Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization
The Y-PLAN (Youth—Plan, Learn, Act, Now!)

Deborah L. McKoy & Jeffrey M. Vincent

W est Oakland, California, is an industrial area suffering the abandonment and blight common to other neighborhoods after the loss of manufacturing employers, a process that began in the 1950s. It is a unique community in many ways, possessing a proud past and a challenged present. In the early 1990s, state and local government designated West Oakland a redevelopment area, which has attracted millions of dollars in foundation grants for development projects. More recently, West Oakland has become a haven for market-rate housing development amidst the recent housing boom in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Stepping into this environment in 2000 was the Y-PLAN (Youth—Plan, Learn, Act, Now!), a model for youth civic engagement in city planning that uses urban space slated for redevelopment as a catalyst for community revitalization and education reform. Sponsored by the Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, Y-PLAN facilitates positive community outcomes by partnering graduate student "mentors," local high school students, government agencies, private interests, and other community parties to work on a real-world planning issue. The Y-PLAN is both a pedagogical tool and a planning studio that addresses specific issues in local communities.

The goal of the Y-PLAN is not only to engage schools and students/youth in community development projects, but also to foster learning experiences for all participants. The name Y-PLAN is a play on words or pun—why plan? Why planning? Why include youth in planning? The Y-PLAN experience shows that youth can effectively participate in the development of public buildings and spaces. Unencumbered by previous models or traditional views of "how things are done," young people use their intimate knowledge of the environment to provide innovative and positive suggestions. The Y-PLAN also challenges professional planners to explain what they do in terms the youth will understand. Uniting students and mentors with local elected officials, private and nonprofit housing developers, and others seeking to improve the West Oakland community forms what Lave and Wenger (1991) call "a community of practice."

The original Y-PLAN initiative quickly gained recognition from local and national officials, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI office adopted the model to engage young adults in urban revitalization processes. Between 2003 and 2006, the national initiative, called "Youth Leadership by Design," grew to include projects in thirty-eight cities in sixteen states.

Abstract

Operating out of the University of California, Berkeley, Y-PLAN (Youth—Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) is a model for youth civic engagement in city planning that uses urban space slated for redevelopment as a catalyst for community revitalization and education reform. The program partners graduate level mentors, high school students, government agencies, private interests, and other community members who work together on a real-world planning problem. This article analyzes the data produced by Y-PLAN between 2000 and 2005 and demonstrates the model's effectiveness in fostering positive community outcomes and meaningful learning experiences, as well as its theoretical implications for the planning and education fields. We have identified three central conditions on which the success of the Y-PLAN rests: 1) authentic problems engage diverse stakeholders and foster a "community of practice"; 2) adult and youth partners share decision-making; and 3) projects build sustainable individual and institutional success.

Keywords: community development; community of practice; Y-PLAN; participation; public schools; youth

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This article focuses on the original West Oakland, California, Y-PLAN initiative to understand what makes this process of participation meaningful, legitimate, and sustainable. Particular attention is paid to the Y-PLAN model's evolution and transition over time and to the factors that have increased its legitimization in revitalization initiatives. First, we present our theoretical framework, relevant literature, and methodology used for this study. Next, we describe the community, the context, and the initial project. Using the theoretical framework, we track changes in participation and engagement over the course of six years, from 2000 to 2005. Our analysis identifies three central conditions that lead to successful school and student participation in urban revitalization:

1. Authentic problems engage diverse stakeholders and foster a "community of practice" that includes local government officials, planners, neighborhood residents, educators, and students;
2. Adults share decision making with youth, valuing their input and giving them a noticeable role in outcomes; and
3. Projects build individual and institutional success that promotes the sustainability of students and schools working on redevelopment projects.

We propose that together these are three conditions promoting the success of projects involving schools and students in urban revitalization efforts. We conclude the article by presenting the challenges facing such work and proposing questions for future research.

▶ **Theoretical Framework**

Just as the Y-PLAN brings together people from the fields of education and city planning, the theoretical framework we use to understand the Y-PLAN's successes and challenges brings together prominent education theory and planning literature. In particular, we draw on three bodies of literature: situated learning in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998); citizen and youth participation in planning (Arnstein 1969; Hart 1992); and a small but growing body of literature that connects city planning and public schools (Chung 2002; Vincent 2006a). The notion of community, albeit with varied interpretations, is at the core of this literature and provides a unifying thread. The literature addresses our basic questions—why is it important to engage students and schools in urban revitalization, and how is it possible?—and offers insight from multiple perspectives. It is in this discussion that we have situated our analysis of the Y-PLAN participation and engagement in West Oakland's revitalization process between 2000 and 2005.

Situated Learning in a Community of Practice:
A Social Theory of Learning

The community of practice idea and situated learning theory provide a mechanism for looking at the Y-PLAN model, especially with regard to student involvement in formal community development work. Much like traditional educational theory (Dewey 1916), situated learning theory assumes that learning takes place in the context of social participation rather than solely in an individual mind (Wenger 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991). In this view, learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs; that is, learning is situated in what is termed a *community of practice*, whereby a group of people (the community) work collectively to find answers or solutions to a given problem (the practice).

Social interaction is a crucial component of situated learning—learners become involved in a community of practice that embodies certain beliefs and values, and as a group, engage in some sort of collective endeavor. Through interaction with senior partners in that community, newer learners/members come to see themselves in new ways and in a new relationship with the world and people around them. For example, high school students in the Y-PLAN class grow to see themselves as legitimate participants and important players in the redevelopment of their communities. As in an apprenticeship model, they begin as novices and over time become experienced partners, all the while teaching each other as they learn and improve their own skills and knowledge. In essence, their identity within the community of practice has been transformed. An important element is the ability of learners to see themselves as capable participants from the start and as agents in learning processes and everyday life. If students and adults/professionals are to learn from each other, the latter must ask students questions that are relevant to their experience and within the boundaries of their capability and knowledge.

Access is another essential component of situated learning. As Gee (1992) argues, gaining access to the group discourse by interacting with people who have already mastered this discourse is what allows newcomers to adopt the behaviors and belief systems of the community. Lave and Wenger (1991) outline a trajectory that sees newcomers or apprentices as "legitimate peripheral participants"; they are viewed not as lacking expertise but as holding different levels of knowledge and experience.[1] For example, while Y-PLAN youth may not have an understanding of design principles and the skills to use them, they do have deep levels of understanding about who uses the spaces in their environment at different times of the day and why.

