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Risks, Rules, and Roles

Youth Perspectives on the Work of Learning for Community Development

Zusammenfassung

Risiken, Regeln und Rollen. Jugendperspektiven zur Lernarbeit in der Gemeindeentwicklung

Basierend auf zehn Jahren Feldforschung mit dem Fokus auf den Makro-Mikro-Zusammenhängen zwischen organisationaler Struktur und dazugehörigem Ethos einerseits und Sprachverhalten und Rollenspiel andererseits konzentriert sich dieser Beitrag auf den institutionellen Wandel, der sich auf die kognitive, soziale und sprachliche Entwicklung der Jugend auswirkt. Auffällig ist die Selbstbehauptungskraft derjenigen Jugendlichen, die in ihrer außerschulischen Freizeit den Weg zu jugendzentrierten Einrichtungen finden. Diese Organisationen vermitteln eine institutionelle Macht, die die Leere der intergenerationellen Kommunikation, der Bildungsabbrüche und der fehlenden Aufgaben für Jugendliche im Familien- und Gemeindeleben füllt. Abschnitt 1 gibt zum einen einen Überblick über Interaktionsbereiche, die Arbeit und Unterstützung, die Institutionen der postindustriellen Gesellschaft nicht geben, und zeigt dann auf, welche institutionelle Kraft manche Jugendliche durch Engagement in jugendzentrierten Initiativen entwickeln, denen Schlüsselfunktionen in ihrer Sozialisation zukommen. Hier werden altersgemischte Peergruppen ihre eigenen Interessenvertreter, um eigene Lernumgebungen zu schaffen, die sich signifikant von den herkömmlichen, auf Stoffvermittlung bestehenden Ansätzen unterscheiden. Teil 2 beantwortet die Fragen, was in diesen Lernumwelten geschieht und welch wichtigen Platz Lernen in diesen jugendzentrierten Einrichtungen mit ihrer deutlichen Betonung von ernsthafter produktorientierter Arbeit und Darstellung einnehmen. In diesen Projekten mit ihrem Angebot für den Zeitraum zwischen Kindheit und vollständigem Eintritt in das Erwachsenenleben akzeptieren Jugendliche Risiken, spielen Rollen und setzen sich Regeln, um hervorragende Gruppenergebnisse, z. B. bei einer Theateraufführung, zu erreichen. Abschnitt 3 betrachtet die Sprache, die in diesen Organisationen benutzt wird, und benennt die Mittel, mit deren Hilfe jugendzentrierte Einrichtungen dynamisch bleiben und auf die raschen Wechsel der jugendlichen Bedürfnisse antworten. Teil 4 beschreibt einige notwendige Änderungen im Denken der Erwachsenen hinsichtlich der Sozialisationsmodelle und beschreibt ihre Rolle für die effektive Gestaltung von Lernumgebungen für junge Menschen. Im fünften Abschnitt werden Forschungsergebnisse der Makro- und Mikroebene zusammengefasst, um die Wichtigkeit der Forschung zu unterstreichen, die darüber aufklärt, welche Rolle Regeln, Rollen und Risiken in der Lernarbeit spielen.

Summary

Based on ten years of fieldwork with a focus on macro-micro linkages from organizational ethos and structure to language behavior and role-playing, this report centers on institutional changes that affect cognitive, social, and linguistic development of youth. Argued here is the resilience of those young people who find their way to youth-based (as distinct from youth-serving) organizations during their out-of-school lives. These organizations provide an institutional force to fill the

voids left by intergenerational communication and nurturance breakdowns and an absence of meaningful work for youth in community and family life. Part 1 gives an overview of areas of interaction, work, and support that institutions fail to give in post-industrial societies and sets up the framework to view the fact that some youth create an institutional force through youth-based organizations that take over key socialization roles. Here cross-age peers become their own agents to create an ecology of learning significantly different from customary agents of transmissive socialization. Part 2 answers the questions of what happens in this ecology of learning, and how learning works in youth-based organizations that place high emphasis on the real work of production and performance. Within these organizations that offer a type of liminal zone between childhood and full entry into adult life, youth take risks, play roles, and set their own rules in order to achieve a group goal of excellence in performance. Part 3 looks at language use within these organizations and addresses the means by which youth-based organizations remain dynamic and responsive to the rapidly changing dimensions of youth needs. Part 4 sets out certain changes necessary in the thinking of adults about models of socialization and their role in helping to make possible learning ecologies young people will see as effective. Part 5 pulls together the macro and micro dimensions of the findings to highlight the importance of research on the ways that rules, roles, and risks play within the work of learning.

1   Institutional Voids

When institutions of society become unable to handle key changes in the rhythms and patterns of human behavior, new institutions need to emerge. Throughout human history, however, in spite of wars and major political changes, emergence of our familiar institutions (such as family, religion, government, organized economies, and formal education) came slowly, silently, and in coordination with numerous shifts in key arrangements of daily patterns of existence and interaction among individuals.

Every postindustrial society, regardless of level or condition of its social welfare approach, faces problems resulting from the redefinition and shift of institutions. Patterns of employment as well as leisure have drastically shifted family life and community cultures, and the need for new institutional arrangements to care for the young appears increasingly evident to certain decisionmakers. Acknowledged is the need to provide extended care for children from families with two working parents or a single parent who works outside the home in at least one job – often with extended hours (and in the United States, often without health benefits). Exodus from rural areas and mid-sized towns in the second half of the twentieth century has over-burdened urban zones, which have, in turn, been unable to provide self-sustaining neighborhoods for the poor and working class as urban centers have turned from industry to financial and governmental business.

In this paper, I look at the future of communities as learning ecologies for youth. The view here centers on a segment of young people within the United States who have responded to the absence of intimate transgenerational socialization and local work opportunities by finding places where they help set rules, take risks, and try roles to prepare them to remain in their communities as assets. These young resist continuing previous decades of brain drain from their poor communities – urban and rural. They perceive their own opportunities to achieve the dream of middle-class life as highly limited, and they choose now to focus on the social enterprise of community building through expanding their own learning in authentic ways. Social enterprise represents entrepreneurial efforts by neighborhoods to

build responsible, aesthetic, locally-grounded opportunities for resource development within impoverished communities. Simply put, those engaged in social enterprise find ways to put local energies to work for the community, without waiting for external educational, governmental, or multinational corporate forces. These efforts at work in post-industrial nations take much from grassroots microenterprise projects in „Third World" development programs, in that key resources lie within local people, their ingenuity, social and moral values, and goals for rational approaches to intergenerational maintenance.

