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YOUTH ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL AND NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

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Youth Organizing Initiatives

Youth organizing, a strategy for community change that involves leadership by young people, has become steadily more widespread during the past decade. Confirming this trend, a recent scan of the field (Torres-Fleming, Valdes & Pillai, 2010) identified 160 active youth organizing initiatives (up from 120 as recently as 2004) in the United States. Youth organizing initiatives take place in a variety of settings, including community centers, schools, churches and independent organizations. The most common issue that these groups seek to address through their organizing is education.

Fueled by increasing inequalities in education, youth organizing initiatives have taken both a practical approach – conducting research and demanding specific changes in local policies and practices – and a justice-oriented approach, arguing for young people's rights and ability to participate in civil society, and to have equal access to opportunities, including quality education and safe neighborhoods.

There is an emerging understanding among scholars and practitioners that youth organizing is a particularly potent model for working with youth. This is, in part, because youth organizing creates change at multiple levels (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). First, at a systemic level, youth organizing functions as a much-needed source of public engagement in local schools and school systems (Orr & Rogers, 2011), as well as a catalyst for changes in communities (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Mediratta, Shah & McAlister, 2009). In this way, youth organizing

often has beneficial effects even for young people who are not directly involved in these initiatives. Second, at the level of individual youth development, youth organizing initiatives create unconventional and dynamic extracurricular settings in which young people – particularly low-income youth adversely affected by educational inequalities – are exposed to critical, experiential civic education (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Developmental, educational and career development outcomes for these youth are often seen to improve through involvement in youth organizing (e.g., Conner, 2011). Moreover, youth organizing provides a powerful demonstration of the potential of young people to exercise power and leadership in the civic domain, and to work effectively across generations. In this way, it likely contributes to changes in perceptions of young people in their local communities. This chapter examines each of these three mechanisms and provides two illustrative case examples to make these points more concrete.

Case Example 1: Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE)

A collaborative effort of six Chicago community organizations with long traditions of organizing and social action, Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE),[1] was formed in 2007. VOYCE is a youth organizing collaborative that was launched with a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project on public education issues. Several of the member organizations had been doing youth and intergenerational organizing for many years. Others joined the effort due to their recognition of the need for citywide youth involvement in addressing problems with public education. The multi-organization collaborative effort attracted the support of private foundations and began working with groups of students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) – the third largest school district in the US.

The students' work began with training on participatory action research as a tool for social change. After publicly launching their campaign, they held meetings with school officials and reflected on their own educational experiences in order to formulate questions for the YPAR project on school settings and policies, and to make recommendations for improvement. The questions they identified concerned the curriculum of Chicago schools and the school environments. The backdrop for these questions was that the schools were among the worst in the nation in terms of graduation rates and preparation for college, with a 50 percent graduation rate and 8 percent college completion rate. Youth researchers designed a research project, surveying 1,325 other CPS students and interviewing 383 stakeholders in the CPS, including parents, students and teachers. Youth researchers then analyzed these data. They also conducted site visits to successful schools in other locations, including New York, Texas and California.

The research was published in a 2008 report titled *Student-led solutions to the nation's dropout crisis* (VOYCE, 2008). The report triangulated findings from the quantitative, qualitative, and observational research conducted by youth. The findings indicated that students in CPS generally did not find their schools' curricula relevant, that they had internalized their schools' problems including the dropout rates, that they did not see school as a stepping-stone to future academic and professional successes, and that they did not have strong relationships with school staff, or feel free to express themselves in their school environments. VOYCE called on CPS stakeholders to work with youth to identify solutions to these issues, including the adoption of district-level policies that would create better relationships in schools and a greater sense of purpose. They presented their findings and recommendations to school officials in a series of meetings, and to the broader community through large public presentations, including local and national media. These actions resulted in school- and district-level changes, as well as further refinement in the ongoing research and action.

