DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SETTINGS: PUTTING THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT INTO ACTION

ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

Forum for Youth Investment

in partnership with Learning Policy Institute and Turnaround for Children
and in association with the SoLD Alliance

Emerging science tells an optimistic story about the potential of all learners. There is burgeoning knowledge about the biological systems that govern development, including deeper understandings of brain structure and wiring and its connections to other systems and the external world. This research indicates that brain development and life experiences are interdependent and malleable—that is, the settings and conditions individuals are exposed to and immersed in affect how they grow throughout their lives.

With this knowledge about the brain and development, coupled with a growing knowledge base from multi-disciplinary research, there is an opportunity to design learning systems in which all individuals are able to take advantage of high-quality opportunities for transformative learning and development. The situation facing our country today—sharp and growing economic inequality, ongoing racial violence, the physical and psychological toll of the pandemic—underscores the need to enable societal and educational transformations that advance social justice and the opportunity to thrive for each and every young person.

Design Principles for Community Based Settings: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action, seizes this opportunity to advance change. It provides an overarching framework, the Guiding Principles or Whole Child Design, that can guide transformation of learning settings for children and adolescents.

The inner circle names the five science-based elements that, taken together, are the guiding principles for healthy development, learning, and thriving:

- Positive Developmental Relationships

- Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging

- Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development

- Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

- Integrated Support Systems

The outer circle of the graphic names the four essential conditions for equitable whole child design: all learning and development settings need to be transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming. In day-to-day practice, all of these elements need to be considered and actualized together.
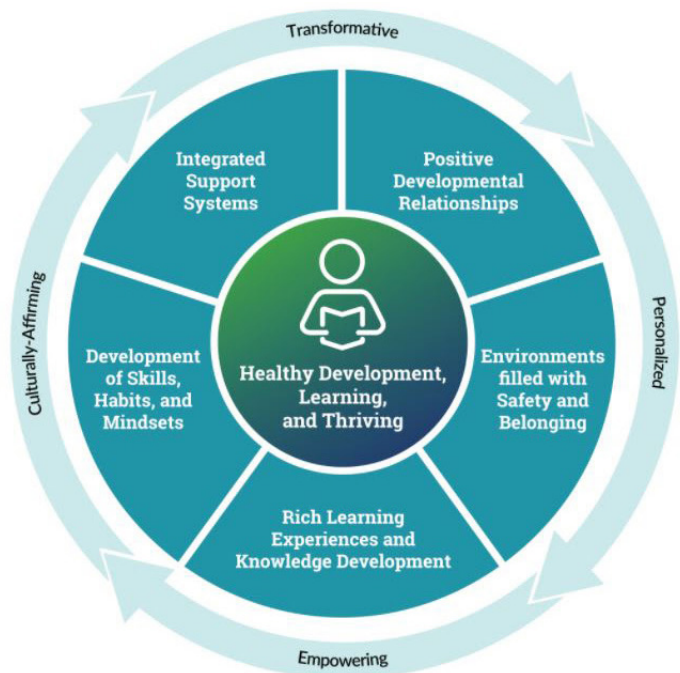
This section is part of the larger playbook and focuses on what community-based settings can and do to foster Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging. In this playbook, we explore how these principles are the nonnegotiable starting points for community-based settings, including how these principles are being explicitly used to engage and validate learners. This playbook also offers framing for how to think about these design principles in the context of the diverse structures and complex array of programs, organizations, and institutions operating in the "community" space. The full playbook can be found online **here**.

ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

YOUTH BUILD McLEAN COUNTY

Youth Build McLean County is a nonprofit organization that provides educational and occupational skills training for youth. It offers training on residential construction for both new home construction and rehabilitation of affordable homes in the community. Youth Build's mission is to build, develop, inspire, and challenge educationally and economically disadvantaged young people to make a difference. Given the nature of the program, the personal histories of the young people they serve, and the local community, the young people navigate various challenges through a shared understanding of what it means to be part of the Youth Build community.