These efforts also reflect a new model of socialization that replaces that of transmission passing on the wisdom of the elder to the younger and demanding respect, obedience, and compliance to established rules and values of earlier generations. Meanwhile, family processes, learning opportunities and relationships in work that previously carried transmission have almost entirely disappeared. In essence, though the ideal of transmission remains, with two-working-parent households, single parent households, and the relegation of elders to special care facilities, the infrastructure that provided long hours of side-by-side projects for children, youth, parents, grandparents, and even extended family members no longer remains. Yet as the young get propelled forward through the changing circumstances of intimate associations in the late twentieth century, they move to create transitional and transformative contexts of socialization. In so doing, because their behaviors and attitudes have no match with what elders have known, youth lose the respect, understanding, faith – and often the affection – of their elders. At the close-up level at which traditional cultural anthropologists and linguistic anthropologists work, we can see that they also lose details of interaction – eye contact, slow touch, sustained voice contact, shared rhythms of time, and opportunities for co-working.

The transitional model of socialization centers the individual identity on the social, with room for a playing through of group and individual learning within periods and rituals of transition. The transformative gives much attention to risk, taking its cue in part from the work of German sociologist Ulrich BECK[1], as well as other critics of politics, tradition, and aesthetics in the modern social order who assert the random unpredictable distribution of hazards and dangers for all. Think here of the thousands of middle-and high-level executives who have lost their jobs after years of loyalty and moving up in corporations (especially in the United States). They believe they have done everything „right", but something has gone wrong with the trajectory to which they were socialized. Events such as job loss, divorces, and early death of young people through AIDS amount to transformations that require new risks, new rules, new connections. Both transitions and transformations mark learning ecologies that young people create that provide support in cross-age transitional socialization groups who establish rules, help others find or know the rules, and orient newcomers who pass a few critical tests to know what the rules are. They themselves are responding to the failures of traditional fixed institutions in society and adapting to the dilemmas that postindustrialism presents. Surrounding these efforts of youth are their concerns about media exploitation, heavy consumer and material forces on (especially) the working poor, and the empty promises educators make when they link school achievement to guaranteed employment. The youth within this study feel the need to „do something different," to chart new means of accounting for self and meaningful connections, and to learn in new ways for purposes and goals not yet acknowledged by most adults. A sampling of some of these projects and performances – ways of being different – they create include:

- Teens grow 40,000 pounds of vegetables on four acres from May until September each year. They serve 15 soup kitchens, set up a „farmer's market" on Saturdays in the summer in a nearby urban area, and sell shares in a cooperative food distribution program.
- Young people run a federally chartered credit union. They pioneer school banking programs and develop a theatre group that has performed at the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions.
- Joining together in a Boys and Girls Club, young people create a theatre group that works up interactive programs related to key issues of concern in their region. All summer they create scripts and practice, while also hearing daily lectures and demonstrations from experts in chosen topics: neurochemists, criminologists, and social workers come to talk about drug addiction, for example. At the end of the summer, youngsters must pass with a score above 90 an examination covering the work of the summer. During the academic year, they schedule three performances a week for parent groups, juvenile detention centers, schools, and civic clubs who pay the team a consulting fee for their appearances.
- Inside an abandoned warehouse, young people, working with young adults, create a mini-mall that contains stores offering specialized services (from barbering to a bookstore for children). They also do several shows a month, including Poetry Night, Comedy Hour, and dramatic programs. Members also offer dance classes for local children.
- In a rural midwestern community, students survey their families and friends for inventions they wish had been created. Young people check hardware and small appliance catalogues to see if such inventions are already out there. For those they find missing, they return to their shop classes at school and design, create, and test. After fieldtesting, they try their hand at marketing their inventions – through county fairs, local main streets, and friendly merchants in the local community. They pool their resources to bring in a consultant to help them design improved marketing plans.

In all of these forms, the youth immerse themselves in high risk and hard work to revel in a strong present sense of what they can do. Their work rarely celebrates the future as something distant for which they prepare, but instead, the future is in the present. They refuse to accept the grand narratives that adults push on them or that the public media promote: that of victim, culprit, perpetrator, or mastermind of trouble.

The data for results reported here come from a decade of study of youth-based organizations in neighborhoods across the United States. Discovery of these organizations became analogous with finding a thriving ecological zone previously unknown in what was otherwise a dismal environment with little evidence of productive life. Within the out-of-school ecological zone of learning provided by youth-based organizations, the young develop a sense of themselves as learners within community contexts and pursue information, skills, and contacts in the course of high-risk work tightly governed by rules they themselves develop. Here seems to be a case of the young of the species enabling the building of youth organizations as an institutional force within a society greatly in need of some way to fill the gap left by contemporary demands of family, loss of social responsibility by religions and neighborhoods, and the shifting and encroaching demands of a rapidly changing labor market.

Working in 30 regional areas and 124 youth-based organizations which were hosts to nearly 30,000 youngsters over the decade, a senior team of Milbrey W. MCLAUGHLIN,

public policy analyst of Stanford University, and myself, as linguistic anthropologist, headed a rotating group of young scholars acting as guerilla anthropologists, living, working, and playing among the young people in the different sites.[2] Data collected included details of macro features of these organizations as well as audiorecordings of the language used by the young people while in their youth organizations and numerous recordings of their leisure hours away from the organizations. In addition, many of the young people kept a variety of written forms of data, ranging from reflective journals to daily logs of activities, media usage, and transportation usage.

