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Sahar Arbab

Western Washington University, s.arbab13@gmail.com

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**Learning Through Action in Whatcom County, Washington: Developing and Assessing the
Impact of Youth for Environment and People (YEP!)**

By

Sahar Arbab

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Kate Darby, Chair

Dr. Gene Myers

Riley Grant, M.Ed.

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dr. Gautam Pillay, Dean

Master's Thesis

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Sahar Arbab

May 15, 2018

**Learning Through Action in Whatcom County, Washington: Developing and Assessing the
Impact of Youth for Environment and People (YEP!)**

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sahar Arbab
May 2018

Abstract

In partnership with RE Sources for Sustainable Communities based in Bellingham, Washington, this action research project led to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the organization's first youth-led organizing committee called Youth for Environment and People (YEP!). RE Sources for Sustainable Communities is an environmental education nonprofit located in Bellingham, Washington, whose mission is to, "promote sustainable communities and protect the health of northwestern Washington's people and ecosystems through the application of science, education, advocacy and action" (RE Sources Website, 2017). Using Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory, we* implemented YEP! with the goal of increasing the teen participants' political self-efficacy. To ensure the intended outcomes of the program would be met, I designed the program to incorporate the characteristics common to youth organizing programs which I found through a literature review and interviews with program coordinators. In order to create a program which was locally relevant and responsive, I conducted interviews with community members who have experience working with young people in the area. During the implementation, I collected qualitative data through focus groups and participant observation to determine if taking part in this committee led to increased political self-efficacy amongst the participants. This paper discusses some of the best practices of organizations supporting youth action as well as how participating in this youth-led initiative impacted the participants' political self-efficacy. Finally, other important findings regarding the experiences of the YEP! members emerged from the data such as the value of collective efficacy.

Key words: Youth-led action, Youth voice, Positive Youth Development (PYD), Political self-efficacy, Environmental action

*Throughout this paper, I switch between using "we" and "I". When I use "we", I am specifically referring to the work which Priscilla Brotherton and I (Sahar Arbab) did together, whereas "I" refers to work I did on my own.

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Introduction

In 2015, two youth groups in Los Angeles, Youth for Environmental Justice and the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition, collaborated with the Center for Biological Diversity to sue the City of Los Angeles for violating the law by allowing oil companies to continuously drill wells in residential neighborhoods. Companies were primarily drilling wells in communities of color and were neglecting to assess the environmental impacts. In response, the city settled out of court and created stricter procedures for these companies to follow (Grist, 2017). Various media outlets have been following a 2015 suit filed by 21 youth against the U.S. government in what has become known as Juliana Vs. the United States. Their primary motive is to hold the federal government accountable for a failure to take action on climate change and ensure their generation's right to "life, liberty, and property" (Our Children's Trust, 2018). Despite attempts by the U.S. government and fossil fuel industry to blockade this suit, these young people have forged ahead. In March 2018, the government's request for "writ of mandamus" was denied by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (Our Children's Trust, 2018). These are powerful instances of youth activism. But there are many more examples of young people taking action today, which can be seen through their participation in and leadership of movements like Black Lives Matter, the DREAMer movement, and the campaign for fossil fuel divestment (Braxton, 2016).

In recent years, youth programs designed to support and encourage youth engagement have developed (Rossen & Conner, 2016). For these programs to be successful, it is important they learn from current youth activism initiatives (Hart & Gullan, 2010). Opportunities for these young people to partner with supportive adults can further their organizing skills. Programs which promote youth organizing skills and provide opportunities for youth-adult partnerships are

beneficial to the development of young people. This thesis explores the development of a program of this kind in Whatcom County, Washington.

During my first year as a master's student at Western Washington University, I met with Riley Grant to discuss her desire to create a youth leadership program at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities. RE Sources is a Bellingham, Washington based environmental education nonprofit whose mission is to, "...promote sustainable communities and protect the health of northwestern Washington's people and ecosystems through application of science, education, advocacy and action" (RE Sources Website, 2017). Riley and I decided to collaborate on the development and implementation of a program which would engage young people in grades 9-12 throughout Whatcom County, Washington in decision-making and community organizing. We also agreed upon an objective which would fulfil my academic interests. I would conduct research to determine if the teens found increased political self-efficacy as a result of participating in the program.

I started this action research project by gathering literature on Positive Youth Development (PYD). PYD theory argues that young people need opportunities to positively participate in their communities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). This model throws out previous deficit approaches to youth programming in favor of an asset-based approach where youth are viewed as vital members of society. The present research, from program design to implementation, was conducted through a PYD framework. I then delved into articles about youth organizing and found many scholars were beginning to draw connections between youth organizing activities and intended PYD outcomes, such as increased confidence and self-efficacy (Christens & Dolan, 2011). The literature revealed that increased political self-efficacy is not only an intended PYD outcome, but a crucial characteristic for ensuring youth feel confident in

their ability to produce change (Catalano, 2002). From the literature, I found youth organizing programs have specific characteristics that make them stand out amongst other youth programming approaches: 1) the programs focus on issues that impact the involved youth (Ginwright, 2009), 2) youth learn strategies for collective organizing (Braxton, 2016), 3) youth choose the issues to act on, 4) adults offer support, but youth take the lead in decision-making (Christens & Dolan, 2011). The last characteristic regarding the roles of youth versus adults became particularly important to me as both a researcher and adult facilitator in the program. I looked further into research regarding youth-adult partnerships and found in order to foster youth voice, I would need to provide emotional support (Conner, 2012) and intellectual challenges (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017) for the participants. Due to RE Sources' position as an environmental education not-for-profit and my academic focus within an environmental college, I looked for specific examples of youth taking action for the environment. I quickly found youth-led environmental action has resulted in intended PYD outcomes, while also creating positive change in young people's communities (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Multiple youth programs have successfully involved young people in environmental action and have resulted in increased self-efficacy. With this literature in hand, we began the visioning process for the program.

Before the main planning stages for this program began, Riley moved on to a new position outside the organization, but continued to enthusiastically support this effort. Priscilla Brotherton became my primary partner at RE Sources. Together, Priscilla and I identified adults in the Whatcom County area who have knowledge of the local teen population. I met with teachers, after-school program coordinators, and a previous school director. From these individuals, I learned that youth in the area were excited and passionate about various issues, but

formal opportunities to engage in social change were minimal. All these people agreed that a youth organizing or engagement opportunity would fill a gap in programming within the county.

I contacted potential interviewees from across the country who coordinate youth organizing or service opportunities for teens. From a nonprofit in Minneapolis to a state-wide organization in Alaska and from a youth leadership initiative in Seattle to a school in Chicago, I learned from program coordinators and educators about their successes and challenges collaborating with youth. Through these conversations, I learned about how these programs got their start. I was also able to gather informative data about how to best support participants in these programs. I felt prepared to begin planning. Yet, my conversations also left me reconsidering our original approach. Multiple individuals I spoke with recalled how their programs did not start formally, but rather grew from conversations and collaborations between individual youth and the organization. Priscilla and I thus decided this effort would have better momentum if we invited youth to participate in the planning of an event to engage their peers in some form of action. This resulted in the formation of the committee Youth for Environment and People (YEP!).

In order to recruit youth to participate in this committee, we sent emails to school teachers, principals, and guidance counselors. We reached out to students in environmental clubs and I gave two school presentations. We created a webpage, put out a press release, and posted information on the organization's social media platforms. By the end of February, we had a group of YEP! participants ready to work together for a shared cause. YEP! members met weekly during March and April of 2018 to pick an issue to take action on and then plan an event to draw attention to their cause. The group struggled to agree on an issue, but eventually settled on the idea to encourage the Bellingham School District to make it a requirement for high school

students to complete service hours with environmental or social justice organizations. Their ultimate goal was to see their peers become more aware and informed about issues impacting their community and the world. Each meeting consisted of an activity to build community, a presentation from a guest speaker, and a planning session. I conducted focus groups with and participant observations of the teen participants to determine if participating in the program led to increased political self-efficacy.

In general, political self-efficacy took on a wave formation throughout the program. On some days, members would feel very confident while on other days they seemed unsure of the impact they could have. Overall, the members displayed increased self-efficacy for specific tasks, but were unsure of their ability to achieve their overall goal. Although this research originally intended to look at individual outcomes, collective efficacy became a more prominent and significant theme throughout the meetings. Based on my observations and the focus groups, the members felt more aware of how to work towards change and remained eager to make a difference. The main barrier to increased self-efficacy was lack of attendance and time. The participants were discouraged when their peers did not show up to meetings. They also felt pressured to “do something” by the launch event and many expressed that it was not enough time to reach their goal.

Throughout this paper, I switch between using “we” and “I”. When I use “we”, I am specifically referring to the work which Priscilla and I did together, whereas “I” refers to work I did on my own. With the exception of the literature review, I consistently use first-person, as the nature of this work required both Priscilla’s and my active participation and engagement with the teenagers. The following pages contain parts of this story described through a literature review, a

description of our methods, results from our preliminary planning stages and the program itself, and a discussion on how these results apply to the fields of youth development and organizing.

I play multiple roles in this thesis, as I was the developer, facilitator and researcher of this program. Therefore, I find it important to note I am personally invested in the outcomes of YEP! and throughout the implementation I was always hoping to see an increase in political self-efficacy amongst the members. Further, my positionality impacted the way I interacted with the participants. I am a 27 year old cis-gendered female from a middle-class background who identifies as a person of color. On average, I am about 10 years older than the members who participated in this program. At the start of the YEP! program, I had lived in the Whatcom County area for 1.5 years. Multiple members mentioned to me they enjoyed having someone younger running the program since I felt more relatable to them. I also faced challenges in the implementation phase as I had most recently worked with young people from a very different community with different assets and challenges. This previous experience influenced how I entered the YEP! space and interacted with the participants. Slowly, I became more aware of the concerns and interests of this particular group of young people. Throughout the program, I found myself becoming invested in their success and happiness. Often, our conversations shifted from the focus of the program toward more personal conversations, which I will not discuss in any more detail, but feel it is an important indicator of the relationships we all formed with one another.

Literature Review

Overview of Literature

Positive youth development (PYD) emphasizes that young people will thrive when they have mutually beneficial relationships with the people and institutions they interact with (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). PYD approaches emphasize the importance of young people engaging in society (Lerner et al., 2002). Yet, young people may not always have the opportunities which allow them to participate fully. One strategy for fostering PYD is through the creation of programs aimed at providing opportunities for youth to engage with their communities in a way that is mutually beneficial (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Specifically, youth programs that provide opportunities for organizing and civic-engagement are particularly successful at fostering PYD (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Among the many outcomes associated with PYD, a frequently cited benefit to youth is increased self-efficacy. Increased self-efficacy in a PYD context means that young people hold the belief that they have the ability to achieve their desired goals (Tsang et al. 2012). An area in which youth civic-engagement has found success and has led to increased self-efficacy is environmental action (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Results of youth environmental action initiatives have aligned well with intended PYD outcomes, but there is room for more research in new and different contexts. The literature uses terms such as youth organizing, action, advocacy, and civic-engagement interchangeably as will this paper.

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is the theory that youth are valuable resources to society, and they will thrive if they develop mutually beneficial relationships with the people and institutions they encounter (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Literature uses the term youth in various ways, which encompasses multiple age groups, but in general, PYD refers to the time between childhood and adulthood, or adolescence. PYD grew from a combination of contributions from

academics, policy makers, and youth practitioners (Lerner et. al, 2005). In the fields of comparative psychology and evolutionary biology, scholars were studying how development occurs through a combination of “biological and contextual levels of organization”. Influenced by the work of comparative psychologists, developmental psychologists sought to understand the “plasticity of human development” and the “importance of relations between individuals and their real-world ecological settings” (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2009, p. 16). PYD was simultaneously gaining traction from the development and evaluation of youth intervention programs in community settings. Through evaluations of intervention-based programs for “problem behaviors,” both scholars and practitioners began to recognize these programs were not successful and began to favor approaches which took on an asset-based model to adolescent programming. Youth workers began to share their belief in the potential of young people based on their direct experiences implementing programming. Finally, demographic changes such as the increase in single or two working parent households resulted in increased attention to how young people spend their time outside of school (Lerner et al., 2005). This shift led to the implementation of policies which promote the creation of after-school programming for young people.

Prior to the 21st century, youth programming and research focused on young people as problems that required interventions (Lerner et al., 2002). Furthermore, scholars studying human and youth development used a theoretical model that involved a split between the individual and their context (Lerner et. al, 2002). These scholars used a framework that was incapable of capturing the relational nature of development for youth (Lerner et al., 2002). Towards the end of the 20th century, however, relational models of development began to emerge that emphasized

the important relationship between the individual and their context, as well as youth with the potential for positive development (Lerner et. al, 2002).

Contemporary development theory emphasizes the importance of understanding systemic relationships between individuals and their contexts as the core to developmental change (Lerner et al., 2002). Development theory suggests that changes throughout one's lifetime are fueled by their relationships with family, peers, and community. These relationships change interdependently across one's lifespan. Therefore, positive change between individuals and their communities leads to positive development. In order to foster PYD, scholars recommend that youth need constructive opportunities to engage well with adults, their peers, and their communities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). PYD approaches emphasize the importance of young people contributing to society so that as they develop, their environment improves along with them. This approach views youth as valuable resources in society, as opposed to previous views which looked at young people as in need of efforts to help them "overcome deficits" (Damon, 2004). Advocates of PYD have looked towards intentional community programs as the avenue through which young people can positively develop (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). More specifically, programs that support youth organizing have been particularly successful at fostering positive development (Christens and Dolan, 2011).

Characteristics and Outcomes of Youth Organizing Programs

Youth organizing efforts work to achieve both social change and positive outcomes for young people. Following the introduction of PYD theory, various disciplines started to present new ways of thinking about young people (Kim & Sherman, 2006). Practitioners were simultaneously noticing the potential of young people and looking for ways to develop more opportunities to engage youth in meaningful ways. New opportunities for youth development became apparent in service-learning and academic institutions. Further, youth organizing gained

prominence as a place where community organizing and PYD could intersect (Kim & Sherman, 2006). Another reason youth organizing gained traction was a recognition by researchers and practitioners that there was a generational gap in social justice leaders (Kim & Sherman, 2006). Previous generations were prominent in efforts such as women's liberation, civil rights, and solidarity movements, yet did not focus attention on training the next generation of leaders (2006).

A specific approach through which community organizations have been successful at fostering PYD is youth organizing and civic-engagement (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Civic-engagement in a youth development context means youth are involved in working towards meaningful change in their communities through activities such as service, raising awareness, altering power dynamics, and influencing decision-making (Gallay et al. 2016). Various characteristics set youth civic-engagement and organizing apart from other approaches to youth development that make this approach particularly successful at fostering positive development amongst youth: 1) the programs focus on issues that impact the involved youth (Ginwright, 2009), 2) youth learn strategies for collective organizing (Braxton, 2016), 3) youth choose the issues to act on, 4) adults offer support, but youth take the lead in decision-making (Christens & Dolan, 2011). These overlapping characteristics create a setting in which PYD can occur.

