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Nurturing Assets through Collaborative Arts-Based Inquiry with Youth

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***Abstract:** The aim of this article is to disrupt assumptions of youth capacity by offering a case study of collaborative arts-based practitioner research in program evaluation and development that puts youth ingenuity and aspiration at the forefront. The author served in multiple roles for the study as practitioner researcher, teaching artist working directly with youth participants, and education programs manager within the organization. The four major objectives of the Arts & Youth Leadership Development in Action project speak to a variety of constituents: social science researchers, administrators of not-for-profits that serve youth populations, program developers within such organizations and youth workers. The aim of the research was to facilitate youth in recognizing and applying their assets while imagining and enacting new arts education programming. The research served the education department by providing a conceptual framework – positive youth development – to inform pedagogy. Specifically, the project enabled youth to design a program wherein they could actualize their own definition of leadership. This connects to the objective of reframing the nebulous phrase “youth leadership” for scholars and practitioners from the viewpoint of youth themselves. This case study illustrates the unique manner in which the arts can facilitate youth in envisioning and embodying their aspirations.*

***Keywords:** youth leadership, arts-based research, positive youth development, applied theatre, practitioner inquiry, assets*

Youth leadership programs are a component of many not-for-profit organizations, yet youth rarely have the opportunity to self-determine what leadership means to them (Taft & Gordon, 2013). Within a neoliberal context, where conformity to capitalist structures takes priority, leadership can be reduced to job-readiness and other such market-driven skills with no room for imagination, care, or social accountability. In fact, organizations rarely articulate the concept of leadership in clear terms. A review of materials from youth leadership institutes, programs, and councils, demonstrated that

few sources provided a definition for “leadership,” let alone “youth leadership” (Powell, 1993). The Princeton Center for Leadership Training offers a description in the context of their Peer Group Connection program, which is used in over 100 high schools. They define leadership as “the ability to work effectively in a group, to make a positive contribution to the group process and to stimulate and motivate others to function as a team, as well as to achieve common objectives and solve common problems” (p. 121). This definition is narrow in that it places leadership solely in relation to teamwork with no mention of factors such as vision, ethics or innovation. A gap exists in articulating criteria for leadership, most importantly, principles of leadership that are both meaningful and inspirational to youth.

Conceptual Framework

The case study examined in this study is grounded in a positive youth development approach and the belief that youth participants should take a leading role as “knowers and actors” in the brainstorming, decision-making and implementation of its activities (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 367). The positive youth development (PYD) perspective emphasizes that supportive adults should look to youth’s strengths as a means for helping them build and sustain healthy lives (Benson et al., 1998). PYD is based on a belief that youth deserve respect and meaningful opportunities to make impact as responsible, compassionate, capable, civic-minded, initiative-taking members of our communities (Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). This framework developed to counteract adultist assumptions that youth are apathetic, materialistic and dangerous (Bell, 1995; Damon, 2004; Steinberg, 2011). The words of critical youth scholar Giroux echo those of youth as they reflect on stereotyping by adults: “Rather than being defined as valuable resources, students now are essentially being defined as a threat” (Pollard, 2014, p. 181). One Youth Leadership Council member shared this sentiment when speaking about the desire for the Youth Leadership Council (YLC) to someday facilitate interactive arts workshops for adults.

It would really help them see us as leaders, because you know like, usually older people think that us teens, you know, are a bit sketchy and they’re like... bad kids. (Rose, 17 year-old first generation Dominican-American female, Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

Structural violence against young people takes many forms in the northeastern United

States city where the research took place. Such violence is manifested through processes such as standardized testing and the rhetoric of meritocracy, egregious rates of expulsion, dropout, incarceration and police shootings of racialized youth, and fiercely protected allocations for military budgets that result in cuts for programs designed to support impoverished communities. These youth deserve as many resources as possible to bring about change against such oppressive conditions as they continue to envision and to attempt alternatives. As a practitioner researcher, I sought to facilitate the process by which youth could claim, enact and experiment with new roles using their unique developmental assets in an applied theatre context.

