Integrating Positive Youth Development Into Planning

for Youth Workforce Development

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Abstract

Employment is a crucial activity that sets youth up for success. Workforce development activities delivered by states and localities play a direct role in delivering such activities to youth. Positive Youth Development (PYD) has been widely studied and implemented in various youth-focused settings. There is a current need to understand PYD's integration in workforce development activities for youth, a gap this study addresses. The research question central to this study is, *"How are principles of positive youth development currently present in youth-specific workforce efforts?"*. Qualitative interviews with workforce representatives from 10 states were analyzed to examine how PYD is present in workforce activities. Data indicated uneven representation of PYD throughout activities. PYD practice implications, integration and suggestions are discussed.

Introduction

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the primary federal workforce policy that provides oversight and distributes federal resources to states to deliver workforce services at the local level. Each state has a state workforce development board (SWDB) and most states have local workforce development boards (LWDB) that determine locality-specific needs and resources to inform workforce planning. SWDBs coordinate with state governments to set strategic plans and then communicate with LWDBs to execute them. Youth are a primary population of workforce development and, therefore, strategic plans identify the specific circumstances of youth and planned efforts to offer relevant programs to support education, training, and employment. Workforce development boards, both state and local, consequently, play an important role in the provision of workforce development engagement and activities for youth.

Positive youth development (PYD) is a well-known interdisciplinary approach that is widely utilized in community settings. Scholars have summarized the application of PYD into helpful frames, identifying overarching themes and pillars (Damon, 2004; Amodeo & Collins, 2007). While more outcome research is needed, some studies have found positive effects for certain youth populations (Sanders, Munford, & Liebenberg, 2017) or for certain youth outcomes, such as academic achievement (Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017). Although there is an extensive body of scholarship regarding PYD and its application, there has not been a specific focus on its potential utility in the arena of workforce development. Given PYD's documented positive outcomes in programmatic settings, examining PYD's presence in workforce development planning will provide insight into 1) ways that PYD may already be

active and 2) potential areas for improvement in using PYD for workforce activities. The present study seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the extent to which states and localities currently utilize PYD in workforce development activities. The research question central to this study is, "How are principles of positive youth development (PYD) currently present in youth-specific workforce efforts?"

Literature Review

Many community-based efforts can be broadly grouped under the term "positive youth development" (PYD). PYD incorporates several beliefs about the inherent strengths of youth and their need to engage in a variety of opportunities and supports in order to successfully move into adulthood. Existing within a range of settings these opportunities for youth development have long been part of the social fabric. In this conceptualization, youth are not problems to be managed or controlled but have a variety of skills, strengths, talents, and assets that they can contribute to the community; young people are vital resources with innate capacities to thrive (Damon, 2004). PYD approaches have long been contrasted with deficit-oriented models that focus primarily on preventing youth problem behavior (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). Opportunities are critical to a PYD orientation. "Positive youth development occurs when opportunities are made available to youth in meaningful ways and when relationships support young people to develop their own unique capacities and abilities" (Sanders & Munford, 2014, p.161). Programming within a PYD paradigm casts a wide net but is characterized by attributes such as the following: asset-based, collaborative, community-oriented, competence-building, connectedness, cultural membership, holistic, long-range, normative, promotive, universal (Collins, Amodeo, & Clay, 2004).

PYD has origins within community practice but it has grown in its application to many settings in which youth are engaged. Federal policy has recognized the importance of youth development approaches. In particular, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs aims to coordinate the wide range of federal efforts regarding youth and promotes a positive youth orientation to this work. They define PYD as follows:

> 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 (2020).

Foundational work by Pittman and colleagues (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003), Lerner and colleagues (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009), Benson and colleagues (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen, 2011), among others, laid important groundwork to shift the paradigm and identify key concepts needs for policy and program interventions. For example, recent research has focused on youth engagement in governmental decision-making often through mechanisms such as youth councils and advisory boards (Augsberger, Collins, & Gecker, 2017). PYD scholars argue that in addition to gaining competence in the various developmental areas, youth need to be engaged by having access to full participation in the community, the workplace and the broader society (Pittman et al. 2001).