The community of practice concept is particularly helpful in analyzing the Y-PLAN because it describes the learning

process in a way that is complementary to redevelopment, which in itself is a coordinated process of identity transformation. In community development, municipal and community leaders seek to change the way a place is perceived so that despair and degradation give way to opportunity and prosperity. Likewise, community of practice theory also provides a continuum of transformation. Like other social theorists, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that situated learning must occur in the context of everyday life. The authenticity of Y-PLAN's work serves as an example of how activity around common concerns and interests creates a community of practice.

Ladders of Participation

Citizen participation theory, a canon in planning literature, provides a second lens for our analysis of the Y-PLAN model. Community participation first appeared as a vague requirement in urban renewal programs with the Housing Act of 1954. A more concrete set of criteria for "maximum feasible participation" was established with the Model Cities Act of 1966. Although this law required that communities participate in defining interests and values for redevelopment, the process of eliciting and incorporating community input remained poorly defined. In fact, public participation received plenty of lip service without clearly articulated requirements.

Against this backdrop, Arnstein (1969) constructed her "Ladder of Citizen Participation," which created typologies for citizen participation in a public decision-making process. The ladder has since become a central component in the city planner's training. The rungs of the ladder correspond to the extent of citizens' power, that is, their ability to determine planning outcomes. The ladder metaphor is useful in recognizing and categorizing the different types of public participation that occur in planning projects. Arnstein's fundamental point was that participation without redistribution of power leads to an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. As a result of this frustration, plans fail to win community acceptance, and the community itself feels further marginalized and may engage in public protest.

Adapting Arnstein's ideas, Hart (1997;1992) developed the "Ladder of Young People's Participation" as a tool for thinking about children and youth working with adults in community and environmental development projects. Hart placed his ladder against the backdrop of "adultist" planning and decision making, referring to attitudes that result when adults presume that young people, because they lack life experience, have little to offer to community revitalization processes (Armstrong 1996). Confronting "adultism" means scrutinizing the way we interact and communicate with young people, especially in community development strategies. We propose that this ladder is also useful for analyzing high school students' engagement in their community.
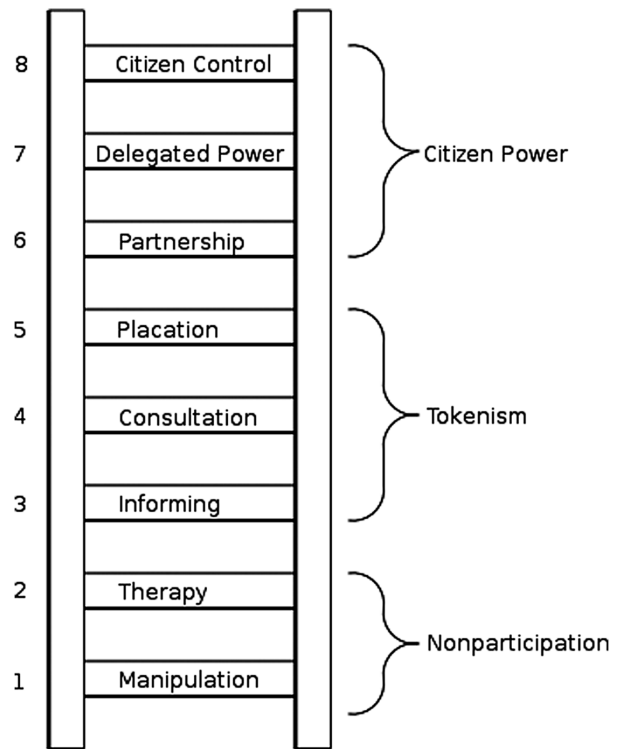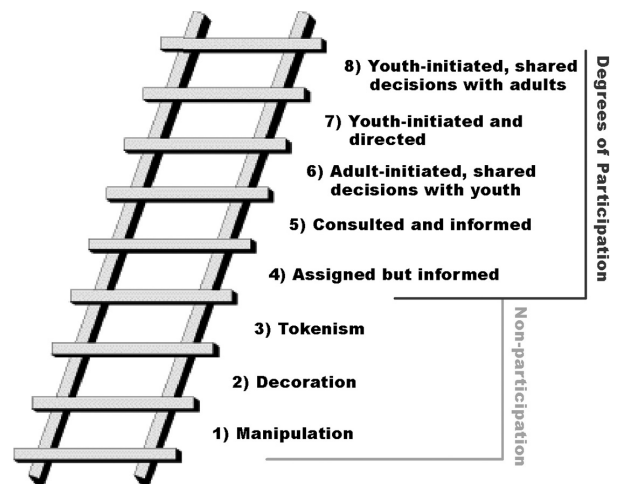

Figure 1. *Arnstein Ladder*

Figure 2. *Hart Ladder*

According to the first three rungs of Hart's ladder, adults are in control and young people play predetermined and marginal roles. If and when youth are involved in planning processes, they are usually token participants typically involved only in the front-end design phase of a program. Higher rungs shift toward giving young people more ownership through close reflection on issues and work with adult partners. The sixth rung takes participation to a critical new phase: the

involvement of young people in the entire process from conceptual design to the development of technical details and implementation.

The top two rungs represent youth-initiated projects, which require high levels of competence from young people. At the highest rungs, Hart places *shared* decision making with adults; he argues here that young people realize that collaborating with adults as *partners* will improve a project's success. Thus, everyone participates and everyone brings something to the table, in effect creating a community of practice. Hart's ladder demonstrates that the partnership between youth and adults is one of mutual benefit, understanding, and activity.

Hart's ladder can be seen as a tool to address the isolation of many urban public schools and their students from local community planning initiatives, an issue rarely addressed by the planning field. Urban youth often feel that their school environment and educational process have little relevance to their present lives or future trajectories. Involving them in community projects may help to eliminate this alienation, but only if their contributions are respected and the projects are authentic. To engage students as marginal or "token" participants will only confirm their sense that they are at best ignored and at worst disparaged by the community at large. If a project is authentic rather than a simulation or academic exercise, discrete skills might be gained and the ability to influence neighborhood change becomes possible. Over its brief life, Y-PLAN has moved from engaging students in simulations to giving them a pivotal role in which they are truly legitimate partners with adults and capable of impacting social change through authentic community development projects.

Schools and Community Revitalization

A third and final area of literature that supports this study is the growing body of work that highlights the importance of public schools for city planning and policy making. Significant new dialogues across the country are raising questions about the relationship between public school quality and neighborhood improvement, creating new visions for public schools and, recognizing the potential of public schools as tools in urban development and revitalization (e.g., Bingler 1999; Chung 2002; Baum 2004; Vincent 2006b). These issues arise when city officials realize that poor-performing schools hinder city revitalization goals such as attracting and retaining middle-class families and when educators recognize that urban residential poverty concentration makes it difficult to improve academic performance.

