



DAVID P. WEIKART

CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

building community



PEER INTERACTION





DAVID P. WEIKART

CENTER FOR YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality,

a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is dedicated to empowering education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. The Weikart Center encourages managers to prioritize program quality. We offer training, technical assistance, and research services that all come together in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs.

Bringing together over fifty years of experience and the latest research,

the Youth Work Methods are proven strategies for working with youth. Whether you believe that the purpose of an out-of-school time program is to improve academics, to build life skills, or just to provide a place where kids can hang out and be kids, the approach presented in the Youth Work Methods series provides a foundation for building safe and productive places for youth.

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building community

Tom Akiva & Gina McGovern



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PROGRAM QUALITY**

Acknowledgments

The youth development approach described in these pages was originally developed and tested at the HighScope Summer Workshop for Teens (founded in 1963), later called the Institute for IDEAS. In the late 1990s HighScope's Youth Development Group took the learning approach developed at the Institute for IDEAS and delivered training for youth workers. These workshops, grounded in HighScope's direct experience, were extended by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality through research in positive youth development and evolved into what is currently our Youth Work Methods series.

The current training framework rests on a foundation developed by many, including David P. Weikart, Nicole Yohalem, John Weiss, Becky Prior, Kiku Johnson, Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom, Laenne Thompson, Tom Akiva, Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, David Martineau, Linda Horne, Mary Hohmann, Charles Hohmann, Charles Smith, Monica Jones, and many others.

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why build community?

Building Community in a youth program is important for many reasons. A strong, welcome community can help young people feel safe, feel a sense of belonging, and build their sense of selves within the group. Even beyond these personal growth areas, a strong program community can create an environment in which learning can better occur.¹

**Here are four good reasons to build community.
A strong community can...**

Help young people feel that they belong

Researchers argue that sense of belonging is a fundamental human need; that is, everybody wants to feel like they belong. Additionally, in most cases, students who feel a sense of belonging in school tend to do better academically. That's probably why the National Research Council lists "opportunities to belong" as a key feature of positive development settings.

Help groups get along and be productive

Groups go through normal stages in their development (see page 16). When you intentionally support positive group development in your program, it can lead to groups that function better and more smoothly—which is good news for everybody!

Increase participation and attendance

Feelings of belonging in a productive group environment can lead to improved participation and attendance. This can be more noticeable in youth programs than in school since youth programs are usually voluntary. If a youth doesn't feel part of a community, why would they want to come back?

Increase student learning

Finally, building community can lead to increased student learning, whether your focus is on academics, enrichment, or broader learning goals. This is true in schools and it is true in youth programs. When youth feel safety and belonging, they are in a good position to learn.

The strategies presented in this guidebook are designed to help you help your youth feel like they belong, to help groups get along and be productive, and ultimately to improve their participation and learning.

¹ For a review of the scientific literature behind these claims, please see pages 90-95.

overview

What is Building Community?

Building Community focuses on promoting a climate in which youth can feel part of a group. Community building can take place in both structured and unstructured ways. Structured avenues include welcomes, icebreakers, problem-solving games, trust games, name games, and partner activities. Unstructured venues such as transition times are also contexts in which community building can occur.

The Building Community Method shares some similarities with the Weikart Center Cooperative Learning Method; however, the two are distinct. The Cooperative Learning Method is designed to help group projects be successful, and Building Community focuses on promoting a climate in which youth can feel part of a group. That said, however, many of the strategies presented in Cooperative Learning such as promoting interdependence, can benefit from the activities presented here. Similarly, the activities in the Planning and Reflection Method, though not specifically addressed in the present guide, may also result in a stronger community.

Why is Building Community important?

A great thing about employing Building Community strategies is that they're fun and make group management easier. The way you interact with youth can make a big difference: we recommend actively involving yourself in building community activities, participating as possible with youth. It is also helpful to be mindful of various aspects of the group dynamic including power and control, youth comfort levels, the stage of development of the group, and the particular experiences of new members. In addition, we recommend explicitly having youth discuss their group experiences and communication when the activities are centered on youths' background and the group's diversity.

