AT OUR BEST

Building Youth–Adult Partnerships in Out-of-School Time Settings

edited by
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Printed in the United States of America

To young people everywhere:
We (adults) are at our best—as educators, mentors, and caregivers—
when we listen, learn, create, and act alongside you.

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INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY WHEN THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE

María Elena Torre
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In January of 2019, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, a gathering not designed for the presence or participation of young people, 16-year-old Greta Thunberg turned an opulent room of global leaders upside down as she called out their failure to address the rapid acceleration of climate change. Disgusted with their passivity, she made an urgent demand for action, ending with:

> Adults keep saying: "We owe it to the young people to give them hope." But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I have every day. Then I want you to act. I want you to act as if you were in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.[1]

We are living in times of crisis. While Greta's action and continued organizing has captured global headlines, youth activists everywhere are making

similar demands and forcing public attention to the extreme structural inequalities that shape our lives, schools, and communities. Young people in the United States are organizing against white supremacy, xenophobia, cisheteropatriarchy, sexual violence, gentrification, the gun industry, the criminalization of migration, racist policing, mass incarceration . . . and the list goes on. These inequalities are not new, their roots are intertwined with the colonization of this land, but the speed and magnitude of their contemporary manifestations call for our immediate response. In unprecedented numbers, young people are taking to the streets, walking out of schools, interrupting business as usual. They are reaching out and building new solidarities—even at times after stumbling over traditional divisions—recognizing intersectional struggles, and insisting on new ways of being. Times of crisis call for action, and today's urgency requires us to engage our most radical imaginations.

Luckily for us, this is precisely the gift of this gorgeous collection of writings. Lovingly gathered by Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Jessica Tseming Fei, and Deepa Sriya Vasudevan, the book you now hold in your hands offers intimate and collective stories of intentional intergenerational organizing and other forms of youth-adult solidarities and partnerships. Through poetic personal essays, theoretical and empirical studies, and reflections on collaborative research, programming and activism, youth and adult authors share honest insights into what it means to build, together, the just world we are fighting for.

The youth–adult partnerships highlighted in this volume break apart the kinds of youth–adult relationships that have too long been encouraged. Youth are not innocent blank slates, in need of protection and education; adults are not all powerful harbingers of knowledge. And neither group is patronizingly sought by the other for their "pearls of wisdom," or as Greta Thunberg rejects, their offer of "hope." Instead, the youth and adults in these chapters represent passionate actors who have come together because of a deep recognition that each has invaluable knowledge born of situated experience that is essential to creating the change they are mutually invested in. With their collectives, they build what Gloria Anzaldúa called *nos-otras*, a "we" that holds us (*nos*) and others (*otras*) together with a hyphen that insists on both individual recognition and mutual implication, enacting a solidarity that holds at once the tension of/between history and future imagination, of oppression and transformation.

This work is not easy—it is filled with the *choques,* or clashes, inherent in *nos-otras.* Intersecting power and vulnerabilities that cut across age/race/ethnicity/gender/sexuality/class/(dis)ability lines must be continually navigated and engaged. Tensions produced by the pain, frustration, and outrage around the injustices being tackled—often differently experienced by members of the collective—must be attended to. None of these

important challenges are glossed over or swept under the rug in the pages that follow. Rather these tensions and *choques* are offered as generative gifts to the readers, grounded experiences for us to learn from, puzzle through, and be provoked by, as we engage these partnerships in our own contexts.

At Our Best: Building Youth–Adult Partnerships in Out-of-School Time Settings reminds us of the radical possibilities that emerge when differently positioned people come together, when youth and adults join forces and meaningfully engage each other's lives. Whether located in participatory research or collaborative organizing, each chapter offers us the necessary inspiration, reflection, creativity, and courage needed to respond, in partnership and solidarity, to the crises before us. The authors, young and old, open our imaginations to the power of collaboratively analyzing and theorizing the varying conditions of our lives and the systems and structures that shape them; of simultaneously reaching backwards and forwards, across time and generation, rooted in and at the intersection of our differences. Their stories incite us to see ourselves in each other and to see each other's struggles as our own. It is time to roll up our sleeves and join together with those younger and older, as we work, sing, draw, dance, research, and organize for justice.

NOTE

1. Greta Thunberg's full speech is available at https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We urgently need to bring to our communities the limitless capacity to love, serve,
and create for and with each other."

—Grace Lee Boggs, Community Activist, Writer, Speaker

Over the past eight years, the three of us have shared the wonderful gift of working together on a variety of educational projects and academic endeavors related to youth voice, community building, and out-of-school time spaces. There is so much we have learned about the intersection of these practices and contexts through our past collaborative work—from each other, our students, and colleagues; many of these insights have found a home in this volume. This book has become a meaningful meeting place for our questions about issues of power and practice in developing youth-adult partnerships in OST spaces, as well as an opportunity to bring multiple perspectives to the table. We are proud and excited by the range and number of voices in this volume, and the lively conversations between youth development scholars, youth workers, youth organizers, and young people that have emerged on these pages.