One of the most striking realities of American public schools is their traditional isolation and "disconnect" from local government and the other facets of our society, especially in terms of community development and land use planning (Baum 2004; McKoy and Vincent 2005; Vincent 2006a).

Despite increasing evidence of change, such as the community schools movement (Dryfoos 1994; Blank et al. 2003; Dryfoos et al. 2005) and the growing interest in connecting schools and community development (Timpane and Reich 1997; Stone et al. 1999; McGaughy 2000; Chung 2002), this separation remains apparent at numerous levels.

One way to address this issue is to involve schools and students in localized revitalization efforts. Institutionalizing such participation, however, requires building personal, political, and institutional bridges across traditional agency boundaries. Changes in federal policy in the mid-1990s, particularly with the HOPE VI urban revitalization program, helped address the lack of community participation in housing redevelopment, which changed the landscape of community development work. For instance, HOPE VI, initiated under the Clinton administration, better incorporated citizen participation and community building into project development in response to research findings supporting its merits (e.g., Naperstek and Freis 2000).

When it comes to connecting schools with local community development, a few key concepts emerge. One is the idea of systems thinking. In other words, we need to think about how the multitude of agencies, institutions, and adults in a given locality engage with each other and young people. Revitalizing only one of these institutions cannot repair the entire "ecosystem" for youth or for schools (Timpane and Reich 1997).

Another concept is that community development work can be used to change the identity of schools from isolated and independent agencies within cities and neighborhoods to institutions enmeshed with other agencies in an interconnected landscape of decision making (Timpane and Reich 1997). This type of identity transformation speaks to the idea of a community of practice, which creates a dense web of relationships to develop new institutional and individual identities.

A third concept in connecting schools with local community development is connecting students to community development work by placing learning in real-world contexts through using the community as a classroom (Steinberg and Stephen 1999). Formally, this can be done with a community-oriented and project-based pedagogy using learning techniques such as classroom-based social action projects that benefit communities while containing explicit learning components for the students (Stern et al. 1994; McKoy 2000; Stern et al. 2000).

A final concept is that the school facility itself can be seen as a tool for community development (Chung 2002). Examples include coordinating the development of affordable housing with the creation of new schools for mixed-income developments that aid in diversifying the student body; creating joint-use school facilities that offer community services or amenities; and turning existing buildings into new schools through adaptive reuse (Vincent 2006b). In short,

the relationship between schools and community development is getting more recognition, and some see the crossroads of education and schools as the next frontier for community development work (Kretzman 1992; Noguera 1996, 2003; Grogan and Proscio 2000; Powell et al. 2001; Baum 2003, 2004; Katz 2004).

► **Methodology and Data**

The following analysis is based on six years of Y-PLAN projects and draws from a range of data sources. Participant observation provides the primary tool of data gathering in this paper; it was carried out through informal interviews, direct observation, participation in activities and events, collective discussions, and analysis of the personal documents produced within the group. Additional data was collected over the course of the program. Table 1 lists the sources and summarizes the data obtained through each. The program description later in this article draws from these sources.

Everyone involved in the Y-PLAN became a participant in this community-based research project, including the professor, the graduate student mentors, the high school students, their classroom teachers, elected officials, public and private developers, and representatives of housing and planning agencies.[2] Participants learned from each other and saw how their perspectives differed. Youth tended to focus on who gets to make what decisions and why, gaining insight into the power structure in their community. For example, they noted that although a wide range of community members complained about certain conditions—the quality of a local park or train station, for example—their voices were not heard until public officials became involved. Youth also keenly perceived that some adult partners were more willing than others to engage them or trust in their ability to contribute constructively to planning processes. Professional planners were forced to clearly explain and demonstrate their work; rarely are they trained to learn from young people, which the Y-PLAN requires them to do. In the same vein, youth rarely see themselves as important in decision-making processes, something Y-PLAN helps them to achieve.

Thus, the Y-PLAN is structured to bring out the "expertise" in everyone, from developer to city official to high school youth. Adults must listen to criticism and be willing to acknowledge fault. Furthermore, interaction with students and youth often provoked adults to ask questions they had not asked previously. For example, they may need to explain what *city planning* is—a question that is deceptively difficult. Discussions with youth required adults to be clear and concise and to understand the complexities of their profession well enough to explain them in the simplest terms. On the other hand, developers had the opportunity to ask youth significant questions that lacked textbook answers, for example, why they use or do not use particular products or stores.

Thus, the participants all contribute their various expertise to enhance understanding of the issues and to use this knowledge with activity for community benefit (Israel et al. 1998). Strand et al. (2003, 3) define community-based research as "a partnership of students, faculty, and community members who collaboratively engage in research with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change." This collaborative work and understanding was central to this study on the benefits and challenges of Y-PLAN as a pedagogical tool and a planning studio to promote community change and to outline conditions of success in the Y-PLAN model.

► **The Y-PLAN Model in West Oakland, California**

Initiated at UC Berkeley in 2000, Y-PLAN was modified again and again in the early years as experience provided new insights into best practices. Hundreds of young people—both Berkeley graduate students and students at a local high school—have participated. As projects became more authentic, the program made significant contributions to the local community and changed the institutions that were involved. In this section, we look at the initial project, its evolution, and its transition into a national program.

The Setting

West Oakland covers an area of approximately 2.3 square miles with a total population in 2000 of approximately 20,000. The racial breakdown consists of about 65 percent African American, 16 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian, 7 percent white, and 4 percent other. Of significance is the rise in both Hispanic and white populations between 1990 and 2000, by 85 percent and 27 percent respectively. Of the nearly 8,000 West Oakland households in 2000, 78 percent of them were designated low-income. About 30 percent of the residents were under the age of 15.

The streets and alleyways of West Oakland carry reminders of the community's past: the shipbuilding industries of World War I and World War II; the rise of the first black labor union—the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters—in the 1920s; the West Coast jazz and blues music scene in the 1930s and 1940s; and the civil rights work of the Black Panthers in the 1960s. The neighborhood also shows the common characteristics of urban disinvestment—abandoned buildings, vacant lots, underperforming schools, and one of the highest homicide rates in the country. Today, however, many efforts are under

Table 1.
Primary data sources and findings.