The vignette below provides several examples for how the program lays the foundation for building interpersonal and community-building skills by providing an intentional space with consistent routines such that all young people feel safe to share their stories and hear from others. It highlights a time when racial tension emerged between two groups of young people when a group of white young people started wearing clothes displaying Confederate flag memorabilia. The vignette also provides several examples of the structures and practices that the adults institutionalized that were culturally responsive and inclusive, providing young people with opportunities to lead, share perspectives, respectfully disagree, question dominant narratives, understand causes, and consequences.

A noteworthy routine that Youth Build practices as a program is to start each day by reciting the creed below as a daily ritual that helps young people set intentions, build community, and maintain consistency.

"I am YouthBuild. I proudly accept the challenge YouthBuild offers me to transform my life through education, leadership development, completion of vocational training, and service to my community. I gladly receive the opportunity to develop my independence, work history, and personal integrity. I make this pledge now to myself and to the world. I am YouthBuild. I do make the difference."

During the time that racial tensions emerged when a group of white young people started wearing apparel displaying Confederate flags, the sense of belonging that young people felt in the program along with youth leadership skills and youth voice that the program inculcated among its young people helped them to put forward their perspectives and collaboratively problem solve. A group of black youth were deeply hurt by the Confederate apparel as they were aware of the deep legacy of slavery and white supremacy associated with the Confederacy and the confederate flag. This group of youth voiced their concerns to the program administration. The group of white people who were wearing the Confederate apparel on the other hand felt that the Confederate flag was a symbol of cultural heritage that they had grown up with and had no active memory of the offense that symbol held for others or the controversy around it.

One of the first steps that the leaders did was to provide a space that would empower the two groups of young people to discuss the issue and agree to a mutually agreeable solution that they could they bring forward to the administration. The discussion was unsuccessful, and the symbol appeared often in the clothing that young people were wearing. The leaders realized that the young people needed more scaffolding and education regarding the symbol. Youth Build is not about enforcing rules and codes but believes in engaging young people in the discussion, with their permission to teach. After gaining young people's permission to teach them, the leaders gathered all young people to come together to discuss appropriate apparel, address controversial and hurtful symbols, thereby reinvigorating community expectations and an anti-racist approach in building community.

The staff at Youth Build often use these community meetings as a structure to build relationships, build community, and pose challenging situations for the whole community to come together, discuss, and reflect. The meetings are structured around the relationships that adults and young people share at Youth Build. It is an opportunity to share personal stories in a safe space with adults and young people who have worked together through the program. It is a space to create new meanings, unlearn, and relearn as they work together to define their program culture. Youth Build uses a robust developmental lens to use conflicts and challenges as an opportunity to come together and tackle the issue head on and not side-step or ignore which is often the alternative that the outer world presents. At the conclusion of this community meeting, the young people who donned confederate flags apologized. They also joined an initiative to design an organization wide T-shirt that everyone could wear and be proud of.

Source: Adapted from the Readiness Projects "**Building a (Culture) War-Free Zone**."

OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

Features of the physical environment, as well as how time and space are used and how relationships and experiences are created, set the tone for environments filled with safety and belonging. The context of the environment sends messages about the value placed on the young people and adults who work together in a learning setting. What is important or unimportant, what is rewarded or sanctioned, who is powerful or powerless, and who is viewed as trustworthy or untrustworthy are all communicated by the environment. Broken or functional furniture, current or outdated technology, and sufficient or limited supplies communicate that those participating in the space and those working in the space are important or unimportant, worth investing in or not. Access to and use of texts and materials that acknowledge and reflect young people's backgrounds, culture, and interests send a message about the degree of acceptance and belonging, the legitimacy of young people's cultures, and the importance of youth voice in the community setting. And an emphasis on restoring relationships rather than punishing missteps sends a message about whether young people are viewed as worthy of trust and belong to the community.

An environment can be rich in protective factors or contain significant risks to both young people and adults. A positive learning environment supports growth across all domains of development—physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional—while it reduces stress and anxiety that create biological impediments to learning. Such an environment takes a "whole child" approach to learning and development, seeking to address the distinctive strengths, needs, and interests of each and every young person as they engage in learning. Settings that provide developmentally rich relationships and experiences can buffer the effects of stress or trauma, promote resilience, and foster healthy development and engagement in learning.