Problems that Impact Youth

Research suggests that when young people identify with the problems in their community, they are more likely to act on them (Ginwright, 2009). Furthermore, if they are aware of the powers and forces that create these conditions, they are better able to take action (Watts et. al, 2003). In a study of 180 youth organizing initiatives, researchers discovered that the most common issues young people organize on are education reform, community and neighborhood development, immigrant rights, and gender (Braxton, 2016), all of which are

issues that can directly impact youth (Ginwright, 2009). There are many case studies which discuss youth organizing on issues that directly impact them. For example, one such case study discusses a teen-led action project to decrease air pollution by advocating for anti-idling policies for diesel buses in their communities (Loh & Sugerman-Brozan, 2002). The youth recognized they were being directly impacted by poor air quality in their community and found diesel buses were idling near their schools. The youth were able to take ownership of the action project as they chose the direction of their campaign and connected the air pollution to negative health impacts amongst themselves and in their community.

Learning Strategies for Collective Organizing

Collective organizing happens when people work together towards a shared cause. When youth learn strategies for collective organizing they are collaboratively harnessing their collective social power to work towards positive change in their communities (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Youth organizing programs invite young people to participate in spaces where people come together to express shared concerns and interests and ultimately take joint action (Rogers & Terriquez, 2016). Through this process, young people develop the analytical, action, and reflection skills needed to act collectively towards a cause (Ginwright, 2003). These larger skill categories can include competencies such as research, debate, direct action, recruitment, and discussion (Ginwright, 2003). A major component of youth organizing programs which results in these competencies is political education and leadership development (Braxton, 2016). For example, an important component of collective action is recruitment. Through organizing, young people learn how to effectively recruit others to join their cause (Rogers & Terriquez, 2016). Therefore, youth are not only learning strategies for collective action such as recruitment, but they are also developing other competencies such as public speaking. For example, Rogers and Terriquez cite the example of a young person involved in a youth organizing program called

Youth United for Community Action (YUCA). The individual said during their time at YUCA, they were encouraged to phone bank as a way to inform the community about their weekly meetings. As a result of phone-banking, the individual said they became more confident using their voice and speaking up (2002). These skills are most effectively developed when youth take the lead in decision-making (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Further, young people can be encouraged by role modeling opportunities. When young people see others their age taking action and succeeding, they build their confidence in their own abilities (Hickman & Riemer, 2016). In an article about a youth environmental action program implemented in six different countries, called Youth Leading Environmental Change (YLEC), the authors discuss the benefits of youth interacting with practiced activists, as it provided an opportunity for role modeling (Hickman & Riemer, 2016).

Youth Autonomy

Youth organizing is a successful strategy for fostering youth development when young people take the lead in identifying problems and solutions. Furthermore, these programs have youth-adult partnerships in which young people take the lead in decision-making (Christens & Dolan, 2016). This means the issues youth take action on cannot be predetermined by the host organization. This autonomy leads to positive outcomes such as increased self-confidence and self-efficacy for youth (Christens & Dolan, 2011). For example, a case study on the Power Project located in Los Angeles looked at African American and Latino youths' efforts to challenge workplace and environmental health issues (Delp et. al, 2000). The campaign followed the youth community organizing approach. First, they identified a problem and the processes that led to it. Next, the youth took the lead in developing intervention strategies. As result of participating in this initiative, the members developed stronger analytical skills, communication

skills, and increased confidence in taking action for issues that they are concerned about (Delp et. al, 2000).

Although youth-organizing programs emphasize youth autonomy, adults do provide educational and structural support. Jonathan London, a professor of human ecology at UC Davis, argues that although decision-making power is very important for youth organizing initiatives, these movements will only be sustained by well thought out support plans by the host organization (2007). London cites a particular youth initiative in a lower-income neighborhood in San Francisco in which youth had strong decision-making authority, but the organization housing their initiative changed hands multiple times, which resulted in less committed youth. Therefore, organizations should consider both the necessary resources needed to support long-term youth initiatives and the level of youth autonomy needed to support PYD.

Barriers and Pitfalls in Youth Organizing

These programs also face potential pitfalls which can impact one's self-efficacy (Conner, 2012). In his book, *Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action*, Professor of Social Work, Melvin Delgado, outlines the various challenges presented in youth organizing initiatives. Some of the most prevalent ones are adultism and feelings of failure. For example, when young people do not achieve the change they were working towards, they can feel defeated and lose a strong sense of efficacy. One way youth organizing programs address this potential pitfall is through debriefs (Conner, 2012). When youth are encouraged to identify what things went well and did not, they are better able to learn from their efforts and apply this newfound understanding to their next campaign. Further, education researcher Jerusha Conner suggests effective youth organizing programs work to encourage their participants to identify successes even when they fail (2012). Adultism is another common barrier to youth development within

organizing programs (Delgado, 2007). Adultism is a form of oppression which refers to the belief that adults are the experts on young people's needs and concerns. Adultism can manifest in organizing initiatives when adults do not allow young people to take the lead in decision-making. This can lead to a lack of youth agency within organizing initiatives (Delgado, 2007). Although there are pitfalls within youth organizing initiatives, skilled coordinators can foster youth voice and agency through effective youth-adult partnerships.

Youth Voice and Youth-Adult Partnerships

Community support for increasing opportunities for youth to become involved in decision-making is growing (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2012). Many organizations, such as local government entities and not-for-profits have worked to incorporate youth voice by including young people on boards, committees, and other decision-making entities. Youth voice requires resonance, meaning that when young people share their thoughts, they feel like those ideas were heard and considered (Evans, 2007). As human ecologist, Shepard Zeldin and colleagues argue, "...youth voice is not only about expression, but more centrally, it is about recognition by powerful others and by inclusion in consequential deliberations" (p. 390, 2012). One way to achieve this recognition and resonance is through youth-adult partnerships (Evans, 2007; Libby et al. 2005; Zeldin, 2010). Support for youth-adult partnerships is advocated for in multiple ways. Some practitioners and researchers come from a social justice perspective arguing that young people's voices should be represented in decisions which impact them. The other reasoning for these programs is they lead to positive youth development. Scholars suggest participation in these programs can lead to positive outcomes such as an increased sense of social responsibility (Sherrod et al., 2002). Finally, scholars have argued organizations function better when many voices, not excluding young peoples, are included in decision-making (Zeldin et al, 2002). Thus, involving youth in organizational decision-making appears to be a win-win

situation, where organizations are functioning better and young people are benefiting emotionally and their voices are taken seriously. Youth spaces within organizations provide a unique opportunity for young people to become purposeful agents in their own development (Larson, 2000). Working alongside adults can enhance that development (Zeldin et al. 2012). People are often separated by age in decision-making processes, creating detrimental results such as a lack of youth-adult understanding and certain groups feeling isolated. This societal practice of separating generations in decision-making contexts may be a result of adults' desire to shelter children from the realities of the world (Zeldin et. al, 2012). But young people stand to benefit from participating in decision-making processes alongside adults.

Implementing youth-adult partnerships into already existing organizations presents unique challenges. An example of such an effort can be seen within 4-H Youth Development (4-HYD) programming, which was originally created by Congress in 1914 to provide training for rural youth on agricultural technologies (Zeldin et al., 2008). The program has since expanded to urban areas and provides services to youth through after-school programming and service learning. All of these programs now prioritize youth-adult partnerships which is reflected in their various national programs such as “Youth at the Table,” “National Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century” and “Youth in Governance” (Zeldin et al., 2008). 4-HYD is unique as it is an established organization which had not previously worked to establish youth-adult partnerships, but has now made this an objective. Through semi-structured interviews with 4-HYD staff members in Wisconsin, Zeldin and colleagues found that because the organization has not operated through youth-adult partnerships previously, staff had to work to overcome existing organizational norms. The researchers found in order to effectively implement youth-

adult partnerships, staff had to respect the current organizational traditions, while simultaneously encouraging stakeholders to try new approaches.

Another example of a youth-adult partnership is the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) in San Francisco (Libby et al., 2005). Unlike 4-HYD, YLI has operated with a youth-adult partnership approach from its inception. The organization found an effective youth-adult partnership meant young people were involved in decision-making within all aspects of the organization. One way YLI does this is through supporting youth philanthropy initiatives, where young people work in collaboration with adults to make granting decisions. Not only did these partnerships have positive outcomes for the participating youth, but they also improved the functioning of the organization as a whole. YLI also supports young people as they partner with adults to train practitioners from youth-serving organizations on how to switch to a PYD model instead of using a deficit approach. The organization found the content of these trainings were enriched due to the young peoples' participation. Further, when it comes to reaching other youth, YLI found youth leaders were effective at engaging their peers and ensuring their participation (Libby et al., 2005).

Fostering youth voice through youth-adult partnerships requires adults who are comfortable and skilled at these relationships. Researchers at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University used critical reflection methods to determine the primary role of adults in supporting young people as they work towards community change (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017). The two researchers both identify as “adult allies” in a youth participation effort. They conclude that effective adult allies are individuals who are capable of providing training for youth leaders, challenging young people to think more critically, reminding youth of the necessity of their work, taking youth voices seriously, and helping to

sustain the work of youth through contributing to daily tasks (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017). These characteristics mirror what other researchers have found leads to sustained youth engagement. Young people are more likely to stay engaged in programming when they feel a sense of agency over their environment while receiving support from adult allies (Zeldin et al. 2010)

Political Self-Efficacy

As displayed through the discussion of the major characteristics of youth-advocacy programs, many PYD outcomes are associated with young people's participation in these initiatives. Youth advocacy has proven to lead to positive outcomes such as connection with others, reasoning skills, civic identity, analytical skills, communication skills, and decision-making skills. One particular outcome that is cited frequently in case studies of youth advocacy is increased self-efficacy. Catalano and colleagues reviewed 25 youth development programs that had effectively promoted PYD outcomes and found all of the organizations included components to promote self-efficacy (Catalano et al. 2002).

As the literature suggests, developing opportunities for youth to take charge of decision-making and collective action in regards to issues that impact them create the setting in which PYD outcomes such as self-efficacy can occur. Self-efficacy is the individual's belief that they possess the ability to achieve their desired goals through their own actions (Catalano, 2002). If one has strong self-efficacy, they are likely to have more motivation to take action (Bandura, 1997). An individual's self-efficacy is usually influenced by their sense of control over their own environment (Bandura, 1997). Amongst youth, self-efficacy has been measured both quantitatively and qualitatively (Tsang et al. 2011). For example, as part of a study to measure the impact a workshop had on youths' participation in environmental action, the researchers measured self-efficacy through a nine-item scale which assessed the individuals' beliefs in their

own abilities to make positive change in their communities (Hickman & Riemer, 2016). The researchers delivered the scale at multiple points during and after the workshop to measure change. They then compared the total Likert scale averages to see if an increase in self-efficacy occurred. Self-efficacy scales are usually designed using “I statements” in the present tense, such as, “I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort” (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). These statements are usually associated with one’s confidence in their abilities to solve problems and take action. Self-efficacy can also be measured qualitatively. For example, Schusler and Krasny researched programs involving youth in environmental action (2010). Through interviews with youth, they identified PYD outcomes, such as self-efficacy. In this particular study, the authors conducted group interviews, in which the interviewer asked the youth questions related to their overall experience, interaction with adults, and ways they learned from the experience. Youth took turns talking and responding to others’ comments. The interviewer then transcribed and coded these statements with general categories.

It is important these measurements of self-efficacy are designed for the specific context researchers are interested in (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is very situational (Bandura, 2006). For example, an individual can have high self-efficacy for project management, but low self-efficacy for exercise. Therefore, measurements of self-efficacy should be designed for the context and situation in which the researchers are concerned with (Bandura, 2006). Political self-efficacy is a specific form and involves, “...gaining political confidence and a sense that one’s everyday choices and actions matter and can contribute meaningfully to political goals” (Beaumont, 2010, p. 526). Young people’s confidence towards influencing government can be influenced by their experiences working towards change in their schools or other institutions they encounter in their youth (Bandura, 1997). Political efficacy has two dimensions—internal

and external (Beaumont, 2010). Internal political efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to act politically and that their actions have meaning. In order to measure this construct, researchers have asked youth through interviews and focus groups questions such as, "Do you think that by yourself you could influence decisions that affect your school? Why or why not?" (Eveland, 2005, p. 42). The answers to these questions reflect young people's belief in their ability to take action.

In other instances, themes related to self-efficacy have emerged from narrative research. Researchers at the University of Malta conducted narrative research with youth participating as activists in an environmental organization in Malta (Buttigieg & Pace, 2013). The researchers intentionally chose to interview active, young participants in the organization to better understand their motivations for participating. The authors indicated several themes which emerged from their interviews. Two of the themes were self-efficacy and locus of control. All interviewees expressed a high internal locus of control, meaning that, similar to internal self-efficacy, they believe they are in control of their actions and can produce change. The authors determined these young people had strong self-efficacy and internal locus of control by statements such as, "I am, at a point, where I would really like to do something. I would like to make things change and to see more locals and tourists alike appreciate Maltese nature and its products. In fact, I am working on a project with a friend of mine, and together we are trying to secure some funds for a particular farmer in Gozo." Here, the interviewee is indicating their belief in their ability to improve ecotourism in Malta. The authors are staying consistent with the definition of self-efficacy as they are capturing statements associated with one's belief in their ability to take action and make a difference. In a study conducted on youth involvement in organizational governance (Zeldin, 2004), the researcher interviewed youth to determine how

participation impacted their own development. The results indicated many young people found increased self-efficacy as a result of their role in these organizations. Meaningful involvement of youth in organizations has led to increased self-efficacy in multiple cases.

Youth and Environmental Action

An even more specific context in which youth advocacy can occur and lead to increased self-efficacy is environmental action (Harré, 2016; Hickman and Riemer, 2016; Schusler and Krasny, 2010). Environmental education scholars Tania Schulser and Marianne Krasny have defined youth environmental action as, "... a process of co-creating environmental and social change that builds individuals' capabilities for further participation in contributing to personal and community transformation" (2009). Therefore, through this perspective, youth participating in environmental action not only help improve their communities but also develop their competence in engaging in issues of concern to them. Community psychologist, Nikki Harré, states that environmental action is not intended to promote behavior change, but rather aims to address root causes of environmental problems and change social systems (2016). Riemer and colleagues argue that environmental action is an appropriate setting for civic-engagement as it aligns with the characteristics of youth civic-engagement programs (2014). The authors argue that through the practice of taking action on environmental issues, young people will develop the skills needed for effective civic-engagement, and this will ultimately increase their self-efficacy. For example, in the study by Schusler and Krasny, the researchers conducted narrative interviews with 33 educators and group interviews with 46 youth that were all involved in youth environmental action programs in New York State. Through analysis of their interviews, the authors found strong similarities between their results and intended PYD outcomes, and "came to understand environmental action as an important context for young people's personal growth"

(2010, p. 209). As mentioned earlier, the authors specifically cite increased self-efficacy amongst youth as a result of participating in these programs.

