

# Democracy and Development: The Role of Outside-of-School Experiences in Preparing Young People to Be Active Citizens

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## ABSTRACT

Public schools historically have been the primary institution responsible for preparing young people for participation in a democratic society. However, the almost exclusive focus by today's schools on knowledge and skills hinders their ability to be environments that support overall development and to produce the kinds of flexible, creative, and critical citizens that are needed to continuously create and recreate democracy. This review of the literature reframes the topic of *democracy and education* so as to address the relationship between *democracy* and *development* specific to youth development. In so doing, it adds practices by and findings from outside-of-school youth development programs to the dialogue on democracy. The review of outside-of-school programs is framed by a conceptualization of development as a dialectical, social, and creative activity, arguing that environments promoting this kind of development are necessary if we are to further democratize our culture.

*Do we learn to be citizens in school?  
Marching down hallways,  
Eyes front, mouth closed,  
Voting for class president,  
for who can clean the blackboard,  
But no responsibility  
for what or how or why to learn,  
Where is the conflict, the disagreement, the creative energy,  
Needed to build community and change the world? (Lobman, unpublished)*

I AM A LIFELONG educator and a political activist who has, along with many others, come to the conclusion that schools as they are currently structured are not a pathway to full democratic participation for many young people, nor are they the means by which significant societal transformation is going to occur. In retrospect, I learned to be a citizen at sleepaway camp. Away from the constraints of school and family, 100 children and 30 young adults, lived, played, and worked together—we had to figure out who was going to clean the toilet and how we were going to deal with the kid who wouldn't take a shower and why Fern the goat ate our bathing suits. There were not as many rules as there were in school, but there was much more responsibility. Watching young adults not much older than me take responsibility for

everything, I learned that I had a responsibility to the greater world, too. This camp experience, along with many others provided for me by my activist, middle-class parents, taught me that I shared the world with other people, that I wasn't just a consumer or a victim of society but that I was a builder, a creator, an individual who could make decisions, together with others, for how we wanted the world to be.

I grew up to become a schoolteacher, and am now a teacher-educator, and most of my research has been on how to make classrooms more creative and developmental for children and teachers (Lobman, 2005, 2007, 2007, 2010). However, I have continued my interest in, and developed a better understanding of, the importance of outside-of-school experiences. I have done so through a close association with the All Stars Project, ([www.allstars.org](http://www.allstars.org)), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting human development through the use of an innovative performance-based model. All Stars creates outside-of-school educational and performing arts activities for poor and minority young people in cities around the United States. Not unlike my summers at camp, the All Stars developmental

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methodology has helped thousands of inner-city young people come to see themselves as community builders and has given them experiences that allow them to become more cosmopolitan, something theorists believe is critical to full democratic citizenship (Appiah, 2006, 2007). My understanding of the work of the All Stars has led me to explore more broadly what outside-of-school activities contribute to successful preparation of young people for democratic participation.

This review of the literature reframes the topic of *democracy and education* so as to address the relationship between *democracy* and *development* specific to youth development. In so doing, it adds practices by and findings from outside-of-school youth development programs to this important dialogue. I begin by conceptualizing development as a dialectical, social, and creative activity, arguing that this kind of development is necessary if we are to democratize our culture. I then discuss ways in which outside-of-school youth development programs appear to support this objective. I use the first person throughout the article both to represent myself as a subject of the research I review—someone who benefited tremendously from outside-of-school learning opportunities—and also as someone who works to integrate what I write about as active projects in my own teaching and activism.

