

Youth leadership programs for community development and social action: a pedagogical approach

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Abstract This conceptual paper explores pedagogical interventions that can be applied to social change centered youth leadership programs. It specifically focuses on two interventions, *Image Theatre* and *autonomy promotion*; the former is a pedagogical tool while the latter is a pedagogical approach. These interventions are vital for social change centered youth leadership programs because they allow facilitators to account for participants' sense of agency and determination while concurrently engaging them in critical social analyses necessary for the advancement of community development and well-being. This paper presents a description of *Image Theatre* and *autonomy support* as well as a discussion of how facilitators can apply these interventions to youth leadership programs. The theoretical tenets that inform the aforementioned pedagogical interventions, theory of self-determination and critical consciousness, respectively, are presented.

Introduction

Communities worldwide are experiencing monumental socio-political challenges, be they connected to natural disasters, political instability, and/or economic crises. Some communities have invested in leadership and capacity building programs that empower local citizens to work independently or in collaboration with private organizations and local governments to solve

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societal problems. The goal of these programs is to work towards *social change*, which in this context refers to efforts 'to serve those who have been disadvantaged' and 'to address systemic problems in a way that will increase the power of marginalized groups, communities or interests' (Chetkovich and Kunreuther, 2006, p. 2). Many leadership and capacity building programs emerged in 'the mid-1980s in response to changing demographics, technological change, social change, and varying resource allocations which challenged...communities to seek new ideas and methods for sustaining their quality of life' (Langone and Richard Rohs, 1995, p. 253). These programs target various demographic sectors (e.g. women) but increasingly focus on *youth*, as future leaders with agency and as key contributors to community development (Kirk and Shutte, 2004; Campbell and Erbstein, 2012). According to Bhattacharyya (2004), 'in order to promote agency, community development must aim at generating *critical consciousness*' as well as 'addressing problems that the affected people 'own' and define, and take active measures to solve' (p. 13). The increasing inclusion of youth in community development and leadership programs is a positive response to historical approaches that have ignored youth as viable social change agents (Delgado and Staples, 2007).

Youth are a vital component to the successful evolution of any given community, be it small or large, urban or rural, wealthy or impoverished. According to Brennan, Barnett and McGrath (2009), the 'interactive and dynamic relationship between community and youth development' allows for 'stronger communities [to] emerge' (p. 343) and more capable youth to thrive. Similarly, Delgado and Staples (2007) articulately state that 'no nation...can afford to neglect its youth and still hope to play a viable role in the global economy [as well as] meet the social and educational needs of its citizens' (p. 3). According to the authors, nations that disinvest in their youth populations are eventually forced to expend financial, social, and political resources on 'remedial services and correctional supervision' (p. 3). Youth development is thus an important part of community development.

The term youth development has been varying defined as *natural process*, *principles*, and *practices* (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman, 2004). Youth development as a *natural process* encapsulates: 'the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on [his/her physical and social] environment' (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman, 2004, p. 3). The assumption is that the ideal development scenario is one in which youth 'lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life' from their formative years to adulthood as a result of having developed 'competence to earn a living [and] to engage in civic activities' (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman, 2004, p. 3).

The definition of youth development as *principles* is based on the premise that youth development is grounded in 'a commitment to enabling all young people to thrive;' this premise is founded on 'two principles: universality or

inclusiveness (all youth) and a positive orientation building on strengths (thriving)' (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman, 2004, p. 3). From this vantage point, youth are capable of making choices and decisions that contribute to their growth and well-being (Checkoway, 1998). Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman (2004) describe the genesis of this particular conceptualization of youth development as having emerged in response to extant approaches that emphasized youth problems and deficiencies and highlighted remedial programs. The contemporary focus is on how to *foster resiliency to help all youth thrive* by further examining dimensions such as social support, *agency, motivations, aspirations, competencies, family, community, and schools*, to name few (Benard, 1991; Klau, 2006; Brennan, 2008).