Researchers have studied multiple examples of youth engaging in environmental action from across the United States—from air quality organizing in Roxbury, Massachusetts (Loh & Sugerman-Brozan, 2002) to workplace environmental health in Los Angeles (Delp et. al, 2000)—and from fighting an incinerator in Detroit (Gallay et al. 2016) to advocating for climate justice on a national level (Our Children’s Trust, 2016). Overall, the literature suggests that youth organizing in an environmental action context will lead to PYD outcomes, such as increased self-efficacy. Despite the numerous examples of youth participating in environmental action, there remains room for understanding how, in different contexts, the outcomes associated with these programs align with intended PYD results like increased self-efficacy. Not only will research of this kind contribute to a growing collection of work striving to better understand the outcomes of youth participation, but it can also glean critical first-person accounts of these program’s effectiveness in meeting their goals, which may become useful data for practitioners interested in implementing or improving upon these programs.

Summary of Literature

There remains room for understanding how youth advocacy within an environmental action context can foster intended PYD outcomes (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Specifically, more research could be conducted to determine whether youth environmental action leads to increased self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a desired outcome of PYD that reflects one’s belief in their ability to take action and create change (Tsang et al. 2011). This can be measured both quantitatively through Likert scales (Hickman & Riemer, 2016) and qualitatively through interviews (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Self-efficacy measurement tools should be specifically designed for the context and goals of the researcher (Bandura, 2006). The literature suggests that engaging youth

in organizing in general and environmental action specifically can lead to increased self-efficacy, especially when intentional youth-adult partnerships are formed. These models should be applied in new contexts in order to further determine if they are effective at meeting desired PYD outcomes like increased political self-efficacy.

Whatcom County Background

Whatcom County is located in northwestern Washington and borders British Columbia on its north and Skagit County to its south. Whatcom County was established in 1854 on land that was and is home to the Lummi, Nooksack, Samish and Semiahmoo (Whatcom County Website, 2017). Today, the Lummi and Nooksack have federally recognized reservations in the county (Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, 2016). In the 1850's lumber and coal brought more industries to Whatcom County and the population grew (Whatcom County, 2017). After some economic decline in the 1890's, the county again began to grow with the new and expanding industries of shingle mills, salmon canneries, shipyards, and agriculture (Whatcom County Website, 2017). Today, Whatcom County is made up of multiple cities and towns. In addition to Bellingham, the county seat and home of RE Sources, there are the towns of Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas.

The current population of Whatcom County is 212,284 (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income is \$53,145. According to U.S. Census data, the population is 87% white, 9.2% Hispanic or Latino, 4.4% Asian, 3.2% American Indian and Alaska Native, and 1.2% Black or African American (US Census, 2010). In regards to public education for K-12 students, the county has seven public school districts in the county and multiple private schools (Whatcom County Website, 2017).

In present day Whatcom County, agriculture continues to be a large sector, producing the most raspberries in the United States (Washington State Employment Security Department, 2015). Education is also a large contributor to the local economy. Whatcom County is home to multiple higher education institutions such as Western Washington University, Northwest Indian College, and Whatcom Community College. Students attending these institutions often take part

in the service sector of the area, which draws tourists from Canada. In fact, Canadian spending in Whatcom County helped the area in its recovery from the 2007 recession (Washington State Employment Security Department, 2015).

The county also has some heavy industries. Cherry Point, which is located in the northwest corner of the state, is home to an aluminum smelter and crude oil refineries (Washington State Employment Security Department, 2015). Recently, Cherry Point became the location of a social and environmental controversy. In May of 2016, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied a permit application for a proposed coal export facility called Gateway Pacific Terminal (Wohlfeil, 2016). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers noted that the proposed project would impact the treaty protected fishing rights of the Lummi Nation. Other social and environmental challenges in Whatcom County include, but are not limited to urban water quality issues, water rights, development, agriculture, endangered species issue, farmworkers rights, food deserts, and industries and cultural resources that are impacted by environmental changes, such as salmon fisheries. Politically, Whatcom County has representation from both major political parties. In the 2016 presidential election, candidate Hillary Clinton won the county, while both Democrat and Republican candidates won local elections (Wohlfeil, 2016).

Multiple community and nonprofit organizations in the area are taking action on the issues mentioned. Specifically, RE Sources took action to prevent the permitting of the proposed Cherry Point terminal (RE Sources Website, 2017). RE Sources was founded in 1982 as Bellingham Community Recycling to advocate for curbside recycling in Washington State. Since then, the organization has grown to have four main programs. RE Sources has programs which focus on clean energy, clean water, and sustainable schools throughout the region. Currently, RE Sources serves youth through four main educational programs: Green Classrooms, Waste

Rangers, Young Water Stewards, and middle and high school programs related to water conservation, waste prevention, and consumer habits. These education programs serve students in elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition to education and environmental work in the region, the organization manages the RE Store, which diverts construction materials from becoming waste by selling them at a low cost to the surrounding community (RE Sources Website, 2017). The proposed environmental action program would work to better connect the organization's advocacy and policy work with its youth educational work in the community.

Methods

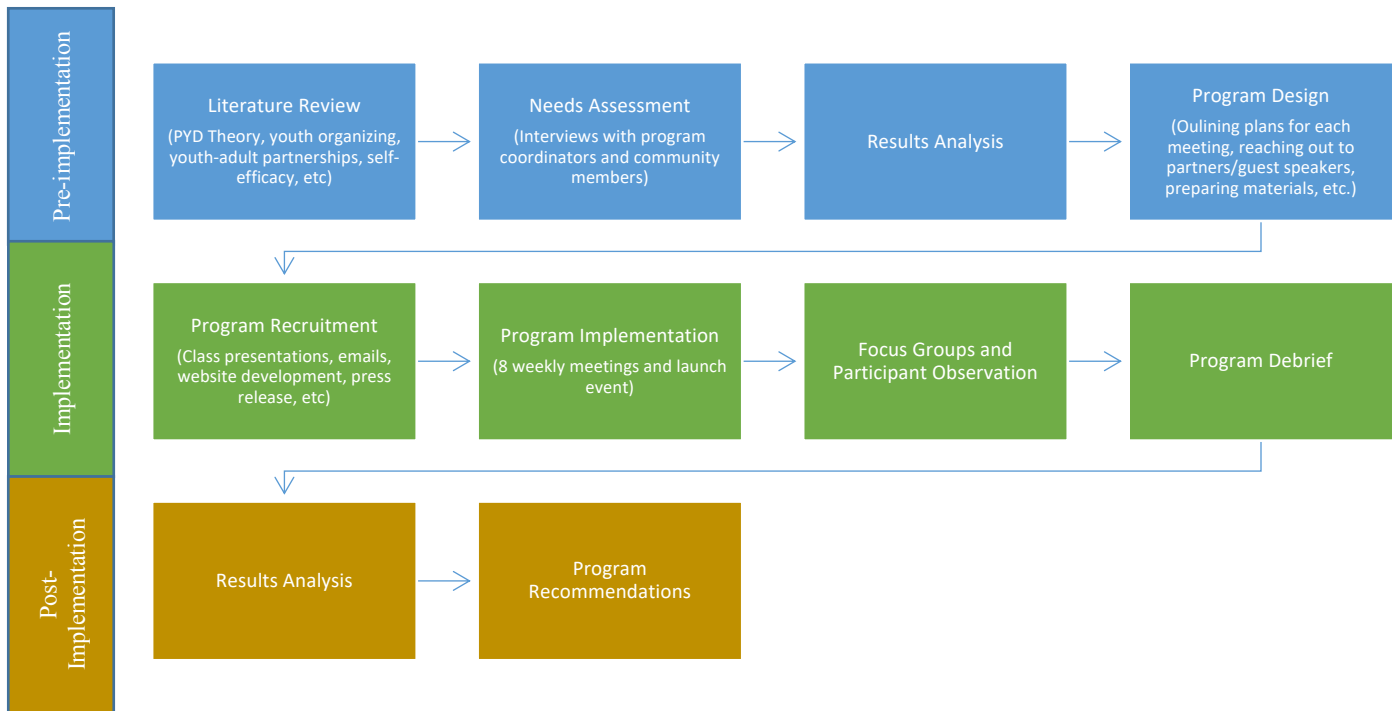


Figure 1 Methods Overview

My methods involved multiple phases. First, I collected data to inform the design of a youth organizing program in Whatcom County. Then I implemented the program and evaluated its impact on the participants. This research is rooted in qualitative methodology, as the intent was to determine whether or not the teenagers in this study found increased self-efficacy as a result of participating in YEP!. Qualitative inquiry is a useful methodology when the researcher is looking at the meaning particular individuals or groups place on specific experiences (Maxwell, 2013). My methods include a combination of action research (Payne & Payne, 2004), focus groups, and participant observation (Patton, 2002). First, I conducted interviews to determine the best practices for developing a youth action program specifically located in Whatcom County. This initial research informed the creation of Youth for Environment and People (YEP!), which I then studied through participant observation and focus groups. This

second segment of my research used methodologies from what is sometimes described as “action learning inquiry” (Patton, 2002). In action learning inquiry, a dual process occurs where there are specific findings which can inform practice, while at the same time the researchers conducting the inquiry learn more about their own role (Patton, 2002). In this case, the research findings both inform RE Sources about how to best facilitate YEP!, while I learned best practices for navigating youth-adult partnerships. The findings from the focus groups and participant observations shed light on some ways organizations can foster increased self-efficacy amongst youth.

Ethical Considerations

For all phases of this research, I applied for and received approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee at Western Washington University (See Appendixes A-C). I asked for consent from both the teens and their parent/guardian in order for them to participate in this study. Throughout this study and in this reporting, I used pseudonyms for all the youth participants in order to protect their identity

Action Research

This thesis follows an action research approach, which blurs the lines between academic research and community-based problem-solving. Action research “aims at solving specific problems within a program, organization, or community” (Patton, 2002). In this case, the problem we were addressing was the need for more avenues for youth organizing within Whatcom County. Action research is also characterized by its collaborative process. Researchers and practitioners work together to solve problems and measure their success. For this research, RE Sources for Sustainable Communities, and specifically Priscilla Brotherton, was my partner and collaborator. Together, we both used our knowledge and experiences to form this program. The teens also served as partners in this research, as they helped inform us how the program

could improve to better serve their needs and reach our goals. Editorial members of the journal *Action Research* write that, “Action research challenges the claims of a positivistic view of knowledge which holds that in order to be credible, research must remain objective and value-free” (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 11). Instead, the editors argue, action research upholds the notion that knowledge is socially-constructed and research is value-laden (2003). Priscilla and I both brought our lived experiences into the design of this program. I worked to keep the research process transparent, so the participants knew I was looking at changes in their political self-efficacy.

Phase 1: Learning how to Engage Youth

Often action research methodology intends to produce social change and involves partnerships between academic researchers and community members or organizations (Payne & Payne, 2004). The goal of RE Sources was to develop a space within the organization for youth voice. My goal was to determine how participating in a space like this impacts the political self-efficacy of the participants. In order to achieve the first goal, I conducted interviews with both program coordinators and community members. The data gained through these methods helped me determine best practices for encouraging youth-voice.

Program Coordinators

Interviews are a common strategy used when researchers are interested in learning from educators and coordinators regarding their goals, challenges, and successes with youth programming. Collecting and synthesizing information related to how others have developed similar programs is important for informing program design (Rothman & Thomas, 1994). With this information, the program developer can build on successful models and learn from unsuccessful strategies (1994). In order to determine how other organizations across the country

have created opportunities for youth-voice, I conducted interviews with program coordinators from five different organizations: Climate Generation, Woodland Park Zoo, Seward Audubon Society, Evanston Township High School, and an Alaska-based environmental organization. Each organization varied in their approach, but they all had one common goal, which was to support youth as they took action on issues and causes that were important to them. The degree to which these young people were taking action varied from service projects to advocating for policy change on a state level. These coordinators were found through both colleague recommendations and an internet search. I used search terms such as “youth environmental action”, “youth social justice,” and “youth organizing.” I found the remaining interviewees through the snowball method (Patton, 2002). I used a semi-structured phone interview approach (Patton, 2002), which allowed for the conversations to take natural turns. The interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. I recorded the interviews, except for one interview where the recording did not work. I also took thorough notes during each interview.

Examples of interview questions:

- 1) What are the main goals of this program?
- 2) What inspired this program?
- 3) How do you encourage the youth to reflect on program activities?
- 4) How do you foster and encourage youth autonomy in decision-making and action planning?

Community Members

In the process of developing an intervention, it is important that the researcher work collaboratively with members and relevant actors in the community (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010). This process involves speaking with key informants to determine local problems, needs, and strengths (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010). In order to better understand the specific needs for youth voice within Whatcom County, I conducted semi-structured interviews with community members. I identified these individuals by internet searches and from recommendations by

colleagues and employees at RE Sources. In order to include a variety of perspectives, my criteria for interview subjects was only that they had to have experience working with young people in the area. I conducted five interviews with community members. These individuals included educators, consultants, and foundation employees. The interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. A few of these interviews were recorded, but thorough note-taking was my primary method of documentation. Before the analysis, I digitally transcribed all audio and notes.

Examples of Interview Questions:

1. What issues most directly impact youth in Whatcom County?
2. What are the most pressing environmental issues in Whatcom County? How do these impact youth?
3. To what degree are youth taking action on these issues? What are some examples, if any, of how youth have taken action in this community?

Surveys with Youth

For my final pre-implementation method, I intended to survey 30 teenagers in Whatcom County regarding their interest in opportunities to take action, as well as more logistical information such as which days of the week they have the most availability. This survey can be found in Appendix E. The survey included questions directed at both quantitative and qualitative data. The participants were a convenience sample. RE Sources has a relationship with a local teacher who agreed to distribute the surveys. These teenagers live in the county and have varying interests and experiences. The participants did not have an expressed interest in civic-engagement or the committee. Unfortunately, I was not able to connect with the teacher again and these results were not collected. Therefore, in order to collect this information, I personally asked the participants questions from the survey in our first meetings. I asked the participants about concerns they had in their communities and barriers they faced taking action.

Examples of Survey Questions:

1. In the past, what has prevented you from participating in activities that interest you?
2. What do you think are the most pressing issues in your community?
3. What do you think are the most pressing environmental issues in your community?
4. What are you most proud of in your community?
5. During the months of February and March, which days of the week are you typically busy? Please provide your best estimate.

Analysis

I summarized all interviews into text and then analyzed them through inductive coding (Bernard, 2006). This approach allowed my understanding to develop through close analysis of the transcriptions. My process began with simply reading the texts and underlining information I felt would be important as we strategized how to engage youth. Once patterns began to appear, I began creating thematic categories. Using the cut and paste feature in a Word document, I then used a pile-sorting method (Bernard, 2006) to group common quotes and insights together. The themes that emerged were then summarized.

Recruitment

In order to recruit youth to participate in this committee, I created an application and sent it to schools and community organizations throughout Whatcom County. RE Sources also sent the application to their contact lists for their education programs. I visited two schools and gave a PowerPoint presentation on YEP!. We sent applications out in January 2018. Interested teens had one month to apply. In order to be eligible, participants had to live in the county and be in high school (i.e. 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade). The application was made available via a webpage we created for the YEP! (See Appendix H). We received 12 applications and accepted all of them. The application can be found in Appendix G. Based on insights gleaned from my interviews, the main criterion we used for participation was a clearly indicated enthusiasm for participating in

the committee. Once the members were chosen, they were notified via phone and email. Our first meeting occurred at the end of February 2018.

