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Guiding Goals, Principles, Objectives, and Outcomes of Youth-Led Research

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Youth-led research, as already described, is so much more than research for the sake of uncovering new knowledge on particular conditions. It has implications for interventions that may be program or community based. The conceptualization of the goals, principles, and outcomes for these types of initiatives is determined by the sponsor(s) of the research. Once a determination is made for undertaking a youth-led research project, then a process must ensue that addresses the goals, principles, and outcomes of the research project.

As I have already addressed in the previous two chapters, youth-led research can best be understood and appreciated when placed against a backdrop of paradigms that are asset-based, embracing the importance of youth developing a voice and actions that actively and systematically tap their potential for social change. Once this stance is embraced, what follows represents a systematic effort at concretizing and operationalizing this point of view. There are multitudes of ways that this can be accomplished through youth-led initiatives. These

principles help practitioners navigate through the difficult waters of practice. As the saying goes, "To practice is human. To implement is divine!" Practitioners rely on principles for guidance in developing interventions under a wide variety of circumstances and settings.

In this chapter I provide a foundation for youth-led research by focusing on its primary goals, principles, objectives, and potential outcomes. Each of these areas represents an important dimension of the planning and implementation process that goes with an intervention such as youth-led research, and brings with it a range of potential approaches. Thus, practitioners and organizations sponsoring this form of research have a high degree of flexibility in how to conceptualize and carry out youth-led research. This is a very important quality because "one size" does not fit all organizations and communities.

❖ GOALS

Youth-initiated research and the corresponding values and questions guiding it must be firmly grounded in the reality of what is important in the lives of youth at a particular point in time, and not in what adults think should be important to youth. Thus, a goal, or set of goals, serves to motivate and guide interested parties or constituencies toward using positive social change as a guide to developing research questions. A goal can be defined as a vague and inspirational statement of what is to be accomplished through an intervention. A goal, in essence, sets the stage for the development of principles, which in turn lead to the creation of operational objectives.

It is critical that research, at least that which is based in the community or evaluation of social programs, must have as a central purpose a bringing about of positive social change in the lives of youth in one form or another (Campbell, Edgar, & Halstead, 1994). Social researchers never have the luxury of seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Thus, having a clear focus and purpose for undertaking a research project serves as a beacon or guide for youth-led research. The process of answering research questions (as well as the actual answers), as a result, must have significant meaning for those undertaking the research and those willing to answer the questions and be a part of the research. The more significant the questions being asked are, the higher will be the likelihood of instilling motivation in all parties to engage in the research. However, this also results in higher expectations for positive and significant change to occur once the research has been completed.

Interestingly, as adults we expect outstanding behavior from youth, yet have very little confidence in their abilities to meet our expectations. In many ways, we expect more from them than we do from ourselves (Hine, 2000):

> We seem to have moved, without skipping a beat, from blaming our parents for the ills of society to blaming our children. We want them to embody virtues we only rarely practice. We want them to eschew habits we've never managed to break. Their transgressions aren't their own. They send us the unwelcome, rarely voiced message that we, the adults, have failed. (p. 3)

Howard et al. (2002) comment that those who work with a human rights focus and with provision of services to marginalized youth have shown the greatest enthusiasm for youth-led research. This embrace is probably due to the need to empower youth while generating data and information on how best to engage them in the process and achieve important social changes in their lives. Research becomes a political method that emancipates and transforms rather than one that emphasizes scientific integrity and maintains the status quo. Embracing a rights perspective naturally influences the nature and purpose of any social investigation.

The goals of youth-led research, in essence, are grounded in the belief that society can be made better only through the partnership of all sectors of the country, including our youth. Cheshire and Edwards (1998), for example, note that the involvement of children as researchers has a relatively long and distinguished history in the United Kingdom, dating back to the 1960s. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) effectively argue that students must play a central role in the creation of knowledge within the classroom; knowledge acquisition must be accompanied by a high level of critical understanding and competencies in the search for a more socially, politically, and economically equitable and fair society. Steinberg and Kincheloe go on to define student researchers as those individuals "who possess a vision of 'what could be' and a set of skills to uncover 'what actually is'" (p. 2). Thus, student as researcher within a school classroom should be competent in critiquing "mainstream" knowledge and institutions, and the effects of power relationships and privilege.

The goals of research are further grounded in the belief that all age groups are capable of undertaking research. Research does not, as a

result, have to be complicated, expensive, or technologically centric. Research has over time been conceptualized and operationalized as resting in the hands of few, who in turn have transformed the knowledge, science, and technology generated by research into an industry that has served to disempower those for whom it was intended to benefit (Shrestha, 2000).

Shrestha (2000) argues that research must not be viewed as the exclusive domain of any one age group:

Research is a natural behavior of all persons. An infant explores, interacts, experiments, learns and adapts or makes changes in one's biophysical and psychosocial domains alone with others and [the] environment. This way, the people survive, grow, develop and make innovations and changes throughout their life individually as well as collectively. . . . Research is thus a common medium of perception and development in establishing dynamic relations in and around the total niche of people and environment. Historically, too, throughout the period of human development some tried to put research in straight-jackets in order to monopolize research and research technology to harvest benefits and exploit others and nature. (p. 1)

Having students' voices influence their educational activity involvement is sometimes much easier said than done. The quest to foster youth voices has its challenges:

It is tempting to think if you pay attention to students' voices, you will hear what you already know. Secretly, adults—outside schools as well as in—generally believe that they know best. Just as tempting is to take at face value the quick responses students often give when asked for input. As we know but too often forget, some students feed back what they think adult listeners want to hear. Some feel ill-qualified to render an opinion, and some fear reprisal for speaking what they believe is true. Hardest of all, some students, even when encouraged, keep their feelings under wrap. (Cervone & Cushman, 2002, p. 97)

It may be unreasonable to expect youth to feel comfortable in articulating their opinions when asked to do so because of countless numbers of years when their opinions were not valued or even sought. Thus, the process of getting youth to voice their opinions may take a lot

Figure 3.1   Social-Related Goals

1. Ultimately increase the effectiveness and efficacy of youth programs and services.

2. Create an organizational and community climate conducive to civic involvement by youth by tapping their expertise.

3. Provide youth with meaningful learning opportunities that will result in competencies that can be translated to other spheres in their lives (Males, 1996, 1998).

4. Provide youth with meaningful opportunities to engage in dialogue among themselves and with adults about their perceptions of their social reality. There is a wide agreement that there must be a meaningful link between the inquiry, researchers, and the audience (Alcoff, 1994; Schwandt, 1996). This dialogue can result in new understandings pertaining to issues and possible solutions; it also can generate enthusiasm for the process of research by highlighting its worth and potential contribution to positive social change.

longer and require greater effort than most adults are willing to acknowledge. It may be best to view this process developmentally, with an understanding that it will take time and accomplishment of various stages to get youth to the point where they feel empowered enough to give voice to their opinions. Patience and persistence assume added importance in bringing about changes in youth behavior; the same can be said about adults!