In 2011, VOYCE released another report that focused on the issues with school disciplinary policies. The report, *Failed policies, broken futures: The true cost of zero tolerance in Chicago* (VOYCE, 2011), leveled a critique on the zero-tolerance discipline policies of the CPS. It argued that the Chicago schools' security and discipline policies were overly punitive. The report includes case examples of students whose education had been derailed by run-ins with the harsh disciplinary infrastructure of the schools for minor rule violations, such as writing on a desk or bringing a cell phone to school. The VOYCE report also descriptively analyzed educational and budget data from the district, demonstrating, for instance, that the schools' disciplinary policies were resulting in increased rates of out-of-school suspensions, but not increased perceptions of safety. The harsh disciplinary policies, the report argues, were contributing to mistrust and alienation among students, harming the relationships between students and school staff, and, in many cases, increasing school disruptions. And, of course, the increases in suspensions and expulsions had negative implications for student educational outcomes.

The 2011 VOYCE report went beyond the student perspective on disciplinary policy and analyzed budgetary data, discovering, for example, that the CPS spent $67 million in 2010–11 on safety and security. Their analysis compared this figure with expenditures on other initiatives in the district. For instance, in 2010–11, CPS spent only $1.5 million on arts education, $29 million on language and cultural education, and $35 million on college and career preparation. In combination, these areas received less funding than school security. Further, the district had more than 1,000 full-time employees in safety and security – far more than other comparable offices. The report makes the case that the direct expense of administering zero-tolerance policies pales in comparison to the costs associated

with poor student outcomes, dropouts, and incarceration: "We know that it is much more cost-effective to educate students than to incarcerate them. The annual cost of educating a student in Chicago is approximately $12,880, while the annual cost of incarcerating a young person is $76,095 – almost six times the cost of their education" (p. 22). Relying on previous studies on the likelihood of arrested students dropping out and the associated increases in costs to the public, the VOYCE report estimates the arrests that occurred in the CPS in one year (2009) alone will cost Chicago $240 million in public funds over time.

Youth leaders from VOYCE have presented the findings and recommendations from their research to multiple audiences, including CPS, the Board of Education, and other Chicago elected officials. In addition, they have traveled to present their work at events sponsored by the US Department of Education. As of this writing, VOYCE's efforts have had effects on policy, including revisions in the CPS student code of conduct that include an end to automatic two-week suspensions and cutting the maximum time for all offenses in half. CPS has not entirely overhauled its approach to school discipline, but youth leaders are keeping up the pressure.

Catalysts for Community and School Improvement

As the VOYCE example illustrates, building sustainable power in community organizations to create change in local systems is among the primary goals of most youth organizing initiatives. They do this by building new networks of relationships among participants, developing leadership and research capacities, and implementing strategic approaches to grassroots issue-based advocacy. In this way, youth organizing often draws on traditions of grassroots community organizing among adults (e.g., Stoecker, 2009; Swarts, 2008), a practice that has become more widespread in neighborhoods and institutions across the US during the last thirty years (Wood & Warren, 2002). Mediratta, Shah and McAlister (2009) examined multiple organizing campaigns related to education over the course of six years, reporting their successes at influencing school policies, curricula, teacher training and parent and community engagement in the schools. While only some of these initiatives involved youth in their work, nearly all were found to be effective at improving school climates, professional cultures in schools, instructional cores, and student educational outcomes.

Conner, Zaino and Scarola (2012) interviewed 30 adult leaders in the Philadelphia schools about the influence of a particular long-standing youth organizing initiative, the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU). They found that the district leaders credited the PSU with being a critical force for change in district policies. Moreover, the PSU was viewed as a stakeholder and important ally for (or potential threat to) ongoing decision-making in the district, due to their knowledge of the issues, their public visibility, the fact that they had

become a frequently sought source for journalists covering the schools, and their relationships with policy-makers. Like other successful youth organizing initiatives (e.g., VOYCE), the PSU has been able to alter power relations between local institutions and develop roles and agency for youth leaders in the local ecology of games (Long, 1958) that determines local priorities, agendas, and the distribution of resources. In this way, youth organizing represents a form of public engagement in educational systems, which is widely viewed as a critical component of educational reform and improvement (Orr & Rogers, 2011).