WHY ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING ARE IMPORTANT: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

The brain is a prediction machine that loves order: It is calm when things are orderly and gets anxious when things are chaotic or threatening. The brain wants to know what is going to happen next. We are constantly making predictions, unconsciously and at every moment of the day; positive, consistent routines allow our brains to predict what is coming next, which reduces the cognitive load needed to process new information. This new information fuels the learning process and the brain's ability to be productive.

When the brain knows what is coming next, it can plan for what it is going to do in response. However, if the environment is chaotic and unpredictable, the brain is less able to focus, concentrate, and remember. Environments designed with shared values, norms, and routines create calm, consistent, safe settings, which in turn promote productivity, curiosity, and exploration.

Our environments influence the expression of our genes. Each of us has about 20,000 genes in our genome, yet in our lifetime, fewer than ten percent of our genes will get expressed. Gene expression happens through a biological process called epigenetic adaptation, in which the environments, experiences, and relationships in our lives determine which genes are expressed. Thus, the life cycle of a child is shaped by the contexts they experience and is not predetermined in a genetic program.

Young people's ability to learn and take risks is enhanced when they feel emotionally and psychologically safe; it is undermined when they feel threatened. The internal resources that children and youth bring to learning—including prior knowledge and experience, integrated neural (social, emotional, and cognitive) processes, motivation, and metacognitive skills—are affected by the environments they experience. When young people encounter trust, caring, and positive relationships with adults and peers, they can draw on these resources for learning. On the other hand, when they experience significant adversity or trauma, both their brains and their bodies are affected through the biological mechanisms of stress. This stress can become toxic when threats are constant. The surge of cortisol and adrenaline that is part of the stress response triggers hypervigilance and anxiety, reducing working memory and focus. Unless other supportive relationships and contexts are available, this process can affect the developing neural architecture that is critical for learning.

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SETTINGS DO TO FOSTER ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING?

There are three primary ways that community-based learning and development settings can foster environments filled with safety and belonging. First and foremost, learning and development settings need to feel like safe spaces for young people, with **consistent routines and expectations**. A key strategy for helping young people feel like they belong is to **intentionally create a sense of community** among peers and adults. Finally, environments that promote belonging feel **inclusive of and culturally responsive to all participants**.

How to Build Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging

▶ Cultivate safety and consistency

▶ Build community

▶ Be culturally responsive and inclusive

Cultivate Safety and Consistency

Environments that cultivate safety and consistency have shared values (e.g., respect, responsibility, perseverance, contribution) that are translated into agreements and expectations for each member's actions and interactions to build a foundation for creating a strong sense of community and belonging within the setting and across the larger community. Creating an environment in which young people learn to take risks, feel physically and emotionally safe and are given the opportunity for agency and contribution can transform social, emotional, and academic behavior and outcomes.

Key Practices to Cultivate Safety and Consistency

▶ Implement consistent routines and rituals that support risk-taking and help young people feel physically and emotionally safe

▶ Help young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, within and beyond the system or setting

▶ Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed

Implement consistent routines and rituals that support risk-taking and help young people feel physically and emotionally safe. Routines and rituals provide a sense of structure and stability and make the learning and development setting feel calmer, orderly, and predictable. This is particularly helpful for young people who have experienced instability in their family lives and having a predictable environment with consistent rituals and routines relaxes them. However, these rituals are not meant to be rigid and further control or police young people, especially young people of color.

AHA! (Attitude Harmony Achievement) is a community program in Santa Barbara, CA that supports teens' social and emotional development. Over the years program staff learned that teen brain development needs consistency, reliability, and ritual to help youth feel more contained and relaxed. The familiarity and repetition become comfortable and help them move into being able to lead activities. One of their strategies to promote consistency is to start programming with a mindfulness exercise consisting of a few of moments of just breathing and paying attention to the breath helps them settle in and learn how to calm their minds.