The Method

The Building Community Method involves four strategies:

- Create avenues for community building
- Be involved and mindful
- Don't leave anyone out
- Promote respect for diversity



Stages of Group Development

Several theories of group development have been proposed over the last several decades (for examples, see literature review on page 90). These various theories, which are more similar than different, use different terms and perspectives to characterize common phases that groups undergo. Probably the most popular is the model proposed by Tuckman (1965), which suggests that a group tends to go through five stages:

Forming – At this stage people are just getting to know each other, testing things out—and this may produce some anxiety for group members. Members are focused on getting a sense of what the group is going to be like. The leader’s role is very important in this stage as she is looked to for guidance both about the tasks the group will engage in, and the group norms that will be set.

Storming – It’s completely normal for a group to go through a “storming” stage, characterized by interpersonal differences, questioning the leader, and even conflict and polarization of group members. In this stage, people may react against efforts of control, whether these efforts come from other group members or from a designated leader. It’s important for a leader to recognize the normality of this stage and remember that conflicts won’t necessarily continue forever.

Norming – This is when the group really starts to come together. In this stage, groups often begin to experience cohesion, group norms emerge, and conflict tends to fade though it still may be somewhat present. It is easier for the group to make decisions than in the previous stage, and commitment to the group can develop (i.e., youth think of the program as “theirs”).

Performing – At this stage a group is cohesive and works together to get things done. Group roles solidify and the group is functional.

Adjourning – In this final stage, a group ends their time together. In a youth program it can happen at the end of the school year or program cycle, or when a particular group is done with its task.

A couple important points about group development are important to consider. First, group members’ decisions about whether to stay or leave are often based on their experiences during the forming stage. This is a critical piece of information for voluntary, out-of-school time activities - those early group experiences matter! Second, in the storming phase, conflict is normal. The storming phase can be frightening to an adult leader who has worked hard to plan activities for youth. Just remember, conflict is a normal part of group development! However, research suggests that a group may not move past the “storming” stage if people don’t trust each other, so it is important to pay attention and make sure conflict doesn’t get out of hand.



Thinking Through Age Groups and Content Areas

The previous pages provide guidance about how to think about building community across age and content area. Use this worksheet to consider how you might facilitate community-building experiences to a specific group.

Age group:

Content area:

Choose a community-building activity (or more than one) from the group games presented in the second half of this guide.

Is there anything you should do to make sure it works for this particular age group?

Is there any way the activity might be improved by customizing it for the content area?

If working with a partner, share your response and ask for feedback. Record new ideas below.

Sharing Building Community With Others

If you've completed the training and want to share the concepts of Building Community with other staff at your agency, we have some recommendations for how to do this. Although in other guidebooks we provide sample agendas, sharing this Method with others is somewhat easier, as the best way to share building community is simply to make group games a regular part of the activities you do with staff. Additional recommendations are below.

DO THIS FIRST: Group Games

(pages 34-87) 15-20 minutes

Rather than just asking staff to consider the importance of community or how to build it, first facilitate a fun, community-building experience with them! One of the best things about the group games presented in the second half of this guide is that they work with people of all ages; in fact, they're particularly fun with a group of adult youth workers!

Pick an energetic activity like Kitty Wants a Corner (page 65) or Energy Ball (page 49), a get-to-know-you activity like Two Truths and a Lie (page 83), or Personal Crests (page 74). Actually, pick any group game; you might be surprised at how well these activities work with adults. Then, after everyone is laughing and having fun, have a debrief conversation about how they feel and why building community is important in a youth program. You can use the suggestions under Benefits below if you like. Then you can get into the strategies presented in this guide.

Benefits – Why Build Community?

