Creative Youth Development Toolkit

Landscape Analysis

Working with Youth

by Ashley Hare

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About this Paper

Americans for the Arts is proud to be one of the leaders of the Creative Youth Development National Partnership, which is working to advance the field of creative youth development (CYD), the intentional integration of arts learning and youth development principles. As part of this collective initiative, Americans for the Arts commissioned field experts to produce a set of seven landscape analyses about key topics within youth development. These papers identify trends in creative youth development, share recommendations for CYD practitioners, and suggest areas for future exploration. The areas of focus of these papers are:

1) Trends in CYD Programs
2) Advocacy and Policy
3) Working in Social Justice
4) Program Evaluation
5) Preparing Artists & Educators
6) Working with Youth
7) Funding, Sustainability, and Partnerships

These landscape analyses are one part of a larger project led by Americans for the Arts to create a new, first-of-its-kind Creative Youth Development Toolkit that will aggregate the most effective tools and resources from exemplary creative youth development programs throughout the country. The CYD Toolkit will build upon the success and longevity of the Youth Arts Toolkit (2003), a landmark study of arts programs serving at-risk youth that can be found at http://youtharts.artsusa.org/.

Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

In 2014, a national survey of Creative Youth Development (CYD) programs was synthesized in a report titled Setting the Agenda (Stevenson, 2014). The survey found that CYD organizations overwhelmingly target the outcome of skill/mastery (100 percent) over leadership (86.8 percent), agency (67.4 percent), and civic participation (66.4 percent). To acknowledge this deficit, CYD field practitioners created the following as one of five policy recommendations, as part of the Policy and Advocacy Agenda for Creative Youth Development:

- Develop and deepen opportunities for young people to create a more just and equitable society.
  - o Collaborate with youth to integrate their voices and leadership into the core structures and practices of creative youth development programs and the broader sector.
  - o Champion creative youth development programs as spaces in which young people develop positive self-identities, recognize liberating and oppressive forces, and activate these programs' potential for impact.

This recommendation is the most significant when working with youth. As demographic shifts impact communities across the United States, urgent questions surrounding leadership and who holds power must be addressed. Understanding how power flows between youth and adult arts practitioners, researchers, educators, and administrators can redefine how knowledge is produced and programming is designed.

In this article, I use the movement of power to analyze trends of praxis relating to the sub-topic of CYD, Working with Youth. First, I reviewed youth development literature from various sectors to explore a theoretical connection between shifts in power and positive youth development. This produced four suggested trends needing power shifts when working with youth: 1) Expanding Rights, 2) Redefining Assets, 3) Identity and Representation, and 4) Governance and Leadership. I will trace these trends with a special attention to power-imbalance, along three lines: adultism, racial inequity, leadership hierarchies.

For this article, "young people" and "youth" are ages under 18, with an acknowledgement that some CYD programs extend up to the age of 21 and 24.

Lastly, although not explored in this article, it must be acknowledged that if changes in leadership structures are to exist, then the word "leadership" must be re-examined.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Power: Adultism To Shared Leadership

Before discussing the four trends, power itself must be examined. Power lies at the center of access, diversity, inclusion, and equity. In working with youth, adults must continuously analyze the spaces they occupy: Who has the authority to make decisions? What type of decisions? Whose voices were not included in the process? Whose bodies were included, but voices silenced? Regarding age, race, gender, class, religion, ability, education, sexuality, who is afforded systemic privileges? Who belongs to the dominant culture and who does not? What conditions have been created to maintain dominant culture?

To remain abreast of current national trends in the arts, power-relations must be a central focus of our analysis and work with youth. To begin a move towards shared leadership between youth and adults, it is important for CYD organizations to define power, understand how power is currently manifested through Adultism, and explore new ways of shifting to shared leadership.

> **POWER:** There is insurmountable theoretical research around power, from Frantz Fanon's Colonizer/Settler dynamic to bell hooks' "From Margin to Center" analysis, which centers her 1984 book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. As a place of entry for this article, I use The Praxis Project's Power Analysis Module and their introduction to the word power: "The concept of the word power, many times, takes on the meaning of "power over others." It can also address the ways in which we empower ourselves; in Spanish it is called *poder*, to be able. As we share how power has played out in our lives, we can remember the ways we have resisted oppression." How does a CYD organization see power flowing throughout internal policies and procedures?

