the central unifying concept that characterized the primary psychosocial developmental outcomes of each participant. This finding illuminates the need to expand our focus in youth development research and practice to include positive developmental outcomes that can result from coping with life crises during adolescence.

### **"Push" and "Pull" A Qualitative Study of Factors that Contribute to Older Youth Leaving the 4-H Program [Article 100503FA005]**

*Albright, Mary Beth; Ferrari, Theresa M.*

For years, 4-H has struggled with the complex issue of membership retention, especially among older youth. However, little research has been done concerning why 4-H members choose to leave the program. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the reasons for leaving 4-H with the ultimate goal of improving retention of older members. Specific objectives of the study were to (a) explore reasons why youth chose not to re-enroll in the program, (b) identify barriers to participation, and (c) determine what conditions would facilitate participation.

Focus group participants consisted of older youth ( $n=16$ ) who were enrolled in 4-H in a community club in 2007 in Erie County (Ohio), but who did not re-enroll in 2008. Significant findings from the study concerning the retention of older 4-H youth were related to (a) experiences with adult leaders, (b) experiences with competition, and (c) conflicts with other activities. Recommendations for theory, research, and practice are offered.

### **The Impact of a Youth Development Program on Secondary Students' Career Aspirations [Article 100503FA006]**

*Williams, Bonita; Thompson, Jody; Taylor, Tonya; Sanders, Karen Eley*

This study's purpose determined the extent to which adolescents' participation in a youth development program may be linked to the participants' post-secondary education and career aspirations. One hundred and seven adolescents, ages 14-19 in grades 8-12 completed Holland's Vocational Interest Survey and the 4-H Career Decision Survey. Ordinal regression analysis indicated participation in 4-H had a positive impact on career decisions for students who participated in 4-H for two years ( $p < .038$ ) and six years ( $p < .001$ ). Significant differences were apparent with 80% of the racial/ethnic groups surveyed concerning a college fair's impact on career choice and college major determination.

## **Program Articles**

### **Addressing Criteria in the Development of a New 4-H Foods Project [Article 100503PA001]**

*McConnell, Susan; Scholl, Jan*

As youth and society changes, 4-H projects must change and adapt. *Make it with Mixes*, a 4-H curriculum, provides a new way of looking at food preparation. It may be one of the first state foods projects created without an emphasis on "from scratch" cooking or baking. Aimed at beginning 4-H members, ages 9 to 13, the project teaches cooking skills with the aid of

commercial mixes. However, the main focus of the project is on making comparisons between food labels, costs per serving, and recognizing quality food products. Science and mathematics activities are also incorporated into the curriculum. This article discusses the organization, criteria and strategies used to create this new foods project.

### **Planting the Seed: An Evaluation of a Community Youth Summit**

**[Article 100503PA002]**

*Outley, Corliss; McKyer, E. Lisako J.; Smith, Matthew Lee*

Meaningful youth engagement produces benefits both to youth and to the community in which they live. This paper discusses a day-long youth summit held for 289 middle school students. Youth attended a combination of mass and break-out sessions based on America's Promise Five Promises. Planners and evaluators assessed proximal student outcomes throughout the day. A two question visual analog scale was developed and utilized to assess students' perceptions of learning and enjoyment.

### **Research and Evaluation Strategies**

#### **Using Community-Based Programming to Increase Family Social Support for Healthy Eating among African American Adolescents [Article 100503RS001]**

*Williams, Joel E.; Griffin, Sarah F.; McCune, Amy S.; Linke, Gregory H.*

Little is known about emotional and instrumental social support for nutrition behaviors among African-American adolescents. In this paper, we specifically examine intervention effects on emotional, instrumental and total (composite) social support for fruit/vegetable and low-fat dairy intake. Data from a larger intervention, based on Social Cognitive Theory, which was implemented with 38 African-American adolescents and their families to increase fruit/vegetable intake, low-fat dairy intake and physical activity behaviors are presented. One-way ANOVA analyses revealed that intervention participants had positive and significant increases in emotional social support for low-fat dairy intake ( $P=0.01$ ), total social support for fruit/vegetable intake ( $P=0.05$ ), and total social support for low-fat dairy intake ( $P=0.02$ ). Specific recommendations addressing family social support for healthy eating through youth development programming are discussed.

### **Resource Review**

#### **Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today**

**[Article 100503RR001]**

*Dawson, Patricia*

Understanding the values of today's teens and tweens and how they make decisions is crucial for all youth professionals. An excellent resource to assist youth professionals has been developed by the Girl Scout Research Institute and Harris Interactive. *Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens* highlights a national research study which explored the values of today's youth as well as how they make decisions. The 52 page document shares significant findings from the research utilizing youth quotes, tables and diagrams. The work builds on a similar study commissioned by Girl Scouts USA in 1989 and shares an encouraging picture of today's youth. Readers will find the results from this research to be of great value when developing youth programs.

## **Envisioning and Implementing a Whole-School Youth Development Approach**

**Kristin Geiser**

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## Envisioning and Implementing a Whole-School Youth Development Approach

Kristin Geiser and Christina O'Guinn  
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**Abstract:** Middle schools have the opportunity to positively impact the full development of young adolescents. Yet, initiatives that promote schools' rigorous attention to specific academic outcomes can make it difficult to attend to other important and interconnected domains of adolescent development. How might middle schools intentionally situate academics within the broader frame of youth development? Youth in the Middle (YiM), a partnership between John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University and Kennedy Middle School in Redwood City, California, has pursued four areas of work that are central to developing a whole-school youth development approach. This article describes these work areas and offers preliminary evidence of progress.

### Introduction

Young adolescents are in the midst of tremendous intellectual, physiological, emotional, and social growth and development. These domains are interdependent and interactive. Yet, in the midst of national, state, and district initiatives that promote rigorous attention to a particular set of academic outcomes, it is easy to slip into discourse and practice that suggest we can attend to one domain (e.g., the intellectual domain) in isolation from other domains. For example, research shows that a focus on academic achievement often translates to significantly reduced time devoted to anything other than reading and math instruction (Center on Educational Policy, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007; Teachers Network, 2007). In an effort to develop one domain, we tend to inadvertently betray what we know to be true about the link between multiple domains.

How, then, can middle schools attend to the important work of academic learning while leveraging growth in interdependent domains? This is what we at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University refer to as a *youth development approach*. For nearly three years, we have had the privilege of coming alongside Kennedy Middle School as it has taken intentional steps to situate its work – inclusive of a significant

focus on academic achievement – in the context of a school-wide youth development approach referred to as “Youth in the Middle” (YiM). In this article, we will summarize YiM’s four signature work areas and offer preliminary evidence of progress.

## **Core Work Areas**

### **Work Area 1: Engage Cross-Functional Expertise in Support of Youth**

Youth, families, teachers, after-school staff, administrators and other school personnel all have important roles to play in supporting youth. As such, an important focus of YiM is to help adults in different roles understand, value, and ultimately seek the perspective and expertise of all who live and work in the school setting. YiM began with a visioning team of administrators, teachers, after-school staff, family engagement specialists, and community partners. During year one of the program, the sole purpose of this team was to develop a shared vision of a school that reflects a youth development approach. We found it very powerful to begin by focusing on participants’ hopes for young people. For example, the team’s first meeting began with consideration of this question: *“Imagine your students in ten years... what would you hope to see?”* By entering into the work this way, participants:

- 1) shared personally and authentically (and therefore began to feel invested in the process),
- 2) realized that they had the same hopes for their students as school members in different roles (and therefore began to see others as allies), and
- 3) acknowledged that their hopes for their students aligned with a vision of youth development (and therefore saw the youth development approach as resonant with their goals).

Intentional efforts to engage diverse expertise through the project enabled the adults in the setting to develop a sense that they did share a common vision for their students and for their setting. They also developed a real sense that their particular roles were important not because of what they could accomplish on their own – but because they were interconnected with others in ways that created a larger system designed to support young people.

### **Work Area 2: Situate Academic Learning and Achievement in the Context of a Youth Development Approach**

Youth development often feels like an abstract idea rather than a very practical approach to teaching and learning. To address this, YiM encouraged the adults in the school setting to:

- 1) revisit their understanding of the conditions that promote academic learning and achievement,
- 2) make the connection between the conditions that promote learning and those that promote youth development across multiple domains,
- 3) see how their understanding of learning and achievement is supported and strengthened by a youth development approach,
- 4) identify the school’s existing youth development-aligned practices and policies, and
- 5) develop a plan for expanding these practices.

Intentional efforts to situate academic learning and achievement in the context of a youth development approach honored the settings’ commitment to multiple domains of development

*and* reinforced the importance that they succeed in supporting the intellectual domain. A youth development framework interrupts the “either/or” binary that we often find in educational discourse – and offers a “yes/and” alternative – *yes* youth are developing in multiple domains, *and* schools need to be settings where youth thrive in the academic and intellectual domain. YiM cultivated our capacity to hold both of these truths.

### **Work Area 3: Integrate Local and Research Knowledge**

As YiM participants began to intentionally implement a youth development approach throughout the school setting, they needed to better understand current research regarding teaching, learning, and young adolescent growth and development (research knowledge). They also needed to better understand their particular community and its unique strengths and challenges (local knowledge). Ultimately, they also needed the support to integrate research knowledge and local knowledge in ways that directly informed their practice. This was accomplished by:

1. tailoring professional development to identified school needs,
2. identifying opportunities to apply research knowledge in Kennedy’s specific context, and
3. evaluating the impact of new practices.

For example, in the early stages of the program, Kennedy expressed interest in understanding how it could better inspire students to engage deeply in learning. The staff (including after school staff, and other school support staff) then participated in a day of learning with Stanford psychology professor Dr. Carol Dweck who presented her research on growth mindset (Dweck, 2007, 1986). After the presentation, participants considered what Dweck’s framework would look like in practice. Participants first considered this question, *“What would they see and hear that would be evidence of a growth mindset at Kennedy?”* With concrete images in mind, they then considered, *“How might we get from here to there? What steps could we take next week?”* Participants then collectively designed an action plan of specific practices they could implement the following week. In the following monthly meetings of cross-role collaborative teams some time was set aside to reflect on the implementation and impact of these strategies. The combination of immediate and ongoing space to follow up allowed participants to integrate their own local knowledge with academic research knowledge in ways that informed and, in a few cases, changed practice to reflect a youth development approach.

### **Work Area 4: Cultivate Habits of Shared Responsibility for a Youth Development Approach**

Throughout the implementation of YiM, the visioning team worked intentionally to grow the number of people in the school setting who understood, held, and moved intentionally toward a school-wide youth development approach. One core strategy that promoted shared responsibility was the development of an inquiry stance. For example, rather than mandate a school-wide effort to pursue a youth development approach, the leadership team framed their third year of YiM with the following question: *“What practices (teaching strategies and school policies) can we use to create a more caring school community and motivate all students to learn?”* Questions invite inquiry, curiosity, and engagement. Questions evoke a response. This question, in particular, reinforced the idea that “we,” individuals across the setting, were invited and expected to respond.

At different points in the process to date, cross-role collaborative teams formed their own sub-questions which led them to develop habits of inquiry, such as identifying priorities; forming

authentic and researchable questions; reviewing relevant research and best practices; developing interventions; evaluating impact; and modifying practices in response to this cycle of inquiry.

For example, one team took the idea of creating a more caring school community and honed in on the setting's discourse – or the way people talk to and about others in the school setting. Through this focus, school members have become more aware of how they speak about others and staff have a growing sense that they are responsible not only for their own discourse, but also for engaging their colleagues in ways that invite more positive discourse. Another team has looked at student interactions and developed practices that acknowledged and celebrated caring actions between students.

## Evidence of Positive Impact

After year two of implementing YiM in concert with other efforts at Kennedy, there is preliminary evidence of progress in four areas:

### 1. A significant number of adults in the school setting have a working understanding of youth development.

One third of the staff reported an increased understanding of youth development and they can articulate a youth development approach and its connection to learning.

*Our vision has been defined by looking at youth development...I have heard very positive feedback from the teachers like, 'Yes, we need this.' It's not 'we want it' it's 'we need it.'...We are all clear that even though it's the academics that are extremely important, our focus is on youth development and academics are part of youth development.*  
(Administrator)

### 2. Adults are reframing students as youth in the middle of multiple interactive settings.

Adults in the school are aware that their students are young people first –that “student” is but one part of their identity and “school” is but one part of their landscape. Adults are consciously building stronger relationships with youth and other adults and view them as partners in supporting youth.

*I have been trying to be very deliberate about making sure that I connect with the kids. I'm listening to them...to pick up on things that may be bothering them.* (Teacher)

*I used to think that schoolwork wasn't as important as after-school activities. Now I have a more collaborative relationship with teachers.*  
(After-school Staff Member)

*I have a greater understanding and appreciation for [after-school program] personnel.* (Teacher)

*We are building more relationships. The kids, instead of only having one favorite teacher in the team, I'm hearing three or four favorite teachers in the team.*  
(Teacher)

### 3. Adults are beginning to change practices to engage multiple domains of youth development in the service of intellectual development.

Teachers are experimenting with practices that acknowledge and engage the strengths of the young adolescent. For example, young adolescents often long to be of value and demonstrate mastery but they are worried about making mistakes and looking foolish in front of their peers. One teacher's effort to intentionally connect to this longing had a profound effect on one student:

*At first I didn't know...how to write a sentence in parallel structure. I was worried... After you gave me that blue piece of paper that said, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." I was challenging myself to try, try again. I kept trying and finally, I understood. I felt proud. (8<sup>th</sup> grade student)*

### 4. Overall school climate is more conducive to youth development.

Adults in the school community report that the school climate and overall tone feel much improved and reflective of an environment that supports youth development.

*I think that coming into this year...on day one, week one, there was just a complete change in the environment. I think just happier people from staff to students. (After-school Director, referring to the shift between year one and year two of YiM)*

## Conclusion

For over two decades, school reform literature has reminded us that we cannot mandate, force, or rush cultural or normative organizational changes (Fullan, 1993; Oakes 2005). With this in mind, YiM focused on intentionally pursuing a school culture reflective of a youth development approach through by focusing on four areas of work that would sustain and foster change over a long period of time. Evidence suggests that this program is fostering some changes to the school setting that will promote students' growth and development – inclusive of, but not limited to – the intellectual domain. We are extremely encouraged by Kennedy's courageous effort to situate its attention to academic achievement and other core goals within the context of youth development, and we are heartened by the evidence that this approach can result in positive changes.

The lessons shared in this article were learned through the hard work of incredible colleagues navigating a very difficult season in public education. This is but one snapshot of their long-term commitment to serving young people in their community. As we go to press, Kennedy's community is working tirelessly to sustain the good work that it has begun and to move through the next phase of the change process in ways that honor a youth development approach and effectively foster student learning and achievement.

*For more information on YiM and to download tools and resources to support your efforts to implement a youth development approach in your setting, visit the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at <http://jgc.stanford.edu>.*

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# **Preparing the Next Generation of After-School Educators: College Students' Perceived Learning and Civic Engagement Associated with the CASE Program**

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## Preparing the Next Generation of After-School Educators: College Students' Perceived Learning and Civic Engagement Associated with the CASE Program

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**Abstract:** First-year evaluation findings from the University of California, Irvine Department of Education's Certificate in After-School Education (CASE) program are reported in this paper. The goal of CASE is to promote positive youth development in diverse learners through education and training of the after-school workforce. CASE blends instruction across five, 10-week long courses with 70+ hours of fieldwork in local after-school programs (ASPs). CASE course and fieldwork enrollment, perceived understanding of course material, multicultural education, and civic interests and engagement were measured through student surveys. Students in CASE courses report higher levels of perceived course understanding ( $p < .01$ ), civic responsibility ( $p < .01$ ) and empowerment ( $p < .05$ ) than students in the non-CASE courses. Students enrolled in CASE courses requiring fieldwork report greater perceived course understanding ( $p < .01$ ) and academic engagement ( $p < .01$ ) than CASE students without fieldwork. The findings suggest the program is achieving several of its early goals.

### Overview

A recent review of literature on out-of-school time highlights both the growing popularity of and need for after-school programs (ASPs) (Mahoney, Parente & Zigler, 2009). In total, approximately 8.4 million children are currently enrolled in ASPs (e.g. After-school Alliance, 2009). There is a trend toward increasing ASP participation among all income levels though the trend is especially pronounced among the lowest income levels (Harvard Research Project, 2006). With this growing trend, the findings that participation in ASPs can lead to positive social development (Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005; Posner & Vandell, 1994) as well as improved academic performance (Grossman, Price, Fellerath, Jucovy, Kotloff, Raley, et al. 2002; Huang et al, 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1994) seems increasingly important. However,

participation in an afterschool program does not always lead to positive outcomes. Whether or not a child benefits from after-school program participation depends on the quality of the program (Catalano, Berglund, Ryna, Lonczak & Hawkins, 1998; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Vandell & Pierce, 2001). Specifically, multiple studies have shown that program quality is a product of teacher quality (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Pierce, Hamm & Vandell, 1999; Smith, Peck, Denault, Blazeovski & Akiva, in press). In light of the growing trend of ASP participation, it seems important to focus on improving ASP teacher quality which may be a productive step toward higher quality and greater benefits from ASPs. The current paper highlights the impact that staff quality has on potential benefits of ASP participation and the consequent need for professional development of ASP educators. Accordingly, the paper describes the first program of its kind aimed to comprehensively train ASP educators in a university setting and reports early findings on student's experience in this program.

## **The Value of After-School Programs**

Research suggests that after-school program participation has the potential to lead to various positive youth development outcomes. For one, involvement in afterschool programs has been linked to improved academic performance (Grossman, et. al., 2002; Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee & Baker, 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1994). The improved academic performance may be a product of proper stimulation outside of school afforded by ASPs. Alternatively, studies have shown that unsupervised time can lead to negative academic outcomes (Synder & Sickmund, 1999; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001) and that many children do not receive stimulation and adult support that they need to succeed in school (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & Iver, 1993). Perhaps academic enrichment in many ASPs can account for improved academic performance (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese & Macias, 2001). Additionally, ASP participation can lead to positive social development including improved peer acceptance and decreased problem behaviors (Mahoney et. al., 2005; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Synder & Sickmund, 1999; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001). ASP participation has also been linked to lower rates of obesity (Mahoney & Lord, 2005). To the extent that the developmental system works as a whole, benefits are synergistic. For example, gains in cognitive functioning support social well-being and vice-versa.

While many students have been shown to benefit from ASPs, research suggests that low income and minority students who are at risk of academic failure may be especially likely to benefit from ASP participation. For example, low achieving students, black students, Hispanic students, and English language learners have been found to show greater gains in math achievement compared to other students involved in ASPs (Welsh, Russell, Williams, Reisner & White, 2002). Further, Lauer and colleague's meta-analysis of ASPs showed that test scores of low-income and at-risk youth improved significantly in both reading and mathematics after participation in after-school programs (Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow & Martin-Glenn, 2006). Therefore, providing children with sufficient out-of-school stimulation may help to level the playing field for children who may not otherwise receive out of school stimulation conducive to academic achievement in US classrooms (Rothstein, 2004).

However, not all after-school programs yield these important benefits. Research shows that the extent to which ASP participation facilitates positive development depends on the quality of the after-school program staff (Catalano, Berglund, Ryna, Lonczak & Hawkins, 1998; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Mahoney, Stattin & Lord, 2004; Pierce, Hahm & Vandell, 1999; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996; Smith, Devaney, Akiva & Sugar, 2009). Given the important potential benefits of

after-school programs and because benefits of after-school programs depend on staff quality, facilitating the ability of staff to provide high quality service seems critical.

Evidence suggests that appropriate professional development provides the means to prepare ASP staff (Hall & Cassidy, 2002; Puzio, 1987; Smith, et. al, 2009; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen & Garet, 2008). Teacher training has been linked to more confident and successful teachers and has shown to help teachers understand the diverse perspectives of learners (Causey, Thomas & Armento, 2000). Specifically, the fieldwork component in teacher training is linked to preparing educators to create successful learning environments for diverse populations (Rowe, 2003). The most recent review of professional development literature suggests that teachers who are products of successful professional development tend to have a positive effect on student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley, 2007).

However, professional development for ASP educators has not been a priority. Neither formal education nor training is required of many ASP staff (Boufard & Little, 2004). If available at all, ASP staff training models are usually limited to workshops, professional meetings, or online webinars (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). Such workshops have been criticized as an ineffective process to prepare K-12 educators (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). In an attempt to fill the educational void in ASP educator training, the University of California, Irvine initiated a comprehensive program designed to train ASP educators in a university setting.

### **Overview of the Certificate in After-school Education Program**

The CASE program is designed to train ASP educators through a blend of required coursework and related fieldwork in ASPs. The program is currently in its second year of operation and is focused on pre-service training and education aimed at university students. However, the program also offers the coursework to staff in the community through university extension courses and therefore provides in-service training opportunities as well. CASE students are required to complete five courses including:

- a course on the foundations of out of school learning;
- a choice between courses on human development or multicultural education;
- a course on academic curricula relevant to after-school settings;
- a course on expanded learning curricula (i.e. athletics, arts, technology etc.) and
- an elective course chosen from either the academic or expanded learning categories (See Table 1 for complete list of CASE courses).

The fieldwork may be completed at any of the six ASPs that chose to partner with CASE and met CASE criteria (for a detailed explanation, see Mahoney, Levine & Hinga, 2010).

**Table 1**

Amount and type of fieldwork required in CASE courses.  
Spring 2009 course are included in the present study.

<b>Course</b>	<b>Fieldwork</b>	<b>Spring 2009</b>
Adolescent Development in Education	none	yes
Child Development in Education	none	yes
Multicultural Education in K-12 Schools	none*	no
Foundations of Out-of-School Learning	10 hours observation	no
Art in the Elementary School	20 hours interaction	yes
Educational Strategies for Tutoring and Teacher Aiding	20 hours interaction	no
Foundations of Elementary School Mathematics I	20 hours interaction	yes
Foundations of Elementary School Mathematics II	20 hours interaction	no
Preparation for Teaching Fine Arts in K-12 Schools	20 hours interaction	no
Principles and Practices of Coaching Sports II	20 hours interaction	yes

Note: The column marked "Offered Spring 2009" denotes courses which were included as part of the present Study.

\* Whether fieldwork is included varies by instructor and is not included as part of the 70 hours of CASE required fieldwork hours.

The type of partnership between UC Irvine and selected ASPs can be labeled as a university-community (U-C) partnership. A U-C partnership is defined as an explicit agreement between a community based organization and an academic unit to engage in a common project or goal, which is mutually beneficial (Suarez-Balcazar, Harper & Lewis, 2005). The goal of CASE U-C partnerships is to provide local ASPs with trained volunteers while also providing CASE students with hands on experience at ASPs under scaffolded conditions. One of the goals of the program is to positively impact CASE students. The potential benefits to CASE students include: increased understanding of course material, diverse cultures, and service learning ideals through the blend of coursework and hands on (fieldwork) experience.

### **CASE as a Community of Practice and Social Learning System**

The current paper explains how CASE creates a Community of Practice, which may create additional learning benefits to CASE students, in comparison to students not involved in the CASE program. A Community of Practice is a type of community created by the quest for a shared ambition (Wenger, 1998). The shared ambition of CASE, is the desire to learn about the after-school education field. There are three crucial elements in a Community of Practice (COP):

- the *domain* – A COP has an identity defined by a shared field of interest;
- the *community* - Through pursuit of a common domain, COP members engage in shared activities and build relationships that allow them to learn from each other;

- the *practice* - Members of a COP develop a shared repertoire of resources based on sustained interaction and experience.

The CASE program creates each of these three elements.

Students who complete CASE courses share a common interest in the *domain* of After-school Education. Also, the comprehensive nature of the CASE program allows CASE students to learn from each other and build relationships as a *community* of ASP educators. Additionally, sustained interaction through fieldwork and coursework allows CASE students, professors and current after-school educators to create a *practice* marked by shared repertoires. The comprehensive nature of the CASE program (involving completion of multiple courses and fieldwork hours) creates the COP of CASE. The current evaluation focuses on how CASE students may benefit from CASE as a COP, compared to students who are not part of the COP formed by CASE.

