



Creative Youth Development Toolkit

Landscape Analysis

Working in Social Justice

by Bettina Love

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About this Paper

Americans for the Arts is proud to be one of the leaders of the **Creative Youth Development National Partnership**, which is working to advance the field of creative youth development (CYD), the intentional integration of arts learning and youth development principles. As part of this collective initiative, Americans for the Arts commissioned field experts to produce a set of seven landscape analyses about key topics within youth development. These papers identify trends in creative youth development, share recommendations for CYD practitioners, and suggest areas for future exploration. The areas of focus of these papers are:

- 1) Trends in CYD Programs
- 2) Advocacy and Policy
- 3) Working in Social Justice
- 4) Program Evaluation
- 5) Preparing Artists & Educators
- 6) Working with Youth
- 7) Funding, Sustainability, and Partnerships

These landscape analyses are one part of a larger project led by Americans for the Arts to create a new, first-of-its-kind **Creative Youth Development Toolkit** that will aggregate the most effective tools and resources from exemplary creative youth development programs throughout the country. The CYD Toolkit will build upon the success and longevity of the Youth Arts Toolkit (2003), a landmark study of arts programs serving at-risk youth that can be found at <http://youtharts.artsusa.org/>.

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INTRODUCTION

Social justice is a concept tied to action; it's a theory useless without action. Prominent educational scholar Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) defines a social justice-oriented approach as a framework that “actively address[es] the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability” (p. 57). In broad terms, social justice in the field of Creative Youth Development (CYD) means working with youth from multiple identities to expand and nurture their analytic sensibilities, creativity, self-reflection, and critical thinking skills to engage youth in the work of fighting for visibility, inclusion, and intersectional justice; in addition to promoting and supporting youth culture as a mechanism to drive youths’ understanding of and ability to challenge racial violence, and structural and systemic oppression. According to Montgomery (2016), radical educator and activist Paulo Freire’s most famous book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* inspired early visions of CYD. As Freire’s writing stresses reflection and action for justice, this connection fundamentally links the work of social justice and CYD.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

In relation to the United States, before the terms “youth development” or “creative youth development” were coined, “juvenile organizations” in the early 1900s were created for youth, particularly young men, to address some of the social and economic concerns facing the U.S. at that time (i.e., human rights, immigration, and urbanization) (Walker, Gambone, Walker, 2011). For example, Ernest Thompson Seton was influential in establishing the Boy Scouts of America and many other clubs and organizations for young men. Seton believed that nature should be preserved, and that Native Americans could teach young white men a lot about nature. He wanted boys to explore the woods in ways that did not involve hunting (Kelly, 2016). Juliette Gordon Low, inspired by the Boy Scouts, created the Girls Scouts, which started in Savannah, Georgia, with a group of culturally and ethnically diverse girls. However, diversity and inclusion were not hallmarks of juvenile organizations in the early 1900s. One of the largest Boy Scout councils—Old Hickory—did not integrate until 1974 (Demby, 2013). Juvenile organizations of the time were riddled with racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

By the 1950s, youth organizations were community-based, and CYD began to emerge in its full form (Walker, Gambone, Walker, 2011). Although CYD is a relatively new term, its roots can be traced back to the surge of free community-based arts programming conducted in the early

1900s; it appears later in the 1980s, when many local arts councils established art programs for young people to support their growth artistically and personally through art (Montgomery, 2016). According to the National Guild for Community Education, CYD is a “longstanding community of practice that intentionally integrates the arts, sciences, and humanities with youth development principles, sparking young people’s creativity and building critical learning and life skills that carry into adulthood.” However, by the 1960s until the late 1980s, youth organizations were used to address society’s moral panic concerned with the “perceived potential for troublesome, criminal, self-destructive, and generally bad behavior,” thus “new youth programs were organized and the older organizations adopted programs around drug prevention, anti-drunk driving campaigns (reminiscent of the temperance movement), pregnancy prevention, and productive alternatives for troubled, vulnerable, at-risk youth” (Walker, Gambone, Walker, 2011, p. 3). The field of youth development became consumed with the idea of “fixing kids” (Walker, Gambone, Walker, 2011).