Source	Description	Summary of Data
Graduate student online journals and weblogs	Graduate students recorded weekly entries in secure online weblogs	Graduate students learned about the challenges facing urban schools and the reality that these public schools often lack quality relationships with their local neighborhoods. Graduate students learned over time to engage with communities and populations that are not typically a part of city planning, e.g., youth, their families, public school teachers, and administrators.
Graduate student final papers	Graduate students described their experiences, evaluated particular aspects of the project, and assessed how those experiences relate to their future careers as urban planners and/or educators.	Graduate students understood the need to consider high-quality schooling in the context of traditional city planning policy making and practice. Graduate students recognized the many ways community development goals have important relationships to public schools, e.g., how mixed-income communities can support diverse local school enrollments. Some graduate city planning students decided to enter the education field full-time as teachers or administrators. Most city planning graduate students expressed a fuller appreciation of the importance of public education to the vitality of neighborhoods and cities.
High school student written assignments	High school students reflected on their experiences on a bi-weekly or monthly basis.	High school students learned new information about the social and built environments of their neighborhood. For example, using community mapping, one group of students discovered that five churches were housed in old storefronts. High school students showed interest in college preparation. Many expressed interest in studying city planning or architecture after being introduced to these fields through Y-PLAN. High school student interest in civic engagement grew both during the Y-PLAN and beyond. Each year, three to five students have continued their involvement in community Y-PLAN projects beyond the scope of the course by attending meetings, sharing opinions, etc.
Charette products	Final projects produced by high school students included community surveys and planning models, as well as videotaped final presentations.	Each year, the ability of graduate students to mentor high school students and guide them through high quality community analysis deepened. Both mentors and students demonstrated greater understanding of the complex and multifaceted aspects of community development and city planning.*
School, community, and city participants interviews and focus groups	High school students reflected on the Y-PLAN process (data gathering, the charette, and final presentations). Specific questions included: What local entities become involved? Why are they involved? Do their relationships and priorities change over time? How does this affect the planning process?	High school students learned about the field of city planning and how planning decisions affect their neighborhoods. Teachers learned ways to tap into community resources and develop new relationships with community members and city officials. Teachers improved curriculum by connecting the Y-PLAN project to core content, such as English and Social Studies. Community partners and city officials learned that public school administrators and teachers were interested in participating in neighborhood change. School administrators and teachers learned that community partners and city officials were interested in participating in school change. Participants from all categories learned that neighborhood change and school change would both be better supported as connected endeavors.
Course evaluation forms	Graduate student mentors completed anonymous course evaluations at the end of each semester.	The majority of graduate students rated the course *above average* compared to other city planning courses. Many graduate student participants commented that the course entails a great deal of time and might be more appropriate as a required studio or practicum course within the Master of City Planning degree program, rather than an elective course.
Outside program evaluations	Education researchers conducted two evaluations, in 2003 and 2005, to assess the educational benefits and literacy development for the high school students participating in Y-PLAN.	Evaluators found that high school student participants in Y-PLAN developed enhanced oral literacy, research, and limited technology skills, as well as civic engagement knowledge.

* The quality of the final project models and presentation planning boards also depended on the grade and capacity of the high school students. Each year, however, the Y-PLAN program was able to build on lessons learned from previous years to guide the high school student charette process.

way to transform this neighborhood into a place of pride and prosperity for residents.

Two large HOPE VI grants funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have financed the transformation of West Oakland housing projects into mixed-income communities. Numerous private sector redevelopment projects have also occurred. Local youth watch this transformation go on around them, but they are typically alienated from the process and often left to wonder whether they will still have a place in this gentrifying neighborhood as new, wealthier residents and families move in, given the Bay Area's expensive and tight housing market. As one student stated on a community mapping tour,

> Buildings are coming down all over here. Javier used to live over there—now he's over in east Oakland with his dad because his house got redone. People are changing too; some is good, less hanging out on that corner over there and stuff. I'm not sure where we are all gonna live, I like living close to school and stuff.

Concurrent with neighborhood revitalization, the local McClymonds High School has been targeted for comprehensive reforms, with a Small Schools grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This large, comprehensive high school will be broken into three smaller learning communities between 2004 and 2007, to improve achievement and create greater community within the school. The school reform design calls for greater attention and engagement with the surrounding community. In addition to money for improving educational quality, funds have also been raised from private foundations to build a health center on the school grounds.

Although both the neighborhood and the school are undergoing significant change, there is little formal connection between these processes. For example, at a community meeting to review new designs for a proposed minipark, local homeowners were amazed to hear about the school reform changes under way at the high school. Learning about the new health center to be located just two blocks from her house, the president of the West Oakland Neighborhood and Business Association said, "Wow, this is great. When did all this happen?"

The Program Model

The West Oakland Y-PLAN program builds on a tradition in which UC Berkeley city planning graduate students go off campus to work with local communities and schools. Funding comes largely from the University-Community Links program in the UC's Office of the President, a program designed to engage faculty in community-based research linked to academic courses.

The Y-PLAN provides a planning studio in which university students learn about urban communities' redevelopment policies while they educate off-campus communities. As educators often note, the best way to learn something is to teach it. On campus, graduate students learn to use planning tools such as asset mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology; off campus, they are able to experience real-world application of planning tools, using them to help youth understand their own communities.

Since 2000, six Y-PLAN projects have been completed, involving more than 100 mentors drawn from UC Berkeley undergraduate and graduate students along with more than 300 hundred high school students. One or two classes typically participate each year; both remedial ninth graders and honors seniors have been engaged, indicating that this type of learning environment is beneficial to all types of students. The typical group size is thirty to forty students, with a student-mentor ratio of about 4 to 1.

During early stages of the Y-PLAN program, the project director reached out to community leaders to solicit possible youth projects. More recently, however, city and community leaders have approached Y-PLAN with ideas on a wide range of community development projects. As Y-PLAN now receives more offers for projects by prospective "clients" than can be pursued during any one semester, three criteria have been established for project selection. First, any Y-PLAN project must pose "youth-friendly" questions, or in other words, questions that the youth themselves will be able to realistically explore. Second, Y-PLAN teaching partners at local schools must agree that the proposed project has educational value and connects directly to the school's curriculum. Last, Y-PLAN youth must find this project interesting and meaningful to them and their community.

Once a project is selected, UC Berkeley graduate students (hereafter called *mentors*) guide high school youth (hereafter called *students*) through a ten to twelve week community planning process that culminates in public presentations of their proposals for changing the school neighborhood.[3] Plans have included the design of the West Oakland Transit Village, a community garden, and cultural history projects that raised awareness of the powerful and cultural-historic role this community played in the industrial migration and development and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (see Table 2 for a summary). For students and mentors, the Y-PLAN helps to transform the image of a place from degradation and violence to pride and historic significance. As one student said, "It's like these places and things you see around all the time have meaning, and we're all a part of it, too. That's cool." The mentors and students learn side by side, sharing with each other their differing perspectives, insights, and frustrations.