At minimum, youth-led research should accomplish four primary social-related goals, all of equal importance (see Figure 3.1). Each of these four goals, in turn, addresses immediate and future needs and systematically builds on the capabilities of youth and the goals they possess for their future. Building on or enhancing competencies is one of the most direct benefits of youth-led research in addition to getting youth-generated data and recommendations.

The process by which to achieve these goals within a research arena cannot be overly stressed (Save the Children, 2000):

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) is a process shaped primarily by stakeholders—in this instance children and young people. . . . As with all participatory research, children's participation in PME starts with negotiating with those who control children's time, their freedom to travel, to have information, and have and express opinions. The key to negotiating children's

freedom to participate is clarity about what is expected from their participation. It is vital to stress that participation is based on equality and not on privilege. (p. 30)

❖ PRINCIPLES

Principles play an influential role in helping us to negotiate our way through life's difficulties as well as life's more pleasant periods. Consequently, it should not come as any great surprise that they also play a significant role in professional interventions. In fact, principles play a monumental role in helping to guide any form of social intervention. They act as a vital bridge between the world of the academics and theories, and the world of the practitioners. In essence, they connect theory to the "real world." Principles should never be meant to restrict practitioners. Instead, they are meant to provide license to individualize practice by taking into account local circumstances (issues, resources, goals) in devising an intervention (Delgado, 2002). It is necessary to create a set of principles that specifically apply to engaging youth in a research role within communities and programs.

Earls and Carlson (2002) put forth a value or vision that should guide any form of youth-involved research, which is that youth-led research must embrace youth participation in order to create a more valid and useful product or outcome of the research: "In the process, social science achieves a closer approximation to reality. We claim that youth participation in research adds significantly to substantive validity and adds another dimension to the research (and policy implications), namely, democratic legitimacy" (p. 63). In essence, researchers must not only concern themselves with reliability and validity, but they must also add democratic legitimacy. Principles must embrace elements of Earls and Carlson's (2002) emphasis on participation.

A number of researchers have drawn on their experience in conducting youth-led research, lending the field an opportunity to draw on these lessons to establish a set of guiding principles (Schensul, Berg, et al., 2004). Earls and Carlson (2002), for example, share some observations of their experience in Chicago conducting a study of youth well-being:

First, adults must provide some structure to kindle that motivation and provide incentives for children to initiate. In the context of our research study the purposes and design of the work provided

sufficient structure. Second, we discovered the importance of having an adult present. Good guidance, like good nutrition, had to be a regular and engaging affair. Somewhat surprisingly, we learned that it was too easy to over estimate the children's readiness to keep activities moving forward when an adult partner was temporarily absent. Another surprising aspect of this experience was the frequency of absenteeism, despite the children's loss of salary. Apparently, the need for free time was more important to them. (p. 74)

In discussing their experience initiating participatory action research with Latino youth with disabilities, Balcazar, Keys, Kaplan, and Suarez-Balcazar (1998) highlight the consciousness-raising aspects of such research. However, this type of research is not without its set of challenges, such as relinquishing control of the research endeavor, settling for a short-duration project rather than one that is extended in time and goals, and the lack of literature reporting on the outcomes of youth participatory action research.

It is important that a set of guiding principles for youth-led research be presented. It is tempting, although not very useful, to present an exhaustive list of principles and allow the reader to select nine principles that best meet their interests and needs. However, I have elected instead to select nine principles that, I believe, establish a core that must guide any youth-led research project regardless of its goals, context, and circumstances (see Figure 3.2). These principles span a variety of arenas. Like all sets of guiding principles, this set embraces a set of values. These values are empowerment, inclusiveness, rights, and equality across all sociocultural groups.

In addition, this set of principles is grounded in the professional literature, representing a compilation of principles developed by a variety of organizations and practitioners, including myself. I will utilize practice examples throughout this book as a means of illustrating their significance for use in development of youth-led research.

❖ LIMITATIONS AND CONCERNS
REGARDING YOUTH-LED RESEARCH

Youth-led research brings with it numerous advantages for sponsors, participants, and the community at-large. However, youth involvement in research has limitations that must be acknowledged and

Figure 3.2   Principles for Youth-Led Research

1. Research must ultimately benefit youth researchers, participants, and commu-
    nities (Lau, Netherland, & Haywood, 2003; London et al., 2003; Mead, 2003).
    The ability of youth-led research to maximize benefits across social arenas and
    constituencies, particularly those that have historically directly or indirectly
    resulted from research, is critical to the ultimate advancement of the field and
    its ability to play a vital role within community capacity enhancement initiatives.
    Clarifying the benefits that result from the research will increase the quality of
    the results by getting youth to believe in the importance of their work.

2. Research must be timed to maximize the participation of youth as both the foci
    of the research and as researchers themselves (Schensul, LoBianco, et al.,
    2004). No research stage is exempt from youth participation and decision
    making (Matysik, 2000; YOUTH IMPACT, 2002). Every effort, in turn, must be
    made to increase the participation and responsibility of youth to assume
    greater decision-making powers in the project.

3. Children and youth have the right to be at the table discussing research along-
    side adults and are entitled to engage in a process that encourages giving
    them a legitimate voice (Checkoway, Dobbie, & Richards-Schuster, 2003;
    Voakes, 2003). Milner and Carolin (1999) argue that adults must actively
    endeavor to really listen to the voices of children and youth in a manner that
    they are unaccustomed to. Youth must be viewed as possessing rights, opin-
    ions, and ideals that are equally valid as those of adults, although they certainly
    represent a departure from those of adults (International Youth Foundation,
    2000).

4. Youth-led research must not violate the rights of those being asked to partici-
    pate in a research undertaking, youth or adult. As in adult-led research, ethical
    considerations are prominent and must be developed with specific procedures
    clearly articulated to ensure the protection of subjects, data, and researchers.
    These rights must be prominently addressed in the training of youth researchers
    and available to all research subjects and the community-at-large to see. These
    rights must always be written so that they are comprehensible to whoever
    reads them, and in multiple languages when necessary.

5. Research methods must stress inclusion by taking into account any physical,
    emotional, or cognitive challenges children or youth subjects may have
    (Checkoway et al., 2003). No individual can, or should, be excluded from par-
    ticipation in a research project because of a disability or an inability to read or
    write. This applies to both those being researched and those doing the
    research. Communities consist of multiple types of groups, and research must
    endeavor to include their voices to ensure that findings are representative of
    the community.

6. Youth bring a unique perspective to the research process that must be taken
    into account in financially compensating them for participation. Local and self-
    knowledge have equal if not greater legitimacy than knowledge obtained from

(Continued)

books and formal classroom instruction. Thus, youth should not automatically be considered "minimum wage" staff simply because of their age or need for training and support. Adequately compensating youth, particularly in the case of those from marginalized communities, is another way of supporting these communities indirectly, and not just through an accurate assessment of their needs, issues, and assets.

