



THE PATHWAYS PROJECT/PROYECO CAMINOS: YOUTH, PROGRAMS & PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Pathways Project/Proyecto Caminos is a collaborative research project between the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development and the University of Illinois. The goal of the study is to understand how young people develop real world skills in youth programs, how these skills transfer to other parts of their lives, and how culture comes into play (Latino youth make up half of our sample). It relies on questionnaires, interviews and observations to follow high school aged youth, their parents and the staff from 12 programs. This poster describes the overall study and presents preliminary findings from the pilot study.

This study is sponsored by the William T. Grant Foundation. The goal of the William T. Grant Foundation is to help create a society that values young people and enables them to reach their full potential.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

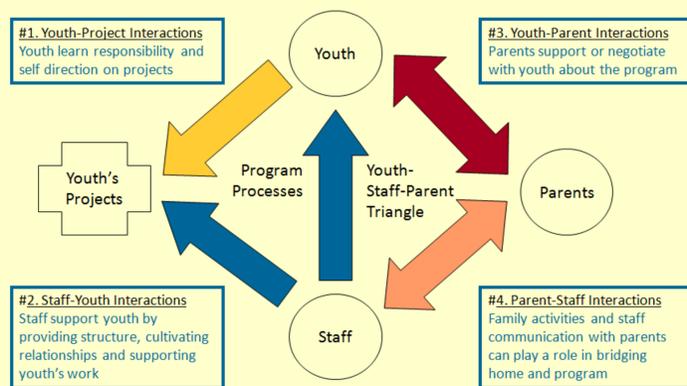
How does the “development” in youth development work?

This is a new study on how:

- Young people develop real world skills (responsibility, strategic thinking, teamwork) in programs over time,
- Program staff foster youth’s skill development,
- Skills transfer to other parts of their lives (family, school, planning for the future), and
- Culture comes into play.

The goal is to understand the *processes and pathways* of youth development in ways that are helpful to youth programs and their staff.

HYPOTHESES



PROGRAMS

Main study targets 12 programs for high school aged youth in a variety of community and programmatic contexts that:

- Serve at least 20 youth,
- Meet regularly (120 hours/year, typically 3-4 hours per week over a school year), and
- Include projects planned and carried out by youth (arts, tech, science, service, activism).

Sample. Half our sample will be Latino youth from Mexico and Central America to address the gap in knowledge about this growing population and ensure policies and programs reflect their experiences and values.

RESEARCH DESIGN

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

#1. Youth-Project Interactions

- What experiences in programs help youth develop responsibility?
- How do projects help youth develop strategic thinking?
- How do emotions in projects help youth develop skills for managing emotions?
- Why do youth drop out of programs?

#2. Staff-Youth Interactions

- How do the structures staff plan for programs help youth develop skills?
- What are the “dilemmas of practice” encountered by program staff and how do they respond?
- How do youth experience different forms of feedback from staff on their work?

#3. Youth-Parent Interactions

- What kinds of support do parents provide?
- What negotiations occur between parents and youth around youth’s program participation?
- What learning from the program transfers to home?

#4. Parent-Staff Interactions

- How do parents experience their children’s participation in the program?
- How are programs effective in facilitating parents’ positive attitudes and support for the program?

#5. Role of Ethnicity, Culture, and Gender

- How do dynamics between youth, staff, and parents differ as a function of ethnicity, culture, and gender?
- How do Latino youth serving programs optimize conditions for youth development and positive relationships with parents?

METHODS

- **Questionnaires.** Collected 4 times from youth and program staff and twice from parents.
- **Interviews.** 4 times with prospective sample of youth-parent pairs and with program staff. A retrospective sample of youth.
- **Observations.** Programs will be observed regularly using rubrics based on the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool.

PILOT RESULTS

SAMPLE

The Spring 2011 pilot phase involved:

- Interviews with 37 youth,
- Questionnaires from 81 youth, and
- 4 programs in Minneapolis, Chicago and central Illinois.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

#1. Youth-Project Interactions. Steps in youth’s cycle of developing responsibility:

- Accepting a role. Youth described taking on obligations by either choosing or being coaxed into a program role.
- Wavering commitment. Youth expressed initial excitement with their role, but at some point most wavered in their commitment.
- Fulfilling obligations. Despite wavering, most youth followed through with the obligations of the role.
- Changes in self and behavior. Youth reported that successfully carrying out demands increased their image of themselves as responsible and influenced how they acted at home and school.

#2. Staff-Youth Interactions. Types of staff assistance that youth viewed helpful to their work and learning:

- Balancing act. Giving youth freedom while providing adult expertise and guidance.
- Emotional support. Calming fears and bolstering youth’s confidence.
- Instrumental support. Providing judicial assistance and direction to ensure youth’s success in their work.

#3. Youth-Parent Interactions. Patterns of parental support of youth program participation:

- How parents support their child's participation. Parents most frequently showed interest or asked about the program, and less frequently participated in program-related activities.
- Age and ethnic differences. Younger (vs. older) teens were more likely to report that their parents asked if everything was OK at the program, and Latino (vs. non-Latino) teens reported higher overall support.