Even youth workers who work to support young people's developmental growth can fall into the "deficit-based" approach of seeing youth merely as "at-risk" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). From this perspective, still prevalent in much scholarly research, youth are seen as inevitable victims of substance abuse, violence, crime, low test scores and unsafe sexual behaviors, often without a critical analysis of the systemic inequalities, which Fine and Ruglis (2009) called, "circuits and consequences of dispossession". Under-resourced, racialized urban youth, a description that matches most youth participants in this study, are particularly targeted by these views, with "the blame for social problems [fixed] onto their 'risky' bodies" (Fox & Fine, 2013, p. 321). In contrast to the at-risk perspective, positive youth development takes an asset-based approach by recognizing the resources that youth bring to the table, both as individuals and members of their own communities.

The relationships that youth workers build with young people in programs whose pedagogy are informed by a PYD approach seek out the strengths of individuals in order to nurture their developmental assets. The Search Institute published the *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (ages 12-18)* after conducting a study in which they interviewed over 100,000 youth to establish specific factors that encompass positive youth development (Benson et al., 2011). In this model, assets are divided into external and internal with four subdivisions of each. For the purposes of this research, I focused on the external developmental asset of Support from my lens as a practitioner and interrogated how non-relative caring adults could improve in nurturing the development of internal assets. Many youth have difficulty recognizing and activating their assets, such as the internal developmental asset of Positive Identity, without the facilitation of caring adults who design and implement programs with intentionality around positive youth development (Eccles et al., 2002). One aim of this arts-based research and leadership program

collaboration was to bring supportive adults together to help youth recognize, value and become emboldened by their assets.

According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, educators seek to provide learning opportunities that sufficiently support and challenge students to maximize cognitive development. An exemplary youth worker is one who somersaults within the zone of proximal development, propelling constant cycles of skills-acquisition based on youth interests and strengths, and providing guidance and space for youth to apply those skills independently. The ideal is for youth not only to make decisions on the content and structure of their programs, but also to build capacities that enable them to "self-manage" the process with minimal adult influence or supervision (BEST Initiative, 2012; Crooks et al., 2010). For educators, this means maintaining a balance between direct instruction with opportunities for youth to take on roles as teachers and autonomous change agents.

These conceptual premises informed my pedagogical and research aims to co-construct a youth program that could provide sufficient services, supports and opportunities to activate participants' zone of proximal development, to help bolster their developmental assets and to open access for them to serve as leaders on their terms. Unfortunately, this vision of youth at the helm does not frequently align with that of the youth organization itself (Taft & Gordon, 2007). I did not hold the decision-making power to ensure that the youth, though spearheads of the program expansion process, would feel satisfied by the long-term outcome of the research. I discussed openly with the youth the inevitable limitations on putting into action all of the ideas that may flourish out of the research process as we collectively examined possibilities for future programming. It is a concern that remains with me that I could not guarantee the sustained organizational commitment to take up program changes articulated in the proposal that resulted from the research.

Collaborative Applied Theatre Research

Engagement in the arts is one potential setting that allows youth to recognize, acquire and embody developmental assets. Upon conducting a study of over 700 youth theatres, researchers Hughes and Wilson (2007) concluded that taking part in theatre helps many youth to flourish through discipline, risk-taking, and individual responsibility in working together with a group to meet a challenge within a safe, self-affirming, creatively-expressive space (p. 64). Applied theatre in particular has the potential to facilitate the process wherein youth strengthen confidence and acquire skills

to become effective in attaining their goals (Alrutz, 2015; Hughes et al in Kershaw & Nicholson, 2001). The term “applied theatre” refers to theater created for, with and/or by communities with the purpose of improving social conditions through empowerment and active engagement (Prentki & Preston, 2009). Applied theatre practitioner and scholar Neelands (2009) adds political urgency to discourse on applied theatre, urging us to maximize its potential as a space for participatory democracy and agency. Neelands’ charge applies to practitioners and researchers alike, that we reclaim “the idea that we are all social actors with the possibility of being our own artistic actors in the direction of our realities and our dramas” (p. 186). Drama and education scholar Nicholson (2005) describes the experiential benefit of participation in theatre: “It is about travelling into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar” (p. 13). Through originally devised theatre youth can explore and depict their circumstances and aspirations with creative freedom in a fictionalized realm.