Interventions based on PYD principles are considered to be particularly relevant for youth of color who have long been burdened by problem-focused labels (Travis & Leach, 2013). PYD is also linked with efforts related to youth empowerment, civic and political engagement,

and efforts toward social change to build more equitable and just societies. Iwasaki (2016) recently detailed meaningful youth engagement facilitated by youth leadership, highlighted as a key mechanism for PYD and social justice youth development.

Perhaps most challenging have been efforts to adopt PYD principles within youth-serving systems that are characterized by formal bureaucracy and social control. Although primarily associated with community-based intervention, in recent years there have been numerous efforts to promote PYD in public systems such as child welfare. These have included efforts to develop youth as trainers to improve the system (Clay, Amodeo & Collins, 2010), to identify practice principles for using a youth development approach when addressing youth substance-abusing behaviors (Amodeo & Collins, 2007), and to work with youth in group care settings (Collins, Hill, & Miranda, 2008). The juvenile justice system also has recognized the potential for PYD particularly in regard to restorative justice for juvenile offenders (Dillard, Newman, & Kim, 2019). Recently, "positive youth justice" has being articulated as a framework that uses a PYD framework with the juvenile justice population (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010). PYD has also been used to guide specific interventions for incarcerated young women (Elliot, Leve, & Racer, 2018).

As noted in the introduction, there is comparatively little attention to PYD within the arena of workforce development. One report from Child Trends (Moore, Lantos, Murphy, Redd & Beckwith, 2018) recognized the potential for PYD in workforce settings and described the development of an assessment tool for these settings. As they note, "Integrating PYD approaches into workforce training programs has the potential to increase the effectiveness of such programs by creating opportunities for young adults to learn, succeed, and enhance their soft skills (e.g., persistence and effective communication), and by providing role models for further soft skill

development and career growth (p.2)." Flanagan, Zaff, Varga, and Margolius (2020), focusing on a global perspective, also articulate a PYD framework as necessary for developing the web of relationships that would make workforce development approaches for "risk-immersed" youth successful (p.49). Noting that youth who experience disruptions to their education and career pathways seldom experience a single form of risk or adversity, they write "Perhaps one universal assumption applicable to this otherwise diverse group of youth is that simple exposure to high-quality career programming may be insufficient for navigating the changing world of work. Instead, more comprehensive, systematic, PYD approaches may be required to shift the balance of risk and protective factors sufficiently enough to promote thriving throughout school, work, and life (p.50)."

In summary, PYD has been widely recognized as a key paradigm in work with youth across multiple settings. There has been limited attention to the possibilities for PYD in workforce development. The current study aims to address this gap.

Methods

Data were collected in a study examining how the workforce development system addressed the needs of system-involved youth (Authors, 2020). Ten local workforce development boards in 10 different U.S. states were included in the study. Geographic diversity was important due to the extensive contextual differences in local areas. Small to medium sized states were the sample for the study, as well as those with high (above the median) rates of disconnected youth and geographic diversity. In each setting, three interviews were planned: with the Executive Director (or designee) of the LWDB, with the Chair for LWDB Youth Council (or other identified youth specialist), and the Executive Director of the SWDB (to understand the broader context).

There is some variation in how the WDBs are organized so that the specific interview participant may not have these titles, but in all cases, they had administrative leadership roles. Information to identify WDBs and their contact person is available online (careeronestop.org). Initial contact was made by email to the identified person of the LWDB to describe the study and seek participation. At the conclusion of this interview, participants were asked to provide contact information for the Chair of the Youth Committee (if it existed) or an alternate expert regarding the youth component of the WDB programming. Independently, the SWDB was also contacted for participation. In one small state there were no local boards so only the SWDB was interviewed.