2   What's happening?

Neutral as this question sounds, it is the guide of most anthropologists who wish to capture the pace and substance of everyday life. The young people of this study sought out what they regarded as effective learning sites or, in their words, „places to be". These places ranged from grassroots organizations, such as tumbling teams or agricultural projects to highly organized nationally affiliated sports groups to community centers that sponsored programs in the visual arts, drama, videoproduction, or discjockeying. Some sites had fixed locations for coming together, such as urban performing arts centers, community center buildings, or athletic fields, while others moved about, finding space whenever and wherever it might be available for their use. All groups had one or more adult leaders who served as legal and fiscal agent for the group. All groups organized their activities around the work of learning in order to produce peak performance by a certain deadline – set for athletic playoffs, show opening, or production deadline. All groups went through a cycle from planning and preparation to intensive practice, followed by performance and evaluation. This cycle was in all cases followed by a downtime or time off before a new season or cycle began. All groups included considerable attention to play, light heartedness, and rites of intensification that bonded group members through rituals that looked much like family reunions, community fairs, or celebratory parties. Three major categories of youth-based organizations emerged:

ARTS: drama group, percussion band, drum & bugle corp, visual arts center, media arts center, chorus, mural development community, art on wheels

SERVICE – LEARNING: conservation corp, police academy gang intervention, agricultural cooperative, literacy and social service, early education (daycare and after-school assistance), medical and social service (nursing home and hospital volunteering)

ATHLETIC – ACADEMIC: baseball, softball, soccer, swimming, basketball all with intensive study of academic units on topics related to specific sport.

Patterns and features of behavior of these organizations emerge slowly within long-term fieldwork, for each site appears for many months to be utter chaos with young people running in and out, talking all at once, laughing and playing pranks on one another, while being busily engaged in moving toward a product or final performance.

   Being within these youth-based organizations is not a job – a series of tasks someone else directs; young people compare the work of their organization with their outside jobs:

„There no one is excited about it [their job] and no one is really upset about it, but they just kind of do it. Here [at the arts center], everyone's all, 'Yes, let's go work on this project.'"

Youngsters remain keenly aware that authentic outside judges will assess their final performance – whether athletic playoff among teams or the mounting of a visual arts show in a gallery or several weekends of play performances. Commitment to a final product before such assessors keeps the level of critique within the group and between adult leaders and youngsters high, especially through the final weeks of practice. Having a clear goal or direction toward which they must move and knowing their final judges will have no emotional attachment to them or their success or failure provides high incentive for each individual to sustain commitment to the best performance possible for benefit to the group as a whole. Competition exists first and foremost as incentive for the group to work against its own best prior performance as well as against high criteria or standards set by judging teams outside the youth-based organization's immediate world.

These features give the work of learning within the organizations a definite cast of the real world. Each group collects its own inner resources by seeing those outside or the „world out there" as different, as judgmental, harsh, and demanding. In talking about how to get other youth involved in theatre, one young member expressed his view this way: „what gets to kids, [it's] the real stuff … [what] really helps you find yourself when you do all the work. Because the minute you start doin' all the work, you feel as though it has to be a part of you." Another youth talked about the art work of his organization as a form of internal construction: „when you do something where you create, it builds something inside you that never really goes away..." By preparation within the group, individuals and group see themselves as learning to face outsiders and the real world successfully. Those on the other side of the we/they dichotomy include school, „the streets", police officers, other teams or performance groups, authorities and judges in general, family members, and potential employers. Adult leaders often justify tough standards or harsh judgments within the organization rules by explaining „we've got to be tougher here so you'll be even more ready for what's out there waiting for you."

The over-arching ethic of operation for all of these organizations derives from seeing youth as resources and not as problems. Since finances, buildings, equipment, time, and involved adult personnel generally fall far short of need, youth themselves become central resources for maintenance of youth-based organizations. This ethic behind the organizations reinforces group conviction that „everyone has work – lots of it – to do here", and everyone takes responsibility helping instruct others in skills and information needed to accomplish tasks. The group cannot afford any hint that learning benefits only single individuals, for whatever is learned is passed on, extended, and tested within group situations. Individuals therefore develop talents for teaching, facilitating, demonstrating with others – newcomers, the less skilled, the resistant. Young people bond with one another and with their adult leaders, and older and more experienced members move up into positions of increasing responsibility to encourage and sustain within-group allegiance.

Critical to the group's cohesion are opportunities to transition into greater levels of responsibility, often accompanied by title and a slight change of uniform or a coveted piece of apparel, such as a hat or special T-shirt. Young people serve in nearly every capacity within their organizations, from board member and publicist, to team manager or junior coach, to receptionist or travel coordinator. Many, though not all, youth organizations have levels of membership, with transitional movement from a lower-skilled group to a group of recog-

nized higher competence and often more frequent performances or a wider range of travels. The essence of these features rests in the wide distribution of roles among the youth that keep them informed about rationale, philosophy, and ethics of the organization, as well as details critical to its on-going maintenance and operation. Within this array of roles, as well as in working toward moving up through transitional positions available (e.g. from one level of chorus to the next), young people find themselves needing certain literacy, numeracy, oral communication, and technological skills, as well as requiring assistance and information from those outside the youth-based organizations (insurance agents, travel agents, and funders). They regard these needs and learning challenges as part of the „real-world“ atmosphere of the group.

Rules that mark daily life of youth-based organizations embrace behaviors and attitudes broadly, but they must be followed, e.g. „nobody gets hurt here“. Refusal to follow these rules means expulsion from the organization – a serious consequence, since the organizations judged as „places you want to be“ by local youth, have long waiting lists and often can take in only a few new members each seasonal cycle.

3   How do these groups change?

Institutional and organizational change within families, corporations, governments, and many other groups familiar to adults generally change, on the one hand, gradually and relatively predictably, or, on the other hand, by catastrophic circumstances, such as impending competitive threat. Youth-based organizations give much attention to change within their ethos of operation, for keeping pace with young peoples' sense of „changing times“ ensures continued youth interest. Closely grounded to local circumstances as these affect young people, youth-based organizations change some features with each new cycle or seasonal start-up. Adult leaders, with the help of young people who have been in the organization for several years, take a meta-frame on the group with each new cycle and reorganize responsibilities, reassign roles, and redesign times and means of operation as needed. Just as critique runs consistently through practice, performance, and evaluation of each product or performance, so members receive constant encouragement to think reflectively about the group as a whole. Adult leaders and youth members alike ask: why is the group younger this year than last? how is it we are not attracting many of the kids out there who are over 14 years of age? is it time we shifted from being a drama troupe to being a drama program that makes clear how what we do here relates to job skills such as communication and responsible team-building? Each season's opening brings a reassessment of rules, roles, and relationships of the group in the past season, with suggestions and questions tossed to young members for response, new ideas, and complaints.

