

COMMUNITY/YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Exploring the Nexus Through Youth Leadership in Community Planning

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ABSTRACT

It is a deceptively simple formula: “youth contributing to communities <-> communities supporting youth.” The mutual and inter-generational interdependence is appealing: so why is this vision a dream, largely deferred if not outright denied, in most communities? Why has the realization that youth and community development are inextricably linked – that youth are essential partners in community building, and that community building can provide developmental opportunities for youth – not been enough to make linking the two common practice? We contend that what is needed to move this realization into reality are concrete models of practice in which youth can play leadership roles in addressing community issues, and communities can learn to align themselves to better support their youth. While some excellent models of practice do exist, Youth In Focus seeks to contribute a method of Youth-led Research, Evaluation, and Planning (Youth REP) as a unique and powerful resource for those seeking to link community and youth development. Youth In Focus is a non-profit intermediary training organization that supports youth to apply their knowledge to improving the institutions and communities that affect their lives. We argue that Youth REP offers an approach that can contribute to the fulfillment of all of the following in Table 1.

Youth In Focus has implemented a number of projects with a community/youth development emphasis. Now, we seek to deepen our practice by enhancing our curriculum with new participatory planning and design training methods – developed to guide urban and rural youth of color, immigrant youth, and other under-represented youth as they apply their knowledge to revisioning and revitalizing their communities.

This paper will introduce Youth In Focus’ Youth REP pedagogical model, present one case study (a youth-led neighborhood assessment to guide redevelopment

Community/ Youth Development Principle	Youth REP Supports and Opportunities
Open community dialogue with youth	Proactive forums for youth-adult partnerships based on youth-produced research/ evaluation/planning of community issues.
Perception of youth as resources and allies by adults	Youth offer data-backed analysis and recommendations and energy to help the community address common challenges.
Youth development opportunities rooted in community	Exploring community issues is the context and the content of the projects. Youth research the underlying issues of their specific project topics.
Opportunities for social action.	Youth engage in community building through “entry point” of research/ evaluation/planning.
Increase youth leadership capacity	Youth develop critical thinking, communication and analysis skills, as well as collaboration, conflict resolution, and team-work capacities.

Table 1. Community/Youth development principles.

approaches in the South of Market in San Francisco), and explore a series of questions relating to the further development of a community/ youth development training method. These questions include:

- What are the fundamental skills, areas of knowledge, and experiences needed for youth to play meaningful and powerful roles in community planning and design?
- (To what extent) Do these learning goals vary from participatory planning training for adults?
- What are the most promising methods of developing these planning capacities with youth?
- (To what extent) Do these methods vary from participatory planning training for adults?

This presentation seeks to both present the ideas and work of Youth In Focus, and engage in a teaching/learning dialogue to improve the conceptual understandings and practical methods of community/youth development.