Lastly, youth development has also been described as the 'range of *practices*,' employed in 'programs, organizations, and initiatives,' which 'foster the development process' (i.e. natural process) through a philosophy premised on the *principles* of universality and thriving (Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman, 2004, p. 3). From this vantage point, youth might be engaged in practices facilitated by organizations that work alongside them to co-create solutions for societal problems and co-design viable and/or sustainable community development plans (Checkoway, Pothukuchi and Finn, 1995). For instance, experts like Checkoway (1998) have proposed social action agendas that entail active engagement of youth in youth organizing or youth advocacy programs in order to influence policy on matters of import to youth.

Advocacy work requires self-determined (autonomy support) change agents who embody a critical approach to understanding and problematizing societal challenges in order to devise viable solutions. But as youth worldwide continue to be recruited, as participants for social change and community development oriented leadership programs, one wonders how important competencies like *critical thinking* and crucial dimensions like *autonomy promotion*, which enable young leaders to *thrive* and be effective as change agents, can be or are accounted for within the pedagogical design of programs. Poignantly, extant research on the 'relationship between youth leadership programs and community development' (Etuk *et al.* 2013, p. 412) offers limited direction in terms of pedagogical insights, especially as relates to social justice or social action (Cushing, 2015). Additionally, scholarly advances in the area of youth development have not been paralleled by explorations on the nexus between youth development and youth leadership (Kress, 2006), particularly as relates to explicit discussions on pedagogical interventions, that facilitate the cultivation of resiliency, agency, and critical thinking amongst participants (Gilbert, Horsman and Kelloway, 2016). There is therefore, 'still much to be discovered about the nature of leadership, and on leadership motivation in particular' (Gilbert, Horsman and Kelloway, 2016, p. 158) not to mention critical thinking.

Research in the fields of *social psychology* and *critical pedagogy* that focuses on *autonomy promotion* and *Image Theatre*, respectively, offers valuable lessons that can be applied to the pedagogical design of community development centered youth leadership programs. Firstly, scholars in social psychology have written extensively about *autonomy promotion as an approach to pedagogy* that is particularly usefully within learning contexts (Deci and Ryan, 1985); it is informed by the theory of *self-determination* (see Figure 1). *Autonomy promotion* prioritizes the cultivation of constructs like self-initiation, self-determination, and self-motivation, which we argue, are important dimensions in helping youth thrive and in fostering resiliency amongst youth leaders in community development related work. Resilience in this case, refers to ‘the process of adapting well in the face of adversity...threats or significant sources of stress’ (APA, 2014, online) that one may encounter working with communities. *Autonomy promotion* thus highlights the importance of designing youth leadership programs, which cultivate ‘behaviors, thoughts and actions’ that help youth leaders to ‘bounce back’ each time they encounter challenges in community development work (APA, 2014, online).

Secondly, scholars in critical pedagogy have highlighted *Image Theatre* as a valuable *pedagogical tool* that can help learners to engage in critical thinking (Boal, 1985). As is the case with *autonomy promotion*, applications of *Image Theatre* within youth leadership programs have remained scarce. *Image Theatre* is a *pedagogical tool* that is theoretical informed by *Critical Consciousness* (see Figure 1). *Image Theatre* prioritizes, amongst other things, the cultivation of competencies like critical thinking and problem solving. It is imperative to empower youth leaders with critical thinking skills, especially in a world in which society is witnessing the ubiquity of information that is ‘packaged to

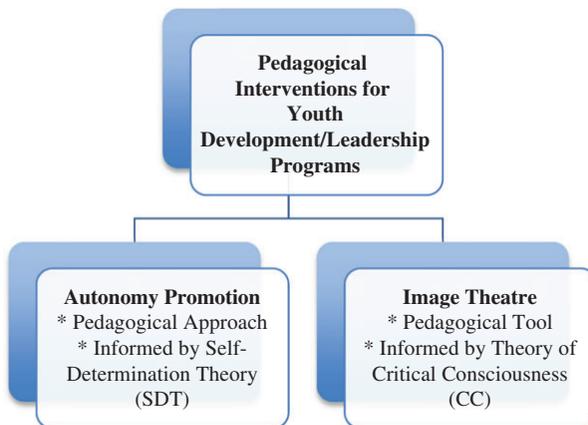


Figure 1. Pedagogical interventions for youth leadership programs focused on community development.

serve vested interest groups, neither the individual citizen nor the public good' (Paul and Elder, 2006, p. 13). Pedagogical tools like *Image Theatre* allow for focus on competencies (e.g. critical thinking) that facilitate the cultivation of youth leaders who can engage in critical social analyses, 'take charge of their own minds, recognize their own deepest values, and take action that contributes to their own and the good of others' (Paul and Elder, 2006, p.13–14).