Underlying the Y-PLAN strategy is the knowledge that public space—what youth often call their "hood"—is a powerful identity-forming presence in the lives of urban teenagers (Skelton and Valentine 1998). Youth understand the rhythm and nature of places in unique ways, from the way

Table 2.
Y-PLAN projects and participants, 2000-2005.

Year	Project	Proposed by	Participating Agencies
2000	Local Bay Area Rapid Transit Station Redevelopment	Y-PLAN project director	University of California, Berkeley and High School City Councilmember
2001	HOPE VI Public Housing Redevelopment Open Space	Y-PLAN project director	University of California, Berkeley and High School Oakland Housing Authority City Councilmember Community residents
2002	West Oakland Transit Village	Y-PLAN project director with Bay Area Rapid Transit	University of California, Berkeley and High School Alliance for West Oakland Redevelopment (nonprofit developer) City Councilmember Community residents
2003	Minipark Redevelopment	City of Oakland	University of California, Berkeley and High School Oakland Dept of Parks and Recreation City Councilmember Oakland Housing Authority Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation Community residents University of California, Berkeley landscape architecture professor San Francisco Foundation
2004	Oakland Housing Authority Retail Space	Oakland Housing Authority	University of California, Berkeley and High School Oakland Housing Authority Urban Strategies Community Development Corporation City Councilmember U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development University of California, Berkeley landscape architecture professor Community residents
2005	West Oakland Historic Central Train Station Redevelopment	BRIDGE Housing and youth	University of California, Berkeley and High School BRIDGE Housing (nonprofit developer) For-profit developers City Councilmember Community residents Local unions University of California, Berkeley landscape architecture professor

a space is used to the social relations that are generated there—not by what outside "experts" deem important (Nespor 1997; McKoy 2000; Seyer-Ochi 2000). The Y-PLAN process validates these insights and the powerful contributions young people can make to improve their neighborhood. The program helps them translate their unique understanding of the places where they live, play, or go to school into proposals for improving their environment.

Youth look at plans with fresh eyes, using the experiences, relationships, and needs of a growing young person; developers and other adult participants may never have experienced what, to these young people, is commonplace. Moreover, youth are not as burdened by failed promises, political agendas, anger, and frustration as their elders. Also, fun and comfort may rank above financial outcomes and profit making in their hierarchy of values. By listening to youth, adults are able to re-imagine what is possible about a place. Young people's visions are not constrained by formal, traditional, or professional notions of what is right or wrong. For example, they may not understand why fences are necessary. Fences may be more important to help adults feel safe, or indeed, they may be an outsiders' idea of what would make local residents, both youth and adults, safer. Indeed, the youth, who are so often the source of fear, may have the best insight into what makes a street corner dangerous or safe, inviting or scary.

Implementation and Growth

Each year, the Y-PLAN grew in unique ways, reflecting the interests and talents of mentors, high school students, and

adult partners including community leaders, city administrators, and elected officials. In this section, we analyze Y-PLAN's change over time.

During 2000, the first year of the Y-PLAN initiative in West Oakland, UC Berkeley mentors led high school students through an analysis of the MacArthur Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Station, which was slated for repairs and modernization. Four teams of students developed different plans, identifying issues important to them, such as why the dark underpass is "a really, really dangerous place" and how the young people "who never even really ride BART" are blamed for the dangerous reputation of the station. Besides their years of experience as residents of this community, students based their work on photos, sketches, surveys, and interviews of residents coming and going from the station. This evidence was collected during the first month and analyzed in partnership with the mentors and a high school teaching partner.

Then, the students formally presented recommendations for ways to improve this station and make it an asset in the community to city and community leaders. The students suggested several socially responsible dimensions, such as promoting locally owned stores and resisting the large big-box stores increasingly popular in the community. This focus on creating positive social outcomes is common among Y-PLAN students. As one Y-PLAN student remarked, "[we do] not want to do the same thing they [adults] do. That's how this place became the way it is."

In the second year, the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) agreed to have students develop plans for the open space of a new HOPE VI public housing project in West Oakland. In the third year, The Alliance for West Oakland Redevelopment, a local nonprofit developer, agreed to have students come up with a vision for the proposed West Oakland Transit Village. For both projects, the students offered unique proposals reflecting their perspective as young people who live and/or go to school in the community. Mentors provided information on commonplace conceptions of how housing and transit open space is used and provided details on less traditional, "cutting-edge" design ideas. As a result, students suggested quiet reading areas and benches where their grandparents and guardians could watch younger children on a jungle gym instead of the typical basketball court. In describing this choice, one student stated, "People don't realize how loud it is when you live right above this stuff." Another student added, "We need quiet spaces, too, you know, to think and stuff."

In the program's formative years, student involvement in the redevelopment designs was limited to consultation. Although authentic questions were raised by clients such as BART, the Oakland Housing Authority, and local nonprofit developers, the students had no real involvement in the formal redevelopment design. BART, for example, had no vehicle for incorporating student comments and seemingly had no interest in doing so. When students presented their ideas for the open space at the HOPE VI project —ideas the housing authority had requested—it was learned that the design department had already accepted professional designs. In the third year, plans and financial agreements were already in negotiation before students developed their vision for the transit village. This is typical of many participatory planning processes, where community feedback to experts is more token than genuine. Therefore, Y-PLAN's first three years found it on rungs one through three on Hart's "Ladder of Young People's Participation."

Engaging the students while stimulating the interest of policymakers and planners became an increasingly important goal of class projects in the ensuing years. However, getting large institutions and bureaucracies to listen to students and use their ideas proved to be one of the most difficult obstacles for Y-PLAN. In the fourth year of the work in West Oakland, Y-PLAN mentors were determined to ensure that policymakers would not only propose an authentic question but also give sincere consideration to the resulting student ideas.

The 2003 project focused on an abandoned minipark adjacent to a new HOPE VI development, McClymonds High School, and several private homes. The Oakland Housing Authority identified this project for Y-PLAN, hoping to transform what the City of Oakland had deemed "one of the six most dangerous parks in Oakland." Working with seventeen Y-PLAN mentors, forty McClymonds students developed a plan, won the support of community agencies, and proposed a new design to transform the once drug-infested property just twenty feet from their school into an inviting neighborhood gathering spot. With this project, Y-PLAN moved up the theoretical ladder (to rungs four or five) with more authentic participation. Students were consulted and directly influenced the process in legitimate ways. They crafted a park theme around the historic role West Oakland had played in the nation's history. Proposals included a poetry wall engraved with students' spoken words and a cement map on the ground that described historic events. In some cases, the history they learned and honored in the park was quite personal. While conducting an oral history of family members, one student learned that his uncle was a sleeping car porter in the 1950s and a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, known as the Pullman Porters.

