



## Module 7: Support for Efficacy and Mattering Research Review

Settings that enable positive youth development are considered to support youth's sense of efficacy and mattering. These settings enable youth to feel confident, capable, engaged, and valuable in their environment and social settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). They often provide opportunities for youth to voice their opinions and be involved in leadership, decision-making, and planning in their communities (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Support for efficacy and mattering is typically discussed within the context of youth programs where programs and opportunities are usually coordinated or facilitated by youth workers or other caring adults; however, it is important to note that youth are ultimately the agents of their own development, with adults providing help and guidance (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005).

### **What Is Support for Efficacy and Mattering?**

Support for efficacy and mattering is a concept with varying definitions in the literature, and several terms have also been used synonymously or alongside the concept (e.g., youth empowerment, youth voice, self-esteem, youth engagement; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Mitra, 2004; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011). In order to define the concept of support for efficacy and mattering, efficacy and mattering will be discussed individually before a discussion of the overall concept within positive youth development. First, efficacy, also known as self-efficacy, has been defined as a person's belief in their own ability to achieve certain goals and enact certain behaviors (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Schunk & Meece, 2006; Tsang & Hui, 2006). Some positive youth development theorists posit that there are two kinds of self-efficacy. Coping self-efficacy is a youth's perceived ability to control or cope with potential difficulties while task self-efficacy is a youth's perceived ability to enact a specific behavior successfully (Tsang & Hui, 2006). Yet other theorists suggest that all self-efficacy is domain-specific: academic self-efficacy relates to youth's perceived ability to obtain good grades while social self-efficacy relates to youth's perceived ability to make friends (Schunk & Meece, 2006). Regardless, the literature on youth efficacy converges to suggest that youth need to feel efficacious in order to be engaged in positive development opportunities and to achieve positive developmental outcomes (Balsano, 2005; Catalano et al., 2004; Tsang & Hui, 2006). Next, mattering has been defined as a person's belief that they are significant, valuable, and meaningful within their environment and social settings (Dixon, Scheidegger, & McWhirter, 2009; Elliott, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2005; Marshall, 2001). Youth who feel they matter have a sense that they contribute something to the community and those around them (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003), and research suggests this sense of mattering is important for youth's self-esteem as well as their sense of identity and meaningfulness (Elliott et al., 2005; Marshall, 2001).

Therefore, a youth development setting that provides support for efficacy and mattering 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 et al., 2011; Theriault & Witt, 2014). There are several important components to youth's sense of efficacy and mattering and the programs that support it. First, youth must have the ability to share their thoughts and opinions, and other individuals in the setting (e.g., peers, adult leaders) must listen respectfully and value youth's input (Browne, Garst, & Bialeschki, 2011; Evans, 2007; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). Youth must also have opportunities for their input to be put into action, which may include collaborating with adults to make decisions that affect them, planning activities for youth and the community, serving on youth-adult partnership committees or boards to improve programs, or a host of other activities (Horwitz, 2012; Mitra, 2004; Scheve et al., 2006; Serido et al., 2011; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Importantly, these opportunities must feel authentic—that they actually make an impact and are issues that matter to youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Serido et al., 2011). Through these components, coupled with support and encouragement from peers and youth workers, youth develop important skills, traits, and competencies (e.g., self-confidence, agency, leadership skills; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Browne et al., 2011; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Serido et al., 2011). Taken together, these components make up the concept of support for efficacy and mattering.

### **Importance of Support for Efficacy and Mattering**

As youth mature, they are expected to move toward adult roles, taking on more responsibility and initiative (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). However, youth are often provided with few opportunities to learn and practice these vital skills (Balsano, 2005; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; McLaughlin, 2000). In fact, the large majority of youth interviewed by McLaughlin (2000) did not feel noticed in their communities or that their voices were heard, and many indicated that there were few youth activities available. Unfortunately, this lack of opportunity and engagement of youth can contribute to poor youth development outcomes and problematic youth behavior; however, when youth are engaged and supported, they offer meaningful contributions to the community and have more positive youth development outcomes (Browne et al., 2011; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Hawkins et al., 2009; McLaughlin, 2000).