(page 2) 10-15 minutes

After facilitating a community-building activity (see above), and before looking at the Benefits section of the guide, ask staff to brainstorm reasons that building community in the program might benefit youth. Then, have them read through the benefits. At this point, they could talk in small groups about how they see these benefits in their work with youth, and why it is important for youth to experience these benefits. You might also ask staff to consider their own experiences in learning environments that had positive or not so positive community climates—and how that affected their learning.

Strategies

(pages 6-12) 15-20 minutes

After facilitating a community-building activity (see above), ask staff to read the overview and brief introduction to the method on page 6. Open up a discussion: what are your reactions? What do you think of this method? Is this something we should consider addressing in our program? If you have enough staff, small groups can read individually an opportunity or support strategy (pages 7- 12) then share what they read with others either through a Jigsaw or Expert Group structure (see Cooperative Learning Guide for information on these and other grouping techniques).

Stages of Group Development

(page 16) 15-20 minutes

Have staff consider groups they've been in. Did these groups go through any identifiable stages? This discussion may or may not lead to insights. Either way, next have staff read the stages on page 16. Discuss: Have you experienced these stages in groups? Have you seen the stages in groups at this youth program? You can use the worksheet on p 17 if it fits your purposes.

Across Age Groups & Content Areas

(pages 19-21) 15-20 minutes

For age, you might have staff read through the text and review the table on page 19. For content areas, page 20 is a short read—essentially that page says you can do these activities in any content area but you might customize some. The worksheet on page 21 is designed to help staff consider how to build community with particular age groups and content areas.

In Your Program

(pages 24-25) 20-30 minutes

This section of the guidebook contains two planning forms. The first (page 24) is focused on implementing the Building Community Method in the youth program as a whole. The second (page 25) is geared toward leading an activity.

Research Review

(pages 90-95) 20-30 minutes

Have staff read the Research Review before coming to the meeting. Begin the session by having staff underline two sentences in the text that stand out as important or intriguing. Have staff form group of no larger than 4. Have one person in each group begin by reading the statement that they underlined, without going into why they underlined it. The person to the left then shares their thoughts on the quote the leader read aloud. The next person shares their thoughts on that same quote, and so on until it gets back to the leader. Then the leader has the “last word” to share.



how to use this section

This section of the guide contains group games—short, easy-to-lead activities to do with a group. These games have a number of purposes and there are multiple ways they could be categorized (see page 8). We provide the following categories; most games fall into multiple categories. The next page lists all the games and the categories they fall into.

- **Name games** are useful at the beginning stages of a group to help participants get to know each other's names and build an effective learning community. Encouraging young people in a group to learn each others' names (and learning them yourself) is important for helping a group develop a sense of belonging and group identity.
- **Icebreakers** help everyone acclimate and come together as a session begins. They may be simple and silly, or they may relate directly to the goals or content of the group gathering. Their purpose is to “break the ice.”
- **Energizers** are short activities to break up less active exercises and rejuvenate participants. Adults and youth alike can benefit from these active games, and energizers are appropriate for all ages. Energizers provide a change of pace and a chance for folks to move their bodies and get their personal energies flowing.
- **Team-builders** represent a class of activities that include trust-building, get-to-know-you, communication, team challenges, and bonding games. Team-builders help youth (and adult leaders) get to know each other. These activities usually set up a structure so that youth share things with each other that they may not otherwise think to share. Importantly, the structure of bonding activities also helps insure that all youth—even the shy ones—get a chance to participate in the group.
- **Diversity** activities are designed to help participants consider the role that diversity plays in society and in their lives. Participants in these activities typically look inward and consider their own histories, identities, and beliefs, but this introspection often leads to empathy and compassion for others who are different from them.

Below is a sample group game page with explanations of each of the sections:

A brief description of the group game

A step-by-step description of how to lead the group game

One or more examples of the group game in action


Clapping Circle

what
This activity uses simultaneous clapping to get the group energized.

how to do it

1. Have participants stand in a circle.
2. One person turns to the person on their right and claps his/her hands.
3. The person on the right claps hands simultaneously with the first person then turns to the person on the other side and claps again.
4. This continues around the circle, with each person clapping twice each time the clap reaches them.

examples
Have one person begin with one clap, then turn to the person on their right and clap again. On the second clap the person on the right should clap also, and play continues around the circle.



time
5-10 minutes

materials
none

adaptations
If the group is large enough, you can try to manage two simultaneous claps, going in different directions around the circle.