In the context of social change centered youth leadership programs, it is important for facilitators to explore theoretically informed pedagogical approaches/tools particularly when one considers the definition of youth development as *practices* that are, in many ways, 'part of a larger conversation about public participation and *social justice*' (Cushing, 2015, p. 43). Accordingly, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore two pedagogical interventions, *Image Theatre* and *autonomy promotion*, which can be applied to social change centered youth leadership programs. This paper presents the theoretical tenets that inform the aforementioned pedagogical interventions followed by a discussion of how facilitators can apply them to youth leadership programs. The theoretical construct of *critical consciousness* is discussed to showcase how it philosophically animates critical social analysis tools like Image Theatre (Freire, 1973; Watts, Diemer and Voight, 2011) and the theory of *self-determination* is presented to explicate the linkages between social psychology and emergent pedagogical approaches like autonomy support (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2012). In general, this paper focuses on how youth leadership development programs may enhance participants' sense of agency and determination, by facilitating autonomy-supportive conditions, while concurrently engaging them in critical social analyses, necessary for the advancement of community development and well-being.

The emphasis of this research is on social change driven programs that encapsulate an educational outreach agenda. As authors, we draw on our varying experiences with youth leadership programs implemented by our university, which is located in the United States. Many similar university-led youth programs exist in the United States and they are often broadly categorized under community outreach efforts through which universities partner with governmental or non-governmental sponsors to provide capacity building opportunities for local (e.g. inner city youth; native American youth) or international youth from emerging economies. The Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, hereafter referred to as YSEALI, is a US government funded and US public university implemented program that the authors are involved with, as academic director/facilitator, guest facilitator, and participant (albeit in a different regional program), respectively. YSEALI is similar to programs in the United Kingdom such as the Queen's Young Leaders. Initiated by President Obama in 2013, YSEALI imbues youth to (continue to) work towards social change in their communities. Furthermore,

[t]hrough a variety of programs and engagements, including U.S. educational and cultural exchanges, regional exchanges, and seed funding, YSEALI seeks to build the leadership capabilities of youth in the region, strengthen ties between the United States and Southeast Asia, and nurture an ASEAN community. YSEALI focuses on *critical topics* identified by youth in the region: civic engagement, environment and natural resources management, and entrepreneurship and economic development (Department of State, 2017, online).

The public universities that collaborate with the US government on this program can host one or two institutes that focus on the aforementioned critical topics. The authors are affiliated with the civic engagement institute. Each institute is five weeks long and highlights dimensions of leadership and other institute relevant topics; the partnering universities maintain creative freedom as relates to pedagogical content development. Content is disseminated through traditional classroom activities, such as lectures, seminars, group projects, presentations, and class discussions. This is complemented with activities such as site visits to various community outreach organizations, engagement in volunteer activities, and meeting with policy makers, and cultural tourism opportunities. Each institute comprises twenty-five–thirty fellows from across Southeast Asia between the ages of eighteen–twenty-five for the academic fellows program and ages twenty-five–thirty-five for the professional fellows program. Within Southeast Asia ‘approximately 65 percent of the people...are under the age of thirty-five’ so YSEALI aims to ‘harness the extraordinary potential of youth in the region to address critical challenges and expand opportunities’ (Department of State, 2017, online) that contribute to social change and community well-being.

In addition to enacting YSEALI related roles, the authors are also academics. As researchers, we are collectively interested in the nexus between social justice, critical pedagogy, and youth development and how this body of knowledge can inform the design of youth leadership programs so as to yield more resilient leaders who can skillfully draw on critical thinking competencies to co-create innovative community development solutions. A query of enduring interest to us is: How can one create autonomy supporting learning environments in which competencies like critical thinking can be interactively taught utilizing tools like Image Theatre?