New approaches to improving urban public education, such as the Promise Neighborhoods[2] program, are highlighting the links between community capacity (e.g., affordable housing, access to health care, parental and community engagement) and student educational outcomes. While youth organizing similarly seeks to create change at the intersections of neighborhoods and schools, there are distinguishing characteristics of an organizing approach to educational improvement that can help to inform other approaches. These include: (1) youth organizing initiatives build new bases of grassroots power that exist outside of the formal, existing decision-making structures in local communities; (2) youth organizing efforts are grounded in a social justice orientation; and (3) unlike many other approaches to education reform and improvement, youth organizing actively involves young people in efforts to change and improve their own neighborhoods and schools.

Grassroots Power

Many approaches to changing systems begin with the assumption that a rational solution to problems can be discovered and implemented if only all stakeholders can communicate and work cooperatively. A community organizing approach to social issues insists that this is a naïve view, and that, in fact, many problems persist because of power relationships and imbalances. A change in the status quo often means that some people will win and others will lose. Change is therefore likely to be resisted, and this means that conflict is likely to occur when groups push for change (Christens, Jones & Speer, 2008). Organizing is an approach that builds civic power outside of existing local power structures and can therefore advocate for changes in policies and practices that might be too politically costly or inconvenient for elected officials or other publicly prominent positions to endorse. This often allows organizing initiatives to address issues that would not be brought to the fore if not for their insistence.

Social Justice

An organizing approach is also rooted in an orientation that views systemic disparities as issues of justice. Applying this orientation to education means

that every student deserves an equal chance for educational achievement and success. Barriers to equality of opportunity include not only elements of the educational systems, but also socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that limit the opportunities available to students of color or low-income status (e.g., lack of access to health or dental care, recreational and extracurricular opportunities, family supports). These disproportionate challenges are understood as oppression. A more mainstream approach to address disparities would be to designate disadvantaged students as "at risk" and to target them for special programs and support services. While such supports are often important, an organizing approach is more likely to insist that systems reorient and transform themselves in more fundamental ways in order to effectively provide opportunities to all students.

Youth Involvement

Finally, and perhaps most notably, youth organizing involves young people themselves in the change making process. A guiding philosophy of many community organizing initiatives is that the people closest to the problem should be a part of the solution to that problem (Stahlhut, 2003). Many approaches to education reform and improvement do not involve the students of the schools in determining the direction of reforms. Failing to involve students in educational change efforts not only sacrifices opportunities to gain crucial insights from students' perspectives, it misses opportunities for youth to be agents of their own development and to work collaboratively with adult allies and decision-makers (Zeldin, Christens & Powers, in press). Studies indicate that participating in community and educational change efforts can be an impactful experience in the lives of young participants (e.g., Conner & Strobel, 2007; Kirshner, 2009), leading not only to a critical awareness of social justice issues, but also to improved formal educational outcomes.

Case Example 2: Youth United for Change (YUC)

Youth United for Change (YUC) was founded by 15 young people and one adult staff member in 1991 to explore the root causes of drug abuse in their Philadelphia community, including the lack of meaningful educational and career opportunities for youth (Youth United for Change, 2012). In 1993, YUC changed its structure and established a school-based model of youth organizing that recruited youth to work on school campaigns. Today, YUC operates five school-based chapters that organize youth in traditionally low-performing Philadelphia public high schools to demand improvements in public education. There is also a sixth chapter that engages youth city-wide and organizes young people who have been "pushed out" (dropped out) of the public education system.

Through the school chapter models, youth leaders recruit students to meet weekly after school to identify problems, conduct research on school reform, and develop campaigns. Each chapter receives support from a YUC staff organizer, but the youth volunteer leaders are at the forefront of the campaigns. For example, an initial campaign in Kensington High School focused on eliminating study hall. Youth leaders and members identified study hall as a problem because it was considered a waste of both student and teacher time. They conducted research on alternative uses for this time period (Sherwood & Dressner, 2004), drafted a petition, solicited signatures from students and teachers, and then met with the school principal to discuss proposed alternatives. As a result, study hall periods were eliminated in Kensington High School. These early victories demonstrated to youth members that research and action are capable of producing change. Subsequent successful school-based campaigns included efforts to improve school facilities, implement more rigorous academic curricula, expand after-school programming, and improve the safety of the schools.