Response was generally high. One state was problematic, and we were unable to get a response from either the LWDB (we tried twice) or the SWDB. We, therefore, substituted another state. In two states, the initial LWDB did not respond so we successfully identified an alternative LWDB in each state. On two occasions the LWDB did not identify a Youth specialist to contact for an interview after initially agreeing to but then not following up.

Data Collection

Twenty-five interviews were conducted with 33 interview subjects (some localities had more than one participant per interview). Interviews were conducted between April and August 2020 and they lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview and then transcribed for analysis. All interviews and transcriptions were conducted by the co-authors. Interviews were supplemented by document review of state and local plans to triangulate interview data. State and local plans are publicly available and were reviewed for their youth-focused content in order to have a basis of comparison and analytic reference to the interview data. Document review included reading reports for specific youth related efforts such

as Youth Committees, key partners, and relevant local context (e.g., unemployment rates, key industry sectors).

Questions included a focus on the following topics: past/current initiatives for child welfare and juvenile justice populations, structure and membership of the WDBs, interactions across the state-local-contractor levels, key partnerships, mechanisms for engaging youth in policy/programming, for example. Consistent with qualitative interviewing, probes were used to gather detailed information (e.g., "can you tell me more about that?") and to gain further clarity and understanding about the information collected.

Data Analysis

Analysis began concurrent to data collection, which involved reflective memos on the content of the interviews and potential emerging themes for analysis. Transcripts were organized and read several times by the co-authors. Memos were utilized to reflect on and identify common and emerging themes, as well as unique or unusual findings. Transcripts were read through initially to familiarize the authors with the data. The second readings of transcripts focused on two responses to questions asked given their focus on youth, noting other mentions of youth in relation to the research questions. Descriptive thematic analysis was employed as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). This included creating an additional, broadly encompassed list of potential themes once all of the transcripts, and aforementioned youth-specific questions, were read through once. Data were organized into charts and matrices to identify commonalities and differences. Several methods were utilized to enhance the validity of findings: triangulation of method; detailed notes and memos; multiple data analysts, preparation of an evidence trail linking data, analysis, and conclusions.

Findings

Four core themes were identified: *Barriers to Youth Engagement*, *Youth Engagement Mechanisms*, *Recognizing and Meeting Youth Where They're At*, and *Inclusion of Youth Voice*. These four themes are described in detail below.

Barriers to Youth Engagement

Barriers to Youth Engagement included mentions of tangible and abstract barriers that respondents expressed as being detrimental to their ability to engage youth in workforce development activities. Engagement within these contexts included initial outreach and recruitment of youth, retention in workforce activities, and ongoing communication with youth participating in workforce activities, among others.

A total of 12 respondents described barriers fitting the above criteria. Respondents discussed barriers that youth face directly in relation to how it prevents engagement in workforce activities. Lack of resource to meet basic needs was one example. One participant described how needs such as transportation, childcare and housing instability impact youth's ability to engage in workforce activities; consequently these can and should be addressed by workforce development activities. This sentiment is reflected in their statement, "There is an understanding that those are needs that need to be met, but that they [local workforce board and its activities] can help with that and then also get youth in school/help with getting a GED. It's about breaking a cycle."

Respondents also expressed how workforce staff and employees and employers face barriers that impact their ability to engage with youth due to the complexities associated with WIOA along with accompanying federal policies and measures. One participant illustrated both of these perspectives when stating, "At the end of the day, we have to follow federal measures…more employers would engage in work-based learning if they saw the benefits of it."

Barriers in this sense were also explicitly described in relation to employer awareness, with one respondent expressing, "The challenge is that employers do not really understand what youth experience really looks like." Both of these respondents were describing the impact, and constraints, of WIOA on employers and how it impacts their ability to be settings that are welcoming to youth.