Theoretical roots linked to image theatre and autonomy support

The adoption of interventions like *Image Theatre* or *autonomy promotion* requires cognizance of the theories in which each tool is rooted. Hence, the

subsequent section presents a synopsis of the two theoretical lenses, *critical consciousness* and *self-determination theory*, which inform *Image Theatre* and *autonomy promotion*, respectively.

What is critical consciousness?

In discussing education for development, Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire, perhaps the most noted twentieth century pedagogue, advocates for raising critical consciousness (CC) and conscientization, as both the means and ends of a liberatory education. CC aims to create critical awareness of oppression through continuous engagement of action and reflection while developing a self-determining subject. Freire's work, with populations residing within emerging economies, focused on critical literacy; that is, the ability to read as well as 'how to read the world in relation to the awakening consciousness' (Freire, 1973, p. 81). In the context of youth leadership development, Watts, Diemer and Voight (2011) outline three integrated core components of CC: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action:

Critical reflection refers to a social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequities, such as social, economic, racial/ethnic, and gender inequities that constrain well-being and human agency... Political efficacy is the perceived capacity to effect social and political change by individual and/or collective activism...Critical action refers to individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, which are perceived to be unjust (p. 46).

In essence, CC comprises critical analysis and awareness coupled with a perceived sense of agency for effective engagement that influences civic and political action. For instance, youth will be more engaged in social action if they feel that they can create change in what they have learned to be unjust. From this vantage point, critical action/reflection and sense of determination are vital to any curriculum for community development and social action oriented youth leadership education.

Facilitating critical reflection within an educational environment for youth leaders entails engaging participants in the process of identifying societal problems, everyday life contradictions, and social inequities through reflection and dialog followed by a collective structural analysis of how such disparities affect social outcomes (e.g. health, wealth, and educational). The format of such a pedagogical design is to allow for the discussion of one's own understanding of how one causally attributes and makes sense of social issues. Through sharing and dialog, the goal is to deepen one's learning of his/her perspectives and underlying premises of thought. Such learning expands consciousness through deepening one's understanding of the frames through which one sees the world and its contradictions.

Social action and critical reflection are reciprocal; that is, critical reflection, an awareness of unjust social conditions, necessitates and motivates social action; however, enabling social action is fueled by one's sense of political efficacy. Participants' learning of their individual and collective efficacy is enhanced through an analysis of their ability to effect social change through political participation and social action (Watts, Diemer and Voight, 2011). For instance, through the use of story-telling and narrative inquiry, one can guide participants through an analysis of their own and their peers' inventory of political involvement and social action within their community contexts. Such an approach would augment participants' awareness of their capacities, and it would enhance their willingness to engage in effective social and political action. Additionally, such an approach would enable participants to better comprehend the roles enacted by various stakeholders, including the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of local governance structures.

CC is indeed a useful theoretical construct. In terms of application, theoretically aligned tools like *Image Theatre* can be effectively utilized to help participants attain CC. The cultivation of CC amongst participants can take place within any context, however; from a theoretical and practical standpoint, we argue that it is well suited for autonomously supportive learning environments that intrinsically motivate young leaders to aptly engage in critical social analyses. The creation of *autonomously supportive* learning environments requires an understanding of the key tenets of self-determination theory (SDT), which inform this didactic approach. The subsequent segment introduces SDT.

What is self-determination theory?

SDT has been applied to a variety of pedagogical contexts (Deci et al., 1991) but not to leadership education programs, despite its applicability. Developed by two psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the late 1980s, SDT posits that there are three psychological needs that human beings strive to satisfy, namely, competence, autonomy (or self-determination), and relatedness.

Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions; relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one's social milieu; and autonomy refers to being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions (Deci et al., 1991, p. 327).

According to Deci and Ryan (2012), the satisfaction of these three needs results in *autonomously motivated* individuals who are *intrinsically* motivated versus individuals who experience *controlled motivation*, which means they are not volitionally engaged. Through empirical research, psychologists have indicated, 'regardless of age, socioeconomic status or culture, the

satisfaction of these three psychological needs has been consistently shown to be associated with psychological health and effective performance' (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 85). Additionally, it yields a state that inspires creativity, dynamism, innovation, engagement, and activity in individuals (Deci and Ryan, 2012).