Help young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, within the setting and beyond. When young people have a personal connection to the work they are doing, they are likely to be more motivated and engaged. Adults need to make an effort to know them deeply and solicit discussions about their personal experiences in a safe and supported environment to help them identify personally meaningful goals and purpose.

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee is a youth-led advocacy program where each year young people decide to focus collectively on a current issue through creative art. Young people identify an issue that is important to them, their peers, and the community and this opportunity to exercise their choice and voice is a powerful motivator and keeps them engaged in the learning process. Young people feel a personal sense of purpose and collective sense of responsibility to impact their community positively. One of the projects included organizing a city campaign called *Saving our Sons* that promotes black male achievement in Milwaukee. Through the support of staff, young people were able to move through challenges and became more comfortable when they saw the positive impact their work had on their community.

Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed. Restorative practices enable adults to understand how they may unintentionally trigger or escalate problem behavior; these practices help young people and staff cultivate strategies for resolving conflict and creating healthier, more positive interactions.[1] Restorative practices could include daily group meetings and community building circles where both young people and staff share their experiences and feelings; using peer mediations where young people actively listen, negotiate, and problem solve to resolve a conflict between young people; and also for more formal counseling. Implementing restorative practices can be particularly challenging for adults who work in larger systems such as juvenile justice, where historically those systems have not been set up for healing.

Restorative practices are "processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing."[3] Relationships and trust are supported through universal interventions such as daily meetings, community-building circles, and conflict resolution strategies. (Figure 10).

Figure 10: What are Restorative Practices?: Adapted from Schott Foundation, Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, & National Education Association. (2014). Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships & promoting positive discipline in schools

Build Community

Building community involves implementing a set of strategies for promoting positive group functioning and supporting young people's sense of belonging. It is important to be mindful about how young people interact with each other; setting expectations and establishing rituals helps adults manage young people in a way that is safe and responsive to their needs. It is also an opportunity to share control with young people and provide them agency to co-lead the process of building a safe space to learn. Adults need to be mindful to include all young people, especially those that belong to marginalized communities and ensure that both adults and young people refrain from exclusionary behavior.

Key Practices to Build Community

▶ Use positive behavior management practices aimed at fostering a healthy, inclusive community

▶ Foster strong peer to peer relationships

▶ Co-develop program expectations with young people

Use positive management practices aimed at fostering a healthy, inclusive community.
Being able to manage the learning process in both group and one-on-one settings depends on an adult's ability to guide young people to their co-developed expectations, goals, and processes. Redirection and knowing hot spots for young people are critically important during sensitive discussions. Adults should also be actively involved and ensure that all young people are included, feel welcomed, and there is no instance of exclusionary behavior. Young people can also be empowered to facilitate peer mediation.

An afterschool program through Bright Futures at Hicks Elementary School, Michigan, understands that children often need a space to process their emotions on their own first before they can fully cognitively engage with the content and with their peers and adults. They have structured a *by-yourself space* that they refer as *Alaska* that is equipped with a stress ball, coloring tools, and visual cues that can help young people calm down. Children are empowered to use this space whenever they feel like they need some alone time. Staff then check in to see if they need additional support or time and to join the group when they feel ready[4].

Foster strong peer to peer relationships. Young people may come from a wide variety of backgrounds and it is essential that adults create explicit spaces for young people to know each other, process emotions, hear each other's stories in order to foster a safe environment that creates a sense of belonging. Helping young people build their empathetic listening and perspective taking skills as they share their personal stories helps to build strong relationships and understanding among peers. One effective strategy to fostering peer relationships is a game called Connections where children sit in a circle and share something personal if they want to.

WYMAN'S TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM (TOP)

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) in St. Louis, Missouri, is an evidence-based program that uses a combination of group discussion and community-service learning opportunities to empower teens to lead and build strong communities. Their initial program activities include getting-to-know-you icebreakers, name games, and teambuilding activities to help all teens feel safe and welcome.

