



**JOURNAL OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

bridging research and practice



# **The Promotion of Character through Youth Development Programs:**

**A Special Edition of the  
*Journal of Youth Development***

## **Guest Editors:**

Andrea Vest Ettekal, Tufts University  
Kristina Schmid Callina, Tufts University  
Richard M. Lerner, Tufts University



**Volume 10, Number 3**  
**Special Edition, Fall 2015**

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**The Promotion of Character through Youth Development Programs: A View of the Issues**  
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*Ettekal, Andrea Vest; Schmid Callina, Kristina; Lerner, Richard M.*

Contemporary developmental theories suggest that out-of-school-time (OST) youth development programs may be an important context for character development and education because of the positive, mutually influential relations between youth and adult leaders found in exemplary instantiations of such programs. Although still in its early stages, research about this role of OST programs, including evaluations of specific programs, is beginning to burgeon in relation to increased interest in person-context models of human development, the fact that each of tens of millions of American youth participate in several OST programs each years, and heightened emphasis among scientists, educators, and policy makers about the importance of promoting character among the diverse youth of the nation. Both to reflect the state-of-the art and in the hope of promoting further research progress, the articles in this special section describe how the attributes of young people and the features of the OST programs youth development in which they participate may link together in promotion of character development.

**Character Development among Youth of Color from Low-SES Backgrounds: An Examination of Boy Scouts of America's *ScoutReach* Program**  
[Article 151003FA002].....Page 14

*Ferris, Kaitlyn A.; Hershberg, Rachel M.; Su, Shaobing; Wang, Jun; Lerner, Richard M.*

This study examined character attributes associated with participation in *ScoutReach*, Boy Scouts of America's recent program innovation created to deliver Scouting curriculum to underserved populations. Participants were predominantly Black/African American (72.9%;  $N = 266$ ,  $M_{age} = 10.54$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) and resided in low-income urban communities. Youth completed surveys assessing how much they embody different character attributes (e.g., kindness, helpfulness, hopeful future expectations), and a subset of youth ( $n = 22$ ) also participated in semi-structured interviews examining character-shaping experiences within the program. Results replicated an eight-factor character structure established with youth involved in traditional Scouting programs, and indicated that involvement in *ScoutReach* may positively contribute to the development in youth of prosocial behaviors, future career goals, tolerance beliefs, and the manifestation of character attributes across Scouting and non-Scouting contexts. Together, these findings have implications for measuring character constructs among youth of color from low-SES backgrounds, and for the conduct of youth-serving character development programs more generally.

## **The Choices, Challenges, and Lessons Learned from a Multi-Method Social-Emotional / Character Assessment in and Out of School Time Setting**

**[Article 151003FA003]**.....Page 31

*Shapiro, Valerie B.; Accomazzo, Sarah; Claassen, Jennette; Fleming, Jennifer L.*

Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs are increasingly recognized as a venue to actively engage children and youth in character development activities, but little guidance exists as to how to assess individual children and youth in OST environments for the sake of evaluating their character development. This research brief uses an illustrative case study to reflect upon the experience of selecting and completing a strength-based, multi-modal social-emotional / character assessment that used a direct assessment and a multiple informant behavior rating scale in an OST setting. Insights derived from the case study reveal opportunities and challenges associated with each assessment modality. This paper shares lessons learned with those conducting individual assessments in OST environments and with those seeking to improve our capacity to complete screening, formative, and summative assessments of social-emotional and character constructs in OST youth development programs to help children thrive.

## **The *Arthur* Interactive Media Study: Initial Findings from a Cross-Age Peer Mentoring and Digital Media-Based Character Development Program**

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*Bowers, Edmond P.; Hilliard, Lacey J.; Stacey, Danielle C.; Tirrell, Jonathan M.; Wartella, Katherine; Batanova, Milena; Lerner, Richard M.*

In the midst of increasing emphasis on the inclusion of character education in both school and out-of-school time programs, digital technologies have become ubiquitous in these settings. Based on the potential of these technologies to enhance children's character development, the *Arthur* Interactive Media (AIM) study investigated if one specific unit or set of digital media-based activities engaged youth in discussions about character. First and second grade students were paired with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, respectively, while engaging with an online interactive graphic novel (IGN) about a character-relevant story based on the *Arthur* cartoon series. Teachers ( $n = 8$ ) completed surveys about the AIM Unit, and conversations between cross-age peer dyads ( $n = 27$  dyads) during their engagement with the IGN were analyzed. Results indicated that teachers were very satisfied with the materials and reported that children were very engaged throughout. Analyses of children's conversations indicated that children participated in character-relevant conversations involving humility, forgiveness, and future-mindedness while engaging with the IGN.

## **Cross-Cultural Perspectives After Participation in the YES Program: A Pilot Study**

**[Article 151003FA005]**.....Page 64

*Fuentes, Vanessa E.; Goncy, Elizabeth A.; Sutherland, Kevin S.*

Guided by empowerment and ecological theories, the Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) program facilitates character development through activities based in cultural differences, team building, and social change. This pilot study consisted of two focus groups ( $n = 13$ ) of middle school youth conducted after their participation in an abbreviated version of the YES program. Specifically, the present study examined youth's cross-cultural perspectives after participation. The focus groups were transcribed and coded for emergent themes using Heaton's (2005) supplementary data analysis framework. Qualitative analysis resulted in two emergent themes: 1) enhanced appreciation for similarities and differences in cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and 2) the role of respect in understanding differences and confronting stereotypes. Specifically, youth reported that engagement in this program fostered positive awareness of cultural differences and respect for inter-ethnic relationships. The findings provide support for the benefits of the YES program on moral development and promotion of healthy peer relationships.