Many schools and organizations collaborate with teaching artists and practitioner researchers who utilize the arts as a means for collective envisioning, social action and community education. Emerson professor and teaching artist Nelson works with high school students in an under-resourced community to explore power dynamics within their lives through the creation of theatrical pieces performed for the school and families. In reflecting on her experiences, Nelson (2011) expresses how involvement in the devised applied theatre provides an essential point in forming a sense of self-efficacy in the moment and in looking towards the future:

Most important was their perception that they had something important to say, and that people would listen when they said it, as the belief in one’s power is a necessary starting point for all action. (p. 170)

Another example is the youth research and community advocacy of the Mestizo Arts and Activism Collective in Salt Lake City, Utah. Youth there create public art, blogs, videos and policy proposals, making demands for change based in artistic self-representation of personal experiences with issues vital to their community (Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013). Both of these cases reveal how the artistic participation provided an entry point through which to examine current circumstances and to attain what Appadurai (2004) calls “the capacity to aspire”. This quality perhaps belongs on the list of internal developmental assets. In both of these cases, youth utilized their own strengths as artists and educators to enhance their internal and external developmental assets, their sense of present and future purpose, and their role as resources in their communities.

There is a need to respect and draw from the unique expertise of youth as a means to create new artistic, pedagogical and research methods and to explore possibilities that may advance all fields. In her research with LGBTQ street-youth, Cruz (2014) states that researchers who work with youth living in oppressive circumstances must hold the stance that “[youth] insight is enlightening and survivor-rich, and that you have as much to learn from youth as they from you” (p. 212). Youth contributions must not be lost in the cacophonous “cultural ‘force field’ [that] can screen out competing and oppositional discourses” as critical feminist Smith (1999) warns in her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (pp. 46-47). Youth workers, program managers, and youth researchers must remain fiercely dedicated to supporting and honoring youth experience in our work.

A PYD-informed pedagogy combined with applied theatre practice fosters an inclusive, engaging environment for youth to gain a greater understanding of their own strengths by sharing their personal, unique outlooks. Each youth’s perspective is valuable while delving into research questions through artistic devising and more traditional qualitative methods. As described below, the youth were driven by the knowledge that they could contribute to the community by improving programming for peers and by educating adults in the fields of education and youth arts programming.

Method

The research design is specific to the artistic prowess, political engagement and social priorities around strengthening communities exhibited by the Youth Leadership Council (YLC) members. The youth participants came to the table with creativity, raw artistic talent and a drive to improve themselves as artists, community activists and mentors. This arts-based research marked a significant shift in the manner with which the organization’s education department involved youth in their programming. Through this project, the new YLC members and I engaged in collaborative inquiry to assess and propose changes to the summer program, which had been in existence for five years. Simultaneously, we interrogated the concept of leadership and formulated potential structures for future YLC programming that would resonate with the youth. By virtue of the collaborative nature of the research, the YLC members took part in all stages of the program iterative and expansion process, from conception through execution of assessment, innovation, and later implementation of changes.

During the summer program preceding the research and the creation of the YLC, the youth took on various roles as students, teaching artists, community advocates and performers. A substantial portion of the research focused on youth analysis and

evaluation of specific summer program elements and corresponding developmental assets. The discussion in this article however will focus more on the theories of leadership that emerged in the research data from YLC activities that took place the school year following the summer program. The research provided a process of communal analysis and mutual learning through artistic devising and peer brainstorming as the youth defined and embodied leadership for themselves. For instance, the youth conducted interviews with each other to explore visions of personal and generational leadership in the present and future and to identify the corresponding skills and programmatic changes that could support the actualization of those ideals. In small groups, they identified values essential to the program and collectively devised creative works and interactive arts-based workshops for peers entering the program the following summer that engaged with those values. As a practitioner-researcher, I offered support by challenging the youth to apply their insightful abilities in deepening their inquiry and to tap into their range of aesthetic techniques to communicate their messages.

The Youth Leadership Council members included sixteen adolescents who represent six Boston neighborhoods, nine ethnic groups, eleven schools (four public, four public, and three private), grades 9-12, fourteen of whom participate in the free school lunch program.