Although YUC achieved many early successes, leaders still expressed frustration that their victories were not producing the improved educational quality that members envisioned (McAlister, Mediratta & Shah, 2009). This frustration forced YUC to reexamine its underlying theory of change and to develop a more systemic strategy to improve school outcomes. In 2001, the state of Pennsylvania pushed a district privatization proposal and takeover of the local school district's governance. This presented an opportunity for YUC to move beyond school-based issues and to participate in a district-wide coalition against the state's privatization proposal. Participating in the coalition allowed YUC to develop relationships with a variety of school reform and advocacy groups, including the Philadelphia Student Union (Conner, 2011). This alliance with Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) would prove to be particularly beneficial as YUC prepared for its most notable campaign, the Small Schools Campaign.

Amid devastating budget cuts and a district policy of consolidation into large schools of 800 to 1,000 students, YUC students led a plan to involve parents and influential community allies to address long-standing deficiencies in education and services provided in comprehensive high schools. In 2002, the citywide Small Schools Campaign resulted in a proposal to replace a large failing high school with four new schools of 400 to 500 students. Youth leaders at the Kensington High School chapter invited school officials to tour their building and convinced leaders to add their school to the list of buildings in need of repair (McAlister, Mediratta & Shah, 2009). Youth leaders then initiated a "listening campaign" to identify problems and issues with their school and solicit ideas on how the school might be renovated and improved. A vision for four small, autonomous schools that would share property emerged from the listening campaign (Suess & Lewis, 2005).

Over the next two years, members of the YUC Kensington chapter conducted research on the small schools model and traveled to Chicago, Oakland, Rhode Island and New York City to observe and further research a variety of school models. Concurrently, at the local level, members of YUC partnered with members from the PSU to actively garner support for the Small Schools Campaign. YUC also built a coalition of supporting organizations, including Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP), Research for Action, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Collectively, these organizations developed a proposal for a new district policy on small schools and created an outreach plan to inform elected officials about the actions needed to transform public education in Philadelphia (McAlister, Mediratta & Shah, 2009). YUC advocated for a transparent public planning process. In June of 2005, YUC won a public commitment from Philadelphia's Chief Academic Officer for the creation of four small high schools to serve the Kensington community and the creation of a public planning process for the school's redesign. In September 2005, three small, theme-based high schools opened on the Kensington campus; three years later, construction on the fourth school began. The themes of the new small schools (i.e. performing arts, business, and culinary arts) were proposed by YUC students based on the results of their research.

The success of the Small Schools Campaign marked an ideological shift in focus for YUC from solely school-based issues to more structural and systemic issues in education. This ideological shift also resulted in several practical changes. For example, after the Small Schools Campaign, YUC decided to focus on more multi-year campaigns rather than campaigns based on the academic school year. The organization also began to integrate more political education for its members to situate school reform campaigns within a larger analysis of community change (McAlister et al., 2009). In addition, while school chapters continue to organize their individual school-based campaigns, they also attend monthly meetings with all YUC chapters to discuss crosscutting issues and explore potential district-level campaigns

YUC continues to spearhead school-based campaigns, but the organization simultaneously considers how district policies affect the school climate and, when necessary, advocate for district-level changes. For example, a school-wide survey led by the Strawberry Mansion chapter of YUC revealed test taking misconduct at the school. Specifically, student surveys identified that teachers were completing blank answers on students' exams and that tests were being administered in classrooms with instructional aids on the walls (McAlister et al., 2009). Surveys also demonstrated a strong dissatisfaction with the school's practice of pulling students from core subjects for test preparation. Based on this research, students produced a report documenting concerns and recommendations for improvement, met with district administrators, and

presented testimony to the Philadelphia School Reform Commission which led the district to update its standardized testing practices and procedures.

YUC is a respected organization leading to tangible outcomes in the Philadelphia school district. At the district level, the organization has been influential in small schools construction on the Kensington campus. YUC is also credited with changing adult perceptions regarding youth engagement; district and school leaders now understand the benefits of engaging students in reform activities (McAlister et al., 2009). Youth engagement is also leading to positive outcomes for young people. For example, administrative data from the restructured Kensington high schools indicate an improved school climate and increased student engagement. Although the demographics of the school have remained the same, student attendance has increased, the dropout rate appears to be decreasing, state exam scores show positive trends in math and reading, and there is an increased number of students who identify as college bound (McAlister et al., 2009).