7. Because children and youth are not a monolithic group, youth-led research must strive to recognize the power of diversity within this age group. Thus, there is a tremendous need to make findings reflect the impact of diversity in the lives of both the subjects of research and the team of researchers (Delgado, 1979). Social and economic justice themes must ultimately find their way through all phases of a research project, particularly the recommendations in the final report.

8. Youth-led research must embrace social change as the primary and ultimate outcome of any research undertaking. This change goal will be arrived at through a participatory process that results in a consensus decision pertaining to target and process to be utilized (Fetterman, 2003). It must also serve to mobilize a community and provide it with a detailed road map for what strategic changes are recommended as the next steps.

9. Youth-led research must never be conceptualized as episodic; instead, it must be viewed as an ongoing process that is integral to an organization's mission (Checkoway et al., 2003). This form of activity needs to be valued equally alongside other forms of programming that have as a central goal improving the life of youth within schools and communities (Brase et al., 2004).

systematically addressed. As in adult-led research, these limitations can be minimized but not totally eliminated (Delgado, 1981, 1995; Save the Children, 2000). The following twelve limitations, as the reader will quickly note, are not easily overcome. This list, I might add, is not in any particular rank order pertaining to importance or challenge:

1. Although youth can have a profound understanding of events and conditions in their lives, asking them to draw social policy implications, for example, may be asking too much of them because of their limited understanding of the broader world. High expectations of youth, but not unrealistic ones, must guide youth-led research. The danger of expecting and demanding too much is offset by expecting and demanding too little. Finding the delicate balance between the two is an ever-constant challenge, but one that must be addressed head on in any youth-led research venture. Developmentally and

experientially, older youth may be in an advantageous position when compared to younger and less experienced youth, to draw policy conclusions.

2. The concept of power, although usually associated with adults, is also a critical factor in youth interactions. Some youth may find it too arduous to share or hand over power to other youth involved in the research process. Effort must be made throughout the research endeavor to identify power differentials and help youth recognize these situations and develop appropriate ways to redress them. Some of the power differential may be based on sociocultural factors such as gender. Heightened awareness of how decision making occurs and how responsibilities are assigned can prove important in facilitating the growth process for youth researchers, and can help them better understand their own biases.

3. Youth researchers may encounter situations that parallel conditions that they, too, may be experiencing or have experienced, making for potentially difficult interviews or seriously compromising their participation in a research project. Although this subject is usually a part of any well-designed training program, it can easily re-emerge in an interview when the subject matter is one that has had, or currently has, profound meaning in the life of the researcher. Such situations not only increase the likelihood of youth obtaining information that may be skewed, but they can also cause severe discomfort or even trigger an emotional response that can eventually lead to youth dropping out of the research team.

One study involving youth interviewing key informants in Latino-owned botanical shops (culture-based pharmacies) is such a case in point. Two interviewers absented themselves from this phase of the research project because of fears they had about botanical shops. Both interviewers had had negative experiences with this type of nontraditional setting (Delgado, 1996).

4. Parental concerns over the safety of their children conducting interviews may seriously limit the selection of the geographical area being studied. A process exploring parental concerns needs to be a part of any youth-led research, with the understanding that parents may insist on logistical changes to ensure the well-being of their children. Seeking ways to inform parents of youth researchers directly and indirectly (e.g., through newsletters) is one way of minimizing concerns parents may have about the safety of their children.

A meeting of the parents or guardians of the youth researcher prior to initiation of the actual research is highly recommended, to help allay concerns and build strong community support for the project. This meeting can be cast in a variety of ways. However, a "celebration" of the inauguration of the project provides an uplifting forum for issues to be raised and for validation and support to be expressed.

5. The gender and age of the researcher influence the nature of a research study. It is almost never advisable, for example, to have female youth researchers interviewing male respondents. The reverse is also true. Pairing male and female interviewers minimizes this potential barrier, although it is costly to implement. Having field interviews conducted in certain sections of a community may raise safety concerns on the part of parents as well as youth, as already noted. Sometimes these geographical areas develop reputations of violence because there is an excessive probability of violence occurring there. Sometimes this is not the case, but reputations persist. Parents may restrict youth participation in a study due to safety concerns.

6. Question types and study foci are influenced by the age of the researcher. When youth are entrusted to interview adults, for example, the nature and types of questions must be carefully chosen. Questions pertaining to stigmatizing adult problems, such as unemployment, substance use or abuse, and health conditions, may not be considered "legitimate" for youth interviewers to ask. Limitations on the type of questions that youth can ask adults limits the nature and scope of youth-led research projects.

7. Youth undertaking studies involving other youth who speak a language other than English as their primary language must be sufficiently bilingual to be able to record responses, particularly when interviewers code-switch (change languages within a sentence). This situation is not that unusual when the content of the interview elicits an emotional response, causing respondents to switch to their primary language even though they may be fluent in English and may have started the interview in English. These types of interviews can be very demanding on youth researchers. It not only necessitates that they, too, switch languages, but also that they be able to record the responses in the primary language of the respondent. In situations where the interviews are tape recorded and later transcribed, the expense of doing so can be quite formidable because of the kind of language expertise needed on the part of the transcriber.

8. Confidentiality is the cornerstone of any good research and practice. Thus, breach of confidentiality takes on added significance in cases where youth live in the same community in which they are conducting research. This point is ironic because youth possession of local knowledge allows them to bring much-needed expertise and perspective to a research project. Because of these concerns, parents may not grant permission for their children to be interviewed. As adults, we know how difficult it is, or impossible, as the case may be, to keep a "secret." The challenge is just as great for youth, no more so than when they come across the individual they have interviewed in a social situation or in school.

9. Research undertaken by youth may not be given the respect it deserves by other youth and adults because of the notion that if the project is considered "important," then adults must carry it out. This point may resonate for adults. However, it also applies to youth. Youth researchers are in an excellent position to undertake research on topics that are particularly relevant for youth. It becomes ironic that other youth may be reluctant to participate because they do not believe the research to be serious because adults are not in the positions of power in the research. Youth researchers must be prepared to have their expertise and legitimacy questioned by other youth, difficult as this may be to accept.

10. The "scientific merits" of youth-led research findings will undoubtedly be challenged as youth seek to disseminate their findings to professional audiences and key community stakeholders. The blurring of the lines between researcher and subject will often be the focus of this criticism. Park (1993) addresses this very point in a critique of positivist research:

The gist of the criticism is that not maintaining a proper distance between the researcher and the researched, as in the policy in participatory research, seriously compromises the objectivity of the data, thus destroying its validity. This charge, however, derives from a misguided emulation of natural science methodology [that] has maintained the separation of the subject and the object in controlled experiments. The arguments concerning this shortsighted methodological stance in the social sciences are overwhelmingly on the side of the practice prevalent in participatory research. (pp. 16–17)

Scientific merit is not absolute and therefore is highly subject to sociopolitical factors in its determination. No research is perfect, but there are ways to minimize criticism and increase the chances that the results do, in fact, represent the views of the community. There are critical lessons to be learned that have applicability beyond research. Youth, for example, must accept that achievement of perfection can be a goal, but one that cannot be achieved in everyday life. Making an honest effort to minimize bias and do the best job possible are goals that will serve youth well in life, however.