In most youth-based organizations, at least each week, a meeting takes place that opens with adults or older members asking „OK, how's it goin'? what's up? what's not goin' well and what's goin' OK? Any rules we need to change, any thoughts on how the teams are workin'?“ Supplementing these public occasions in some organizations are journals and portfolios of work (visual arts, creative writing, schematic plays in a particular sport, etc.). The organizations find every occasion to involve members in writing reflections, collecting and critiquing their work, preparing portfolios for job interviews or

visitors to the organization. A typical journal entry may range from recording the mundane details of practice to the moments of wonder and discovery. Two entries for a drum corps follow:

We had to play for an hour, so that meant that we didn't have time to play and joke around. While we were setting up, I saw this girl. She was beautiful, so you know I had to flirt with her. I had to pause from flirting with her to go play [with the corps].

We arrived at the school, and, you know, did our thing. We do the same thing every show. We unload, get everything inside, argue about who is doing what and why, get hollered at for arguing, set up our drums, then the bells, warm up, and then we get hollered at for warming up… After we were done, the kids wouldn't let us get off stage so we played about three encores … The show was over and we did our other thing. Tear down the drums, reflect on how good we were, lay around, take the drums to the car, play around, get hollered at for playing around, and then after all of that we leave.

Changes that come with regrouping or sharing of journal entries and portfolio components also occasion discussion of shifts in local circumstances – open information about new gangs, realigned gang groups, turf changes, school reorganization, re-organized community police units, or any other circumstance that may affect the young people themselves.

Bringing into open discussion these issues – often avoided or silenced by adults in other circumstances – signals a key feature of organizations that young people regard as effective. Every individual comes as expert in something; each person has different bodies of information, levels of competence in various skills, and a host of network affiliations that the youth group may need to call upon. „Let's make sure we all understand that this group needs all the expertise we can get" means that every individual has to assume a variety of roles to become as resourceful as possible for and with the group. For one play of the year, an individual may be technical manager, while for several others, roles will vary from scriptwriter to actor to lighting crew to program designer.

Areas of expertise develop during their work within the organizations. Key areas of development easily traceable for groups (as well as individuals) are language development, building social relationships, offering evidence and building substantive information, strategy-building through risk-taking and explication.

Language development. As young children grow through the toddler years, a sure sign of their emergence as „little people" comes through their widening use of words, phrases, and stances of performance that underscore different ways of using these. Though scholars rarely attend to language development as these toddlers grow older, the same pattern of linguistic development holds as individuals mature in widening networks. For many young people who have neither at home nor at school participated extensively in open discussions or small-group conversations about substantive matters and as planners and thinking partners, their facility with certain language structures lies dormant. Conversations with peers to test and develop social relationships only occasionally take speakers into roles that allow them to play across a scale of adapted voices, strategic thinking, and listener ever ready to reinforce, substantiate, or add to the ideas of others. As young people come into their youth-based organizations, we have been able to track their linguistic development in certain syntactic structures as well as ways of contributing to talk with their peers while at work on a project or performance of the group (see HEATH 1998).

Their language use with respect to narratives is particularly striking. They use very few narrative forms that we might term „stories." Story as narrative appears to have fallen out

of the language repertoire of older children and youth in connection with the dropping away of particular types of extended opportunities to engage with adults in performance and projects as learning opportunities. Within youth-based organizations, language centers in activity, and thus directives, questions, challenges, counterstatements, and thought completions account for the majority of utterances. Extended units of talk take place not by an individual (except adult coaches in art and athletics), but by the group in collaboration, with a high incidence of sentence completions, and overlaps that tie meanings together rather than abort or contradict thought. Argument consists of first-hand experience abbreviated in opinion set against the same by another or second-hand reported experience, and occasionally by direct citation to a referenced source (video, teacher, another youth group, referee, etc.). Stories appear at points of breach in social interactions or as special tests in order to see about bringing someone else in (see HEATH 1994). Not talking about yourself, not telling stories, not taking up the floor as an individual operate as preferred forms of communication. Young people most often describe themselves as watchers and listeners.

Ritual and routine, questions and answers. Ritual and routine mark the groups' interactions, so that predictability reigns. Rituals center in being on time, starting warm-ups, getting out paints or equipment, and then moving into what becomes an expected flow of rhythm and connection to tasks and group members. Several key interactions in all the youth groups hold well-known generic conventions: examples include debriefing that occurs after a public embarrassment to the group, the critic's circle, or daily opening eventcast that takes place in some groups. Otherwise, talk focuses on the work of the group, whether it is producing a script, getting philosophical about what the group is doing, or dogging on one another to keep the pace and tenor of interpersonal relations out in the open. All of these except problem resolutions and debriefings are laced heavily with humor and play. All sit within an intense sense of group pride. Playfulness enters their work, sustains it, and accounts for much of its creativity.

In the opening weeks of each season, youngsters hear hundreds of open-ended questions and hypotheticals („what if?" „what about?" „if …, then what?' thrown at them, with plenty of wait time for answers, ideas, jokes, exaggerated claims. During these weeks, a high preponderance of such language forms on the part of adults and older youths in the group comes with only rare directives or negatives. As certain forms of language initially used by adults decrease in frequency, young members pick up these features and use them more. During practice, young members put forward more and more hypotheticals (e.g., „if we do this, then how about …?") and offer more „what if?" queries and ideas that include modals (e.g., „it would be possible to cut that scene, if Jenny could get that costume change cut down in time"). In the final weeks before the playoffs or the final performance, hypotheticals and „what if?" questions fall away, as directives from adults and older members reach a peak; everyone is frantically geared toward final performance and inevitable assessment.

Almost from the opening days of every season, adults address group members by name – either their own or new nicknames or names of the moment. A majority of statements of more than a few words come with a vocative, a call to a specific person, linguistic evidence that the adults keep alert to what is going one and how everyone is playing roles, and is accountable and responsible.

Presentation, performance, and production. The cycle of youth-based organizations allows a range of oral and written genres created by young people taking on various roles. For example, production of the organization pamphlet takes on a meaning for members of the public relations committee different from any sense of the pamphlet that representatives to the organization's board of trustees may hold. The latter may consider themselves and the group's funders as primary audience for the pamphlet, while the public relations committee may plan to distribute the pamphlet primarily to neighborhoods already sending their children to the organization.