Phase 2: Youth Action Committee

Youth for Environment and People (YEP!) began meeting weekly in March 2018 until April 2018. We had seven meetings and one event. My study spanned the entirety of those weekly meetings. I sought to answer the following question: Do the teen participants display increased political self-efficacy as a result of participating in the YEP! program? The study spanned eight weeks and involved weekly and direct interaction with the participants. Therefore, my inferences are limited to short-term changes. Due to the short nature of this study, there were limited opportunities for external events to impact my results. Further, the participants did not age enough for me to consider maturation as a reason for any displayed changes in efficacy. I used two methods to ensure my inferences were associated with the members' participation in the YEP! program. In order to determine if and to what degree the youth displayed the intended PYD outcome of increased self-efficacy, I conducted pre- and post-focus groups as well as participant observation. Self-efficacy is very situational, as an individual can have self-efficacy for some things and not others. Therefore, I specifically focused on the participants' internal, political self-efficacy as described in the literature review.

Focus Groups

Self-efficacy relates to one's perceived capability, thus my data collection focused on the participants' beliefs in what they can do, meaning their capability, and not what they will do, which refers to intent (Bandura, 2006). In order to contextualize the self-efficacy measurement, I concentrated the focus groups on each teen's perceived internal, political self-efficacy within their community. My evaluation was particularly concerned with internal political self-efficacy,

as it aligns strongly with intended PYD outcomes. Collecting qualitative data through focus groups has multiple benefits (Patton, 2002). Focus groups allow for the collection of information from multiple people in a short amount of time. When answering questions in a group setting composed of similar other people, individuals can respond and build-off of others' comments (Patton, 2002). Finally, focus groups can lead to shared meaning. Due to the purpose of my focus groups in evaluating changes over time, the majority of my questions were structured and asked in similar ways between the pre- and post-focus groups (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I was able to compare the answers between the start and the end of the program. Some questions varied due to the flow of the conversation. In order to ensure that all necessary questions were asked at each meeting, I invited a colleague to observe and check-off questions (Patton, 2002). If I missed a question, my colleague could interject before the focus group concluded. These focus groups were recorded and my colleague and I took thorough notes. The colleague took notes on when each member was talking to ensure consistency. Finally, in order to ensure the conversations were not dominated by a few individuals, I encouraged participation from less vocal members (Patton, 2002). These focus groups each lasted for approximately thirty minutes.

Below are examples of focus group questions:

- What are some problems that you see in your schools or communities?
- What ideas do you have for how you could solve these problems? Can you tell me how you would do that?
- Do you think that you could work to solve these problems on your own?

Participant Observation

Throughout the six meetings, I took thorough notes on the behavior of both the group and each member. These notes were dated and included the pseudonym for the person being described. Participant observation allows for the explanation of events through first-hand observation (Patton, 2002). This method allowed for themes and insights to emerge that did not

become clear to me in the focus groups (Patton, 2002). Sometimes individuals do not share everything from an experience during focus groups due to multiple limitations, such as not believing the information is significant (Patton, 2002). By conducting participant observation, I was able to obtain a richer analysis of the events that occurred and the impacts they had on the participants. In order to ensure the teens were self-reflecting, a debrief occurred after a few meetings which encouraged the participants to think about some of their strengths, challenges, and concerns. I took on an “active participant” approach (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), meaning that I was fully participating in and even facilitating activities with the YEP! group. Throughout programming, I was also reflecting on my strengths and challenges as a facilitator. In order to effectively conduct participant observation, I worked to develop a strong rapport with the teens by being transparent about my intentions but also working to ensure they felt comfortable knowing I was observing them. One way to establish rapport is through reciprocity, which, “includes telling the truth when the researcher is asked about the research, his or her goals in research, or his or her own life story” (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p. 50). In order to record my observations, I took field notes on individual and group behavior. My observations were primarily focused on the participants’ political self-efficacy. I noted conversations, non-vocal cues, group dynamics, individual responses to questions, and other indicators which I understood as a reflection of the group’s or individuals’ self-efficacy. Although the intent of my observations was to determine if the participants’ experiences led to changes in their political self-efficacy, I also noted other patterns and themes which emerged during my observations. I noted these additional observations, as I found them informative for evaluating the success of the committee and ultimately our model for this program. Along with the data obtained through the

focus groups, the observations I noted throughout the program became my primary source of data used to determine if the program led to increased political self-efficacy.

Analysis

I analyzed the data gained through the participant observation using the same methods described in the interview process. Each focus group was transcribed into text. I took a much more detailed approach to transcribing the focus group interviews, as I was particularly looking for changes over time. Once the focus groups were transcribed, I then closely analyzed them through inductive coding (Bernard, 2006). My process began with simply reading the texts and underlining information related to how each teen perceived themselves, issues they were concerned about, and ways they believed they could take action. Once patterns in subjects began to appear, I started creating thematic categories. Using the cut and paste feature in in a Word Document, I then used a pile-sorting method (Bernard, 2006) to group common quotes and insights together. My notes were analyzed with a similar approach. I looked for themes that related to confidence and self-efficacy amongst the teens.

Program Development Results

Interviews with Program Coordinators

In addition to examining the literature on youth organizing, I also conducted interviews to better inform myself on best practices for programming which supports youth action. I interviewed coordinators of 5 different programs which support young people as they do service projects and/or take action on issues that are important to them.

I interviewed the primary adult coordinator from the following programs:

- Youth Environmental Activists Minnesota (YEA! MN) is a program of Climate Generation, a nonprofit located in Minneapolis. YEA! MN engages high school students in action projects on climate change and other environmental issues. This program has been around for about ten years;
- Seattle Youth Climate Action Network (Seattle Youth CAN) is a program of the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. The program is a network of teens who attend meetings and trainings around action on climate change. To date, the organization has engaged over 300 youth in events;
- Tenacious Roots is a program of the Seward Park Audubon Society in Seattle, WA. This program is a series of three-week sessions which occur after school. The sessions engage youth in advocacy, organizing, and restoration efforts;
- Evanston Township High School is just North of Chicago. The high school has a community service department which engages teens in service and leadership development through two different programs.

- A state-wide youth program in Alaska engages youth in one to two-year campaigns on a particular social or environmental issue. Youth from across the state come together for two annual summits which prepare them to take action in their own communities.

All of the programs work with high school aged students (grades 9-12). Some programs primarily reach urban students, while others work with rural and suburban youth. Through inductive, qualitative coding, I was able to identify the following thematic categories based on the coordinators' responses. Various patterns emerged within all of these themes which helped inform the planning process for YEP! The most prominent themes were:

1. Program Inspiration
2. Program Structure
3. The Core Group of Youth
4. Events
5. Youth Autonomy
6. Emotional Support
7. Informed Participants
8. Diversity
9. The Campaign/Issue
10. Impacts on Youth

These qualitative data became very important to the development of the YEP! program. Further, not only did these data reveal important insights for our program, but it also allowed me to assemble a list of best practices for youth action programs.

1. Program Inspiration

A common theme which emerged from the interview process was that most of these programs began when a few already engaged youth got involved with the organization, which then led to more formalized programming. For example, at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, the program coordinator spoke about their experience getting Seattle Youth CAN started. They had other youth programs, but not ones which directly engaged youth in action projects. A few of

the teens the coordinator worked with were eager to “lead by example” and take action, specifically on climate change. The organization began to develop a program by working with a small group of teens who were already engaged with the organization and interested in taking action on climate change. Similarly, at Climate Generation, the organization decided to launch a one-time event to get students together from multiple schools to talk about climate change and sustainability. After the event, a teen approached them and said, “We can’t lose this momentum. We have to do something.” That teen then worked with the organization to plan multiple events for the rest of the year to engage young people in action. The coordinator of Seattle Youth CAN said, “... that coupled with a lot of really great teens who I happened to be working with who were asking for opportunities to not only talk to other people about what they could do but lead by example and take action themselves really sparked this idea of Seattle Youth Climate Action Network.” These programs began when already interested and engaged youth pushed these various organizations to provide space and support for youth-led action.

2. Program Schedule

Many of the people I spoke with talked about how their programs have gone through multiple structures and formats. For example, at the Seward Park Audubon Society, the Tenacious Roots youth program has followed various models. The program coordinator told me that:

Previously the way the program worked was it was every Saturday for six weeks. What they were finding was there was a drop off due to having to give up that many of your Saturdays. When I came in I thought to myself, how can I get time with them that doesn’t take away so many of their Saturdays? So the model I came up with was to have meetings on Thursdays after school for three weeks, we would learn about the topic and then meet every Saturday. That way, they were only giving up 3 Saturdays instead of 6.

Scheduling appeared to be one of the more difficult aspects of these programs. For example, the Alaska program, which engages youth from across the state found that the best way to engage young people across such a large geographic region was to have two annual summits, but this was not always how the program was structured. As the coordinator of Seattle Youth CAN said of the program he coordinates, many of these programs take a “trial and error approach”.

3. The Core Group of Youth

Not only did the majority of these programs begin with a few passionate and engaged teens, but another similar pattern emerged. Many of these programs are still supported by a core group of teens. The programs may engage more youth at events, but a smaller group is helping facilitate these events and maintain communication with the organization. For example, Seattle Youth CAN has a committee of youth who help determine the actions the network will take. Another example is YEA! MN, which provides events that are open to any youth, but coordinated and run by a small group of devoted members. This model was developed because the organization recognized the importance of, “putting a lot of resources into a smaller group of students.” These “leaders” in the program take on the most responsibility. For example, the coordinator of the Alaska based program said that, “Each year, we invite back 4 teens that were clear leaders from previous summits to be the trainers. In that role, we meet ahead of time with each other with myself and other adults in the summit and plan in more depth what the summit will look like.” In Evanston Township High School’s community service club, there are students that serve on a leadership team. Each member of this team takes charge of a particular issue or project. For example, they have particular committee leaders devoted to issues such as hunger. Leaders will plan the activities for morning meetings which are open to all students. Within all

these programs, there are various roles the participants can take on and some students inevitably take on more of a leadership role.

4. Events

Many of these programs use events to attract youth who are not already involved and to keep the current members engaged. All of these organizations hold events where youth are taking action or strategizing on how to do so. In the case of Tenacious Roots, it may be in the form of a restoration project on a Saturday. YEA! MN hosts two events each month which are open to any youth who want to participate. The program in Alaska brings together young people from across the state for two annual summits. The Seattle Youth CAN coordinator said that “We have organized a big culminating event for the year, which has been an opportunity to bring other teens into the network that may not have had an opportunity to do this before. It was [an] opportunity for them to connect with teens that were already engaged. And for the summit, it is really an opportunity to bring in community activists and stakeholders.” For many of these programs, events are not only a place for the youth to engage with each other, but also to connect with community members and leaders. Finally, these events also serve as a way to attract more young people to their programs.

5. Youth Autonomy

The youth autonomy theme emerged when I asked questions of the coordinators about how they navigate youth-adult partnerships. I was curious how these programs ensure that the initiatives remain youth-led, but are also still reasonable for the organizations and coordinators to support. One pattern which emerged was that the coordinators try not to intervene, but will on occasion when they believe that their organization cannot support an initiative due to legal barriers or capacity reasons. For example, the coordinator in Minnesota said that when the youth

come up with an idea that the organization doesn't believe they can support, "I'll have an honest conversation with students and say hey this is something as Climate Generation that we can't support, but I support your thinking on this and you should do it on your own if you want to." Similarly, in Alaska, the program coordinator sometimes has to help the participants scale down their goals to something reasonable. The coordinator said that she reminds the youth that, "choosing a campaign is not just about making a difference on something, but also learning the process of developing a campaign.... learning to be strategic about what you work on. Whenever there is an issue with the campaign, I explain why, and they understand and say 'well let's do something else'." Other coordinators mentioned that sometimes the members will create plans which ultimately become tasks the adult coordinators have to complete. For example, at Seattle Youth CAN, the coordinator talked about how they found that when goals became too big, the responsibilities often fell on staff. Therefore, they work with the participants to make attainable goals. In all of these programs, adults are present and do play a seemingly crucial role. They guide the participants and provide both practical and emotional support. As the coordinator of YEA! MN said, navigating youth autonomy "is a dance". This adult facilitation appears to be important for ensuring that these programs continue and that group progress and knowledge is not lost. As the program coordinator at Evanston Township High School said, "It is important to have a steward of the program." This "steward" is often an adult, as young people will move on.

6. Emotional Support

The need for coordinators to be aware of the participants' emotions emerged as a theme through the interviews. The coordinator of YEA! MN in Minnesota talked about the importance of helping their teens navigate their emotions. The coordinator said that, "The basic tenets of how we do our work is we are grounded in a sense of self, so [we] help students understand their

gifts, passions, their privileges, and oppressions and [help them] understand how that impacts how they take action in the world.” Further, in Alaska, the program coordinator encourages the participants to reflect on the progress of their campaign: “After each summit, we reflect and focus on relationship building. I really reserve time to think about the relationship we built.” The coordinator talked about how successes such as building important relationships are often overlooked in these initiatives. A similar sentiment was echoed by the Evanston Township High School coordinator who said that they make sure to celebrate success and emphasize the importance of their process over their product.

7. Informed Participants

Almost all of the coordinators discussed in some way the importance of the participants being informed about the topic they are taking action on. All of the programs involve some type of educational activity before any action is taken. At Evanston Township High School, the student leaders are responsible for educating their peers on the issue, which means they need to have strong background knowledge on the topic. For example, they often raise funds for an issue/campaign by selling things in their school. The coordinator mentioned that they work with students to make sure that they are not just asking their peers to buy things, but also simultaneously educating people on the issues. At YEA! MN, the members learn about the issue through partnerships with other organizations or by activities prepared and led by the core group of youth. The coordinator of Seattle Youth CAN said that one of their main foci for the program is climate literacy. The youth take time to learn about climate change before taking action. Similarly, at Seward Park Audubon Society, the coordinator of Tenacious Roots said that, “One of the main things I want them to leave with at the end of the program is a better understanding of climate change.” Therefore, although producing change and learning organizing strategies is

the main focus for most of these programs, making sure the participants are becoming more informed about these particular issues is also a critical component.

8. Diversity

Multiple coordinators spoke about the importance of diversity in their programming. This is something that most of the coordinators brought up without my prompting. For example, at the program in Alaska, the coordinator discussed the importance of not having a rigorous application process so that more young people apply. She said that:

Early on we integrated some specific goals about racial diversity and geographic diversity. Balance of male and female. And that takes precedence over any previous [goals]. Our theory of change is that everybody should have a voice on these issues. And often [these issues are affecting] Alaskan native communities, lower-income communities, and communities of color a lot more. And those are not necessarily the people that are going to have an A+ but that does not mean that people shouldn't be included. Our application process is actually a lot less about how well you can write and things like that and more about how passionate you are about these issues. Smaller details can matter more to us in the application process and that has turned out really well this fall.

Each program coordinator mentioned the importance of diversity in some way. Some programs are more focused on racial diversity, while others are concerned about socioeconomic diversity.