COPs are thought to have many benefits. Of particular interest are two benefits of COPs that are important for ASP educators:

- 1) a deep understanding of material and
- 2) an intensified mutual commitment to the domain of interest (Wenger, 2000).

The CASE program allows students to form a COP which may provide CASE students with the potential for a deep understanding of ASP education and an intensified mutual commitment to ASP service through the blend of coursework and fieldwork.

Second, the design of CASE allows students to learn through experience. Experiential learning occurs through the blend of coursework and fieldwork afforded by CASE courses and fieldwork opportunities. This blend provides students with knowledge to be ASP educators (through coursework) as well as practical experience (through fieldwork). Specifically, the blend of knowledge (through coursework) and experience (through fieldwork) allows student engagement (interactions with others), imagination (how one sees oneself as being connected to a broader community) and alignment (coordination of perspectives and actions to reach higher goals) (Wenger, 2000).

Through the blend of coursework and fieldwork, CASE students are able to engage in both, the academic and practical components of ASP education. Academic engagement provides students with a knowledge base and theoretical background pertinent to their careers as ASP educators. While they learn these theories and implications they are also able to engage in interactions with ASP students and staff, and are in turn able to decide for themselves which coursework components pertain to their practical experience. Additionally, CASE provides students with the opportunity for alignment of ideas learned in courses with actual fieldwork experience. Lastly, through theories of learning in courses and hands-on fieldwork experiences, CASE students are able to imagine themselves in the role of an after-school educator. The CASE program employs experiential learning to provide CASE students with the potential for a deep understanding of ASP education. The following subsections, highlight the potential benefits of CASE as a COP and social learning system.

## **Understanding Course Concepts**

The content offered through CASE courses covers concepts integral to successful ASP educators. To supplement classroom learning, CASE students are provided opportunities to learn experientially through direct work in ASPs. The comprehensive nature of the CASE program (including an interrelated coursework regimen and the fieldwork component which aligns with coursework) should help students feel like members of the ASP educator community and therefore allow them to place what they learn into a broader framework which helps with understanding (Wenger, 2000). Second, most CASE courses require a fieldwork component that is tied to ideas learned in courses. According to Wenger's COP theory, the fieldwork experience should allow students to align the ideas they learn through coursework with their fieldwork experiences, which should help students have a deeper understanding of their coursework, including: perceived understanding of course material and perceived ability to apply course concepts.

## **Understanding Diverse Populations**

Effective educators need skills to work with diverse youth (Banks, 1995). However, multiple evidence sources suggest that it is the lack of direct and meaningful interaction with different cultures that prevents educators from a proper multicultural understanding (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Fereshteh, 1995; Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997). Follo and colleagues (Follo, Hoerr & Vorheis-Sargent, 2002) found that educators must be immersed in other cultures to develop a multicultural understanding. Immersion can take the form of fieldwork (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997) as implemented in the CASE program. Multicultural education is covered across CASE courses and is an integral aspect of fieldwork. The courses integrate ideas about how to educate diverse individuals and fieldwork sites consist of students from diverse ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses. Of additional importance is the reflection and dialogue between students and supervisors about multicultural experiences so that stereotypes and biases are not reinforced (Ooka, 1994). The face to face experience under direct supervision in fieldwork paired with the reflection and multicultural teaching in coursework should help students feel more prepared and comfortable to work with diverse individuals.

## **Service Learning Measures**

Social learning through U-C Partnerships may also act to increase service learning measures among CASE students. Ample evidence has shown that students who participate in high quality service learning are likely to show multiple benefits. For one, students' empowerment tends to increase as they learn they can impact real social needs (Chung, 1997). Service learning tends to increase students' interest in furthering their education (Lewis-Charp, HanhCao, Soukamneuth & Laco, 2003) and may promote positive attitudes about civic engagement (Tannenbaum, 2007). Service learning may help students to understand community needs, develop ethic of service and civic responsibility and increase their desire to actively contribute to community (Billing, 2000). The mix between community service (ASP participation) and reflection (during coursework) through the CASE program seems to provide an ideal learning experience for the enhanced empowerment as well as academic, civic, and career engagement.

## **The Present Study**

This study assesses whether college students' perceived course understanding, multicultural understanding, and service learning intentions are related to participation in CASE courses and

fieldwork. To test the idea that students in the CASE program benefit from the COP created by CASE, students in CASE courses were compared to students enrolled in a university course offered in the same department (the Education Department) that is not part of the CASE program (hereafter referred to as the "control course"). To measure the relationship between the above measure and fieldwork (or experiential learning), this study capitalizes on the design of CASE which requires fieldwork for some but not all CASE courses. The present study compares students in CASE courses with a fieldwork component to students in CASE courses without a fieldwork component along the above measures.

There are four main expectations for students in CASE courses (compared to the control course) and for students with fieldwork (compared to those without fieldwork).

1. First, we expect students in CASE courses to report greater understanding of course material and feel more prepared to apply course material than students in the control course due to the COP created by the comprehensive nature of the CASE program.
2. Second, we expect students in CASE courses with fieldwork to report greater understanding of course material and feel more prepared to apply course material than students in CASE courses without fieldwork, in accordance with the idea that fieldwork creates opportunities for social learning.
3. Third, consistent with social learning theory, we expect that students in CASE courses with fieldwork will report greater comfort levels, desire to work with, and feeling of preparedness to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds than students enrolled in courses without a fieldwork component.
4. Fourth, we expect students in CASE courses to report higher service learning scores than students in the control course, due to the emphasis on the importance of service in the COP of CASE.
5. Fifth, we expect students enrolled in CASE courses with a fieldwork component to report a stronger orientation toward service learning than students in CASE courses without a fieldwork component because of the importance of service learned socially through fieldwork experiences.

## Methods

**Participants.** Participants include 174 students enrolled in one of five CASE courses offered during the spring quarter of 2009 (81% of total students enrolled in these courses) and 50 students enrolled the control course (93% of students enrolled in this course) that was also offered through the Department of Education (see Table 1). Because CASE courses vary as to whether they involve fieldwork at an ASP, the sample can be further categorized as follows:

- 1) students enrolled CASE courses with fieldwork ( $n = 66$ );
- 2) students enrolled in CASE courses without fieldwork ( $n = 112$ ); and
- 3) students enrolled in the control course ( $n = 50$ ). Table 2 provides a list of the courses surveyed. The majority of students in these courses are full-time undergraduates and 77% were female.

**Table 2**

Descriptive statistics for study variables separately for students in CASE courses with and without field work and students in a control course.

	<b>CASE with fieldwork</b>	<b>CASE without fieldwork</b>	<b>CASE Total</b>	<b>Control</b>
<b>Number of Students enrolled</b>	84	131	215	54
<b>Surveys collected</b>	86%	78%	81%	93%
<b>Personal Information</b>				
Possible interest in CASE	66%	53%	66%	76%
Ethnicity				
Asian	40%	62%	53%	54%
Black	2%	1%	1%	0%
Hispanic	12%	8%	12%	15%
White	20%	26%	29%	23%
Other	6%	3%	5%	8%
Future Education Career	67%	71%	69%	55%
Plan to work for ASP	70%	69%	70%	56%
Female	78%	83%	81%	67%
Year in College	3.4	3.2	3.3	2.7
Age	21	21	21	20
Hours work per week	7	6	7	3
<b>Outcome Measures</b>				
Perceived Learning	3.3	3.2	3.2	2.8
Multicultural Understanding	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9
Service Learning Domains				
Academic	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.1
Civic	3.3	3.2	3.2	3
Career	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.1
Empowerment	3.2	3	3.1	3.1

Note: Percentages refer to percent of students within the column. Actual values refer to means within a column.

**Procedure.** During the last week of the spring quarter, students in each CASE course and the control course were asked to complete a survey during class time. The students were read the purpose of the survey and were made aware that survey completion was not mandatory nor did it impact their course grade. The surveys contained no identifying information. Students enrolled in courses without a fieldwork component were not asked questions pertaining to fieldwork experiences. The surveys were otherwise identical.

## Measures

Basic demographic information, degree of perceived learning, multicultural appreciation, and service learning scores were measured through survey questions. An average score for *perceived learning* was based on students' answers to three questions regarding: understanding of course material; course usefulness; and feeling of preparedness to apply course concepts (e.g. "How ready to you feel to apply the information you have learned in this course?" Each question was based on a four point scale. Cronbach alpha reliability was .64.

An average score for *multicultural understanding* was based on each individual's average score based on answers to four questions. The questions included: amount of experience with; feeling of comfort working with; feeling of preparedness to work with; and desire to work with diverse populations. (e.g. "How well prepared do you feel to serve low SES and minority populations?"). Each question was based on a four point scale. Cronbach alpha reliability was .80.

To measure service learning domains, participants responded to questions from four scales taken from the Higher Education Service-Learning Survey created by the Higher Education Service-Learning Survey. (2000). The survey includes six statements pertaining to academic engagement, such as: "I find the content in school courses intellectually stimulating." There are nine questions specific to civic engagement, for example, "I am concerned about local community issues." Six questions pertain to career engagement, including "I feel well prepared for my future career." Lastly, there are eight statements aimed to measure empowerment, such as, "I can make a positive difference in my life." Responses to each statement are scored upon a four-point Likert scale. Statements either positively or negatively endorse each construct, so that in the case of negative statements, Likert-scale scores were reverse coded. Statements pertinent to each of the four categories were randomly mixed throughout the surveys. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the four scales were as follows: academic engagement (.68); civic responsibility (.86); career engagement (.76); and empowerment (.69).

## Results

**Perceived Learning.** Regression analysis uncovers that, consistent with our first hypothesis, students in CASE courses report higher average levels of perceived course understanding than reported by students in the control course ( $B = .27, p < .001$ ) (See Table 3). Consistent with our second hypothesis, students enrolled in CASE courses with a fieldwork component reported higher levels of perceived learning than students enrolled in CASE courses without a fieldwork component ( $B = .23, p < .01$ ) (See Table 4).

**Table 3**

Regression coefficients of CASE courses compared to the control course

	<b>CASE</b>
<b>Perceived Understanding</b>	.27***
<b>Multicultural Understanding</b>	.51
<b>Service Learning Domains</b>	
Academic	-.01
Civic	.19**
Career	.06
Empowerment	.12*

Note: Controls include: ethnicity, gender, age, year in college, and future career plans.  
P<.05\*; p<.001\*\*\*

**Multicultural Understanding.** Our third hypothesis was not met. Regression analysis failed to show a significant link between multicultural understanding for either students enrolled in CASE courses compared to the control course (See Table 3) or for students enrolled in CASE courses with fieldwork compared to those enrolled in CASE courses without a fieldwork component (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

Regression coefficients of CASE courses with fieldwork compared to CASE courses without fieldwork.

	<b>Fieldwork</b>
<b>Perceived Understanding</b>	.23**
<b>Multicultural Understanding</b>	.30
<b>Service Learning Domains</b>	
Academic	.18**
Civic	.06
Career	.07
Empowerment	.12

Note: Controls include: ethnicity, gender, age, year in college, and future career plans.  
P<.01\*\*, p<.001\*\*\*

**Service Learning Measures.** Our fourth hypothesis was partially supported. Two reported service learning scores significantly differed between students in CASE courses compared to students in the control course: civic engagement ( $B=.19, p < .01$ ) and empowerment ( $B=.12, p < .05$ ) (See Table 3). Regression analysis did not reveal significant differences in comparisons between academic engagement or career engagement between students in CASE and non-

CASE courses. Lastly, our fifth hypothesis was also partially confirmed. One service learning measure, academic engagement, significantly differed between CASE students in courses with fieldwork versus students in courses without fieldwork ( $B=.18, p < .01$ ). No significant differences were found between empowerment, civic engagement or career engagement between students enrolled in CASE courses with fieldwork, compared to those enrolled in CASE courses without fieldwork.

## Discussion

This study reported early evaluation findings of the CASE program. The evaluation was intended to help understand the current level of implementation of the program and assess some of the associated impacts to identify areas where improvement may be needed. In addition, because of the considerable interest and need for education and training programs to better prepare the after-school workforce, it is hoped that the program design and assessment will be of use to parallel efforts occurring around the nation. Overall, the results suggest that university students enrolled in the CASE courses, particularly those with a fieldwork component, report high levels of service learning and civic engagement, compared to university students not enrolled in CASE courses.

To begin, consistent with our first hypothesis, findings suggest that students enrolled in CASE courses tend to score higher on aggregate scores of perceived learning. This link parallels past work by Lave and Wenger (1991) that explains that engagement, imagination and alignment of material leads to comprehensive understanding. This literature is also consistent with our second hypothesis and corresponding finding that students in CASE courses with fieldwork reported higher scores of perceived learning than students in CASE courses without fieldwork. It seems that the experiential learning, afforded by hands on fieldwork experience, relates to increased learning.

Next, our third hypothesis that perceived multicultural understanding levels would be higher for students in CASE courses versus the control and for students in CASE courses with fieldwork compared to courses without fieldwork was not supported. This may be a product of either a lack of reflection associated with hands on experience or an insufficient amount of exposure to diverse populations during fieldwork. Perhaps further studies may look at the degree of reflection as a mediating factor between CASE courses or fieldwork experience and scores of multicultural education. Conversely, the process of reflection may be adequate but the amount of multicultural education received over one quarter may simply be insufficient to multicultural understanding. Possibly, with a higher dosage of coursework matched with fieldwork, results may differ. Increased multicultural understanding may be linked to more than one quarter of CASE courses and/or fieldwork experiences. Perhaps, greater multicultural understanding will only be linked to the completion of all CASE requirements because it is the cumulative nature that is important. Further, the CASE curriculum includes a course specific to multicultural understanding which was not offered during the spring quarter measured here. Completion of the course on multicultural education may be a strong predictor of multicultural understanding.

Finally, our fourth and fifth hypotheses that service learning measures would be higher for students in CASE courses compared to the control course and for students in CASE courses with fieldwork compared to courses without fieldwork was partially supported. Findings suggest that students in CASE courses reported higher levels of civic engagement and empowerment than students in the control course, though there were no significant differences between the groups in academic or career engagement. Students in courses with fieldwork compared to those in

courses without fieldwork only yielded higher scores of perceived academic importance. No other comparisons were significant.

The positive findings are consistent with the theory that the comprehensive nature of the CASE program lends itself to imagination of self as an ASP educator and therefore is linked to greater scores of civic engagement and empowerment (Wenger, 2000). And the service learning literature suggests that service learning experiences are linked to increased academic engagement (Lewis-Charp, et al., 2003). Although prior research does not suggest why service learning outcomes would vary across the measures, the lack of findings in some areas may be due either to the fact that the CASE program is at an early stage of development or that a short timeframe for evaluation was undertaken in this study. For example, perhaps service learning outcomes in other areas will be more apparent as students accumulate a greater dosage of CASE courses and/or fieldwork experiences over time. Alternatively, as the program matures, any given course may have a greater associated impact on student outcomes.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study represents the first step in examining experiences of students within the CASE program. As such, we discuss limitations and directions for future research. First, this study is not causal. While we did control for possible confounds (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and grade) we cannot claim that completion of CASE courses or fieldwork caused students to score higher on any measure. There are a number of potential confounds that may influence the established links between either enrollment in CASE courses or courses with a fieldwork component, such as baseline differences. Future research should employ methods more conducive to understanding causation. For example, pre- and post-test assessments should be undertaken to assess course-related growth over time.

Additionally, as mentioned for all measures, lack of findings on certain measures may be due to the early timing of this evaluation. Perhaps differences between CASE courses compared to the control course may be related to the completion of all multiple CASE courses, rather than just one. Similarly, it is possible that outcomes related to fieldwork experiences increase with the completion of greater amounts of fieldwork. Future studies should measure dosage of courses and fieldwork, as well as a combination of the two to determine if outcomes depend on additive exposure to CASE courses and/or fieldwork. In terms of all outcomes, if there is a link between dosage and outcomes it will be important to determine whether the completion of CASE program requirements provides sufficient dosage to yield beneficial results.

The measures may also be a limiting factor in the determination of more lasting impacts of the CASE program. Perception of learning is not equivalent to actual learning. For the purpose of this preliminary evaluation, perception of learning was an important measure because it may lead to greater confidence and illuminate certain processes that at least are linked to actual learning. However, while perception is important in this early evaluation, an additional aim of CASE is to prepare students who have a true understanding of course material which may be measured through course tests or other more objective measures. Likewise, reported multicultural understanding is important in this preliminary evaluation to understand early processes. Future studies may benefit from a more objective measure of multicultural understanding, possibly including observation of CASE student interactions with diverse children or survey questions that aim to measure multicultural understanding more objectively.

## Conclusion

It is evident that institutions of higher learning can play a role in developing training and education for the after-school workforce. In this study, the differences between students in CASE courses and students in courses with fieldwork suggest that the CASE program is on the right track toward better preparing ASP educators with respect to their understanding of relevant course material and perceived academic, civic, and career engagement. Important next steps for the evaluation include replication of these findings using a more rigorous research design and examining how these sorts of outcomes may relate to changes in program quality and child outcomes.

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## **Weaving Evaluation into the Fabric of Youth Development**

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## Weaving Evaluation into the Fabric of Youth Development

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**Abstract:** An Empowerment Evaluation process served to engage staff and campers and foster integration of authentic assessment methods into youth camp programming over a three-year period. Key elements to the process included program planning, staff training, timing and balance of action and reflection activities, data collection and management. Camp staff involved for 2-3 years reported improved focus and staff who served in the third year achieved mastery in communication, leadership, teaching, and management skills. A purposive sample of three different camp venues evaluated in Year 3 indicated that campers improved significantly in outdoor and life skills. Over 70% felt safe, supported, and enabled to build skills. Implications for practice, research, and policy are discussed.

### Introduction

Youth programs such as summer camps are living systems that staff and campers know as few evaluators could hope to appreciate. Thus a professional evaluator is wise not to disrupt the flow of non-formal learning but rather collaborate with camp staff to assess processes and outcomes from the inside out. Such an integrated or embedded evaluation process adds value beyond generating accountability data. Engaging camp staff and campers in sharing experiences, achievements, and struggles enables both parties to build positive relationships, identify and adjust to changing needs, and use that knowledge and skill to optimize their camp experience. The purpose of this research report is to describe a program development process used to integrate evaluation into the fabric of a residential summer camp and describe outcomes for three diverse experiences served by that facility.

A growing body of research indicates that residential summer camps benefit youth campers (American Camp Association, 2005, 2006; Garst & Bruce, 2003; Klem & Nicholson, 2008; Loeser, Bailey, Benson, & Dean, 2004) and teens or young adults who serve as counselors (Brandt & Arnold, 2006; Garst & Johnson, 2005; Garst & Bruce, 2003). High quality camps provide supportive relationships (Spencer, Jordan, & Sazama, 2004; Thurber, Scheuler,

Scanlon, & Henderson, 2007) in which youth can connect with nature, learn outdoor or specialized skills, and grow in social and leadership skills (American Camp Association, 2005, 2006). Most of these benefits derive from *how* programs are conducted; that is, their use of positive youth development practices (American Camp Association, 2005; Powell, 2003).

Camping programs face increasing pressure to demonstrate exemplary practices and outcomes, yet most must do so with limited expertise, budget, and time on evaluation tasks. Fortunately, timely investments in program development and staff training can set the stage for continuous quality improvement and sustained outcomes to meet these demands (American Camp Association, 2007; Henderson & Bialeschki, 2007). Empowerment Evaluation (EE) (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005) provides a theoretical framework and skill set particularly well-adapted to program development and capacity-building in camp settings. In contrast to traditional approaches, EE operates as more of an internal evaluation process focused on self-determination and capacity-building. The evaluator acts less as an expert and more as coach and critical friend, collaborating with program staff toward mutually valued goals in program improvement and professional development. EE enables staff, who are well-positioned to judge children's needs and performance, to *record* data as it is generated, *reflect* with peers, supervisor, and project evaluator, and *refine* strategies to better meet needs of individual campers or groups. This approach seems consistent with recommendations for staff development by the American Camp Association (2007) and for engaging youth and staff in camp quality improvement (Bialeschki, n.d.). Alternative or authentic assessment (AA) methods recommended for school (Rennert-Ariev, 2005) and out-of-school (Fenichel & Schweingruber, 2010) settings are compatible tools to implement Empowerment Evaluation and positive youth development practices.

### **Evolution of the Camp Evaluation Process**

The evaluation process and outcomes described herein was woven into the fabric of camp life over a three year period. Within the broader framework of Empowerment Evaluation, annual orientation, cabin conversations, weekly staff debriefing, and end-of-season debriefing clarified the camp's mission (positive youth development through outdoor and life skills programming) and engaged staff and campers in annual and weekly "taking stock" and iterative planning activities.

In the first year, guided by positive youth development practices (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and program evaluation standards (Joint Committee, 1994), the authors developed a simple logic model and trained staff to complete checklists on outdoor skills and manage youth self-assessments of life skills (pre/post) and program climate (post). Camper feedback was overwhelmingly positive. However, counselor role overload, program time constraints, and camper literacy issues contributed to consistent stress over the evaluation process.

In the second year staff received more training and scheduled more time to observe and interact with campers on outdoor and life skills. Youth self-report was limited to post-camp assessment of program climate, using a PowerPoint program with infrared clickers. Debriefing conversations for campers and camp staff aided individual growth, group cohesion, and program adjustment. By the third year, experienced staff were able to blend observations, checklists, individual contacts, and debriefing conversations of cabin groups into the natural flow of programming. Most made use of suggested small group activities and conversation topics targeting life-skills to enhance this process. Campers were given a daily time to write in a

journal and rest after lunch. Camper registration data was matched with process and outcome input, enabling group comparisons. A summary of youth and camp staff results follows.

## Methods

A purposive sample was selected representing the facility's diverse camping groups, all of which served 10-15 year-olds. These included a traditional youth camp, 4-H Junior Camp (JR), including 51 boys and 49 girls ( $n = 108$ ), a special audience camp, Operation Military Kids (OMK), reaching 41 boys and 37 girls ( $n = 79$ ), and a wildlife/hunter safety theme camp, Fur, Fish, and Game (FFG) with 45 boys and 8 girls. All campers completed an enrollment form including demographic data. During each week, campers were assessed on two impact areas, outdoor skills and life skills, and one environmental factor, youth program climate. Outdoor skills in JR and OMK included archery and canoeing, assessed by instructional counselors using rubrics for safety and procedural skills. FFG campers completed a series of hunter safety and wildlife knowledge courses and assessments conducted by expert volunteers.

Each camper was assessed by his or her cabin counselor using a retrospective post-then-pre Life Skills Observation Checklist (LSOC) and journal. Six skills derived from the American Camp Association (ACA) study (2005): listening, conflict resolution, building friendships, new adventures, independence, and connecting to nature. Two skill sets were recommended by camp staff: practicing camp traditions (e.g., completing chores, etiquette, flag and other rituals) and exercising leadership. External observation was deemed more reliable than self-report as used in the ACA (2005) study since. Observations also reduced youth time on evaluation tasks and enhanced counselor awareness of camper growth. A pilot group of camp staff affirmed its face validity and utility in the month preceding camp. All counselors were trained on use of the tool before camp and checked periodically by the camp director throughout the summer.

Near the end of their weeklong camp experience, all participants completed a 30-item Youth Program Climate (YPC) survey using PowerPoint slides and infrared remote clickers. YPC construct validity rests on best practice program traits including safety, support, positive social norms, belongingness, skill-building, self-efficacy, and synergy with home and community (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Previous research found it reliable with child and teen audiences (Silliman, 2008, 2009). Campers also enjoyed a brief time each day to write in personal journals. These reflections were not collected for analysis but may have contributed in content or quality of nightly conversations in cabin groups.