11.   The general rule of 50/50 has been applied to youth development projects and is also applicable to youth-led research (Goggin et al., 2002). What is 50/50? Simply, 50 percent of the time is devoted to formal activities, such as training and work, that serve to engage youth in purposeful activities that stress some aspect of educational learning. The remaining 50 percent is allocated for informal interactions and activities that stress fun and entertainment. This does not mean that learning is not taking place, however. It means that a causal atmosphere allows learning to transpire in ways that engage youth. This perspective often flies in the face of most conventional research projects that stress the seriousness of the undertaking at the cost of fun and purposeful learning.

12.   There are a number of concerns, or considerations, that must be taken into account in using certain visual-focused research methods, although these methods offer much promise in the field of youth-led community research (Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Save the Children, 2000):

1. Drawing as a means of communication is very much dependent on drawing abilities and not everyone has these abilities, adult or youth.

2. Depending on the age of the respondent, drawing may not be an activity associated with other children or /youth, and they may consider it "child's play."

3. In the case of youth who draw frequently, their images may be the result of stereotypical images that are based on past teaching and discussions rather than current perspectives

4. Interpretation of images by adults can be the result of misinterpretations.

Visual-focused methods are not panaceas for situations where youth are illiterate or have difficulty expressing them in youth-led research. They must be considered part of a wide array of methods that can be tapped when appropriate to both the content being researched and the local circumstances.

The twelve limitations outlined above should not come as any great surprise to those who have participated in youth-led research. Any form of research would be fraught with limitations. Biases inherent in losing objectivity are more than offset by the "reliability" of the results from being closer to the phenomenon being studied (B. Williams, 1996). However, youth-led research brings with it a set of limitations that directly correspond to the age of the researcher, which is not the case in adult-led research.

❖ INNOVATIVE METHODS OF YOUTH-INVOLVED RESEARCH

Community-based research according to Strand et al. (2003) encourages development and application of "unconventional criteria" for determining the most appropriate research methods, and avoids discipline-bound methodologies. These innovative approaches can encompass video, art, theater, or quilting activities, for example, that seek to tap local knowledge, making this form of research particularly appealing to youth. Any discussion of youth-led research is not complete without attention to the use of innovative research methods. The openness of the field to new ways of gathering information makes this field very attractive to youth, practitioners, and academics alike.

The seemingly constant introduction of innovative methods and research designs makes vigorously staying abreast of the field arduous for most practitioners and academics alike; innovation by its very nature brings with it a set of challenges. Getting detailed information on an innovation is one example, particularly when it occurs in a foreign country that does not share the English language. Relying on academic publications takes too long because of the peer-review process and potential extended publication lag time. Access to reports and the language that is used can also hamper publications. Scholarly publications by the very nature are not intended for public consumption, and require a considerable amount of decoding and rewriting to make the content useable for the general public.

Youth-led research has expanded dramatically over the past decade and, in the process of doing so, has embraced numerous innovative and fun approaches to undertaking research. The introduction of nonwritten and visual-based methods, for example, has broadened the reach of this type of research to include youth with disabilities who would normally not be able to participate, and various age groups of children (Kirby, 1999; Morris, 2000; Ward, 1997). Further, an emphasis on visual methods has allowed youth who are illiterate to also share their voices with the world. A stress on inclusion in creating methods naturally involves careful consideration of who can and who cannot participate in a purposeful manner.

Theis, Pickup, Hoa, and Lan (1999) do a wonderful job of describing the use of photography as a research tool by young Vietnamese youth with visual impairments, and show how participation is not restricted because of a disability. The use of photography, with the proper training, support, and equipment, allows youth to capture a perspective that may not initially lend itself to the conventional use of written or verbal language. It also provides them with a vehicle to involve the broader community through possible exhibits in public venues.

Save the Children (2000) has issued a challenge for youth, particularly in their role as researchers, that no age group should be ignored because they are too young. This organization has played an international influential role in bringing forth new research methods that place youth in all research roles, particularly the roles of participant and researcher.

The use of innovative methods de-emphasizing written and spoken techniques can allow researchers, in this case adults, to involve even those as young as 3 or 4 years old. The use of felt boards to draw pictures, role-play, and play, for example, can tap children's views and feelings about particular subject matter. In fact, many of the research methods used in participatory research depend on visual techniques that can be modified according to the developmental stage of children and youth. These techniques, as I've already noted, also have the advantage of being able to enlist the opinions and perspectives of youth who have experienced great tragedies and trauma in their lives but have not been afforded a meaningful opportunity to share their experiences with others.

Cameras can be an effective method through which youth can record what is good about a community, what is missing, or what needs to be altered to make a community stronger. Pictures, in addition, can

be used to establish baselines and monitor conditions over an extended period of time, thus recording positive or negative changes. Photography, as a result, can be an effective vehicle through which youth can use a set of "lenses" to record their perceptions and lend themselves to comparisons, dialogues, and archival retrieval for future reference. The peers, parents, and elders of the community, in turn, can attend exhibitions of these photographs, allowing youth to effectively "show off" their talents and work, making an exhibition a community-unifying and -validating event. In some communities across the United States, there are relatively few such events and when they occur, they become that much more significant.

The introduction of digital cameras will no doubt revolutionize the use of photographs as qualitative data–gathering tools. Although considerably less expensive than digital cameras, conventional cameras, particularly those that are disposable, can end up costing more, due to the time and expense required for film development. Photographs taken with digital cameras can facilitate comparative assessment within and between communities across the nation and internationally. Youth in one city can share and have access to photographs from youth in another community several thousand miles away and be able to dialogue more easily with their counterparts. Compared with conventional photographs, digital pictures can be more easily manipulated to allow for more critical analysis; for example, sections within a photograph can be enlarged to highlight key findings. Finally, digital pictures lend themselves to wide-scale national and international dissemination through the use of the Internet and computers. This allows youth to exhibit their work in a manner that can influence other youth thousands of miles away, unlike conventional photograph exhibitions that almost exclusively target a local audience.

Lau et al. (2003) report on a middle-school project where youth researchers, as part of an interview team, spent two weeks interviewing and photographing students, teachers, staff, and parents, with focus on the prevention of violence and what action steps are need to address it within their school. The authors report on another school project where seventh- and eighth-grade boys utilize video and scripts to interview youth, school district employees, school staff, and foundation representatives and make a movie about what elements make for a good after-school program.