9. The Campaign/Issue

Many of the coordinators I spoke with discussed how the youth would organize around one issue every year, or in the case of the Alaska program, sometimes every two years. This model allows the youth to focus their efforts, build upon successes, and learn from their challenges. In the Alaska based program, the coordinator will survey members every year or two years about the issues they are concerned about. Then, the coordinator will look at the most popular ones, reach out to various organizations, and see where they will have the most capacity. She will then pick a campaign. In the Seattle Youth CAN program, the youth committee will help determine the focus of their campaign. Although the greater vision of the program is for

young people to take action on climate change, the teen leaders take the charge in choosing the more specific area to work on. In Evanston Township High School's Emerge Program, the students will fundraise and organize on typically one issue per year. The coordinator in Alaska said that, "Youth working on a single issue was much more powerful than different chapters working on local issues." Choosing one issue per year allows the program and its participants to gain momentum and increase their capacity for organizing.

10. Impacts on Youth

Unsurprisingly, each of the coordinators talked about how their respective programs had an impact on the participants. The majority of these programs focus on organizing and leadership skills. For example, Evanston Township High School's Emerge Program conducts conflict resolution training with the students. There was a general theme of positive impacts, but no clear patterns. Each coordinator spoke about different changes they have observed. In Seattle Youth CAN, the youth have increased climate literacy and more interest in engagement. In YEA! MN, the participants seem more confident taking action. The program coordinator said that he has seen changes in participants even after one meeting. Similarly, after participating in two sessions of Tenacious Roots, which means six weeks of programming, the coordinator said that she observed changes in the participants. She also said, "the really neat thing that we have seen now, two of the teens have decided to start paths in environmental studies and environmental science. They directly attributed their desire to study that to their participation in the program." Other program coordinators spoke about how their past participants have stayed involved in the organization or pursued studies in environmental fields, while others said they are still trying to figure out a way to track this.

Interviews with Community Members

I also conducted unstructured interviews with community members who have knowledge of youth culture in Whatcom County. I chose these people based on recommendations from Priscilla and Riley, as well as through an internet search. I recorded one of these interviews, and for the rest I took notes. I interviewed the following community members:

- A teacher who works in a Whatcom County school district outside of the city;
- A teacher who works in a Whatcom County school district in the city;
- An education consultant in the county;
- A coordinator of a YMCA afterschool program;
- A local foundation employee who runs a youth philanthropy program.

Not as many patterns emerged from these interviews as did with the program coordinator ones, but I was able to identify a few themed categories:

1. Youth Concern for Social/Environmental Issues
2. Barriers to Youth Participation
3. Knowledge-Action Gap

1. Youth Concern for Social/Environmental Issues

It was clear through all the interviews I conducted that youth in the area are concerned about various social and environmental issues. Some of the issues these individuals have observed young people expressing concern about are climate change, domestic violence, LGBTQ rights, sexual harassment, racial justice, and mental health. An example of youth in the area showing care about local issues is through the youth philanthropy program. In this program, high school students are reviewing grant proposal and awarding money to environmental initiatives. The coordinator of this program said that many of the members have expressed a

desire to do more by actually getting involved with these organizations. Further, one of the teachers I talked with told me about how a domestic-violence prevention group came to their school and multiple students were eager to get involved. Some students are active in scout programs or in youth groups. Yet, many of these individuals told me that there are still untapped avenues for youth participation, but there are multiple barriers preventing some young people from getting involved.

2. Barriers to Youth Participation

I asked each of these community members what they thought were barriers to youth participation in organizing or out-of-school programs. Multiple potential barriers were mentioned. For example, the education consultant I spoke with discussed young people's "obsessive academic and sports involvement" preventing them from getting involved in their communities. Multiple people I spoke with discussed the barrier of transportation and specifically how it prevents young people who live outside the city from participating in activities. The lack of good public transportation outside the city was mentioned as the primary reason for the transportation barrier. The divide between the City of Bellingham and the surrounding county was mentioned multiple times. For example, the YMCA program only occurs at the Bellingham branch location even though there are other locations outside the city. The coordinator said that other communities do not seem interested. The teacher who works in the greater county area also mentioned this divide, saying, "Frankly, another barrier is this county versus city. It's just a political reality....it is pretty obvious that there are people in the county who view people in the city as not having their interests in mind." He went on to say that, "This is a barrier for the youth out there who are caught between several value systems. A value system that supports their way of life and has supported their family for generations is at odds

now with what they are learning in school.” This conflict of values was also mentioned by the city-based teacher who mentioned that within their high school they have political and socioeconomic diversity, which sometimes creates conflict. Finally, another barrier which was mentioned was identity. The education consultant I spoke with talked about how for many young people, how they are perceived is the driving force for what they do. He said that kids who become active are often on the margins of social groups. Similarly, the city-based teacher mentioned that he has observed how when students enter high school, a “separation of self occurs.”

3. Knowledge-Action Gap

Another barrier emerged which became deserving of its own category. Many of the interviewees discussed how teens seem aware of issues, but their behaviors will run counter to that knowledge. For example, the city-based teacher discussed how many of the students express concern about climate change, but they do not take these issues into consideration in their consumer habits. Further, the teacher outside the city said that, “Youth are primed to do something. They know there are problems. They don’t know about solutions.” He discussed how sometimes these students need adults to provide support before they can take action on their own. This sentiment was shared by the education consultant who talked about a need to nurture the value of taking action in young people. For example, he discussed his experiences working with teens on service projects. Often these students would resist this work until they actually got involved and then realize the value. Yet, he also stated that he believes youth in Whatcom County are more engaged than young people from other areas. Many of the people I interviewed talked about how teens need some form of mentorship in order to feel comfortable taking action on their own.

Applications to YEP!

These interviews illuminated multiple themes and patterns amongst five youth organizing initiatives. Youth programming which focuses on organizing is complex and is often refined through trial and error approaches. Although these programs are designed to be youth-led, negotiating youth autonomy can be difficult as there are adults running these programs who are trying to make sure the participants have good experiences, while they simultaneously become familiar with the challenges of organizing. As echoed in the literature, one of the primary roles of adults in these programs is to provide emotional support, reflection opportunities, and sometimes push-back for the participants. Adults will tell the participants when their goals might not be reasonable or if the host organization cannot support a particular idea. Further, adults can help young people recognize their emotions and the other important successes happening outside the campaign goals, such as the important relationships which were formed through their efforts. The adults in these coordinator positions play an important role, as they ensure these programs can continue building capacity.

Just as these programs have adult “stewards”, they also often have a core group of youth who are in regular communication with the organization. These youths take on a leadership role and work on engaging their peers in action projects and educational activities. By having a few youth who are regularly meeting with the organization, the programs maintain a degree of youth autonomy. These youths are taking part in the primary decision-making for the trajectory of their campaigns.

The majority of these programs started with a different operating model than they are currently following. Some programs engage youth from multiple schools and sometimes different cities and towns. It was important for these organizations to develop realistic time

commitments for the participants. As displayed with the Tenacious Roots program, the coordinator found that they were losing participants by asking them to give up too many of their Saturdays. Further, some programs changed their locations or meeting times to become more accessible.

These programs have skill-building goals, but they are all also hoping to increase the participants' background knowledge on the subjects they are organizing on, whether it be climate literacy or restoration efforts. Most of the coordinators spoke about how they feel the participants are more informed about the issues after participating in the program. This knowledge is fostered through formal educational opportunities, but can also be attributed to the fact that many of these programs commit to one cause over a one to two-year time span. This seems to allow the campaigns to gain momentum. This commitment to a particular cause seems to be something that all of the programs prioritize, and ultimately we decided to do this with the YEP! program.

My conversations with these coordinators helped me maintain my confidence for the vision I had for our program in some areas while pushing me to rethink our approach in others. Early on, we conceptualized a formal program, where there would be specific activities happening at each meeting and a campaign focus that had specific goals chosen before the first meeting. After chatting with these coordinators, it became clear that this may not be the best way to build momentum for a youth organizing program. Rather than working to create a structured program, it became clear that we should engage youth less formally, such as through a committee. This way, the teens could take the lead in deciding what they would organize on and how. Taking what I learned about how many of these organizations engaged larger groups of youth through events, I chatted with Priscilla about making the committee's goal to plan an event for Spring 2018. The youth would then come in with their various ideas for what to take action

on and then we would lend support and resources as they prepared for this event. It appears that these events allow young people to have something to work towards or to encourage them to develop deadlines for their campaign.

Although our visioning for the program shifted from these results, I also felt encouraged that my own role would be beneficial in the program. Negotiating youth autonomy is a challenge in all of these programs, but adults do play an important role. The interviewees all brought up similar points to the literature I read. Adult coordinators of these programs play an important role in making sure that the young people involved are reflecting on their actions, successes, and challenges. From these results, I decided to build in opportunities for reflection and group dialogue around the participants' hopes and concerns for their campaign. Further, I included in the design opportunities for team and trust building to help our space feel supportive and welcoming. Finally, as we progressed through the planning of this program, I kept referring back to the trial and error pattern which emerged from these interviews. Our program design would probably not be perfect on the first try, but we would quickly learn our flaws through observation and feedback.

There were not as many patterns which emerged from the community member interviews as there were from the program coordinator ones. One reason for this might be that all of these individuals seem to have interacted with youth in the county in different ways. Some work with youth in formal environments like schools while others have experience coordinating less-structured educational activities. It did become clear across all the interviews that young people in the area could benefit from more opportunities to take action on issues they care about. The need for some sort of mentorship became a pattern across these interviews, which reassured me that YEP! would be filling a need in the community.

The barriers to participation which emerged from these interviews became an important consideration for us as we planned the program. We discussed various possibilities of where we could meet that would allow more teens to participate. Ultimately, however, our recruitment was not very successful outside the city so we eventually decided to consistently meet at the RE Sources offices in Bellingham. I returned to these interviews during the program implementation phase as I began to see connections to the points some of these individuals made about young people's identity, as well as the knowledge-action gap. The observations I noted during program implementation proved to agree with some of the points made during these interviews.

Youth organizing through youth-adult partnerships creates a seemingly unique community. Therefore, the program coordinator interviews provided insight into how these communities are fostered. The coordinator interviews were instrumental in shaping the formation of YEP! and evaluating the program as it progressed. Finally, the community member interviews helped me consider the context of this program its potential needs, barriers, and impacts according to location.

Designing YEP!

Once Priscilla and I agreed upon creating a committee of youth instead of a formal program, the design process became more about building in support systems for the future members and less about creating activities and lessons. First, in order to provide opportunities for role modeling, I reached out to Western students with knowledge of local environmental issues and invited them to present at our meetings. I also reached out to the various program coordinators I interviewed and asked them if they could connect me with some of their current and past members. I was able to set up an in-person visit with someone that had participated in the Alaska program and a video conference with a current member of YEA! MN. Since the literature discusses the importance of young people seeing others their age taking action, I felt these opportunities would be important.

I also scheduled opportunities for debriefing into each meeting. Both the literature and my interviews informed me that having opportunities for youth to reflect upon their organizing process is important for the emotional health of the participants. These opportunities would also help me with some formative assessment of how YEP! was going. Further, I reached out to a local organization that does team building and conflict resolution activities with young people. I described to them our program and how the members would be making decisions together and asked if they could provide some type of training for the members on these topics. They agreed to put something together and offered their services in-kind as part of a grant they had.

Both the interviews I conducted and the articles I read included information about the importance of introducing young people to the various skills needed for organizing work. I wanted to have three workshops: one on starting a campaign, one on promoting a campaign, and another on influencing decision makers. Priscilla recommended various staff members at RE

Sources who could lead these workshops. I reached out to them, described my goals, and scheduled a time that they could come in. Finally, I left free time in each meeting for the group to plan and discuss with limited adult influence. The literature argues that youth autonomy is fostered when young people take the lead in decision-making. I wanted the members to have the opportunity to talk amongst themselves about the issues they are most concerned about with limited adult influence.

One of the bigger challenges for designing this committee was coming up with a name. I brainstormed multiple ones such as Youth for Environment and Society (YES! Whatcom), Young Voices for Change, and Teen Action Group (TAG Whatcom). I then sent them to Priscilla who shared them with the rest of the staff at RE Sources. The staff added to the list names like Youth Community Builders, Young Future Shapers, Youth Community Builders, Youth Driving Change / Youth Making Change, Youth Engagement Corps, and Youth for Action. We wanted something catchy that would be attractive to young people. Priscilla sent some to teens she knew and they gave feedback. Youth for Environment and Society became a leading contender, but some felt the word society was too general, which is why we ultimately chose Youth for Environment and People (YEP!). We wanted potential members to know that this group would not be restricted to taking action on only environmental issues and I was not sure if teens in the area were familiar with how environmental and social issues intersect.

Once we had a name and a format, I created an application and copy for a webpage. A RE Sources staff member added a page to the RE Sources website with all the information I provided (See Appendix H). The webpage included a link to the application on a Google form. In order to get teens to apply, I began the recruitment process described in the methods section. An outline of the YEP! meetings is included in Appendix I.

Program Implementation Results

One of the first challenges of implementing YEP! was finding a time everyone could meet. By the application deadline on February 26, 2018, we had 12 applications. All of the individuals who signed up had other work, school, or family obligations. After multiple emails, calls, and polls, we decided Friday afternoons would be the best time to meet. I hesitated to schedule our meetings on Fridays, but we decided to go with this time in order to ensure the majority of the members could attend. We would meet seven times over eight weeks. During these meetings, the members would choose an issue to take action on and plan an event to engage their peers and draw attention to their cause. We would support the members by providing workshops related to organizing and activities to build community.

We held our first meeting at the local REI Store's community room. I was the first to arrive. I rearranged furniture and awaited the participants' arrival. I thought maybe five of them would show up. This doubt was partly due to my pessimism, but also because of my previous experiences running youth programming. I often found teens would sign-up for things, but then not attend. The participants started to trickle in. From here on, I refer to each YEP! member as "teen," "member," "participant," or by one of the following initials which do not actually match their real names: MK, LG, ST, KL, MA, DV, KD, CF, and MT.

First came MK. This member helped me move chairs around and we chatted about her classes. The other members started to arrive. In total, 9 people showed up. We started with ice-breakers. I asked the participants to go around the room and say a story about their name. I started, then the participants looked around, hoping someone would volunteer to go next. Eventually, they went in a counter clockwise circle, sharing their names and a brief story to help us remember. There was a feeling of awkwardness in the room. Some participants knew multiple

other members while others knew none. They seemed unsure of how the program would go and whether it would be a good fit for their interests. To get our conversations started, I had invited a few students in Western Washington's Huxley College of the Environment to talk about their research and how it may apply to community action. Only one person could come and his presentation was focused on alternative energy, and specifically on community solar projects. I was surprised when the members started asking him question after question. They were so curious how these projects worked, how beneficial they were, and if there were any potential barriers. I recognized that all of the members were curious people, eager to learn and take action. This observation was reaffirmed in the first focus group I conducted.

After our guest left, I gave a brief presentation on the structure of YEP! and then I provided some examples of youth-led organizing initiatives. From here, we moved into the focus groups, which five of the teens agreed to participate in (See Appendix F). The goal of the focus group was to help me determine the participants' base level of political self-efficacy. It is important to note that this first focus group was brief, partly due to the fact that we quickly ran out of time and the teens' parents were arriving to pick them up, but also because the group dynamics had not yet been formed. The members were still trying to get a sense of one another. Therefore, they limited how much they shared. Overall, participants seemed confident in their ability, but unsure how to initiate action. One thing they all agreed on was a sentiment expressed LG: "I want to be a positive change in the world." Our conversations focused on issues they were concerned about and how they might intervene.