Camp counselors (12 male, 14 female) self-assessed their own competencies before and after the camping season using the Camp Staff Skills assessment. Fifteen competencies representing communication, leadership, teaching, and management skills were drawn from camp job descriptions and prior research (Brandt & Arnold, 2006; Garst & Johnson, 2005). Fifteen additional items administered at the end of the season tapped staff perceptions of the Influence of Camp Staff Experience on factors ranging from desire to help others to career choice. Face and content validity for both scales were established through a panel of camp directors. Each scale enabled staff to reflect on core capacities and growth in the counseling experience. The camp director also completed individual observations on staff skill growth using the same scale. Camp Staff engaged in debriefing conversations together weekly, taking note of program strengths and needs for improvement. The camp director supervised all staff and was aided by several experienced counselors in coaching newer staff. Data for all scales was analyzed using SPSS-PC, Version 16. Informal notes from weekly staff debriefing conversations were examined for key themes to gain additional insights on the process.

## Results

### Youth Outcomes

Results were tabulated for each camp in order to preserve the uniqueness of each audience and program yet facilitate comparison of trends across them. Outdoor Skills, Life Skills, and Youth Program Climate were assessed in each camp.

**Outdoor Skills Observations.** Campers in JR and OMK arrived at camp with scant awareness of safety rules or basic skills in archery or canoeing. At the conclusion of camp, over 90% of youth were able to describe and follow safety rules and complete the basic skills independently. FFG camper knowledge of wildlife and hunter safety was not assessed initially, but all those who participated earned the hunter safety certificate.

**Life Skills Observation Checklist.** Cabin counselors evaluated eight factors characteristic of the camping experience and provided retrospective ratings on each camper. Pre- and post-camp differences were significant for all variables in all camps. Trends for the greatest gains, by camp, were as follows:

- 4-H Junior Camp: Scale reliability for LSOC pre-test was ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and for the post-test ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The five factors with greatest gains included Building Friendships (.72 on a 4-pt. scale), Listening (.67), Trying New Things (.59), Independence (.58), and Leadership (.52) were significantly higher than three areas with smallest gains, including Connecting to Nature (.44), Keeping Traditions (.44), and Resolving Conflicts (.39). Ratings of boys and girls for all areas showed no statistical differences on beginning, ending, or gain scores. Reliability for difference scores was high ( $\alpha = .84$ ).
- Operation Military Kids: Scale reliability for LSOC pre-test was ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and for the post-test ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The five factors with greatest gains include Leadership (.72), Building Friendships (.57), Conflict Resolution (.57), Keeping Traditions (.49), and Connecting to Nature (.48). Ratings of boys and girls for all areas showed no statistical differences on beginning, ending, or gain scores. Reliability for difference scores was high ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Results confirm earlier research indicating that expanding friendships and social skills, trying new activities, developing independence and leadership are among the most important results of attending Summer camp.
- Fur, Fish, and Game: Scale reliability for LSOC pre-test was ( $\alpha = .60$ ) and for the post-test ( $\alpha = .74$ ). The five factors with greatest gains include Keeping Traditions (.64), Leadership (.63), Building Friendships, Conflict Resolution, and Independence (.50). Ratings of boys and girls for all areas showed no statistical differences on beginning, ending, or gain scores. Reliability for difference scores was high ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Results confirm earlier research indicating that expanding friendships and social skills, trying new activities, developing independence and leadership are among the most important results of attending summer camp.

**Youth Program Climate Survey.** Youth reported that their camp experiences were overwhelmingly positive. Alpha reliability for the scale in all three camps averaged .88. Over seventy percent in all camps agreed that they felt safe, supported, and enabled to build skills. Although as many as fifty-four percent (in OMK) disagreed that "Other Kids Cared," most (65-90%) affirmed social norms for acceptance and belonging, teamwork (76-88%), and service (84-91%). Almost thirty-five percent in two camps indicated that "Conflicts Were a Problem," suggesting that individual hassles rather than overall camp culture were problematic. Further,

around ninety percent youth in all camps did not report feeling “Embarrassed or Put Down.” Although the vast majority (70-80%) felt that adults listened and were approachable, nearly one quarter did not agree that adults were approachable.

In all camps, a large majority of youth (75%) agreed that camp provided opportunities to set goals, learn new subjects, and gain skills. About the same percentage viewed camp as a place to take responsibility and make a difference. Over seventy percent of youth reported that the camp helped them grow in confidence, responsibility, and leadership. Over ninety percent felt that rules were clearly defined and seventy-five percent agreed that discipline was not too strict or loose. Over seventy-five percent agreed that activities promoted healthy habits.

Perspectives on program climate showed few differences by age, gender, or race, with significant differences only in the 4-H Junior Camp group. There, girls scored significantly higher than boys on viewing other kids as caring, discipline as appropriate, and seeing camp as a part of a broader social network. No differences were identified by race.

### **Counselor Debriefing Observations**

Weekly debriefing conversations led by the camp director or his assistant enabled camp staff to reflect on programming and evaluation activities, to encourage and to learn from one another. Early in the Year 3 Evaluation staff rehearsed a shared understanding of Outdoor Skills Checklists and Life Skills Observations, then regularly checked procedures for implementing these tools. Discussions revealed the need for cabin counselors to assist instructional counselors in helping campers demonstrate Outdoor Skills Checklists. Staff noted that the Life Skills Observation rubric provided focus and clarity on carrying out the camp mission and building relationships with campers. They also shared ideas on how to frame questions with individuals or small groups that might result in more accurate and complete documentation of life skills growth. Staff generated several strategies for facilitating daily reflection on Nature, teamwork, or outdoor skills learning as well as ways to invite camper input on the next day’s activities. During these times, staff also shared ideas to teach and discuss life skills such as conflict resolution and leadership. Debriefing also resulted in eliminating evaluation ideas such as efforts to monitor cabin routines (based on tedium and time constraints) or duplicate camper journals (limiting input demands, allowing greater privacy). Most importantly, debriefing facilitated mid-course program improvements and re-energizing around the mission which supported quality and continuity of programming (as evidenced by outcome and climate results) throughout the camping season.

### **Counselor Outcomes**

Reliability for Camp Staff Skills assessments was high (alpha [pre] = .85, [post] = .89). At pre-test, over fifty percent described themselves as having mastery in communication, leadership, teaching, and management skills. However, 11 of 15 items showed significant pre-post differences ( $p < .05$ ): communicating with peers and with supervisors, leading small and large groups, mediating conflict resolution, dealing with difficult children, planning educational activities, decision-making, self-discipline, and problem solving. Non-significant differences in pre-post scores on listening, conflict resolution, teaching, teamwork, and handling emergencies were largely due to high levels of initial mastery.

In their weekly debriefing sessions with the camp director, staff identified critical strengths and weaknesses of their own and the larger camp schedule and took an active role in troubleshooting solutions. At the end of the season, responses to the Influence of Camp Experience survey (alpha = .87) indicated that staff viewed camp as a major influence on their

growth in desire to help others (78%), outdoor skills (71%), practical skills (62%), quality relationships (58%), and safety practices (50%). A high percentage of staff cited camp as a moderate or major influence on several other skills: creativity (100%), appreciation of differences (96%), workplace skills (96%), empathy (88%), self-efficacy (88%), sense of citizenship (88%), critical thinking (87%), health habits and fitness (83%).

## Discussion

Using an Empowerment Evaluation approach over a three-year period, the authors and camp staff developed and implemented a plan integrating evaluation with educational and relational processes in a residential youth camp. The process seemed simple at first, and was in many ways an extension of the camp director's practice of taking stock, week-by-week through the camping season and annually between seasons. In fact, staff who began the process in 2006 could have answered in the affirmative to most of the items on the American Camp Association (ACA) Youth Outcomes Readiness Checklist (American Camp Association, 2007). Consistent with Checklist priorities, a mission statement and program goals were documented and interpreted to staff and parents and the camp was accredited with ACA. Also, stakeholders including campers, parents, and staff had been engaged in prior evaluation efforts, with results shared in program improvement and promotion. In addition, staff made efforts to assess camp culture and involve campers and staff. Finally, tools were developed and implemented to gather data.

Using the Empowerment Evaluation process, nearly two years of careful listening to counselor and camper feedback, refinements in camp procedures and evaluation instruments, and adjustments to training and mentoring were needed to turn apparent readiness into effective practice. By Year 3, staff became interpreters of the camp's mission, took stock of operations and opportunities, and adjusted plans to maximize their effectiveness with each camping group. Authentic assessment of outdoor skills enabled campers to learn and confirm skills interactively with experts. Debriefing and planning conversations in cabin and activity groups engaged youth in deciding, discovering, and discussing, which enabled staff to more accurately and effectively document growth in life skills.

The one-time, game-like Youth Program Climate survey provided a much more empowering and less stressful medium for evaluating camp experiences than the pencil-and-paper approach used in the first year. Ease-of-use and relatively few questions or difficulties in implementation, and high reliabilities confirmed the value of instruments and methods.

In the third year of the program development process youth outcomes were positive for all camping groups. Both boys and girls at all ages experienced significant growth in life skills such as building friendships, communicating, and working out conflicts. Most took advantage of unique opportunities to try new activities, develop independence, and practice leadership. Youth also grew closer to Nature and camp traditions emphasizing responsibility and teamwork. These results are consistent with research by the American Camping Association (2005) and others indicating that intensive camping experiences can have profound effects on the development of middle and high school youth. Practical and social competence, confidence and independence, positive connections with peers and adults, character in respecting rules and persons, and caring through collegiality and service are recognized as significant factors in successful transitions from middle childhood toward puberty and adolescence (Theokas, Almergi, Lerner, Dowling, Benson, Scales, & vonEye, 2005).

Each of the groups sampled found the camp climate safe, supportive, and skill-building. This feedback from youth supports the inference that life skills growth observed by camp staff resulted from the camp experience rather than observer bias. Gender differences in perceptions of social climate likely reflect patterns of affiliation (e.g., girls usually more collaborative, more socially skilled). Different views of belonging by age may reflect relative experience at camp or away from home, maturity, or circumstantial factors.

Camp counselors grew personally and professionally. Several staff were returning to counseling and all staff were hired for their skills in communication, leadership, teaching, and management. Nevertheless, almost all achieved higher levels of mastery in most skills and credited the camp counseling experience with moderate to major influence on their growth in these areas.

During weekly debriefing sessions, several counselors noted that life skills observations enabled them to see their activities in context of a larger goal and know what to look for and nurture with each camper in their charge, during both formal and informal contacts with campers. Thus for both campers and counselors the process of action and reflection reinforced practices of positive youth development

### **Limitations**

This evaluation was, in fact, part of a multi-year process of refining program planning, implementation, and data collection. Samples are not representative of all campers but do reflect a diversity of audiences and programs in one camp. Although tools and methods were effective, they were not triangulated by external observers. Significant growth can occur in a brief time, yet camp programs are but a week in the lives of young people. Limited resources and contact information precluded follow-up contacts with campers or parents which may have reinforced or extended end-of-week reports. Staff training, coaching, and debriefing while fairly effective, was not extensive, and refinement of skills could significantly improve accuracy and utility of future evaluations.

### **Recommendations**

The process of weaving evaluation into youth development programming in this residential camp accomplished much, yet much more remains to be accomplished. Suggested improvements for practice, research, and policy follow.

### **Practice**

Program development is an iterative process that succeeds when program quality and outcome targets are identified accurately (e.g., consistent with youth development best practice and camp mission) and precisely (e.g., measurement is clear, detailed, and aligned with practice). Following the Empowerment Evaluation model, the process should engage a widening circle of stakeholders and gain much of its direction from them. Camp staff were central to this process. They served as front-line interpreters of camp priorities and activities to parents when they arrived at camp and to campers throughout the week. They designed and implemented program activities to teach content and life skills valued in the camp's mission. Simultaneously they observed campers and documented their progress. In addition, they facilitated feedback from campers on both needs and experiences. From these roles they provided practical insights for improving both program and evaluation processes. Given this history, refining resources, training, coaching, and support for camp staff is the top priority for continued improvement of programs and evaluations.

Authentic assessments (e.g., Outdoor and Life Skills tools) and informal procedures (e.g., cabin conversation protocols) should be documented in greater detail. However, to avoid rigid application and facilitate creative use of tools, programs should invest heavily in training staff and engaging youth. Improvements in data collection such as automated registration and use of personal digital assistant devices (PDAs) would significantly improve just-in-time as well as long-term use of quantitative results. Cell phone cameras, Think pads, pre- or post-camp blogs could enhance gathering of qualitative data. Technology that reduces time and error in data recording and enables just-in-time results will greatly enhance staff efficiency and data utilization.

Addition of on-site external observers or multiple measures for key outcomes could enrich current results. For instance, youth self-assessments or feedback from parents or community youth leaders could add credence or clarification to authentic assessments.

However, perhaps the most important consideration for programming and evaluation is the balance of cost and benefit, especially since most camps last for only a week, aspire to relatively simple goals, and prioritize relationship and creativity. Based on the past three years' experience, extensive use of reflective or evaluative methods is best combined with documentation of a few critical indicators of value to specific stakeholders. In fact, a practical working knowledge of goal-setting, experimentation, and debriefing may be among the most worthwhile life skills that youth can learn experientially at camp or elsewhere.

### **Research**

Insights and gaps identified by this study invite further investigation in a variety of youth programs and settings. Youth development professionals need to better understand the environments and interactive processes that facilitate growth and development in subject matter, self-awareness, and life skills. At the same time, researchers and practitioners need to better understand the types of outcomes that can be achieved in a brief program (e.g., one day to one week) and how those outcomes can be sustained. For instance, anecdotal comments from parents in prior years suggest that the camp experience may serve many purposes. Camps may be laboratories for learning skills not practiced elsewhere, such as water sports, environmental exploration, or hunter safety. In other cases, camp activities may be catalysts to learning or behavior changes such as using table manners or starting a horse club. For others, new friendships, self-awareness, or insights on life beyond one's hometown may set in motion patterns of maturation and relationship with lifelong effects. Some of these effects may be evident immediately while others may not be manifest to campers, staff, parents, or others until much later.

A more detailed examination is needed on the intersection between education and evaluation. The Empowerment Evaluation process and authentic assessment tools must be refined and tested under a variety of more rigorous conditions than was possible in this study. Another line of research might well examine how camp staff and campers make use of these processes in their subsequent learning and leadership. As technology tools become more affordable, researchers should examine their potential and limitations as youth development and as evaluation tools.

### **Policy**

The processes and outcomes of this evaluation hold implications for youth programs, organizations, and funding agencies. Youth program directors and staff should develop logic

models, lesson plans, and assessment tools with the help of evaluators long before the program season begins. Staff should be introduced to evaluation tools as methods to better understand and assist campers rather than as simply "reporting requirements" or "tests." At the organization level, investments in planning and training for program staff as well as support for data collection and reporting will likely yield higher quality programming as well as more reliable evaluation results. Professional organizations in youth development should place greater emphasis on empowerment evaluation methods since they are philosophically and practically consistent with youth development best practices.

Foundation and public funders should support development of processes that lead to quality climates. Like program staff, funders need to understand that developmental outcomes such as changes in self-awareness, self-discipline, and relationship skills may have more profound effects in the long-term than knowledge or skill gains. Funders must recognize the enormous potential of short-term programs to inspire, inform, or foster interaction, but also the limitations relative to year-round programs. Finally, as organizations and funders recognize the importance of integrating evaluation in education, they may be more likely to support investments in staff training and salaries and look beyond number-crunching as the only or best approach to demonstrating program benefits.

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## Appendix A: NC 4-H Youth Program Climate Survey, Residential Camps

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cabin:** \_\_\_\_\_

For each item below, mark the word that fits your experience at this **4-H camp**. Use the following scale: (A) Strongly Disagree; (B) Disagree; (C) Agree; (D) Strongly Agree. You have the option to skip any question or section if you choose. Your thoughtful answers will help improve this program.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. I felt safe from being hurt or injured.....	A	B	C	D
2. I was embarrassed or put down.....	A	B	C	D
3. Activities promoted healthy habits.....	A	B	C	D
4. Adults listened to what I had to say.....	A	B	C	D
5. I felt comfortable going to adults for advice.....	A	B	C	D
6. Other kids cared about me.....	A	B	C	D
7. Conflicts between people were a problem.....	A	B	C	D
8. I learned to work with others as a team.....	A	B	C	D
9. Serving others and volunteering was important	A	B	C	D
10. I felt like I didn't belong.....	A	B	C	D
11. All kinds of kids were welcomed.....	A	B	C	D
12. I learned to accept differences in others.....	A	B	C	D
13. Activities taught me to develop a plan to reach my goals.....	A	B	C	D
14. I was challenged to think and build skills.....	A	B	C	D
15. There were opportunities to learn new subjects.....	A	B	C	D
16. I felt that I could make a difference.....	A	B	C	D
17. I was encouraged to take responsibility.....	A	B	C	D
18. Perfect performance was more important than learning from mistakes.....	A	B	C	D
19. Rules and expectations were clear.....	A	B	C	D
20. Discipline was not too strict, not too loose.....	A	B	C	D
21. Activities were just right for my age.....	A	B	C	D
22. I gained a broader view of 4-H.....	A	B	C	D
23. I gained a broader view of the world beyond my community.....	A	B	C	D
24. Activities were related to issues in my club, my family, my community.....	A	B	C	D

This week...	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
25. I had fun at 4-H camp.....	A	B	C	D
26. I gained more confidence in myself.....	A	B	C	D
27. I became more responsible for myself.....	A	B	C	D
28. I learned to be a better leader.....	A	B	C	D
29. I decided to do more in 4-H during the year...	A	B	C	D
30. Is an experience I would recommend to friends.....	A	B	C	D

**Thank you for participating in this survey and helping 4-H *make the best better.***

## Appendix B: NC 4-H Camp Staff Skills Survey

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### *Camp Staff Skills*

### -End-of-Camp Self-Assessment-

Rate yourself on the following skills related to camp work, using the following scale:

- (A) Novice: Learning and beginning to practice roles and skills under guidance;
- (B) Associate: Able to perform simple tasks on own or assist others in complex situations;
- (C) Master: Able to handle most situations on own;
- (D) Mentor: Able to train or coach others.

You have the option to skip any question or section if you choose. Your thoughtful answers will help improve this program.

		ASSOCIATE	MENTOR	
	NOVICE			MASTER
1. Listening to youth with understanding.....	A	B	C	D
2. Communicating clearly with peers.....	A	B	C	D
3. Communicating effectively with supervisors....	A	B	C	D
4. Leading small groups.....	A	B	C	D
5. Leading larger groups.....	A	B	C	D
6. Teaching or mediating conflict resolution.....	A	B	C	D
7. Conflict resolution with peers.....	A	B	C	D
8. Dealing with difficult children.....	A	B	C	D
9. Teaching camp skills to children.....	A	B	C	D
10. Working effectively as a team member.....	A	B	C	D
11. Planning an educational activity.....	A	B	C	D
12. Handling emergency situations.....	A	B	C	D
13. Decision making to foster program effectiveness	A	B	C	D
14. Self-discipline in completing responsibilities.....	A	B	C	D
15. Problem solving related to responsibilities.....	A	B	C	D

## *Influence of Camp Staff Experience*

### **-End of Season Feedback-**

Indicate how your experience on camp staff influenced you in these areas, using the following scale: (A) No Influence; (B) Slight Influence; (C) Moderate Influence; (D) Major Influence.

	INFLUENCE			
	None	Slight	Moderate	Major
---				
16. Critical thinking.....	A	B	C	D
17. Learning to learn.....	A	B	C	D
18. Creativity.....	A	B	C	D
19. Empathy.....	A	B	C	D
20. Appreciation of differences.....	A	B	C	D
21. Desire to help others.....	A	B	C	D
22. Practical skills (working with my hands).....	A	B	C	D
23. Outdoor skills (water, target sports, camping)....	A	B	C	D
24. Workplace skills (organization, efficiency, etc.)...	A	B	C	D
25. Health habits and fitness.....	A	B	C	D
26. Self-efficacy.....	A	B	C	D
27. Safety practices and first aid.....	A	B	C	D
28. Sense of citizenship.....	A	B	C	D
29. Career choice.....	A	B	C	D
30. Quality of relationships.....	A	B	C	D

-----  
**Thank you for participating in this survey and helping 4-H *make the best better.***

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# **Positive Youth Development in the Midst of Coping with Parental Cancer: Implications for Youth Development Research and Practice**

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## **Positive Youth Development in the Midst of Coping with Parental Cancer: Implications for Youth Development Research and Practice**

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**Abstract:** Four implications for youth development research and practice resulted from a qualitative study on psychosocial developmental experiences of late adolescents coping with parental cancer during late adolescence. The study employed a developmental systems framework and grounded theory methods. Results suggest three primary psychosocial developmental influences, including multilevel influences (individual, familial, and extrafamilial risk and protective factors), coping strategies to maintain control, and responses to uncertainty and anticipatory grief. The particular combination of risk and protective factors present in participants' lives resulted in positive outcomes; resilience was the central unifying concept that characterized the primary psychosocial developmental outcomes of each participant. This finding illuminates the need to expand our focus in youth development research and practice to include positive developmental outcomes that can result from coping with life crises during adolescence.

### **Introduction**

Death and dying are uncomfortable topics of discussion in our society, especially with regard to non-normative experiences such as the loss of a child or the loss of a sibling or parent during childhood or adolescence. Despite the accompanying discomforts, cancer diagnoses commonly prompt families to confront death and dying because there is a widely held belief that a cancer diagnosis is essentially a death sentence (Hersh, 1997).

The perceived inevitability of death associated with cancer distinguishes the coping experiences of these families from those coping with other types of chronic or life-threatening illnesses. The anticipation of an impending death in the family may be especially challenging for adolescents,

who do not have the luxury of putting physical, cognitive, and emotional developmental tasks on hold while engaging in grief work (Balk, 1998) or while living with constant uncertainties in their family lives.

Loss, and presumably anticipated loss, of a parent places adolescents at developmental risk (Kiser, Ostojka, & Pruitt, 1998). However, little is currently understood about the contextual factors that may moderate developmental outcomes among adolescents coping with parental cancer. Research is needed that examines the positive developmental outcomes adolescents may experience stemming from a parent's diagnosis, illness, or death due to cancer.

This article draws implications for youth development from a qualitative study that inductively examined the psychosocial developmental experiences of adolescents coping with parental cancer. The study took an inductive approach by allowing the findings to emerge from the voices of the youth who were coping with parental cancer rather than testing preconceived notions or hypotheses about their experiences. The findings from this study are instructive for youth development researchers and practitioners who want to better understand adolescents within various contexts as they cope with illness, death, and other major life crises. The findings identify "windows of opportunity" for where, how, and when youth development researchers and practitioners can be most helpful.

This article reviews three major areas:

- (1) background on the field of youth development and related theoretical development and how this history pertains to the topic of adolescent development at the interface of coping with parental cancer;
- (2) a short summary of findings from the qualitative study (Ashurst, Hans, & Smith, in press); and
- (3) a discussion of implications and recommendations for the future of youth development research on adolescent development in the midst of coping with a major life crisis.

## **Background**

Throughout most of the 20th century, adolescence researchers viewed youth development through a negative lens by focusing on shortcomings and the "storm and stress" of adolescence (Hall, 1904; Lerner, Lerner, Phelps, & Colleagues, 2008). This perspective has been especially prevalent in the study of grief and loss among adolescents. Experiences of parental death or dying during adolescence have been viewed as an extremely negative experience that disrupts adolescents' normative development (Balk, 1996).

Bereavement experiences in adolescence can lead to debilitating consequences when grief interferes with normative developmental task in adolescence (Balk, 1998). However, findings have been mixed concerning the outcomes of adolescents who have experienced parental death and dying. Some studies have detected considerable adjustment problems (i.e., Kranzler, Shaffer, Wasserman, & Davies, 1989; Robinson, 1998; Siegel, Mesagno, Karus, Christ, Banks, et al., 1992; Thompson, Kaslow, Kingree, King, Bryant, et al., 1998). Other studies have found positive developmental effects, such as bereaved adolescents emerging more emotionally and interpersonally mature than unaffected peers (Balk, 1996) or anticipatory grief aiding in recovery after a death (Parkes, 1975; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). The benefits of anticipatory grief, a common experience with parental cancer, are themselves unclear because some studies

have found no differences between adolescents who had ample time to anticipate a parent's death and those who did not (Moss & Moss, 1996; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998).