> **ADULTISM:** John Bell defines Adultism as "the systematic mistreatment and disrespect of young people" (2015). Bell explains that besides criminalization, youth are the most controlled group in U.S. society. Little research on Adultism exists compared to other isms, which is not an insignificant fact; it furthers the notion that young people are seen as property and are not taken seriously until they reach the age of 18. As an example and replacing the word child, imagine a person stating "When my wife acts up, I continuously pinch down on her elbow until she corrects her behavior." Or "You are so smart and articulate for a black person." In what ways can the CYD field place a microscope on the daily microaggressions against young people?

> **SHARED LEADERSHIP:** When defining shared leadership, one of the most commonly cited research studies in youth development is Roger Hart's 1992 Ladder of Participation. Hart described a ladder with degrees of participation to examine where culture, and the institutions and organizations within, place significance when engaging young people.
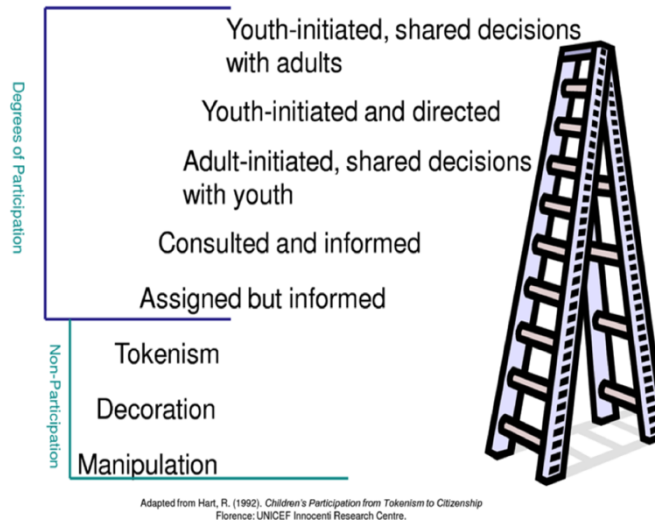
At the bottom of the ladder is Tokenism. Using youth to perform or "tell their story" at a gala or conference without inviting them to participate or compensation for their time is Tokenism. At

this level, youth may feel less of a sense of belonging. The further down the ladder an organizational structure sits, the less youth input is valued. This could create distrust between young people and the organization.

Climbing to mid-level participation, youth voice is valued and consulted during initial programming design, but adults still hold power to decide if shared ideas will be integrated in final implementation. This may also create distrust and have a negative impact on positive youth development outcomes.

Existing at the top of the ladder are organizations that follow young people, then share leadership for implementation. To reach the top of the ladder, there must be a discussion of "power relations" (Hart, 1992). Topping the ladder are youth-adults relationships where both are facilitators and learners of knowledge.

Ladder of Youth Participation

Degrees of Participation
- Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults
- Youth-initiated and directed
- Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth
- Consulted and informed
- Assigned but informed

Non-Participation
- Tokenism
- Decoration
- Manipulation

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

As the CYD sector discusses ways for youth to exist in shared decision-making and leadership space with adults, four trends of praxis outlined in the remaining sections of this article may serve as entry points: 1) Expanding Youth Rights, 2) Redefining Assets, 3) Identity and Representation, and 4) Governance and Leadership.

KEY TRENDS

Trend #1: Expanding The Rights Of Young People

The United States has built a culture that deems people under the age of 18 (children/youth) as inferior to people over the age of 18 (adults). The culture centers safety for young people and from young people; either needing protection from society, "passive beneficiaries of charitable assistance" (International Institute for Child Rights and Development, 2007) or society needing protection from youth, labeling them "violent, criminal, drop outs, gangsters" (Mestizo Arts and Activism Collective, 2008). Furthermore, young people are invisibilized and de-centered in laws and policies. They have no rights to vote, own property, or legally establish business on one's own. And yet, society expects youth to be fully contributing citizens when they turn 18. Extending rights to young people has been in debate since President Clinton signed the United Nations Rights of the Child Treaty in 1995, but the treaty has not been ratified by the U.S. Senate. Ratifying the treaty would mean a shift in U.S. laws, including requirement for adults (parents, teachers, or politicians) to share power and space with young people, rights to privacy,

freedom for religious choice, lifting ban on ethnic studies, abolishing life sentencing, and banning corporal punishment in schools and homes.