Age requirements were also identified within these types of barriers. An ability to enroll younger youth in programming was considered a beneficial engagement tactic for a couple of reasons. For example, "Better serves to get them earlier…need to start younger. Waiting until they're 16-17 is going to be hard to crack." Other restrictions due to the federal legislation were also identified. This largely centered on the rigid requirements necessary for utilizing federal funds. Specific examples of this included the complexities of the law itself as well as the specified focus on out-of-school youth. The challenges of meeting this benchmark were mentioned by several participants; for instance: "[State] receives such little funds and 75 percent are required to be spent on out of school youth. Creates a barrier." In these ways the WIOA created some barriers that impacted how youth, LWDB and SWDB and local employers were restricted.

Furthermore, the importance of youth, employers and other supportive services having similar expectations, and positive communication practices was described as potentially creating barriers to engagement. This was described in the context of the literal barriers that can occur when communicating with youth: "Another challenge is communication. You'll have relationship with a young person and they'll just drop off. Figuring out innovative ways to stay in touch with them. Facebook used to be used for this, not as effective anymore. Keeping them engaged is a challenge."

Others described the disconnect in terms of expectations between youth and workforce activities. Youth can have unrealistic expectations of what workforce activities they have access to and when, as well as employers having unrealistic assumptions about youth. One respondent noted that several players may have unrealistic expectations: the youth, the employer, and the workforce provider. Establishing the expectations was key to the work: "Once engagement happens and everyone is on the same page, then the work can be successful." Similarly, one of the respondents who had chaired the Youth Council and was on the employment side of the relationship explicitly pointed to a lack of mutual expectations by stating, "I've been told 'you got to understand their [youth's] reality.' But they also need to understand my reality. There's a disconnect." Thus, the inability to bridge expectation gaps was considered detrimental to the overall ability for youth to fully engage in programming.

Together, the various ways that respondents described barriers illustrated the difficulties faced by youth, workforce staff and administrators and employers when it comes to engagement and retention in workforce development activities for youth.

Youth Engagement Mechanisms

Youth Engagement Mechanisms included descriptions of ideas, actions and entities whose role within the locality has the potential to facilitate greater youth engagement in workforce development activities.

One structural mechanism to foster youth engagement might be a youth committee or other entity that provides a formal role for youth input to service planning. For those localities that did have a youth committee as part of the LWDB, youth themselves were rarely represented. It was far more common for there to be specific positions held by adults whose primary role was to ensure that youth-specific needs were addressed. In this way, youth councils do serve as a

mechanism to implement strategies to ensure services are responsive to youth needs and interests. One respondent expressed this by stating, "There is a state-wide youth council and each of the [local] workforce development boards has a youth lead that makes up the Youth Council" with the youth lead referenced being an adult that assumes the role of ensuring youth remain a focus of Youth Council discussion. Other respondents indicated more direct youth involvement in such a mechanism, with one stating, "We have individual youth councils, at the local level. We recommend that youth sit on the councils. Some larger boards have included youth." Youth councils and similar entities were ultimately unevenly represented across interviews and illustrated variation across LWDBs.

Mechanisms were also described in relational terms. Respondents spoke to partnerships between individuals and entities and expressed how the presence of such a relationship promoted engagement. This was most frequently expressed by describing how contracted agencies and community partners play a key role in connecting youth to services and keeping them engaged. For example, one member of an LWDB stated, "The only way we can get people is through these partnerships. That's what's been increasing our numbers lately, word of mouth through these partner organizations." Another LWDB respondent explicitly pointed to this kind of mechanism by stating, "Our strength has been in youth because of all the strong partnership with local organizations." These two examples demonstrate a consistent illustration of how this particular mechanism presented across types of respondents: local boards were more likely to name the salience of partnerships to contracted agencies and other community members than those of state boards. This is to be expected somewhat given the working relationship of LWDB and contracted agencies and was backed up by agencies in their responses. For example, one respondent from a contracted agency spoke to this ability to be an effective mechanism for youth

engagement, as well as thoughts on potential reasons why, "Because we are a social service agency, we are in a unique position to continue to connect with youth… we take a different view, see holistically, can connect to needed services. We know where shelters and foodbanks are."