Data Collection

Findings are based on a multitude of data sources, mainly through reports from the youth. Preliminary data includes the three components of the application process: individual video interview, original spoken word piece or monologue, and application essay. I conducted additional informal audio-recorded interviews and peers recorded interviews with each other in preparation for the program's main event, the Innovation Forum. The dean of the university invited the YLC to present their artistic works and to allow an audience to watch a research focus group in action. The Innovation Forum is monthly gathering held for university faculty, students and community workers in the fields of education, arts and social services. The main source of data took the form of transcriptions of the audio recording and video documentation of the Innovation Forum. At this event, youth performed original artistic works, self-facilitated a fishbowl-style focus group discussion about the impact of the existing summer program, devised strategies and action steps for expanding and improving youth programming at the organization and engaged the audience in a Q & A. Practitioner field notes from YLC

meetings, rehearsals, and informal communication with members also served as data points.

Analysis

After data collection, I engaged in analysis of the youth applications, interviews, Innovation Forum performance, focus group and Q & A responses, as well as informal communication and my own observations using The Search Institute's Developmental Asset Model (DAM). This framework supports the project's aims to evaluate the organization's existing youth programming. In the coding process, I determined the frequency with which the YLC named developmental assets and the related conceptual and concrete programmatic elements that led to those results. In preparing for the future, I sought to isolate, organize and examine the resources necessary to apply the youths' ideas in order to determine concrete proposed short-term and long-term adaptations to current youth program models. I looked through my coded data for the most prevalent youth-reported desired outcomes as a guide for decision-making. I also considered the program elements and structures the youth reported as most influential in supporting their development and how to preserve and expand on those existent best practices.

Findings

Youth entered the summer program with distinctive artistic talents, compassion, and desire for social change. They opened up by applying those assets while engaging in creative expression in a safe space where they simultaneously practiced innovation and social competencies in devising art within the research project. Their self-esteem and sense of purpose increased as they pushed to achieve professional artistic excellence and embody idealism through applied theater. YLC programming, such as the Innovation Forum event, helped the summer program participants reflect on these experiences in acts Vygotsky would advocate, that is, "[to] name and celebrate their existing and growing competence" (Wilhelm, 2002, p. 26). The youth, emboldened with courage and confidence from the summer and YLC arts-based and peer interview research activities, examined what it means to be a true leader.

Leadership: Youth Leadership Council Definition

Youth participants defined and actualized a unique form of leadership through the research. Leadership, to them, is not about taking the spotlight as the representative of an ideal, or guiding a group to victory, or proclaiming the path that others should follow. In

their eyes, leadership is about understanding, learning from and connecting to others, having the courage to shine a beacon of creativity and confidence so others may be inspired to open themselves up and claim their own potential to create a vibrant, compassionate community.

That's the leadership, not when you're able to like boss people around, not when you're able to just make me feel bad about themselves. ... [Leaders] give you love and you give to yourself. I gave my love to you guys- you gave each other love, and because of that, we were able to draw out our deeper selves, and that's a leader (Parker, 17 year-old first generation Haitian-American male, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013).

A true leader really listens to everybody [and] shows that they're having intentions and they're creating goals off of what you're saying and ... That is what people will look up to more when they see that [a leader] can act as their role model and be open to them. They will want to be that. (Heather, 17 year-old Caucasian female, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

Youth Leadership Council Unifying Motto: "Make it Your Own" and "Give it Back"

The youth who participated in the summer program were not content to reminisce about fun times they had. They took pride in the gains they made together and wanted to use their collective courage and creativity to inspire others in the community. The combination of unique strengths they brought into the program and assets further developed in the summer program enabled them to embody leadership on their own terms. For the YLC, leadership meant utilizing the assets and skills they developed individually and collectively in the summer program to become active social change agents. YLC activities allowed for continuous recognition by one's self and others of those assets, as well as opportunities for brainstorming application and for creating socially-engaged performance art. With reinforcement from each other, the youth expressed their desire to take on leadership roles by creating opportunities for others to grow in ways similar to their own experiences.