Like digital cameras, video cameras have emerged as research tools that can be used effectively by youth. The continued decrease in

the costs of video cameras and the widespread availability of such equipment has increased its attractiveness as a method for undertaking research. As Howard et al. (2002) report, the use of video has become a method for successfully engaging youth in the research process ():

> Video is an important medium; it is easily transportable, inexpensive and is congruent with many young people's "culture reading" skills. Unlike live performance (i.e., music, drama, dance, etc.), it can be viewed more often than once, and can reach a potential audience larger than any auditorium maximum capacity. It was important that the medium for this project was video, given that it is a relevant cultural medium for the participants and for the intended audience. (p. 7)

Howard et al.'s (2002) observations of the attractiveness of video within youth circles suggest that this method of research can also serve as an attractive recruitment tool.

Faulkner (1998) reports on the use of video cameras as a means of increasing the participation of youth in documenting and communicating about their lives and the challenges they face in meeting their basic needs. Youth were able to integrate drama by re-creating scenes from popular Brazilian soap operas about the life of the wealthy. Youth assumed the roles of reporters and decision makers of who best represented this perspective. They, in turn, developed technical expertise in producing, directing, filming, acting, and editing their own documentary. Adults provided assistance when solicited to do so. However, the final product was shaped and owned by youth themselves.

The following testimony of Hayley, 16 years old, on the benefits of using video as a research tool illustrates the multiple gains that are capable through youth-led research (Howard et al., 2002):

> I just want to say that participating in the video project was one of the best things I have ever done. I have gained heaps of experience and a better understanding of myself, youth and society. It has really opened my eyes to the career pathways I might choose in the future. (p. 7)

Hayley's transformative experience is not unique to this individual. This type of experience can play an important role in helping to guide a young person along a career path that may not involve

research, but may entail the use of videos and the communications field, for example.

My experience with video cameras and youth-led research occurred in the mid-1990s when a group of Latino (Puerto Rican) youth in Holyoke, Massachusetts, undertook a project developing a video of Latino community needs (Delgado, 1995). This needs assessment represented a visual assessment of their community and how adults in authority were neglecting youth needs. Youth selected the scenes, chose background music, developed narrative, videotaped, and edited the video. The project was focused on drug prevention because of the source of funding and as a result, youth had this as a central organizing theme. Afterward, a premiere, which involved parents, peers not in the program, and community leaders, was held and allowed youth to showcase their accomplishment. Each youth, in turn, was provided with a copy of the video to be shown in their homes and in the institutions that they felt needed to be educated. Some of the youth participants showed the video within their high school classrooms and in the houses-of-worship they belonged to.

Participation in video production is an effective way of generating excitement in a research project. There is a certain Hollywood aura associated with the creation of a video and a premiere showing. The excitement can be positive in getting a community to coalesce with youth and generating momentum toward achieving social goals. A visual report, if you wish, unlike conventional written reports, brings the potential for engaging community residents because it allows groups to share information, even if members are illiterate. Just as importantly, however, video reports lend themselves to engaging youth who would otherwise not bother with a written report or summary. Unlike written reports, videos provide youth with a chance to see themselves and hear their own voices. This certainly personalizes the research process for youth.

Based on their assessment of participatory evaluation methods used in Nepalese children's clubs, Hart and Rajbhandary (2003) identify a number of promising approaches for encouraging research participation from youth. Their central guiding principles include (a) making research methods "simple and clear" for use by youth who are not formally schooled, (b) putting data analysis and interpretation in the hands of youth researchers, and (c) taking into account time restrictions and attention spans.

Community mapping used yarn, pieces of cardboard, and crayons to encourage youth to identify nonclub members in all households

(understanding patterns of social exclusion), categorization and ranking participation in activities using the movement game and card sorting, arranging cards into diagrams as a means of developing an understanding of organizational structure and decision making, use of skits of preferred activities to establish categories for a preference-matrix, and Venn diagrams for identification of the people and organizations that have any influence on the running of clubs (Hart & Rajbhandry, 2003).

Innovations in research methods are not limited to visual approaches. When children and youth are literate, there are various ways of eliciting responses that do not involve the usual question-answer format, which may work well with adults but may be considered too limiting for use with youth. Participatory methods used with literate respondents can include essays, poetry, diaries, recall, and observations (Save the Children, 2000). Storyboards or comics have been used to assist youth in describing scripts of common events in their lives. Typically, figures are presented, and the respondents are asked to fill in a blank narrative to help them express a scene or event in their lives. This method utilizes visual cues as prompts for narrative and does so in a way that does not embarrass youth in the process.

The importance and use of semistructured or unstructured interviews are well acknowledged within the field of youth-led research (Save the Children, 2000):

> One of the best ways to build up an understanding of children's lives, their interests and needs is to interview them. Interviewing is one of the most fundamental approaches to research and both semi-structured and unstructured interviews are vital to any participatory work. If done sensitively, they can elicit a great deal of qualitative information. Children, too, can have a reasonable amount of control over the process and the issues covered. Adults can carry out the interviews with children, or children themselves can interview one another. These interviews can cover life stories, testimonies of an event or specific topics. (pp. 23–24)

A search for innovative methods does not necessitate discarding conventional approaches, however. Although the field of youth-led research certainly lends itself well to the introduction and use of innovative methods, there are many appealing elements in the "old-fashion" methods when they take into account the age of the respondents and researchers and are sufficiently flexible to take into account local

circumstances. The combination of conventional and innovative methods provides researchers with the flexibility of designing research agendas that capitalize on local conditions and strengths, therefore allowing research questions and local circumstances to dictate research design rather than the reverse. A mixture of conventional and innovative methods also brings diversity to a research undertaking, increasing the likelihood of keeping youth researchers engaged and highly motivated.

❖ OUTCOMES OF YOUTH-INVOLVED RESEARCH INITIATIVES

The "best practices" movement has provided a rationale and framework for documenting the effectiveness of youth-led research and other youth-led initiatives. Although best practices have emerged in virtually every aspect of human services, it has only recently made its way into the youth development and youth-led fields (Delgado et al., 2005). Best-practice challenges related to making youth development and youth-led relevant to nontypical youth provide an exciting opportunity for evaluators to influence the field of practice.

Any in-depth appreciation of youth-involved research outcomes by necessity must take a broad and multifaceted perspective, helping ensure relevance and direct applicability to this field. The benefits to be derived from youth-involved research are many and so are the challenges of researching them. Calvert, Zeldin, and Weisenbach (2002) note that these positive impacts need to be explored and detailed. The potential expansiveness of the field of evaluation brings with it a host of specific challenges related to identifying and measuring a research project's impact, particularly when changes do not occur immediately. The establishment of a foundation from which positive social change can occur is a major achievement, although difficult to measure when it is initially established.