As the meetings went on, some members stopped attending. In total, we had seven committed members, but there were always a few that could not come to a meeting. Although I was happy with this number, having fewer participants come than originally signed-up impacted

the members' self-efficacy. They often said things like, "Is this it?" and "Where is everyone else?". Throughout the meetings, they would question why some of their peers stopped coming or would express concern about their ability to reach their goals with only a few people. Priscilla and I eventually recognized that when we expressed our disappointment in the lack of attendance, this furthered the participants' concern. We worked to give praise to the members who did show up at each meeting. Our approach to programming centered around remaining flexible. We had structured workshops each time we met, but we left the planning time up to the participants. This approach had both positive and negative outcomes, which became apparent throughout our seven meetings. After this first meeting, we regularly met at the RE Sources' offices. Priscilla and I agreed that in order to make sure the participants felt they had a space in the organization, we would use the same room for each meeting.

At our second meeting, we had a guest speaker who was an organizer as a teenager and then a workshop on organizing led by a staff member at RE Sources. Looking around the room, I noticed almost every member taking notes, often very thoroughly. They asked the previous teen organizer questions about how to produce environmental change and how much time she devoted to her campaigns. Some questions were more specific such as, "What do you do after you get a petition?" After our guest left, the organizing workshop began. The facilitator asked the participants, "What is a campaign?" None of the teens offered an answer. Further, when he asked, "Who are decision makers?", the participants looked around the room with hesitation. Once again, I noticed all the members were taking notes. The members mostly asked questions about timelines for campaigns and where to start during the beginning phases of planning. The facilitator talked about the need to create an overall vision for a campaign, but also emphasized the importance of detail and having specific goals. This advice was something the teens

continued to refer back to. The facilitator also referred to the acronym SMART or Specific, Measurable, Aspirational, Realistic, and Time-Bound. He said these were important characteristics of a campaign goal. This acronym became something both Priscilla and I referred back to throughout the program.

After the workshop, we shifted into planning for our campaign and ultimately the event scheduled for late April, 2018. I had asked each member to come prepared with an idea to take action on, but when I asked them to share, they were mostly silent. In order to get the conversation going, I asked them to go up to the whiteboard in our meeting room and write down their ideas. Their proposals were varied. ST expressed interest in doing salmon habitat restoration and said we could partner with a local organization that has this as their mission. One member opposed this idea, saying that she had already done something like this and preferred to “do something new”. LG was excited about the salmon habitat restoration idea and stated the importance of salmon to the Lummi Nation. This same teen also proposed the group could work on increasing recycling and composting in schools.

ST expressed that she wanted to get Washington state to adopt policy in-line with the Paris Agreement. She expressed some disdain for the idea of collaborating with current efforts stating that she felt young people would only be recognized for their abilities if they did something different. KL proposed two ideas. The first was to teach younger children about the importance of sustainability. The other was to work on making it a requirement for all high school students to take an environmental science class before they graduate. KL also expressed that she would be willing to take action on any of the issues the group brainstormed. Finally, I also received a detailed email from CF who was not able to make the meeting. She stated her passion for taking action on homelessness, which she stated was a significant problem in the

community. In the email, she included statistics about homelessness and various ways the group could take action on this issue from hosting a food drive to providing employment support. This was by far the most detailed proposal.

Each idea was unique and Priscilla and I were unsure how to get the group to compromise on something. The original goal of the meeting was to vote on an issue, but the members decided to wait until the following week, so the rest of their peers who were not in attendance could share their thoughts. The members made this decision without the influence of Priscilla or me. The participants talked amongst themselves and agreed it would be fair to wait. During this meeting, the personalities of each member were becoming clearer. Some were more vocal and had the ability to steer the group, while others were quieter and “went along” with the decisions of the rest of the group. As noted in more detail later, I began to notice nonverbal cues of hesitation and frustration from some of the less vocal participants.

Our third meeting had a similar structure to the previous one. We video chatted with a teen participant from YEA! MN (one of the programs I included in my interviews) and then another RE Sources staff member led a marketing workshop with the teens. The YEP! members had a lot of questions during the video chat conversation. Their questions focused on the structure of the YEA! MN meetings, the issues those members have taken action on, and how many people come to their meetings. After our video chat, we moved into the marketing workshop. The facilitator asked the members to go around the room and share where they get their news from and which social media platforms they prefer. There was a mix of responses. Some members shared that they check a wide variety of news sources, while others stated they do not regularly check the news. The members seemed to have more opinions about social media. Some expressed frustration with how social media has made their peers obsessed with

self-image. The facilitator discussed the importance of being aware of who your audience is during a campaign and then provided a brief training on how to create a press release and write an engaging post on Facebook. The members asked questions about how to engage people who care about an issue but may not know how to get involved.

After this workshop, we continued our discussion about which issue they wanted to work on. In retrospect, I wish I had intervened to encourage the participants to come to a decision. The members who had been missing at the previous meeting were present, but now others were not able to make it. Again, the teens hesitated about making a decision without all members present. Priscilla and I encouraged them to chat about the various issues, why they felt they were important, and how the group might intervene. The participants expressed concern that their campaign would not continue after the meetings finished. One member shared how she had a group like this before in her school, but once they stopped meeting nothing got done. I began to sense their concern for achieving the “big picture”. As the program moved on, I noticed they had strong efficacy for specific tasks, but they were doubtful about reaching their end goal. I reminded them they were just working towards the first steps and campaigns can take multiple years before they achieve their goal. I also shared with them what I had learned from the coordinator interviews and how some of the programs will devote two years to a particular campaign.

Nonetheless, their conversation continued and they began a process of elimination, removing issues they felt were not practical or did not have a clear direction. Two issues appeared as favorites. The first was making it a requirement for high school students to take an environmental science class and the other was to do some kind of educational campaign around homelessness. These two issues were both so different and I had a really hard time imagining

how the group would compromise on something. Each participant seemed to deeply care about the issues they chose. The group decided to have everyone vote before the next meeting on which issue they preferred. Therefore, I created a poll after the meeting and emailed it to everyone.

I heard sighs and saw eye rolls, as I told everyone at our fourth meeting that the votes were tied (not everyone had voted). I realized we had spent too much time deciding and I began to get nervous we would run out of planning time. We temporarily put this conundrum aside as we had another workshop. This was a civics workshop which focused on how to reach politicians and draw attention to a cause. Again, this workshop was led by a RE Sources staff member. The members had some questions, but not many. Many of them learned for the first time who their local politicians were. After this presentation, we got back to our discussion on which issue we should choose. I began to get a sense of how each participant approaches conflict and debate. Some members were very adamant about their position. Regarding taking action on homelessness, one member said, “that would be too easy and nobody would change their minds.” I could see some signs of disagreement with this statement, but nobody spoke up to counter the point. I am not sure if this was by coincidence, but the softer-spoken individuals in the group all seemed to favor doing something about homelessness. Later, one of the members in favor of working on an issue related to homelessness told me she had been dreading our meeting because she does not like conflict and has trouble sharing her opinion. She also noted that she was surprised at how well the conversation went. Priscilla and I encouraged the participants to come to a compromise. The one common goal each of these different campaign proposals shared was that they both wanted to educate others. In one case, their peers and community members might become more aware of issues surrounding homelessness, whereas in the other case high school

students would become more aware of environmental issues. I asked the members if there was a way we could achieve both goals. I suggested finding ways to inform their peers about local community issues.

Eventually, the group decided that they wanted their peers to learn by volunteering with local organizations which work on various social and/or environmental issues. They decided to pressure the school board to make volunteering a requirement for high school students. I noticed a sense of relief among all the members as they looked around and realized this was something they could all be happy with. Eager to get started, we jumped into planning mode and I encouraged the participants to think about which tasks they could start working on. The members kept proposing ideas until ST pointed out to us that we were ignoring everything we had learned in the organizing workshop. The members all agreed that it would be important to take a step-back and work on drafting the vision, mission, and goal of our work. Over the next week, members added ideas to a shared, online document. The members determined their goal was to develop service-learning opportunities in high schools and ultimately get a service-learning class together. The participants had various notions of what it means to take action, and this continued to play an important role throughout each meeting. Some sought immediate change and wanted to physically do something like plant a garden or run a food drive, while others were interested in influencing policy and institutional change. Those who favored the latter, I also observed had more self-efficacy. This difference in efficacy is not necessarily due to one approach being better, but rather because these members believed they could make an impact even if any results would not be seen during their tenure as YEP! members. They had confidence in their ability to make a difference on a larger scale and influence decision makers.

Once a decision was made regarding which issue to take action on, I had to grapple with my own bias towards service-learning. Further, I felt a little directionless with the topic. I had expected them to choose a seemingly more straightforward issue such as banning straws in restaurants or encouraging their peers to use alternative modes of transportation to school. I did eventually decide to act on what I learned from the literature and encourage the members to think more critically about the issue. I asked questions such as, “Who does service benefit?” and “Will students learn from this if it is mandatory?” Some members shared my critical perspective. For example, LG came to our next meeting with information on why service-learning is not always meaningful for students and the various barriers some students face reaching required hours. The members discussed how they might combat these barriers. ST suggested their teachers could help students connect what they learn in the community back to the classroom. The same member suggested service could happen during class time. For example, representatives from various organizations could visit high school classrooms and suggest projects which could be implemented in the class. LG suggested those who do not have the time to do service due to family or work obligations could instead write a paper. LG continued to express doubt that mandatory service was the right approach throughout our remaining meetings, but the group stuck with this approach and worked to find ways to alleviate her concerns.

Between meetings 4 and 5, Priscilla and I met to chat about the YEP! members’ goal. We both agreed the ultimate goal would take some time and brainstormed steps they could take to eventually achieve it. We both acknowledged getting a service requirement and/or a service class in the schools would not be possible in the time we had. Instead, Priscilla suggested we have the members work towards getting a required day of service for all freshman the following school year. I agreed this would be a more realistic approach. With this goal, the members could work

on pressuring the school board to implement a service day. At our next meeting, I proposed this idea to the members and they seemed excited. They felt this would be more achievable in the remaining time we had together. There were four members at this meeting, and their conversations had a courteous tone. They took time to hear one another's opinions and to make sure they were all in agreement on how to proceed. I noted, however, that some members seemed to show non-verbal disagreement with an idea, through shrugging and facial expressions, but did not verbally express these concerns and difference in opinions. Often, I had to directly ask these participants to share what they were thinking. KL took on a leadership role during this meeting. She took note of the various suggestions of the other members and wrote down tasks with corresponding deadlines. This meeting felt very productive compared to our other ones. I also began to notice unexpected benefits of the program for the participants. They began talking with each other about subjects outside the program. Two members shared job opportunities while others talked about other programs and committees they were involved in. Thus, YEP! became a kind of networking opportunity for the participants. I began to notice how confident the participants were when it came to their ability to complete specific tasks. For example, CF confidently agreed to email the district's superintendent and ask for a meeting. All the members agreed to come up with an "elevator pitch" and talking points for their campaign.

The YEP! members were able to identify various tasks for their campaign. Since the audience for their campaign were their peers and the institutions they already interact with, they had more efficacy for creating a plan. They could easily identify both their allies and potential opposition. Being able to work within their schools, which are places very familiar to them, increased the members' self-efficacy. Further, the participants started to identify potential barriers to their campaign. For example, one member asked, "What if all the students can't

volunteer on the same day?” The others immediately starting naming alternatives. This was a sign to me of increased self-efficacy as they were not discouraged by these barriers, but rather saw them as an opportunity to problem solve. Although some members still held back from sharing their ideas and concerns, all of them were talking and sharing more than they had at the first few meetings. This increased vocalization of ideas was partly due to the relationship building happening between the members, but also because they were referring back to the various workshops they had and applying what they learned to the campaign.

Meeting 5 also had a workshop, which was focused on team-building. A facilitator from a local conflict resolution center joined us and asked the members to share a bit about YEP! and anything about the current group dynamics. All of the participants shared how they felt the group worked well together. Towards the end of the meeting, I noticed some participants were eager to leave. They explained that they needed to make sure they could catch the bus. Then, one member offered to give everyone a ride so they could stay longer. This interaction displayed a sign of teamwork, but also reaffirmed the transportation barrier many of the interviewees mentioned.

At our sixth meeting, we had a lot of tasks to accomplish, but our plans were briefly derailed by a conversation which ensued about the ultimate goal of the campaign. Only two members were present as there were various other school events happening that night. Both of the present members showed signs of disappointment. They felt their peers were not as committed as them. These two members had consistently attended the meetings and were always willing to take on tasks. These same two members, though, often had diverging opinions. This difference in opinion was exacerbated by the fact that one was more outspoken than the other. There was slight disagreement over our approach. The group was not able to schedule a meeting with the superintendent and one member thought this would be important to do before our launch

event. Even though I agreed it would be beneficial to meet with someone from the school district, I encouraged the members to stay focused on the event we would be hosting in two weeks. I reminded them that this event would be a way to draw others into the YEP! program, an opportunity to take action, and a chance to share with others the goal of their campaign.

The two present members debated a bit about whether our goal should ultimately be to have a one-time service event or to implement a service-learning class. LG again reminded us why required service was not the best route to take. I realized I had been contributing to the shift in focus of our conversation. Priscilla and I worked to get the group back on track. With only two weeks until our event, we did not have time to change course. We encouraged the present members to think of a schedule for their event. Based on our suggestions and their own ideas, they decided they would give a presentation on YEP! and their campaign. Then, they would have a guided conversation with their peers about everyone's concerns within the community. Next, they would lead breakout sessions on letter writing and petition creation. Finally, they would end with a service project in the community. We ended the meeting with a clear plan. I would send out an email with all the tasks to complete. Priscilla would organize a service project. LG created a morning announcement for their schools and agreed to collect materials for the breakout sessions. Finally, ST agreed to work on recruitment and create a flyer. We ended the meeting and I followed up with whole group the following Monday.

Our last meeting before the event felt fun and relaxed. We had a clear plan in place. I had prepared some materials on letter writing and petition drafting so the members would be prepared to lead their breakout sessions. We went over these materials and I asked for volunteers to lead each session. The members quickly divided themselves into two groups and then worked to divvy roles for each section. We put the schedule on the board and went over who was doing

what. The members quickly volunteered to lead specific tasks. The participants did not seem concerned about the event, but did express some worry that they would not have an audience. I asked them how recruitment had gone. They successfully got a morning announcement running in their schools and put flyers up. KL shared with the group how she put flyers all around the school before asking permission. After placing the flyers on the walls of her school's hallways she sent an email asking for permission. She received a reply saying that she could not place the flyers up. She told us that she thought to herself, "Oh well, too late." This was a sign to me that she felt confident taking action for something she thought was important without asking for permission. Our conversations then shifted from the event and became more casual. We were all laughing as members shared funny stories about themselves. Many of the members were seniors, so they were sharing events they were looking forward to and their future plans. I also ran the second focus group at this meeting, which helped me measure progress, but also revealed the members' favorite aspects of the YEP! program. When I asked them about their least favorite aspects, the only response was how it was frustrating when other members did not show up for meetings. Ultimately, the last meeting and focus group revealed that overall the members had a positive experience in the program.