Youth development from the mid-1960s onward was influenced by *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* as called by the Moynihan Report of 1965, commissioned by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration, which argued that discrimination forced Black families into “a matriarchal structure” which “seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro, and in consequence, on a great many Negro women.” The Moynihan Report claimed that Black men’s feelings of alienation led to high rates of poverty, child abuse, and low educational outcomes. In short, Moynihan branded and blamed the Black family structure for Black people’s inability to assimilate into White American culture. Moynihan’s views became widespread and dominated the narrative explaining inner city youth and their communities. Black youth were labeled “at-risk” while little if any attention was given to the “complex social forces affecting their lives, as well as the oppressive community conditions that require youth action” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, pg. 84). Black youth were America’s problem children that needed tough, punitive, punishment and since they could not be trusted, they needed surveillance. However, in the early 1990s, the youth development field began to shift from focusing on youth as the “problem” to recognizing and affirming the strengths, assets, and knowledge of youth (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Pittman & Fleming, 1991). The shift investigated how “young people’s choices are bound up by complex relationships between peers, family, school, work, and the political and economic resources available to them” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 84). This new approach in the field brought forth new ideas focused on positive youth development models that centered social justice, returning to a key element of CYD.

KEY TRENDS

KEY TREND #1: SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Leading scholars in the field of youth development, Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota, in their 2002 article “New Terrain in Youth Development: The Promise of a Social Justice Approach” argued that, despite the shift in positive youth development, too much of the focus was on White middle-class ideas of youth culture, effectively ignoring low-income youth of color

and their realities that differed from White norms. As a model to address the lives of youth placed at the margins of society, Ginwright and Cammarota conceptualized the framework of social justice youth development (SJYD). This model is deeply influenced by what Freire calls “praxis: ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’” (1993, p. 33). SJYD encourages youth to take social action by making sense of their world and to transform by exploring “their own and others’ experiences with oppression and privilege” while understanding “the underlying causes of social and historical processes that perpetuate the problems they face daily” (p. 88). The authors cite an instance at a youth rally to protest California’s Juvenile Justice Crime Bill, Proposition 21, when youth shouted the chant, “Ain’t no power like the power of youth, cuz the power of youth don’t stop.” SJYD upholds the idea that youth have the power and capacity to respond to injustice.

There are three primary stages of SJYD: self-awareness, social awareness, and global awareness. First, self-awareness helps youth cultivate the skills of self-evaluation and self-exploration to investigate their identity in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion. The second stage, social awareness, encourages youth and gives them the time and space to think critically about the complex issues facing their community. The final stage, global awareness, asks youth to take their understanding of their identities and their knowledge of injustice in their community and expand that to oppressed people throughout the world. For example, youth understand “how capitalism exploits people’s labor in almost every country; or how European colonization intended to culturally and economically dominate the entire world; or how white supremacy identifies all people of color as inferior; or how patriarchy renders women subordinate to men in almost every culture in existence” (Ginwright and Cammarota, p. 90). Lastly, SJYD is focused on youth’s “emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical wellness” because they are encouraged to “share, listen, and learn from each other” (p. 93). SJYD reflects an approach that centers and affirms youth’s assets and can improve not just the lives of young people, but all of us.

KEY TREND #2: YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Another approach that blends social justice and youth development is youth participatory action research (YPAR). This framework teaches youth how to conduct research methods (i.e., mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative) to empirically study their own social contexts which produces research that allows youth to advocate for equity in their communities (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). The foundation of YPAR is social justice. This research should be used to advocate for and advance youth agency, self-determination, and liberatory actions with the end goal of improving youth’s living conditions (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). YPAR teaches youth how to design a research project, collect data, analyze data, and disseminate findings in the most accessible and impactful way to their community. YPAR projects specifically examine injustice; the research investigation will be youth driven, be a co-learning space for all, and ensure the youth understand how research can be a tool to gain equity for those at the margins (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008; Torre & Fine, et al, 2007). YPAR is a tool to increase youth involvement in social movements for social change that ensures youth have opportunities to take on leadership roles. The documentary *Precious Knowledge* (Palso, 2011) is an ideal example of YPAR as Latinx and Chicanx students learn their cultural

knowledge and the action research skills needed to fight against the Tucson school board's actions to abolish their ethnic studies classes.