Subsequent Y-PLAN projects built on this model and continued to move up Hart's "Ladder of Young People's Participation." In 2004, OHA again came to Y-PLAN with several project ideas. Youth were most interested in identifying the types of local businesses and services their families and peers would like to see in newly renovated commercial space along 7th Street, an active thoroughfare and part of a HOPE VI redevelopment project. Students were consulted on questions that OHA professionals could not answer, such as what types of services and products do the youth in the community want? In addition, the project scope was defined in far

greater partnership with the youth who were able to say that this was in fact a question and project that interested them.

In spring 2005, students were asked to make recommendations about the redevelopment of Oakland's abandoned and historic Southern Pacific Railroad Station. While the overall project was proposed by adults—in this case the local developer BRIDGE Housing, who had seen earlier Y-PLAN presentations and thought students would be helpful in developing a community-centered design—youth were able to identify particular aspects of the project that interested them, such as what types of services would be brought in and how the large open spaces would be made available and attractive to West Oakland youth. Working with other community leaders, UC Berkeley mentors and high school students had to consider the range of controversial issues often involved in public-private initiatives, for example, whether and how developers' decisions are driven by profit motivations rather than the overall best interests of all residents.

To assist in the students' planning research, BRIDGE Housing, along with other private developers involved in the projects, brought in designers, architects, and engineers to answer student questions about the old train station and surrounding land uses. To help the students develop ideas for the plaza in front of the train station, Walter Hood, a well-known Berkeley landscape architecture professor who happens to be a former West Oakland resident, took them on a bus tour of various local urban open spaces.

At the end of the course, the high school students presented their ideas for the train station and its plaza to a jury at Oakland's City Hall, as is customary in the Y-PLAN initiative. Their proposal included a career center with job training opportunities for local residents, a youth-run café, a performance and community meeting space, a photography exhibition highlighting the station's historical significance for Oakland, and an exhibition space for local youth art. Ideas for the plaza included shade trees, a play area for young children, a railroad "history" tunnel, a walking path with facts about the station, and a fountain with a seating wall for all ages to enjoy. The City Council voted to approve the Central Railway Station proposal and also to review several of the student ideas for the final design.

National Expansion

Based on Y-PLAN, the Department of Housing and Urban Development**'s** Hope VI program developed Youth Leadership by Design (YLD) as a model of youth engagement starting in 2002. Over the next three years, YLD involved more than 500 youth and adult allies (housing staff) across the nation in work to revitalize public housing sites. Central to the effectiveness of the Y-PLAN model—and incorporated by YLD—is that all adults who participate must be active, engaged participants throughout the project, from design through implementation. The national initiative stemmed from the HOPE VI office's strong interest in engaging young adults in the transformation of their public housing development and neighborhood. The project involved summer training summits at UC Berkeley where youth and adult allies from across the country attended multi-day workshops together on campus. Participants were mentored by Berkeley graduate students, many of whom had served as Y-PLAN mentors, and learned the basics of city planning and community development in addition to strategic organizing media tools such as radio, video, and graphic design. To ensure that the skills and project ideas developed at the summer summits were implemented, local and regional follow-up meetings were conducted to sustain and grow these efforts. After the 2004 summit, a reporter for the *Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education* wrote, "The Youth Leadership by Design Summit for HOPE VI youth is one of the best kept secrets of Berkeley" (Burdman 2004). Along with much of HUD's HOPE VI program, the YLD concluded in early 2006, but the model of youth engagement remains a part of HUD's Office of Social and Community Services work in New Orleans and elsewhere.

▶ Conditions for Success

Findings

Since the spring of 2000, graduate students in UC Berkeley's Department of City and Regional Planning, Graduate School of Education, and other departments have participated in Y-PLAN, contributing a wide range of experiences and expertise. Because it is designed to be flexible and to tap into the strength and talents of participants, the Y-PLAN work and projects take a new form each year. Within this variation, however, three common conditions can be linked to their success in engaging youth and schools in community development work. In the findings described below, we use the three related sets of literature previously described as a lens through which to analyze the Y-PLAN initiative and the overall learning process.

1. Authentic problems engage diverse stakeholders and foster a "community of practice"

During the past six years of work, the authenticity of Y-PLAN projects has steadily increased along with the importance of students' ideas and proposals to their partnering adults and agencies. *Authentic* engagement, analogous to Hart's (1992) term *genuine,* is an essential component of project-based pedagogy and refers to learning activities that have real and direct meaning, relevance, and potential impact on the world rather then exercises in hypothetical problem solving (Archibald and Newmann 1989). In a community of practice,

learning takes place when participants have access to key people, places, and resources in a particular area of work. Access to other professionals—or knowledgeable individuals with experience in a particular trade or area of work—is essential to making a process authentic for youth and other members of a community of practice, and it is a criterion for all projects taken up by Y-PLAN.

Y-PLAN has succeeded in increasing authenticity, as participating students see their unique perspectives and proposals adopted by community leaders engaged in local revitalization efforts. For example, because the dilapidated and dangerous park in West Oakland stood next door not only to McClymonds High School but also to the new HOPE VI housing development, the neighbors, teachers, parents, and public housing residents all had a shared interest in transforming this space into a safe, inviting place. Like much of West Oakland's infrastructure, this park had been abandoned for decades, and over the course of twenty years, several minimally successful community improvement endeavors had been attempted. As a result of the Y-PLAN activity, the minipark became a unifying cause for neighbors, the local high school, civic leaders including a city councilmember, and nonprofit organizations such as Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation.

Each year, the real-world significance of Y-PLAN projects grew. Whereas earlier projects, such as the transit village proposal, were of little interest to developers or city agencies, recent projects such as the park and redesign of the train station have been given high priority by private and public sector leaders. Access to people and resources involved in West Oakland's revitalization helps students develop a new understanding of themselves as change agents in their neighborhood. In journals, work assignments, and interviews, students describe such experiences and their growth. As one student said in 2003, "I learned I have ideas that can make a difference, that the stuff we're supposed to be learning inside here [McClymonds High School] actually means something outside, out there. Important people, even our councilwoman, come to listen to us."