Young people get together to identify routines and rituals that they can use to work together as a team. They identified an acronym called ROPES for the group to set the tone for how they want to behave with each other. ROPES refers to:

- Respect and Responsibility

- Opportunity, Openness and "Ouch" (a term used if something offends)

- Participation and Positive attitude

- Education, Empowerment, and Escuchar (Spanish for "to listen")

- Sense of humor and Sensitivity

Facilitators articulate their expectations for the teens, and teens share their expectations back for facilitators to develop a common understanding. The ROPES are signed by all group members and posted in the club meeting space where they can be referenced throughout the TOP club. When conflict or emotional tensions get the group off track, facilitators and young people both use the acronym ROPES to remind each other of their group agreement.

TOP also motivates young people to design a community service-learning project that is personally meaningful to themselves and to the group. It provides young people with an opportunity to exercise their voice and agency to decide what they want to do and also motivates them to persevere despite challenges. For example, one of the projects that young people chose to pursue was related to advocacy against drunk driving. It was the first time they were doing advocacy work, but the subject was personally meaningful to the teens as they had recently lost a group member who was killed by a drunk driver. They wanted to try something out in the community of the friend they lost who was from East St. Louis, even though their program was based in St. Louis. The adults supported them in reaching out to the agency in East St. Louis and the young people decided to do their advocacy work through a community garden in East St. Louis.

Source: Adapted from Smith, Charles, Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Barbara Hillaker, and Stephen C. Peck. (2016) *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social and emotional learning.* Forum for Youth Investment.

Other children are encouraged to actively listen and share if they see a connection to the story being shared. This helps young people find similarities and offers them opportunities to ask questions of each other in a respectful way.[5]

Co-develop program expectations with young people. Co-developing program expectations with young people promotes a sense of team identity and mutual accountability. It ensures that young peoples' voices and needs are incorporated, and they can take leadership roles in managing a positive environment. Co-developed program expectations provide agency to young people to take an active role in creating a safe space. For example, young people can establish expectations for how they can interact during discussions to ensure that every young person is heard. One such expectation could be around using a speaking tool that allows young people with an opportunity to share and others have to actively listen. Similarly, both adults and young people can create a list or visual of group agreements and co-sign to facilitate mutual accountability.

Be Culturally Responsive and Inclusive

Young people need safe places for learning, ones in which they feel respected and valued, and that the environment builds upon the cultures, identities and experiences of them and their families. Enacting culturally responsive approaches to teaching involves working actively to reduce implicit and explicit bias in adults' own practice, both in the specific setting as well as in the larger community.

VOYAGER OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL (VOB)

The mission of **Voyager Outward Bound School (VOB)** (based in St. Paul, Minnesota) is to change lives of teens through challenge and discovery. VOB works with African American boys in middle school and provides them an opportunity to learn wilderness skills such as canoeing, leadership expeditions, and rock climbing. Practitioners at VOB employ many strategies to build community.

They **facilitate a process of co-development of expectations and agreements** through a series of guiding questions that ask young people to consider what is important to them as a group. Part of the questions help identify the non-negotiables of being a group member, such as respecting others and themselves. Adults are also encouraged to share their expectations so that collectively youth and adults build trust and mutual accountability.

VOB **uses beginning rituals, often referred to as tone sets, which include welcoming, setting expectations, and letting young people decide their activities for the day**. These rituals are also an important component to developing trust which is essential as young people climb together and literally have their lives in each other's hands. VOB also has a restore ritual for addressing conflict. The idea is to restore or bring back what has been lost: trust, open communication, respect, etc.

VOB **uses an acronym tool, PROPS, that young people use to provide every young person to participate during group discussions**. PROPS stands for People Respecting Other People Speaking. When young people are standing in a circle and someone talks out of turn, the instructors remain quiet and young people generally speak up and just say, "PROPS," and that is the cue for the young person to continue to focus.

Young people are actively encouraged to make goals for themselves and choose activities according to the skills that they want to practice. A young man in the program shared how even though he has great fun with his family members, there is not much opportunity to share emotions. He says that the program helped him to be open about his emotions and realize that it is okay to take support from others and that there is no shame in that.

VOB staff use a debrief ritual after each activity to process and sort out emotional responses. These conversations also provide adults with an opportunity to assess what is working and how far they should push and what additional supports young people need.