The outcomes of youth-led research, as a result, must be placed within a developmental framework that facilitates their identification and measurement (Moore & Lippman, 2005). McCall and Shannon's (1999) framework for investigation of youth-led initiatives, in this case youth-led health promotion, can help us better understand the effectiveness and sustainability of youth-led research. McCall and Shannon developed a six-stage framework to categorize the developmental stages of research:

Guiding Goals, Principles, Objectives, and Outcomes   97

Figure 3.3   Developmental Stages of Research
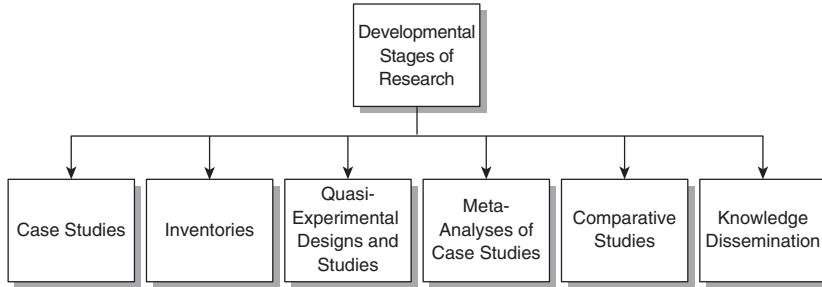
SOURCE: McCall and Shannon (1999, pp. 4–5).

1. **Case Studies:** The cases are generally qualitative in nature and rely heavily on participant feedback and observations. Data primarily raise issues and are used to create linkages between activities and apparent results. Case studies bring an inherent advantage of providing a detailed and vivid rendering of a phenomenon, and therefore make for relatively easy access to practitioners and scholars alike. In addition, they attempt to develop a holistic picture that facilitates the adaptation of an intervention that takes into account how local circumstances played a role in shaping outcomes.

2. **Inventories:** Efforts to catalogue various types of programs and activities based on established criteria play an important role within the field. Data, in turn, are used to advance theories and explanations based on said groupings. Inventories allow researchers and practitioners to establish a better grasp of the key elements involved in an intervention.

3. **Quasi-Experimental Designs and Studies:** Empirical observations are derived utilizing quasi-experimental designs and studies. The results are considered summative but not generalizable to other settings and situations. The attractiveness of quasi-experimental designs and studies is unquestioned in research because it facilitates the isolation of key factors at play in bringing about a studied change.

4. **Meta-Analyses of Case Studies:** The goal of developing explanatory theories is served through the analyses of case

studies. Meta-analyses, however, are predicated on the availability of numerous studies with sufficient details to allow comparisons along a variety of key dimensions.

5. **Comparative Studies:** Once theories are developed they then lend themselves to large-scale comparative studies, allowing scholars to draw conclusions based on empirical findings. These comparisons can cut across national and international boundaries, making their appeal that much greater in the scientific community.

6. **Knowledge Dissemination:** Knowledge development and dissemination represent the final stage in any research endeavor; policy development ensues for this increased awareness. (pp. 4–5)

Youth-led research, like its youth-led health promotion example is best categorized as stage one (case studies), at this point in time. This stage is the most rudimentary of the six identified by McCall and Shannon (1999). However, this categorization by no means should be considered a slight on this movement. All movements such as youth-led research go through an initial stage that, at times, can best be described as confusing or ambiguous, but one that generates considerable excitement and imagination. Youth-led research falls into this stage, but has the potential to make its way up the ladder, so to speak, and reach the stage of *knowledge dissemination.* This progression may take years if not decades to achieve, however.

Youth-led initiatives effectively cast youth into a spotlight that focuses on their capabilities and contributions to community and society. These types of initiatives, in addition, engage youth in dialogue and create opportunities to enhance their skills and encourage their participatation in social problem-solving strategies (Burgess, 2000). Such initiatives also represent a creative way of employing youth that would otherwise be excluded from the labor market, and they help circulate money within the community (Israel, 2000). Opportunities to earn money in ways that stress positive civic contributions directly benefit youth, their communities, and society in general. Youth involvement in research also results in youth becoming more self-confident and developing a belief in their power to create their own future; their empowerment also empowers their community, which is especially important in cases where the community is undervalued (Marsh, 2002).

Further, youth-led research can provide valuable insights into how schools and community-based organizations can develop structured means to involve youth in decision-making roles that most significantly influence their lives (Fletcher, 2003). This type of research provides youth with competencies and insight into how organizations effectively disempower them. One youth member notes the following benefits of participation in decision-making (qtd. in Goggin et al., 2002): "Young people felt that they had become more aware of their own community . . . its laws, its people, its youth, and what they need. They feel that education works in both directions: they educate the community and are educated by it." (p. 33) The benefits of empowerment can be far-reaching and life-altering for youth and their communities.

YOUTH IMPACT (2001) youth program evaluators in San Francisco comment on their various forms of growth: "The things we enjoyed from the whole process were learning presentation, writing, and critical thinking skills. We also had the opportunity to learn more about San Francisco and all the wonderful CBOs [community-based organizations] serving children and youth" (p. 7). According to Sabo (2003b), the competencies youth may acquire as researchers are quite impressive (survey development and analysis, focus group facilitation, logic model development, program development, and qualitative and quantitative data analyses) and compliment those identified by Youth Impact.

The following six youth testimonials from the Youth Impact evaluation project illustrate the range and types of benefits youth derive from participation and how they broaden this vista of the world around them. This broadening of their world can only be a positive outcome in the course of their lives (Youth Impact, 2001, pp. 20–21):

I believe this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for youth to genuinely improve the programs of San Francisco. (Lily Onovakpuri)

I think my experience was very interesting. It was interesting seeing all the different programs and meeting different people. I learned a lot about different places in the city and a lot of CBOs that I never knew about. (Marvin Rivera)

I learned about evaluation and planning. I had the opportunity to learn about things other kids my age would never have the

opportunity to do. By us being youth ourselves we know what youth want and need and through that we'll be able to work towards providing better services for the youth. (Khalillah Hill)

The things that I learned will be beneficial in life because they will help me further my skills as a person and as a worker doing evaluations in the future. (Kenisha Roach)

I think that Youth IMPACT is giving back a lot to all of the funded CBOs. We are giving them a voice to speak up about the important things that they are doing. We are also giving them a voice to let the government know the help they need to improve their CBO. (Jamie Golden)

I like doing the evaluation. It made me more aware and more interested in politics and things that go on in the city so it can help me in the future. (Kamael Burch)

Branda Robertson's (Columbus, Indiana) observations on her growth as a result of participating in a community youth mapping research project further highlights the multifaceted gains possible in this type of research (Community Youth Development, 2000):

Not only did it give me something productive to do over the summer months, but it opened up so many opportunities and possibilities for me. It gave me more incentive to keep working for my community, especially for youth. I learned what the real world is like. I was able to interact with adults on a one-to-one basis. I improved my communication skills greatly and gained more self-confidence. I learned what is and is not out there for young people. (p. 1)

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2002) identify five prominent benefits for youth researchers: (1) a method for acquiring knowledge for social action; (2) enable the exercise of political rights; (3) sharing in the democratization of knowledge; (4) preparation for participation in a democratic society; and (5) strengthening social development (pp. 3–4). Youth in Focus (2002), in turn, identify three critical outcomes of youth-led research: It (a) facilitates good youth development, (b) strengthens organizational development and capacity building, and (c) catalyzes youth involvement in community change (pp. 2–3).

