Out of School Programs for Youth: What Matters for Success at the Program Level

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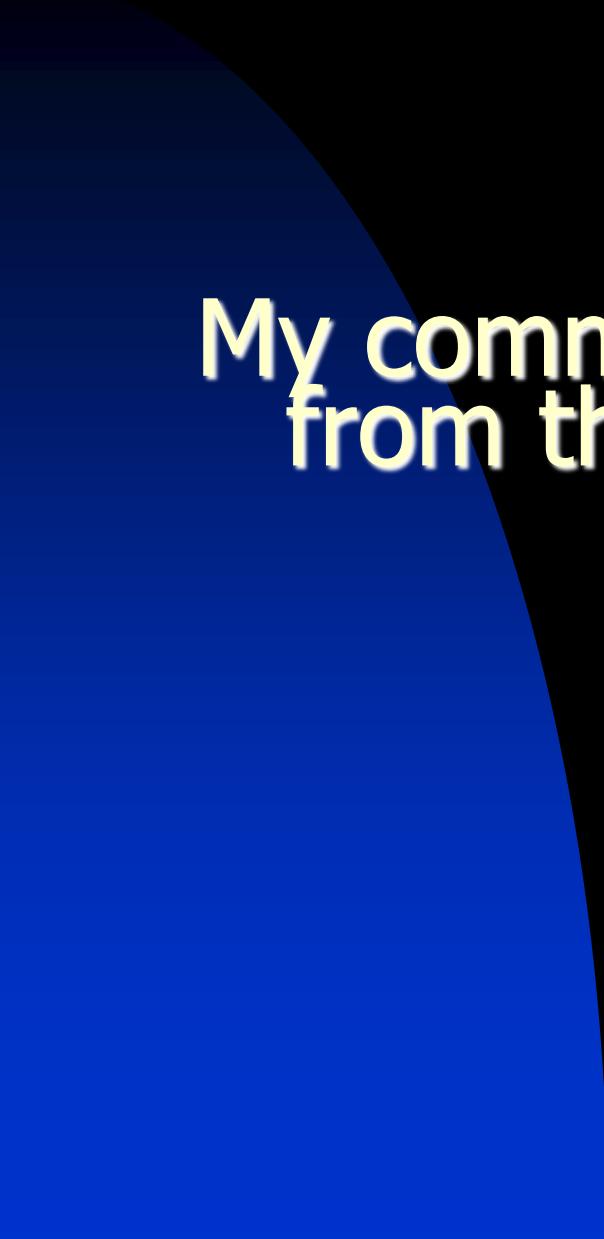
My comments will draw heavily from the following sources:

NRC/IOM Report on Community-Based Programs for Youth

Work by Milbrey McLaughlin and Shirley Bryce Heath on outstanding youth serving programs

Work by the W. T. Grant Foundation on the characteristics of outstanding youth serving programs

Theoretical Goals of the NRC/IOM Report

- Identify those personal and social assets that have been shown to predict either concurrent well-being or a successful transition to adulthood

- Identify those features of contexts that have been shown to facilitate the development of the personal and social assets

Goals

- Today I will summarize our conclusions regarding key features of programs that support positive youth development and point out how these features are consistent with the recommendations made by McLaughlin and her colleagues and by the W. T. Grant Foundation.

Promoting Adolescent Development at the Program Level

What is necessary for adolescents to be happy, healthy, and productive at the present time, as well as successful, contributing adults in the future?

We looked across full range of contexts (including community-based programs for youth and service learning programs for youth) studied in several disciplines and looked for convergent evidence across longitudinal and experimental studies

Theoretical background

- Person Environment Fit
  - People learn and develop best in environments that fit with their basic needs

- Stage Environment Fit
  - People thrive best in environments that fit with their developmental needs

What are these needs?

- **Connell, Deci & Ryan**
  - Competence – Mastery, Challenge
  - Emotional Support – Belonging, Attachment
  - Autonomy – Personal Control
- **Other needs**
  - Mattering – Making a meaningful difference
  - Responsibility – Being a contributing member of one's social group
  - Identity – Knowing one's place in one's social context
  - Engagement – Challenge and Enjoyment

How Might These Needs Meet in Programs for Youth?

- We looked at several developmental literatures looking at families, schools, organized programs, peer groups, and informal activity settings to identify those characteristics that might support these needs.

Promoting Positive Youth Development

Provide diverse opportunities for young people to:

Engage with caring adults outside their families

Move into healthy and productive adulthood

Promote positive relationships with other youth

Young People

Be happy and healthy

Provide opportunities to learn healthy and valued behaviors, expectations, values, morals, and skills