Source: Adapted from Smith, Charles, Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Barbara Hillaker, and Stephen C. Peck. (2016) *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social and emotional learning*. Forum for Youth Investment..

When learning settings do not have diverse communities to draw from, practitioners can actively work to provide young people with windows and mirrors to grow understanding of their race and culture, and those of others, so that the cultures and lived experiences beyond the walls of the setting and community are made visible. Culturally responsive approaches include recognizing young people's' culturally grounded experiences as a foundation on which to build knowledge, exhibiting cultural competency in interacting with young people and families, demonstrating an ethic of deep care, and possessing a sense of efficacy that is consciously transmitted to young people.[6]

Use affirmations that establish the value of every young person's many identities and abilities and actively counter stereotypes and bias. Young people in marginalized and minority communities often experience fear and anxiety of confirming the stereotypes associated with their identities. Practitioners can work to become self-aware of their own biases, aim to have high-expectations of every young person's ability to learn, and work to actively counter stereotypes. They can discuss with their colleagues the harm that these stereotypes cause, strategies for how young people can manage the stress and anxiety, and investigate why these stereotypes persist in society. Constant affirmation of their belief that every young person is and will always be able to push through all challenges if they continue to try and practice is a part of a culturally inclusive setting.

YW BOSTON

As the first YWCA in the nation, **YW Boston** has been at the forefront of advancing equity for over 150 years. YW Boston's mission is to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all. It wants young people to understand that social injustice is not primarily about individuals treating other individuals unfairly, but it is about systemic and institutionalized factors that perpetuate privilege in some groups and injustice in others.

YW Boston provides young people with historical and current political contexts, frameworks, and vocabulary, interactive activities that spark discussion, and guiding questions. While the tools provide the structure, staff believe that the reactions, stories, and personal experiences of the young people drive the core of their conversations. Invariably there are conflicts and disagreements as young people work together, and staff work to empower young people to solve these in a safe and supportive environment.

YW Boston shared an instance when there was a sharp disagreement among young people over the use of potentially offensive language. Some young people felt that the word has been reclaimed within hip hop culture and has an affectionate meaning when used among black youth. However, other young people felt that it was a shameful part of US history and does not need to be reclaimed. Some of the white participants wondered why they cannot use the word while others can, and the arguments got intense.

This conversation provided an opportunity for the adults to remind the young people about the importance of youth-led conversations, and that racism is a systemic and systematic structure that cannot be solved in a day. However, listening to one another and having the conversation in a safe and supported way is the first place.

Doing this work also involves adults actively challenging stereotypes and discrimination and speaking up about institutional injustice. This includes making their values known when youth (or other adults) act in ways that are insensitive or discriminatory, or when youth discuss incidents in their lives in which they experience insensitivity, personal or institutional discrimination. Adults cannot take a position that race and ethnicity do not matter.

YW Boston's closing ceremony of their Immersion Week involves young people and counselors standing in a circle, holding hands, and sharing something about the week that really impacted them. Young people express their emotions through spoken word, music, songs, etc.

Source: Interviews with expert adults as part of the Social Emotional Challenge. For details visit **https://www.selpractices.org/**

Assata's Daughters, in the Washington Park neighborhood of Chicago, centers the experiences of black-identified youth through the creation of black-led, youth-driven projects modeled from the liberatory Black organizing tradition. Started to provide a "container" for young people to meaningfully participate in the movement for black lives, Assata's Daughters maintains a "homequarters"—safe space in which young people meet regularly to affirm their personal experiences, work out feelings of grief and anger, connect personal experiences to the collective experiences of other youth, and reaffirm their cultural identity in the historical tradition of resistance.

Build on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families to make learning engaging. Building practitioners' own cultural competence (i.e., their ability to build relationships across differences and develop an understanding and knowledge of the communities they serve) is a component of environments that build in diversity and cultural knowledge. It helps them to appreciate the wealth of diversity that young people bring into the programs along with their many learning styles that need to be incorporated to make the learning and developmental settings both fun and engaging.