Learning environs can enhance or thwart a learner's autonomous motivation. Accordingly, SDT maintains that the *learning environment* is vital because its careful structure has the potential to foster 'a genuine enthusiasm for learning and accomplishment and a sense of volitional involvement' in the learning process (Deci *et al.*, 1991, p. 325). This statement is particularly important when one considers the learning contexts within which youth leadership programs are implemented and wherein youth leaders are inducted into community development related work. According to Reeve (2006), learners have a set of needs, interests and values that have to be accounted for within learning environments. If the aforementioned needs, interests and values are accounted for, the outcome is that learners will showcase 'great flexibility in problem solving, more efficient knowledge acquisition, and a strong sense of personal worth and social responsibility' (Deci *et al.*, 1991, p.325–326). Autonomy-supportive environments can yield active, engaged, innovative, and creative leaders who will be able to withstand the uncertainty and the often-challenging work required of change agents who collaborate with communities to co-create solutions for complex societal problems. Such youth programs could indeed result in self-motivated leaders who possess an attitudinal predisposition to flexibly work within various community development contexts.

There is certainly more information related to CC and SDT than the brief synopsis provided in this paper. Although influenced by distinct disciplinary lenses, a noteworthy theoretical thread that connects CC and SDT, and one related to community development, is the emphasis on agency and empowerment so as to allow individuals to make informed choices that help self, and by so doing contribute to capacity building at the community level. Rather than depth, the goal of this theoretical part of the paper was to present a broad overview that allows readers to situate the two interventions, Image Theatre and autonomy promotion, within the theoretical bodies of knowledge that inspired their creation. Cognizance of these theories will allow facilitators, who choose to incorporate the proposed pedagogical interventions to identify other philosophically allied approaches or tools so as to further bridge the gap between theory and practice related to youth leadership and community development. The subsequent section of this paper presents two pedagogical interventions related to the abovementioned theories, *Image Theatre* and *autonomy promotion*, which we utilized within the civic engagement institute of the YSEALI program at Arizona State University (ASU).

Pedagogical interventions for youth leadership programs

Image Theatre: making thought visible

Image Theatre is a pedagogical tool informed by the construct of critical consciousness (CC). It can be used (alongside other tools) in the design of community development and social action oriented youth leadership programs. Image Theatre is a performance-based technique that allows participants to share their individual perspectives and stories (Boal, 1985). It engages participants in projecting their reflections on realities that surround them and their perceptions of themselves as change agents of those realities. Image theatre is the telling and retelling of stories through sculpting actual images and exploring desired change processes for a real context. It allows for an embodied experience wherein participants use their bodies to sculpt. Inspired by the theories on transformative learning, this process grants participants the opportunity to reflect on the

premises on which [societal] problems are posed or defined in the first place, perhaps by finding a new metaphor that reorients problem-solving efforts in a more effective way...becoming critically aware of [ones] own presuppositions, involves challenging [ones] established and habitual patterns of expectation [as well as] the meaning perspectives with which [one makes] sense out of [ones] encounters with the world, others and [oneself] (Mezirow, 1990, p. 24).

The activity invites participants to: engage in an in-depth analysis of a real everyday life example related to a specific community; share their perspective on the situation as presented; and, discuss desired social change and how it might be carried out. Notably, participants in the YSEALI program are often engaged in self-initiated social change work that focuses on issues such as, but not limited to, homelessness, sexual abuse, voting rights, access to education, gender equity, and religious freedom; such issues can be discussed in the context of Image Theatre. In small groups, each participant starts with sculpting an image, using other group members as statues (see Figure 2). The sculpted image corresponds to the sculptor's analysis of the situation. Each participant, the sculptor and the sculpted, while remaining in the image is asked to explain his/her sense of the sculpture and the effects of his/her position and sense of self vis-à-vis the image s/he represents as well as in relation to others in the image. The participant sculptor then sculpts an image to represent a desired change and a series of transitional images. The transitional images illustrate the process of reaching the desired outcome by moving from one reality to another, based on the perspective of the sculptor. Each participant sculptor shows how the image is modified through reorganization of forces, relationships, and positionalities (Boal, 1985, p. 135).