The generally negative lens through which adolescence was examined for most of the past century changed dramatically over the past two decades. The emphasis of youth development research and interventions has shifted away from the deficit approach that focused on prevention of problems and problem behavior to an emphasis on positive youth development (Jones, 2005). Despite the developmental challenges adolescents may face, evidence reveals that the majority of adolescents experience these years as times of relative calm and stability (Balk, 1995). This new knowledge has led to the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which views youth as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed (Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2005) and emphasizes the need for promotion of asset building and examining the role of resiliency in adolescents' lives (Jones, 2005).

This focus on resiliency and plasticity underscores the role that youth can play in fostering their own development (Jones & Perkins, 2006). Furthermore, the ecological context – homes, schools, and communities – plays an important role in shaping developmental experiences and outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 2006). This new understanding and awareness that adolescents' trajectories are not fixed has led researchers to develop increasingly sophisticated approaches for overcoming the limitations of individual theoretical perspectives. The human development models that have emerged eschew the reduction of individual and social behavior to fixed genetic influences and instead stress the relative plasticity of human development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005).

The PYD framework has arisen because of interest among developmental scientists in using developmental systems, or dynamic models for understanding the plasticity of human development and relations between individuals and their real-world ecological settings (Lerner et al., 2008). The use of developmental systems is becoming increasingly prominent in literature on grief and illness (Lerner et al., 2005), where it posits that prolonged stages of illness, constant uncertainty, and anticipatory grief carry the potential to disrupt emotional detachment from parents, relationships with peers, or academic performance (Siegel, Karus, & Raveis, 1996).

However, this approach also suggests the potential for positive, healthy development by aligning the strengths of adolescents with the resources for positive development present in their diverse ecologies (Lerner et al., 2005). Thus, the individual and systemic coping and adaptation process associated with illness or death of a parent during adolescence can elicit both risk and protective factors, which may explain the contradictory findings of previous research on adolescent outcomes following parental death and dying experiences. An integrative developmental systems perspective framed the qualitative study summarized below with a view of adolescents as developing individuals who are simultaneously part of an interdependent family system and a larger, interdependent ecological context.

### **Summary of Qualitative Grounded Theory Study**

The study from which implications for this article were drawn addressed gaps in the grief literature by focusing on four primary areas:

- targeting adolescents rather than younger children (Marwit & Carusa, 1998);

- targeting adolescents who had not yet experienced the loss of an ill parent rather than only adolescents who had already experienced the loss of a parent (Morin & Welsh, 1996);
- attending to influences on outcome (Dowdney, 2000); and
- separating adolescents by developmental stage (Marwit & Carusa, 1998).

Furthermore, this study addressed gaps on multilevel influences on adolescents' perceptions or experiences of death (Morin & Welsh, 1996), influences or experiences specific to developmental stage (Marwit & Carusa, 1998), influential factors on individual concepts of death (Morin & Welsh, 1996), and protective factors that may influence outcome (Dowdney, 2000).

The sample consisted of five males and three females in late adolescence (ages 18-21) who had a parent diagnosed with cancer. The procedures for data collection and analysis were modeled after grounded theory principles originally put forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1994; 1998). Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews guided by 13 open-ended questions about coping with parental cancer during late adolescence which were designed to gain a better understanding of psychosocial developmental experiences and impacts.

Inductive analysis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized, whereby each new interview was compared to categories that had emerged from previous interviews. Systematic notes were kept for each participant throughout the research process to record the conceptual development of emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once an overall familiarity with the data was obtained, Nvivo™ qualitative data management software was used to facilitate open and axial coding. Ultimately, nine categories containing 30 codes were generated. Selective coding was then used to validate the relationships between the codes and categories as well as the interrelationships between categories.

The study focused on two research questions:

- What are the most important psychosocial developmental influences identified by late adolescents who are coping with parental cancer?
- What are the particular psychosocial developmental experiences or impacts that result from coping with parental cancer during late adolescence?

Ashurst, Hans, & Smith (in press) provides a fuller description of the methodology and results. However, a short summary of the results are provided below as a backdrop for the youth development research and practice implications that follow. For the first research question, three primary psychosocial developmental influences emerged from participants' experiences (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Research Question 1: Psychosocial Developmental Influences*

Influence	Subcategories	Relationship to Developmental Task
Multilevel Influences in Daily Lives	Individual: perceived role in family; personal theories on the experience of parental cancer	Autonomy and identity
	Familial: attachments, communication, family dynamics, prior losses, family roles	Intimacy, autonomy, identity
	Extra familial: ignorance, support, understanding	Intimacy
Coping Strategies to Maintain Control	Appraisal: denial, journaling, negative thinking, theorizing	Identity
	Problem-focused: multiple stresses, knowledge seeking, priority changes	Achievement, autonomy, identity, intimacy, sexuality
	Emotion-focused: escape, fantasizing, guilt, humor	Achievement, identity, intimacy, sexuality
Responding to Uncertainty	Triggers: changes in the ill parent, helplessness, suddenness	Identity
	Concerns for the future: Fears for self, future losses, post-death changes	Autonomy, identity, intimacy, sexuality
	Meaning making: advice to others, closure, faith, legacy	Achievement, autonomy, identity

The first influence was multilevel influences present in their daily lives. These included individual, familial, and extra familial levels of risk and protective factors. The second influence was coping strategies to maintain control. These were a route for accomplishing or hindering the psychosocial tasks of late adolescence in the midst of their family crises. The third influence was responding to uncertainty and anticipatory grief. Uncertainty was an important factor in understanding participants' responses to illness and dying because the chronic stress from uncertainty left them to feel like they had no control.

For the second research question, the central unifying concept of resilience was the primary psychosocial developmental experience and impact that resulted from coping with parental cancer during late adolescence. Participants believed they had experienced a "fork in the road" where they consciously decided which way they were going to go. All participants chose the positive route, which revealed a form of resilience in action. This conscious choice to take a resilient path seemed to impact all aspects of their psychosocial experience.

The resulting maturity they gained then fed back into their individual, familial, and extra familial experiences, which enhanced their coping strategies and responses to uncertainty and anticipatory grief, and facilitated further psychosocial development. There were positive outcomes mentioned for each of the five psychosocial developmental tasks (Hill, 1980): achievement, autonomy, identity, sexuality, and intimacy (see Table 2).

**Table 2***Positive Outcomes on Psychosocial Development*

Psychosocial Developmental Task	Positive Outcomes
Achievement	All participants shared that the experience of parental cancer taught them to be competent and resulted in an increase in their achievement orientation.
Autonomy	All participants agreed they had become more independent as a result of their experiences.
Identity	All participants saw how their identities had developed and changed over the course of their parent's illness and could articulate these changes.
Intimacy	All participants developed a greater level of intimacy with parents, siblings, friends, other adults, or some combination of these. Greater intimacy led to increased ability to express themselves and greater empathy and caring about others.
Sexuality	Two participants articulated awareness of connections between their experiences with parental cancer and their sexual development.

This study was not designed to gain a representative understanding of experiences among adolescents whose parents have been diagnosed with cancer. Although these findings are instructive with regard to positive youth development in the context of family crises, they should not be considered representative of all coping experiences and outcomes. This was a small sample who self-selected themselves for participation, which likely biased the findings toward resilient or positive outcomes.

This study also focused on a specific developmental stage, and experiences may differ according to developmental stage. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a rich description of the participants' experiences couched in a developmental and systemic context, which may be useful for researchers and practitioners working with youth and families who are coping with cancer or other major life crises.

### **Implications for Youth Development Research and Practice**

Resilience was used to describe the participants' experiences rather than restoration because the positive development occurred prior to a parent's death. Nevertheless, the central role of resilience in these participants' experiences supports the notion put forth by Stroebe and Schut (1999) and Balk (1998) that more attention needs to be directed toward restoration, a positive aspect of development that can occur after (and perhaps during) parental loss.

The psychosocial developmental influences summarized in Table 1, and especially the overall finding of resilience as the primary psychosocial developmental impact, may provide insight into the mixed findings of prior research on adolescent outcomes following parental death. As the late adolescents in this study coped with parental cancer, they drew upon all of the psychosocial developmental influences to integrate the experience into their lives. These influences included risk factors associated with their individual and family backgrounds and larger environmental contexts, which can create vulnerability to distress or negative

consequences (Thompson et al., 1998). However, protective factors were also present and seemed to moderate participant's vulnerability to negative consequences.

The particular combination of risk and protective factors in this study resulted in positive outcomes for the participants. The discovery of resilience as a primary impact underscores research findings by Balk (1996) that most adolescents emerge from their bereavement more emotionally and interpersonally mature than unaffected peers their own age. It also provides support for Balk's (1991) finding that adolescents do experience positive outcomes from grief experiences, as these participants were able to identify positive outcomes for both their present and future psychosocial development.

Over the course of this study, it became apparent that outcomes were dependent on the presence and salience of various risk and protective factors. Positive, neutral, and negative outcomes are all plausible outcomes for adolescents coping with parental cancer, depending on the characteristics of the psychosocial developmental influences that are present.

This finding lends support to the developmental systems model, which posits that an experience like coping with parental cancer can disrupt psychosocial tasks (Siegel, Karus, & Raveis, 1996) but also suggests that the potential for healthy developmental outcomes exists, regardless of diverse ecologies (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). This notion was the central finding from this study, where risk and protective factors were both discovered, yet resilience was the primary outcome from the unique influences, coping skills, and uncertainties in these participants' lives. As a result of this central study finding, four primary implications are offered below that are directly related to youth development research and practice.

### ***Research on Risk and Protective Factors during a Life Crisis***

The experiences of participants in this study highlight the lack of knowledge in the current literature about risk and protective factors. The concepts presented in this study contained a combination of risk and protective factors, but each participant seemed to have enough protective factors present in their lives to take a resilient path. Researchers need to continue gathering information from people at the time they are going through a major life crisis as this study did to move research forward about vulnerability to or protection from negative outcomes. By focusing exclusively on retrospective accounts, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the experience of coping with parental cancer during adolescence from the effects of subsequent life circumstances. Furthermore, studies that have focused only on retrospective accounts leave questions about the generalizability of findings to adolescents who are currently going through the experience and what needs to be done to bolster protective factors and minimize risk factors. Gathering information during the time of a major life crisis can ultimately result in more effective interventions in working directly with these adolescents and their families as they are actively coping with parental cancer.

### ***Examination of Positive Outcomes***

There is a lack of published research on positive outcomes that may result from the experience of coping with parental cancer during the different stages of adolescence. This study expands our understanding of the experiences and needs of late adolescents coping with parental cancer by identifying a multitude of factors associated with positive outcomes and resilience. Resilience-based and asset-based models should be integrated into examinations of young people who are coping with parental illness or death. An important question not answered in

this study that should be examined in future studies is the relative contribution each protective factor makes toward resilient outcomes.

### ***Minimizing Risk Factors and Maximizing Protective Factors***

Practitioners need to help late adolescents identify and accentuate the protective factors that are already present in their lives, and assist them in developing protective factors they are lacking. Some of the protective factors in this study that had strong connections with the finding of resilience included attachments and closeness with family members, increases in communication, perceiving the non-ill parent as helpful, support or understanding from others, reestablishing routines or normalcy, perseverance, self-reliance, peace of mind, faith, helping others, priority changes, opportunities for escape, and humor.

Practitioners also need to help late adolescents become aware of risk factors that are present in their lives and plan strategies to reduce the influence of these risks. Some risk factors that served as barriers to resilience for these participants included avoidance of family communication, addiction, cutoff relationships, secrets, emotional suppression, triangles, perceiving the non-ill parent as unhelpful, prior losses, ignorance of others, denial, pessimism, juggling multiple stresses, use of drugs or sex to escape, guilt, feeling helpless, suddenness, fears for self, concerns about future losses, and barriers to closure. Practitioners can also reframe risk factors as opportunities for growth or skill development that could become protective factors if they motivate a late adolescent to find ways to gain strength out of adversity.

### ***Continuing and Expanding the Use of Integrated Theoretical Perspectives***

Integrated theoretical perspectives are appearing with greater frequency as researchers attempt to overcome the limitations of individual theories. Contemporary integrative theories like developmental systems eschew the reduction of individual and social behavior to fixed genetic influences and stress the relative plasticity of human development (Lerner et al., 2005). Furthermore, developmental systems models argue that the potential for systematic change in behavior exists as a consequence of mutually influential relationships between the developing person and his or her biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, culture, physical and designed ecology, and historical niche (Lerner et al., 2005).

Individual theories of human behavior are incapable of capturing the complexity of many issues, including coping with parental cancer during late adolescence. The resilience that characterized participants in this study provides support for the developmental systems notion that there is potential for positive, healthy development, regardless of diverse ecologies (Lerner et al., 2005). Further grounded theory development utilizing developmental systems models with this population and other populations who are coping with parental illness or death will aid in further refinement of the model that emerged from this study.

As patterns emerge and more adequate integrative models are developed, the theories that emerge can drive effective practice for working with many age groups and types of crises. Eventually, theory may identify specific protective factors that are most closely associated with positive outcomes and specific risk factors that are most closely associated with negative outcomes. In addition, the finding of resilience as a central unifying concept in this study supports the need for development and refinement of resilience and asset-based theoretical models. Boss' (2006) therapeutic approach to ambiguous loss is noteworthy in this regard.

## Conclusion

The potential for change is a core strength of all youth that can be built upon, which is a cause for optimism because it means we can influence the life paths of children in a positive direction (Lerner et al., 2008). In other words, adolescence is a time of numerous changes, more so than at any other point in the life span. However, this presents a unique opportunity to intervene to bolster protective factors, help adolescents to visualize a positive future for themselves, and find ways to actively reach toward positive outcomes. Although parental cancer and death certainly have the potential to cause long-term negative consequences for adolescents, the participants in this study demonstrated that positive outcomes are possible when adequate protective factors are present. Examples of positive outcomes experienced by these participants include increased maturity, increased life skills, competencies gained for coping with future problems and crises, improved self-esteem and confidence, and improved physical and mental health.

Future research should further examine the factors that produce these positive outcomes (Balk, 1998; Stroebe & Schut, 1999; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). As our evidence-based knowledge and theoretical models identify pathways that lead to healthy outcomes following traumatic life experiences, practitioners should strive not only to minimize negative outcomes, but focus on to maximizing positive outcomes. In the end, researchers, practitioners, and theory builders all can play a role in assisting people in gaining strength through adversity.

*"Don't let it win. Even if, by chance, that it does take a parent's life, still, don't let it win. You always have the power to get the upper hand over it, at least mentally."*  
- Study participant

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# **“Push” and “Pull”**

## **A Qualitative Study of Factors that Contribute to Older Youth Leaving the 4-H Program**

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## **“Push” and “Pull” A Qualitative Study of Factors that Contribute to Older Youth Leaving the 4-H Program**

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**Abstract:** For years, 4-H has struggled with the complex issue of membership retention, especially among older youth. However, little research has been done concerning why 4-H members choose to leave the program. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the reasons for leaving 4-H with the ultimate goal of improving retention of older members. Specific objectives of the study were to (a) explore reasons why youth chose not to re-enroll in the program, (b) identify barriers to participation, and (c) determine what conditions would facilitate participation.

Focus group participants consisted of older youth ( $n=16$ ) who were enrolled in 4-H in a community club in 2007 in Erie County (Ohio), but who did not re-enroll in 2008. Significant findings from the study concerning the retention of older 4-H youth were related to (a) experiences with adult leaders, (b) experiences with competition, and (c) conflicts with other activities. Recommendations for theory, research, and practice are offered.

### **Introduction**

Retaining members in youth programs is an issue faced by youth development professionals. It raises concerns because youth will not experience the benefits of youth development programs if they do not continue to participate (Anderson-Butcher, 2005; Lauer, Little, & Weiss, 2004). Declining participation during adolescence is not a new phenomenon (Quinn, 1999), nor is it unique to 4-H youth development programs.

Although the overall success of 4-H youth development programming depends, at least in part, on the ability of the program to retain its members, studies about 4-H retention have been limited. Those that have been conducted have varied greatly in their methodology and in their source of data. It appears that studies involving youth who no longer participate in the program are lacking. Understandably, program dropouts are a hard audience to reach, and they may be reluctant to share their reasons for discontinuing their membership in the program. The question remains: Why are youth leaving the 4-H program in adolescence?

Hollister (2003) stated that studies conducted to isolate better strategies for boosting and sustaining participation in youth programs can make a major contribution to the field. As few of the studies investigating 4-H retention asked the youth themselves why they chose not to re-enroll, the present study sought to investigate this question. The 4-H program in Erie County, Ohio, was chosen as the location of the study described in this paper.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was grounded in two specific theoretical frameworks. First, from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005), the environment in which youth development occurs is viewed as a set of nested contexts ranging from families and peer groups to the culture and government; the theory proposes a series of hypotheses about how these contexts or systems interact. In the current study, the focus was on the way in which factors in the different environments impacted a youth's 4-H experience and hence their decision not to re-enroll in the Erie County 4-H program.

The second theoretical framework was Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) Theory of Flow, which contends that when individuals experience meaningful challenges that are matched to their skills, they experience sustained enjoyment or "flow," which is repeated each time they participate in the activity (Larson et al., 2004). Therefore, according to this theory, if youth do not feel challenged through their 4-H experience, they will not wish to repeat the experience and will likely choose to discontinue their involvement with the program.

### **Adolescents' Participation in Youth Programs**

The existing research concerning adolescents' participation in and commitment to youth activities demonstrates that young people engage in activities that foster their identity exploration and development (Ferrari & McNeely, 2007; Fredricks, Alfeld-Liro, Hruda, Eccles, Patrick, & Ryan, 2002), and that these activities can offer distinct learning experiences not available in other contexts of their lives (Larson, 2000; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Lewis, 2008; Vandell, Shernoff, Pierce, Bolt, Dadisman, & Brown, 2005). Researchers suggest that older youth may prefer different program offerings and different patterns of participation than younger youth (Harris, 2008; Herrera & Arbreton, 2003; Marczak, Dworkin, Skuza & Beyers, 2006; Vandell et al., 2006). That is, they want activities suited to their interests, to have a choice of activities, to be with friends, and to have some flexibility in structure. Also, studies show that youth desire new and challenging activities, as well as opportunities for leadership, to hold meaningful roles, and to carry out real responsibilities (Arbreton, Bradshaw, Metz, Sheldon, & Pepper, 2008; Chaskin & Baker, 2006; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Harris, 2008; Pearce & Larson, 2006).

The prevailing notion is that because they have more freedom as they get older, youth "vote with their feet" and will leave youth programs if their needs are not met. Several studies have

documented a general decline in organized activity participation during adolescence (Bamberger, 1982; Gould, 1987; Hustman, 1992; Theokas, Lerner, Phelps, & Lerner, 2006). Although much attention has focused on understanding the dropout phenomenon, many adolescents do remain involved in youth programs, some even increasing their involvement during this period and experiencing high levels of achievement. Again, because youth benefit from programs only if they remain in them, it is important to understand when changes in participation occur and what motivates a decline in participation.

### **Negative Experiences**

Although the literature is replete with studies of positive outcomes associated with youth programs, negative experiences have been documented and are of particular concern (Dworkin & Larson, 2006; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004). Though such negative experiences can eventually lead to positive outcomes (e.g., when youth are able to reflect on what they have learned and grow from their experience), in the meantime they can interfere with youth development goals, particularly if young people drop out of activities as a result (Dworkin & Larson, 2006). Dworkin and Larson (2006) found that these negative experiences were related to peers, adult leaders, oneself and other parts of one's life, parents, and community members.

### **Retention in 4-H**

Relatively little research has examined the retention of 4-H youth. Overall, the studies of 4-H member retention reveal that older youth are difficult to attract and retain in the 4-H youth development program. Several trends are apparent from reviewing this body of literature. First, it is evident that older youth find 4-H less appealing and are less likely to join 4-H than younger youth (Harder, Lamm, Lamm, Rose, & Rask, 2005; Homan, Dick, & Hedrick, 2007; Russell & Heck, 2008). If older youth do join the 4-H program, they are more likely to discontinue their involvement when compared to those who joined at a younger age (Hartley, 1983). However, it is also apparent from reviewing the literature that retention is not only a challenge when dealing with older 4-H youth, but a challenge for 4-H youth of all ages (Astroth, 1985, Russell & Heck, 2008).

Several studies revealed the importance of adult club advisors to a participants' satisfaction with the 4-H program (Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Hartley, 1983; Wingenbach, Meighan, Lawrence, Gartin, Woloshuk, 1999), while one study found members' relationship with adults to have little effect on retention (Lauxman, 2002). Other studies indicated that satisfaction with the 4-H club experience influenced members' decision not to re-enroll (Norland & Bennett, 1993; Ritchie & Resler, 1993; Wingenbach et al., 1999). It should be noted that there is likely an overlap when discussing the displeasure with adult club advisors and displeasure with 4-H clubs, as adult advisors play an important role in a member's 4-H club experience. In short, positive or negative experiences with club advisors would likely impact a member's overall club experience.

The extent to which members' parents were involved and supportive of their participation in 4-H emerged as a factor in the retention of 4-H youth (Astroth, 1985; Cano & Bankston, 1992; Hartley, 1983; Homan et al., 2007; Norland & Bennett, 1993, Ritchie & Resler, 1993). Several authors also discussed the importance of incorporating "fun" into a members' 4-H experience (Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Homan et al., 2007; Nutt, 2008; Ritchie & Resler, 1993; Wingenbach et al., 1999; Wolfe & Carroll, 2003).

Despite the research discussed above, there is still much to learn about the complex issue of 4-H retention. Studies concerning 4-H retention have varied greatly in their methodology and in

who has been included as participants. Interestingly, only a few studies on 4-H retention have utilized focus group methodology (Cano & Bankston, 1992; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Nutt, 2008). Few of the studies that investigated 4-H retention asked the youth themselves why they chose not to re-enroll in the program.

## Methodology

To address gaps noted in the literature, a qualitative study was designed to explore factors related to older youth discontinuing their involvement with the Erie County 4-H program. Specific objectives of the study were to

- a) explore the reasons why youth chose not to re-enroll,
- b) identify the barriers to participation, and
- c) determine what conditions would facilitate participation.

Focus group methodology was selected and practices recommended by Krueger (1994; 1998) were followed. Focus groups are useful for uncovering factors that influence individuals' opinions, behaviors, and motivations (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

## Focus Group Questions

Nine questions were developed for interviewing youth (Appendix A). The questioning route focused on barriers to participation involving older youth and the 4-H program. To establish face validity, the questions were reviewed by a panel of experts to determine appropriate content and structure. External validity was not a major concern, as generalizability is typically not a goal of studies employing focus group methodology (Krueger, 1994; 1998).

## Procedures

The university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the study. Erie County's 4-H member database was used to obtain a listing of the names and contact information of youth ages 12 to 18 in 2008 who were members of Erie County 4-H in 2007, but who did not re-enroll for 2008. This age group was selected because previous research has shown that around the age of 11 or 12, member dropout begins to outpace new enrollments (Russell & Heck, 2008). The study did not include 4-H members enrolled only in 4-H through their involvement in 4-H school enrichment or special emphasis programs as of the same dates. From this list, individuals were contacted through their parent or guardian and invited to participate in focus group interviews. Parents provided permission per the IRB's requirements.

A moderator team consisting of a moderator and an assistant moderator facilitated all of the focus groups. The same moderator and assistant moderator participated in all focus group sessions. Pizza and drinks were provided at the conclusion of each focus group meeting. This provided an incentive for participants to attend the focus group sessions. In addition, a ten dollar gift certificate to the local mall was given to each youth participant as another incentive to attend the focus group session. Additional details regarding the procedures are provided by Albright (2008).

## Participants

From an initial list of 65 youth who met the study criteria, 16 youth participated in one of three focus groups. There were 13 females and 3 males between the ages of 12 and 18 ( $M=15.3$ ). They had participated in 4-H for 3 to 11 years ( $M=5.7$ ).