## Development and Democracy

I studied psychology in college in the 1980s and early childhood education in graduate school in the 1990s, and both experiences provided me with a heavy dose of developmental theory. The theorists I studied, Piaget, Freud, Erikson, and Kohlberg, were all stage theorists who explained (often very elegantly) how children go from infancy to adulthood, and in the case of Freud and Erikson, what can get in the way of that otherwise inevitable progression. While some of these theories focus more on cognition and others on social-emotional or moral development, they all share an understanding of development as a linear process that explain how children reach the ultimate goal of being productive, adapted members of society. There are many valuable critiques of these theories' inherent Eurocentric and masculine bias (see Burman, 1994; Gilligan, 1993; Lubeck, 1998). While I share those critiques, what has always most concerned me about how developmental theory explains children becoming normal (or not so normal) adults is that the theory does not appear to provide humanity a way forward out of the growing messes we are in. None of these philosophers and academics adequately explained or suggested the conditions for societal transformation.

Soon after college I was introduced to the work of Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, through that of Fred Newman, a philosopher and one of the founders of the All Stars Project, and Lois Holzman, a developmental psychologist and a cofounder, along with Newman, of the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy. Newman and Holzman were leaders of activist researchers who, coming out of the social movements of the 1960s, were developing new approaches to psychotherapy, education, politics, and youth and community development in the 1980s. Newman and Holzman wrote about their methodology in Vygotskian terms (Holzman, 1985, 1997; Holzman & Newman,

1987; Newman & Holzman, 1993), and by the 1990s, they had synthesized this articulation with postmodernism (Newman & Holzman, 1996, 1997). Their body of work addresses the philosophical underpinnings and political ramifications of educational, psychological, and psychotherapeutic theories and of institutional practices and policies.

For Newman and Holzman, Vygotsky is a dialectical methodologist (Holzman, 1997, 2009; Newman & Holzman, 1993, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Their work focuses on the dialectical, improvisational, and emergent activities by which human beings create environments where people can grow—socially, emotionally, culturally, and politically—and in the process become active creators and producers of their lives, their learning, and the world. While Newman and Holzman reject mainstream psychology's construction of a linear and universal form of development (i.e., the Freudian, Eriksonian, or Piagetian stages), as openly political scholars they have chosen not to reject development as a human activity. For them, "development is the activist, relational, qualitative transformation of the given circumstances, the existing environment, the totality" (Newman & Holzman, 1997, p. 166).

From this perspective, development-as-activity can be considered revolutionary, because it disrupts the way things are and introduces something new. Newman and Holzman (1996) present language learning as a wonderful example of this kind of transformative activity.

*Children, for example, qualitatively transform (more precisely, they participate in the process of qualitative transformation) many times in their first few years. Becoming a speaker (or signer, in the case of deaf children) of language is not mere acquisition of a skill or behavior. It is qualitatively, emotionally, intellectually, socially—totally—transformative. Given the critical importance of language in our culture, new worlds of possibility, learning, social relationships, imagination, and creativity open up once the young human being is able to make meaning (in history) and use words (in society). (p. 166)*

While it is true that our species is particularly good at creating developmental environments for infants and young children, it is also the case that people can and do create development throughout our lives, such as when we go beyond the limitations of our identities and roles in the world and perform in a way that qualitatively changes what we are able to do and how we are seen. When a four-year-old picks up a book and "reads" to his baby brother, when a teenager leaves for college, and when an adult is promoted to a more responsible position—in all of these cases, development is made possible because people are able to perform both as who they already are and as who they are becoming. There is a tendency, given the goal- or product-oriented nature of our society, to see even this understanding of development as linear or toward a particular outcome. Newman and Holzman, following Vygotsky, warned that this is distortive of what it is that human beings are actually doing. When we isolate the products of development from the activity of creating development, we distort and often stall the activity of creating developmental environments. It is possible, they argued, to shift our focus and see development as the

continuous life activity in which children and adults do not just develop an identity, or adapt to their life circumstances, or even choose from different life paths, but socially and continuously create identities, life paths, and culture. Newman and Holzman came to use the phrase *tool-and-result methodology* to describe their nondualistic practice-oriented approach whereby human beings do not just adapt to our given circumstances but actively transform what is to make something new.