Every part of this process was a collective endeavor, and we would like to acknowledge the various individuals and entities who supported us along the way. First, we are truly grateful to Helen Malone, Elizabeth Devaney, and the Information Age Publishing OST Series Editorial Board, including Dale Blyth, chair of the Advisory Board, and Brenda McLaughlin and Femi Vance, co-chairs of the Editorial Review Board. We are so grateful for

the opportunity to be a part of this book series. Relatedly, we would like to thank the members of American Educational Research Association's Out-of-School Time Special Interest Group and past book editors of the OST series—many of whom shared experiences that informed the direction of this book. We are also deeply thankful for a book development grant from former Dean James E. Ryan and current Dean Bridget Terry Long at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which assisted with critical costs for copyediting, administrative coordination, and author contributions. A special thank you to Ellen Meisels and Amy Maranville, who assisted with chapter copyediting, as well as George Johnson and Lisa Brown at Information Age Publishing for supporting our vision for an edited collection that blends and bridges the worlds of research and practice, reflection and action, and writing and art through adult and youth voices.

We would like to extend our appreciation to all of our authors and contributors for their enthusiasm and dedication throughout the editorial process. From early idea-generating conversations to later rounds of revisions and feedback, your commitment to sharing your knowledge and experience is what makes this collection shine. Thank you, chapter authors and youth contributors, for making the topic of intergenerational partnerships in OST come alive through your engaging prose, poetry, and artwork. Because we held a selective process for youth contributions to this book, we would like to acknowledge *all* the young people who shared their work with us as well as our friends and colleagues who helped promote the opportunity for these submissions. We also want to make a special note of appreciation to Alyssa Liles-Amponsah, who beautifully captured an image of intergenerational solidarity through her artwork for our book cover. We must share our deep gratitude to our own multigenerational families for their timely advice, love, and support. Finally, to our past, current, and future students, you continue to inspire our work in innumerous ways. We are excited to share this book with you as we continue to engage in conversations about navigating intergenerational partnerships, in all of their beautiful complexity.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Youth from around the world have taken a frontline role in publicly addressing some of the most pressing social issues of our time: educational inequity, gun violence and reform, police brutality, racism, climate change, and more. Some of these youth-led efforts have gained attention from news outlets and social media as well as political traction among policymakers. Many have wondered what enables youth to step into the spotlight with such conviction, courage, and conscientiousness. How have young people implemented powerful strategies for change, despite the harm and trauma that so many have endured? What intergenerational ecosystems exist to support youth voice and leadership—and how can adults play a role in strengthening and sustaining this work?

Sitting at the intersection of education research, practice, and activism, we have been inspired by the wisdom and power of youth. We believe that adults can be advocates and partners for young people working towards social change within their programs, schools, and communities. We celebrate the oft-silent and taken-for-granted work of intergenerational partnerships, in which youth and adults envision and enact dreams for a better future together. From this standpoint, we have been troubled by news and media reports that fail to acknowledge the vast landscape of youth organizing and action, both within the United States and across the world, as well as those that erase the long history of intergenerational organizing and youth-led social movements (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; HoSang, 2006; Kwon, 2013).

Young people engaged in social change efforts have often asserted that their efforts are not isolated. For example, the young people who survived the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and went on to lead marches and rallies that catalyzed a nationwide movement to end gun violence, have publicly recognized the longtime activism of youth of color for safety in their communities. Through building coalitions with longstanding youth organizations, such as Power U and Dream Defenders in Miami and Peace Warriors in Chicago, Parkland students highlighted the interconnected nature of the injustices that young people face, while also drawing attention to the ways in which these issues differentially impact communities due to social factors such as race and class.

Despite mainstream portrayals of recent political actions led by youth activists as unprecedented moments in time, youth-led movements for social change are not an invention of the modern era. Historians and education scholars have documented the instrumental role that young people have played in anti-colonial protests as well as movements for civil rights, democracy, and educational equity (e.g., Boren, 2013; Conner & Rosen, 2016; Franklin, 2014; Gordon, 2009; Kirshner, 2015; Sturkey, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Young people today are inheriting and extending these legacies of youth leadership, building upon the foundations of their predecessors as they work toward equity, inclusion, and justice in a changing world.

Throughout history, there have been many instances of adults mentoring, supporting, and standing in solidarity with young people who are fighting for their rights. For example, in the Newsboy Strike of 1899, young men refused to sell papers published by Pulitzer and Hearst, demanding higher wages and more equitable working conditions. Despite being relatively powerless economically and politically, the so-called "Newsies" developed a democratic process and drew on labor union strategies to win their campaign. Behind the scenes, the Newsies were supported by editors at competitor papers, who provided significant coverage of their efforts (Leavy, 2016). Almost half a century later, during the Mississippi Freedom Summer

of 1964, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee began Freedom Schools, alternative educational spaces where youth participated and engaged in Black print culture and discussed citizenship and freedom in ways that were profoundly limited in public school systems. In these schools, with the support of volunteer teachers, Black youth explored their intellectual and cultural heritage through the creation of youth-authored "freedom newspapers" (Sturkey, 2010). Sturkey (2010) notes that before Freedom Schools and freedom newspapers, Black youth activism "was limited to local civil rights campaigns where students played supporting roles to adult leadership" (p. 349). A few years later, in 1968, Chicanx students staged a series of walkouts in East Los Angeles to demand better educational conditions. Calling for bilingual education and ethnic studies, young people advocated to be reflected in the curriculum and respected in their schools. A small group of educators supported the efforts and the cause of these students, helping them organize and strategize their activism (Watanabe, 2013).