## **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data, transcripts were reviewed line-by-line and themes were developed for each question. For each question in each of the three focus groups, major themes, minor themes, and unique responses were identified. After each focus group transcript had been analyzed, an overall analysis was performed for each question by identifying major themes, minor themes, and unique responses for each question for all three focus groups combined. Finally, the transcripts were reviewed for any common themes across the responses to all interview questions. An initial categorization of themes was then created. As a validity check, a state youth development specialist with experience in focus group methodology reviewed this categorization and agreed with the overall conceptualization of the data.

## **Results**

Significant findings from the study concerning the retention of older 4-H youth related to the following themes:

1. experiences with advisors
2. experiences with competition
3. conflicts with other activities

Because of the qualitative nature of the data, each theme is presented followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the related literature.

### **Experiences with Advisors**

While some youth discussed positive relationships with their club advisors, many youth discussed inappropriate behavior exhibited by adults and parents, uninvolved and unsupportive advisors, as well as advisors who were overly involved. One youth stated that in her club "it was a family-type advisor thing and they were always fighting constantly; you couldn't focus on one thing because they were always fighting."

Several youth mentioned advisors who were uninvolved or unsupportive. One youth discussed an advisor who left it up to the club president to do everything, while another described an advisor who expected the club members to coordinate all club meetings and activities, but then didn't step in to offer assistance when the club wasn't meeting. Another youth remembered being extremely disappointed when her club advisor would not let her lead any games or activities for the club after being elected recreation leader. One youth expressed frustration that her 4-H club never met. Because her club never met, she assumed her advisors didn't care. She left the 4-H club program with the sentiment "If you don't really care, I don't really care."

In contrast, focus group participants also discussed over-involved advisors and parents. One youth said that she thought that "throughout the years...parents have gotten too involved in the meetings. I know advisors are supposed to help out with the little details, but it always seemed like the parents took over and it was sort of frustrating." Similarly, another youth described her first 4-H club as being "run by advisors."

From several perspectives, results from this study indicated that one of the primary reasons youth did not re-enroll in the Erie County 4-H program was because of negative experiences with advisors. The large volume and variety of discussion in the current study related to participants' experiences, both positive and negative, with club advisors reflects the central role that these adults play in organizing and setting the climate of 4-H clubs. The relationship

between a club advisor and a member clearly had an influence on a youth's satisfaction with their club, and their satisfaction with the 4-H program as a whole. 4-H club advisors also play a pivotal role in establishing how a 4-H club will function, which in turn affects youth satisfaction with the club, and again, with the entire 4-H program.

The literature on attachment, social development, and social control all highlight the importance of connectedness to non-parental adults in the positive development of adolescents (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Grossman & Bulle, 2006) and therefore support the findings of the current study. Adults walk a fine line when it comes to giving the right amount of support; neither too little nor too much is good, and what is needed changes as youth become more skilled (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005). While the literature supports the notion that providing youth with positive, non-parental relationships can be a powerful preventative and stabilizer, the literature also reveals that a negative role model can be detrimental (Dworkin & Larson, 2006; Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Dworkin and Larson (2006) concluded that one of the most frequent types of negative experiences in youth activities was aversive behavior attributed to the adult leaders of the activities, which is congruent with our findings.

When specifically comparing the current study with other studies concerning the retention of 4-H youth, there is a good deal of congruency regarding the important role adult advisors play in the retention of 4-H youth. Teens who choose to participate in youth organizations often do so because of the support provided by the staff and adult leaders (Ferrari, Lekies, & Arnett, 2009; Ferrari & Sweeney, 2005; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Heinshon & Lewis, 1995; Rhodes, 2004; Rivera-Caudill & Brander, 2008). Quite simply, they like the adult or what the adult is providing. In addition, Hartley (1983) found that 4-H club leaders with higher rates of first-year member re-enrollment also received more positive ratings for leader effectiveness than did club advisors with lower re-enrollment rates, which also supports the findings in the current study. Finally, recent research has shown that support from volunteer leaders mediates the relationship between 4-H club context and youth outcomes (Fogarty, Terry, Pracht, & Jordan, 2009).

### **Experiences with Competition**

Negative experiences with competition were also established as a theme across research questions. While some participants described positive experiences with competition, many youth described perceived favoritism during judging, unclear expectations for judgments, problems with organization during judging, and poor sportsmanship exhibited during competition. As one youth stated:

It's frustrating whenever you put in all of this time and energy into your projects and you do it for fun. You're supposed to be excited about it and everything and it's just frustrating when the parents make it so competitive just like over placings. It's just a downer because it's supposed to be fun. Yeah, it's great when you win first or second, but that's not everything. It's about the project itself.

Many youth described perceived problems related to judging. Project judging is the capstone experience for most 4-H youth because it provides youth with the opportunity to share what they have learned through their project work and to get constructive feedback on the quality of their project. Therefore, it makes sense that perceived negative experiences with judging would influence a youth's decision whether or not to re-enroll in the 4-H program.

Unlike the current study, little research on 4-H retention has found competition to be a factor in youth's decision not to re-enroll in the 4-H program. However, a 1992 study by Cano and Bankston that explored factors associated with participation and nonparticipation of ethnic minority youth in the Ohio 4-H program identified inequality of judging experiences as a factor affecting the participation of minority youth in 4-H. Similarly, a more recent study by Radhakrishna, Everhart, and Sinasky (2006) that investigated youths' perceptions of competitive 4-H events found youth to be somewhat concerned with excessive parent involvement, unethical practices, and unhealthy characteristics that are prevalent in competitive events. However, it should be noted that in this same study, several youth also reported many positive effects of competition as well. Although negative experiences with competitive 4-H activities was found to be a major theme in the current study, the majority of previous studies have not identified competition as a factor in the retention of older 4-H youth.

### **Conflicts with Other Activities**

Participation in other activities was also a theme found across research questions. Several participants said that 4-H was time consuming and interfered with other activities in which they were involved. For example, one youth stated that, "I'll be attending college in August and I sort of wanted to have the summer before I go to college to not have to worry about judgments and interviews and stuff like that and 4-H meetings."

Because of the importance our society places on organized sports and other activities and because of the demands placed on youth who are involved in these activities, it is not surprising that youth feel pressure to make a choice between these activities and involvement in 4-H. One youth stated that:

I just think people sometimes choose sports over 4-H 'cause it's within their school and they're with all their friends they've grown up with all their lives, so they're used to being with those people and they've become really close with them. That's probably why some people choose that.

In addition, several youth discussed their jobs and the conflicts working created with other activities such as 4-H. One youth stated that her job was very willing to work around her schedule, while another participant stated that, "Since I work two jobs, I basically work everyday and you're kind of like physically and mentally exhausted and you're just like I don't want to do anything but go home and lay down and sleep."

Results of the current study revealed that opportunities for participation in other activities, such as athletics and the arts, influenced the retention of older 4-H youth. Although conflicts with other activities are typically viewed as a common reason that youth discontinue their involvement with the 4-H program, this has not been well documented in previous research. The current study found that conflicts with other activities were indeed a major factor in the retention of older 4-H youth, but only three previous studies specifically involving 4-H youth have found conflicts with other activities as influencing re-enrollment (Lauxman, 2002; Ritchie & Resler, 1993; Thompson, 1998). As well, competing interests and conflicts with other activities, work, and family have been identified as barriers to participation in other youth programs (Bodren, Perkins, Villarruel, & Stone, 2005; Okeke, 2008). Given the findings of the current research, the issue of conflicting activities appears to warrant further investigation.

It is also important to remember that research has shown that the typical pattern is to participate in more than one structured out-of-school activity (Theokas et al., 2006; Vandell et

al., 2006). Authors suggest that participation in multiple activity contexts might actually be desirable, as activities meet different needs (Theokas et al., 2006,). Furthermore, certain participation patterns (e.g., sports plus youth development) may produce more positive outcomes (Zarrett, Peltz, Fay, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007).

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the reasons why older youth do not re-enroll in the 4-H program after multiple years of participation. Using focus groups with teens who had discontinued their 4-H club participation, three major themes – experiences with adult leaders, experiences with competition, and conflicts with other activities – were discovered.

This study supported the notion that adult leaders play a critical role in the experiences young people have in programs and organization such as 4-H. Youth discussed their encounters, both positive and negative, with their 4-H club advisors, and it was evident these experiences impacted their decision not to re-enroll in the 4-H program. While several youth discussed positive experiences with competition, the current study clearly revealed negative experiences with competition as influencing a youth's decision to re-enroll in the program. Finally, conflicts with other activities such as sports and work ultimately led some members to leave 4-H and direct their time elsewhere. These youth were still engaged in constructive pursuits; none of them indicated that they were leaving to simply hang out.

On the other hand, barriers to participation found in other studies of youth program participation did not surface in our focus groups. Other research has found uninteresting activities (Herrera & Arbreton, 2003), boredom (Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001), lack of program fidelity (Okeke, 200), transportation (Nutt, 2008; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001), and negative opinions of peers (Borden et al, 2005; Homan et al., 2007; Nutt, 2008) as reasons that interfere with youth program participation.

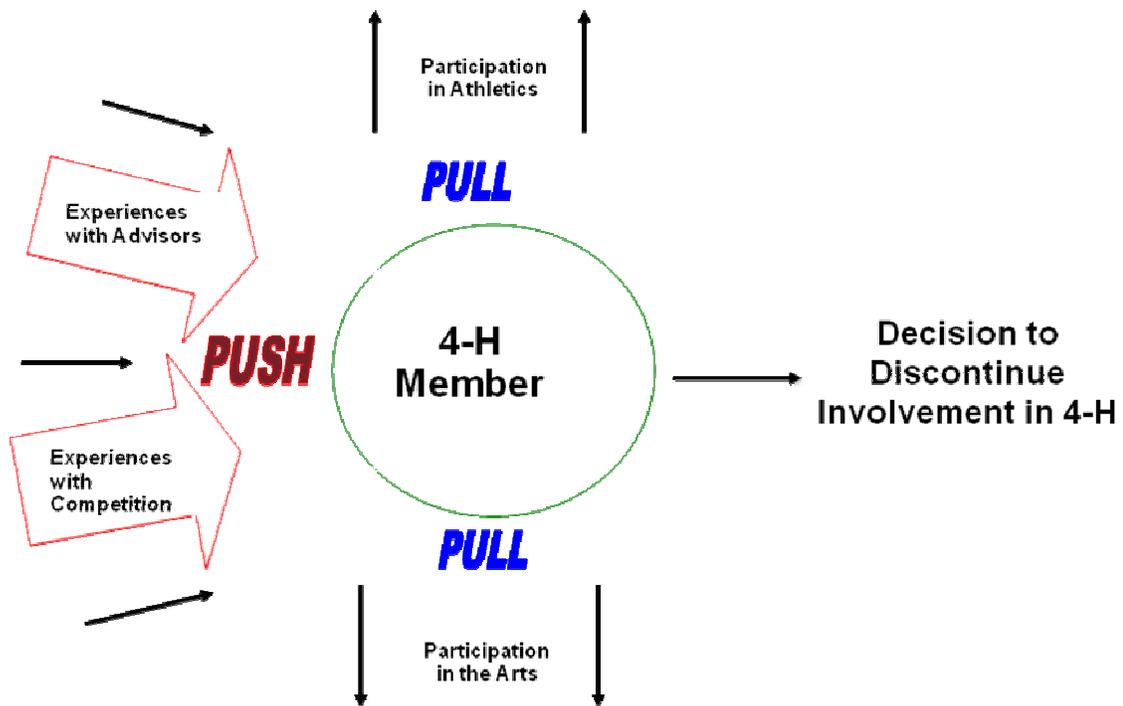
## Conceptual Model

Qualitative research is useful in building rather than testing theory (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). It appears that two distinct processes may be at work here. Results from the study indicated that negative experiences with 4-H club advisors and negative judging experiences may be "pushing" youth out of the 4-H program, while the lure of participation in other activities may be "pulling" youth from 4-H and propelling them to pursue other interests, such as athletics and the arts. Figure 1 represents a model of the process we believe happens regarding the retention of older 4-H youth, based on the themes derived from this study's data. Additional research will be needed to more fully understand these dynamics.

Certainly both negative experiences and competing interests are of concern to youth development professionals. However, from a developmental perspective, we view the "push" created by negative experiences as more problematic than the "pull" of other activities. This is the case only if the youth end up choosing to spend their time in other constructive activities rather than hanging out or other unstructured pursuits. It is possible that youth not interviewed in this study had such an activity profile. Unstructured time has been shown to be problematic because youth report more boredom (Larson, 2000) as well as more problem behaviors (Li, Bebiroglu, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008) when their time is spent hanging out. Ultimately, the goal for healthy development is to engage young people in ways that support their current development and help them transition to a productive adulthood.

**Figure 1**

**Conceptual Model: Factors Influencing Older Youths' Re-enrollment Decisions**



Source: Albright (2008)

**Implications**

This study has many implications for theory, future research, and practice. These implications are important as those engaged in youth development research continue to investigate the complexities of retention in youth programs and are important as youth development professionals discern how the findings of the current study relate to their own youth programs.

**Implications for Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development (1979, 2005) is useful for understanding the 4-H club experience. This model helps us realize the importance of roles, activities, and interpersonal relationships within the multiple settings where youth spend their time. Furthermore, it helps in recognizing how the other systems within the ecological model interact with one another in an effort to create positive or negative experiences for youth within 4-H club delivery system.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) Theory of Flow is useful when discussing how the 4-H club experience is related to the retention of older 4-H youth. According to Csikszentmihalyi, when individuals experience meaningful challenges that are matched to their skills, they experience sustained enjoyment or "flow," which is repeated each time they participate in the activity, which in turn creates the desire to repeat the experience. The theory is useful in recognizing the importance of providing meaningful, challenging experiences for youth within the context of their 4-H experience and most specifically, within their 4-H club. This is especially important since some youth indicated they are not being challenged through their participation in 4-H.

The concept of flow helps youth development professionals realize how youth who are members of leader-directed clubs or youth who have adult advisors who are uninvolved or unsupportive may become discouraged and chose not to re-enroll in the program. These types of club experiences do not provide challenges for the youth involved and therefore do not create the desire to repeat the experience.

One unique response during the focus group interviews came from a young lady who revealed that although she had chosen to discontinue her involvement with the 4-H club program, she remained a 4-H member because of her involvement with the 4-H CARTEENS program, which is a leadership development program where teens are responsible for the development and implementation of a traffic safety program for their peers. The question then becomes, what prompted this teen to remain in 4-H CARTEENS but to discontinue her involvement in her 4-H club? The answer likely, at least in part, lies within Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) Theory of Flow. This young lady probably remained involved in 4-H CARTEENS because, unlike her former 4-H club, 4-H CARTEENS provided her with meaningful, challenging experiences with a small group of other teens. Opportunities for progressive learning and leadership are important because they allow youth to maintain their interest and continue their involvement as they get older (Walker, 2006). Further attention to understanding the concept of flow would be beneficial to youth development professionals.

Other theories might also prove useful in understanding the processes underlying re-enrollment decisions and developing appropriate programming for older youth. These include Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (Fusco, 2007), Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory (Duerdin & Gillard, 2008), Eccles et al. (1993) stage-environment fit (Digby & Ferrari, 2007; Ferrari & McNeely, 2007), and Walker's (2006; Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Borden, 2005) developmental intentionality (Ferrari et al., 2009).

## **Implications for Future Research**

### **Limitations**

It is important to note that the sample used in this study was limited to those who agreed to participate from the list of youth who were Erie County 4-H club members ages 11 to 17 in 2007 but who did not re-enroll in the 4-H club program during the 2008 program year (25% of those who met the study criteria). Although the data obtained were rich in detail, the results cannot be generalized beyond the group who participated in the study. However, given that only three focus groups involving 16 former 4-H club members were held, the individuals who participated were a fairly representative group in terms of age and years of participation in 4-H. Furthermore, these data are believed to be valid, because steps were put into place for a peer review analysis. In order to reach a broader population, a different research method, such as a survey, would need to be used.

### **Additional Studies**

The study generated additional questions to be explored that would add to the body of research about the retention of older 4-H youth.

**1. Replication of focus groups:** First, the current study could be replicated in other counties to see if the major themes are consistent across counties. This would address the limitation of the small sample size in the current study, as it is possible that there are other reasons that youth choose not to re-enroll that were not identified.

**2. Survey:** Next, based on the findings of the present study and possibly subsequent studies in other counties, a survey research study could be designed to ask older youth who chose not to re-enroll in the 4-H program questions about their experiences. Themes generated from the current study could form the basis for questions on such a survey. A survey would allow more former 4-H members to participate, which would create additional data and help researchers learn more about why older youth chose to discontinue their involvement in the 4-H program. Furthermore, a survey provides more anonymity than a face-to-face method, which would lessen concerns about youth giving socially desirable responses in interviews.

**3. Current members:** A similar focus group study could be performed with older youth who are current 4-H members, as current members may also be having negative experiences through the 4-H program. Current members are enrolled in some of the same 4-H clubs as those who participated in the focus groups interviews, and current members were evaluated at the same judging events and activities as those who chose not to re-enroll. Current members may also be experiencing the *push* stemming from negative experiences with adults and negative experiences with competition and are very likely experiencing the *pull* of participation in other activities; nevertheless, they have chosen to remain involved. What is it that is keeping these members in the 4-H program, while some of their peers are choosing to discontinue involvement? What is it that tips that balance for some, but not for others?

In fact, although we were unaware of it at the time, such a study was being conducted simultaneously with current 4-H members in Wisconsin, and it identified some of the same themes (Nutt, 2008). Interestingly, Nutt (2008) concluded that further study should examine negative experiences, a theme brought out in our study.

**4. Volunteer training:** Because some of the negative experiences were related to club advisors, another area of research that needs to be addressed is how 4-H club volunteers are trained. Research questions could look at the content of the types of training offered in counties and how that training prepares volunteers to provide a positive club experiences for 4-H members. Do club advisors recognize the importance of allowing members to lead the club? Are they skilled in techniques to do so? Do 4-H club advisors realize the value of providing challenges within the 4-H club that match the skills of the members in the club? A study directed to the volunteers who facilitate 4-H clubs could address these questions.

**5. Competition:** This study clearly demonstrates the importance of youth's experiences with competition in their decision to re-enroll in the 4-H program. As the literature notes that competition can be positive or negative, further investigation should be done concerning how experiences with competition are related to the decision to re-enroll.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of the current study on the retention of older 4-H youth have many implications for practice. Although these recommendations were derived from a study of 4-H members, we believe they are applicable for other youth development programs as well.

- helping club advisors and other 4-H volunteers to understand the needs of older youth and to practice strategies aimed at improving the ways they work with them and their parents
- developing ways to reward cooperation, not just competition, providing training opportunities for volunteers related to fostering a sense of healthy competition for members within the club setting, and creating training for project judges (e.g., Evans, McKendrick, Wesley, & Smith, 2008)

- developing strategies that can help youth balance competing demands on their time and become successful in both 4-H and other activities, such as athletics and the arts
- offering a variety of programming opportunities for leadership, decision-making, and meaningful service for older 4-H youth that fit their developing sense of self
- creating intermediary leadership opportunities for youth who are 11 to 14 years to keep members engaged
- figuring out ways to give youth what they want by offering some programs that have flexibility, less structure, and more leisure with small groups of friends who share a specific interest
- following up routinely with those who do not re-enroll

## Conclusion

Although making the decision to pursue certain activities and to discontinue involvement in other activities is a normal part of healthy adolescent development, county 4-H programs should pay particular attention to factors that are pushing youth out of local 4-H programs in an attempt to more effectively meet their needs. 4-H professionals must realize that their programs cannot achieve the desired impact if youth do not remain involved in 4-H programming. Effectively meeting the needs of older youth may therefore make participation in 4-H just as appealing, if not more appealing, than participation in other activities.

As young people grow older, part of the developmental process is to give them an increasingly larger voice and choice in the issues affecting their lives. Who best to ask why older youth leave the 4-H program than the youth themselves? Listening to their voices will help youth development professionals develop and improve programs so that these youth are not “here today, gone tomorrow.”

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## **The Impact of a Youth Development Program on Secondary Students' Career Aspirations**

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## The Impact of a Youth Development Program on Secondary Students' Career Aspirations

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**Abstract:** This study's purpose determined the extent to which adolescents' participation in a youth development program may be linked to the participants' post-secondary education and career aspirations. One hundred and seven adolescents, ages 14-19 in grades 8-12 completed Holland's Vocational Interest Survey and the 4-H Career Decision Survey. Ordinal regression analysis indicated participation in 4-H had a positive impact on career decisions for students who participated in 4-H for two years ( $p < .038$ ) and six years ( $p < .001$ ). Significant differences were apparent with 80% of the racial/ethnic groups surveyed concerning a college fair's impact on career choice and college major determination.

### Introduction

Youth have numerous opportunities to explore careers during their preteen and adolescent years. According to Verhoeve (2003), youth have a cursory knowledge of approximately 50 occupations. They gain this knowledge through television, electronic media, neighbors, family and friends. Youth have good knowledge of approximately 12 occupations and an excellent knowledge of approximately six. As youth age, they have increased opportunities to gain detailed information concerning careers. Some of those opportunities include career fairs, job shadowing, and participating in youth development programs such as 4-H (Michigan State University Extension, 2009).

Currently one of the foremost youth development initiatives in the United States (NIFA, 2009), 4-H has its origins in the Land-Grant University. The Land-Grant University has four subject-matter areas of support: Agriculture, Family and Consumer Science, Community Viability, and 4-H and Youth Development. Helping youth develop leadership and other life skills is one of the main emphases of the 4-H Youth Development program (Hendricks, 1996). The 4-H Youth Development program believes in providing settings where youth can learn experientially "through hands-on interaction with the subject matter" (Arnold, 2003, Introduction section,

para. 2). The interaction is accomplished through participation in one of the 13 4-H delivery modes; among them are 4-H clubs, camps, special interest programs, and school enrichment (Garst, Hunnings, Jamison, Hairston, Meadows, & Herdsman, 2006).

The Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program, in collaboration with the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence implemented a career/college fair in conjunction with the annual 4-H Congress in 2008. State 4-H Congress is an annual conference of youth who participate in 4-H. The purpose of 4-H Congress is to provide education and life-skill development for participants. Students not only participate in workshops, but also compete in statewide competitions in 10 curriculum areas (Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.).

The career/college fair was developed to expose the 4-H'ers to career and post-secondary education options. The college fair also provided an opportunity for 4-H'ers as prospective post-secondary students to receive specific information regarding college and universities, including entrance requirements, academic degree programs and funding options.

Thirty-three higher education institutions from around the Commonwealth participated in the fair. Eight college departmental representatives from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University provided information about their programs of study and the occupations youth might consider. This study sought to determine the impact of the career/college fair on the participants and specifically addressed two broad research questions:

- 1.) Do participants' career aspirations vary by race/ethnicity, curricula participation, and years of participation in a youth development program?
- 2.) Does participation in a youth development program help to clarify participants' career aspirations?

## **Review of Literature**

This study sought to determine the extent to which adolescent participation in a youth development program may be linked to the participants' post-secondary education and career aspirations. Factors that were of particular interest included age, race/ethnicity, curricula participation, and years of participation in the program. This section will present literature that highlights the theoretical framework of the study, as well as a review of studies that offer a descriptive analysis of college choice and career aspirations by select demographic characteristics.

## **Theories in Career Development**

A number of theories have been developed to explain career development, more recently, theories of vocational psychology and career development that have substantive relevance are Holland's Career Typology (1997), the Theory of Circumscription (Gottfredson, 1981), the Social Learning Approach to Career and Decision Making (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Two noted and relevant theories by Super (1954) and Holland (1959, 1997), serve as the foundation for the current study. Super's theory (1954) has six life and career developmental stages which have been coined as the Life Span Vocational Choice Theory (Salomone, 1996). The six stages include:

- a) crystallization/exploratory stage (ages 14-18),
- b) specification stage (ages 18-21),

- c) implementation stage (ages 21-24),
- d) stabilization stage (ages 24-35),
- e) consolidation (age 35), and
- f) readiness for retirement (age 55).