*We understand human development to be the dialectical unity (meaning making/learning-leading-development). Meaning making is the tool makers' (our species') tool-and-result, a nondualistic dialectic-in-practice way of changing the many totalities that determine the changer. Human beings are never fundamentally changed (i.e., never develop) except insofar as, by our revolutionary activity, we change the totality of our continued historical existence. This we accomplish not by the humanly impossible act of materially altering all the elements of history but by the uniquely human activity of materially reorganizing what exists to create new meaning for everything (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 86).*

For me, the phrase *tool-and-result* gives expression to the dialectical nature of human development—it does not deny product (results), but it conveys that the kinds of results that are produced via development are inseparable from the creation of the environment for, and the activity of, development. For example, when a baby is learning to speak, it does not make sense to separate the babbling-turning-into-speaking from the total activity of families and communities coming to relate to the baby as a becoming-speaker. The tool, creating the environment for speaking, and the result, speaking, are inseparable. In Newman and Holzman's Vygotsky-inspired version of development, human beings have the capacity to transform totalities, to create something new out of what already exists. Development, rather than being a set of stages, is an activity.

I wish I could say that I immediately saw the political implications of this understanding of development, but my commitment to traditional understandings of change and revolution delayed that (and that is a separate story). However, early in my career as a teacher, this understanding of tool-and-result development did transform my practice. As an early childhood educator, I had always seen myself as the provider of developmentally appropriate experiences that children could then participate in. With the shift toward a tool-and-result understanding of development, I became much more interested in children cocreating an environment where everyone grows and does new and challenging things together (see Lobman, 2010). I became radically focused on environment building. While the students in my class continued to learn about many things, the question they and I repeatedly asked ourselves was, “How are we going to do this *together*?” It was a shift away from a linear view of development to a dialectical one, in which the creating of the learning environment was both a tool and a result. In this kind of environment, students could and did develop into creators, environment builders, and collaborative learners.

While I may have been primarily focused on the implications of tool-and-result methodology for classrooms, Newman has brought this conception to an effort to understand (and develop) American democracy. As he sees it, democracy has become all about the outcome (not unlike our contemporary classrooms), and since his work has included a long history of challenging the political system, this is not good:

*Over time, electoral democracy became culturally more and more focused on the outcome rather than the process. It was increasingly less and less about the collective process of decision-making and the self-transformative culture that civically active and involved society engenders. It was more about the decision, pure and simple. The product, not the process; the outcome, less and less revolutionary. (p. 167)*

Over the centuries, democracy in the United States has become almost exclusively associated with voting for a particular party or candidate and, the 2008 presidential election notwithstanding, the trend in the United States has been toward less and less political participation, particularly among young people, poor people, and people of color (see Federal Election Commission, table 1; Minority voter turnout, 2009). Newman (2000) goes on to say that what is needed to revitalize American democracy is a focus on development.

But even structural reforms that lead to an expansion and revitalization of electoral democracy, while desperately needed, do not address in and of themselves what is a more fundamental and far-reaching problem for the American community—indeed, for the international community. That problem is the breakdown of *development*. As the developmental capacities of most contemporary, “advanced” societies have diminished, economic, social, moral, personal, and political democracy has been more and more substituted for development. Consequently, any further efforts to rejuvenate democracy that do not simultaneously and continuously reinitiate development are doomed to reinforce and further institutionalize the nondevelopmental framework, that is, the political culture, of contemporary society (Newman, 2000, p. 168).

I find the argument Newman is making particularly provocative because I believe it challenges two of the largest and most authoritarian institutions in the country: politics and education. If democracy is a collective, creative, emergent, and participatory activity, then, it seems to me, development, not knowledge, is what is needed to prepare young people to participate in its creation. Young people need environments where they can develop, where they can actively participate in creating their lives and come to see themselves as active producers of the broader culture. This shift is a serious challenge for a society where education and democracy are so focused on results. A tool-and-result methodology for developing democratic participation is not a means to a particular end but a process by which people create the environments that can then allow for more development (and hopefully more democracy).