Another mechanism discussed were tangible ways to try and literally reach youth, as well as keep them engaged. The strategies of reaching youth were an example of this, often relating to such mechanisms as social media and going to physical locations where youth may be found. One respondent stated, "Years ago we abandoned the model of sitting in an office and assuming they'll come to us. [We] mounted a social media campaign, highly successful at reaching youth." The same respondent went on to describe the on the ground efforts as, "[We] have staff who go to where the young people are – this is different in different communities, where young people hang out." These strategies were also identified in a different locality: "A lot is done with social media efforts, along with physical efforts too. Walking, knocking on doors, talking to teachers about local industries. Talked about need to get to where the youth are."

Communication was another way in which engagement was discussed. The assertion that youth voice specifically is not only important, but crucial when attempting to spark and sustain engagement was summed up: "Communication and advocacy are key when it comes to recruiting youth and keeping them engaged, and ultimately having them be successful." Another respondent focused on the importance of homing a communication strategy in their locality's efforts to effectively engage youth when stating: "Lots of talk around how to communicate. Encouraged them to redesign the webpage to make it more user friendly…we need to incorporate more videos and less words. Really have to push for platforms that work for youth and are for youth."

Mechanisms, then, took on a variety of forms, spanning from youth committees to social media efforts. Each example shared the common goal of hoping to elicit and sustain youth engagement through these mechanisms.

Recognizing and Meeting Youth Where They're At

Recognizing and Meeting Youth Where They're At distinguished itself from the thematic mentions of mechanisms for engagement by moving beyond statements about actions taken and focusing on describing their conceptualizations of how youth circumstances are seen and understood as they relate to workforce development activities. Responses that fit into this category provide insight into how respondents view situations that youth are in and how these situations impact how localities approach interaction and engagement with youth. "Recognizing" speaks to the ways that participants conceptualized youth circumstances. One respondent described this in broader discussion of how their locality approaches youth engagement by saying, "It is important to address home situations, recognize the importance of this on youth."

This was also reflected in discussion of potential career pathways for youth. Career pathways are a core concept for workforce development. There are typically four to five career pathways identified for their potential to lead to sustained productive employment and they vary by locality depending on the availability of specific industries. When reflecting on this, a respondent stated, "Would like for them [local and state boards] to talk about a miscellaneous category when it comes to career options. I think that that's a good conversation…Have to continue to look at the area and the disparities in the areas, transportation, access to educational outlets, or access to technology, continue to adjust and be open minded to the changing population and changing interests." The respondent was discussing how young people's interests, circumstances and needs do not always align to available career pathways.

"Meeting" youth where they are at often included concrete descriptions of how localities address such variability and recognition. Participants identified supportive services within the community, counseling, and other training activities as a way to both acknowledge these circumstances and attempt to support youth in addressing them. One respondent illustrated what acting on the recognition that not all youth bring the same interests and backgrounds to the table, "The other way youth perspectives are integrated are by providing individualized services. Services are not cookie-cutter; determine what each youth needs." Another discussed how their efforts of engaging youth are in response to the home circumstances that they recognize they are in: "Try to address how not to allow the household they're in to weigh too heavily on what they do with their lives. We're often the safe space. We have food and water available, clothing, to put on or take home. We try to provide resources…try to be a safe space to vent, use the lab, the idea is there needs to be more supports without so many requirements. Should be more accessible [resources]. They should be able to get them automatically." In this way, the recognition of young people's home circumstances that impact their ability to fully engage in workforce activities is met with attempting to provide barrier free resources and safe spaces for them, while supporting their workforce goals.

Others focused their efforts in reaching youth by taking what was described as a "holistic" approach. Some of these comments harkened back to literally meeting youth where they are in order to connect: "We have a holistic view of youth. We go to the youth; we don't expect them to come to us." The term holistic was used with some frequency throughout interviews, and with a wide range of connection to various other themes being discussed. One respondent summed up the process of both recognizing and meeting youth where they are in relation to utilizing a holistic approach when stating, "We come side-by-side with them. If [a]

parent of youth is unemployed, we might help with employment services while they help with educating youth. We are now creating partnership. We want to be part of the discussion. To look at young adults holistically. We try to immerse ourselves in as many crevices as possible."