Develop sense of security and personal identity

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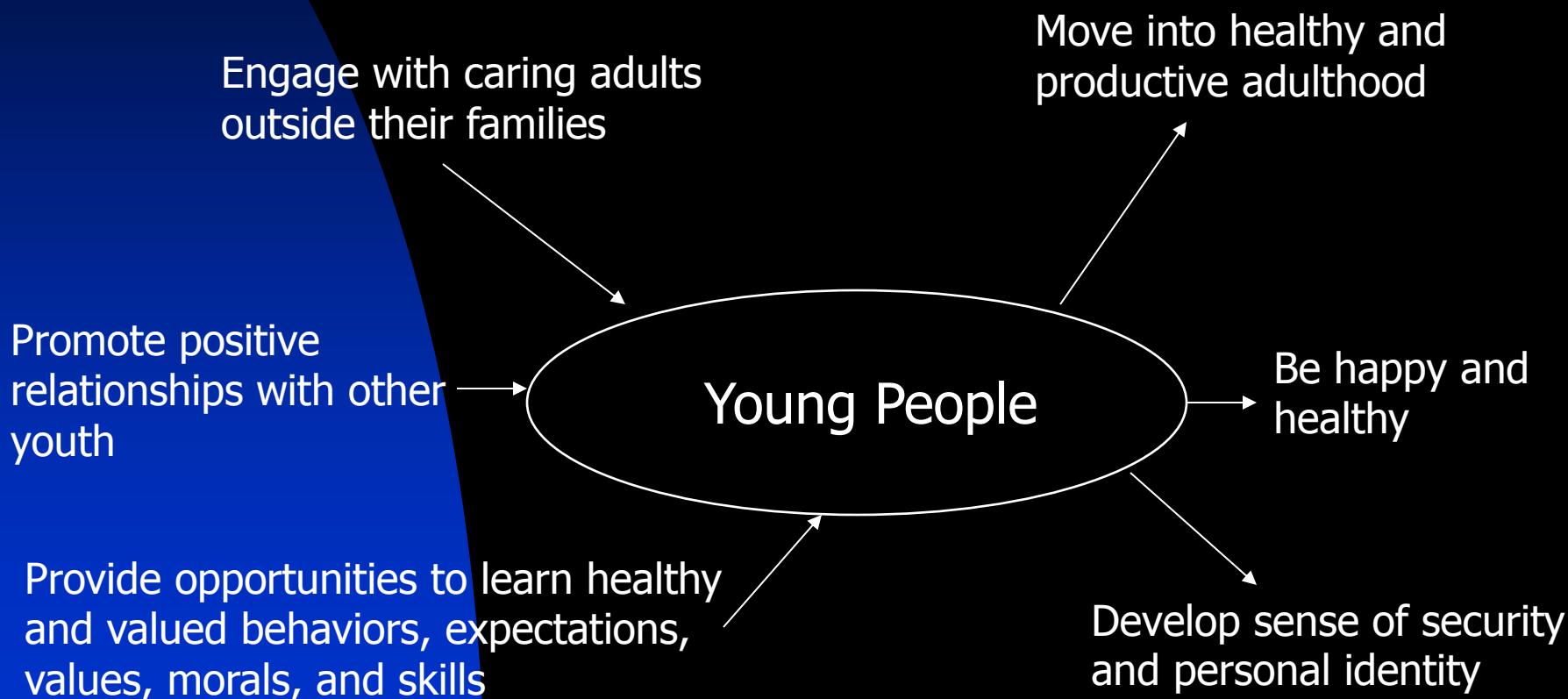
Features of Programs that Influence Development

- Appropriate structure

- Supportive relationships

- Opportunities to belong

- Positive social norms

- Support for efficacy and mattering

- Opportunities for skill building

Age and Culturally Appropriate Structure and Social Norms

- Appropriate levels of monitoring, rules and controls
  Particularly key for adolescents

- Clear rules and limits

- Consistent and fair enforcement

Opportunities to Belong

- Opportunities for social inclusion for all groups

- Active outreach to increase diversity of participants

- Encouragement of strong positive social identity formation

- Support for cultural and multi-cultural competencies

- Preventing exclusionary behavior among the participants

- Preventing bullying or other discriminatory behavior

NRC/IOM

Opportunities for Mattering and Leadership

- Youth-based empowerment practices

- Opportunities to provide meaningful services to one's community

- Opportunities to move into positions of leadership and responsibility

Opportunities for Developing a Sense of Efficacy: Motivational Scaffolding

- Provision of challenging activities with stress on improvement and cooperation

- Stress mastery not competition

- Opportunities to demonstrate and celebrate one's accomplishments

- High expectations for everyone

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Opportunities to Learn Essential Skills: The programs must be about "something"

- Intentional learning environments

- Use of embedded learning strategies

- Opportunities to learn life skills and "soft skills"

- Opportunities to learn cultural and multi-cultural competence to navigate multiple complex worlds

- This is the set of characteristics that are also stressed by McLaughlin and her colleagues and by the W. T. Grant Foundation. It is also the set of characteristics that is most discussed with regard to OST Science Programs.

What does this mean for assessing the success of OST Science Programs

- Essential to support PYD and the other individual level outcomes discussed earlier because these program aspects are critical to getting and keeping the youth engaged in what the program is about.

- Essential to provide the very best opportunities to learn and do science and to develop a "science identity"

What does this mean for assessing the success of OST Science Programs

- We will be discussing this latter set of characteristics a great deal over the next 2 days but we should not forget the first set of characteristics.

- We need to be thinking always about three complementary issues:
  - What do we want the participants to learn?
  - How can we best help them learn these "things"?
  - What do we need to do to help them become engaged in these learning activities?