## **Democracy and School**

While I began this article by questioning the role of school in preparing children for democracy, in all fairness I must consider whether the learning methodology of most schools is even

designed for that purpose. The history of American schools' nearly complete focus on children acquiring skills and information is intimately tied to the definitions of development accepted by most American psychologists and educators in the 20th century. The legacy of human development as an unfolding of stages (and independent and/or determinant of learning) remains to this day, as evidenced by the lack of focus on development in most public schools. Development, in this sense, is a maturational process that sets the stage for the acquiring of skills and information, and it is therefore not considered the domain of public schools. While there have always been scholars who have countered this separation and have argued for attention to be paid to the whole child (Comer & Gates, 2005; Dewey, 1938/1987; Neill & Lamb, 1995; Noddings, 2005), this position has not heavily influenced public schools. If anything, they have become narrower in their focus, as teachers feel increased pressure to focus their efforts on the learning of skills and information.

Schooling in America has never had development as a primary function and, as many educators lament, we are instituting practices that move further and further away from it. They focus almost exclusively on the products of learning. There are exceptions, the hundreds of school-based programs and curricula that provide young people with opportunities to be active participants (i.e., service-learning, community action programs, education for social justice), but they are in the distinct minority. Further, even such programs are constrained by evaluation-and-outcome models that make it difficult for their practitioners and participants to fully embrace development. While schools may play a necessary role in providing children with knowledge and skills that they need to be functional adults, they do not produce the kinds of flexible, creative, and critical citizens that we need if we are going to continuously create and recreate democracy (Ladwig, 2006). Many critics of institutionalized schooling practices have noted this:

*Within institutions such as schools, opportunities to think and act outside the constraints of the expected role of student or the structure of curricular and extracurricular requirements come rarely. Moreover, schools in many post-industrial nations increasingly require standardization of product or outcome, determined by quantifiable measures of performance on standardized tests. Narrow definitions of achievement that such pencil-and-paper tests honor cannot adequately capture either specialized talents, adaptive ways of knowing, or critical stances. (Heath, 2000, para. 22)*

All of this points to the fact that the reliance on schools to prepare children for participation in a democratic society has serious implications for the kind of democracy that is produced. Given the scripted, product-oriented nature of school, most students do not leave it having developed an activist, creative sense of themselves as learners or as citizens. It seems possible that this has helped produce a citizenry and a democracy in which many people see themselves as passive participants, who at best consider the right to vote to be the defining characteristic of democracy.

While schools are constrained by their historical role in society, outside-of-school programs have a different history that includes introducing young people to the broader culture (Halpern, 2009). The discourse of democracy is not prevalent in discussions of the benefits of outside-of-school programs, and yet literature describing such programs shows them to foster many of the characteristics that are thought to prepare young people to be active, rather than passive, creators of democracy.

If we are shifting our focus to outside-of-school experiences, then we cannot paint all young people with the same brush. While there is variation among and within schools, there are even more vast differences in the types of outside-of-school experiences that young people have access to and participate in. Middle- and upper-class children are often exposed, during their outside-of-school time, to a wide range of what the world has to offer, and as such are more likely to see themselves as active producers and creators of our society (Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2004; Halpern, 2009; Hart & Todd, 1995; Lareau, 2003). Poverty, on the other hand, often limits experiences. Both economic disadvantage and societal racism turns children into outsiders (in school and out), and their lack of exposure to the broader culture keeps them from becoming full and active participants in its creation. As Kurlander and Fulani (2009) of the All Stars Project point out, comparing the life experiences of poor and middle-class kids is almost impossible:

*Comparative analysis can only be done when the things being compared are sufficiently similar. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb "compare" as "To speak of or represent as similar; to liken." But the learning and development experiences of poor kids and middle-class kids couldn't be more different. Thus, comparisons based on test scores that yield the construct of an achievement gap are the educational equivalent of a "false positive" in medicine—where an illness has been incorrectly diagnosed and is therefore being incorrectly treated.*