I think when something's being taught to you, you're able to like, absorb it- and you make it your own. And once you're really to that point of being comfortable [...] when someone teaches it to you, you should be able to teach it to other people and that way, City Spotlights leaders will be able to retain the skills that they

learned from what was taught to them. (Luna, 17 year-old Latina female, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

It's all about taking a chance, and that was like, the hardest thing to overcome [...] Deep down, you're like, 'I should take a chance.' You have to work your way to doing that, and when we did, we became these great leaders. [...] You know, by them giving to us, we were able to learn and now we're giving back. (Rose, 17 year-old first generation Dominican-American female, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

Polyvocality in Arts-based Data

Arts-based research has potential to provide an inclusive atmosphere in which data can emerge in myriad forms throughout the process. Devised productions in the organization integrate spoken word, movement, mask, music and skits, offering a wide array of languages with which to communicate. Youth performed the "give it back" pedagogical element of their self-defined leadership by using their minds, voices and bodies through multiple artistic modalities to inform and incite action in their audiences. Drama education scholar Gallagher (2008) wrote about methodological "polyvocality" that honors multiple interpretations and voices as a vital component of research (p. 71). Theatre and social psychology scholar Fox emphasizes the principle of polyvocality inherent to arts-based data that provides "a way to stitch together different ways of knowing" (pp. 6-7).

One particular performance excerpt from the Innovation Forum illustrates the multi-layered nature of artistic devising and representation. One quartet of youth created a sequence of scenes that depicted their personal struggles reflective of social issues that were not taken up sufficiently in their opinion during past program experiences. In the fictional story, one character is killed as a bystander in a gang shooting while walking to an audition that his father refused to drive him to since "dance is not for boys." Interpretations of the piece included the metaphorical spiritual death from societal devaluing of creative expression and the need for programs to create space for more controversial issues around violence based on the prevalent gun homicide that plague many neighborhoods within the city. Each piece contained explicit and subtle messages purposefully open to interpretation for the audience. Through the creative devising, collaborative inquiry and performance process, the youth determined values they found essential to success of the program and vital for the health of society. They performed

leadership by making these messages “their own” and “giving them back” through the power of the many languages of applied theatre.

Leadership in Action

Youth Leadership Council research activities provided a venue for youth to identify, celebrate, practice and improve the leadership skills they are eager to apply in creating a culture of inclusivity and high expectations for the subsequent summer. In preparation for the Innovation Forum, Parker and Sapphire formed a vision of leadership for their future as they considered the most vital takeaways from the summer program experience. What started as Parker conducting an interview with Sapphire quickly transformed into an equalizing dialogue. Vygotsky recommends that educators use dialogue as a means to enhance learning through “intersubjectivity,” a mechanism that “allows for two consciousnesses to inform and shape each other” (Wilhelm, 2002: 25). Over the course of their mutually inspiring conversation, Sapphire (18-year-old Black female) and Parker (17-year-old first generation Haitian-American male) articulated the need for leaders to open up and relate to people, to build comfort that enables community members to open themselves up artistically, and to enact social change.

Parker: Ok, but what can we do now?

Sapphire: I mean, it’s doing stuff that we love to show people the importance of things like bullying, to stop bullying, and stop violence, and you can show that through the arts.

Parker: So, by doing what you love the most, [...] by expressing yourself, your true self, then you’re able to make a community grow.

Sapphire: Especially when people feel comfortable within a community, to open up and show others their skills that you’re talking about. [...] In order for there to be comfort, there has to be that communication.

Parker: So now we have to learn to communicate, be comfortable within ourselves and be able to exercise that kind of comfort, that kind of confidence in what we love to do to other people so that we can change the community and we can better it. (Peer Interview, January 20, 2013)

Theatre practitioner and youth worker Rohd (1998) expressed the value of reflection with the adage, “the processing of the process = moments of learning” (p. 8). The Innovation Forum served as a setting that opened the youth to a communal reflexive process that helped them deepen and expand their unique understanding of leadership. While reminiscing around their summer experiences at the Innovation Forum, the youth thanked each other for modeling the skills that helped them in the process of constructing concepts of youth leadership. Emerson professor and youth performing arts program director Bethany Nelson (2011) remarked after hearing her high school students’ reflections on their experience creating and performing theater together, “they became ‘giants’ in each other’s eyes” (p. 167).

In the summer, doing like flash mobs, I think that, Irina was like a true leader, because, although everyone was tired, and we still did it. I would look up to her like, ‘damn, Irina? You’re really doin’ good,’ so, let me try to be better. (Isaiah, 16 year-old Black male, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

During a youth-facilitated Q & A with the audience, the teens responded to a community arts graduate student inquiry by sharing how they came to form their values as leaders and how they emulated these attributes with each other during the YLC research meetings and rehearsals. Many teens expressed pride as they recognized in the moment their adeptness at embodying the very skills they came to identify as those of a strong leader.