2. Adult and youth partners share decision-making

As Hart (1987; 1992) argues, youth and adults must share in decision-making processes to create meaningful civic engagement that leads to a greater distribution of power among students and adult partners. Each year, Y-PLAN participants have increased their influence over projects and earned increasing respect as informed neighborhood change leaders from their peers, high school teachers and administrators, their mentors, participating university professors, and community leaders. Using Hart's ladder as a tool for analysis, Y-PLAN projects have clearly grown beyond rungs one, two, and three (see Figure 3). Although the first two projects (2000 and 2001) were little more than simulation exercises, the next two projects (2002 and 2003) provided increasingly
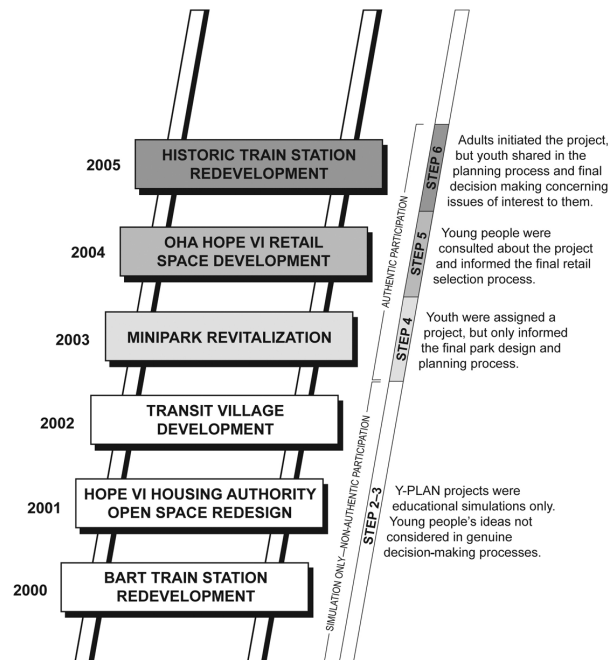

Figure 3. Y-PLAN Ladder

authentic endeavors. In the last two years (2004 and 2005), the students became engaged in the entire redevelopment process from design stages to implementation, thereby moving them farther up Hart's ladder.

Y-PLAN curriculum has changed as more has been learned about the work. Student planning models and final public project presentations provide increasingly detailed and analytic descriptions of the projects and planning process. The length of the course has nearly doubled from five and a half weeks the first year to the current twelve-week curriculum, and community mapping research and GIS data collection were included in many student presentations to the City Council and other governmental and planning agencies. Twelve weeks is a rather limited amount of time in terms of realizing community redevelopment goals, yet student ideas continue to be used by adult leaders in the community long past the actual meetings. For example, in 2004 students proposed putting a community-owned grocery store in the new commercial corridor created by a HOPE VI development. Although the project proposal is still in negotiation, the OHA has made this idea a priority as it selects tenants for this location.

Students often learn the most when they must present and defend their ideas to mentors and partners. This takes place throughout the second half of the semester as students solidify their proposal ideas, budget, and other logistics. Financial and regulatory limitations often provide students with a "reality check" on their ideas. The students' 2003 park proposal, for example, was first budgeted at nearly $1 million, far above

the estimated $300,000 that the City might make available. Once students learned of this estimate, they went back to the drawing board and consulted with the mentors to develop a more reasonable proposal to present at City Hall. Such discussion and negotiation demonstrated the kind of shared decision making that is key to achieving the highest form of civic participation according to Hart's ladder.

Each year, Y-PLAN students have provided more detailed and critical analysis and recommendations as the program is better able to assist their visioning and planning process and to help adult partners understand their role in authentically engaging youth. For example, at presentations, city officials have learned to ask questions that are more realistic to the kinds of knowledge students might have, rather than questions concerned with in-depth economic analysis or highly complex design and land use regulation.

3. Projects build individual and institutional success

Successes realized by institutions and individuals participating in Y-PLAN foster sustainable programs that engage students and schools meaningfully in revitalization efforts. Although the long-term influence of Y-PLAN experiences is still unknown, there is some indication that participation has a lasting effect on participating high school students and mentors. Partners report that students are continuing to build on lessons introduced during the project. Sometimes this involves community activism, but more often students were inspired, motivated, and confident to pursue personal development. For example, in the fall of 2005, a Y-PLAN high school student began classes at UC Berkeley, studying environmental design with professor Walter Hood, whom he met during the design of the park. When asked if he felt his peers also benefited, he said, "I made it here, and others will come too. You have to know a lot of details about admissions but it's possible. I did it." In 2006, three former Y-PLAN students enrolled at UC Berkeley—a significant number given that in the previous ten years, four McClymonds High School graduates have attended UC Berkeley. Other students continue to take on leadership positions at McClymonds High School. For example, a 2002 and 2003 participant ran for class president, acknowledging that her Y-PLAN experiences helped develop her leadership confidence, "especially all the pressure leading up to our City Hall presentations."

Although no formal or mandatory structures maintain student involvement over time, many past students have returned to act as peer educators for new Y-PLAN participants. Still, sustainability of student participation is difficult given the way schools are structured on nine-month calendars. Additionally, high school courses often lack continuity from one year to the next, which inhibits long-term engagement. This lack of ongoing student participation, both through high school and beyond, remains a major challenge for the Y-PLAN model.

Over the course of Y-PLAN history, institutional relationships have provided greater and more sustainable avenues of connection and collaboration between schools and their neighborhoods. As the depth of involvement with West Oakland redevelopment stakeholders grew, a systems approach to project planning and thinking has emerged. The Y-PLAN has become an important vehicle by which city leaders can learn about the interests and concerns of their younger constituents and work collaboratively to incorporate youthful ideas into new policies.

In some cases, Y-PLAN involvement has led to continuing roles for students. The new minipark design, a product of the 2003 project, became part of the redevelopment portfolio of other organizations. Although UC Berkeley and McClymonds High School are now secondary players in the destiny of this minipark, high school students remain involved with today's park stewards, including Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation and city agencies. In addition, three high school students and two UC Berkeley mentors still attend meetings to discuss plans for the train station redevelopment, and students are likely to be included on the project's permanent advisory board. This continued involvement is one of the greatest indicators of the sustainability of Y-PLAN projects.

When mentors graduate and go on to professional urban planning careers, they take with them their understanding and firsthand experience of working with local schools. Additionally, their ways of thinking about their education and social change have been transformed, along with their ability to determine the quality of their local communities. More than ten mentors are now either working directly with school districts or including youth in their professional careers—a further institutionalizing of the change Y-PLAN fosters. Some of their positions include: director of policy for a member of the Los Angeles Unified School district board of Education, working on the district's massive new school facility siting plans; workforce coordinator for the San Francisco Unified School District's School-To-Career office; project manager for the American Red Cross, integrating young adults into disaster preparation planning in the San Francisco Bay Area; and a project manager for real estate development at a nonprofit housing organization working to get youth involvement in their development projects.