*Historically, education has been seen as—and has been—the singular pathway out of poverty and into the middle class. And while it continues to be the case that individuals can and sometimes do succeed through education, for the mass of poor kids of color, public education – as it is currently construed and constructed—is failing. These kids are not simply failing to learn. They are failing to become learners. This is a problem of catastrophic proportions, one that requires a different description. We are not facing an achievement gap. If that's all that was going on, we would simply have to close it. No, we are facing something more serious. It is a development gap. A generation of young Americans (at the very least) is passing through the public school system unable to become learners. Unless and until we accept and understand that, educators and policymakers will focus on the achievement gap to no avail. (p. 3)*

We owe it to this "generation of young Americans unable to become learners" to work together to better understand the data already generated and to go outside whatever framework and disciplinary discourse we are comfortable with. Therefore, in the remainder of this paper, I want to draw your attention to research

that begins to shed light on what I believe to be the proper role of outside-of-school programs: supporting the overall development of young people in ways that prepare them to participate in and, if they so choose, transform American democracy and the global society. It is hoped that bringing together heretofore separate fields of inquiry and research approaches will help create conditions for less circumscribed and more informed and creative dialogue on the topic.

## Outside-of-School Experiences and Development

In spite of the proliferation of scholarly interest in outside-of-school programs during the last decade (Ladwig, 2010; Vadeboncoeur, 2006), there is not yet a unified field of research devoted to understanding the impact of outside-of-school programs on either children's achievement in school or their overall cognitive, emotional, and social development. The relevant data come from scholars located within different departments or subspecialties of education and psychology and remain fragmented. The major areas from which findings are generated have been the following: (a) evaluation of after-school programs and their impact on academic achievement; (b) research on positive youth development; (c) research on the integration of arts and learning; and (d) research on and practice of youth theater and other performing arts. The remainder of this paper briefly reviews the rationale of and inquiry into each. This research survey is not exhaustive—its focus is on the ways in which outside-of-school activities provide young people, particularly inner-city youth, with a broader backdrop of experiences that supports their overall development and allows them to perform as active participants in society.

### NOTICING OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Dialogue and debate about children and adolescents is so often focused on the educational opportunities and roadblocks of schooling that it is easy to forget that they have learning lives outside of school. Young people in the United States spend only about 25% of their time in school (Heath, 2000). Families with time and money—often ethnic-majority families—are able to organize their children's out-of-school time to supplement school learning through trips, camps, organized sports, cultural and religious programs, and individualized lessons. Such is not the case for the majority of low-income—often ethnic-minority—students.

Beginning in the 1990s, this difference between the more and the less privileged became an important area of investigation, mostly from two different groups of researchers and scholars: those seeking to understand the academic achievement gap between middle-class/White children and poor/racial-minority children and those fostering a new conceptual framework known as positive youth development. The latter was a paradigm shift away from viewing youths as problems to viewing them as resources, and away from a prevention model to an approach that builds on young people's strengths and capabilities to develop as successful adults within their own communities (The National Collaboration for Youth, 1996). The two groups of researchers and evaluators initially asked different questions.

*Achievement approach.* Those motivated by the achievement gap asked, "To what extent does outside-of-school educational and cultural enrichment activities contribute to school success?" Edmund Gordon and his colleagues coined the term *supplemental education* to characterize the varied enrichment experiences that lead to high academic achievement and foster the development of human and social capital. In their ongoing work, they delineate and advocate for research and changes in policy and in family and community practices that will bring about universal access to such experiences (Gordon, 1999; Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005). Another term in use is *complementary learning*, an initiative of The Harvard Family Research Project (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp>).