In recent years, youth of color have continued to drive grassroots efforts toward justice in their schools, neighborhoods, and communities. Campaigns, rallies, and marches have taken place across the country, with notable leadership by the Black Youth Project 100, a project coordinated by Professor Cathy J. Cohen. Across these historical and contemporary movements, youth–adult partnerships and intergenerational solidarity have been critical to building community power and engaging transformative work.

Recognizing the contributions of young people—in addition to the efforts of the adults who have stood behind and beside them—has been a major influence on our work in education research and practice. With combined experiences as critical educators, youth workers, mentors, and youth participatory action research (YPAR) facilitators in cities such as Cambridge, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, the three of us have often witnessed the power of youth–adult partnerships occurring within out-of-school time (OST) spaces in particular—for instance, in youth programs, school-based extracurricular and co-curricular activities, community-based organizations, and through social justice education networks. In this volume, the fourth in a series on current issues in OST, we take up the theory and practice of youth–adult partnerships occurring in and through these programs.

This book provides research-based evidence and participant testimonials to help readers understand the power of intergenerational learning in OST spaces, while also responding to key questions that scholars, adult practitioners, policymakers, and youth navigate in this work, such as: What role can (or should) adults play in supporting youth learning, voice, and activism in schools and communities? What strategies of (and approaches to) youth–adult partnerships are most effective in promoting positive youth development and organizational transformation? What tensions and challenges

arise in the process of doing this work? And what are the pressures of our contemporary era that influence youth–adult partnership in OST today?

We believe that building youth–adult partnership is a necessary component of developing high-quality OST programs for youth. It is also oftentimes the most meaningful and important work that adults can do with young people—especially with youth who are routinely minoritized, controlled, and patronized within existing systems of education.

In the following section of this introduction, we define youth–adult partnerships and explore the historical evolution of the concept. Next, we locate youth–adult partnership work within the broader context of research on quality youth programming in OST. We conclude by laying out the purpose and structure of this volume.

THE MEANING OF YOUTH–ADULT PARTNERSHIP

While the concept of youth–adult partnerships is not new, research and writing about qualities of youth–adult partnerships, and the factors that create them, is relatively recent. This research has been largely motivated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989), a document whose origins date back to the early 20th century. In 1924, the League of Nations adopted a Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which guaranteed children and youth five fundamental human rights, including a right to the resources necessary for healthy development, protection from exploitation, and significant relief in times of distress. In 1946, the United Nations built on this document, expanding it to include seven key points in 1948, and then 10 key points in 1959. The current version, which became effective in 1990, includes 54 separate articles and has been ratified by all eligible member states except the United States (Rothschild, 2017).[1]

In the United States, youth–adult partnerships have long been associated with the struggle for civil rights. In the early 1800s, several organizations were established to protect and advocate for abused and neglected children in the United States. In 1832, the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics, and other Workingmen passed a resolution condemning child labor, and by 1836, Massachusetts had become the first state to pass a child labor law.[2] The same year, the National Trades' Union Convention adopted a recommendation to set minimum age requirements for factory work—a recommendation that was repeated without government action for over a hundred years, until the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. These early efforts to prevent the abuse and neglect of children and youth slowly gave way to more nuanced fights for civil rights. In 1851, Massachusetts passed the first modern adoption laws, and 2 years later, Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, youth

and adults collaborated to advocate for the right to education, the right to food and housing, safe working conditions, rehabilitative justice systems, and equitable child welfare practices. The role of young people in these movements varied but often included publicly sharing their experiences and perspectives, pushing for more radical visions of change, building collective will and capacity, and supporting boycotts, marches or other forms of nonviolent direct action.[3] In similar ways, youth have contributed to national civil rights movements, anti-war movements, labor movements, socialist movements, anti-racism movements, and queer liberation movements.

Despite this long history, only in the last 50 years have educators, activists, and researchers endeavored to define and document what youth–adult partnerships entail. In 1974, the National Commission on Resources for Youth defined youth–adult partnerships as those in which there is "mutuality in teaching and learning and where each age group sees itself as a resource for the other and offers what it uniquely can provide" (p. 227). Two years later, that same commission added that, "youth participation can thus be defined as involving youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunity for planning and/or decision-making affecting others, in an activity whose impact or consequences extends to others—that is, outside or beyond the youth participants themselves" (p. 25).

