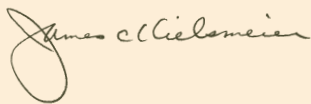# the generator

DEAR READERS

NYLC has long believed that **youth voice** is key to transforming young people from passive recipients of information to vital, contributing members of a democracy. This issue of *The Generator* celebrates the reaffirmation of that importance through the release of evidence-based K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, the culmina-tion of a year-long, nationwide effort. Look for further information on research that supports these standards in this spring's "Growing to Greatness 2008" report and online at *www.nylc.org/ standards*.

JIM KIELSMEIER
President & CEO

New Resources Support K-12 Service-Learning Standards

The release of the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Prac-tice (see following page), heralds a number of complementary efforts.

The National Youth Leadership Council is announcing a national Generator School Network; service-learning trainers James and Pamela Toole and the National Service-Learning Partnership are launching an online professional development community; and educator Deb Wagner and her Michigan colleagues have developed a new set of service-learning materials called "The Box." All of these efforts build off of the "Principles of Effective Practice" released in 2007, now revised after a national review process, and codified as standards.

NYLC's new Generator School Network is designed to support schools committed to school-wide high-quality practice. The goals of the initiative include sharing best practices through online forums, curriculum develop-ment, and professional development. "In this time of electronic communication, we are excited about the opportunities technology advances offer us for new ways of interacting," says NYLC Vice President Wokie Weah.

The initiative will be implemented in phases. In this first year, six national pilot sites have been selected. The sites will undergo a self-assessment process supported by Network Advisors, and will field-test online offerings. By next spring, 100 schools will be involved in the initiative, further refining the services; and by 2010, the Generator School Network will be fully launched. Twenty-five Generator School Network Advisors, each of whom offers an area of service-learning expertise, will support the schools and guide NYLC's work.

At the same time, the Tooles have just launched a professional development network (*www. slprovidersnetwork.org*). "It's the 'Facebook' for those that provide service-learning professional development and technical assistance to meet, share resources, and collectively raise the quality of professional development practice," says Jim. "With the launch of the new stan-dards, teachers and youth workers need ways to learn to apply them. That is a professional development challenge, and we seek — through this new community — to come up with many answers." The site also will offer a peer-reviewed online professional development library, access to topical PowerPoint presenta-tions, and — by next fall — a set of guidelines for Quality Service-Learning Professional Development Guidelines.

Concurrent with these efforts, Michigan educa-tors have developed a comprehensive service-learning training resource called "The Box." Wagner and a team of six trainers have been offering trainings in Michigan, and increas-ingly nationwide. "It's been a surprise for us to see this grow from a local project to state project, and now a national project," she adds. To learn more, visit *www.nylc.org*.

Youth Voice

Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

For a complete copy of the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, and their corresponding indicators, visit *www.nylc.org/standards*.

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

— Meaningful Service
— Link to curriculum
— Reflection
— Diversity
— **Youth Voice**
— Partnerships
— Progress Monitoring
— Duration and Intensity

Youth Voice Research — Findings, Gaps and Trends

Youth voice can be one of the most challenging aspects of quality practice, but it is perhaps the single most essential element in getting young people to lead, and thereby gain from service-learning experiences.

"There is no black and white in how to incorporate authentic youth voice; rather, youth voice is a beautiful shade of gray."

Little research exists to support this practice, and the research does not always find a correlation between youth voice and desired outcomes. Despite the lack of a conclusive cause-effect relationship, practitioners know its value. As NYLC Youth Initiatives Manager Sarah Ullmer says: "There is no black and white in how to incorporate authentic youth voice; rather, youth voice is a beautiful shade of gray. It depends upon the goals, structure, and staff capacity of your classroom, school, or organization."

Current Findings

Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found a significant, moderately positive correlation between the youth voice attributes of service-learning programs and students'

post-service civic knowledge (2005, 112). Other research to-date has offered additional optimistic findings.