The life span vocational choice stresses the importance of self-concept and the work world demands adaptation of their career choice.

The crystallization/exploratory phase is indicative of the time in an adolescent's life when they begin to define their identity as an adult through social and career choices (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). During this stage, youth narrow their choices, although they are not firm (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Adolescents' career choice is influenced by the community resources available to them, support by family members (Jackson, Kacanski, Rust & Beck, 2006), and the self-efficacy of the adolescents (Anderson & Brown, 1997).

The purpose of Holland's (1959, 1997) theory was to match an individual's personality type with a similar work environment. After years of research examining vocational choice, Holland concluded that there were six individual personality types in which individuals were categorized: Artistic, Enterprising, Investigative, Realistic, Conventional, and Social. Depending on the personality, people generally prefer to work in environments that are dominated by personalities similar to their own.

### **Career Preparation, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status**

Important career decisions, such as whether to attend college, a technical school, enter the military, or go directly into the job market after high school are made during adolescence (Adams, Benschhoff, & Harrington, 2007; Turner & Lapan, 2002). The students' environments can have an impact on their career aspirations after high school. The earliest influences on students are their parents and other adults in their lives, such as teachers, program directors, and mentors. Having support from parents or other adults helps students to develop career goals for themselves (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Anderson & Brown, 1997). When students have lower aspirations about their life after high school, they tend to have low grades in school and have lower aspirations regarding their future career (Jackson, Kacanski, Rust, & Beck, 2006).

Other researchers (Carter, Thompson & Warren, 2004; Childs & McKay, 2001; La Londe, Leedy & Runk, 2003; Rollins, 2003; Tournaki, 2003) have investigated the effects of students' gender and socio-economic status on teachers' perceptions of academic success. Teachers tend to predict greater social and academic success for females than males; teachers who do not teach math were more likely to agree that success in math is more of a male attribute (Carter et al., 2004). Furthermore, students from low socio-economic backgrounds were perceived as having less potential in math and language arts than other students.

Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) and Tomini and Page (1992) interviewed counselors and teachers regarding class (or student) placement decisions of the students they served. Those interviewed claimed that their decisions were based on objective measures (such as exam scores). Yet, these researchers found that social class was an important influence in the decision. Students who had similar academic and conduct records but who came from a lower social class were often classified by these same educators as being less likely to succeed in college and more apt for less academically rigorous options such as on-the-job training and the military. Thus, the

researchers concluded that the subconscious perception of these educators' was the higher one's socioeconomic status the more successful they would be when the academic rigor of the job increased.

Sadly, both teachers and counselors had a tendency to stereotype students based on small amounts of information (e.g. gender and socio-economic status) (Jackson & Nutini, 2002). Therefore, teachers and counselors must be able to recognize their own stereotypes and put those biases aside. Doing so will allow teachers and counselors to be instrumental in reducing educational inequalities due to gender and socio-economic status thus opening up opportunities and facilitating vocational training and college entry for all, regardless of gender or social class.

The purpose of this study was to determine if career aspirations of youth varied by age, race/ethnicity, curricula exposure, and years of participation in a non-formal youth development program. Appropriate methodologies examined the study questions.

## **Methodology**

Data were collected using the 4-H Career Decision Survey (Williams & Taylor, 2008) designed by Virginia 4-H Specialists and administered during the first career/college fair coordinated by the Virginia Tech Academic Support Services. The survey was administered during the 2008 Virginia State 4-H Congress. The fair was a collaboration between the Virginia 4-H Youth Development Program and CAEE.

Before attending the career/college fair, 4-H youth were given a modified version of the Holland's Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI, 1985). The VPI was suitable for high school students; it was designed for youth to determine their possible career interests. The VPI served as a companion instrument to assist youth in discovery of possible career areas to consider. Included with the instrument was a description of the typologies (Realistic, Enterprising, Artistic, Investigative, Social and Conventional), careers students might consider, skills associated with each typology, and college majors students might consider. For the 1985 version of the inventory, the following psychometric properties were reported. Holland (1985) reported mean values ranging from 1.39 (Realistic Scale) to 4.32 (Social Scale) for a sample of female 9th through 12th grade high school students. A sample indicated mean values ranging from .91 (Realistic Scale) to 3.05 (Social Scale). Test-retest reliability coefficients for the VPI have varied between .80 and .54 depending upon the high school sample (Holland, 1985; Meinster & Rose, 2001).

## **Participants**

The VPI (1985), approved by the Virginia Tech Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, was offered to 298 youth ages 14-19 who had the option to attend the career/college fair. One hundred and seven youth submitted a completed survey with 72% of the respondents being female and 28% being male. The racial/ethnic groups that completed the survey were follows: African-American (29.9%), Asian (0.9%), Bi or Multiracial (1.9%), Caucasian (58.9%), Latino/Hispanic (4.7%), and Other (3.7%). This was a sample of convenience.

## **Instrument**

For this study, authors Williams and Taylor (2008) developed the 4-H Career Decision Survey. The 4-H Career Decision Survey was designed to measure the influence that 4-H Youth Development and the 2008 career/college fair had on the career aspirations of 4-H youth. The

survey took less than 10 minutes to complete. The 4-H Career Decision sample survey included 10 items measuring dependent variables; some sample items are listed:

- 1) "4-H has helped me in my college major choice;"
- 2) "My 4-H club experiences have helped me decide a college major;"
- 3) "Participating in this college fair gave me a better understanding of what I would like my college major to be;" and,
- 4) "The Career Interest Inventory was helpful in determining my career interests."

The Career Decision survey served also as a background questionnaire to collect pertinent demographic information. Because of the small sample size, validity and reliability were not tested.

The 4-H Career Decision Survey consisted of the following variables: seven dependent variables and six independent variables. The six independent variables were gender, district, number of years in 4-H, race/ethnicity, and major/favorite project. The response categories were ordinal: "strongly agree," "agree," "no response," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The survey used a five item Likert scale ranging from five (strongly agree) to one (strongly disagree).

The analysis employed ordered logit regression to conduct the multivariate analysis. The ordinal regression method of analysis appears to measure the effects of multiple explanatory variables that were not assumed continuous and is appropriate for data that is evenly distributed among all categories. This ordinal regression technique allows modeling of dependence of an ordinal or ordered response on a set of predictor covariates (Hummel & Lichtenberg, 2001; Thomas & Galamos, 2002).

## **Results**

This section provides information on the significant positive relationships. Table 1 reports the estimates of ordinal regression and the results of the significance tests. The table discloses positive significance that deals with years in 4-H, age, race/ethnicity and specific 4-H projects. The results indicated that youth who participated in the 4-H animal science project had knowledge about various careers before completing the modified Holland's Inventory ( $.038 \leq .05$ ); results also indicate that other experiences outside of 4-H had a significant impact on animal science project students learning about careers ( $.025 \leq .05$ ). 4-H had a significant impact on career aspirations of youth who participated in 4-H for two years ( $.038 \leq .05$ ) and six years ( $.001 \leq .05$ ); for youth who participated in 4-H for seven years, experiences outside of 4-H assisted them with exploring careers ( $.042 \leq .05$ ). For students participating in the 4-H camping program, experiences outside of 4-H were significant in career exploration ( $.05 \leq .05$ ) (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

Ordinal Regression on 4-H Youths' Career Decisions (Estimates) (n=107)

<b>VARIABLES</b>	<b>Knowledge of Interests Before Career Interest Inventory</b>	<b>4-H Experiences and Career Choice</b>	<b>Other Experiences and Career Choice</b>	<b>Career Interest Inventory and Career Interests</b>	<b>College Fair and College Major Determination</b>	<b>College Fair and Career Choice</b>
<b>YEARS IN 4-H</b>						
2 Years	.659	.038*	.591	.275	.883	.632
6 Years	.531	.001*	.349	.921	.394	.571
7 Years	.998	.421	.042*	.669	.499	.998
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>						
African Am./Black	.111	.783	.067	.045*	.000*	.002*
Asian/Pacific Is.	.400	.559	.079	.172	.000*	.002*
Caucasian/White	.997	.808	.770	.291	.004*	0a
Latino/Hispanic	.572	.262	.056	.140	.018*	.042*
<b>4-H PROJECT</b>						
Animal Science	.038*	.025*	.151	.604	.121	.181
Camp/Outd. Ed.	.155	.850	.050*	.189	.454	.021*

\*= $p \leq .05$ 

The Holland Career Interest Inventory was significant in assisting African-American youth with understanding their career interests ( $.045 \leq .05$ ). The college fair helped to clarify college interests for the following racial categories: African-American/Black ( $.000 \leq .05$ ), Asian/Pacific Islander ( $.000 \leq .05$ ), Caucasian/White ( $.004 \leq .05$ ), and Latino/Hispanic ( $.018 \leq .05$ ). The racial/ethnic category that did not have significance was the bi-racial category.

The college fair showed indications of significance in assisting youth with understanding their career choice. Understanding career choice was significant with the following racial/ethnic categories: African-American/Black ( $.002 \leq .05$ ), Asian/Pacific Islander ( $.002 \leq .05$ ), and Latino/Hispanic ( $.042 \leq .05$ ).

Table 2 revealed model fit; goodness of fit was determined by model significance. A model does not fit well if the level of significance is less than or equal to .0005 (Norusis, 2008). The chi-square test was used to determine model goodness of fit (Moore & McCabe, 1989). The model for this study fits well; all levels of significance on the dependent variables are greater than .0005.

Model fitness was supported by the following explanation of the significant dependent variables related to model fit. Levels of significance were revealed in relation to the dependent variables. 4-H Club Experiences (35.330) include primary educational mode of the 13 offered by the 4-H program. 4-H Experiences (39.083) are the general 4-H participation opportunities. Other Experiences (42.597) are activities besides 4-H that have an impact on youths' career decision or college major choice. 4-H Record Books (35.237) are the written curriculum that youth complete as a part of the 4-H non-formal education experience. College fair/Major (45.078) was the event that had significant impact on the youths' college major preference or choice. The college fair/career (40.936) was the dependent variable, which indicated a significant result regarding the youths' career choice. The one dependent variable that was not significant was the Interest Inventory (.081). The Career Interest Inventory (33.032) was administered to the youth to assist with identifying career interests (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

Model Fit for Dependent Variables and Goodness of Fit

Dependent Variables	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
4-H Club Experiences	35.330	23	.048*
4-H Experiences	39.083	23	.019*
Other Experiences	42.597	23	.008*
4-H Record Books	35.237	23	.049*
Interest Inventory	33.032	23	.081
College fair/Major	45.078	23	.004*
College fair/Career	40.936	23	.012*

\* $p < .05$

A Pearson Chi square goodness of fit test determined large observed significant levels; this indicates models with good fit (Norusis, 2008). Large observed levels were indicated with the following dependent variables: 4-H Club Experiences (385.165), 4-H Experiences (290.028), Other Experiences (381.769), 4-H Record Book (282.028), college fair participation and College Major (282.310), and College Fair and Career Choice (313.025). The only variable without a large observed significance level was the Career Interest Inventory variable Career (582.588) (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Pearson Goodness of Fit Statistic for Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
4-H Club Experiences	385.165	377	.377
4-H Experiences	290.574	377	1.00
Other Experiences	381.769	377	.422
4-H Project Books	282.028	377	1.00
Interest Inventory	582.588	377	.000
College Fair/Major	282.310	377	1.00
College Fair/Career	313.025	377	.993

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations to this study. First, over 500 students attended 2008 4-H Congress. However, due to youth’s participation in statewide competitions conducted at the same time, not all students were able to attend the career/college fair. Second, the sample size for this study was too small for the results to be generalized to other 4-H youth programs outside of Virginia. Third, both instruments were piloted for the first time at this 4-H Congress and the validity and reliability for the instruments were not examined prior to their administration. Finally, the various 4-H clubs in Virginia learn about careers in a variety of ways. Some students did not complete a 4-H project. Since these projects expose students to different occupations, some students did not have 4-H project-based career exposure.

**Discussion**

This study confirms that the 4-H experience does indeed have a significant impact on the career decisions of *some* youth, but *not all*. Specifically, youth who had participated in 4-H for two years, six years, and those who had participated in the animal science and outdoor education projects reported that 4-H was useful in helping them to decide on a career. This finding indicates that 4-H is exposing youth to specific careers and occupational experiences. The results of this study also demonstrate that students in 4-H have learned about careers not only by participating in 4-H, but with activities outside of 4-H. One can assume that students learn about careers not only in the schools that they attend, but also in the other developmental youth activities in which they participate. Many public schools in Virginia have career counselors who counsel students concerning future full-time employment and choice attendance.

However, when the student data were aggregated by race, the results indicated that the Career Interest Inventory, 4-H experiences and outside experiences were not helpful to any racial group in deciding career choice. This may be an indication that students had already decided on specific careers or that they are unsure about specific careers. However, Holland’s Vocational Interest Survey was significant in assisting the African-American participants with understanding

career interests. The students who participated in this study were between the ages of 14-19. Thus, they may not be ready or equipped to make decisions about their future careers. It would be useful for 4-H programs to intensify participants' exposure to various careers through 4-H projects. This would be developmentally appropriate for this age group.

The college fair was helpful to students in determining their possible academic major and career choice. Students were able to ask individuals about the classes concerning particular academic majors and future career choices. Talking to the representatives may have provided the student enough insight to decide whether to explore the major further and/or to think about other majors.

A future study for Virginia 4-H should focus on the types of outside organizations in which participants have membership. Researchers can examine whether these activities, including 4-H make a difference when students are deciding on careers.

### **Implications**

Based on this study, the 4-H Youth Development Program may need to intensify its career awareness for youth ages 14-19. It is apparent that youth participants have become significantly aware of careers in Virginia through the animal science program and the outdoor education program in particular. Career awareness for this age group is developmentally appropriate as youth are seeking information regarding their next phase in life. This significant difference may address youth's departure from youth development programs that do not provide developmentally appropriate opportunities.

Long-term involvement in 4-H is evident in this study. Results of the research indicate that long-term participation in 4-H Youth Development has a positive impact on the career choice of youth. For instance, the 4-H community club programming and after-school programming are programs that assist with long-term youth development. These programs provide youth opportunities to experience mastery, belonging, generosity, and independence. In the club program or other long-term involvement opportunities involving a caring adult, the adult can create opportunities for youth to assess their experiences, service to others, and build in their successes for the future (Kress, 2004).

The college fair impacted eighty percent of the racial and ethnic groups in the study positively. Four-H youth development specialists and agents might consider efforts such as this to expose youth to career options in relation to their interests. The one group that did not show significant differences regarding participation in the career fair was those indicating bi-racial/multi-racial identity. This is consistent with other programming areas where needs of those of mixed racial identity are not being met (Root, 1996a; Root, 1996b). Specialists may look at this specific group to determine how to meet their needs regarding career awareness and decision-making.

### **Summary**

This study's purpose was to determine the extent to which adolescents' participation in a youth development program may be linked to the participants' post-secondary education and career aspirations. This study indicated that the Virginia 4-H youth development program had positive impact on youth's career decisions in relation to specific years of program involvement, race/ethnicity, and specific curricular participation.

Early exposure to higher education is beneficial to students. For many of the youth attending the career/college fair, it was helpful to discuss attending college with various college representatives. Representatives from the college departments enlightened the students about careers that should be considered. Youth development specialists might consider taking young people to visit various colleges. Specialists might also consider inviting representatives from college departments to engage in activities with the youth in their programs.

Individuals who work with youth development programs might consider exposing youth to various careers through projects. Youth could learn about various careers, which would assist them in career decision making. It would be beneficial for the projects to have a set of standardized goals and learning outcomes. This would make the programs' impact easier to assess.

Youth development programs assist young people in making decisions about their future. Whether the programs focus on careers or postsecondary education, these programs are vital to helping young people understand their interests and values.

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## **Addressing Criteria in the Development of a New 4-H Foods Project**

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## Addressing Criteria in the Development of a New 4-H Foods Project

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**Abstract:** As youth and society changes, 4-H projects must change and adapt. *Make it with Mixes*, a 4-H curriculum, provides a new way of looking at food preparation. It may be one of the first state foods projects created without an emphasis on “from scratch” cooking or baking. Aimed at beginning 4-H members, ages 9 to 13, the project teaches cooking skills with the aid of commercial mixes. However, the main focus of the project is on making comparisons between food labels, costs per serving, and recognizing quality food products. Science and mathematics activities are also incorporated into the curriculum. This article discusses the organization, criteria and strategies used to create this new foods project.

### Project Overview

Since 1914, and perhaps even earlier, 4-H has taught cooking and baking “from scratch.” In 2006, a 4-H club decided to try an activity using commercial mixes. Following the activity they communicated what they had learned in a fair exhibit: The club members enjoyed the mix project because it saved time. They found it was easier to learn food preparation skills when the number of ingredients and equipment was reduced. The 4-H leaders said that it made a good club project and youth with a lot of experience enjoyed it as much as the beginners. The young people could also compare nutrition information using the labels on the packages. New experiences with equipment was put into productive activities: such as kitchen scissors as a means to open packages (and cut small foods and pizza) and an oven thermometer used to make a determination whether to adjust baking times or oven rack settings to meet the requirements of the package recommendations.

For many years, using criteria as basis of curriculum development and evaluation has been shown to create highly effective educational materials and programs (Defazio, 2008; Denmark, 1963; Gordon, 1968; Jacobs, 1989; Hass & Parkay, 1993; McNeil & Darby, 2008; Squires, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Other than for the Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education

Program (known as EFNEP), only a few (Armstrong & Vasold, 1925; Brink, 1964; Futchey & Bishop, 1941; Ikeda & Moyles, 1986) have studied 4-H foods projects during their project development phase.

## **Objective for the Project Development**

The main objective of this study was to develop a basic state level 4-H foods project (using criteria established by a curriculum committee) to help young people learn basic concepts of food preparation, with fewer ingredients and equipment.

## **Method**

In 2007, the 4-H Family and Consumer Sciences state committee met and determined that a mix project would be useful to younger 4-H members (9 to 13 years of age) based on the work completed by the 4-H members in 2006. But, Extension educators and volunteer leaders in the state were unsure if the mix project would be successful. Would the fair judges confuse the products made with mixes with recipes from scratch? Would a separate fair category designed specifically for the mix products need to be created?

## **Criteria**

Criteria, established by the project development committee, were used to create the project. It was important that criteria be selected that would address preparation of commercial mixes as well as basic meal management skills. These were the fourteen criteria selected:

1. Compare Nutrition Facts labels and judge food products
2. Encourage foods demonstrations
3. Teach food and kitchen safety
4. Illustrate basic table setting
5. Describe how to do the dishes
6. Explain math and science concepts
7. Incorporate diversity messages
8. Include some recipes to enhance the taste of the commercial mixes
9. Develop enthusiasm among young members and volunteer leaders
10. Emphasize cooking and baking skills not currently found in cookbooks
11. 4-H volunteer leaders as well as teachers should be able to lead the project.
12. Alternative recipes for low-income audiences not able to afford the commercial mixes
13. Appeal to older 4-H members and those who would like to continue in the project
14. A project record that is easy to complete, allows youth to see what they learned, and helps volunteer leaders and Extension professionals evaluate how well the project teaches basic food preparation skills.

In addition to the creation of the 4-H project guide, 4-H leaders felt that an overall food series leader guide (previously produced on videotape) needed to be updated on DVD to include educational resources to successfully complete the new project.

## **Funding and the Review of Materials**

In 2008, a General Mills grant was secured to create a *Make it with Mixes* project on the state level. The grant required that a registered dietician work on the project. The main authors (4-H curriculum specialist and Extension educator) and the editor were employed by Cooperative Extension. A computer technician and an illustrator were hired. Over 50 commercial mixes were purchased and entire mix boxes were reviewed for recipes, hints, and ingredients used. Some of the mixes were gluten-free, fat-free or made a nutrition claim. The mixes and the recipes were evaluated using product standardization evaluations from various sources.

To introduce 4-H leaders and members to the project, five leader in-services were held. 4-H members made mixes and demonstrated them during these in-services, not only to test the mixes and their suitability to young people, but also to gain support and comments from the leaders and members who attended throughout the development process. Each of the in-services meetings were evaluated with the standard participant evaluation forms used in our state. Extension agents also received training and were able to pre-order the project materials at the trainings.

Three sets of reviews were sent out to all foods leaders and Extension educators. The last set of reviews was distributed and collected during an Extension annual conference as a quick turnaround was necessary before the project could be edited at the university level. (In this case, the leaders and educators evaluated the curricula by writing comments on the drafts.) The three periods of review were important due to the diversity of the comments and the challenge of addressing the criteria. Four meetings with the illustrator were needed in order to create the eighty graphic images in the forty page project.

## **Curriculum Development Preliminaries**

The authors first selected the types of mixes that were to be addressed in the project and the order that they were to appear in the project. Designed to build skills developmentally and focus instruction on similar types of baking pans and equipment, the order of mixes presented in the project was as follows: puddings, cake, quick breads and pound (loaf) cakes, muffins, wedges and bars (corn bread, gingerbread, bar cookies), cookies, biscuits, pizza and pie crust and pancake and waffle mixes. Because there are many other mixes available, the option to use those mixes was supported. Members were required to make as few as two different mixes of the same type (i.e. brand name vs. generic) per year or complete the entire project book of ten types of mixes. Ideas were given on how to use the mix in creative ways, for example, layering a pudding parfait.

## **Addressing the Criteria in Developing the Project:**

The following criteria were used in developing the curriculum:

### **1. Compare Nutrition Facts labels and judge food products.**

Outside of a computer review of every ingredient, it is difficult for adults and youth to determine nutritive value of recipes. Reviewing and comparing nutrition facts labels found on commercial products is much easier. In the project, two nutrition facts label "blanks" were included for every mix type so members could fill them in using the package information and make the comparisons. In addition, a form to compare cost per serving and a food product evaluation specific to the type of mix helped the youth determine how a standardize food product should look and taste

## **2. Encourage foods demonstrations.**

An entire page of the curriculum was dedicated to food demonstrations and a place was designated in order to brainstorm possible topics to present to their group. A state 4-H food presentations resource was also suggested.

## **3. Teach food and kitchen safety.**

Five main hazards in the kitchen were addressed: cuts, burns, falls, electric shock, and explosion (food from microwave cooking and glass put on the burners). The importance of washing hands, setting up the kitchen counter for food preparation, putting a damp cloth under bowls to prevent breakage, and returning food to the refrigerator before washing the dishes were among the topics related to food and kitchen safety.

## **4. Illustrate basic table setting.**

An entire page was dedicated to setting the table with two large illustrations on how to set place settings for a basic dinner and a basic dessert setting (that does not include a knife). Other more complex table settings were illustrated in the first drafts, but it was thought that only basic settings should be included in this project; the more complicated relegated to an advanced foods or an etiquette project.

## **5. Describe how to do the dishes.**

Step-by-step instructions were given on how to wash dishes in a sink and in a dishwasher. An illustration showed how to set up a kitchen counter in order to have the food preparation go smoothly and safely with areas for: dishwashing, food waste, and cooling the food product after baking.

## **6. Explain math and science concepts.**

Math and sciences concepts were shared in sections related to: measurements, sifting, greasing and flouring, cooling, pan sizes, mixing and over-mixing, the difference between baking soda and baking powder, and the cutting of servings from round cake and rectangular pans.

## **7. Incorporate diversity messages.**

Most of the illustrations were line drawings of equipment and food. The few illustrations with human figures represented both boys and girls of various races. Many options were included for the types of foods the 4-H member could make. Cultural foods could be adapted easily using a mix as a basic ingredient. Gluten-free mixes for those with celiac disease and other mixes without egg, salt or other ingredients were addressed for those with food allergies. An affirmative action statement was also included. Members without sight can request an audio version of the project.

## **8. Include some recipes to enhance the taste of the commercial mixes**

Additional recipes were added to supplement the mix project, such as crumb topping for pies and muffins, making pound cake from cake mix, and a single pudding serving for a snack.