Estimated time and materials needed to lead the group game

Notes on adapting the group game for different contexts

A picture that may help convey the game



Betcha Never



what

This activity works best as an icebreaker or bonding activity to allow participants to get to know each other better. It challenges participants to think of unique things about themselves that no one else is likely to have done, and ends up with participants finding experiences they have in common with each other.

how to do it

1. Ask participants to come up with one thing that is true of them that they think no one else in the room can claim to be true.
2. Give each person a chance to state their name and the one “betcha never” fact about themselves.
3. If someone else can claim the fact, the individual must come up with another “betcha never” until each person has stated one unique fact.

examples

John: *“I betcha never had 4 younger sisters”*

Amy: *“I betcha never broke your arm”*

Dylan: *“I broke my arm!”*

Amy: *“I betcha never broke your arm on a dirt bike!”*



time

5 -10 minutes

materials

none

adaptations

With a group that knows each other fairly well, have participants make statements with another group member in mind. Then have the group guess who it is. For example, Joe says, “Betcha never won a karate tournament.” Annalia says, “That was Olivia!” Then Olivia makes a statement about another group member until all members have had a positive statement shared about them.



Bounce the Ball



what

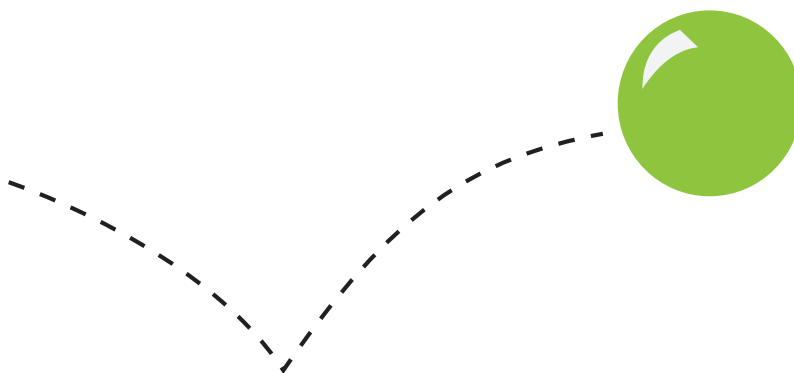
Use a ball, either a tennis ball or a larger, bouncy ball. The leader begins with a question about the session and asks participants to answer it when the ball is bounced to them.

how to do it

1. Clear a space so that no one is injured and nothing broken.
2. Participants stand in a circle.
3. Leader begins with a question, such as, "What is something you liked about the session today?" and bounces the ball to a youth who then answers.
4. The catcher then bounces the ball to someone else who answers. It is important to use a large-sized bouncing ball so that everyone can easily catch it. A smaller ball is more difficult and the "misses" can be a distraction to the process as well as leave the individual with a sense of failure.
5. Participants continue bouncing the ball around the circle to each other and answering the question. Participants can answer more than once. After folks run out of things to say, you can add a new question.

examples

First have participants say something they liked about the session. Once they run out of things to say, ask, "what will you do differently next time?" or "What's something you are looking forward to?", "How will I use this outside of the group?", "What will this mean for me in the future?"



time

5 -15 minutes

materials

large bouncing ball

adaptations

Have youth create the questions.

Change the tone of the activity by having each youth say something positive about the person they are about to pass the ball to.