Sunday, April, 29th was the day of our event. One member was not able to come and another did not show up, so we had 5 YEP! members there ready to lead the event. There were three other teenagers who showed up. Priscilla and I seemed to be the only ones who were concerned. The YEP! members were all in good moods and asking when they could get started. I was surprised to observe their willingness to run through the schedule as planned despite the low attendance. KL stood up and passionately spoke about YEP! and why they chose their campaign. LG and ST gave a presentation on their goals and how they planned to achieve them. Then, KL

and MA led a team-building exercise. Next, we moved into the action items. KL had prepared a list of administrators for the school district and walked the group through how to write a persuasive letter. They answered most of the guests' questions, only differing a few of them to Priscilla and me. Finally, LG went over the purpose of the petition until we realized we were running out of time and needed to get to the planned service project. Priscilla had prepared a project to mark storm drains with educational signage about where the water goes. Before we went outside, Priscilla gave a brief overview of stormwater using a model. We then went out to mark the drains and we also brought supplies to clean up trash along the way. All the YEP! members were enthusiastic about this project. They each made sure that they had a role and were contributing in some way. They chatted as they picked up trash and marked the drains. Eventually, we made our way back to RE Sources where we picked up the room. We then all stood in a circle and Priscilla and I shared our appreciation for their participation in YEP!

Throughout the program, I struggled to balance my multiple roles. I had to consistently remind myself to take notes while facilitating discussion. Further, I often hesitated to intervene when I felt the members needed to make a decision. This hesitation led to more challenges. It took the group multiple meetings to decide what they wanted to take action on which led to us having less planning time. Once the group did decide, the path forward was hard for me to conceptualize. I had originally imagined these young people choosing to act on something more specific. I could sense the members' anxiety over our limited time together and many of them questioned what would happen after the program was over. Most of the members were seniors and knew they would not be coming back the following year so they were concerned their efforts would be lost.

Priscilla and I met many times to discuss the future of the program. YEP! was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation. Therefore, the program had some limited funds to continue. We also debriefed with the members to see where they felt the program could improve. Some aspects of YEP! the members enjoyed most were the opportunities to meet other youth organizers, connect with students from other high schools, work with RE Sources staff members, do hands-on projects, and share ideas with each other. Some of the suggestions for improvement included having an issue picked out beforehand and meeting at a different time. Members also reiterated their disappointment when their peers did not attend meetings. Finally, they all agreed that making the program last longer would be beneficial. This information helped us think about a future model for YEP!, which is discussed in the conclusion. Through my observations during the program and from the two focus groups, I was able to identify multiple themes. These themes mostly centered around the participants' political self-efficacy, but other important insights emerged from the data as well:

1. High Efficacy for Specific Tasks
2. Context is Important for Efficacy
3. Strong Group Efficacy
4. Attendance of Peers Impacts Efficacy
5. Time Impacts Efficacy
6. Previous Organizing Experience Equals Higher Efficacy
7. Identity Plays an Important Role
8. Critical Thinking Skills
9. Differing Views on how Change Happens
10. Role Modeling is Important for Efficacy
11. Multiple Entry Points for Youth-Led Organizing
12. Civic Knowledge

1. High Efficacy for Specific Tasks

Throughout each YEP! meeting, I noted how each participant willingly took on tasks and felt confident in their ability to complete them. Each member would volunteer to take on a task

without much hesitation. This was a shift from what I found in the focus group. At the beginning of the program, the members seemed confident in their ability to produce overall change, but had difficulties naming specific tasks they could do to get to their final goal. For example, when I asked the group how they would take action on issues they are concerned about, one member said, “We could have like uh a big event like a clean-up event. We did a beach clean-up at our school, so something of that variety.” When thinking about taking action, the members often named the end goal and did not really discuss the process for reaching it. This pattern changed throughout the meetings as we had workshops and discussions on the specific steps a campaign should develop before getting started. The members became more aware that before beginning a campaign, a lot of visioning and discussion happens. This was reaffirmed when ST reminded the group in one meeting that we were moving ahead with our plans too quickly and we needed to talk about the process for reaching our goal first.

2. Context is Important to Efficacy

Throughout our meetings, various ideas were proposed. The members discussed which ideas they felt were achievable, often coming back to the ones that involved their school. In the organizing workshop held at our second meeting, the facilitator discussed the importance of working on an issue where the campaign members have leverage. The members seemed to take note of this and favored working to change an institution they interacted with every day. For many of the issues discussed, the participants would say things like, “But how would we do that?” or “Nobody would listen to us about that”. When ideas were proposed related to their school, the participants were able to suggest specific ways they could take action.

3. Strong Group Efficacy

During the first focus group, I observed a pattern of members sharing how they had been let down when their peers stopped contributing to an effort. A similar sentiment was often shared throughout the meetings. The members felt that if they were in a group with other committed individuals, they would be able to produce change. Yet, these same members did not feel they could reach a campaign goal on their own. For example, one member said:

I decided to get involved because I was trying to work on a project with two of my friends um about the environment and policy and they were not very committed and they kept telling me they were going to work on it once they were done with their college apps and then they got burned out and stopped caring. And I got really annoyed (laughter) and so then I started contacting different organizations in Bellingham and then heard about what Sahar was doing and then decided that um it would be better to work with people that actually care and want to do something.

Multiple other members shared in the first focus group how they stopped making progress toward a goal when their friends or peers stopped contributing. I asked the participants if they felt they could take action on their own. One member said, “I think it is more like make a difference in someone’s life, like changing how their day is going or something. Maybe not necessarily changing how the world works. Like you definitely need other people and support to do that.” Another member shared this sentiment, saying, “I think as a group with our different qualities. I think groups obviously bring a lot more variety so uhh putting that together it makes change more likely to happen.” This collective efficacy remained the same throughout the program. In the second focus group, I asked the members, if they were comfortable taking action on their own. LG said:

I think that you need more perspectives in order to make good, informed change and I think that just having yourself is kind of not as effective I don’t think and it’s also a lot cuz there’s most likely going to be a lot of stuff that needs to get done. You’re going to need to bounce ideas off of somebody.

The members did bounce ideas off one another throughout each meeting. Members felt stronger as a group which led to some challenges.

4. Attendance of Peers Impacts Efficacy

Throughout the program, attendance varied. At the beginning, we had nine members, but only seven remained truly committed to the program. There were always a few members who could not come to a meeting. Therefore, we had anywhere from two to six participants at each meeting. I could see how the unpredictable attendance started to cause the most committed members' efficacy to waiver. They expressed their disappointment in their peers. As discussed, many had experienced this before. In the focus group, one member said, "...um with the environmental club at [member's high school], there's been like definitely meetings where nobody shows up, which is super disappointing." Throughout the meetings, the efficacy of the group became dependent on the attendance.

5. Time Impacts Efficacy

The members also faced the barrier of time, which had a significant impact on their efficacy. Once the campaign focus was chosen, the members only had a few weeks to plan for their event and create a vision for their campaign. Often, the participants expressed they did not have enough time and they could not believe the program was almost over. Everyone, including myself felt the tasks were rushed and we did not always have time to pay attention to detail. Many members expressed concern that their efforts would be lost once the program ended. It became clear to me that the members had not increased their political self-efficacy in terms of the end goal. Some members had high efficacy from the beginning and stayed that way throughout the duration of the program while others' efficacy highly depended on situational factors like time and attendance.

6. Previous Organizing Experience Equals Higher Efficacy

Some of the teens came in with previous organizing experience and thus had higher self-efficacy than the rest of the group. Those that entered the program with high efficacy generally kept their confidence throughout the program. Many of them had experience working on something which was not successful but they still wanted to take action, which reflects their confidence in their abilities. One member spoke of her experience working with Planned Parenthood. She said, “In teen council we went down to Olympia and lobbied our local officials. We got actual bills passed. After that, I was like how can I do this with the environment. Lobbying is super helpful. Make sure you are voting for the right issues”. These teens with direct experience working on a campaign were usually very organized in how they approached tasks and planned for the YEP! event. During the second focus group, this same member said, “I think that our role is to go out there and to do it. If we go out there and take action on the change we want to see, it will happen.” She entered and left the program with strong efficacy for making change happen.

7. Identity Plays an Important Role

Identity became an important factor throughout the meetings. The YEP! participants seemed adamant about “doing something different” that will “make people notice them”. Some members were eager to show adults that young people are aware of issues in their community and capable of producing change. Once a debate occurred between the members on which campaigns would be “too easy” and not unique enough. Some members did not agree with this sentiment and shared that they would be happy contributing to current efforts. This difference in self-identity between being a collaborator versus and innovator created minor debate throughout the program.

8. Critical Thinking Skills

Throughout the program, the members displayed their abilities to think critically. The first sign of their critical thinking skills was in the first focus group. For example, when discussing climate change, one member said,

And just yesterday in my environmental literature class, we watched this movie about how these like, a bunch of island nations are losing their land and having to move to different areas and losing their culture and so I think one of the main reasons I am really passionate about climate change is because its driven by greedy people just being selfish and then it is affecting people who its completely not their fault and it is not fair to them.

This statement displayed the member's ability to think about the various roles members of society play in climate change and the disproportionate impacts that occur. Further, as the program went on, multiple members thought critically about their campaign. For example, one member was highly critical of mandatory service, citing both that it has less of an impact and arguing students may not be able to do it. These critical thinking abilities allowed the teens to foresee potential problems in their campaign.

9. Differing Views on how Change Happens

The members all entered the program with varying ideas of how change happens and these perspectives continued to shape how they contributed to the campaign and what steps they each thought the group should take. Some members believed change happens through a hands-on approach. These participants wanted to physically do something to improve their community. For example, during the first focus group, when I asked the participants how they might take action on an issue they are concerned about, one member said:

Volunteering at the animal shelter. So down in [name of town], when I worked at [animal shelter], I made like 200 toys for the animals cuz they didn't really have anything, they were just in cages with nothing, no bedding or anything like that. They were just stuck in cages, so I thought making toys for them and giving them cloth bedding, and taking them out and making sure they got outside would be nice.

Another member shared this sentiment, saying in the second focus group:

I think I came into this kind of expecting something more tangible, like you know cleaning up beaches or doing like a big kind of community engagement event and that is kind of where my confidence [was] I think when I came here. And I wouldn't necessarily say I am less confident now, but it's just a little more, I don't know not something I can't physically touch or do. It's something that is kind of left out of my control at the moment.

Throughout the YEP! meetings, the members often emphasized their desire to implement a project or do service in the community. On the other hand, some members see change as happening through policy or influencing decision makers. For example, one member said:

My original idea that I was trying to do and didn't really make a lot of progress for um the environment and policy was to pass a law like the one that was passed in Hawaii last year, um uh kind of stating that Washington state would follow the Paris agreement, but would do so without like actually following it because that is illegal but like have some principles to follow. But like make that an actual law and not just follow an agreement.

These differing notions of change sometimes prevented decisions from being made as the group could not agree on a path forward. Sometimes we would interject to encourage a compromise and on other occasions we just let them work it out even though it took longer to move forward.

10. Role Modeling is Important for Efficacy

During the second focus group, the members continually mentioned how much they enjoyed the guest speakers, particularly the ones from the youth organizing programs. ST said:

Um I think that it has been really cool when the people come in and talk to us about organizing a campaign and when the person from Alaska came and talked about her own group that she was in it was really cool to hear other people's input and like um advice as well as hearing what they had done that worked.

The members always had some questions for our guests, but when these particular individuals, with experience organizing as a young person talked with us, the members had a lot more to ask. Multiple other members mentioned how they enjoyed learning from these guests and interacting with people outside the program.

11. Multiple Entry Points for Youth-Led Organizing

Each member had a different entry point into the program. They all deeply cared about different things. This further reinforced the need for more youth organizing and engagement opportunities within the county. These various entry points were an indication of the differing ethical frameworks between each teen. In the first meeting, some spoke about their love for animals, while others expressed concern about social justice issues. Multiple teens mentioned climate change. Some were afraid of what would happen to the environment. While others were concerned how climate change would impact communities. This diversity in entry points may be why the group settled on the service campaign. The approach they took allowed for more possibility and to potentially help multiple causes at once.

12. Civic Knowledge

Both the focus groups and our various workshops indicated the members had limited civic knowledge. Most members were unsure who their representatives were and how to influence decision makers. In the focus group, I asked the members to name their governor and senators. They were not able to answer clearly. They could identify names, but not titles. Similarly, in the organizing workshop, the members were unsure how to begin taking action on an issue. This theme is summarized well by a statement from LG during the second focus group: “I learned a lot from [the facilitator] as well, kind of just the layers of creating change, having a vision and mission, cuz sometimes that tends to get pushed to the side.” As their knowledge increased throughout the program, so did their efficacy for creating a plan.

Conclusion

I intended this research to determine whether or not YEP! members would find increased political self-efficacy as a result of their participation in this program. Overall, the members of YEP! found increased self-efficacy for specific tasks, but not for their overall goal. Although this research originally looked at participants' perceived, internal political efficacy, the data collected through the focus groups and participant observation suggested that group or collective efficacy became a more significant factor for evaluating the success of the program and the likelihood of the members participating in organizing in the future. When multiple YEP! members showed up to meetings and displayed a willingness to work together, the collective efficacy built individuals' confidence. Liberation psychologists, Roderick J. Watts and Constance Flanagan critique the field of youth development for traditionally having an "overemphasis on individual outcomes at the expense of its attention to collective experiences and the power of collective voice" (2007, p. 781). They go on to say, "As such, collective efficacy reflects a faith in others, a belief that they share a commitment to a common purpose" (2007, p. 786). These authors argue that political change happens when people find others who share their interests and are willing to work together towards a shared cause. Therefore, collective efficacy in youth organizing becomes an important factor in assessing group dynamics and the likelihood of members taking action again. By the end of the program, it was clear there were multiple devoted members and everyone confidently ran the culminating event despite limited attendance.

The event was culminating not just because it was the end of our time together, but also because it was the peak of the group's collective efficacy. Everyone was sharing ideas, asking questions, and taking initiative. I did not observe any members taking up "more space" than anyone else. Some of the members expressed disappointment the group was ending. We spent a

lot of the time at our last meeting and the event laughing. We were sharing stories, talking about our lives, and asking each other questions. YEP! transformed into a group of friends. These moments of bonding and the occasional digression from the topic were significant factors in forming this collective efficacy. The members needed the chance to get to know one another and build trust.