Youth who do have support for efficacy and mattering are well-positioned to attain positive developmental outcomes (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). For instance, youth who have a positive sense of self-efficacy tend to have higher aspirations for their future jobs and more positive expectations about their job outcomes and success (Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Similarly, higher academic, social, and self-regulatory self-efficacy among middle school youth predicts greater life satisfaction in late adolescence and early adulthood (Vecchio, Gerbino, Pastorelli, Del Bove, & Caprara, 2007). Oftentimes, these positive youth development outcomes can be fostered within youth program settings that provide support for efficacy and mattering (Catalano et al., 2004). 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 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 these programs is vital, especially considering that the stronger youth feel their voice is in youth programs, the more positive youth development outcomes they receive from the programs (Serido et

al., 2011). Overall, youth programs are ideally suited to fill the gap in youth's need for more opportunities and activities that support efficacy and mattering in their communities (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; McLaughlin, 2000).

## **Theoretical Foundations of Support for Efficacy and Mattering**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory, originally developed by Albert Bandura, posits that an individual's cognitions, environment, and behaviors reciprocally influence one another (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Importantly, the theory asserts that agency, or the ability to control a person's own life (e.g., behavior, environment) is an essential part of being human (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001). Bandura (1997, 2001) suggests that self-efficacy, a certain type of cognition, is the most important component of people's agency. Self-efficacy affects and is affected by individuals' behaviors and environment; furthermore, self-efficacy plays a large role in an individual's goals, outcome expectations, and actions, ultimately contributing considerably to overall functioning and well-being (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001; Schunk & Meece, 2006; Tsang & Hui, 2006). In relation to youth, self-efficacy significantly affects youth's aspirations and goals, commitment and perseverance, expectations about what they can achieve, and beliefs about how well they can respond to challenges (Bandura et al., 2001). For example, youth's perceived self-efficacy predicts their expectations about future career outcomes (Ali et al., 2005; Bandura et al., 2001).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Ecological systems theory was first proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986). It is most prominently known for highlighting the role of context, as well as interactions between youth and their contexts, in conceptualizations of human development. The Ecological Systems model presents five nested environmental systems or contexts, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Youth interact with and are affected by these contexts at different levels, from the microsystem (e.g., family, schools, peers) having the closest and most direct influence to the macrosystem (e.g., attitudes, ideologies) and chronosystem (e.g., life transitions, historical context) having the broadest influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986). Youth programs fall within youth's microsystem context, which suggests that programs have the potential to directly impact youth and their development (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Importantly, the model suggests that youth programs may have the most impact on positive youth development when taking into consideration the complex, reciprocal effects of youth and their contexts on youth's development (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Overall, ecological systems theory offers a framework for providing support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs in relation to not only individual youth but also the multiple contexts with which youth interact (Berg et al., 2009).

### **Support for Efficacy and Mattering in Youth Programs**

Little research has been conducted on youth program outcomes that specifically relate to support for efficacy and mattering (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Dixon et al., 2009; Evans, 2007; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). However, the existing literature, briefly reviewed in the following section, can provide insight into some important issues regarding support for efficacy and mattering relevant to those conducting youth programs.

## Elements of Youth Programs that Support Efficacy and Mattering

**Adult support for youth voices.** In order for youth programs to support efficacy and mattering, youth need to form close relationships with youth workers (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Horwitz, 2012). Youth need to know that adults in their communities are genuinely interested in them and care about them, which helps to build a sense of mattering (Dworkin et al., 2003; Horwitz, 2012). Indeed, when youth involved in a variety of youth programs were asked what program experiences had been most valuable to them, youth consistently reported that learning adults in the community cared about them was one of the most valuable experiences (Dworkin et al., 2003). Within these supportive adult relationships, youth need to feel that adults listen to their opinions and ideas, respect them as having valuable skills and expertise, and consider their input in program and community decisions (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Horwitz, 2012; Serido et al., 2011; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Once a close, collaborative relationship is formed, youth workers are better able to foster youth confidence, motivation, and engagement to allow youth to make their voices heard (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Horwitz, 2012; Scheve et al., 2006; Serido et al., 2011). Youth workers may foster youth voice in a number of different ways, including providing youth opportunities for decision-making; this can be particularly meaningful when youth make their own decisions about participation in youth programs (e.g., activities, amount of time, level of engagement; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Theriault & Witt, 2014).