It also helps adults to create tasks and projects that are meaningful, engaging, and relevant to the lived experiences of the young people. Practitioners can create opportunities for young people to share their stories and encourage feeling proud of their many identities.

Practitioners can employ structures for young people to share their different cultural and family backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories without judgement. One strategy for acknowledging the value of cultural assets of young people who are non-native English speakers is to include conversations and activities about ethnic holidays and heroes from Native America, Africa, Asia, Arab, and Latinx cultures. An activity that acknowledges the diversity of young people's personal stories involves helping youth develop a personal timeline for themselves. This can be done by interviewing family members, caregivers and friends; adding personal narratives about key historical events; and identifying and sharing their family values. The key is to make these learning and development opportunities engaging and meaningful for all young people.

Develop young people's knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs. Providing opportunities for young people to engage with current events, understand the needs of their communities, and critically engage with injustice that exists in society is critical in building their agency to take actions. It also helps in developing a sense of belonging among all young people and creating an engaging learning environment. Young people need to connect with community experts, other community-based stakeholders, and grassroot organizations to critically engage with the needs and interests of their communities and how they can make a difference. It also provides an opportunity for adults in community-based learning settings to know more about the communities their setting serves.

SUMMARY

Fostering an environment filled with safety and belonging includes young people being in spaces that are physically and emotionally safe and supported. All adults should have high expectations of all young people and support and motivate them to persevere through challenges. Young people are encouraged to try, make mistakes, and improve. They experience stability and consistency as they participate in shared routines and rituals that enable them to take responsibilities and exercise control over their learning. They feel connected to what they are learning and have been guided to identify a sense of purpose for themselves within and beyond their community learning and development settings.

In an environment filled with safety and belonging, young people have strong and positive relationships with their peers as well as all adults. They co-develop what is expected from them and adults and young people are both mutually accountable to these expectations. They also have the agency to remind both peers and adults of these shared expectations and agreements. Adults have created spaces and provided guidance for young people to solve conflicts and process emotions without hurting one another. All young people are provided with many opportunities to share their personal stories, their cultures, identities, abilities, and backgrounds and are guided to listen empathetically and understand each other's many perspectives. Adults are actively anti-racist, and engage young people in understanding, analyzing, dismantling, and acting against systematic structures of oppression and injustice.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

- **Design for Belonging** K-12 LAB provides PowerPoints, tools, and resources to design learning and development opportunities where all unique identities are welcomed and everyone feels like they belong.

- **How Learning Happens** Edutopia video series illustrates strategies that enact the science of learning and development in schools and includes a set of videos focused on cultivating a belonging mindset and classroom and a set on establishing positive conditions for learning. Edutopia also has a list of **ten powerful community building ideas** according to various age groups.

- **Playworks** provides videos and tips on how to use attention-getters and signals along with a Recess Checkup quiz to help adults identify areas of strength and provide strategies for improvement.

- The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality provides guidebooks that includes strategies on how to **build community** and **resolve conflicts** to create a safe and supportive environment and strengthen peer-to-peer relationships.

- Teaching Tolerance provides a series of **four self-paced professional development modules** on unpacking identity, unpacking diversity, understanding justice, and unpacking action.

- Facing History & Ourselves provides various **resources**, including videos, online courses, and webinars that provide strategies around teaching and engaging with history, promoting civic engagement, and creating critical and reflective learning settings.

- Center for Justice and Reconciliation provides a **series of six lessons** introducing restorative justice and strategies for successful implementation.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

END NOTES

[1]Losen, D. J. (2015). *Closing the discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. Teachers College Press.

[2]Borah, P., Conn, M., & Pittman, K. (2019). *Preparing children to thrive: Standards for social and emotional learning practices in school-age settings. Supplement to preparing youth to thrive*. Forum for Youth Investment. Hereafter cited as Preparing Children to Thrive.

[3]Schott Foundation, Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, & National Education Association. (2014). *Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships and promoting positive discipline in schools*. **http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pd**f.

[4]Preparing Children to Thrive

[5]Ibid.

[6]Carter, P., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). Teaching diverse learners. In Richardson, V. (Eds). *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (593-638). American Educational Research Association.