What is gained from this knowledge is a recognition of how conscious or unconscious bias against young people is deeply embedded in U.S. culture. Marginalization based on age, race, gender, sexuality, and ability is woven throughout policies and procedures of every sector, including the arts. A concept shift from keeping youth safe to letting youth lead requires a personal and organizational power analysis. Engagement with young people cannot be discussed without an analysis of how power flows between youth and adults. As done with any marginalized group, young people must have a pathway to participate in discussions that directly affect their lives.

Trend #2: Redefining Assets

The CYD movement is grounded in Youth.Gov's definition of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which states:

> "PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths."

Youth.Gov admits its origins of PYD are rooted in a deficit-based approach, but has refocused to an asset-based approach, seeing the need to engage youth as "equal partners." An asset-based approach focuses on the strengths, not weaknesses, of an individual. This moves from a judgement base (i.e. "Are you smart?") to a leadership framework (i.e. "In what ways are you smart?"). What lies in juxtaposition to centering assets is 1) the current language used to describe young people, and 2) the positions in which they are placed.

> LANGUAGE: Studies in the youth development sector have used the Search Institutes Developmental Assets Framework as a foundation to define assets as "strengths." Oxford dictionary defines an asset as "a useful or valuable thing or person." If a young person holds assets/strengths/value, these are present tense and to be used immediately. Yet, young people are still being described as "Tomorrow's Leaders" and "Future Leaders," with the need to be "Inspired," "Empowered," and "Cultivated."

> The CYD field has the opportunity to center present-tense use of assets when working with youth. This requires a power shift in knowledge production from adult-centered, knowledge-gathering (How much experience do you have? Let me teach you more to prepare you) to youth-centered, knowledge sharing (What type of experience do you hold? Let's combine ours and work together now).

> PLACEMENT: Due to conscious or unconscious Adultism, placement of youth assets still allow adults to hold power. Such examples include:

> - Youth are given the leadership space to teach peers or those younger than them, but are rarely invited to train adults.

- Labeled "Youth Artists" next to adult "Professional Artists" both perform at a conference, but young people are not financially compensated for their time nor invited to stay and participate.
- Youth are asked to "Tell Their Story" at a gala, but not invited to stay and participate. There is also no acknowledgement of resurfaced trauma through storytelling.
- Organizations form youth advisory boards and councils, but they exist separately from the adult table.
- Researchers ask youth to share thoughts through interviews, surveys, and focus groups, but do not consult youth on drafted or finished research that defines them.

When youth are not given shared space to hold power with adults, they will always be sitting at the kid's table with assets unused.

Trend #3: Identity And Representation

"For ten years—the first decade I was in school—all my teachers were white women. As a Mexican American kid, I didn't get the chance to have a man of color as a teacher until high school. Going into my senior year, I like how diverse my teachers are now, but I wish I'd had the same experience when I was younger."

- Jose Romero, High School Senior, The New Teacher Project (2017)

Affirmation of one's identity has powerful and beneficial outcomes on the development of a young person's self-identity and sense of belonging. By contrast, young people who spend time "passing" to fit dominate race, gender, and sexual orientation cultures suffer from isolation, invisibilization, and marginalization (Boyd-Franklin, 1990; Camino 1992). Multiple sectors engaging with youth are focusing on changing leadership to better represent youth being served: Afterschool Sector shows a consensus in a process that ensures staff and leadership reflect the diverse race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, language, and ability of the young people being served (Ignite Afterschool, 2015), Higher Education reports an increase in positivity and belonging when teachers reflect the identity of students (Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, Vick, 2017), STEM focuses on the importance of youth seeing their identities reflected in role models to increase their imagination and confidence to pursue STEM careers (Lee, 2011).

By including racial equity as one of the three core values of Creative Youth Development, the CYD movement had started a conversation about shifting power in leadership. The urgency for arts organizations to begin a deeper, internal reflection is apparent in the static movement of the diversification of arts leadership, even as the sector increasingly focuses on bringing arts programming to young people from urban areas, living in poverty, detained in juvenile detention facilities, and experiencing gender, ability and sexuality discrimination. Young people most represented in these areas are not racial White. By contrast, a study published by Grantmakers in the Arts reports 78 percent of arts managers are White, 72 percent are female, 88 percent have no disability, and 85 percent are heterosexual (Cuyler, 2015). In the last decade, new field studies have surfaced to create more discussions around the lack of representation in the arts. Elena Muslar's "Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Arts Management: An Exposé and Guide" shows a

desire from arts practitioners to shift leadership now. This is hopefully a movement to create studies examining clear representation gaps (race, gender, class, ability, et al.) between the young people being served and the adults doing the serving.