Some research has examined the extent to which youth versus adult leadership, control, or ownership over youth program implementation results in the most effective programs (Larson et al., 2005). Most youth development experts agree that some degree of adult guidance, supervision, and support are necessary for a youth program to run smoothly (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Larson et al., 2005; Scheve et al., 2006). Adults provide youth and youth programs with important abilities and expertise, which allow them to manage group dynamics (e.g., conflict-resolution, collaboration, leadership, group organization), assist in program planning, teach specific skills, and remove program or project barriers (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Larson et al., 2005; Scheve et al., 2006). However, it is important for youth to have some program input and control in order to obtain high levels of youth voice, ownership, motivation, and engagement (Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007; Larson et al., 2005; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Ultimately, the extent to which programs are youth- or adult-driven should be based on the goals of the youth program, characteristics of the participants, and context in which the program is conducted (Larson et al., 2005).

**Inclusive culture.** Youth programs must foster a culture of inclusivity if they are to support efficacy and mattering among all youth. Providing a chance for youth to have their voices heard may be particularly important among vulnerable or marginalized youth, including sexual minority (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning [LGBTQ]) and racial or ethnic minority youth (Craig, McInroy, Austin, Smith, & Engle, 2012; Serido et al., 2011). Marginalized youth have often faced recurrent negative experiences that may result in self-doubt and mistrust towards others; it is vital that these youth feel respected and welcomed in youth programs so that they can benefit from the opportunities provided and build a sense of efficacy and mattering (Halpern, 2006; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Youth workers can support these youth by validating youth's identities and refraining from making assumptions about youth's abilities (Theriault & Witt, 2014). Although relatively little research has directly explored youth program inclusion, youth programs that focus on inclusivity to empower

sexual minority, racial or ethnic minority, and/or impoverished youth have been shown to be effective in promoting positive youth development outcomes, including increased youth efficacy (Craig et al., 2012; Halpern, 2006; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Therefore, youth programs should strive to create an accepting and inclusive program culture.

**Tailored to participants.** Youth cannot gain a sense of efficacy and mattering from youth programs without being engaged in the youth development activities and opportunities programs provide (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Youth development theory and research suggest some important attributes of program activities that help to maximize youth engagement. First, program activities should be developmentally appropriate for youth, meaning activities should have a level of challenge, freedom, structure, and responsibility that aligns with youth's needs and abilities (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Scheve et al., 2006). When youth are challenged by youth program activities and yet able to succeed, they gain a greater sense of self-efficacy (Scheve et al., 2006). One way to tailor activities to youth's developmental levels is for youth workers to scaffold activities to gradually increase youth's autonomy and leadership within youth programs (Horwitz, 2012; Scheve et al., 2006). Second, youth program activities should provide youth with genuine, meaningful opportunities to contribute to their own environment (e.g., youth program, community, school; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Horwitz, 2012; Scheve et al., 2006). It is important that youth can work on projects and activities that are interesting to them and that they care about because these types of activities foster high levels of engagement and a sense of importance (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Dawes & Larson, 2011). Finally, youth programs should offer youth activities that are relevant to youth's personal goals, needs, values, and identities, thereby increasing youth engagement and motivation for the activities (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). For instance, youth program activities can be tailored to be culturally relevant to youth participants (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) or to focus on youth's future career goals (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

### **Youth's Perceptions of Support for Efficacy and Mattering**

Getting youth's opinions and perceptions regarding youth programs that support efficacy and mattering is one crucial way to improve youth's experiences in programs and to empower youth to have a say in what programs are offered (Dixon et al., 2009; Evans, 2007). Several studies have surveyed youth, asking what was most desirable or valuable about the youth programs they attended as well as what characteristics youth programs would have ideally (Evans, 2007; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Horwitz, 2012). Across participants and studies, consistent themes emerged (Evans, 2007; Mitra, 2004). First, youth greatly appreciate having their voices heard, and they find experiences of adults and peers in their community listening to them and respecting their opinions to be invaluable (Brennan et al., 2007; Evans, 2007; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Mitra, 2004). Youth indicated that when they were asked to provide input and given genuine power to make decisions and contribute to program or community plans, they began to feel greater confidence, belief in their own agency, and a sense of mattering and self-worth (Evans, 2007; Mitra, 2004). In fact, in a study of youth in four separate 4-H programs, the more youth felt they had a strong voice in their programs (i.e., they felt others were receptive to their ideas and valued them in the community) the more active they became in their programs and their communities (Brennan et al., 2007). Furthermore, the more involvement youth reported in youth empowerment activities, the more growth they reported in their own positive youth development outcomes (Mitra, 2004).