Building on these ideas, as well as on Articles 12–15 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, researchers have outlined fundamental aspects of youth participation that underlie youth–adult partnerships. Checkoway (2011) describes 10 elements of youth participation, which actively involve young people in the institutions that affect their lives. Mitra, Serriere, and Kirshner (2014) define youth participation as, "a series of rights, including access to information, expression of views and freedom to form collective organization" (p. 292). Shepherd Zeldin and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have put together a variety of resources—research articles, an open access guide, and a website—devoted to building youth–adult partnerships and fostering organizational cultures that support youth engagement in leadership, decision-making, and community change.

Two frameworks about youth–adult partnerships are particularly essential to the design of this book: Hart's (1992) ladder of youth participation and Zeldin, Christens, and Powers' (2012) components of youth–adult partnerships.

The Ladder of Youth Participation

In 1992, after spending 3 years studying young people's participation in environmental projects, Hart wrote an essay for UNICEF in which he described the tension of participation in work with youth. Defining

participation as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives" (p. 5), Hart (1992) describes a typology of the ways in which adults interact with children and youth in school- and community-based projects. His ladder of participation includes eight levels at which young people are often invited to participate in civic and social life. The bottom three rungs of the ladder—manipulation, decoration, and tokenism—are considered "nonparticipation"; they do not actually count as an integration of young people into the decision-making processes that affect their lives. The top five rungs describe typologies of young people's participation that range from "assigned but informed" to "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults." Hart's (1992) ladder provides a typology through which we can understand participation in youth–adult partnerships across dimensions of power and context (see Figure 1.1).[4]

The Components of Youth–Adult Partnership

Zeldin and colleagues have spent the last 20 years investigating examples of youth–adult partnerships and illuminating the mechanisms through which these partnerships lead to positive outcomes. Zeldin's work has been seminal in considering processes and practices of youth–adult partnership, specifically in drawing attention to the role of youth–adult partnerships in community empowerment and in OST settings beyond the U.S. context. Zeldin, Christens, and Powers (2012) define youth–adult partnerships as the practice of: "(a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together; (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion; (c) over a sustained period of time; (d) through shared work; (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue" (p. 388). The authors note that youth–adult partnerships are distinct from other forms of youth–adult relationships, in part because they focus on collective development and transformation. In other words, rather than focusing on individual-level outcomes for youth—in the way that mentoring or coaching might—youth–adult partnership work typically is designed to "support youth (and adults) as agents of their own development . . . [who are] expected to collaborate, choosing objectives, and making commitments on issues that matter to both parties" (p. 389).

In this same piece of work, Zeldin, Christens, and Powers (2012) identify four core elements of youth–adult partnerships: (a) authentic decision-making, (b) natural mentors, (c) reciprocal activity, and (d) community connectedness. Authentic decision-making is defined as the active participation of youth in decisions that affect their everyday lives, including the opportunity to deliberate with those in power. Natural mentors are defined as nonparent, non-peer support figures (Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992).

Youth have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.

Youth have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

Adults have the initial idea but youth are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in making the decisions.

The project is designed and run by adults but youth are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

Adults decide the project and youth volunteer for it. The youth understand the project, and know who decided they should be involved and why. Adults respect their views.

Youth-Initiated, Shared Decisions With Adults

Youth-Initiated and Directed

Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions With Youth

Consulted and Informed

Assigned but Informed

Degrees of Participation

Tokenism

Youth are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.

Decoration

Youth take part in an event, e.g., by singing, or wearing T-shirts with logos, but they do not really understand the issues.

Manipulation

Youth do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, OR youth are asked what they think, adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have had on the final decision.

Non-Participation

Figure 1.1   Ladder of youth participation (recreated from Hart's 1992 ladder of children's participation).

Unlike more formal mentoring, "natural mentoring occurs without a de-fined program, and by the mutual consent of those involved under condi-tions of more equal power" (Zeldin et al., 2012, p. 391). Reciprocal activity is built on the principle of mutuality, and demands that adults and youth act as both teacher and learner. In reciprocal spaces, "there is an emphasis on creating structures and norms for collective reflection and critical think-ing among intergenerational groups" (Zeldin et al., 2012, p. 392). Finally, community connectedness refers to the strength of social networks among members of a community, which can provide both social capital and social

support. These aspects of youth–adult partnership work in tandem to nurture collective development.

Zeldin and colleagues' definition of youth–adult partnership, and the examples that accompany it, resonate deeply for us. We believe that in addition to being reliable, reciprocal, and responsive, youth–adult relationships must be: (a) strengths-based, (b) committed to cultural humility, (c) partnership-oriented, and (d) praxis-oriented (Brion-Meisels, Fei, & Vasudevan, 2017). In these relationships, adults provide the scaffolding and the tools that enable youth to critically analyze and act upon the world around them. We recommend that in order to best support these positive relationships between adults and youth, settings should include or feature: (a) nurturing physical spaces, (b) the space and time to build trust, (c) joy/fun, and (d) a commitment to explicitly address institutional equality (Brion-Meisels et al., 2017). These types of settings typically adopt democratic and participatory decision-making processes, as well as a set of humanizing practices that center individual and collective transformation.