Larson et. al. (2005) compared what they described as "adult-driven" and "youth-driven" youth programs – those programs that are characterized by participation of, but not complete control by, one age group. The authors recognize the risks of youth disengagement from adult-driven programs, but also the potential unpreparedness of young people to lead projects with which they have little prior familiarity. They determine there is the need for preparation and skills development on the part of both youths and adults to be contributing partners and note that in "youth-driven" approaches, each party "may be contributing somewhat different things to the collaboration" (p. 59).

From the youth-driven programs, Larson et al. recommend some of the following techniques for adults to be positively involved in the process: "posing guiding questions"; "providing intermediate structures" (frameworks to support individual stages of the project); "monitoring to keep you on track." From the adult-driven programs, the authors cite "listening to and obtaining feedback from youth"; "acts of humility"; and

THOMAS J. LEEPER
Research Assistant

"cultivating a culture of fairness and opportunity for youth" (pp. 68-69).

Youth Governance

A study by Zeldin et al. (2000) looked at youth governance in 15 organizations and found that while youth voice varied considerably, positive results of young people's participation were evident. The study indicates that both youths and adults were positively affected by sharing governance with members of the other age group. Youths gained experience and skills needed to lead their organization; adults felt increased competence in working with youths and found that "their direct experience contradicted [the stereotype of the disaffected, antisocial youth]." Furthermore, youth involvement helped organizations "clarify and bring focus to the organization's mission" (pp. 31-43).

Next Steps

Future research should compare outcomes in service-learning experiences that either satisfy or fail to satisfy the indicators of quality youth voice. To arrive at definitive conclusions about positive consequences of youth voice, future research must compare programs which demonstrate quality in most of the eight K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice (see *www.nylc.org/standards*) and vary only in their implementation of this standard. ◼

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Youth-Led Theater Tackles Social Justice Issues

For Jan Mandell's Central Touring Theater students — a diverse and close-knit group of St. Paul, Minn. juniors and seniors — "youth voice" isn't a new approach to an old curriculum; it's the essence of all they do.

"We are called to speak!" they proclaim as a chorus in a recent performance at a nearby middle school: "For the students who feel like they are trapped in a cage; for the the deadbeat dad who is trying to make a change; for the parents of soldiers who don't want that call, for the kids who lower education but put the streets on a pedestal!"

During the 45-minute performance, the actors move rapidly through issues ranging from universal health care, to global warming, racism, war, gay parents, consumerism, child labor — and back. It's not the typical stuff of teenaged angst. Their prose is funny, critical, thought-provoking, and thoughtful. And even the wiggly Friday-afternoon-pre-spring-break middle-school audience is left cheering.

> It's not the typical stuff of teenaged angst. Their prose is funny, critical, thought-provoking, and thoughtful.

In this fast-paced picture, there is no nagging teacher. The most Mandell does to marshall their attention is to call out, from time to time: "CTT!" to which the students answer, "Respect!" She provides structure, clear signals, and a culture of mutual support. Says Mandell, "I didn't suddenly have an epiphany; I have always done original voice work with kids." Ever since her own struggles as a dyslexic kid when the arts "saved her," she has been helping young people survive adolescence and work for social justice through theater.

Her co-teacher, Cornelius Rish, says most of these students have been acting together in class for nearly a year before they go on tour.

Youth voice comes to life in practice and performance at St. Paul's Central Touring Theater.

They've practiced prompt-writing, learned how to connect scenes and build in transitions, and figured out when the material calls for a break-out monologue. "I tell the kids our work is never done." They were making tweaks as recently as two weeks ago.

Another visitor, education professor Eileen Landay from Brown University, has traveled repeatedly from Providence, R.I. to collaborate with Mandell on arts literacy. Saying that she wishes Mandell could be cloned, she adds: "The structure is done so well that the kids thrive and develop social conscious. They will go off and do things that make us proud."