## **“You gotta respect” ~ Mexican-origin Adolescents’ Perspectives on Respect in Organized Activities**

**[Article 151003FA006]**.....Page 74

*Ettekal, Andrea Vest; Gaskin, Erin R.; Lin, Alex R.; Simpkins, Sandra D.*

Respect is crucial for promoting participation and positive experiences in organized activities, especially among ethnically diverse youth. However, little is known regarding how Mexican-origin adolescents conceptualize respect and specifically how to promote respect in activities. Guided by theory and previous research, we used qualitative content analysis to elucidate perspectives on respect and features involved in the development of respect in activities. Our sample consisted of 18 Mexican-origin 7<sup>th</sup> graders who resided in the Southwest of the U.S., an area with a history of inter-ethnic group tensions. The adolescents in this study described three different types of respect: humanity respect, respect for culture, and linguistic respect. Potential features involved in the development of respect were identified, including individual- (e.g., moral virtues), contextual (e.g., welcoming atmosphere), and inter-personal (e.g., shared experiences) features. This study increases out depth of understanding of respect in activities, identifies areas for researchers to pursue in future research, and unveils potential implications for designing activities that promote positive, respectful relationships.

## **Intentional Self Regulation and Positive Youth Development: Implications for Youth Development Programs**

**[Article 151003FA007]**.....Page 88

*Chauveron, Lisa M.; Linver, Miriam R.; Brown Urban, Jennifer*

Character education programs are mission-aligned with the positive youth development (PYD) perspective, which, in research with American youth suggests that intentional self-regulation (ISR) develops through mutually beneficial interactions between youth and their environment. Cross-cultural studies of Western youth suggest an adolescence-specific ISR process may exist. We begin to extend this work to assess the relationship between ISR and positive development in young Scottish adolescents (approximately 7<sup>th</sup> grade,  $N = 82$ ; 50% male), a previously unexamined group. ISR was correlated with the Five Cs of PYD and OLS regression analyses demonstrated that ISR predicted two of the Five Cs: Character and Connection. We discuss implications for youth development programs of the findings that ISR and some indices of PYD were linked in a sample of Scottish youth.

## **A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Intentional Self Regulation and Youth Beliefs about the Chances of Achieving Future Aspirations**

**[Article 151003FA008]**.....Page 100

*MacDonnell, Marisa; Brown Urban, Jennifer; Linver, Miriam R.*

Using a mixed methods approach, the connection between Intentional Self Regulation (ISR) and feelings about the chances of achieving future aspirations among 94 Scottish youth (56% female) was examined. Regression analyses demonstrated ISR, as measured by the SOC 9-item scale, was predictive of youths’ feelings about their chances of achieving future aspirations. Qualitative data collected from 26 interviews suggested the use of ISR skills among adolescents, even when those skills were not evident quantitatively. Results indicated the need to employ mixed methodologies when conducting research on ISR with young adolescents, and suggest the need for further testing and development of measures for both ISR and beliefs about the chances of achieving future aspirations. Potential programmatic implications for youth development and character education programs are also discussed.

## Character Development Pilot Evaluation of Two Programs for Youth with Chronic Illness

[Article 151003FA009].....Page 113

*Maslow, Gary; Hill, Sherika; Rozycki, Amanda; Sadun, Rebecca; Sendowski, Mya; Neukirch, Jodie*  
This study examined character attributes associated with participation in *ScoutReach*, Boy Scouts of America's recent program innovation created to deliver Scouting curriculum to underserved populations. Participants were predominantly Black/African American (72.9%;  $N = 266$ ,  $M_{age} = 10.54$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) and resided in low-income urban communities. Youth completed surveys assessing how much they embody different character attributes (e.g., kindness, helpfulness, hopeful future expectations), and a subset of youth ( $n = 22$ ) also participated in semi-structured interviews examining character-shaping experiences within the program. Results replicated an eight-factor character structure established with youth involved in traditional Scouting programs, and indicated that involvement in *ScoutReach* may positively contribute to the development in youth of prosocial behaviors, future career goals, tolerance beliefs, and the manifestation of character attributes across Scouting and non-Scouting contexts. Together, these findings have implications for measuring character constructs among youth of color from low-SES backgrounds, and for the conduct of youth-serving character development programs more generally.

## Character Development Through Youth Sport: High School Coaches' Perspectives about a Character-based Education Program

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*Ferris, Kaitlyn A.; Ettekal, Andrea Vest; Agans, Jennifer P.; Burkhard, Brian M.*

This study examined high school sports coaches' perspectives about a character-based coach education workshop designed to promote positive coaching practices and transform the culture of youth sports. Fifteen coaches ( $M_{age} = 42.07$ ,  $SD = 14.62$ , 73.3% male) provided feedback about Positive Coaching Alliance's (PCA) "Double-Goal Coach" training program and what aspects of the workshop they applied to their coaching practices. Results indicated that coaches believed that participation in PCA workshops contributed to the value coaches attributed to individuals, to coach-oriented character development, and to positive relationships within youth sports. The coaches also suggested changes in future PCA workshops. These findings provide preliminary evidence that coaches' incorporate skills acquired through participation in character-based coach education programs. We discuss implications for coaches and athletes, and for policies aimed at enhancing positive youth attributes developed through sport.