AUTHENTIC YOUTH–ADULT PARTNERSHIPS: A VERTEBRAE OF QUALITY YOUTH PROGRAMMING IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Out-of-school time (OST) programs vary widely in their curriculum (e.g., media arts, political education, health and wellness, outdoor education), in their processes (e.g., maker spaces, organizing spaces, youth on boards, arts-based spaces, athletic spaces, youth radio and television) and in their cultures (e.g., spaces defined by identity, or geography, or ideology, or interest). Yet across programs, OST work is highly relational: Many providers see their roles as working *with* youth rather than *for* youth (Chávez & Soep, 2005; Jones & Deutsch, 2011; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). In OST programs, youth and adults are often partnering to change dominant systems, like schooling or corporate policies. In addition, OST programs themselves tend to be settings of community and collaborative decision-making, from the initial design of programs to the development of activities and projects, and their evaluation (Deschenes, Little, Grossman, & Arbreton, 2010). Historically, OST programs have met a set of youth-driven demands that include access to: informal learning spaces (Halpern, 2002; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005; Malone & Donahue, 2017); information about cultural identities and histories (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; Pozzoboni & Kirshner, 2016); key social, emotional, and civic tools (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005); and sites of resistance and disruption

of educational inequities and sociopolitical consciousness building (Baldridge, Beck, Medina, & Reeves, 2017; Ngo, Lewis, & Maloney Leaf, 2017).

In the first volume of this edited series, *Current Issues in Out-of-School Time* (Malone & Dohahue, 2017), Karen Pittman (2017) makes the argument that the OST field must shift its focus from the *where* and *when* to the *what* and *how*. Pittman (2017) writes that researchers and youth workers should

> embrace sharper, cleaner criteria that describe and differentiate ... [OST] programs not only based on where and when they operate, but also on what skills, behaviors, and capacities they hold themselves accountable for developing, which groups of students they best support, how they create environments that support predictable growth for these populations, and how well they monitor and manage their performance. (p. 295)

Pittman (2017) suggests that this shift is critical if we are to help K–12 educators understand the specific ways in which context-driven, personalized learning can successfully nurture holistic development and equity in educational spaces. By articulating the *what* and *how*, OST programs can provide significant insights for school-based educators on the strategies that underlie context-driven, personalized learning. Indeed, according to Pittman (2017), the *what* and *how* of effective youth programs may, in fact, be the *what* and *how* of effective learning spaces across time-of-day and context.

Through highlighting authentic youth–adult partnerships as a central component of quality youth programs, this fourth volume of the IAP series on OST aims to sharpen the field's understanding of positive, intergenerational relationships—an essential *what* of OST programming. In addition, we aim to articulate *how* positive youth–adult partnerships are nurtured, such that educators across school and community-based contexts can better enact context-driven, personalized learning, while also enabling processes of healing, empowerment, and transformation.

In their work on OST programs, researchers at the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (CYPQ, n.d.) offer a framework for understanding the set of factors that influence the quality of youth programming.[5] The CYPQ uses a pyramid to illustrate the multitiered nature of factors of safety, support, positive interactions, and engagement; factors which combine to create environments in which youth can gain essential skills, thus affording opportunities for positive youth development. In 2012, Akiva proposed adding youth program governance (YPG) to the CYPQ's pyramid. This, Akiva (2012) notes, "may include providing opportunities for youth to lead activities, to participate in advisory boards, and to be involved in decisions about how the physical space is arranged, the activities offered, field trips, how money is spent, and even staff hiring" (p. 1).

Prior volumes of this IAP series provide evidence of the ways in which social-emotional learning (SEL; Devaney & Moroney, 2018) and equity

(Hill & Vance, 2019) are essential to quality OST programs. In some ways, both SEL and equity can be seen as core elements forming the base of the CYPQ pyramid. In order for youth to be safe and supported, OST programs must build a climate that is healthy and health-promoting for all youth. The skill-building and conflict resolution skills found in the second tier of the CYPQ pyramid are explicitly rooted in the fields of SEL and equity. At the same time, it is hard to read the CYPQ pyramid without acknowledging the overlap among its tiers; in other words, each subsequent tier rests squarely on the foundation of the tiers below. In this way, SEL and equity not only form a base on which quality youth programs build; they are, in fact, vertebrae of a backbone that steadies quality OST programs and enables them to promote positive youth development.

In this volume of the *Current Issues in OST* series, we argue that another, equally important, vertebrae is the quality of the relationships between youth and adults in a program (see Figure 1.2). We refer to quality youth–adult relationships as partnerships because we believe that these relationships are only truly authentic when they exist outside of traditional power hierarchies and negative constructions of youth. In using the phrase "youth–adult partnerships" to describe the intergenerational relationships that facilitate high levels of youth participation and power, our work intentionally builds on the work of Shepherd Zeldin and his colleagues, whose research on the quality of youth–adult relationships has been a core part of our own learning.