Though language use sits squarely within the ethos of these youth groups – the goal of all is to provide the best possible representation, performance, or product from the group. Full engagement, including problem-posing and problem-solving by everyone concerned as the season's end approaches, will help ensure maximum achievement. Full engagement here means not only attendance, but cognitive and social interaction at the highest most interactive levels. Even within athletic groups, mental state verbs, such as think, suppose, and consider, pelt young members throughout the practice phase. Young players have to explain how they decided to try a particular play, hold a bat in a certain way, or go for a base steal. „What are you thinking?“ addressed to a youth group member serves a literal and not a rhetorical purpose.

Building relations. Adults within these youth-based organizations make it clear to the young members as well as to us as researchers that their goal centers on enabling members to take away from their group experience individual strategies for „getting along“ in the contemporary world. Unlike schools that tend to focus on the need for students to acquire skills and knowledge that may help them obtain jobs, youth organizations focus on building relationships with colleagues, and in so doing, finding ways to work resourcefully with others.[3] Youngsters write scripts for their own plays and debate inclusion of particular lines, designation of roles, and set design. In taking on these tasks, they practice in authentic and meaningful contexts numerous communicational skills that sustain relationships as well as enable them to accomplish the work before them. Here again, language provides evidence of just how individuals improve their relational skills as they talk together to accomplish the work of the group. Often during planning sessions, as well as within actual work, the talk of individuals will „swarm“ with multiple overlaps congruent in content and with a rapid pace showing common recognition and connection simultaneously (see TANNOCK 1998). These occasions give strong evidence of common engagement.

Offering evidence and building substantive content. Youth-based organizations bring members together to accomplish outcomes, and the clear centrality of this goal supersedes attending to the needs of single individuals. As individuals increasingly give propositional knowledge, use technical or exclusive vocabulary, expand or clarify ideas of others, they evidence their confidence *and* incorporation of information into strategy-building. Adults argue that this „real world“ feature of the work young members do moves beyond popular psychology approaches that support building self-esteem, strong identities, and „feel-good“ approaches to tasks.

Adults working with these youth-based organizations also point out that as young people grow in confidence because they know more about the how and what of making projects or performances work, they will move away from relying on their own opinions or

feelings to support ideas they put out to the group. They will instead offer sources of their ideas (from past rehearsals, other individuals engaged in similar work, etc.), or from sources that can be verified and retrieved, such as videos, printed evidence, or known experts. In other words, youth learn to use information and to reference others' experience, as well as their own.

Strategy-building and risk-taking. Within the youth-based organizations that young people regard as highly effective learning environments, ample opportunities come about that engage young people in forming strategies, rebuilding contexts, and identifying both problems and solutions. Most of the organizations operate with minimal and erratic financial support, within environments that rarely recognize their role as socializers of young people, and often through the determination of a few adults and the young people themselves. Hence any need has to be met through strategies that call on the local resources of individuals within the group – negotiation, request-making, and market-building. Young people have to take risks from which their youth and usual status of child, youth, or student may have heretofore protected them.

One group has to decide on a particular travel plan for the basketball team, determine costs, ways to raise funds, necessary expenditures, and ways of monitoring. Another has to make a last-minute decision of whether or not the theatrical troupe can go on with a show, even when they must play within a gymnasium with no raised stage and no adequate sound system. Does the group risk possible negative public relations by canceling the show, or does the group go forward and risk complaints that the audience can neither see nor hear the show? Such risks come as situations that need analysis as problems that may require a range of solutions. A general aura of high risk surrounds youth organizations, for every person must step forward and try something usually never before attempted with such high stakes and in front of peers with whom one must continue to work if a project is to move to successful completion. The risks of „not measuring up," „making a fool of myself," or „messing up" come with high tolls for young people – ever mindful of the importance of protecting themselves against their peers' insults, derision, or attack.

Explication. Expectation of these risks rings through the language of youth-based organizations. Technical explanations of how to work with the lighting board of a major performing arts center come from one older youth to his apprentice in statements interlaced with „if you mess up …," „when you forget to do x, then y will happen, so don't forget." Groups develop numerous strategies for handling blame when something does go wrong. Some groups have a weekly debriefing session in which individuals can let off steam about the effects of the mistakes or goof-offs of others in the group; such occasions may also focus on the group as a whole being in a „low funk" or having taken on too much. Other groups create imaginary figures on whom everyone can blame snags, mistakes, and haunting errors that once committed cannot be pulled back – a missed lighting cue in a final performance, a strikeout in the last inning of a championship game, a failed free-throw, etc. Keeping groups cohesive and working matters to all members, and regardless of strategy for enabling the group's forward movement beyond problems, sustaining relationships and getting on with the work drive a sense that „we are all in this [risky business] together." One young man who was a member of a drama club that produced its own original theatre pieces written by the young members, talks of his risk-

taking: „There was this scene, it was a gang scene, it was called Tales from the Grave-yard. And when I did that, that and this monologue [the one I did today], I felt very pow-erful. I felt very very powerful ... because I figure now I can actually write other scenes like this … It's the same thing that drives a man to get money and to own things and put things on." For him, like the youth in the drum corps noted above, work has become „our thing." Young people tell outsiders often that though they may have been involved in crime, drug trafficking, and street violence before their work in youth-based organiza-tions, the risks of their yesteryears bear little comparison with the high risks they face every-day within the work of a tight group of peers tied to a deadline and committed to excel-lence of performance and outcome before outside and often unfriendly audiences or as-sessors.

4   Middle Childhood, the Teen Years, and Young Adulthood

In past eras, family, religion, and neighbors, as well as local economies, marked daily life and movement through known rituals and rites of passage. The young of today have little access to these key institutions and the joint work, sense of rhythm and pace, and sense of pride in group accomplishment many in earlier generations enjoyed. Today, socializers come and go as strangers or non-intimates – the personnel of daycare programs, formal education, crime prevention, and juvenile detention. These work to fill the hours of youth with discrete, highly segmented, decontextualized tasks, that must, in general, be exe-cuted and measured for individual and not group achievement. Individual learners have few opportunities for real work – done either individually or in collaboration with others.