Inclusion of Youth Voice

  Inclusion of Youth Voice demonstrated how respondents acknowledged youth voice as being present in workforce planning or not, as well as reflection about why youth voice is important and how it should to be incorporated. The specific efforts bringing in youth voice included surveys, talking directly to youth in a variety of settings, and having youth either sit on the board of youth committees or speak to those on youth committees. A fairly robust effort to include youth voice was described in an example of getting feedback on a strategic plan: "[A] youth serving organization pulled together a number of youth, wide range of youth voices, to provide feedback into the plan." For some participants that did not have concrete examples of how youth were directly providing input, contracted and community agencies were often referenced as being the mechanism by which youth specific needs are brought into workforce planning. One participant conveyed this explicitly by stating "We really should (have youth on the council). We're seeing that, we need to have more of that voice. Partner organizations are largely speaking for them in most settings."

  In addition to contracted agencies, other individuals were identified as being tasked with ensuring local and state officials were attuned to youth voice and needs. These were often designated youth leads, or specific roles tasked with this line of communication on youth committees for those that had them. Reflecting what many interview participants described, one respondent from a contracted agency spoke to this clearly: "More of my job is advocating for their voice. Our case managers advocate all day long for their youth, they know what their

17

struggles are." While respondents pointed to indirect ways that youth voices are brought into planning, this highlighted, and it was sometimes brought up directly by respondents, that localities are not directly bringing youth into workforce planning spaces.
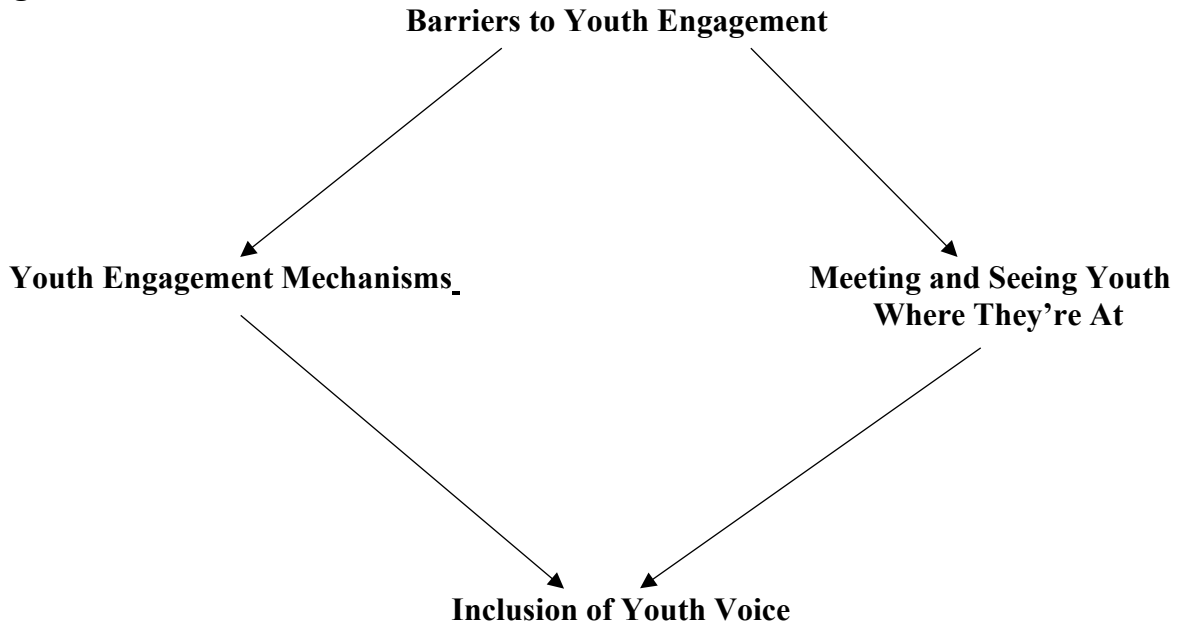
In many instances some combination of a lack of direct inclusion of youth voice was noted, discussion that a lack of inclusion is a barrier, and alternative ways that youth needs are being centered in workforce development planning were described by respondents. This was illustrated by one respondent who discussed how youth perspectives are integrated by saying, "Some are not directly done by us, more likely by our engagement in other entities…brings youth perspective to conversation."