Returning to the CYPQ's Pyramid of Youth Program Quality, one can identify myriad ways in which youth–adult partnerships impact each of the tiers of programming quality. The strength and quality of youth–adult relationships is directly related to young people's feelings of safety in an OST setting, as well as their ability (and willingness) to access support. Given the dangers of hierarchical adult–youth relationships, which often recreate structural violence, we argue that high-quality youth–adult relationships are partnership-oriented. These relationships allow young people to feel seen and valued in their full humanity, enhance young people's sense of agency to pursue their individual and collective goals, and ensure the scaffolding needed for youth to experience success of many kinds. They also demand of adults an equal willingness to grow—to learn, to build capacity, to stretch themselves in new ways—which is critical for long-term, reciprocal relationships. By building partnership-oriented spaces and relationships, OST programs can foster safe and supportive settings where young people's developmental and relational needs are given priority. These settings allow for restorative and humanizing responses to harm, often providing a model quite different from that of school.

In addition to baseline considerations of safety and support, the CYPQ model suggests that youth programs must foster high quality interaction

Figure 1.2 Factors influencing the quality of youth programming (with content adapted from the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality).

and engagement. In the Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) overview, high quality interactions are defined as a peer culture where youth "support each other," "experience a sense of belonging", participate in small groups as members and as leaders, and have opportunities to partner with adults (Smith et al., 2011, p. 6). High-quality interactions occur both

among youth, and between adults and youth. They are characterized by trust, a shared sense of purpose, agency, and authentic collaboration. The YPQA defines quality engagement as settings in which young people feel safe and included such that they can "assert agency over their own learning." Quality engagement requires that youth have "opportunities to plan, make choices, take on responsibilities, reflect and learn from their experiences" (Smith et al., 2011, p. 6). And, they encourage programs to provide youth with choices and opportunities to reflect on the decisions that they have made in the past. Youth–adult partnerships foster high-quality engagement by providing the scaffolding and safety within which flexible engagement can occur. In addition, youth–adult partnerships often draw on adult expertise in ways that have been chosen by youth. That is, although adults have a clear role and purpose in the work, youth pick the central goals.

Evidence from across the fields of education and youth development has begun to illustrate the impact of youth–adult partnerships on the outcomes of participants. Across a study of 198 programs, Deschenes, Arbreton, Little, Herrera, Grossman and Weiss (2010) found that OST programs that were most effective in engaging older youth were ones that included leadership opportunities focused on: volunteering, having input into designing activities, designing and leading activities for peers or younger youth, conducting community service activities, and shaping program rules, among others. Additionally, through hierarchical linear modeling, Akiva, Cortina, and Smith (2014) found that especially for older youth, different youth–adult partnership practices were positively associated with young people's motivations to attend programs as well as their skill-building, further confirming these kinds of partnerships between adults and youth as foundational for positive programming.

We also know that the power of youth–adult partnerships goes beyond their impact on individual youth. As Zeldin and colleagues (2012) note, youth–adult partnerships can lead to mutually transformative experiences for both youth and adults, inspiring ongoing efforts in community advocacy, participation, and coalition-building for all involved. Other scholars (e.g., Camino, 2000; Ginwright, 2005) have suggested that youth–adult partnerships can be healing for adults who have themselves experienced marginalization, exclusion, and trauma. For these reasons and others that will be discussed through the chapters in this volume, youth–adult partnerships not only represent a core element of high-quality OST programming, they also constitute a key aspect of OST pedagogies from which school-based educators might learn.

We entitled this book "At Our Best: Building Youth–Adult Partnerships in Out-of-School Time Settings" because our authors and contributors reveal how youth–adult partnerships necessitate that both adults and young people bring their best selves to their work. The chapters in this volume

explore, in varied ways, how youth–adult partnerships can enable people and programs to develop toward their full potential. In this way, building youth–adult partnerships helps us expand our collective capacity to achieve transformational change in our organizations, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

Out-of-school time programs have the power to model new paradigms of learning, creating, and being. In OST spaces, adults and youth have the opportunity to re-envision learning and build social consciousness without the scripts of the classroom. However, OST spaces can also reproduce the adultism, misogyny, and racism from which youth seek refuge, if these systems of oppression go unchecked (Baldridge et al., 2017). When adults partner with youth in driving the mission, approach, and outcomes of learning, OST settings can become sites of resistance and transformation for all involved. Thus, we believe that it is imperative to address both the possibilities and the challenges of engaging in partnership work in OST, and we see these youth–adult partnerships as representative of the work we can do *at our best*. It is our hope that as educators begin to draw more readily from the best practices of the OST field, the power and promise of youth–adult partnerships become kernels from which they build.

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

In this volume, we bring together the voices of over 50 adults and youth who have thought deeply and critically about youth–adult partnerships, and whose unique perspectives enable us to think in new ways about the theory and practice of youth–adult partnerships in OST. The book is anchored by 14 chapters that represent a mix of empirical research, theoretical and conceptual studies, and engaged dialogue on what it means and looks like to engage in partnership work. Of these 14 chapters, several are co-written by intergenerational collectives of youth and adults, or people who began collaborating with one another in the context of a youth–adult partnership; their chapters are a direct reflection of the many opportunities for learning and knowledge-building inherent in positive youth–adult relationships. In addition, throughout the book, we have incorporated short essays, poetry, and artwork by 11 young people who offer insights based on their lived experiences of partnership with teachers, youth workers, counselors, family members, and other caring adults in their lives. Through these varied works of creative expression and storytelling by young people, readers can engage in the practice of listening to the voices of youth and learning from the wisdom they have to share. For adults, we consider this practice to be the starting point of building solidarity with young people and creating space for young people's stories to be heard.