Green Light, Yellow Light, Red Light



what

Participants collectively reflect on the things they would like to continue doing, the things they would like to stop doing and the things that they would like to start doing.

how to do it

1. Post a piece of large paper (easel paper works well) or use a whiteboard, and draw three columns.
2. In column one, "green light," participants list the things that they would like to start doing in the group.
3. In column two, "yellow light," participants list the things that they would like to continue doing in the group (with or without modifications).
4. In column three, "red light," participants list all the things they would like to stop doing in the group.
5. This can lead to a discussion about norms, decisions, and ultimately a plan based on the lists they generated.

example

The group members write reflections about their summer school enrichment program. They include things they want to keep alive during the school year, things they want to make sure don't continue during the school year, and new ideas for things they want to start.

time

15 -20 minutes

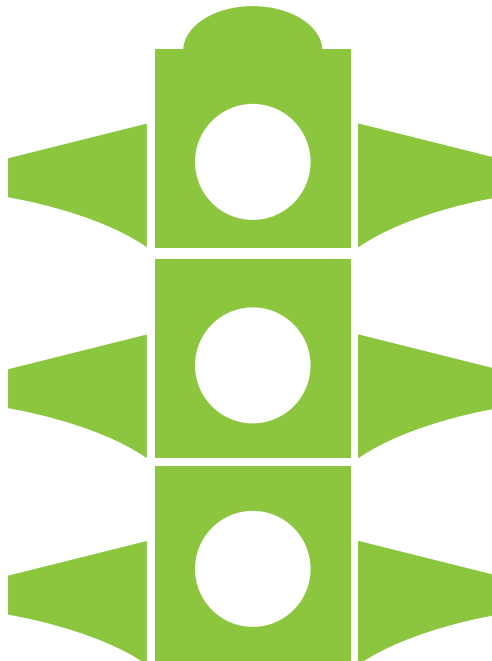
materials

easel-paper/whiteboard/chalkboard
and writing implements

adaptations

Participants can either write together on the paper, take turns, or say their answers aloud and a recorder writes these on the paper.

Instead of doing it all together, youth could do this individually and then share their answers in the large group. This helps to get all the youth to engage rather than having a few youth dominate the discussion.





Personal Crests



what

Participants create symbols to express different facts about themselves.

how to do it

1. Give each person a large sheet of paper and markers, colored pencils, or crayons.
2. Ask participants to draw a large shield, or crest, that is divided into five sections.
3. Within each of the five sections, instruct participants to draw a symbol that express any one of the following:
 - A belief
 - A fear
 - A personal goal
 - A personal accomplishment
 - A role model
 - A favorite food
 - A talent
 - A hobby
4. Encourage youth to draw pictures, not words-even if they are art phobic.
5. Once everyone has finished, have participants share what they have drawn, providing short explanations to the others. You can have volunteers share with the full group or use Stay and stray for additional sharing.

examples

Javin drew his dad as his role model, hamburgers as his favorite food, skateboarding as a hobby, a building to represent his fears about high school, and a report card with straight As as a personal goal.



time

15 -20 minutes

materials

Large sheets of paper
markers, colored pencils, or crayons

adaptations

Focus the activity by being specific about what to include in each section of the crest. For example, for a diversity activity, ask participants to include a representation of their family, their culture, their gender, their religious beliefs, their social class, or their abilities.

Building Community: The Research

Researchers argue that sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1943) and a body of evidence suggests that belongingness in schools relates to academic achievement (Juvonen, 2006). The National Research Council (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) lists “opportunities to belong” as a setting feature that maximizes positive development. Indeed, this research confirms what most youth workers know: the emotional climate in a youth setting is critically important to motivation and learning. Building Community is a collection of strategies for promoting positive group functioning and supporting youth belonging. This document reviews research on the human need for belonging, on group development, and then addresses structures and practices for building community in youth programs.