Within this context, outside-of-school programs are being looked to as supplemental educational environments. At the same time, outside-of-school programs are being asked to show direct evidence that they lead to specific outcomes (such as higher test scores) and are under pressure to become more school-like by providing homework help and mirroring the school curriculum. From a democracy-and-development perspective, it is problematic to judge outside-of-school programs on the criteria developed for schools, because it puts pressure on programs to become replicas or extensions of the school day. In doing this, even successful, innovative cultural programs are less able to prioritize the less measurable—but as important—aspects of human development (Ladwig, 2010).

Most recent studies have focused on melding the academic and the cultural to some degree—emphasizing the supplemental enrichment and "learning how to learn" aspects of afterschool programs but also tracking academic success. With consensus that after-school programs are beneficial, especially for children at risk, the focus has turned to teasing out the features that make an after-school program successful. For example, a recent study commissioned by the Robert Bowne Foundation found that quality out-of-school programs have the following common characteristics: they support children to do things; are youth-centered; have roots in the attending children's neighborhoods; and integrate literacy into a wide variety of activities (Sabo-Flores, 2009). As I have argued, these features give out-of-school activities the potential to provide young people with developmental experiences and to transform young people who see themselves as outsiders into young people who are active citizens.

*Development approach.* Scholars who take a positive youth development perspective ask, "What features of structured outside-of-school time foster youth development?" Rather than looking at outside-of-school programs in terms of academic achievement, they look at how programs challenge and support young people to develop emotionally, socially, culturally, and intellectually and as responsible citizens (Barton, Watkins, & Jarjoura, 1997; Finn & Checkoway, 1995; Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). In her comprehensive review of learning in informal learning environments, Vadeboncoeur (2010) lays out the multiple ways in which a wide range of outside-of-school programs provide a much-needed service to society by giving young people the moral, social, and practical experiences they need to take the country and the world forward. Specifically, research and evaluation of afterschool

programs from this perspective find support for the positive development of feelings of belonging and self-worth; close, positive relationships with others; leadership skills; and social, emotional, and intellectual challenges (National Institute on Out-of-School Time Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 1999). From these kinds of data, it is argued that maintaining such programs as an “intermediary space” between home and school is vital for children and youths and vital for the further development of our communities (Noam, 2004; Quinn, 1999).

Another prominent voice of the development approach is Halpern (2003), who has extensively researched and evaluated the history and current status of afterschool and youth programs. He argues against the trend toward evaluating and aligning afterschool programs with academic achievement. He instead urges that we develop expectations for afterschool programs based on an understanding of the field as a “historically distinct child development institution” (p. 91) that is “well-suited to providing the types and qualities of developmental experiences that other institutions (i.e., the schools and public play spaces) can no longer provide most low- and moderate-income children” (p. 116). In this context, Halpern makes note of another important way in which afterschool programs can be developmental—they provide young people with opportunities to be connected with adults in ways that home and school do not, “adults who exemplify the range of domains that make up the adult community and the range of ways of being an adult” (p. 97). These experiences have always made afterschool and community-based organizations a key component of the development of new Americans.

#### THE ARTS, LEARNING, AND DEVELOPMENT

Research into arts and learning have demonstrated that the learning children do by participating in artistic and cultural activities is an important corollary to the learning that occurs in more traditional academic subjects. There is evidence that the arts teach young people “to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise and then to make other choices” (Eisner, 2005, p. 208). As Eisner and many others point out, these are the skills that are needed to operate successfully as members of a pluralistic and democratic society in the 21st century (Hoffman-Davis, 2005; Eisner, 2005). In addition to the arts contributing to creative and flexible learning, there is strong evidence that the arts support, rather than hinder, learning in other subjects (Catterell, 2002; Deasy, 2002; Herbert, 2004; Murphee, 1995). The positive benefit of learning through the arts continues throughout life: “For at-risk youth . . . the arts contribute to lower recidivism rates; increased self-esteem; the acquisition of job skills; and the development of much-needed creative thinking, problem solving and communication skills” (Psilos, 2002).