The intention of this book is to lift up the stories, experiences, theories and knowledge of authors with multiple positionalities. We focus on amplifying the experiences of young people who have been traditionally marginalized by structures of—and institutions with—power, including young people of color, young people with disabilities, young people from opportunity-constrained environments, immigrant and refugee youth, gender nonbinary youth, and sexual minority youth. The chapters that follow are organized into four sections: "The Foundations of Partnership," "On Relational Practices," "On Organizational Practices," and "On the Complex Role of Adults." Each of these sections addresses theoretical frameworks in addition to concrete strategies and approaches for building youth–adult partnerships in OST. Section I, "The Foundations of Partnership," establishes three fundamental aspects of effective youth–adult partnerships, each of which plays out at both interpersonal and organizational levels. In Chapter 2, Aisha Griffith and Xue Jiang theorize a process of trust-building in youth–adult relationships, based on interviews with youth and adults at a number of different project-based OST programs. In Chapter 3, Luis-Genaro Garcia takes readers into his practice as a teacher, researcher, and artist in Los Angeles, describing how he draws from Paulo Freire's problem-posing methodology to collaborate with youth in processes of community change, working together to challenge oppressive and limiting circumstances. In Chapter 4, Juan Medina, Bianca Baldridge, and Tanya Wiggins explore a set of key tensions that present challenges to authentic youth–adult partnerships, with a focus on the sociopolitical contexts that shape programming in community-based youth organizations. Ultimately, Medina and colleagues highlight the importance of creating organizational cultures that are humanizing, critically reflective, and grounded in an asset-based approach to supporting youth of color. We view such spaces as guided by the principles and aspirations of democratic participation, wherein all members of a community—including those with the least power and privilege—can assert their voices and exercise their rights to shape the conditions of their lives.

In Section II, "On Relational Practices," we zoom in on youth–adult relationships—what we consider the underpinning of effective partnership work. These chapters help us think about what it takes to form, sustain, and leverage positive relationships that are based in shared values and driven by shared goals. In Chapter 5, Marcellina Angelo and Deborah Bicknell reflect on how they cultivated a 10-year relationship through their involvement with the Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN). Through a steady exchange of love, care, communication, and laughter, their relationship grew to allow each person to be their authentic self as they grappled together with racial difference, cultural issues, and personal hardship. In Chapter 6, Donté Clark and Molly Raynor juxtapose and interweave their stories of

growing up, finding poetry, and ultimately co-developing and co-directing a youth arts program in Richmond, California. In addition to acknowledging the contrasts in their identities and backgrounds, their chapter explores how they collaborated across differences of power and privilege to create healing-centered, youth-driven spaces in their local communities. In Chapter 7, Amanda Torres and Anna West, former mentee and mentor as well as longtime collaborators in youth arts organizing and education, dive deeply into the intricacies and complications of forming reciprocal and transformative relationships between adults and youth. They highlight the paramount importance of critical reflection and individual healing in ensuring that the relationships formed between adults and youth do not perpetuate the often exploitative conditions of under-resourced youth organizations, and can effectively provide shelter against systems of oppression in society at large. Within this section, youth authors and artists Kelsey Tonacatl-Cuatzo, Sylvia Boguniecki, Arie Dowe, and Arianna Ayala share their visions and experiences of times when adults supported them to pursue their passions and interests, fostering relationships that honored their unique gifts as young artists and writers.

All together, these authors and contributors help us see the challenges as well as the hope inherent in youth–adult relationships. Perhaps unsurprising for a volume on intergenerational partnerships, these works signal that adults should be viewing younger people as not only worthy of a seat at the table of community change, but also as co-leaders, co-facilitators, and co-directors with valuable contributions to share. Moreover, they illuminate how the quality of youth–adult relationships fundamentally shapes the work that adults and youth can do in partnership with one another.

Section III, "On Organizational Practices," continues to emphasize the importance of positive youth–adult relationships while turning focus to the settings that support youth–adult partnership work. In this section, we include poetry and essays by Tianna Davis, Yohely Comprés, and Latifat Odetunde—young people who describe their involvement in affinity spaces for women of color, student organizations focused on experiential learning and social justice activism, and youth–adult collaborations that amplify youth voice. The chapters in this section further examine the structures, routines, and curriculum that not only foster positive youth–adult relationships, but also center them within the context of OST programs and community-based organizations. In Chapter 8, Pegah Rahmanian advances a model for youth development in which partnership with adults intentionally moves young people through a continuum of adult-led to youth-led participation. Based on her experiences with Youth in Action, a youth development organization in Providence, Rhode Island, Rahmanian contends that differentiation in curriculum, opportunities for personalization, and community-building experiences can help individuals and organizations offer the best