Some of this structure comes from the initial two months the students spend community-building. Rish emphasizes the importance of creating a "safe space" as the foundation for the sorts of risks they'll ultimately take on stage. "So often we want kids to just get up and make speeches, without that sort of foundation."

Hearing student Jamal Rogers sing an original work about nice guys finishing last, or two other students rif on stage about their physiques as "amplified" illustrates the foundation that underlies the honesty on stage.

Before each production, Mandell gathers the group in a circle, they grab hands, and

MADDY WEGNER
Communications Director

offer dedications, ranging from "for all the kids who wanted to be here today but couldn't be," to "for my grandma who has lung cancer."

It's a moment when the youth voices on-stage

NYLC Hosts Roundtable on Youth Councils

In response to requests for guidance on how to form, encourage, and make use of youth boards, in March NYLC convened representatives from eight organizations from across Minnesota for a roundtable discussion entitled "Youth Councils: Creating Authentic Opportunities for Young People." More than 70 attendees from educational institutions, nonprofits, corporations, and local government entities began a dialogue about how to effectively integrate youth decision-making into organizational objectives. Attendees learned from service-learning researchers, veteran youth board members, and each other about key aspects of youth leadership, including: how to start and structure a youth board; effective activities; and staffing and resources.

To support these initiatives, NYLC plans to continue the dialogue and offer future trainings to encourage the formal integration of youth voice into organizations throughout the country. ▪

For more information, visit http://www.nylc.org or contact NYLC Youth Initiatives Manager Sarah Ullmer (sullmer@nylc.org).

merge with their real-world challenges, and when the material for their powerful public work gains a private face. ▪

To learn more about Jan Mandell's approach to youth voice see her book Acting, Learning, and Change: Creating Original Plays With Adolescents.

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Youth Voice Ideas

As the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice emphasize, an exemplary program infuses youth voice into every aspect of the service-learning experience. Each of the standards is supported by accompanying "indicators." The following ideas build off the five indicators for youth voice, listed below.

Youth Voice Standard

Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Quality service-learning ...

☐ **Engages youth in generating ideas during the planning, implementation, and evaluation process.**
—Brainstorming
—Picture prompts
—Written prompts
—Circle process
—Wall of words
—Imaging the future
—Role-playing
—KWL Charts *(What do we know? What do we want to know? What have we learned?)*
—Pair/share
—Youth-led reality-checks

☐ **Involves youth in the decision-making process throughout the service-learning experiences.**
—Agenda-setting
—Action-planning
—Meeting-facilitation
—Dot-voting*
—Fist-to-Five*
—Circle Process*

☐ **Involves youth and adults in creating an environment that supports trust and open expression of ideas.**
—Team-building activities
—Idea or question box
—Collectively established ground rules
—Regular reflection *(individually, in pairs, or groups)*

☐ **Promotes acquisition of knowledge and skills to enhance youth leadership and decision-making.**
—Pre-service training
—Community asset-mapping
—Role-playing
—Youth passions lists
—Leadership role rotations
—Feedback interviews

☐ **Involves youth in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning experiences.**
—Evaluation design
—Essential questions development
—Rubric development
—SWOT analysis *(strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)*
—Survey creation
—Checklist development
—Self-evaluation
—Pre- and post-testing
—Data collection, analysis, and presentation

Youth Perspectives on Youth Voice

"The importance of youth voice lies in one simple idea: engagement. With the power of engagement, you can accomplish anything."
—Siddharth Damania

"It's hard to raise your voice sometimes. Whether it's about something that you close inside or a worldwide concern, speaking out can be hard. In CTT, we understand that in order to have peace and acceptance, we must first have understanding." —Tegan Carr, CTT student actor*

"In order for a learning process to be effective, adults should recognize what appeals to different youths. This can be done by listening to the new ideas they bring to the table."
—Farnaaz Farzanehkia

"Youth voice benefits both youths and adults. It gives adults a youth perspective and allows youths a chance to present their ideas."
—Mathew Amys

"CTT…gives me a chance to get my voice heard. It also give me the chance to hopefully change some young people's lives." —Mari Anderson-Mann, CTT student actor

"We create new and innovative ideas. You give to the youths, and the youths will give back to you."
—Geoffrey Gill

*Central Touring Theater (see story in this issue of *The Generator*.)