Need for Belonging

The concept that people want to feel like they belong has a long history. This concept has been labeled sense of belonging (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Maslow, 1943), belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and connection (Gambone, Kelm, & Connell, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997); all of these terms here will be used interchangeably. In defining this construct, researchers have argued that each of the following components are central: love and acceptance (Maslow, 1943); friendship, intimacy, and avoiding isolation and rejection (Ford & Smith, 2007); the desire to feel connected to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000); and frequent interaction and persistent caring (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In their comprehensive review, Baumeister & Leary (1995) set out to test what they termed the belongingness hypothesis: that belongingness is a fundamental human psychological need. They argue that abundant evidence suggests that belongingness: applies with nearly all people in nearly all conditions; has emotional consequences; directs cognitive processing; leads to physical and mental health problems when not fulfilled; and brings about goal-oriented behavior to satisfy it. They conclude that belongingness is a fundamental human motivation,

universal, evolutionarily derived, and that the feeling of belonging requires two things to be present: frequent interactions and persistent caring. More recently, Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer (2005) argue that people substantially differ in the “strength of their desire for acceptance and belonging” (p. 33). So, belongingness is likely a basic human need, and the diverse youth in a given OST program will likely exhibit different degrees of their need to belong.

Belongingness is listed as one of twenty-three motivations in Ford and Nichols’ Taxonomy of Human Goals (Ford & Smith, 2007); however, belongingness merits focus for its “life-or-death effects and from the logic of human adaptation to surviving in groups” (Fiske, 2008). Developing feelings of belonging has adaptive advantages both related to parent and group bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This appears to be true of non-human primates as well: chimpanzees are known to form coalitions and alliances (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001). Belonging to groups is likely a basic survival strategy and probably “crucial to surviving and thriving” (Fiske, 2008, p. 16). Recent animal and human research has revealed likely hormonal mechanisms for maintaining bonds, specifically oxytocin and vasopressin (Leary & Cox, 2008). Kirkpatrick & Ellis (2001) suggest that evolutionarily, people may have sought belonging (a) for tribal benefits (i.e., access to resources and defense against others); (b) as instrumental coalitions (i.e., groups working together for common purpose like hunting a large animal); (c) for the purpose of mating; and (d) with kin for the purpose of genetic maintenance. Leary & Cox (2008) add to this list: (e) for supportive friendships.

Group development

Several theories of group development have been proposed over the last several decades, including models from Lewin (unfreezing, change, freezing), Tubbs (orientation, conflict, consensus, closure), Fisher (orientation, conflict, emergence, reinforcement), McGrath (inception, problem solving, conflict resolution, execution), and others (Wikipedia, 2010). These, models, however, are more similar than different, all noting the presence of conflict in the early stages of group development. Likely the most popular theory is the stages model proposed

Building Community and the Active-Participatory Approach

Youth and adults learn best through hands-on experiences with people, materials, events, and ideas. The experiential learning model — validated by decades of research and rooted in our early work as part of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation — is the basis of our approach to teaching and learning.

Building Community and Other Youth Work Methods

Building Community is complemented by other Methods in the series. Following are examples of how other Youth Work Methods reinforce Building Community.

A strong community must first be a safe community. In **Structure and Clear Limits**, program staff learn how to clearly communicate limits to create a predictable environment that youth can rely on. Guidelines and rules can help to define what positive behavior looks like so that youth can meet your expectations. Structure and Clear Limits become especially important in preventing bullying and creating a space where all individuals are comfortable to be themselves.

Ask-Listen-Encourage provides strategies that can be used every time you interact with youth to help you to build positive relationships. While modeling these behaviors for youth, you can begin to encourage youth to employ them in their interactions with each other.