Discussion

Once the above four themes were identified, a thematic map (see Figure A) was constructed to support the synthesis and overall conception of how themes related to the initial research question and each other. The research question central to this study is "How are principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) currently present in youth-specific workforce efforts?" Figure A, then, demonstrates how respondents discussed PYD related topics by way of possible solutions to the barriers presented and discussed, with culminating goals of ultimately bringing in young people to directly support youth workforce planning. Within the pre-coding readings of the interview notes, it became clear that consideration of youth and how youth engagement is conceived of within localities was highly variable and therefore warranted a closer examination. Within this youth-specific consideration came an awareness of not only how the themes were interacting with one another, but also how pillars of PYD, were first, not absent, but unevenly present and integrated within current WDB activities, and, second, how the thematic interactions gesture towards insights regarding how PYD can be incorporated into

WDB planning in the future. These two considerations will be discussed, along with discussion

related to the complexities of adopting and implementing a PYD framework into WDB planning.

Figure A

Barriers to Youth Engagement

Youth Engagement Mechanisms

Meeting and Seeing Youth
Where They're At

Inclusion of Youth Voice

Elements of PYD were present within interviews in ways that were often implicitly

expressed within respondent descriptions of youth engagement. Given the wide purview that

PYD covers, pillars have been summarized to include youth having the inherent capacity for

positive growth and development, communities providing a viable and critical delivery system

for PYD, youth as major actors in their environments and as such are underutilized resources in

the production of PYD, among others. In a similar vein, Damon (2004) identified central themes

of PYD, including the utilization of strengths-based approaches and the centrality of community.

Illustrated within responses were challenges (*Barriers to Youth Engagement*) that are

wrestled with, addressed and attempted to be remedied through implementing strategies and

activities (*Youth Engagement Mechanisms*) and being thoughtful about respondents'

conceptualizations of youth, and how this influences actions to acknowledge this recognition

(*Meeting and Seeing Youth Where They're At*). This initial interaction between themes provides groundwork for analyzing how elements of PYD, as defined by the authors above, are unevenly reflected in current WDB activities. The fourth and final theme, *Inclusion of Youth Voice*, can be interpreted as a sought-after way that localities hope to elevate support for youth. It was not uncommon for respondents to reflect on their desire to bring in youth voices to support their workforce efforts in relation to the barriers that made up the first theme. Furthermore, it directly illustrates a core theme of PYD, centering youth in planning and implementation efforts, which has documented positive effects and outcomes in similarly positioned settings (Augsberger, Collins, & Gecker, 2017).

The synthesized conceptualization of themes, along with how respondents conceived of youth needs, efforts, experiences and necessary additional support provides insight into how core elements and principles of PYD are informally discussed and adopted within current workforce planning efforts. For example, respondents' descriptions for both *Youth Engagement Mechanisms* and *Recognizing and Meeting Youth Where They Are At* included mentions of the need for youth councils, the importance of community collaborative relationships to enhance youth engagement and attempts to holistically approach youth circumstances. These echo core themes related to PYD, indicating implicit gestures toward how PYD may be of use in formalized processes.