Figure 2. Group sculpting class based on image theatre.

In constructing the transitioning images of change, the facilitator directs attention to whether and how people are likely to confront, challenge, or be impeded by structures of *power*. Furthermore, the facilitator engages participants in a discussion of how relationships of power enact and reinforce the status quo. As a side note, facilitators can foster deeper conversations on power by complementing the Image Theatre technique with the ‘Power Cube,’ which is a tool introduced by [Gaventa \(2006\)](#). The Power Cube facilitates reflective engagement through which to understand the complex forms and spaces of power at the local level. When combined with Image Theatre, the Power Cube particularly enriches power related conversations during the transitional image stage of Image Theatre; for instance, it can be used to explain the forces and relationships governing the construction of the image. This additional tool thus further creates awareness of power dynamics whilst helping participants to sharpen their critical lenses.

The Image Theatre activity culminates in a conversation with participants about their proposed social change journey, specifically focusing on how they might be involved, what their roles might entail, and how they might choose to effectively function. In large settings, participant observers may also be asked to propose alternative change strategies as spectator-sculptors. For instance, they could re-imagine and re-sculpt the images or join the image to represent other significant elements that they deem important. The intent that underpins the use of Image Theatre is not simply to go beyond an analysis of a given situation through reasoning around information. It is rather to enable deep and critical reflection in a space within which participants depict: their view of the situation, their connection with other ingredients within the context, and their illustration of the path towards positive change. It also facilitates

the exploration of the dynamics of change through different perspectives, the showcasing of different transitional images, and the discussion of what and who needs to be involved. In essence, it is a collaborative conceptualization of participants' theory of change and how they might be involved in the change itself. This process of sharing while reflecting on one's perspective, which occurs at the individual and group levels, could enable participants to become critically aware of their definitions and perceptions of the world but also their ability to restructure their 'assumptions to permit a more inclusive, permeable, and integrative perspective' (Mezirow, 1990, p. 25). As they analyze a series of images depicting a specific change process, participants deliberate upon the change strategies, the power dynamics, and the potential effects on what they consider significant actors and elements of the context.

The use of Image Theatre in our work has allowed us to facilitate sharing of perspectives and (often sensitive) emotions in a playful manner. It grants the sculptor participants a level of freedom and confidence to choose any frame that allows them to demonstrate the significance/relevance of their perspectives. Analyses of the initial image and the transitioning images help participants to build a critical participatory narrative of their proposed journey of change. In other words, as they present and define the situation through their own lens, they also begin to co-craft a story of change with other participants. Through telling and retelling of change strategies, they build a story that draws on their perspectives, including the opinions of actors within the image and those observing the animated tableau as it unfolds. In addition, observing participants are encouraged to re-imagine the story in their own unique contexts. For instance, participants may ponder a question such as: Had the story unfolded in my local socio-cultural context, what change might have occurred in the story? In retelling and re-creating the images, significant discussions arise that help participants to develop a comparative understanding of each other's diverse social and cultural realities. This activity has a strong capacity to make thought visible and jargon free, and specifically overcomes the barrier of purely analytical and verbal discussions, which tend to be dominant in traditional learning environments. This activity is even more significant in international youth leadership contexts because English is not always *lingua franca*.

One important consideration related to Image Theatre is that it requires *skillful facilitation* (which is easily perfected with practice) and a wide array of tasks. When implementing this intervention, facilitators must first orient participants to the tenets of Image Theatre as well as incorporate team building exercises and games in order to integrate participants, 'warm them up and help them shed their inhibitions, but also to establish a form of theatrical communion with them' (Boal, 1992, p. 18). Subsequently, the facilitator then: orients students to the activity; facilitates the selection of