*Visual Arts.* One of the benefits of visual arts programs cited by multiple researchers is that they provide youths, particularly immigrant and inner-city youths, with a context to explore the identities that society associates with them (Heath, 2001; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). The visual arts give young people access to historical and current images they can then reappropriate and

played with. Heath (2001) provides two examples of immigrant youths making use of their identities to create installations and exhibits in their communities:

*Installations at community centers portray veiled young Islamic women playing basketball in hightops within gymnasias off-limits to males during certain hours . . . [and] brainstorming by a group of early teens about what it means to be of Vietnamese heritage sparks an exploration of the stories and art of Vietnam veterans, both American and Vietnamese. The teens who initiated the interest among others at their arts center led planning for an exhibition of art created in response to the words and pictures of the veterans (p. 13).*

In both of these instances, young people used visual mediums to explore actual and stereotypical images of their lives and communities and then took responsibility for sharing them with their communities. In a diverse and democratic society, it seems particularly important that young people discover not just who they are but that they create appropriate environments for sharing that with other members of the community. Heath (2001) goes on to identify that a key characteristic of visual arts programs is that they provide a place where young people can respond to and play with the images that society, including their close family and community, has of them, and as such gain more power over their own lives.

*Performing arts and youth theater.* Findings from both large-scale quantitative and program-specific qualitative studies have found that theater and other performing arts programs for young people are developmental in a variety of ways (Arts Education Partnership, 1999; Heath, 2000; Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Gordon, Bridgall, & Meroe, 2005; Jones, 2003; Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005). As a context for a work-like, disciplined, and committed process, making theater provides a supportive environment for personal and social development, especially in the following ways: positive change in young people’s attitudes toward one another that emerge from learning and creating as a group; opportunities to learn from and build positive relationships with successful adult professionals; increase in motivation to work hard; and greater confidence and ability to communicate.

With a Vygotskian lens, Holzman (2009) probed into the developmental value of performing for children and youths, both in school and in outside-of-school programs. Expanding considerably on Vygotsky’s insight that very young children develop through play, because it allows them to perform “a head taller” than they are (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102), she views performance as sharing important characteristics with children’s play that can account for the success of performance-based learning and development. According to Holzman (2009), babies and toddlers learn and grow through playing at being ways they aren’t yet but will grow into (speakers of language, readers of books, sketchers of pictures, etc.). In other words, in their everyday lives and together with their caregivers, they *perform* their learning and development. Older children and adolescents can do the same, if given the

opportunity. They can perform both onstage and off, and learn and develop in the process.

The linking of performing with developing and the recognition that through participating in performance-based outside-of-school programs young people become active builders and creators are the hallmarks of the All Stars Project's programs. These programs are unique in that most of them are performance programs in a traditional sense (young people often have an opportunity to perform onstage) and they embrace a performance methodology that supports young people to perform in all areas of their lives. This approach gives young people the ability to see possibilities and do new performances, beyond the stage. For example, in a dialogue on their participation in the All Stars theater school, Youth Onstage!, several young people discussed how this approach impacted how they saw and acted in the world:

*Alex: I learned a lot from Youth Onstage! the first time I did it (this is his second semester), but this time I learned a lot more. I don't know, I guess I was more ready for it. I got better social skills out of this semester. I once heard someone say, "The universe is smart; you don't appreciate it if you don't work for it." We worked very hard and we really appreciate what this place is. This should be in the schools. School should be like this. This whole ensemble thing could change everything. Even the economy! Can you imagine?*

*(There was then some disagreement among the students about Alex's claim that the "ensemble thing" could change the economy, with Alex arguing that if everyone developed, we would know how to run things, including the economy, better.)*

*Tiffany: Based on my experience here, I told my teachers [at school] how they can connect better with their students. At first they just rolled their eyes. Now we're going to have a workshop on how we can make a class into an ensemble.*

*Linda: I have the mentality that I have to fight, that whatever new situation I'm in, I'll have to fight. I thought I had to fight for a spot, but I didn't have to fight for a spot at Youth Onstage!. Now, instead of a fight, when I get in a new situation, I ask myself, "How can I get these people to know each other?"*

The words of these three participants are informative of how performance-based programs can affect young people's ability to participate as active builders of society. All three of these young people talk about themselves as responsible creators of their environments, their relationships, and even of the larger society.