Adopting Damon's (2004) summation that communities act as incubators for PYD allows us to consider the implications of PYD as a more formalized foundation for workforce development planning and activities. A core focus of workforce development is the motivation to integrate eligible workers into productive career pathways, as defined by each locality. Indeed, the concept of career pathways is built into the WIOA foundation. This can be thought of as

integration into the community; employers need eligible workers, who then become involved in the workforce and community. In this way, it is possible to conceive of workforce development efforts as attempts to increase community integration and engagement. Utilizing the vision of communities as incubators, attention can be brought to the overlap in incubator-like effects of communities fostering PYD initiatives and the centrality that communities implicitly play in workforce planning. That is, the community can arguably be identified as a common foundation to both general principles of PYD and a crucial element of WDB planning. Many localities make reference to this central foundation within their response.

Incorporating explicit PYD frameworks and/or principles within workforce planning and activities may support a more intentional culture of addressing youth-specific needs. As has been discussed, the centrality of youth supporting efforts related to youth-specific needs is a crucial element to PYD. Data from respondent interviews indicate that efforts related to youth engagement mechanisms and meeting youth where they're at may well be implicitly, and in some cases explicitly, seeking to ultimately provide youth with a more central role in aiding workforce development efforts which leads to the more robust inclusion of youth voice.

Practice Implications

In order to consider what explicit practice implications may be useful within the contexts described in this paper, the inherent complexity of the workforce development system must be squarely situated within the conversation. Aspects of these complexities include multiple levels of policy, complex networks for government, educational institutions and employers and highly context dependent, thus creating greater variability of resources and needs in each community. Furthermore, youth are only one of the populations that are served by the workforce development system. It is a system in which the strengths and needs of youth are at great risk for

being lost in the overall complexity of the efforts. For this reason, explicit and robust efforts are needed to engage youth, their voice, and their contributions. Four suggestions are described below, as derived from the data, PYD literature and the authors' interpretation of data, with the goal being that these implications may be useful to various LWDB's and SWDB's, and particularly those individuals working directly with youth.

1. Require youth committees within each LWDB and develop a mechanism for formal youth inclusion. Earlier research on youth councils in municipal government Augsberger, Collins, and Gecker (2017) describe a range of municipal youth councils classified into one of four types: adult-led; mixed membership/adult-led; mixed membership/adult-facilitated; and, youth-led. Similar to the current study, the term "youth council" is sometimes used by entities solely consisting of adults who are working on youth-related issues but in which there is scant opportunity for actual youth input. A key practice implication from research is to ensure these committees include youth participation.

2. Facilitate linkage of LWDB and SWDB with regional and national expertise in PYD. Some examples of these linkages were provided by a few respondents and were considered highly beneficial to their efforts to engage in a positive way with youth. Thus, LWDBs and SWDBs should actively search out centers, institutes, and other organizations in their state or region with this expertise. Often these centers are affiliated with universities and have a mission of providing information, education, and technical assistance on PYD topics.

3. Utilize contractors with demonstrated expertise in PYD. It was often in the interviews with the Youth Specialist that PYD principles were articulated in regard to workforce

development activities. This was not universal, however. Contracting processes and other partnership mechanisms should elevate expertise regarding PYD to ensure greater infusion into the workforce development services.

4. Strengthen efforts at the national level to provide technical assistance to WDBs regarding best practices in PYD and methods of youth engagement. National expertise does exist such as the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. A higher profile for these national efforts and aggressive engagement with the workforce development system may aid in greater PYD strategies at the local level.

Implementing these practices would explicitly situate PYD within youth-focused workforce development efforts, addressing some of the barriers expressed by respondents and formalizing youth voice as central to workforce development activities.

Conclusion

Education, training, and employment are fundamental components of youth's journey to a successful adulthood. Workforce development systems serving youth populations may have outstanding expertise regarding workforce but lack specific expertise on the youth experience. Utilization of PYD principles and practices hold promise for more effective attainment of youth education, training, and employment goals, consequently supporting the community level engagement central to both PYD and workforce goals. These formalized PYD practices would then support explicit efforts to center youth voice and utilize youth expertise within workforce planning, ultimately enhancing the ability of such workforce activities to meet the needs of youth and to set them up for success.

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