Contexts for Youth Development

As has been observed in adult organizing initiatives (Speer & Hughey, 1995), there is a reciprocal relationship between the development of organizational power and the empowerment of participants in youth organizing initiatives (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). A community organizing approach to creating change in local systems begins with the empowerment and leadership development of participants in the organizing initiative (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister, 2009). In aggregate, this strategy is critical for building the capacity of youth organizing initiatives to successfully change local systems to better support all youth, but it can also be more immediately beneficial for the personal development of youth organizers. Psychological empowerment, for instance, has been identified as a key component of resilience, leading to improved academic engagement and the avoidance of risk behaviors and psychological symptoms (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Youth organizing teaches young people how to exercise agency in the systems that affect their daily lives, providing a buffer against the helplessness and alienation that can develop when young people experience inequitable and oppressive systems without effective avenues for working for change in those systems.

There is increasing recognition across disciplines that disparities in health and education have developmental roots. Disciplines as diverse as economics (Heckman, 2011) and neuroscience (Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009) are uncovering the pathways by which repeated childhood traumas disproportionately experienced by disadvantaged children can adversely influence development and, thereby, educational achievement through adolescence and early adulthood. Prescriptions for decreasing these disparities

involve early childhood interventions and increasing the nurturing capacities of school and family contexts (e.g., Heckman et al., 2010). Less commonly examined are the ways in which some young people, including youth organizers, are responding to adverse circumstances by becoming actively engaged in their communities and schools (Ginwright, 2007). These youth gain critical awareness of the social and political environments that make it more difficult for some to succeed, and the tools necessary to work for change in these environments (Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011). They can also find a socially and emotionally supportive extracurricular environment that supports pro-social development and healing (Ginwright, 2010). Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) recently reviewed the existing literature on the impacts of participation in youth organizing, and grouped the developmental effects among participants into three domains: (1) civic development, (2) psychosocial wellness, and (3) academic engagement. Here, we follow the same rubric for describing youth organizing as a development-enhancing context.

Civic Development

The civic domain – like family, neighborhood and school contexts – is increasingly understood as an important context for youth development (Sherrod, Torney-Purta & Flanagan, 2010). Young people who are civically engaged likely develop psychological sense of community (Evans, 2007) and social responsibility (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). The development of civic attitudes and capacities among young people is beneficial for the future of democratic societies, since democracy requires capably and knowledgeably engaged citizens (Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Research indicates that young people who participate in youth organizing are more likely to be civically active later in their lives (Conner, 2011; Mediratta et al., 2008), and that it is a potent context for development of civic identity (Kirshner, 2009). It is also likely that young people who become engaged in the civic domain develop greater resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), making it less likely that they will become engaged in violence and other risky behaviors.

Psychosocial Wellness

Youth organizing can be considered an empowering community setting (Maton, 2008), meaning that it likely enhances the psychological empowerment of participants. One component of psychological empowerment is the self-perception of one's own ability to lead and have influence in the civic domain. This component has been operationalized as sociopolitical control (Peterson et al., 2010), which has been empirically linked with other positive developmental outcomes for youth (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Another component of

psychological empowerment is the critical understanding of social systems power dynamics and change processes that can be gained as young people participate in organizing and advocacy efforts. These gains in awareness can be understood as critical consciousness (Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011), which is thought to be a particularly important developmental achievement for marginalized or disadvantaged young people (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). The skills and perspectives that young people gain from becoming engaged in liberation-oriented practice likely promote wellbeing (Prilleltensky, 2008).

Academic Engagement

Psychological empowerment has been found to be associated with the perception that formal education is important to one's current and future life goals (Peterson et al., 2010). Participation in youth organizing likewise appears to promote academic engagement. Students engaged in youth organizing have reported that they are more motivated to complete high school, earn better grades and to take more challenging classes as a result of their involvement in youth organizing (Mediratta et al., 2008). Students who have been involved in youth organizing appear to be more ambitious in their goals for academic and professional achievement after high school (Conner, 2011; Shah, 2011). These gains in academic engagement are likely due to the ways that youth organizing increases young people's understanding of the importance of knowledge and skills for creating change in the neighborhoods and schools. For instance, many youth organizers learn how to conduct and present research, evaluate policies, speak in large public venues, and negotiate with decision-makers. Many times, they partner with university-based researchers in these efforts (e.g., Peterson, Dolan & Hanft, 2011). These culturally-relevant educational experiences can change young people's perspective on the relevance and usefulness of education (Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012).