A big key point that I realize, well- just now ... Like, the entire point of us doing this is that [practitioner researcher] can gain as much out of this as we can, that we were able to grow together as we’re guiding each other and expressing our talents and how we feel to other people. ... A true leader opens himself up, and because of opening himself up and exposing their true self and not some kind of mask that they put on to please people, they’re able to grow and people are able to know them and in the end we have a better society. (Parker, 17 year-old first generation Haitian-American male, Innovation Forum Focus Group, February 16, 2013)

The youth expressed similar values of courage, creativity, compassion and desire to catalyze change in community that have come to define what it means to be a youth leader. One YLC member exemplified what had come to be the common motivation and goal of the YLC, “make it your own and give it back.”

The thing is I don't want to build a follower, I want to build a new leader. I don't want people to follow after me and live in my footsteps, I want them to make their own footsteps. I want them to be like- they can be a new leader so they can go off and help somebody else- I don't want them to be like me, I want them to be their own person. (Monà, 15 year-old first generation Barbadian-American female, February 16, 2013)

Youth Leadership: Ongoing Development

The Youth Leadership Council and education department staff worked together to maximize leadership potential in a cyclical process of mutual growth and communal analysis. The arts-based research study provided space for critical and celebratory reflection on past programs as a means to inform future improvements. As they integrated new YLC members one by one and prepared to welcome summer participants, the youth embodied their own visions of leadership. To the YLC, leadership means using their newfound confidence and ability to communicate effectively in combination with their compassion and desire for change to create opportunities to empower others to discover their own voices and to continue the cycle.

But there are more like us that shape our future
They see ways to change the things we could not change
And they have more to share and more to see and more to hear
By learning how to share that power outside of the theatre as well
They accomplish a feat that some of us could not
The people of the future will sharpen and define our love and creativity
That blooms from companionship
There is more to leadership
And it is waiting to be discovered

- Poem by Heather (17 year-old Caucasian female, Innovation Forum Performance, February 16, 2013)

Scholarly Significance

The youth came to recognize, enhance and act upon their developmental assets as compassionate, critical young leaders through the arts-based research and community engagement components of the study. The findings may offer insights for researchers, educators and program managers who desire to create meaningful leadership

opportunities for youth that enable them to appreciate the value of their individuality, to experience a creativity community and to transform their visions into action. My motivation as a practitioner researcher was to gain knowledge so that I might become a stronger advocate for creating spaces that maximize youth involvement. Specifically, I want to promote youth participation throughout the research process in order to expand their “capacity to aspire”, imagine and attempt to enact changes they deemed crucial. Researchers with youth, program managers and youth workers may learn from recognizing and articulating ways in which youth, when offered opportunity and support, experiment with and execute roles that activate their zone of proximal development.

I continue to engage in critical reflexivity about the struggles and successes of the project. I am concerned at the practice of seeking experiential knowledge from youth without necessarily providing an emancipatory environment (hooks, 1994). How can research and youth program settings limit or eradicate restrictions on youths’ active engagement in processes such as project design, data analysis and decision-making on the form and content of scholarly representation and pedagogy? How can we share meaningful ownership with young people so as to create the “‘lived experience’ of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis” that can counteract the inequalities these three groups of youth endure in various life contexts (hooks, 1994, p. 61)? It must be acknowledged that there are often complicated barriers to this emancipatory ideal, such as the need to meet grant objectives, or limits on time and resources. Practitioners and scholars continue to struggle with the impediments between intentions and reality. All the same, there is surely room to grow by combining the ideals of collaborative research and creative practice to develop pedagogy and studies that lead to mutual learning and impact as determined by youth.

This case study illustrates the creativity, conviction, and compassion that youth offer to the fields of educational programming, applied theatre and qualitative research. As these areas continue to emerge and innovate, we can hold each other accountable first and foremost to youth participants and the flourishing of their assets. As practitioners and researchers, we can continue to utilize our own assets in creating opportunities for our youth to participate meaningfully in building towards a more just world in which they can continue to actualize their own definition of leadership.

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