the social issue to be sculpted; guides the selection of the sculptor and sculpted; facilitates discussions regarding the manifest and latent meanings associated with the sculpted image; assists in the processing of emotions that participants attach to the image they have sculpted and the social issue in question; encourages reflections on power, inclusion and exclusion related to the issues; inspires reflections on desired change and what and how that change can occur and manifest in the image; and fosters conversations on lessons learned about taken for granted community related dimensions, which manifest in Image Theatre. In our practice, there were moments when the story was quite personal and participants became too attached and emotional. In order to support sharing, discussion, and learning in such sensitive settings, facilitators have to create spaces where participants feel safe processing their emotions. The element of empowerment that underpins this tool can be further nurtured through the creation of autonomy-supportive environments. The subsequent section describes the autonomy support approach and how facilitators can incorporate it within the pedagogical design of youth leadership programs.

Autonomy support: centering the participant

Autonomy support is a pedagogical approach informed by SDT, which deals with human motivations. It is an approach to teaching/facilitating that focuses on the relationship between the pedagogue, learners and the learning environment with the goal of yielding self-motivated and creative learners who thrive within the learning context and beyond. In order to create *autonomy-promoting environments*, for instance within youth leadership programs, facilitators have to account for three key psychological needs: *autonomy*, *competence* and *relatedness* (Reeve, 2006). Facilitators can enact vital roles in creating environments and content with supportive qualities that nurture, versus thwart, learners' psychological needs. Although youth leadership programs have different foci and to this end content details may differ, the examples provided in this section, regarding the application of psychological needs, have broad applicability.

This section of the paper provides examples of various techniques that youth leadership program facilitators can consider to account for each of the three psychological needs. Firstly and prior to the start of the program, information can be elicited from participants to identify: their levels of experience with community development and social action projects; their specific interests in civic engagement and other relevant topics; and, their needs in terms of end-of-program deliverables. This information is vital, and it can aid in the structuring of a program that is specifically tailored to participants' needs, interests, and likes. For instance, encouraging participants to vote on the nature of their end-of-program deliverables (e.g. a proposal, a mission statement,

an advocacy video, a script for a theatrical social impact focused play that inspires behavioral change amongst vulnerable populations, etc.) can further contribute to a sense of *autonomy*.

In addition to the aforementioned tactic, meetings with or workshops/seminars delivered by various experts can be added so as to further tailor the program but also to support the acquisition of unique skill sets of interest to learners. *A priori* arranged meetings between participants and various experts be they peers, local grassroots organizations, and/or activists are valuable because such sessions not only address the notion of *relatedness* but they also allow participants to hone their networking skills, which are a prerequisite for the success of any social action initiative. The inclusion of free time slots during which participants can meet with experts *of their choice* can further contribute to the notion of autonomy because it grants participants agency to take control of their learning process. Additionally, direct benefit of such an opportunity is that it facilitates an element of relatedness, which is fertile ground on which international social action collaborations can take place. In preparation for all networking sessions, it is important for facilitators to encourage participants not to view networking as a one-way exchange in which youth leaders simply receive information and ignore the significance their own ideas may represent to interlocutors with whom they network; explanations of this manner can be autonomy promoting particularly for young, foreign, and/or minority participants who may feel disempowered in such contexts. The notion of *competence* as relates to youth leadership, and social action can be addressed through the compilation of speaker series/lectures that broadly encompass areas such as leadership theories, communication skills, participatory action and community development, program evaluation, and proposal development, to name a few. The element of critical thinking can be strategically threaded into all speaker series/lectures or activities in addition to sessions that involve Image Theatre. Leadership programs generally incorporate a plethora of competencies for participants but often-critical thinking skills, from a rational and embodied standpoint, are often omitted. Also, often absent are dimensions of autonomy or agency which are necessary to empower participants to make choices that support their personal growth and equip them with adequate tools to solve challenges in their communities. Therefore, efforts to account for autonomy and to augment competencies to include critical thinking are needed in order to contribute to the pedagogical advancement of community development focused leadership programs.