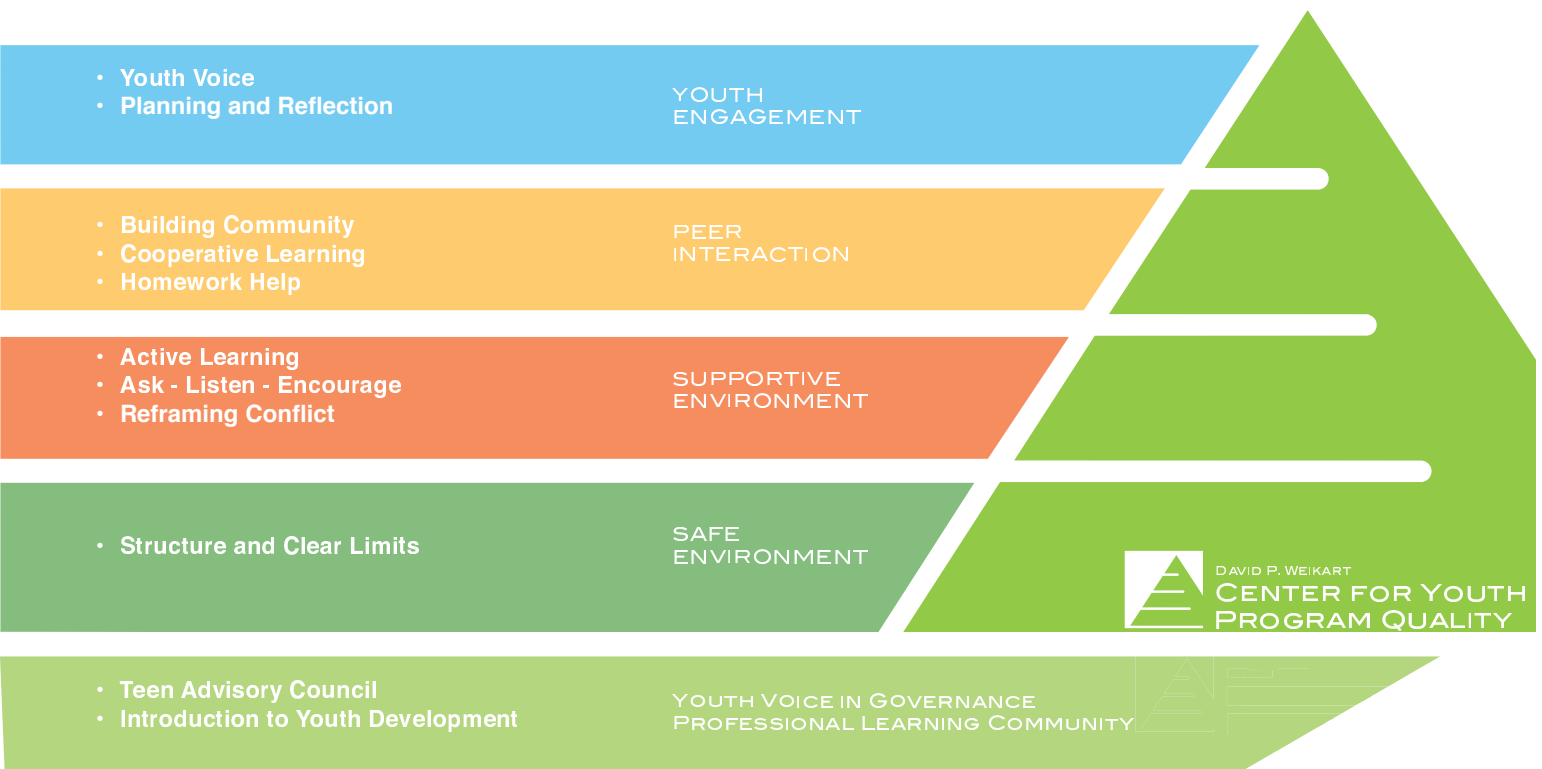
One great way to encourage community building is to create intentional opportunities for youth to work together. The **Cooperative Learning** Method has strategies for making group work meaningful, and for creating interdependent roles so that youth learn to work together to reach goals.

A sense of ownership of the program can lead to a strong community. The **Youth Voice** Method offers strategies for including youth in decision-making and giving them choices within the program.



The Youth Work Methods Series

The Youth Work Methods are powerful strategies for working with young people, based on positive youth development. The Methods are a key part of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), a comprehensive system for integrating assessment and training. Each Method is linked to assessment items and designed to help youth workers improve the areas they choose to focus on.



To learn more about these and other Weikart Center workshops, please visit www.cypq.org.