Second, youth highly valued opportunities to play meaningful roles and make real differences in their communities (Evans, 2007; Horwitz, 2012). Indeed, when youth in an urban community youth program in Ohio were asked about their motives for joining the program and for continuing to participate, one of the most common responses was that youth wanted opportunities to play a role in their community (Ferrari & Turner, 2006). Similarly, sixth grade students that worked on projects aimed at increasing youth empowerment proudly reported that these projects provided them with the opportunity to show themselves and others what they could accomplish (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006).

Third, youth report that one of the most valuable components of youth programs is supportive adult relationships (Evans, 2007; Horwitz, 2012; Mitra, 2004). Youth recognized youth workers and other caring adults as the ones who provided developmental opportunities; challenged, encouraged, and motivated them to make their voices heard; and taught them skills to successfully engage in activities and benefit from opportunities (Evans, 2007; Mitra, 2004). Importantly, youth reported that it was most valuable to them that adults took them seriously and supported them in making their own decisions (Horwitz, 2012). Overall, youth's reports of what they value most from youth programs align well with theory and available research on support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs; adult support, meaningful opportunities to contribute, and youth voice or empowerment consistently emerged as important components of programs that support efficacy and mattering.

### **Youth Participatory Action Research**

Recently, one type of youth empowerment program, youth participatory action research (YPAR), has gained significant attention within the youth development literature on support for efficacy and mattering (Berg et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2010). While YPAR programs vary in regards to implementation, most programs encourage youth to identify community problems, carry out a research project on a community problem, and use their research to inform community action or advocacy (Berg et al., 2009; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Ozer & Wright, 2012). In addition, some YPAR programs include an introductory phase where students learn skills necessary to engage in project activities (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006) while others use unique practices to introduce youth to community problems (e.g., youth taking and sharing photos of community problems to spark discussion; Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008). The research and community projects youth engage in aim to accomplish two main objectives: to foster youth's positive development, voice, and empowerment and to make a positive impact in the community (Berg et al., 2009; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Wong et al., 2010). Some YPAR programs have also been designed to reduce or prevent youth problem behavior (e.g., drug use, risky sexual behavior) in addition to fostering youth self-efficacy, sense of hope, and positive development (Berg et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2008). Either way, YPAR programs tend to take a strengths-based approach to youth empowerment and community involvement, viewing programs as an opportunity to build youth and community assets (Wilson et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2010).

While relatively new to the research literature, YPAR programs have reported positive youth outcomes among youth participants (Berg et al., 2009; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Ozer & Wright, 2012). In an urban, community-service-oriented YPAR program, 90% of youth reported a greater sense of empowerment, and many listed the opportunity to show others what they could accomplish as one of the most valuable components of the program (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006). One community, which conducted youth projects for five years across six locations, reported excellent feedback and

endorsement from youth and adults involved in the program, particularly regarding the opportunities youth had to contribute to decisions and make a difference in the community (Ozer & Wright, 2012). Finally, a YPAR program based on several years of ethnographic research in Connecticut included both a summer component that introduced youth to research and an after-school component that enabled youth to complete a community project informed by their research (Berg et al., 2009). Youth involved in this YPAR program reported a greater sense of self-efficacy and empowerment and reduced rates of marijuana use compared to controls. In addition, youth in the YPAR program graduated at significantly higher rates than the average graduation rate of youth in the same city (85% versus 50%; Berg et al., 2009). In summary, preliminary findings of support for youth efficacy and mattering in YPAR programs is promising, and the field would benefit from additional research in this area.

