



Module 7: Support for Efficacy and Mattering Fact Sheet

Research Overview

Positive youth development is only possible in settings where youth feel confident, capable, engaged, and valued, and these settings are said to have support for efficacy and mattering (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). A youth program that provides support for efficacy and mattering is one that provides meaningful opportunities for youth to have their voices heard, to make a difference in their communities, and to build confidence regarding their value and agency in their environment and social settings (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Evans, 2007; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011; Theriault & Witt, 2014). There are several avenues through which youth may feel supported in their sense of efficacy and mattering, including the following: (a) having the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions; (b) feeling that their input is valued and respected; (c) feeling welcomed, supported, and included by adults and peers in their community; and (d) contributing to projects that impact issues that matter to them and making a positive difference in their community (Evans, 2007; Horwitz, 2012; McLaughlin, 2000; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006; Serido et al., 2011).

Youth involved in youth programs that support efficacy and mattering offer meaningful contributions to the community and attain more positive developmental outcomes (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hawkins et al., 2009). In fact, youth in high-quality youth programs have higher levels of self-efficacy and personal agency than the average American youth (McLaughlin, 2000). In a review of after-school youth programs focused on fostering social and personal positive youth development, the outcome that most improved following youth program participation was youth's self-perceptions, including self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-concept (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Indeed, support for efficacy and mattering within youth programs is vital, especially considering that the stronger youth feel their voice is within youth programs, the more positive youth development outcomes they receive from those programs (Serido et al., 2011).

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Elements of Youth Programs that Support Efficacy and Mattering

- Adult support and structure
- Close, caring relationships with adults and peers
- Inclusive and welcoming culture
- Opportunities tailored to youth participants
- Opportunities that are meaningful and authentic
- Encouragement that builds youth's confidence and agency
- Support and respect for youth voice

Implications for Youth Programs

In order to provide support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs, the following approaches should be considered regarding program activities:

- Allow youth the opportunity to choose which activities they would like to engage in, how much time they want to spend on activities, and how involved they would like to be in each activity
- Ensure opportunities are culturally and developmentally appropriate so that youth gain a sense that their identities matter and a sense of efficacy, even with challenging tasks
- Teach youth skills that will help them succeed during future leadership and service opportunities
- Present opportunities for autonomy and decision-making, which lead to valuable learning experiences

Youth workers can provide support for youth's efficacy and mattering using the following strategies:

- Foster an atmosphere of acceptance, caring, and inclusivity for all youth participants
- Take a strengths-based perspective of youth as valuable, skilled members of the community
- Listen and show respect for youth's thoughts and opinions
- Be accessible to youth and show interest in building close, supportive relationships, which can be used as a foundation for promoting youth's sense of confidence, agency, and value
- Make activities fun and encouraging to foster youth's motivation
- Provide youth ample time to process information and make their own decisions
- Guide youth-led activities to offer structure and promote progress (e.g., ask guiding questions, assist in setting achievable goals, manage conflict, reframe problems)

Organizational practices that enable programs to provide support for youth's efficacy and mattering include the following:

- Encourage youth engagement and promote youth voice through organizational structures and procedures (e.g., set up youth advisory boards, use youth feedback in program decisions)
- Provide youth workers training regarding youth empowerment strategies (e.g., youth participatory action research, peer mentoring for youth, youth-adult partnerships)
- Recognize youth leadership potential and seek out youth for leadership roles in program planning and implementation
- Plan activities and opportunities that are genuinely meaningful and relevant for youth
- Collaborate with community groups and programs to provide youth the opportunity to participate and lead projects that make a positive impact in the community
- Offer a wide range of program opportunities to best meet the needs and interests of all youth
- Balance youth and adult leadership to fit the goals and circumstances of the particular program
- Communicate to youth the effects of their community projects and publicly recognize the positive impacts they make (e.g., award ceremonies, celebrations, public announcements)

**For a complete discussion of this topic and a full list of references,
see the topic paper by the same name.**



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