Here it is useful to make distinctions between work, on the one hand, and jobs or chores, on the other. Formal education is best characterized by the latter two rather than by work. Consider that work appears in positive and negative connotations, always car-rying some promise of open involvement, connected tasks toward some end the worker can see and know; we tell ourselves „I've got to work on listening better"; „I'll work on losing weight (exercising more, spending more time with my children, etc.)." When we talk of work, the elements of choice and outcome generally ring through our words. Jobs, on the other hand, appear in our thinking as both given and determined by others outside our own initiative and often beyond our will. The job of filling out government tax forms is given and defined by others, as are jobs on a factoryline. Chores come to all of us as those reoccurring irritating tasks that march along with daily life and have to be done again and again, with no sense of complete and utter accomplishment ever lasting too long. The chores of taking out the garbage, keeping the garage clean, sorting paperwork, or mowing grass keep returning, despite our futile efforts on any one day or week to clear them away.

Without opportunities for real work within households, communities, religious activi-ties, and school, young people seek to find something to do that offers quick accom-plishments that feel good and bring peer approval. Hence too many move into early high-risk sexual and mind-altering behaviors, as well as peer-linked criminal activities. Within the United States, many young people live in neighborhoods with few recreational facili-ties, no local meaningful work for adults or youth, limited transportation, and no appeal-ing ways of spending the average nine hours daily in which young people are neither at-

tending school nor eating or sleeping. The majority of youth crimes and accidents take place in the four hours just after schools close – while most parents remain at work.

The predominant view of youth in post-industrial societies is that the young use their risk-taking and rule-making to carry out criminal or undesirable activities. Therefore, the young must be stopped through tougher controls. Two perspectives justify this concept – that of the realists and that of constructivists. The former point out what they see as the dire consequences for society from young people who turn to trouble without institutions that provide them caring responsible frames for meaningful learning through work. Realist ways of grounding the predictions for society speak of reports that only 40 % of college/university graduates in Great Britain now obtain jobs commensurate with their educational preparation. Every mature follower of economic news knows that low-skilled jobs have either left or are leaving post-industrial nations, and that young people wishing to enter the labor market will need many competencies not now recognized or generated by formal schooling. Realists keep to a master narrative that rewards hard work in formal education with fitting employment and that insists that development of individuals and societies moves from basics, standard, and predictability of phases that advance toward improvement. Such a narrative gives considerable impetus to increasing powers of governmental forces not previously involved in institutions centrally concerned with youth.

Hence, education, childcare, and family services become the realm of bureaucracies, State and regional, manned by employees who see themselves trying to reverse the disintegration of older institutional ways of schools and families. Public media provide reports of conditions that offer rationale for „protective" actions by institutions of government, while at the same time, those making decisions for such institutions often have little if any expert knowledge. „The facts" become those collected by public interest groups or evaluation centers whose „objective evidence" fuels pseudo-scientific debates by the pubic media and self-aggrandizing reformers. The realist view of youth is both unreflexive and unwilling to decenter away from adult self-interests, a mass-media collective consciousness, and the politics of interest groups. Such a posture receives unreflexive support from a long-standing faith in the inter-relatedness of technology, heightened control, and rationally constructed production and discourse. This realist perspective further points to increased crime against youth and a growing range of forms of crime committed by young people, as well as their popular entertainment displays of disrespect for current forms of authority.

Constructivists that counter realist ways of grounding action have no central core of support, for these often seem mired in relativism, and jargon. Slippery terms such as culture, symbols, agency, and representation come into the discussion, and those of different camps find little agreement among themselves on either identifying a problem or posing solutions. They argue that culture is undefinable, lacking in specificity and identifiability, and too easily falls prey to identity politics.

Meanwhile, young people themselves, many of whom busily go about creating their own authentic systems of meaning, remain invisible to adults unless they step out of line, or until they point to flaws in the master narrative traditionally linking school and jobs. They construct as much of their own reality as they can possibly gain control of, and many become intensely reflective about the contradictions between institutional claims regarding the need to control youth and prepare them for the future and any institutional realignments or innovations that would take into account in realistic terms the current local conditions of youth. They have little faith in any given institutions, as evidenced by

the following essay submitted to a writing contest supported by a youth-based organiza-
tion and judged by outsiders:

Every single person who enters this contest is going to write bullshit like going to college or getting good
grades, stuff that sounds aspiring and pleasant. the kids who enter and tell you the truth risk everything.
they may not be the ones with the pleasant stories and good grammar. they risk rejection of their perso-
nal aspirations and the exposure of the 'monster in the closet': and for what? to spill their guts to someo-
ne who will feel sad or maybe even cry for a few a little while and then award prizes in order to make
their egos feel better; and then you'll forget maybe you'll remember for a week a month or maybe even a
year, but eventually you'll forget, meanwhile the kids who told you the truth can't forget … maybe you
will show the one who tells the truth the way out – for a little while. and that's cruel. how can you expect
them to go back after you've shown them the sun? you can not judge my hopes and
fears, how can you expect to? this contest will exist year after year until one day maybe I'll be the one
presuming things and trying to relate in order to fulfill my ego and giving awards for pleasant bullshit.
that's what you want – isn't it? – me to tell you everything's going to be okay if I win. well it's not …
one, two, tell me what's true, three, four, I don't know what's real anymore, five, six, I only write with
bics, seven, eight, should I leave my life to fate, nine, ten, am I going to be my parents all over again,
thirteen, nineteen, who says life should be played clean, forty, one hundred, almost got enough words I
can't think of anything that rhymes … the end.

Young people such as this writer owe their primary allegiance to groups they themselves
either have a hand in forming or choose to join. Their depth of reflection and level of cri-
tique belie their chronological ages.

   These young care little for the long-term statistics that argue greater economic benefits
come to those with high school diplomas and college degrees. They point out that going
away to college or university not only costs money, but also requires that money be
spent; hence the loss of wages as well as the expenditure of funds may well deter young
people who cannot depend on higher education financial support from either families or
the State. Instead they set aside general material comfort and choose other means of
pleasure and comfort. Some choose to remain in their home communities and to become
highly entrepreneurial while looking about for opportunities to study specific skills, ob-
tain certificates, and through courses taken at several types of institutions collect credits
or hours that may someday be used towards a degree. Others seek adventure through
travel or exotic often strongly ecologically-based life styles, often in remote areas or with
groups of like-minded young people who eke out sufficient cash for bare necessities by
doing local odd jobs.