### **Methodological Considerations**

Some important methodological issues should be considered regarding research on support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs. First, very little research has been conducted on outcomes of youth programs that emphasize support for efficacy and mattering (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Dixon et al., 2009; Evans, 2007; Wong et al., 2010). Much of the literature is theoretical, and research is needed to test the proposed models and hypotheses (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Scheve et al., 2006; Tsang & Hui, 2006; Wilson et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2010). Of the empirical research conducted, most relies on qualitative data regarding youth's and youth workers' views and experiences of programs, and data are typically only gathered from a single youth program or site (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Dworkin et al., 2003; Evans, 2007; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Larson et al., 2005; Mitra, 2004; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Clearly, more research, including research with validated measures, control conditions, and follow-up assessments, are needed to adequately evaluate the effects of support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs.

The definition of support for efficacy and mattering as it relates to youth programs is also important to consider when reviewing the literature. Support for efficacy and mattering has not been consistently defined in youth program research or theory, and several other terms have been used to describe the concept, or parts of the concept (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Mitra, 2004; Serido et al., 2011). For instance, youth empowerment and youth voice are sometimes used synonymously with the concept of support for efficacy and mattering while at other times they are used to describe components of support for efficacy and mattering (Berg et al., 2009; Browne et al., 2011; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Larson et al., 2005; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Serido et al., 2011). Careful attention should be paid to how support for efficacy and mattering, as well as related terms, are operationalized across the research. In summary, while the existing literature on support for efficacy and mattering in youth programs suggests that this support is valued by youth participants, useful in achieving positive youth development outcomes, and helpful in creating a youth-centered, inclusive program culture, caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions given the sparse research and vague definitions in this area of the literature.

### **Implications for Youth Programs**

Theory, as well as the experiences of youth and youth workers, provides ample recommendations for youth programs about how to support youth's sense of efficacy and mattering (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Scheve et al., 2006; Theriault & Witt, 2014). First, it is important for

youth workers to build a close relationship with youth that they can use to support youth in their development and to foster efficacy and mattering (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Evans, 2007; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Ways for youth workers to build a close relationship with youth include the following: listening to youth's thoughts and opinions, portraying respect for youth and the relationship, being accessible to spend time with youth, and showing interest in building relationships with youth (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Evans, 2007; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Horwitz, 2012; Larson et al., 2005; Mitra, 2004; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Serido et al., 2011). Youth workers who treat youth as skilled and knowledgeable partners build strong relationships with youth and increase youth's sense of efficacy and mattering (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Evans, 2007; Scheve et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2010).

In addition to building close relationships with youth, youth workers can foster youth's confidence and motivation in several other ways. Youth development experts suggest adults can teach youth skills through instruction, guiding practice, and modeling in ways that are encouraging and fun for youth (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Evans, 2007; Larson et al., 2005; Mitra, 2004; Scheve et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2010). It is advantageous for youth workers to use a strengths-based approach to youth development, focusing on youth's positive qualities and personal interests (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Christens & Peterson, 2012; Craig et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2008). Both youth and adults also report that youth gain valuable learning experiences when adults provide youth opportunities for autonomy and decision-making (Brennan et al., 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Horwitz, 2012; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Youth workers emphasize that it is essential to allow youth time to process and make decisions, rather than trying to hurry them, as this allows youth to learn and build efficacy (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Regardless of how youth workers support youth in building confidence and motivation, it is vital to be inclusive and accepting toward all youth during this process in order to foster and support their identities (Craig et al., 2012; Theriault & Witt, 2014).

A common theme among youth program research and theory on support for efficacy and mattering is the need to provide youth with meaningful activities and opportunities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Horwitz, 2012; Theriault & Witt, 2014). These opportunities need to fit youth's interests and give youth the ability to make real change, particularly within their own community (Dworkin et al., 2003; Evans, 2007; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; McLaughlin, 2000; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Brennan and colleagues (2007) recommend providing opportunities that fit with youth's motives for joining a youth program in order to keep youth engaged. Opportunities in youth programs also need to meet the specific needs of the youth (e.g., developmentally, culturally), which can be done by youth workers scaffolding and tailoring youth activities (Craig et al., 2012; Horwitz, 2012; Scheve et al., 2006; Theriault & Witt, 2014; Wilson et al., 2008). Importantly, programs that provide a wide range of activities are better able to meet the needs and interests of all youth in the community (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Theriault & Witt, 2014).