*For more information, see back of sheet.

Youth Voice and Consensus-Building

Incorporating youth voice throughout the service-learning cycle can be simplified with the following consensus-building technologies. Remember that consensus-building doesn't mean universal agreement. Instead, it relies on all participants contributing their perspectives so that individual concerns are addressed, and participants become more comfortable with a decision. The following tools, offered by NYLC staff members, can foster democratic expression of youth voice in consensus-building.

Fist-to-Five
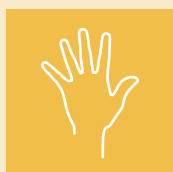
Whenever a group is approaching a decision, "Fist-to-Five" can help poll the group to determine peoples' opinions. To use this technique, the facilitator states a decision the group may make and asks the members of the group to show their level of support by showing a fist or a number of fingers that corresponds to their agreement with the decision.

The more fingers shown, the stronger they support the proposal at-hand, from a single finger indicating a desire to continue discussion, to five fingers indicating full endorsement of the idea. Anyone showing fewer than three fingers has the opportunity to express their concerns, and the group should work to address them. A fist signifies a block or no vote, signifying that the person needs to talk more about the proposal and requires changes for it to pass.

Groups can continue to use the Fist-to-Five process until they achieve consensus (a minimum of three fingers or higher) or determine they cannot reach consensus and move on to the next issue.

Dot-Voting or Dotocracy
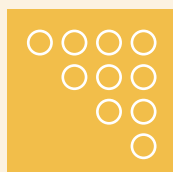
In dot-voting, participants express their preference for one or more ideas among a number of choices. Ideas are drafted and posted, and every member is given the same number of dots. Generally, the number of dots per person should be fewer than the total number of ideas to vote on, but the precise number can vary considerably. Each person then allocates their dots as they choose among the various ideas. They can award an idea any number of dots from zero to all of their dots. More dots indicates more support, so an idea that someone feels very strongly about might receive all of their dots.

Dot-voting can be used to make a final decision or merely to direct a group's discussion to focus only on ideas that have widespread support. This process helps minority viewpoints be seen and heard, and offers a clear visual way to determine which ideas have the most support within a group. Also, it requires participants to get up, move around, and look at all the ideas, which helps engage kinesthetic learners.

While this exercise is typically done using colored, adhesive dots, alternative "dots" can be used, including marbles, candy, post-its, etc. Different colors can also be used to signify the preferences of different groups (i.e., one color for youths and one color for adults to see whether the two groups value different ideas).

Circle Process

In the circle process, participants seated in a circle are able to foster a respectful, egalitarian climate for sharing with and listening to others. It is a way for everyone involved to be both a teacher and a learner, a giver and a receiver. The act of speaking using the circle can be a very empowering process for participants as well as a healing activity because of the experience of being listened to, and of being heard.

The circle leader (often called a circle "keeper" — as in "housekeeper") holds a physical object called a "talking piece." Only when holding the talking piece does one talk; otherwise circle participants listen. The circle-keeper poses the question, and passes the talking piece to the person on his or her left, who addresses the question and when finished, passes it on to the next person. This simple process provides a logical way to take turns.

The circle-keeper helps set the tone of respectful listening and may start off the circle with a few ground rules such as: No talking unless holding the talking piece; everyone has a right to feel comfortable and can decide to pass on the talking piece without talking; anyone who is uncomfortable may choose to leave the circle. Sometimes, after the participants have become an effective group, the talking piece may be simply placed in the middle of the circle.

Visit *www.nylc.org/standards* to learn more about youth voice in service-learning.