Challenges

Integrating schools and students into community development efforts has been under-theorized and lacks guidance in the literature. Efforts are complicated by many things, including the traditional isolated autonomy of schools and school districts, lack of communication between municipal agencies and schools, and a general lack of knowledge

among planning professionals about how to structure and design youth participation programs. Even more complicated is the need to make youth participation authentic and to meet the three conditions for success outlined above. In this section, we discuss some of the challenges Y-PLAN and similar programs face.

School involvement in community development efforts is essential; however, such opportunities must not become burdens for teachers and administrators. Educators, for example, may become concerned that Y-PLAN takes too much time away from traditional classroom activities. Partners need to understand and accommodate the school-mandated requirements that provide quality learning opportunities for their students, especially in an era of increasing federal student testing to meet academic achievement goals.

Models like Y-PLAN can and should be structured to complement and support existing curriculum and learning goals. Teaching partners have become more and more essential in connecting Y-PLAN project work to core curriculum and academic competencies. For example, from 2003 to 2005, students' final Y-PLAN projects and presentations were considered part of their final writing portfolio for the year and addressed other academic standards to develop critical thinking and public speaking skills and competencies. External evaluations of the program are particularly important in assessing how the project promotes academic skills. Such evaluations of Y-PLAN showed that participation enhanced oral literacy and research and some technology skills.

Another important consideration involves issues of membership and access inherent in the community of practice theoretical framework. Such a community can, and perhaps should, include neighborhood residents and key staffers on city agencies, local nonprofits, and the like. Planners need to critically assess the ways low-income neighborhoods at the focus of redevelopment are connected to the different institutions that do work within them—especially how those entities do and do not interact with local schools. The communities of practice formed around Y-PLAN projects attempt to broaden membership and access by reaching across all the institutions (e.g., school, school district, neighborhood groups, city redevelopment agency, local nonprofits, etc.) that do work in the immediate space of the particular neighborhood.

However, a group with membership across institutions will inherently have to deal with issues of power within the community of practice. As Hogan (2002) argues, this is especially true in a community of practice where young people are participants. Whereas the planning literature on consensus theory debates the possible problems that emerge from power differentials within a group working on a planning project (Innes 2004), community of practice theory acknowledges that having people with different levels of power can be beneficial for participants because of access to diverse people and resources. For example, the city director of parks and recreation can bring resources to the group that its members would not otherwise have (such as, maps, plans, information, financial backing). We need to better understand how to negotiate these issues of power within the group, while maintaining the benefits of access among group participants and fostering legitimate student participation.

The role of the university in localized community development work is the subject of extensive literature on university-community research partnerships, which describes the university's civic obligation to its community (Boyer 1994); the benefits that university faculty and students receive from the partnerships (Ferman and Shlay 1997; McNicoll 1999; Stoecker 1999); and the various issues and conflicts that arise from such partnerships (Harkavy and Wiewel 1995; Rubin 1998; Baum 2000; Strand 2000; Benson and Harkavy 2001; Ferman and Hill 2004). The university's involvement typically gives a more prominent voice to communities that might not otherwise get much attention from civic leaders. However, university participants must use caution when balancing their own agenda and that of the community to avoid relegating community participation to a token role. Similarly, because so many school districts are both underfunded and understaffed, it can often be easy for university participants to dictate the action, both inside and outside the model's activities.

There are additional challenges. Program sustainability can be difficult in the tumultuous and changing political environments that are characteristic of redevelopment areas and urban school districts. Providing consistency in action amid changing personnel/actors is also a major obstacle. Additionally, the fluctuating nature of redevelopment funding, both from private and public sources, poses sustainability problems. It is our hope that schools, students, and the variety of local redevelopment actors can overcome these obstacles because they realize the benefits of including young people in local community improvement and they see the inherent relationships between the quality of schools and the quality of urban environments.

Looking Ahead

More research is needed in a variety of areas: for example, longitudinal studies to examine the academic benefits of participation to high school students or to measure incremental change in affected communities. Questions to be asked include how large the effects are and how long-lasting for all learners, high school students, and graduate students alike. These studies will help to reveal the sustainable benefits, as well as the challenges to programs like Y-PLAN.

Also needed is better theory to guide planning professionals in developing a community of practice and fostering situated learning, both for themselves and for the other group members. New theory should also address the overall

professional development of city planners and redevelop-ment professionals that would allow them to provide authen-tic learning experiences for students. As Hart shows in the top rungs of his ladder, the greatest benefit is found when young people and adult partners share in the decision mak-ing. As Checkoway (1998) and Checkoway et al. (1995) have also argued, new theory would go a long way toward address-ing the key obstacles that tend to block young peoples' par-ticipation. A major problem is that Hart's ladder does not differentiate between young people of different class and/or racial/ethnic backgrounds. As race and class are closely tied and highly correlated with poorly performing schools, this point remains a loose end.

This paper has described how Y-PLAN is a model for school and student participation in local community devel-opment efforts. Following this analysis of six years of work, Y-PLAN has successfully demonstrated the value of school and student participation in community redevelopment efforts and has developed a framework for structuring such endeav-ors. Three conditions have been critical to Y-PLAN's success in West Oakland, California. These include: (1) authentic problems engage diverse stakeholders and foster a "commu-nity of practice"; (2) youth and adults share decision making; and (3) projects build individual and institutional success.

It is our hope that schools, students, and the variety of local redevelopment actors can foster these conditions in their own programs. Obstacles that face such programs can be met if adult participants realize the benefits of including young people in local community improvement and the inherent relationships between the quality of schools and the quality of urban environments. As a model to engage schools and youth in community revitalization, Y-PLAN offers impor-tant pedagogical and planning process insights.

▶ Notes

1. Lave and Wenger (1991, 35-36) use the term "legitimate peripheral participation" as a "descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent." They go on to state that "Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community. Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. *Changing* locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajecto-ries, developing identities, and forms of membership." In their usage, "peripherality" is a positive term.

2. The authors are no exception: Deborah McKoy created the current Y-PLAN model at UC Berkeley in 1999 and has taught and directed it ever since. Jeffrey Vincent was a Y-PLAN mentor in 2004 and has since continued with the research and docu-mentation aspects of Y-PLAN.

3. Presentations typically take place at City Hall. Review panels have included the dean of UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design, local public housing directors and staff, municipal plan-ners, city councilmembers, school board members, local develop-ers, and youth peers.

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