One key role that youth workers play in youth programs to support efficacy and mattering among youth is to ensure that the program and activities run smoothly (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Larson et al., 2005). Youth workers who were part of a large youth program that utilized research to promote engagement suggested many ways to guide groups of youth in their planning processes to ensure ongoing progress and motivation (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Suggestions included managing conflict, redirecting unhelpful discussions, reframing problems, offering reflections, providing resources (e.g., useful contacts, information), asking guiding questions, and helping to create short-



term, achievable goals (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Youth workers also suggested that the balance of adult versus youth leadership should be based on the program's goals, situation, and youth participant characteristics (Larson et al., 2005). These ways of monitoring and guiding youth processes ensure that youth do not lose interest or become overwhelmed and projects are not impeded or disorganized (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Evans, 2007; Larson et al., 2005). Organizations that provide youth programs also have a responsibility to train youth workers in how to facilitate a youth-driven approach and to advocate for youth leadership and empowerment within programs (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Riley, Anderson-Butcher, Logan, Newman, & Davis, 2017).

Finally, youth workers can support youth efficacy and mattering by ensuring youth realize the difference that they are making in their communities (Balsano, 2005; Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Wilson et al., 2008). It is vital that youth programs evaluate the effects of community projects so that youth understand what changes have been made and what goals have been achieved (Balsano, 2005; Wilson et al., 2008). Recognition of meaningful community contributions through awards ceremonies, celebrations, or public announcements also enhances youth's sense of success (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014; Brennan et al., 2007). Overall, youth workers play an important role in supporting youth's efficacy and mattering within youth programs. Youth workers can provide this support in several ways, such as building close relationships, fostering confidence and motivation, providing meaningful opportunities, facilitating smooth operation of programs, and ensuring youth recognize their own contributions.

### **Conclusions**

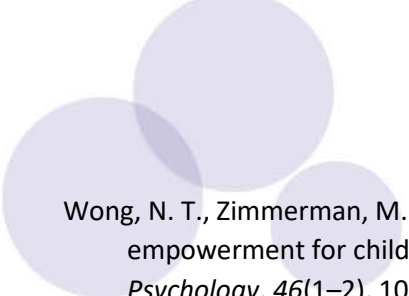
In summary, it is important to youth's positive development that youth program settings provide support for efficacy and mattering, empowering youth to make a difference in their communities and to build confidence regarding their value and agency. Theory and research, which have been primarily based on experiences of youth and youth workers, have consistently found common key components of youth programs that support youth's efficacy and mattering. These vital components include adult support for youth voice and empowerment, an inclusive culture within youth programs, and opportunities for youth to work on projects that are meaningful to them, especially projects that can make a real difference in their community. These elements informed several recommendations for youth programs and youth workers. Recommendations include building close relationships with youth, fostering youth's confidence and motivation, providing youth with opportunities to make meaningful contributions, ensuring smooth program facilitation, and assisting youth in recognizing their contributions to their communities. Overall, the current literature provides useful information regarding how to support youth's efficacy and mattering as well as what additional research is needed in this area.