   Like the young writer quoted above, they adapt to life using their imaginations and often
becoming self-consciously aesthetic and fueled by strong convictions and moral commit-
ments. They demonstrate human agency and moral responsibility, while exhibiting what is
often an inconsistent anti-materialist stance (while they insist on recycling and „buying
green," they burn wood, a major source of air pollution, particularly in some parts of the
world). They have often pushed through particular types of discursive politics and become
convinced that their means of survival depends on flexibility and adaptability. Thus they
create or find themselves drawn to organizations such as those that are youth-based. These
organizations survive not by working through change in order to achieve a particular status,
but by shifting in response to local constituents' needs and to regional situations (such as a
large influx of refugees from a part of the world currently almost unknown in the local
community). Because youth-based organizations operate with a skeletal staff of adults and
often on marginal budgets, flexibility becomes the norm.

Other institutions traditionally believed committed primarily to youth, such as schools and families, cannot bear up under such constant adaptation. In many communities in the United States, for example, the major employer in a rural county may well be state governmental offices, including the schools. That a major function of schools and their systems is to be a regional employer often gets lost in rhetoric which asserts the need to put students at the center of these institutions. So long as so many communities (particularly in the United States) depend to a great extent on schools to keep the local economy afloat, schools cannot respond flexibly to local constituent needs. As adult employers, schools must maintain a strong grip on routine, predictables, and borders that if abandoned would threaten – either immediately or in the long run – jobs held by local adults.

Such forces help preserve the basics and argue for retaining the status quo within schools, leaving them license to ignore discussions of national labor market trends and stated ideals for potential employees from corporate multinational businesses. These employees want individuals who can communicate well in their work within group tasks, recognize and solve problems, access information and other resources, and take pride in products and performances of high quality. Schools as the major institutions thought to be in charge of youth cannot respond in wholesale ways or often in significant piecemeal fashion to implanting such skills in students. Cultural lag binds formal education to textbooks published several years ago and to assessments that favor rote learning and correct quantifiable solutions to given problems rather than creative open-ended explorations and information generation or problem identification. Many teachers and school change agents have, in the past two decades, pushed for some mitigation of these trends. Yet, schools today retain, for the most part, a schedule of opening and closing hours that is over a century old and that fails to recognize the changed nature of family, neighborhood, and religious organizations. Moreover, their approach to socialization of the young still rings most loudly with words emphasizing control, discipline, and punishment. Education institutions – especially those under public control – have made little progress toward recognizing risks taken and rules made and remade by young people as central to learning for the present and the future. Work is still a condition held out as future reward for successful learning in school and not as a key component of developmental learning both within and outside formal education.

What conclusions come from understanding the degree of risk-taking and rule-making that marks ecologies of learning that youth themselves value? Foremost comes the firm conclusion that macrostructural and microstructural features of effective youth-based organizations operate interdependently and do so through three central linkages that hold between the macro and the micro: roles, rules, and risks. Persistent questions addressed to this research on youth-based organizations ask: how representative are these youth? aren't they self-selecting into these programs? what can this work tell us about learning of youth „in general"? These questions miss the fact that it is in the decision of these youth to self-select that their resiliency resides. These are needful youth whose needs are met by the organizations and acknowledged by other young people as critically important. These youth select positive learning environments and do not choose to be somewhere else even when they could have done so.

All youth-based organizations who subscribe to the ethos of youth-as-resource generate positive outcomes of learning for youngsters, but *the arts* appear able to multiply these positive results simply because playing active roles (with an emphasis on the plurality of roles) constitutes the arts. Numerous current theories of learning underscore just

why arts organizations prove highly fertile as ecologies of learning through risking rules and playing roles. These theories underscore as well the importance of ensuring that young people see themselves as remaining connected to their community. In brief, the following list indicates key points from those theories:

- Individual learning takes place within social interactions.
- Highly activating connections that link individuals within social network of learners include personal affective dimensions, goal and group commitments, motivational incentives for group through individual effort, and intensive participatory roles.
- Performance assessment of outcomes of group efforts enhances distribution of understandings and skills across group members and work optimally when multiple forms of display (symbol systems) are called on (visual, verbal, kinesthetic, musical, dramatic) .
- Active agents of learning learn to do and know through incorporating these into being – or taking on a role as inquirer, demonstrator, experimenter.
- Generative learning activates itself, if learners see how new understandings relate to current needs, past projects, and future roles and goals.
- Elements of risk-taking enhance learning; an edge of uncertainty and thrill of discovery elevate a sense of agency.
- Enhanced learning comes from collaboration as communal member who is at different times in various degrees any or all of the following: participant, practitioner, instructor, co-sponsor, assessor, reflective resident philosopher or cheerleader.

Such theories explain how learning through transitions and with a readiness for transformations occurs when macro and micro structural features stay in sync. When such is the case, the learning ecology ensures that generative understandings and substantive knowledge receive active meaningful practice, reflection, and critique within a collaborative of individual learners who recognize one another as resources necessary together to ensure excellence.

5   Concluding remarks on youth research

To the current array of institutions, ranging from the State to families, the view of youth that comes from effective youth-based organizations remains largely invisible. In place of the portraits and other forms of evidence presented here come images and perceptions of young people – especially teenagers – as threatening to parents and increasingly to society at large. Beginning in 1995, the United States, Great Britain, and some countries of the European continent became racked with uncertainties about what the media termed „child murderers" whose violent crimes made newspaper headlines and television images. Judging these criminals as adults appears to be the judicial move of preference within the United States. Yet nations continue to pour funding and interests into infancy and early childhood, often with the espoused hope of enabling these children to steer clear of many of the pitfalls that have „destroyed" their elder counterparts.

The resistance of the young in post-industrial societies to choose to live as youth and instead to take on the risky dangerous behaviors of adults threatens and confuses. Policymakers, educators, parents, and social workers, along with juvenile crime authorities, respond to the unpredictability of young people and their dangerous risk-taking with punitive measures and „medicalized" solutions based on a belief that adults must control the

young. Yet, given the loss of scaffolds of supportive control and necessary work formerly more available than now from families, schools, religions, and neighborhoods, contemporary youths seem unlikely to respond to imposed control outside contexts that acknowledge their capacities to take some adult roles. Criminal gang life, unsafe sexual behaviors, participation in social settings that include alcohol and drugs offer adult roles. Many young take these up in defiance of societal attempts to control their access to such behaviors and in search of high risk behaviors that generate peer respect as well as adult attention. Yet these often disastrous roles do not come with guided or facilitated planning, preparation, and thoughtful practice, and none carries clear outcomes, goals, or standards of performance generated through internal group negotiation. Relationships within gangs, for example, depend on given hierarchical structures (and often functions) that derive from corporate models and allow little room for negotiation, conflict management, and distribution of both rewards and punishments for tasks accomplished well. Hence, many young people enter early adulthood having had few if any extended opportunities to engage with adults in joint work or collaborative enterprises that would bring the linguistic, cognitive, relational, and informational payoffs that come in youth-based organizations of the sort described above. Too many young people believe that what it means to be an adult is to have the freedom to engage in activities of short-gain pleasures and relationships, and high-risk escape efforts.