Data from other researchers and evaluators support and, in some cases, come close to a performance-development understanding. For example, in a study of community-based youth programs, Heath determined that the highest quality programs are those that give youths opportunities to perform in new and different types of roles, not just onstage, but within the program itself, through which they come to see themselves as "capable of acting outside and beyond the expected" (Heath, 2000, p. 39). Heath goes on to argue that outside-of-school programs are often more effective than schools at providing young people with opportunities to grow.

From the field of evaluation, Sabo-Flores proposed that participatory evaluation is a youth development activity. In her examinations of youth-led and youth-run outside-of-school programs (Sabo, 2003; Sabo-Flores, 2007), she cited the ways in which youths "move beyond their socially determined roles" and "become leaders within the program, performing as directors, board members, funders, researchers, evaluators, planners, etc. . . . Evaluation environments should be created in which young people and adults relate to one another as performers. Together they can articulate scripts and improvise various evaluation roles. This self-conscious use of performance supports a kind of playfulness—a trying on and trying out" (Sabo, 2003, pp. 17-23).

As I said at the opening of this paper, much of my work has been in schools and with teachers. I have found that there are many teachers who want to create developmental environments for and with their students. Some of them embrace a performance and improvisational methodology (Lobman, 2010; in press). However, it has become equally clear that there are severe limitations to what they are able to do. That is why, as someone interested in bringing more creativity, process, and development to both education and democracy, I am working to support the creation of alternatives in both arenas.

## Conclusion

The findings from these separate fields offer strong evidence that outside-of-school programs with a developmental focus, most particularly arts- and performing arts-based programs, provide essential learning and development opportunities for children and youths. In these programs, young people can experience themselves as builders, creators, and responsible members of an ensemble or team. Moreover, data suggest that these programs are most critical and most beneficial for those young people whose school life is neither a developmental nor a learning experience. For these young people, it is in outside-of-school programs that they are invited in to participate actively in something greater than each individual and introduced to the world beyond their families, schools, and communities, and they begin to see the possibilities of contributing on a wider historical stage.

Committing to creating and supporting programs that give young people the experience of themselves as builders and creators requires a major shift in societal focus. For more than a century, school has been assumed to be the primary location where children are prepared to participate in democracy, and has been seen as the means by which outsiders became insiders. And while school may have played that role for some people and groups at some times, it is becoming clearer that, in their current form, they cannot fulfill this mission.

For generations, the demand by people and groups who are attempting to do something about racism and poverty has been for more, better, and equal educational opportunities in schools (Kozol, 1992, 2006), however much of the research discussed in this article and elsewhere (Vadeboncoeur, 2006) point to the need for a different fight. Without a policy shift, even children who have access to decent public schools will not necessarily have access to high-quality outside-of-school experiences. While there continues

to be a gap in the quality of schooling for poor and middle-class children, there is an equally problematic gap between the opportunities children receive outside of school (Kurlander and Fulani, 2009). I believe that if we are going to revitalize our democracy, this gap needs as much attention and financial support as does the achievement gap.

As I said at the beginning of this article, we are living in a time when two of the most important societal institutions—schools and politics—have radically reduced their focus to a narrow set of outcomes. This is occurring at the same time as some of the most innovative and enlightened political and educational analysts attempt to redefine democracy and education as process, specifically the process of development. Both systems are failing and/or frustrating a high percentage of young Americans to such an extent that many are choosing to opt out of them entirely, suggesting that revitalizing our democracy needs youth development to become front and center as one of the most important policy issues of our time. We must look beyond schools for creative activities where young people can become participants and creators in ways that might take them—and democracy—to new places.

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