## **9. Develop enthusiasm among young members and volunteer leaders.**

During the training the leaders were impressed by the quantity of food preparation techniques that were built into the project. The young people demonstrating at the leaders in-services were also a major influence in generating enthusiasm. Each shared how they used the mixes to prepare foods for their families and also as afternoon snacks.

**10. Emphasize cooking and baking skills not currently found in cookbooks.**

The following skills were not found in current cookbooks or in our current food and nutrition series, but were included in this project: Use of oven thermometers and kitchen scissors, pan sizes, type, how to cool food products and test for doneness, and graphics of what happens when something is over mixed.

**11. 4-H volunteer leaders as well as teachers should be able to lead the project.**

The text was large enough for beginning members to read. Sections on the inside front cover for the volunteer leader or teacher discussed the objectives of the project, completion requirements, possible food allergies of young people and useful kitchen equipment. Short sentences described individual steps. Through illustrations, leaders and professional teachers were able to describe and demonstrate the food preparation skills to young people.

**12. Alternatives recipes for low-income audiences not able to afford the commercial mixes.**

A recipe for master mix and other alternative projects (making a cookie mix in a jar, for example) were given.

**13. Appeal to older 4-H members and those who would like to continue in the project.**

The member may compare just two mixes or many more. Young people can select mixes not included in the project and many alternative activities were suggested.

**14. A project record that is easy to complete, allows youth to see what they learned, and helps volunteer leaders/teachers and Extension professionals evaluate how well the project teaches basic food preparation skills.**

The project record includes a few lines of writing, but most of the record was created with checkmarks indicating when the young person completed the skills and when they had practiced enough to do them well.

### **Evaluation of the Reviews**

Notes were taken during the development process on any difficulties the youth, volunteer leaders or extension educators expressed during the in-service trainings. The leaders wanted simple rating scales (good, fair and poor) for each food product evaluation.

Some disagreed on how children should be taught various skills (cracking an egg) and there were many concerns about the fair exhibits. The developers had a difficult time communicating how the illustrations should look and either had to demonstrate them for the illustrator or find examples that would communicate the ideas discussed in the text.

### **In-service Evaluations**

At the in-services, youth demonstrated making a mix and general instruction was given about the project book. The leaders were very excited when the youth were present. They appreciated that the project book was created based on the criteria outlined by other leaders and that the leader guide DVD was updated soon afterward. Most were amazed at the quantity of food preparation skills and advice given in the mix project.

The only negative comment expressed was that the recipes made from the master mix should have been included even though they were available on-line or in Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP) materials.

## Impact

The project was completed and forty-six out of sixty-seven counties in the state pre-ordered materials including more than 2,500 project books for use in their counties. Additional materials were developed related to etiquette and master mixes recipes were placed on the web-site. One leader's guide DVD was sent to each county with the option of ordering more and/or making their own copies.

The requirements were found acceptable and exhibits were included in the fair premium listings on the county and state level. Requests were made for presentations from community groups. Fifty Family and Consumer Science educators from across the country attended an informational session about the project in Portland, ME during the annual NEAFCS conference in the Fall 2010 and have started ordering materials for their state.

The 4-H members currently taking the project range in age from beginning 4-H youth (8 years old) to older and more experienced 4-H members, 16 years of age or older. Though the project has not reach an entire completion cycle with exhibits at the fair, preliminary data show that the young people are increasing their learning in important areas which had not before been addressed in other foods projects: label reading and comparison, food product knowledge and improvement, dishwashing, portion sizes, and showing creativity in their efforts.

## Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to develop a basic state level 4-H foods project (using criteria established by a curriculum committee) to help young people learn basic concepts of food preparation, with fewer ingredients and equipment. The development of this project was built on criteria and input by leaders, members and extension educators through testing, several reviews and pre-and post in-service evaluations. A separate category of fair exhibits was created. After completion of the 4-H "Make it with Mixes" curricula, the authors determined that criteria were useful in the development and the acceptance of the materials, especially when the project was controversial in its approach to learning foods and nutrition concepts (mix preparation vs. "from scratch" baking).

This project would be easily adapted in most states or counties and would be very useful in family and consumer science classrooms and afterschool programs where time is limited for instruction.

The project materials may be ordered from Publications Distribution, College of Agricultural Sciences, University Park, PA 16802. Call 877-345-0691 for cost, shipping and quantity orders.

Scholl, J., Kralj, R., Fuller, R., & Jankowski, B. (2010). *Make it with Mixes*, University Park, PA: Penn State University Extension Publication J0671A.

The DVD leader guide may be ordered from the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, % Jan Scholl, 2B Ferguson Building, University Park, PA, 814-863-7444. Questions about the curricula may be addressed to: jscholl@psu.edu.

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## **Planting the Seed: An Evaluation of a Community Youth Summit**

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## Planting the Seed: An Evaluation of a Community Youth Summit

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**Abstract:** Meaningful youth engagement produces benefits both to youth and to the community in which they live. This paper discusses a day-long youth summit held for 289 middle school students. Youth attended a combination of mass and break-out sessions based on America's Promise Five Promises. Planners and evaluators assessed proximal student outcomes throughout the day. A two question visual analog scale was developed and utilized to assess students' perceptions of learning and enjoyment.

### Introduction

The community youth development (CYD) framework promotes youth engagement opportunities as a viable avenue for positive youth and community development. CYD includes positive youth development (Lerner, 2003), while also emphasizing youth-adult partnerships to create social change (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Perkins and Borden (2003) define CYD as "purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their competencies and become engaged as partners in their own development as well as the development of their communities"(p.6). Providing youth with opportunities to engage in the community allows youth to acquire lifelong learning skills that assist in their development. Furthermore, youth community engagement contributes to community development by focusing on solutions to assist local issues facing their community (Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoop-Rooney, & Villarruel, 2003). By placing an emphasis on the role youth can take within a community, we can begin to view youth not as passive actors but individuals that have a voice and can share in the decision-making process that affects their lives and the community they reside in.

### America's Promise

The five "Promises" articulated by the America's Promise Alliance (1997) provide a framework rooted in community youth development philosophy. The Five Promises are research-based,

developmental needs that children and youth require from birth into the transition to adulthood. These promises include: *Caring Adults, Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time, A Healthy Start and Healthy Development, Effective Education for Marketable Skills and Lifelong Learning, and Opportunities to Make a Difference through Helping Others*. These promises are designed as indicators to learn about the inputs, experiences, and opportunities that young people can experience to avoid problem behaviors and also thrive developmentally. In order to describe the well being of children and youth, a holistic picture is needed of their community and the developmental resources it possesses to assist in caring for and preparing them for the future.

Bryan/College Station was named a Community of Promise by the national America's Promise organization in June 2005. The designation was initiated by the Service-Learning Youth Action Board of Bryan High School in the fall of 2000 after returning from the National Youth Summit conference. The students challenged the City of Bryan to apply for the Community of Promise title by making numerous presentations to various agencies and organizations and assisted in the application process. As a Community of Promise, the cities of Bryan and College Station, Texas developed a Board that focuses on the development of character and competence in a child's life and believes that success is dependent on the Five Promises being fulfilled. The Board consists of representatives from local non-profit organizations and agencies (i.e. United Way and local food bank), public entities (i.e. City of Bryan, College Station Independent School District, and Texas A&M University), private companies (i.e. Atmos Energy) and local youth. During the Fall of 2008 the Bryan/College Station Community of Promise Board organized a community based youth summit that incorporated many of the principles of community youth development and encouraged the engagement of adults, youth leaders and their peers.

### **Youth Summits**

Youth that participate in community development efforts are shown to receive many benefits (Breitbart & Kepes, 2007; Cahill, 2007; Checkoway, Dobbie, & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Goodyear & Checkoway, 2003). Organized youth activities have been shown to be popular and effective in delivering content and providing experiences associated with positive youth development. Hansen, Larson & Dworkin's (2003) study results indicate that organized youth activities that provide quality content and positive experiences are not only popular among youth but also provide many developmental assets. Non-profits, volunteer organizations, and governmental programs that work with or on behalf of youth have begun to emphasize the role and impact of youth in community development efforts by focusing on the delivery of these developmental assets via community wide youth summits. By focusing on engaging youth with activities that stimulate enthusiasm and investments in community structures and policy, youth summits have promoted active collaboration between youth leaders, community professionals, volunteers, and youth to identify community issues (i.e., life skills, fiscal responsibility and health) deemed necessary for future civic participation. This paper describes the Bryan/College Station Youth Summit and the assessment of the participants' perceptions about how much they learned and their level of enjoyment during each session.

### **Methods**

The Bryan/College Station 2008 Youth Summit (BCS Youth Summit) was based on the principles of *America's Promise Alliance* (1997), and aimed to deliver the Alliance's "five promises" to targeted disadvantaged youth. The Alliance's research-based framework for youth development focuses on every child having:

- 1) *Caring Adults,*

- 2) *Safe Places*,
- 3) *A Healthy Start*,
- 4) *Effective Education*, and
- 5) *Opportunities to Help Others*.

The 2008 BCS Youth Summit included five sessions based on the aforementioned promises (i.e., one mass session and four break-out sessions). The summit was planned by the Bryan/College Station Community of Promise Board. Each session lasted between 30 minutes to one hour with ten minutes allowed to transition between sessions. Sessions were held in different rooms throughout the summit's venue. Sessions integrated lecture, discussion, and activities to elicit participant engagement and allow them to apply the content and concepts presented. Each of the summit sessions is described below:

- *Ready for 21*. The purpose of this session was to introduce participants to *caring adults* working in professions of interest to youth. Utilizing a pre-administered questionnaire used to determine the vocational interests of participants-to-be, BCS Youth Summit coordinators were able to group participants with caring adults in distinct professional fields for structured interaction. The Caring Adults discussed their job responsibilities and day-to-day work activities with summit participants. Participants were then able and encouraged to pose questions to stimulate conversation and clarify inquiries regarding career development.
- *Healthy Start*. The purpose of this session was to teach participants the *importance of nutrition* and teach participants how to make quick, healthy, and low-cost snacks. The facilitator of this session incorporated youth participants into the presentation by allowing them to demonstrate the procedures of making healthy trail-mix and yogurt smoothies. During this session, participants were provided a snack while learning the benefits of low-fat diets, consuming recommended portion sizes, and eating a balanced variety of foods.
- *Job Skills*. The purpose of this session was to introduce effective life long learning skills to participants by focusing on the *concept of personal finances* and techniques to manage his/her money. The facilitator of this session used a combination of lecture and discussion to ensure comprehension of session content. Additionally, a board game was played to allow participants an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned during lecture.
- *Safe Places*. The purpose of this session was to teach participants the *importance of internet safety* and lifelong learning skills to identify internet threats and avoid internet predators. Facilitators of these sessions utilized uniform PowerPoint presentations to inform participants about proper Facebook etiquette and constructing responsible and safe Facebook profiles. Participants were presented with fictitious Facebook profile examples and then led, through discussions by facilitators, to identify inappropriate content in Facebook profiles and why the inclusion of such content may be potentially harmful.
- *The Call*. The final session introduced the concept of service learning and community engagement to the participants and provides an avenue for opportunities to help others. The local United Way Youth Council served as coordinators and mentors for a city wide service learning event which all participants would participate in. The youth council introduced the event by conducting a skit to illustrate the role of service in the community and introduced various avenues for participant involvement. This was the

only session that utilized peer-to-peer instruction to demonstrate leadership development and youth voice.

### **Target Population**

This study involved a purposive sample (Creswell, 2003) of 289 participants. Participants were identified as eligible to attend the BCS Youth Summit by their middle school teachers. Teachers were provided a checklist using objective criteria to identify disadvantaged students. Based upon teachers' selections, students' parents were sent recruitment letters and consent forms to enroll their child in the summit. Active parental consent was required for students to attend the event. A total of 289 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade participants from 4 local middle schools attended the BCS Youth Summit.

### **Measures**

Youth summit planners recognized the need for collecting evaluation data beyond merely tallying the number of participants who attended the event. Of equal or greater importance was the need to collect

- (1) information to assist in the improvement of subsequent summits,
- (2) data to document goal achievement; and
- (3) evidence which may be parlayed into securing additional event sponsorship, support, and funding in future years.

A Brief Visual Analog Survey Measure for Youth (VAS) instrument was developed and utilized to assess participants' perceptions following each of the four youth summit break-out sessions. The instrument consisted of two questions: (1) How much did I learn this session? and (2) How much did I enjoy this session? Response options were on a 3-point Likert-type scale and enhanced by a visual analog to facilitate comprehension by children with wide-ranging reading abilities (see Figure 1).

Participants' perceptions of the BCS Youth Summit were measured using:

- (1) The Visual Analog Survey Measure for Youth (VAS) (McKyer, Outley and Smith, 2009) was utilized to assess participants' perceptions at the BCS Youth Summit. The instrument contained two 3-point Likert-type rating scale items that asks participants to indicate their level of learning and the extent of their enjoyment for each session attended. Items were scored using a visual analog to facilitate reading comprehension regardless of ability (see Figure 1). The reliability ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) of the measurement was deemed acceptable.
- (2) Evaluator Observations of participants during each session. Each evaluator was trained to observe participant and session facilitator interactions. Verbal expressions and visual emotions were reported. Specific expressions regarding enjoyment and engagement were emphasized as well.

## Figure1. Brief Visual Analog Measure for Youth

**Job Skills**

Please circle the best answer to the following questions.

**How much did I learn this session?**

A Lot      Some      Not A lot

**I enjoyed the session . . .**

A Lot      Some      Not A lot

### Protocol

Summit adult and youth volunteers were given an orientation that covered the summit goals, local logistics, and the evaluation protocol (i.e., dissemination times, locations and collection procedures). Each summit participant was provided an evaluation once they entered a selected session. This allowed the authors to have an accurate count of the number of surveys distributed. At the end of each session, a volunteer provided a reminder that participants should complete an evaluation and submit upon exiting the room by dropping into a colored bag (that matched the survey color) at a collection station located at the exit doors. Once all session surveys were collected, the collection bags were sealed and labeled (see Table 1). Completion rates for each session were calculated by comparing the number of surveys distributed with the number collected.

**Table 1**  
Youth Summit Session Logistics

	Ready for 21	Safe Places	Healthy Start	Job Skills
Number of Rotations	1	3	3	3
Number of Classrooms	1	6	1	2
Total Sessions	1	18	3	6
Number of Room Exits Per Room	3	1	1	1
Total Number of Bags Needed*	3	18	3	6
Paper & Bag Color	White	Blue	Green	Yellow

\* For Dual-wide doors, may want to have a bag on each side of the door. Thereby double the number of bags per door.

### Results

The majority of the 289 BCS summit participants completed the evaluation surveys. The Ready for 21 sessions had the highest completion rate of 93.43% and the Safe Places session had the lowest (73.01%) (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

Youth Summit Session Evaluation Completion Rates

<b>Evaluation Completion Rates (n = 289)</b>	
	<b>Completion Rates</b>
Job Skills	212 (73.34%)
Healthy Start	244 (84.43%)
Ready for 21	270 (93.43%)
Safe Places	211 (73.01%)

The effectiveness of the BCS Youth Summit was captured by the VAS. The majority of summit participants reported learning “a lot” during the sessions (65.7%) (See Table 3). The Safe Places session (83.2%) had the highest ratings, followed by Ready for 21 (68.7%), Healthy Start (66.7%), and Job Skills (43.6%). A majority of students also enjoyed the sessions (59.3%). The Safe Places session had the highest rating (74.8%), and the Job Skills session (33.2%) had the lowest rating. Overall, a positive association was determined to exist between the participants perceptions of learning and enjoying ( $\rho=0.685$ ,  $p<.001$ ), although variations of these relationships were seen between sessions (see Table 4).

**Table 3**

Reported Learning and Enjoyment Levels by Youth Summit Participants

<b>Session-Specific Frequencies</b>							
<i>I learned during this session.</i>							
	<b>Job Skills</b>	<b>Healthy Start</b>	<b>Ready for 21</b>	<b>Safe Places</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>P</b>
A Lot	88 (43.6%)	152 (66.7%)	173 (68.7%)	168 (83.2%)	581 (65.7%)	90.938	0.000
Some	84 (41.6%)	57 (25.0%)	74 (29.4%)	32 (15.8%)	247 (27.9%)		
Not A Lot	30 (14.9%)	19 (8.3%)	5 (7.0%)	2 (1.0%)	56 (6.3%)		
<i>I enjoyed this session.</i>							
	<b>Job Skills</b>	<b>Healthy Start</b>	<b>Ready for 21</b>	<b>Safe Places</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>P</b>
A Lot	67 (33.2%)	145 (63.6%)	161 (63.9%)	151 (74.8%)	524 (59.3%)	110.898	0.000
Some	91 (45.0%)	61 (26.8%)	83 (32.9%)	48 (23.8%)	283 (32.0%)		
Not A Lot	44 (21.8%)	22 (9.6%)	8 (3.2%)	3 (1.4%)	77 (8.7%)		

**Table 4**

Correlations between Learning and Enjoyment among Youth Summit Participants

<b>Correlations: Learned &amp; Enjoyed</b>		
	<b>Correlation</b>	<b>n</b>
Job Skills	0.680**	202
Healthy Start	0.750**	228
Ready for 21	0.568**	252
Safe Places	0.595**	202
Overall	0.685**	884

\*\*p< .001

Evaluator observations of youth during sessions were also performed by evaluation volunteers. Participants were observed generally enjoying the sessions and were engaged throughout many of the sessions. Although all Youth Summit sessions were developed to be interactive and incorporated many experiential activities relevant to real world experiences, the Ready for 21 and Safe Places sessions were observed to be more engaging. As a strategy to actively engage participants, the Safe Places sessions included a close up examination of internet safety for social media sites such as Facebook. Session presenters provided an array of heuristic examples of fictitious Facebook pages that allowed the participants to discuss problems with each page and reflect about how displaying different types of information can result in varying levels of safety threats.

The use of behavioral observations enabled the Youth Summit Evaluation Team to effectively triangulate the accuracy of the VAS to measure outcomes associated with the BCS Youth Summit's effectiveness. The behavioral observation reporting was consistent with the self-reported VAS data results (findings of behavioral observations reported elsewhere).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Summary**

The results of this study are consistent with prior research revealing the benefits of youth being engaged in leadership development opportunities. This is consistent with the scholarship of experiential learning which stresses that the ideal learner is actively engaged in a quality learning process (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Smith, 1991). The use of interactive summit sessions was viewed as engaging and led many students to view the opportunities available to them more positively. This further confirms what Mezirow (1997) described as transformative learning which encouraged youth in this study to change their frame of reference by reflecting on more positive attitudes.

One especially successful aspect of the Youth Summit planning was seen in the Ready for 21 sessions. This session was created by the event planners in response to a pre-administered survey of youth inquiring about their career aspirations. Then, caring adult volunteers representing the various professional careers identified by the students lead sessions to educate about aspects of their employment. This pre-Summit planning and youth involvement is vital during program development because it allows the youth to view their voice as important. Further, it allows for meaningful interaction between youth and adult role models. Positive youth-adult relationships are the center of positive youth development, in as such; young people must feel a strong connection with adults and their community.

The summit provided a supportive environment for the youth to explore the Five Promises. The sessions and activities reinforced the Five Promises and provided each youth with a sense of enjoyment and learning opportunity. Other aspects of the Summit, such as the youth seeing their suggestions for topics and professional careers adopted, further enhanced their experience and enhanced the level of youth voice in the event and planning process. The combination of engagement and voice produced lifelong learning skills that will enhance their transition to adulthood.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this evaluation methodology is the reliability of the VAS measure. The VAS was limited due to including only 2 items. Each item was developed to capture participants'

perceptions based on independent concepts. Therefore, reporting the scale's reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.83$ ) may be inappropriate. However, the internal validity of the VAS (i.e., determining if the VAS accurately measured what the evaluators intended it to measure) was provided (see McKyer, Outley, & Smith, 2009 for detailed methodology) and shown to be effective.

## Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations are offered:

- (1) Given the effectiveness of this program to reach a large number of youth with positive outcomes, it is recommended to use this large-event structure, evaluation methods, and evaluation tools in other settings (i.e., schools and out-of-school time settings), age groups (i.e., elementary and high school aged), and topics (e.g., drug use, sexual health, safety specific events).
- (2) Encourage the utilization of experiential activities that can engage participants regardless of the session topic to enhance effectiveness.
- (3) Assemble a diverse planning committee to ensure all aspects are covered and community assets/resources are effectively utilized.
- (4) Engage participants from the beginning to ensure they are valued and the topics they would like to discuss/learn about are included (and sessions are hosted in context that is relevant to the youth participants).
- (5) If resources are available, incorporate more advanced/rigorous evaluation techniques (i.e., pre/post evaluations to complement VAS and observations) and/or include a process evaluation for use with the summit volunteers).
- (6) Host a pre-Summit evaluation training to properly collect data and make use of the measurement tools.

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# **Using Community-Based Programming to Increase Family Social Support for Healthy Eating among African American Adolescents**

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## Using Community-Based Programming to Increase Family Social Support for Healthy Eating among African American Adolescents

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**Abstract:** Little is known about emotional and instrumental social support for nutrition behaviors among African-American adolescents. In this paper, we specifically examine intervention effects on emotional, instrumental and total (composite) social support for fruit/vegetable and low-fat dairy intake. Data from a larger intervention, based on Social Cognitive Theory, which was implemented with 38 African-American adolescents and their families to increase fruit/vegetable intake, low-fat dairy intake and physical activity behaviors are presented. One-way ANOVA analyses revealed that intervention participants had positive and significant increases in emotional social support for low-fat dairy intake ( $P=0.01$ ), total social support for fruit/vegetable intake ( $P=0.05$ ), and total social support for low-fat dairy intake ( $P=0.02$ ). Specific recommendations addressing family social support for healthy eating through youth development programming are discussed.

### Introduction

In 1983, a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed that the overall health of the nation was improving, but there were significant racial disparities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1983). Now, more than 20 years later, the problem of health disparities persists (Fuller, 2003). Four of the six causes of death that still disproportionately affect minorities are related to nutrition (i.e., cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, infant mortality). Professionals involved in health promotion programming with youth need proven methods to intervene on specific nutrition behaviors related to health disparities. Family-based interventions aimed at influencing social support for healthy eating may be an effective avenue.

## Adolescents and Nutrition

There is a trend for the consumption of fruits and vegetables among children to decline with age. Further, differences in fruit and vegetable consumption among racial/ethnic groups have been noted from childhood through adulthood. (Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 2001). At least one study has shown that racial differences in vegetable intake were not significant, but African-American adolescents did report consuming significantly more fruits than Caucasian adolescents (Brady, et al., 2000). A similar study revealed that African-American adults reported consuming fewer fruits and vegetables than Caucasians (Kumanyika & Odoms, 2001). These findings underscore the importance of intervening early with African-American adolescents in order to maintain and improve their levels of fruit and vegetable consumption across the lifespan.

Milk and other dairy products are the major source of calcium in the U.S. food supply, contributing 72% of the available calcium in American diets (Miller, Jarvis & McBean, 2001). Milk has a higher concentration of calcium as compared to other foods, and milk is fortified with vitamin D, which increases calcium absorption (Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes, Food and Nutrition Board, & Institute of Medicine, 1999). Without consuming dairy products, it is difficult to meet the dietary calcium recommendations (Food Surveys Research Group, 1999). However, according to data from the 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, Americans two years old and older consumed an average of 1.5 servings of dairy per day; the Food Guide Pyramid recommendations are two to three servings per day (Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 1997). Intake of milk and other dairy products has been shown to decrease between six and eleven years of age (Grunbaum, et al., 2002; Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 1997; Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes, Food and Nutrition Board, & Institute of Medicine, 1999). Additionally, when comparing race and gender, Caucasian girls report a 4% higher prevalence of milk consumption than African-American girls and Caucasian boys report a 6% higher prevalence of milk consumption than African-American boys (Gillum, 1991). This racial discrepancy in milk and dairy intake for adolescents may be due to the higher proportion of lactose intolerance among African-Americans and may reflect cultural eating habits modeled from parent to child (Kumanyika & Odoms, 2001; Standing Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of Dietary Reference Intakes, Food and Nutrition Board, & Institute of Medicine, 1999).