Benefits go far beyond making youth competent researchers. In fact, these benefits easily translate into the domain of civic participation, with society being the ultimate beneficiary. London et al. (2003) present a very compelling argument on how youth-led research can effectively transform the lives of youth participants and the organizations sponsoring the research. The nature and force of social action resulting from the research findings can only be possible by what the authors label "careful investment" in youth.

Schensul (1994) identifies three steps that are necessary to transform a research project into an intervention project that has applicability for youth-led research:

1. Determine which causal factors can be altered and which will resist, given the constraints of time and resources.

2. Anticipate what changes are feasible in the causal factors.

3. Anticipate what changes might result in the dependent variable. (p. 3)

The transition from research to social change requires a process of decision making and brokering of competing interests to achieve a consensus on the direction and target for change. The research team in collaboration with outside forces enters into this deliberative process.

Youth researchers must take a multifaceted perspective on their research study experience in order to fully appreciate the impact of their work. Sustain's (2000) community mapping project elicited youth responses along four dimensions: (a) What have I learned? (b) What will I take with me? (c) What did I love? and (d) What will I throw away? These four questions, in turn, divide the experience into attitudes, knowledge, and competencies for each of these dimensions. Just as importantly, experiences do not all have to be positive. Negative experiences, particularly when discussed and the reasons uncovered, can prove just as transformative as positive experiences. Learning, after all, can occur from both positive and negative experiences, although I, like the reader, prefer positive experiences.

D. L. Miller et al.'s (2001) summary of the skill sets developed through participation in research illustrates the benefits youth can obtain through engaging in research:

facilitating interviews, framing open-ended questions, probing for depth, listening, analysing and interpreting data . . . through

active participation in real-life research projects. Successful
collaborative experiences may also increase high school students'
self-efficacy and give them confidence that they have something to
contribute to their peer group and the adult community. (p. 23)

These benefits, not surprisingly, cover a wide variety of types with high
levels of transferability to other arenas.

Another benefit rarely talked about is the potential therapeutic
outcomes youth researchers experience. The discussion of transforma-
tive experiences and outcomes has generally focused on attitudes,
knowledge, and skills. Clacherty and Kistner (2001) report on a highly
innovative youth-led research project based in South Africa. They
report that the research project not only generated important data but
also served as a therapeutic intervention for the adolescent male
researchers (aged 12 to 16 years old) involved in criminal activity. The
research project focused on youth on the "edge of crime." The primary
research tool in the initial stages was a disposable camera.

The boys took photographs that illustrated the "lives of boys in
Kathrorus." The time was spent labeling the photographs and
talking about them, all the time with the boys in the role of "objec-
tive" researchers. The discussion was taped recorded and became
the qualitative data that the adult researcher used to develop a
picture of the reality of boys on the edge of crime and what pushed
them into crime. (p. 1)

South African youth researchers were able to explore and develop
new insights into their own struggles and challenges by recording the
experiences of others; the distancing achieved through the research
role allowed youth to maintain their defenses while concomitantly
beginning to own their own past. Eventually, these youth undertook
similar research projects on school issues, substance abuse, and gun
violence. The positive experiences in one realm served as a foundation
for experiences and research in other realms. Although an emerging
area within youth-led research, youth with histories of receiving
mental health and social services have generally been unexplored and
warrant further in-depth attention from the field.

Perkins and Jones (2002) specifically tie youth development
to youth-led research through the Comprehensive Community
Assessment of Youth Development Opportunities (CCAYDO), a

yearlong assessment and planning project. The primary goals were (Perkins & Jones, 2002):

(1) creating a community taskforce and youth action teams; (2) conducting an assessment of the opportunities for youth in terms of skill development, recreation, and engagement in risk behaviors; (3) identifying the needs and desires of youth, parents, and youth professionals in terms of the enhancement of existing positive youth development opportunities and the creation of new positive youth develop opportunities; and (4) employment of the information gathered from strategies two and three to develop a community mobilization plan to address the identified needs. (p. 2)

Perkins and Jones (2002) have clearly taken the research process far beyond research into the realm of action, illustrating the potential of youth-led research to socially enhance youth lives, their communities, and adult-youth relationships. Further, youth are provided with a viable and meaningful opportunity to learn and serve their communities in the process. Benefits of research, as a result, extend in an ecological manner to a wide range of audiences, both immediately and in the long term, and social arenas. Any concerted effort to better comprehend the outcomes of youth-led research will necessitate the development of longitudinal efforts of both output and impact objectives on communities.

In my experiences with youth-led research (Delgado, 1996, 1998), I found that youth are the primary, although certainly not the only, beneficiaries of youth participation. Based on a community asset assessment undertaken by Latino youth in a New England city in 1994, I identified four benefits the research yielded to the youth and their community:

1. It provided a greater sense of control over the youth's lives, family, and community.

2. It instilled important research skills and knowledge that would serve youth and their community in the future.

3. It provided the community in general, and the Latino community in particular, with a perspective that youth can be, and

are, vital and contributing members of the community, thus
counteracting pervasive views that are deficit-based.

4. It resulted in youth serving as role models for other human
   service organizations.

Like the benefits or skill sets identified by D. L. Miller et al. (2001),
youth, in this case Latino, were cast into roles that are positive, and
they were considered contributing members of the community just
like adults.

Youth can play leadership roles within their respective adult com-
munities and not just with other youth. When these communities do
not share English as their primary language and have cultural values
that are distinctively different from those of the host nation, in this case
the United States, leadership roles can take on important brokering or
bridging functions between the host nation and the newcomer com-
munity (Delgado et al., 2005). As this nation continues to undergo
rapid changes in demographic composition because of the influx of
refugees and immigrants, youth's potential to aid their communities
and the host society in better understanding and appreciating each
other's similarities and differences may well be a critical key to how
well this nation competes in an increasingly global society.

For the Harvard Family Research Project, Horsch et al. (2002) iden-
tified three goals commonly sought in youth-run research projects:
(a) Enhance the individual development of participating youth and
encourage their meaningful involvement in the decisions that affect
their lives. (b) Contribute to organizational development and capacity
enhancement. (c) Provide youth with a vehicle and purpose to create
significant and sustainable community change efforts. These goals
stress capacity enhancement of individuals, institutions, and commu-
nities, and actively unite these three realms together in pursuit of
common goals.