## References

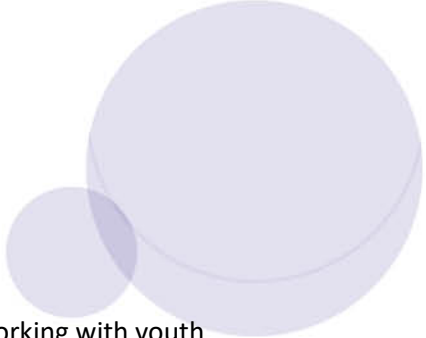
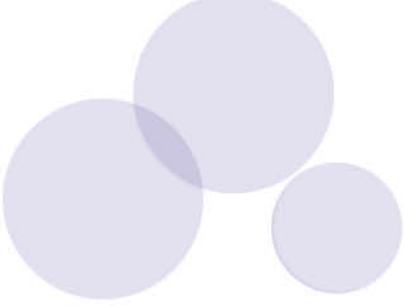
- Ali, S. R., McWhirter, E. H., & Chronister, K. M. (2005). Self-efficacy and vocational outcome expectations for adolescents of lower socioeconomic status: A pilot study. *Journal of Career Assessment, 13*(1), 40–58. doi:10.1177/1069072704270273
- Balsano, A. B. (2005). Youth civic engagement in the United States: Understanding and addressing the impact of social impediments on positive youth and community development. *Applied Developmental Science, 9*(4), 188–201. doi:10.1207/s1532480xads0904\_2
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 1–26. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development, 72*(1), 187–206. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00273
- Berg, M., Coman, E., & Schensul, J. J. (2009). Youth action research for prevention: A multi-level intervention designed to increase efficacy and empowerment among urban youth. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(3–4), 345–359. doi:10.1007/s10464-009-9231-2
- Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Brunson, L. (2014). Creating settings for youth empowerment and leadership: An ecological perspective. *Child & Youth Services, 35*(3), 216–236. doi:10.1080/0145935X.2014.938735
- Brennan, M. A., Barnett, R. V., & Baugh, E. (2007). Youth involvement in community development: Implications and possibilities for Extension. *Journal of Extension, 45*(4). Retrieved from <https://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/a3.php>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513–531. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Contexts of child rearing: Problems and prospects. *American Psychologist, 34*(10), 844–850. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.844
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723–742. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.22.6.723
- Browne, L. P., Garst, B. A., & Bialeschki, M. D. (2011). Engaging youth in environmental sustainability: Impact of the Camp 2 Grow program. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 29*(3), 70–85.
- Catalano, R. F., Berglund, L. M., Ryan, J. A. M., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, D. J. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 591*(1), 98–124. doi:10.1177/0002716203260102

- Christens, B. D., & Peterson, N. A. (2012). The role of empowerment in youth development: A study of sociopolitical control as mediator of ecological systems' influence on developmental outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *41*(5), 623–635. doi:10.1007/s10964-011-9724-9
- Craig, S. L., McInroy, L., Austin, A., Smith, M., & Engle, B. (2012). Promoting self-efficacy and self-esteem for multiethnic sexual minority youth: An evidence-informed intervention. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *38*(5), 688–698. doi:10.1080/01488376.2012.718194
- Dawes, N. P., & Larson, R. (2011). How youth get engaged: Grounded-theory research on motivational development in organized youth programs. *Developmental Psychology*, *47*(1), 259–269. doi:10.1037/a0020729
- Dixon, A. L., Scheidegger, C., & McWhirter, J. J. (2009). The adolescent mattering experience: Gender variations in perceived mattering, anxiety, and depression. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *87*(3), 302–310. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00111.x
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *45*(3–4), 294–309. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6
- Dworkin, J. B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' accounts of growth experiences in youth activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *32*(1), 17–26.
- Eccles, J. S., & Gootman, J. A. (2002). Features of positive developmental settings. In *Community programs to promote youth development* (pp. 86–118). Washington D.C.: National Academy Press. doi:10.1097/00004703-200510000-00009
- Elliott, G. C., Colangelo, M. F., & Gelles, R. J. (2005). Mattering and suicide ideation: Establishing and elaborating a relationship. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *68*(3), 223–238. doi:10.1177/019027250506800303
- Evans, S. D. (2007). Youth sense of community: Voice and power in community contexts. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *35*(6), 693–709. doi:10.1002/jcop.20173
- Ferrari, T. M., & Turner, C. L. (2006). An exploratory study of adolescents' motivations for joining and continued participation in a 4-H afterschool program. *Journal of Extension*, *44*(4). Retrieved from <https://www.joe.org/joe/2006august/rb3.php>
- Halpern, R. (2006). After-school matters in Chicago: Apprenticeship as a model for youth programming. *Youth & Society*, *38*(2), 203–235. doi:10.1177/0044118X06288912
- Hawkins, J. D., Oesterle, S., Brown, E. C., Arthur, M. W., Abbott, R. D., Fagan, A. A., & Catalano, R. F. (2009). Results of a type 2 translational research trial to prevent adolescent drug use and delinquency: A test of Communities That Care. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *163*(9), 789–798. doi:10.1001/archpediatrics.2009.141
- Horwitz, I. M. (2012). *Positive youth development in Redwood City*. Stanford, CA. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1d4e/2e71c88e1c4dda71fba78aa7a8f2803c3cf8.pdf>