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have considered the outcomes of youth organizing initiatives at individual and systemic levels of analysis, and we have explored youth organizing as a process through descriptions of two youth organizing campaigns. As the Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) and the Youth United for Change (YUC) case examples illustrate, youth organizing can act as a catalyst for school and community improvement through strategic research and advocacy for changes in local policies and practices. These changes can lead to improved student outcomes, including attendance, achievement and graduation. Youth organizing differs from many approaches to educational reform and community

development, however, in its orientation to power and social justice, as well as the ways in which it engages youth. Moreover, as the VOYCE and YUC examples make clear, youth organizing campaigns can create impactful extracurricular settings for the youth who participate. They encourage civic engagement and development. Numerous published accounts of youth organizing also take notice of the impressive academic and developmental trajectories among the youth leaders of these initiatives. By way of conclusion, we will explore a less direct mechanism by which we believe youth organizing is advancing social justice and wellbeing for young people, particularly in marginalized and oppressed communities. That is, youth organizing is a demonstration of the power and potential of young people as civic actors. Importantly, it is also often a demonstration of the potential of youth of color.

United States society and institutions offer young people few opportunities to be involved in decision-making regarding the systems that affect their lives (e.g., their schools and communities). Young people are often segregated from adults in much of their daily lives. Interactions between youth and adults fall largely into familial or professional categories, and youth and adults often hold negative stereotypes about each other (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Collura, Christens & Zeldin, 2011). Age segregation can be even more pronounced for low-income youth of color, who have fewer opportunities for extracurricular activity and civic engagement than middle-class peers (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009). These trends are a disservice to young people and society on several fronts. They deprive young people of opportunities to develop and demonstrate their democratic capabilities, and they deprive social systems of intergenerational relationships, which can be a key ingredient for human development (Li & Julian, 2012). Age segregation and ageism can be considered as a self-reinforcing cycle. On the other hand, young organizing is a model for youth civic engagement that can initiate a countervailing cycle (Christens & Zeldin, 2011) in which youth and adults work together, demonstrate their capabilities, and create new expectations for youth involvement in society and institutions.

This argues for policies and institutional supports that will make youth organizing initiatives more widespread and available to greater numbers of young people and communities. Foundations (e.g., the Funders' Collaborative for Youth Organizing)[3] have increasingly taken notice of youth organizing, but many cities, towns and regions still do not have active or high-functioning youth organizing initiatives, and support for youth organizing still pales in comparison with support for other service or extracurricular activities. Since youth organizing campaigns often seek to change policies, governmental entities may be limited in the ways that they can directly support organizing activities. Foundations and local organizations (e.g., community centers; faith-based institutions; nonprofits) must take the lead in developing a stronger infrastructure of support, training, and research. For sustainability, successful

youth organizing initiatives require talented and experienced staff. The payoff would be multi-faceted – youth would be better positioned to take leading roles in improving their local communities, while simultaneously improving their own chances of wellbeing and success. In addition, their actions would drive social change toward norms of intergenerational collaboration.

Finally, insights from youth organizing should be integrated into other community development strategies. Policies and institutions geared toward changing schools and neighborhoods should consider whether they might more meaningfully engage young people in their efforts. For example, efforts that seek to increase public engagement in education, like the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, or to reform education, like the Gates Foundation,[4] might consider whether their approach could be enhanced by more student voice and grassroots involvement. Further, a community organizing approach to building grassroots power, relationships, participatory research capacity, and direct action should be considered as a mechanism for promoting community autonomy and wellbeing.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1 See http://www.voyceproject.org
2 The Promise Neighborhoods program (http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute. org/) is a US Dept. of Education effort to replicate the successes of the Harlem Children's Zone (see Tough, 2008) at linking local institutions (e.g., nonprofits, churches, universities) to provide comprehensive supports for the success of low-income students.
3 See http://www.fcyo.org
4 See http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Pages/education-strategy.aspx

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