It is important to note that a tailored program should not be prioritized over opportunities to add novel content that is new to participants because they may be unaware of the content's significance and oblivious to the interest it may inspire. For instance, for the civic engagement YSEALI program at

ASU, the academic director/facilitator incorporated a session that allowed participants to individually work on *autonomy* disrupting sentiments aroused by fear of the unknown. After all, leaders in community development and social action need to possess a level of emotional intelligence to navigate the uncertainties associated with various community development contexts. Accordingly, a mindfulness and secular yoga class, which combined the physical and psychological as well as the practical and theoretical aspects of cultivating the *internal* leader, was added to the schedule. Participants commenced their mornings with an hour of yoga and meditation practice, which included a discussion on various themes related to the how and why the self reacts in the face of fear, courage, shame, power, money, to name a few. This section of the program allowed participants, who at this point were experts on critically reflecting on societal issues (i.e. CC), to then use the same soft skill to engage in a deeper, often uncomfortable (depending on what one unearths), reflective process of self. This section also allowed them to locate and connect on an iterative basis to the inner drive that *intrinsically motivates* them to engage in community development through social action. Furthermore, participants arrived to class calm, joyful and in control (autonomy), which was conducive to engaging in the tough discussions on the problems that plague society and the ways to co-craft viable solutions. Generally, participants respond receptively in part because such pedagogical interventions empower them and grant them ownership of their learning processes.

Youth leadership program facilitators can choose to adopt one of the two proposed interventions or combine both. We recommend commencing with autonomy promotion because it enables facilitator to be more critically aware of their existential positions vis-à-vis learners while also attuning them to the subtle and often favorable changes in learners' dispositions. The benefits that can be reaped from implementing this relatively simple intervention may then inspire facilitators to experiment with more multifaceted techniques like Image Theatre. Facilitators can refer to Boal's (1992) seminal texts for more detailed guidelines on Image Theatre facilitation. Notably, both interventions have been applied within various international contexts (see Boal, 1992; Deci and Ryan, 2012). The subsequent and penultimate section of this paper offers a brief synopsis of assessment tools that can be adopted.

Conclusion

This paper presents a discussion of two pedagogical interventions, *Image Theatre* and *autonomy support*, and their application within youth leadership programs. The philosophical roots of the aforementioned pedagogical

interventions are discussed by drawing on two theoretical frameworks that inform them, CC and SDT, respectively. Despite the prevalence of extant scholarship on SDT and the construct of CC, the application of these theoretical frameworks particularly, in the context of social action driven youth leadership programs, has remained rare. SDT offers insights related to motivational predispositions conducive to learning whilst CC offers guidelines on engaging learners in critical analyses of societal structures. These two theoretical frameworks are broadly aligned with the philosophy of critical pedagogy, which is 'fundamentally committed to the development, and evolution of a culture of [learning] that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised' learners (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2003, p. 11).

Many social action oriented youth leadership programs target youth from marginalized locales so as to empower them with knowledge and skills that might help them and their communities. Consequently, as pedagogues continue to focus on capacity building efforts through leadership programs that empower youth to engage in community development through social action, more scholarly emphasis will need to be placed on the nexus between critical pedagogy and youth leadership programs. One avenue for future research is the use of assessments tools, like journaling, interviews and/or surveys, to examine the comprehension of concepts like critical reflection and to assess perceptions of autonomy support amongst participants. One particularly useful assessment tool employed in critical pedagogy is journaling because it allows participants to 'internalize the understandings that they arrived at through dialog' and it encourages 'them to apply their new ways of thinking to their lives' (Pescatore, 2015, p. 116). For instance, journaling can be used to assess whether participants have mastered the act of critical reflection. Similarly, quantitative surveys or qualitative interviews can be incorporated to examine participants' perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness related to their experiences of for instance, a youth leadership program. Evaluators can assess whether perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediate participants' perceived autonomy-supportive program facilitation as well as participants motivational orientation (intrinsically or extrinsically motivated) (Deci and Ryan, 2012). Furthermore, longitudinal studies can be undertaken to ascertain whether participation in the youth leadership programs mediates sustained engagement, by youth leaders, in community development related projects. Youth are indeed vital to community development endeavors and to solving societal problems (Campbell and Erbsstein, 2012) so pedagogical developments will continually be instrumental in arming them with knowledge and enabling them as change agents to thrive in today's complex and ever changing socio-political climate.

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