- Lakin, R., & Mahoney, A. (2006). Empowering youth to change their world: Identifying key components of a community service program to promote positive development. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 513–531. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2006.06.001
- Larson, R., Walker, K., & Pearce, N. (2005). A comparison of youth-driven and adult-driven youth programs: Balancing inputs from youth and adults. *Journal of Community Psychology, 33*(1), 57–74. doi:10.1002/jcop.20035
- Marshall, S. K. (2001). Do I matter? Construct validation of adolescents' perceived mattering to parents and friends. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*(4), 473–90. doi:10.1006/jado.2001.0384
- McLaughlin, M. W. (2000). *Community counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED442900>
- Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing “student voice” in schools lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record, 106*(4), 651–688. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00354.x
- Ozer, E. J., & Wright, D. (2012). Beyond school spirit: The effects of youth-led participatory action research in two urban high schools. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 22*(2), 267–283. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00780.x
- Riley, A., Anderson-Butcher, D., Logan, J., Newman, T. J., & Davis, J. (2017). Staff practices and social skill outcomes in a sports-based youth program. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 29*(1), 59–74. doi:10.1080/10413200.2016.1179700
- Scheve, J. A., Perkins, D. F., & Mincemoyer, C. C. (2006). Fostering youth engagement on community teams. *Journal of Youth Development, 1*(1), 0601PA003. doi:10.5195/JYD.2006.400
- Schunk, D. H., & Meece, J. L. (2006). Self-efficacy development in adolescence. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents* (pp. 71–96). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Serido, J., Borden, L. M., & Perkins, D. F. (2011). Moving beyond youth voice. *Youth & Society, 43*(1), 44–63. doi:10.1177/0044118X09351280
- Theriault, D., & Witt, P. A. (2014). Features of positive developmental leisure settings for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration, 32*(2), 83–97.
- Tsang, S. K. M., & Hui, E. K. P. (2006). Self-efficacy as a positive youth development construct: Conceptual bases and implications for curriculum development. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 18*(3), 441–449. doi:10.1515/IJAMH.2006.18.3.441
- Vecchio, G. M., Gerbino, M., Pastorelli, C., Del Bove, G., & Caprara, G. V. (2007). Multi-faceted self-efficacy beliefs as predictors of life satisfaction in late adolescence. *Personality and Individual Differences, 43*(7), 1807–1818. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2007.05.018
- Wilson, N., Minkler, M., Dasho, S., Wallerstein, N., & Martin, A. C. (2008). Getting to social action: The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) project. *Health Promotion Practice, 9*(4), 395–403. doi:10.1177/1524839906289072



Wong, N. T., Zimmerman, M. A., & Parker, E. A. (2010). A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1–2), 100–114. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9330-0



## Appendix A

### Glossary of Terms

**Positive youth development:** a strengths-based, holistic approach to studying and working with youth that focuses on promoting healthy development. Positive youth development research and practice tends to emphasize environmental rather than internal influences on development, altering systems that may foster positive and healthy youth development. In research and practice, the term “positive youth development” may refer to a developmental process, an approach to youth programming, or a specific program or organization.

**Youth programs:** programs that foster youth’s personal development (e.g., social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies), participation, and empowerment while fostering relationships between supportive adults and young people. Youth programs are diverse in their structure, goals, and the youth they serve. These programs may be referred to as after-school, out-of-school, and/or youth programs; throughout this report the term “youth program” refers to any of these programs.

**Youth workers:** volunteers and paid staff, including administrators and individuals engaged in direct service, who engage in youth development work in a variety of settings and programs outside the regular school day. Similar terms include youth development professionals, after-school providers, and youth leaders. For the purpose of this paper, the term "youth worker" will be used to describe all professionals who work in youth programs.



This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture through grant/cooperative agreement Award No. 2009-48667-05833 with The University of Minnesota.