Understanding the absence of minority leadership requires an internal review of one's organization and self. Before working with youth, organizations must first understand how power + prejudice + bias within their organization uphold systemic oppression. This requires a fulltime commitment to dismantling policies and procedures ingrained with racism, gender bias, homophobia, sexism, ableism, [and transphobia] (Sharpe, 2016). Simultaneously, organizations must have a second commitment to diversifying leadership that allows young people to see themselves and their identities reflected. CYD organizations committed to these two strategies will achieve the equitable outcomes set forth in the National Blueprint.

Trend #4: Governance And Leadership

Researchers since the early 1990s have been debating the strengths and limitations of "adult-driven" and "youth-driven" models of leadership (Larson, Walker, Pearce, 2005). To reach the top of Hart's ladder, I advocate for a "youth-driven" approach to CYD organizational structure. With this approach, youth development research shows consistent benefits towards agency, identity development, sense of belonging, and civic participation (Akiva, 2012). These are the same outcomes which ranked low on the CYD national survey, but were desired by the field in the CYD Blueprint.

Embracing a youth-driven approach requires a power shift from dominate culture. Initiating such a power shift creates an uneasiness in adults who visualize William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* novel jumping off the pages and onto the streets. When adults quickly start to rationalize why the "keys to the city" cannot be given to young people, there is a need to reflect on one's desire to maintain power, control, and dominance over another. Youth-driven models require shared leadership methods. No one is suggesting youth hold dominance over adults; rather, youth and adults create a culture of trust and learning from each other (Zeldin, Petrokubi, Camino, 2008). If youth are driving the initial decision-making for desired outcomes they deem important, adults can work in mutual dialogue about implementing proposed ideas. In this model, no party is valued as having more experience over another. Assets are centered in "What experience do you bring?" not "How much experience do you have?" For Freire, there is no student who learns and teacher who educates, but a shared power relationship where both who are taught also teach (1970). Due to the undercurrent of bias towards young people, this concept may be the most challenging to shift.

Youth development rationale indicates when youth have full shared power and autonomy over decision-making, more outcomes are achieved at once. I recently experienced this when working with the Phoenix Youth Arts and Culture Council. In 2017, the Council and I were planning their first citywide Arts Advocacy Summit for and by young artists. None of the fifteen council members had ever planned such a large convening. As their adult advisor, I was asked by the council to decide a start time, types of food, speakers, and the number and length of breakout sessions. Facilitating in a youth-driven model, I never gave direct answers or tasks, but shared leadership by continuously posing questions back to council. Although a longer and more tedious process, this dialogical approach deepened the council member's ownership over ideas, created

agency to complete self-assigned tasks on time, and explored the curiosity of their deepest desired outcomes. By not initiating a top-down, adult-driven approach, council members also expanded their collaboration and conflict resolution skills.

There are a multitude of youth-based organizations where adults have already de-centered themselves and knowledge production is centered solely through youth voice, such as Youth on Board, Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective, and Youth-led Participatory Action Research. As Akiva states, "there are no insurmountable barriers that prevent it from becoming a common practice" (2012). If CYD organizations are to fulfill the CYD Blueprint's recommendation of an "equitable and just society," we need more youth-driven, shared leadership models.

CONCLUSION

There are two salient tensions that we, as a field, must urgently address to accurately represent the diverse practices and values of the emerging CYD field. First, even at the early stages of development, CYD remains mostly defined and authored by those situated with dominant culture privileges. In my literature review, I noticed the most commonly cited authors of youth development research were not diverse (this took extensive Googling for many hours). The centering of the voices and knowledge of these practitioners and thinkers must be questioned in a field in which youth of color are primary participants. How do we begin to center organizations leading this work before the coining of the term? Those organizations who've been centering civic participation, not just as a holistic approach, but for survival because of centuries of systemic oppression? The significant absence of people of color's contribution to the field and in the literature skews not only our current understanding, but also what we come to think as possible.

Secondly, if the CYD movement recommends "opportunities for young people to create a more just and equitable society," not only must their identities be reflected in organizational leadership, but they must be given every space to lead for themselves.

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