Compared to Caucasians, African-American children and adolescents are at a higher risk for developing essential hypertension and cardiovascular disease in early adulthood. The consumption of fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy can greatly reduce this risk (Gillum, 1991). A subgroup analysis of hypertensive African-Americans in the Dietary Approaches to Stopping Hypertension (DASH) study demonstrated a greater blood pressure lowering effect when participants consumed a diet emphasizing fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy. In the DASH study, a control group who ate a diet emphasizing fruits and vegetables reduced systolic blood pressure by 8.0 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure by 3.4 mm Hg. An intervention group who ate a diet emphasizing fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy, reduced systolic blood pressure by 13.2 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure by 6.1 mm Hg (Svetkey, et al., 1999). Increased calcium intake via low-fat dairy products greatly improved blood pressure outcomes in this study compared to a diet emphasizing fruits and vegetables.

## Family-based Interventions

Family greatly impacts behavioral development of children (Baranowski & Nader, 1985), and has been characterized as the greatest overall influence on a child's health (Roberts & Wallander, 1992). Regarding dietary intake, family factors have been shown to affect food preferences and subsequent eating behaviors (Sallis & Nader, 1988). Families influence children and young adolescents through social support. Family support for diet has been shown to be more highly correlated to dietary intake than support from friends, although peer influences increasingly impact behavior as adolescents become more autonomous (Sallis, et al., 1987). Nevertheless, intervention studies have shown that families can significantly impact dietary knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy and behavioral intention (Crockett, et al., 1989), metabolic control (Hanson, et al., 1995), and weight loss (Wadden, et al., 1990) among children and young adolescents.

Nader, et al. (1983) reported on an intervention with 24 families (8 each: African-American, Mexican-American, and Caucasian) with children in the third to sixth grades. The significant treatment effects for social support resulting from this study indicated that family based, social environment-focused interventions were both feasible and important. Perry, et al. (1988) reported on a study comparing a school-based program to an equivalent home-based program with 2,250 elementary students in Minnesota targeting reductions in dietary fat consumption and sodium intake. Students in the home-based program reported more behavior change, showed reduced total fat and saturated fat measured via dietary recall and had more of the "program encouraged" foods on their food shelves, as compared to the school-based program students.

The Child and Adolescent Trial for Cardiovascular Health (CATCH) was a multi-state efficacy study examining the effects of an intervention to reduce cardiovascular risk factors among adolescents (Edmundson, et al., 1996; Nader et al., 1996). The intervention schools involved school-based intervention or school-based intervention plus a family treatment plan. Significant intervention effects were observed for perceived social reinforcement for healthy food choices, improved knowledge, intentions, and self-efficacy. Girls reported significantly greater perceived reinforcement for healthy eating than did boys.

The findings of these studies suggest interventions involving families may be effective avenues for promoting healthy nutrition. The family, as a socially-supportive environment, may in turn reinforce and sustain behavioral changes. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of a community-based intervention on family social support for healthy eating. The data were obtained from a larger study designed to promote healthy eating and physical activity among African American families (Wilson, et al., 2004).

## Methods

### Participants

The larger study utilized a quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest intervention design with a control group. Intervention and control groups met at one of two community centers. Participants for the intervention study were recruited from adolescents involved in general health screenings at community- and church-based centers. Eligibility requirements included being between the ages of 10 and 15 years of age, weighing less than or equal to the 95th percentile body mass index (BMI) for age and gender, African-American race, with normal blood pressure, and not taking medications known to affect blood pressure. Adolescents were invited

to participate in the study via phone call solicitation to their parents. During the phone call, parents were asked if they had other children between the ages of 10-15 who would also like to participate, pending screening for eligibility. A control group (attention control) also met once per week for the same duration of time as the intervention groups and participated in a general health education class that did not emphasize changing nutrition or physical activity behaviors.

Examples of topics covered in the comparison group included alcohol and other drug use prevention, HIV/STD/Teen pregnancy prevention, stress management, and study skills. In total, 38 African-American adolescents and their mothers participated in the study. Table 1 presents study participant characteristics.

### **Data Collection**

All mothers completed an IRB approved parental consent form and all adolescents completed an IRB approved assent form. Mothers completed demographic surveys, trained staff measured adolescents' height and weight, and adolescents completed paper and pencil psychosocial scales. Measures were administered to the adolescents in small groups (without mothers in the room) with one-to-one help provided by trained staff, prior to and after intervention participation. Week one involved obtaining baseline information such as a food intake and educating the participants on serving sizes. At the end of the last session, the same (post-test) measures were completed by all adolescents.

### **Intervention Description**

Adolescents and at least one of their parents (usually the mother) participated in the five-session intervention. The nutrition intervention goal for the treatment group was to increase fruit and vegetable intake to 6-8 servings per day and low-fat dairy intake to 3-4 servings per day, consistent with previous studies by Wilson et al. (Wilson, Sica & Miller, 1999; Wilson, et al., 2002), and following modified DASH diet guidelines (Appel, et al., 1997; Sacks, et al., 1999; Sacks, et al., 2001). Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) was used to guide the intervention. Environment, self-monitoring, goal setting, behavioral skills, and social support-seeking skills were identified as the most relevant SCT constructs. To address self-monitoring the participants were taught to set weekly food intake goals and record their daily food intake behaviors for each using a dietary and physical activity record. Family members used these records during discussion, problem-solving and goal-setting activities each week. Behavioral skill activities were led by a health psychologist and involved problem solving, goal-setting, practicing positive self-talk, self-reward plans, social support seeking, and long-term maintenance skills. The role of family was always emphasized during these activities by asking the families to have discussions while eating food from the food stations. Each session ended with the families discussing specific behavioral skills with the group. Finally, instructions and preparations for the next session were given.

During this first session adolescents were also asked to indicate on a list, the fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods they liked and disliked in order to determine what healthy foods to provide to the families to facilitate availability and accessibility (environment) of preferred healthy foods in their homes. At the end of session two through session five, adolescents were given individually prepared bags of fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy items following their documented preferences to facilitate access to healthy foods. Food stations were set up for each session and were designed to teach the families how to prepare snacks and meals emphasizing DASH foods. Each week the recipes were shared with the families and by the end of the intervention, the families were given a book of recipes from all food stations during the intervention and from recipes provided by the family participants. Family members were also

taught to record their daily food intake behaviors for each week using diet diaries which they used in discussion, problem-solving and goal-setting activities (behavioral skills training) during the sessions. Sessions two through five involved four structured activities: 30 minutes of physical activity, 30 minutes of food preparation, 30 minutes of behavioral skills training, and 30 minutes of discussion. During the last session, families volunteered to bring healthy DASH-style foods prepared at home for all to sample.

### **Staffing**

Most of the staff leading intervention activities were African-American and were from the community in which the intervention took place. During the sessions, physical activities included stretching, calisthenics, walking and basketball (led by a certified physical education teacher) as well as aerobics (led by a certified aerobic teacher). Food preparation stations were led by a retired nutritionist from the local extension service and a registered dietician from the local hospital system.

### **Measures**

Modified versions of the Social Support for Eating Scale (Sallis, et al., 1987) and the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Barrera, Sandler & Ramsay, 1981) were used to measure emotional social support and instrumental social support, respectively. In addition, two versions of each scale were modified to assess social support for fruit/vegetable intake and low-fat dairy intake, respectively. Because the instrumental support scales had not been previously used with African-American adolescents, those instruments were pilot tested for readability and comprehension prior to the intervention study. Appropriate changes to the instruments occurred prior to the intervention study. Pilot testing procedures and forms were approved by [our university's] Institutional Review Board.

### **Emotional social support for fruit/vegetable intake and low-fat dairy intake**

A modified version of the Social Support for Eating Scale (Sallis, et al., 1987) was used to assess emotional social support for fruit/vegetable intake as well as low-fat dairy intake. These instruments emphasized positive and negative emotional social support. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (very often), respondents answered how often family and friends did what was described in each item during the past month. Ultimately, responses to all items on a given instrument were added together to produce a summary score for that instrument. Wilson and Ampey-Thornhill (2001) demonstrated test-retest reliability correlations of  $r=.60$  to  $r=.84$  for the family social support scale with a sample of 148, 13-16 year old African-American adolescents. The 16-item instrument used by Wilson and Ampey-Thornhill is the same Emotional SS F&V instrument used in the present study.

An alternate version of that instrument, worded for low-fat dairy was also used in the present study to assess Emotional SS LFD, by replacing the words 'fruit and vegetable' with 'low-fat dairy.'

### **Instrumental social support for fruit/vegetable intake and low-fat dairy intake**

A review of the literature failed to reveal the existence of social support scales specific to Instrumental SS F&V or Instrumental SS LFD that have been validated with adolescents. Therefore items from an existing instrument designed to assess general instrumental social support (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Barrera, Sandler & Ramsay, 1981) were modified to create two separate instruments; one reflecting instrumental social support for fruit/vegetable intake and one reflecting social support for low-fat dairy. Both instruments contained 17 items. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (about every day), respondents

answered how often during in past month family members did specific activities with/for them. Ultimately, responses to all items on a given instrument were added together to produce a summary score for that instrument.

### **Composite social support for fruit/vegetable intake and low-fat dairy intake**

A composite measure of social support for fruit/vegetable intake (Composite SS F&V) was obtained by adding the summary scores from the emotional support for fruit/vegetable intake and instrumental support for fruit/vegetable intake together. Similarly, a composite measure of social support for low-fat dairy intake (Composite SS LFD) was obtained by adding the emotional and instrumental summary scores from the low-fat dairy instruments.

Fifteen male and fifteen female African-American adolescents, aged 10-15 (M=12.0, SD=1.1), were recruited from a community-based weekend basketball physical activity program to give feedback (pilot test) on the Instrumental SS F&V and Instrumental SS LFD scales. This feedback led to the addition of a clarification sentence in the instructions for both instruments that indicated some items refer to meals and some to snacks, changes made prior to use in the intervention study.

### **Analyses**

The present analysis focuses on intervention effects on social support for healthy nutrition behavior. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 11.5. Descriptive statistics were produced to describe the sample and to examine treatment group differences at baseline. Sample demographics from the intervention study are presented in Table 1. Means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous variables; frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables. Correlation analyses were conducted to determine if any participant demographic or behavioral variables co-varied with social support dependent variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine treatment effects on change in social support (change score = post-test social support summary score minus pre-test social support summary score) for each type of social support (Emotional Social Support for FV, Emotional Social Support for LFD, Instrumental Social Support for FV, Instrumental Social Support for LFD, Composite Social Support for FV, and Composite Social Support for LFD).

## **Results**

All participants involved in pre-test data collection completed the study. No significant differences between treatment groups at pre-test were identified. Intervention process evaluation also revealed excellent participation rates (>75% session attendance) by adolescents and parents with no significant differences between groups.

**Table 1**

Study participant characteristics by participant treatment group

Characteristics		Treatment Group	
		<i>Intervention*</i> (n=21)	<i>Control*</i> (n=17)
<b>Adolescents</b>			
Age, Mean (SD)		11.7 (1.6)	12.0 (1.6)
Body Mass Index, Mean (SD)		20.9 (2.7)	21.4 (4.2)
Male, (Percent)		47.6%	58.8%
<b>Mothers</b>			
Marital Status		<b>Percent<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>Percent<sup>†</sup></b>
Married		38.1%	47.1%
Single, Never Married		23.8%	29.4%
Separated or Divorced		38.1%	11.8%
Missing		0.0%	11.8%
Highest Grade Attained			
Some High School		14.3%	11.8%
High School Graduate		28.6%	17.6%
Some College		19.0%	41.2%
College Graduate		19.0%	11.8%
Professional/Grad School		14.3%	5.9%
Missing		4.8%	11.8%
Employment Category			
Full-time		57.1%	52.9%
Part-time		19.0%	17.6%
Retired		4.8%	17.6%
Unemployed		14.3%	0.0%
Missing		4.8%	11.8%
Total Family Income			
<\$19,999		38.1%	17.6%
\$20,000-\$29,999		28.6%	47.1%
≥\$30,000		28.6%	17.6%
Missing		4.8%	17.6%

\* Pre-test group differences non-significant

† Percents may not equal to 100 due to rounding

Table 2 presents pre-test and post-test social support scores by treatment group. No participant variables were significantly correlated with social support change scores.

**Table 2**

Pre and Post intervention Social Support Scale Scores by Treatment Group

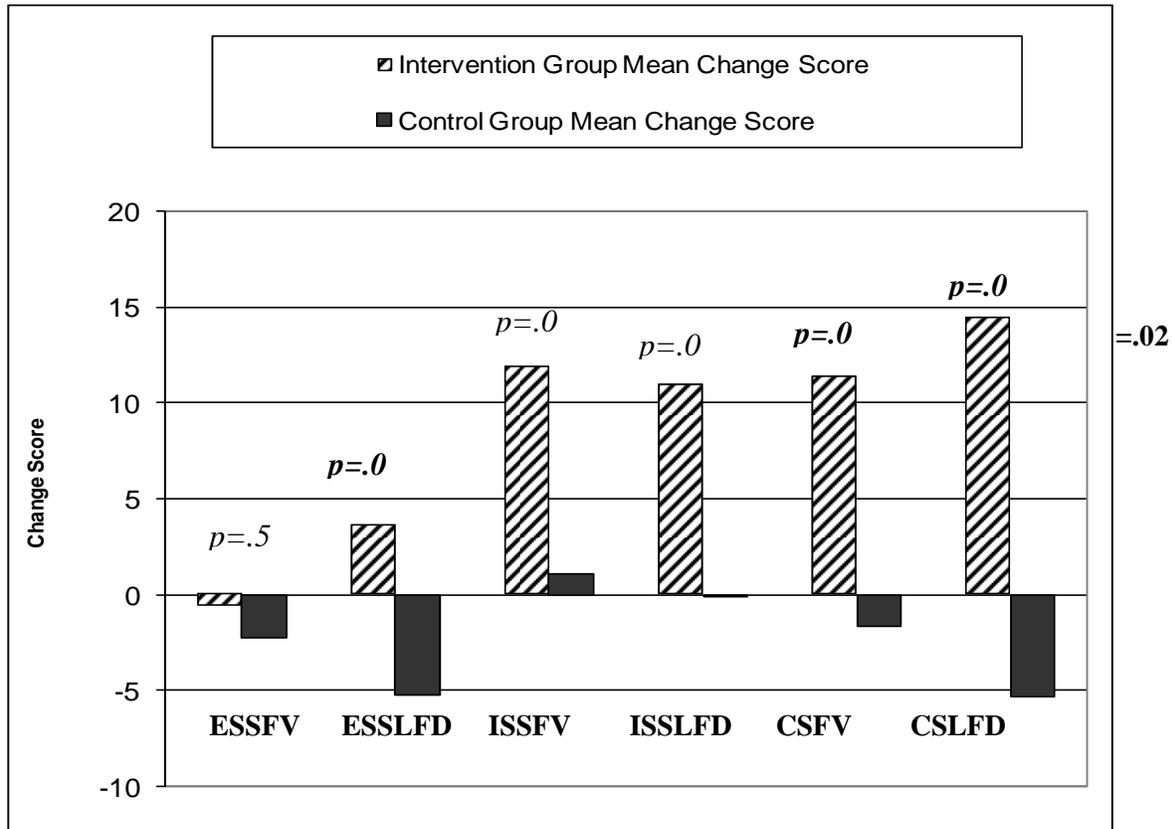
	<b>Intervention</b>		<b>Control</b>	
<b>Social Support Variables</b>	<b>Pre-Test * Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Post-Test Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Pre-Test * Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Post-Test Mean (SD)</b>
Emotional Social Support for FV <sup>†</sup>	51.6 (7.7)	51.8 (8.8)	52.1 (8.8)	49.8 (10.8)
Emotional Social Support for LFD	49.1 (5.2)	52.7 (10.5)	51.7 (8.4)	47.2 (7.2)
Instrumental Social Support for FV	41.3 (16.5)	53.8 (16.7)	55.6 (18.4)	53.3 (17.2)
Instrumental Social Support for LFD	38.1 (15.4)	49.6 (18.9)	49.2 (20.8)	46.6 (19.3)
Composite Social Support for FV <sup>†</sup>	93.1 (19.7)	105.6 (24.1)	108.3 (24.4)	103.1 (25.7)
Composite Social Support LFD <sup>†</sup>	87.1 (17.7)	102.3 (27.5)	100.9 (27.0)	93.8 (24.4)

\* Pre-Test differences not significant

† Significant change from pre-test to post-test

One-way ANOVA analyses revealed that the intervention participants demonstrated significantly greater mean change in social support summary scores for Emotional Social Support for LFD, Composite Social Support for FV and Composite Social Support for LFD than did the control participants. These results are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Change in Social Support Scale Scores by Treatment Group



Change Scores were computed as post-test scale score minus pre-test scale score  
 ESSFV = Emotional Social Support for Fruits and Vegetables  
 ESSLFD = Emotional Social Support for Low Fat Dairy  
 ISSFV = Instrumental Social Support for Fruits and Vegetables  
 ISSLFD = Instrumental Social Support for Low Fat Dairy  
 CSFV = Composite Social Support for Fruits and Vegetables  
 CSLFD = Composite Social Support for Low Fat Dairy

More specifically, intervention participants demonstrated a greater mean increase from pre-test to post-test ( $P=0.01$ ) in Emotional Social Support for LFD ( $M=3.6$ ,  $SD=10.7$ ) compared to control group participants ( $M=-5.2$ ,  $SD=6.6$ ). Intervention participants also showed a greater mean increase ( $P=0.05$ ) in Composite Social Support for FV ( $M=11.3$ ,  $SD=22.7$ ) compared to control group participants ( $M=3.0$ ,  $SD=11.7$ ). Finally, intervention participants had a greater mean increase ( $P=0.02$ ) in Composite Social Support for LFD ( $M=14.4$ ,  $SD=27.7$ ) compared to control group participants ( $M=4.2$ ,  $SD=16.2$ ).

## Discussion

The family focus of this study as an effective avenue for health promotion is supported by the findings of other studies (Edmundson, et al., 1996; Nader, et al. 1983; Nader, et al., 1996; Perry, et al., 1988; Sallis, et al., 1987) in that health behavior may be positively influenced by significant others during the course of the change process and that family members, especially mothers, have important influences on subjective norms related to healthy nutrition. In addition, it may be important for researchers and youth development program staff involved in health promotion programs to explore and attempt to influence social support more broadly. The present study found that total (composite) social support for a given nutrition behavior was affected by the intervention whereas it was more difficult to detect changes in specific types of social support for nutrition behaviors.

The social ecological model (SEM) is a conceptual framework that is useful in translating research to practice. According to SEM, an individual's behavior is determined by factors at various "levels" including: the individual (i.e., "within" the person), interpersonal (interactions "between" people, e.g., 4-H club), community (e.g., in a school or county) and policy levels (i.e., "rules" enforced by national, state, or local entities) (McLeroy, et al., 1988; Stokols, 1996). Further, although an individual's behavior may be influenced predominantly by one level, theoretically, their behavior is determined by a complex interaction of forces from multiple levels. There are a number of ways that youth development staff could promote (especially through healthy lifestyles initiatives) positive family interactions, emphasizing emotional and instrumental social support, for healthy eating. Below we list specific suggestions, arranged by SEM levels applicable to 4-H programs:

- Many youth organizations and clubs engage families. Club meetings and events that focus on healthy lifestyles could target specific nutrition behaviors through skill building sessions (e.g. creating snacks, planning meals, cooking, etc) and include components on how families support each other in these behaviors (individual/family/club levels);
- Older youth could be trained to lead/deliver these focused discussions, model healthy eating behaviors, and provide social support to their fellow club members (individual/family/club levels);
- Club meetings could include interactive discussion sessions on how families can provide emotional, coping, and instrumental support to one another (family/club levels);
- Clubs could initiate family oriented challenges so that families who change or increase healthy eating (and social support) receive special recognition or awards (family/club levels);
- Youth development organizations could partner with local extension community development agents and agricultural agents to link families to local healthy food sources and incorporate farm to table programs into club food services as a model to educate families on local farm to table programs (family/community levels);
- Summer programs and camps could more actively include/engage family members through a range of activities. For example, at the most basic level camps could communicate with parents (via newsletters, e-mails, parent materials that come home with each camper, etc) regarding healthy behaviors learned during camp and how to support the specific behaviors at home. At a more intensive level youth organizations and clubs could host family camp days or family camp weekends. Additionally, alumni camps targeting parents who were members of the club and their children can be an

avenue to reach more families with healthy lifestyle messages (family/club/community levels);

- Ample opportunities exist through partnering with schools including health education classes, family nights, health fairs, and school-wide or district-wide healthy eating challenges (school/community levels).

The present study findings must be interpreted with caution for several reasons.

- First, the small sample size could account for the non-significant posttest change scores for Emotional Social Support for FV, Instrumental Social Support for FV and Instrumental Social Support for LFD.
- Second, the intervention dosage was once per week for five weeks. Perhaps meeting more than once per week and/or having a longer intervention could have lead to significant differences in other types of social support for the intervention group.
- Third, the intervention intended to change multiple behaviors (i.e., fruit/vegetable intake, low-fat dairy intake, physical activity) and researchers involved in large scale efficacy trials suggest long duration and great involvement is needed to change multiple behaviors (Edmundson, et al., 1996).

The intervention may have been more effective by focusing on only one behavior. This recommendation has also been noted by researchers involved in large-scale trials (Edmundson, et al., 1996).

Because little is known about emotional and instrumental social support for nutrition behaviors among African-American adolescents, these findings warrant further investigation. Although this was a pilot study, the significant effects observed are encouraging and suggests that family-based interventions with African-American families are both, feasible and are potentially effective avenues for promoting healthy eating. Future research should examine the effects of family-based nutrition promoting interventions focused on increasing social support for healthy nutrition behaviors with larger samples of African-American families and longer intervention durations. In addition, similar programs should be targeted to other ethnic/racial minority groups and mixed ethnic/race (several population groups together) groups and evaluated.

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## **Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today**

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## Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today

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**Abstract:** Understanding the values of today's teens and tweens and how they make decisions is crucial for all youth professionals. An excellent resource to assist youth professionals has been developed by the Girl Scout Research Institute and Harris Interactive. *Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens* highlights a national research study which explored the values of today's youth as well as how they make decisions. The 52 page document shares significant findings from the research utilizing youth quotes, tables and diagrams. The work builds on a similar study commissioned by Girl Scouts USA in 1989 and shares an encouraging picture of today's youth. Readers will find the results from this research to be of great value when developing youth programs.

### Review

*Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today* (2009) presents findings from a national study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute and Harris Interactive. Over 3,263 boys and girls in grades 3-12 from across the country were included in the study. The research explored what today's youth value and how they make decisions.

Generational differences from a similar study commissioned by Girl Scouts of USA in 1989 are highlighted, noting significant changes in youth experiences over the past two decades including advances in technology, globalization, media coverage, 9/11, Iraq War and public service campaigns. The study indicated a youth shift towards more ethical and responsible beliefs and values among today's tweens and teens.

Significant findings from the study include:

1. Today's youth intend to make responsible choices and refrain from risky behaviors.
2. Youth today value diversity and acceptance.
3. Civic engagement is important to today's youth.

4. Youth today feel that they are able to withstand peer pressure and stand up for themselves.
5. When faced with difficult decisions and moral dilemmas, youth draw influence from a variety of sources but especially from parents and family.
6. Boys and girls do differ in some attitudes and how they approach decisions.

Throughout the fifty two page document a variety of youth quotes, tables, charts and diagrams are used to highlight key research findings. The detailed explanations provide valuable insight for all youth professionals and will prove particularly helpful as youth professionals design educational curriculum and plan youth development experiences.

This report as well as supplemental materials and additional youth-related research may be downloaded from the Girl Scouts of the USA website at [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org) at no charge. If preferred a soft cover copy of the report may be purchased for \$9.95 from the Girl Scout Shop at

<http://www.girlscoutshop.com/gsusaonline/GSProductDetails.aspx?ProductID=GOOD+INT>

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