The Triumph and Success Peer Research Project (France, 2002),
based in England, shares the sentiments that youth researchers benefit
tremendously from participation in research: "Peer research clearly has
a future as a method of engaging young people in project work. Not
only does it create opportunities for young people to learn new skills
but also for them to gain personal benefits from being involved" (p. 4).
These benefits are not restricted to any particular core element. It is
entirely possible for youth to benefit socially, emotionally, spiritually,
morally, cognitively, and physically. The core element(s) emphasized
can vary depending on the primary goals of the project.

Finally, Matysik (2000), in summing up the benefits for youth program evaluators, notes how youth involvement can be a positive and possibly tranformative experience:

> Youth self-reported that their involvement in the participatory projects impacted them personally in the following ways: by learning about the process of research, gaining experience in solving problems, becoming more able to accept new and different ideas, recognizing that it is acceptable to ask for help, experiencing teamwork, feeling more confident in their own abilities, and realizing that the learning process can be enjoyable. (p. 18)

Sabo (2003b) has observed that youth can rise and meet the challenges of assuming a researcher role, and in effect "growing" into this role and becoming "who they were not" (p. 17).

Personal impact goes far beyond changes in attitudes or perceptions; it also includes changes in behavior related to relationships, learning, and the development of productive work habits. Measuring how these areas have benefited from youth involvement in a research project can be quite challenging. Changes may not be immediately apparent and may evolve over an extended period of time, or they may only be minor at first and take on greater prominence at a later period. Failure to note these benefits, however, seriously shortchanges the impact of participation.

Youth-led research, particularly when youth are paid for their time and expertise, also serves to provide youth with money that is often in short supply within undervalued communities. When the research project shares a community capacity enhancement perspective, every effort is made to rent space and purchase supplies, food, and expertise from the community being studied as a means of circulating funding (Delgado, 1998, 1999). Youth researchers are paid, and so are the research participants or subjects. Having research projects based within the community where youth live increases community accessibility to staff and helps break down potential barriers between researchers and community (Delgado, 1998; Israel, 2000). The research process thus becomes a part of daily life within the community and serves to demystify this activity; it also provides other members of the community with an opportunity to enter and find out what is going on if they so wish to do so.

As I address in greater detail in Chapter 7, youth-led research costs can be considerably lower than conventional research endeavors,

because personnel with many academic degrees and years of experience are quite costly. Youth-led research, in addition, tends to be more cost-effective because youth know their community (local knowledge) quite well; this saves time and resources that often go toward orienting an external community research team or engaging local stakeholder support for the research project. Regardless of how well an orientation program is crafted, it will never approximate the knowledge youth possess of their own communities and peer groups. In essence, youth-led research makes sense philosophically, conceptually, and financially.

Horton, Hutchinson, Barkman, Machtmes, and Myers (1999) developed a five-phase model that can be used effectively in conceptualizing and presenting youth-led research and its potential benefits to youth and their communities: (a) experience the activity; (b) share the experience by describing what happened; (c) process the experience to identify common or cross-cutting themes; (d) generalize from the experience to create principles and guidelines for use in other real-life situations; and (e) apply lessons learned to other spheres and situations. This framework, although developed specifically for service-learning, nonetheless, has relevancy for youth-led research and helps influence how learning about research can transpire without alienating youth in the process. This is no small undertaking since learning is often associated with boring lectures, dull books and meaningless assignments in the eyes of many youth, particularly those representing undervalued groups in this society.

Finally, it would irresponsible to think that the benefits of youth-led research are restricted to youth, their organizations, and communities. Adults as a group, too, benefit tremendously from their involvement with youth, particularly when they consider themselves to be in partnership with them. Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, and Calvert (2000) specifically emphasize the synergy that is created between youth and adults when they work together. Adults cannot help but get caught up in the energy that youth bring to an enterprise and the creativity that is often displayed in problem solving, particularly when it involves reaching out and engaging other youth. These persistent efforts to engage youth offer an abundance of opportunities for all youth to develop a better sense of how the world is (not just for adults but for themselves as well) and to play an influential role in shaping it.

The continued evaluation of the effectiveness of youth development programs and the lessons learned in the process will undoubtedly serve as an important step in helping demonstrate the value of youth-led

research and other youth-led initiatives (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Leffert, Saito, Blyth, & Kroenke, 1996; Lewis-Charp, Yu, Soukamneuth, & Lacoe, 2003; Moore & Lippman, 2005). The Harvard Family Research Project's (Horsch et al., 2002) findings of the key elements associated with a successful youth-involved research project are no doubt relevant to other types of youth-led initiatives: (a) organizational and community readiness, (b) adequate training and support for involved youth, (c) adequate training and support for adult staff, (d) selecting the right team, and (e) sustaining youth involvement.

❖ CONCLUSION

It is relatively easy for practitioners to develop a set of operating goals and objectives to guide their youth-led research projects. There is no aspect of social life that does not lend itself to systematic investigation. Some elements, however, lend themselves particularly well to these types of interventions. Research that integrates fun into work cannot be overlooked in any form of youth-led initiative. However, having "fun" takes on added significance when discussing research. Unfortunately, fun is rarely part of any discussion of adult-led research projects, although adults can no doubt enhance their experiences with some fun along the way.

The evolving nature of youth-led research brings with it a set of challenges in defining what is youth-led research and how can we develop boundaries to explain this approach, without effectively limiting its potential reach. Further, as this chapter has indicated, this form of research must be thought of as benefiting youth and their communities in both the short and long run. Thinking of youth-led research as a form of community service compounds a process that is challenging to begin with and makes it more challenging. Nevertheless, the fact that it is challenging should not discourage such efforts; it should make us more cognizant of why it is arduous and why it is so significant in the lives of youth and their community.

Ideally, youth-led research must successfully achieve a delicate balance between generating generalizable knowledge, benefiting the community that is the focus of the study, and improving research protocols for future use on these types of initiatives (Macaulay et al., 1999). Success in achieving all of these articulated goals is never guaranteed.

Nevertheless, rarely will these projects fail completely because of an emphasis on engaging and giving back to the community.

The need for studies specifically focused on identifying the range of benefits, or outcomes associated with youth-led research is obvious. As this form of youth-led initiative continues to become more viable within organizations and communities, so, too, will the cry for research to demonstrate the effectiveness of this form of intervention. The field should welcome such a cry because evaluation of youth-led research can only reflect on its importance and help move this field forward. Research findings will identify what aspects of youth-led initiatives lend themselves to maximizing benefits and which aspects require further modifications. Further, research that is context driven (namely, that which takes into account a range of sociodemographic factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical and cognitive abilities) is complex and does not lend itself to "cookie-cutter" forms of analysis. We must not let this dissuade us, but rather challenge and motivate us to be inclusive and creative in designing research studies because this is important for youth and society, now and in the future.