An extraordinary program that embodies all the elements of CYD, SJYD, and YPAR is Kuumba Lynx, an urban arts youth development program based in Chicago and founded in 1996. Kuumba Lynx exposes youth to the arts through the life skills of positive self-image, intersectional social justice, mental wellness, leadership and teamwork skills. In alignment with CYD, SJYD and YPAR center youth as agents of change with inherent abilities of creativity and expression necessary for social justice work (Heath, Soep & Roach, 1998).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD OF CYD

The field of youth development has a tumultuous history. The field must keep moving in the direction of justice regardless of the political climate or myths America creates about youth, especially youth of color. Art should and must reflect youths' reality no matter how uncomfortable it makes adults. Moving forward, the field of CYD needs to be bold and courageous as it supports youth in the action, not just the name, of social justice. My recommendations for this shift are as follows:

- CYD programs all over the world are embracing the culture of Hip Hop. The origins of Hip Hop embraced empowering youth. In the Bronx, youth in the 1970s across the African diaspora pioneered a sound and culture rooted in African and African American traditions (Chang, 2005). These youth established five primary elements of Hip Hop: Graffiti (taggin'), MCing (rappin'/emceein'/spittin'/flowin'/spoken-word), Deejaying, Breakdancing (B-boying and B-girling), and Knowledge of Self and Community or Street Knowledge (Chang, 2005). These elements constitute Hip Hop as more than just a musical genre, but a site of social and cultural production with traditions, rituals, and customs that affirm youth identity on a global, national, and local level (Love, 2014). However, the element of Knowledge of Self and Community is often ignored. Knowledge of Self and Community, also called the fifth element, is the study of Hip Hop culture, music, and elements, alongside examining issues within one's surroundings to create positive change in one's community. Hip Hop does not exist without Knowledge of Self and Community. CYD programs embrace Hip Hop because they draw youth in and make easy connections to the arts. However, many programs have little understanding of the power and rich history of Hip Hop. In order for CYD programs to fully embrace Hip Hop, they must understand how the fifth element of Hip Hop is just as powerful a tool as SJYD or YPAR. Lastly, too many CYD programs that use Hip Hop as a creative art form for youth do not allow youth to use profanity. You cannot censor youth and call it Hip Hop. Youth must express themselves using the language they see as their authentic selves. CYD programs advertising Hip Hop cannot control youth's creative license and call it CYD.
- The literature and cultural aesthetic of Afrofuturism must become a crucial part of CYD programming. Afrofuturism interrogates present-day issues using fantasy, science,

historical fiction, African mythology, art, Hip Hop, and politics to design a future where identity boxes do not exist because identities are fluid. Worlds and universes where capitalism is never known, and oppression is outlawed. Writer Dream Hampton says that, “All social justice work is science fiction. We are imagining a world free of injustice, a world that doesn’t yet exist.” Youth need spaces to dream about their futures. Justice work is the work of creativity. Social change does not happen without the critical components of creativity, imagination, and ingenuity. If you want to change the world, you have to first imagine what is possible. Social change is only possible because of the space that is created when you dream and are moved to create by the possibilities of those dreams. Getting free starts with imagining (Love, 2016).

- CYD must focus more on girls of color. Girls of color are experiencing social, emotional, psychological, and physical violence inside and outside of schools. Girls of color need more than counter narratives that highlight successful women of color whom society has deemed successful by American standards of exceptionalism and meritocracy; they need to be equipped with radical feminist leadership models that center activism, collective liberation strategizing, art, and exclude no one (Love & Duncan, 2017). Black Lives Matter is a contemporary model of a leaderful movement led by women of color strategists and organizers. These leaders’ ideas, if not their physical bodies, should permeate CYD programs that are concerned with the lives of Black and Brown girls. The idea of activism is foundational to girls of color because they need to know that they have the power to change their communities as leaders.

CONCLUSION

Frameworks in the field of CYD that are grounded in social justice not only benefit youth, but all of us, because CYD work is the work of civics. Civics is more than just voting, working on an election campaign, or food drives; civics is built on a radical imagination and the creativity of people fighting for social change. Social movements move young people because they ignite the spirit of freedom, justice, love, and joy. CYD at its best helps all of us remember our dreams, hopes, and desires for a new world, which is also a civic project. Robin D. G. Kelly (1994) writes that, “[p]olitics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world” (p. 10). The imaginary world creates new worlds that push democracy, where politics and economics are reimagined for a just world. CYD must be at the forefront of this movement because young people must always lead us into our better future.

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