versions of themselves to the world. In Chapter 9, Sarah Zeller-Berkman, Mia Legaspi-Cavin, Jessica Barreto, Jennifer Tang, and Asha Sandler—all members of an intergenerational research collective addressing issues concerning justice-involved youth in New York City—describe practices that are grounded in the principles of democratic participation and power-sharing. In addition to providing readers with theoretical grounding in critical participatory action research (CPAR), Zeller-Berkman and colleagues share examples of ways to name and address power, scaffold roles and responsibilities, establish common goals for action, and engage in group reflection on the progress of shared work as well as on the influence of current events on their everyday lives. In Chapter 10, Erica Van Steenis and Ben Kirshner examine the literature on youth media arts and hip-hop as an entry point to youth–adult partnerships. Drawing from their research on a youth media arts organization in the San Francisco Bay Area, Van Steenis and Kirshner discuss how youth workers have engaged hip-hop music production as a curricular tool to foster equity and collegiality in their relationships with youth. In Chapter 11, volume editor Jessica Tseming Fei presents a conversation between Rush George, Nayir Vieira Freeman, Allyn Maxfield-Steele, and Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson—community organizers who have occupied various roles as leaders and staff members at the Highlander Research and Education Center, founded in 1932 in Tennessee. These contributors cast light on practices such as developing group rituals and norms, learning about the historical and global context of resistance and movement-building, and creating structures of governance that nurture and support younger leaders. Moreover, their stories reveal how intergenerational organizing can help build communities defined by lifelong commitments to mutual learning and collective liberation.

In Section IV, "On the Complex Role of Adults," our authors take a close look at the tensions that emerge in youth–adult partnership work. The chapters in this section surface the ways in which partnership work asks for adults to take on different roles and responsibilities than they traditionally do when working with youth; they also illustrate how educators, organizers, and activists have interpreted the call to partnership in different ways. In Chapter 12, Melissa Kapadia, Anika Kabani, and Nudar Chowdhury discuss tensions that they wrestled with in their roles as organizers and former participants within a summer program for South Asian, Diaspora, and Indo-Caribbean youth. Using the Zeldin, Christens, and Powers (2012) framework for youth–adult partnerships as an analytical lens, they show how even in radical spaces that are designed to be nonhierarchical and healing-centered, youth and adults still need to work actively to recognize and transform hierarchical relations, to balance a sense of comfort alongside the push to grow, and to invest in long-term collective healing that transcends the bounds of any one space and time. In Chapter 13, Samantha

Rose Hale, Heang Ly, Nathaniel McLean-Nichols, and Carrie Mays—authors who first began collaborating as youth and adult staff at Teen Empowerment in Roxbury, Massachusetts—unpack an intergenerational conflict that arose in the process of planning for a community dialogue on racism. Hale and colleagues identify several contributing factors—such as histories of oppression, cultural differences, biases and assumptions, and limited time and resources—that give rise to these tensions between adult and youth, and detail the tools they used, such as debriefing conversations, consensus-building around goals, and shared facilitation practices, to recover from the harm caused by adults in the group. In Chapter 14, Kristy Luk, Noah Schuettge, Keith Catone, and Catalina Perez reflect critically on their collaboration with young people in planning a regional youth-organizing conference. Describing the ways in which this experience revealed tensions of power and manifestations of adultism and white supremacy in an OST space, the authors advance an approach to fostering authentic youth leadership that asks adults to confront their own perfectionism and feelings of shame and failure. Luk and colleagues also share tools for assessing levels of youth participation and power in youth–adult partnership work. Finally, in Chapter 15, Thomas Nikundiwe speaks on the tensions that adults experience around when and how to exercise their own voices in youth-led and youth-run organizations. Drawing lessons from a past conversation between adults and youth involved in the Baltimore Algebra Project, Nikundiwe argues for the importance of fostering strong relationships with and among young people and providing opportunities for youth to take the lead from the beginning stages of youth–adult partnership work. Nikundiwe's chapter adds depth to our understandings of trust as a foundational aspect of youth–adult partnerships, and provokes thought on the many ways in which adults and youth might "flip the script" of hierarchical relations and power dynamics in their contexts. Section IV includes artwork and writing by Emmylou Nicolle, Gassendina Lubintus, Noelis Tovar, and Eduardo Galindo—young people who raise up the need for adults to hold high expectations of youth; create sanctuary spaces that include and honor young people's cultures, families, and communities; and share their own wisdom in order to support young people towards their goals.

We conclude this volume with a chapter written by the volume editors. Brion-Meisels, Fei, and Vasudevan explore connections across the chapters and sections of the book, and describe four core principles of effective youth–adult partnerships that were outlined by our authors and contributors: (a) trust, (b) problem-posing methodologies, (c) democratic participation, and (d) collective action. These principles of partnership represent a synthesis of our learning from the book, and underlie a dynamic mix of strategies that practitioners can use to build authentic youth–adult partnerships in OST contexts and beyond. As a diverse group of authors and