Research such as that reported here on positive learning ecologies is much needed in other post-industrial nations. But such research requires of scholars considerable risk and must depend on radical changes in approaches to youth development. Social scientists – particularly those who study education – have preferred to work within institutions familiar to them – classrooms, laboratories, and carefully controlled home settings. To branch out into work with youth appears to introduce too many variables and conditions that seem out of control. Furthermore, such work challenges given definitions of certain key concepts, such as community, family, and teaching, and calls for locally grounded definitions meaningful and translatable in specific ecologies. Moreover, reflexive consideration of contradictions within society that highlight only certain ecologies of learning while ignoring others makes evident just why residents of these latter sites distrust research and researchers. Young people carry an abundance of such distrust along with a ready arsenal of tricks to hold questioners and onlookers at bay or to lead them astray[4] Access to these learning ecologies and acceptance by their members come only with extraordinary care and over a long period of trust-building; moreover, young people must themselves be brought in as co-researchers and data analysts. In addition, one can never feel while deeply immersed in research on and with the young completely grounded, because neither they nor society allow them sole control over their habitats. Shutdowns of youth-based organizations by civic authorities, sudden family decisions to move out of state, and arbitrary school transfers often discontinued and dislocated the work of learning of the organizations studied in this report. Hence, study of youth must always be also of the interdependent agents and institutions that seek to control young people who insist on managing their own lives. Researchers easily become caught in these cross-fires.

An additional difficulty arises for social scientists who study youth in learning ecologies not dominated by the usual institutions of control for young people. Researchers have been relatively powerless in recent years to counter arguments that many policy prescriptions and corrective programs for youth do not work. A program that spends an extra thousand dollars per pupil to educate inner-city youth is cut by state or Federal authorities

because it has failed to raise reading scores by a specified amount. A program in a youth detention center is shut down because its recidivism rate is too high. However, these measures of success are linear, and learning is nonlinear. New epidemiological techniques for understanding societal change suggest that seemingly minor, remote, and isolated conditions or changes within or outside of a system can have profound consequences on that system. A phenomenon is therefore best understood through examining the interrelationship of its various components rather than through repeated focus on one or more of its component parts. As we come through cognitive psychology and cultural psychology to understand learning in new ways, we will need also to acknowledge that we can no longer move with linear assumptions about learning and teaching – the expectation that every extra increment of effort will or should produce a corresponding improvement in result. Social behaviors are not linear; improvement does not correspond directly to effort, but rather to conditions better thought of as „tipping points" – those edges in which a situation perceptibly shifts from one state to another. Jonathan CRANE'S work on effects of the number of role models in a community – professionals, managers, teachers of high-status – and effects on lives of teenagers – illustrates this idea (see GLADWELL 1996). There is little difference in teen pregnancy rates or school dropout rates in neighborhoods with between forty and five percent of high status workers. But when the percentage of professionals drops below five per cent, the problems explode. For black school children, as the percentage of high-status workers in their neighborhood falls just 2.2 percentage points from 5.6 per cent to 3.4 per cent – dropout rates more than double. At the same tipping point, the rates of child bearing for teenage girls which barely move at all up to that point nearly double as well.

Preliminary analysis within our work suggests that at the tipping point, neighborhoods can go from relatively wildly dysfunctional to relatively functional overnight. There is no steady increase but a little change has a huge effect. We have initial evidence that suggests for certain neighborhoods with high rates of crime, truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as gang activity, out-of-school effective sites to draw young people have to reach a tipping point in terms of percentage of youth population, and then positive changes become almost immediately evident in several other areas of the communities' social life.

Hence, skimming off just a few community youth for positive learning ecologies elsewhere will have little or no effect on general neighborhood conditions. But planting effective youth-based organizations within needful communities and ensuring adequate space and opportunity for 10-13 % of local youth may have a tipping effect that in turn enables other positive features of community life to develop.

Youth-based organizations provide conditionality that is predictable. Patterns and orderings appear at easy glance unpredictable and unique, while they are in fact highly predictable and yet complicated and interdependent in their underlying simplicities, principles, and regularities. The randomness of their pace and the shape of their processes fall into ordered patterns over time and in a conceptual frame that acknowledges them as learning environments filled with activities. These patterns are, so far as we can now tell, those that link together a discourse of inner states, an activity arena of conditionality and alternatives, and an interplay between a rhetoric of intentionality and the exercise of personal and group practice. These complicated interplays move along what are both routinized and highly stylistically open channels of risk, rule, and role. They bring together the macro and micro organizational levels that therefore account for the effects on young people who are members of these chaotic systems.

Notes

1 Though the writings of BECK focus on large societal issues and do not derive from the type of close field study reported in this study, his theories merit careful attention and carry possibilities for comparative framing. See BECK 1992, 1995 and BECK/GIDDENS/LASH 1994.

2 For full details on the methods and processes of the fieldwork, types of data collected and analyses applied, see HEATH 1996 and 1998.

3 Several theories of learning, ranging from those termed „communities of practice" to those preferring „communities of learners" or „learning for understanding," make similar points. The numerous references to the work of ROGOFF cited here (ROGOFF 1994, ROGOFF/CHAVAJAY 1995, ROGOFF et al. 1995), as well as those of PALINSCAR/BROWN (1984), BROWN/CAMPIONE (1990), BROWN (1994), SALOMON (1993), CHAIKLIN/LAVE (1993), BRUNER (1996), LAVE/WENGER (1991), and D'ANDRADE (1981), give only an initial indication of the several views that support a sociocognitive framework for learning.

4 See HEATH (1997) for discussion of the hazards of long-term participant observation among young people outside of schools and other sanctioned institutions of learning.

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