Environmental action is defined as people working towards changing the root causes of environmental problems and social systems (Harré, 2016). Early thinking around the purpose of environmental education emphasized the importance of empowering people with the confidence and skills to “use citizen strategies to help resolve issues” (Hungerford and Volk, 1990, p. 262). Yet, the field of environmental education has also been criticized for its emphasis on behavior change over political action (McLean, 2013). Programs which use a behavior change approach often focus on the consequences of environmental destruction and not the causes. Students are encouraged to ponder how they can alleviate stressors to the environment by making individual lifestyle choices. Education scholar, Sheelah McLean writes that this approach, “...depoliticizes and silences primary causes such as colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. As a result, the socially acceptable solutions students are invited to engage in are often individualistic, and celebrate white middle-class subjectivities through activities such as re-cycling, biking, or buying from organic Farmer’s Markets...(2013, p. 358)”. In programs focused on lifestyle changes, students are not encouraged to influence decision-makers, alter power dynamics, or insist on institutional changes. In his essay, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World”, Michael Maniates problematizes the individualism approach to addressing environmental problems. Maniates calls these behavior change approaches to addressing environmental issues, the “individualization of responsibility”. Individuals concerned about

environmental issues have found the behavior change approach appealing as it is seemingly “apolitical and non-confrontational” (Maniates, 2001, p. 50). But these approaches do not address the root causes of environmental issues. Collective action on the other hand, does. Maniates writes, “In this way, individualization is both a symptom and a source of waning citizen capacities to participate meaningfully in processes of social change. If consumption, in all its complexity, is to be confronted, the forces that systematically individualize responsibility for environmental degradation must be challenged (2001, p. 44)”. When designing YEP!, I wanted to provide opportunities for the members to influence change and work together. I was eager to see the group thinking beyond behavior change approaches. Therefore, it makes sense that collective efficacy became a prominent theme in my analysis of the program. Individual efficacy for producing change is still important, but since our efforts involved multiple people, it is perhaps more important they felt a sense of collective confidence.

A strong example of young people moving away from this individualism approach to environmental issues is the campaign for fossil fuel divestment on college campuses. The campaign for fossil fuel divestment “signals a sea change, from individualised sustainability efforts to youth-led collective political action, and recognition of climate change as a social justice issue” (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2015, p. 662). This youth-led movement is not only a response to inaction on climate change and the social issues related to fossil fuel extraction, but also represents a growing belief amongst young people that personal behavior choices alone cannot reduce climate change impacts (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2015). Many of the young activists see their involvement in the campaign not only as a form of empowerment, but also as an opportunity to take collective action that leads to systemic change (Curnow and Gross 2016). Furthermore, the target of the divestment campaign is visible to young people, which increases

their desire to participate: "...students are attracted to divestment because it presents a direct on-campus target while also addressing broader global issues related to climate injustice" (Grady-Benson and Sarathy, 2015, p. 667). These student activists do not see fossil fuel divestment as their end goal, but rather a step towards climate justice.

The on-campus target for the fossil fuel campaign made the students' goals seem more approachable and feasible. This desire for a campaign to be targeted at a familiar institution became a prominent theme in the YEP! program as well. The literature on youth organizing suggests that when youth are impacted by the issue, they are more likely to take action (Ginwright, 2009). Further, if they are familiar with the various forces which create the conditions they are trying to change, they are more likely to know how to act (Watts, 2002). When the members decided to work towards changing their schools and influencing their administrators, they became more confident. They were quickly able to identify their allies and potential opposition. They knew tactics which could work and ones that would be more challenging. They were excited to change an institution they interacted with daily.

Service-learning and other approaches to encouraging civic-engagement have been criticized for their emphasis on maintaining current social systems and institutions and not challenging them (Watts and Flanagan, 2007). This is why YEP! did not take a service-learning approach. So, it is perhaps ironic that the members ultimately chose to work towards making service a requirement in their schools. But in order to achieve this goal, they had to take action and work to influence decision makers. YEP! strived to use the politicized approach to environmental education, which is demonstrated by the workshops on organizing and the opportunities to influence decision-makers. A few members of the group, though, expressed their

desire to physically do something to improve their communities. They wanted to see immediate change as a result of their actions. I hesitated to implement a form of service, as I wanted to stick to the action model, but we eventually decided to add a service project to the culminating event. The members went around the neighborhood where RE Sources' offices are and marked storm drains with signage that educated the public on where the water goes to discourage dumping trash and fluids in them. Multiple members expressed feeling accomplished for "getting something done". This caused me to reflect on the value of including projects like these in YEP!. Service projects can provide an opportunity for youth to feel in control (Stoneman, 2006). Youth develop a stronger desire to participate and they believe that they can make a difference. The YEP! members needed this "sense of control". Therefore, combining opportunities to both work towards institutional change and opportunities to physically improve their community became important for the group's efficacy. This project also built the members' collective efficacy because the nature of the project required multiple hands. Overall though, the YEP! program stayed focused on its mission to encourage and support youth-led organizing.

My inclusion of opportunities for role-modeling proved to be a significant factor in the collective efficacy of the participants. In the second focus group, multiple members mentioned the interactions they had with other teen organizers. This mirrors what the literature says about the importance of providing opportunities for young people to see others their age taking action. When young people see others (similar to themselves) take action and succeeding, they are more likely to believe that they too have the ability to take action (Hickman & Riemer 2016). Hearing about the success of other teenagers, increased the YEP! members' confidence. This confidence boost combined with learning strategies for organizing also increased the individual member's self-efficacy for specific tasks.

Increased knowledge of how to work towards achieving campaign goals helped the members in the group build their collective efficacy and their self-efficacy for specific tasks. In the first focus group, when I asked the members how they might take action on an issue of concern to them, they mostly offered the end-goal, such as having a clean-up event and not the steps needed to reach this goal. Further, many were unsure how campaigns generally work or of ways to influence decision-makers. After the various workshops on organizing, civics, and advertising, the YEP! members had more ideas for how they could reach their ultimate goal of having service opportunities in their high schools. As the literature suggests, incorporating opportunities for political education and skill building in organizing programs leads to increased analytical and action skills for the participants (Braxton, 2016). For example, in the organizing workshop, the members learned about the initial planning stages for a campaign. The facilitator discussed the importance of making sure a campaign's vision, mission, and goals are clear and agreed upon. At the beginning of the program, the members did not display these visioning skills and often did not think through the process for achieving their goals. Yet, a few weeks into the program, it was the teens reminding the adults that we needed to take a step back before jumping into tasks for the campaign. The YEP! members would quickly volunteer to take on specific tasks and rarely hesitated regarding their abilities to complete them. The literature suggests that one of the benefits of programs like these is that young people get to practice organizing and thus develop skills which increase their confidence and self-efficacy (Hickman & Riemer, 2016).

Throughout the YEP! meetings, I continued to refer back to the interviews I conducted with the community members and program coordinators. The program validated what I learned from the interviews I conducted with individuals who reside in Whatcom County. For example, it was affirmed that young people do care, but there are limited opportunities for them to engage

in action. Right when I was recruiting for the YEP! program, Bellingham area students organized a school walkout for gun control. There were hundreds of students rallying at City Hall. This was an indication to me that the youth in the area want to take action. Many of the community members I spoke with talked about how young people in the area are very passionate about issues impacting their communities, but they may not all know the process for achieving the change they want to see. This point was reflected in the YEP! program. At the first meeting, the members could name the issues they were concerned about and what they want to see happen, but not necessarily the steps they would have to take to achieve this goal. Further, many were unsure who their decision makers were. By the end of the program, though, these steps were clearer which increased their individual efficacy for specific tasks and their collective efficacy. Multiple community members spoke about the barriers a program like YEP! might face in the community. The two most mentioned barriers were transportation and the conflicting obligations of students. These both became apparent in our meetings. There were always a few members missing at each meeting due to prior commitments to sports, clubs, and competitions. Further, many members would arrive late or leave early depending on the bus schedules. YEP! facilitators will have to continue exploring solutions to these barriers.

The program coordinator interviews were a significant influence in the design of this program, but they also became an important reference throughout the implementation phase as well. I began to understand why so many of the programs I looked at started with a few committed young people. Recruitment for YEP! was a challenge, as nobody had heard about it before. We had a few members who signed-up for the program after I spoke in their classroom or emailed information to a guidance counselor, but some of the most committed members had a previous relationship with RE Sources and were asking for opportunities to connect and do more

with the organization. These members were very committed and were the ones who made sure they brought peers to the culminating event. Therefore, I felt confident that by investing in these already engaged members, YEP! would eventually grow.

Another aspect of the program interviews that I continued to refer back to is the practice of reflecting on the important successes happening outside a campaign such as the important relationships being formed. We would not be able to reach our ultimate goal in just seven weeks, but we were forming important relationships. I often encouraged the YEP! members to recognize the connections they made throughout the program. Those moments of bonding I referred to earlier, sometimes felt like a distraction from reaching our goals, but they were also so important in building the group's collective efficacy. Feeling a sense of support from the group brought members back to each meeting. The coordinator of the school-based program in Chicago mentioned the importance of having students reflect on the process over the product. Due to our short time together, this became an important aspect of the YEP! meetings. When members would express concern about their ability to achieve their goals, I reminded them that they were building important knowledge and capacity for the next members of YEP! or other people interested in working on this effort.

These findings are important for informing the future of the YEP! program. The YEP! program had both successes and challenges. Many of the coordinators I spoke with talked about their trial and error approach to programming, which I kept reminding myself of when things did not go as planned. Priscilla and I were often nervous that the members were not benefitting from the program as much as we wanted them to, but when we debriefed, the only consistent criticism was what we already knew—our limited time together and the lack of attendance were frustrating aspects for the most committed members. Therefore, finding ways to increase our

time together and retention for the program are important factors to consider. Priscilla and I have chatted about how to achieve this.

The idea we have discussed in the most detail for the future structure of YEP! is having a summer institute where RE Sources condenses all the workshops we had throughout our 7 meetings into one week. The summer institute would be for very committed YEP! members that are willing to then recruit others to participate in action projects throughout the year. Priscilla and I both thought it would be best to survey these youth beforehand on issues they are passionate about. Then, RE Sources can evaluate the issues suggested, narrow them down to ones where there is capacity and then have the members vote on which one they would like to proceed with. This way, between the end of the institute and fall, RE Sources can find educational opportunities on the specific issues and brainstorm pathways for action. Based on the results, there are two ideal characteristics for the chosen campaign: 1) The members would be working to influence change within organizations, communities, or institutions they interact with regularly, and 2) RE Sources would have the capacity and knowledge to support a campaign on the issue.

During the school year and after an issue is chosen, the members would meet with RE Sources every other week to plan action items and develop ways to engage their peers through various events throughout the year. Priscilla and I agreed that having multiple roles within the program and steps to further responsibility is essential for building something to aspire to and ultimately to ensure retention. Finally, we also think that having mentors for the YEP! members who are close in age is an important factor to consider. Multiple members told me they liked having a student from the University running the program. Therefore, RE Sources should continue developing relationships with college students who can provide support and guidance to

the YEP! members. Five years from now, I would be delighted to see teens in the area leading action workshops and seeing a tangible change in their communities as a result of their efforts. I would like to see leaders in the program being paid to implement these initiatives and taking on an advisory role to the organization so that there is something to aspire to for new members. Programs like these seem to take time to find a model which is appropriate for the setting and surrounding community. I am confident the YEP! program will find a model that works.

More research should be conducted on programs like these in order to better understand how both self and collective efficacy are achieved. Further, better understanding the relationship between these two forms of efficacy in youth organizing efforts can help inform program designs. The most prominent barriers to increased efficacy in the YEP! program were time and attendance. Further research on how to combat these barriers would be beneficial. Attendance of peers continued to be a frustration for the committed YEP! members. Youth development researchers could help inform program designs by looking into how member retention is best achieved.

By the end of the program, the YEP! members I had originally only known from their online applications became familiar faces and personalities. We all got to know each other through discussions on what we are most passionate about. These conversations often involved being direct, but also remaining vulnerable and willing to recognize our knowledge gaps. The members shared their challenges and their aspirations with one another. Each member worked to be considerate and mindful of the others in the group, which led to a feeling of collective efficacy. This outcome was one of the most significant impacts of the YEP! program, even though it was not the outcome I originally intended to measure. The overall impact of the program is summarized best by the words of KL in the second focus group:

I don't really think you can make change by yourself. I think you have to be involved with other people. Like I do think it's important to make choices like 'I don't eat meat' or 'I ride my bike when I can' and stuff like that but if we want to see big change like you have to be with other people. You can't do it by yourself.

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Appendix

Appendix A: IRB Approval for Pre-Program Interviews

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

MEMORANDUM

To: Sahar Arbab, Environmental Studies
FROM:  Janai Symons, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
DATE: 7/13/17
SUBJECT: Institutional Review Board– Exemption Research Approval

Thank you for submitting a research protocol regarding your human subject research EX17-117 “Learning through action in Whatcom County: Does youth participation in local. . .” for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Approval: The IRB has reviewed the materials you submitted and found the project described falls into Category #2: research involving survey or interview procedures. Although the research qualifies for exempt status under 45 CFR §46, the investigators still have a responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of their subjects, and are expected to conduct their research in accordance with the ethical principles of Justice, Beneficence, and Respect for Persons, as described in the Belmont Report, as well as with state and local institutional policy. All students and investigators collecting or analyzing data must be qualified and appropriately trained in research methods and responsible conduct of research.

Determination Period: An exempt determination is valid for five years from the date of the determination, as long as the nature of the research activity remains the same. If the involvement of human participants changes over the course of the study in a way that would increase risks, please submit a revised protocol.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems that may increase the risk to the human subjects or change the category of review, notify the Research Compliance Officer promptly. Any complaints from subjects pertaining to the risk and benefits of the research must be reported to the Research Compliance Officer.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at janai.symons@wwu.edu.

Appendix B: IRB Approval for Survey

<p style="text-align: center;">WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS</p>

TYPE OF REQUEST:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> new	<input type="checkbox"/> continuation	<input type="checkbox"/> modification
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PROTOCOL NUMBER: 18-007

INVESTIGATOR(S): Sahar Arbab

DEPARTMENT: Environmental Studies

PROJECT TITLE: Developing an Environmental Action Program for Teens in Whatcom County

APPROVAL PERIOD: 11/14/2017 – 11/13/2018

Approved by:  Date: 11/14/17
Institutional Review Board

Comments:

Approval is for the period specified above. Please put this project expiration date on your calendar, with a reminder to renew your application at least 4 weeks beforehand to allow for the continuing approval process. Instructions for continuing review will be available on our website.

If there are any adverse events or changes in the research procedures affecting the use of human subjects in this project during the current period, the HSRC must be notified immediately.

Appendix C: IRB Approval for Focus Groups and Participant Observation

<p style="text-align: center;">WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS</p>

TYPE OF REQUEST:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> new	<input type="checkbox"/> continuation	<input type="checkbox"/> modification
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PROTOCOL NUMBER: 18-013

INVESTIGATOR(S): Sahar Arbab

DEPARTMENT: Environmental Studies

PROJECT TITLE: Does participating in the youth committee at Re Sources lead to increase political self-efficacy

APPROVAL PERIOD: 1/29/2018 – 1/28/2019

Approved by:  Date: 1/29/18
Institutional Review Board

Comments:

Approval is for the period specified above. Please put this project expiration date on your calendar, with a reminder to renew your application at least 4 weeks beforehand to allow for the continuing approval process. Instructions for continuing review will be available on our website. Please also contact use to close your application when you have completed all interaction or intervention with human subjects or their identifiable data.

If there are any adverse events or changes in the research procedures affecting the use of human subjects in this project during the current period, the HSRC must be notified immediately.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Note: I will be conducting semi-structured interviews. Therefore, some additional questions may emerge throughout the interviews that are not listed here. There are two sets of questions below. One is for members of the Whatcom County community and the other is for individuals who have experience coordinating youth civic-engagement or environmental action programs. The interviews will follow the structure below unless additional questions emerge due to the conversational nature of these interviews.

Interview questions for Whatcom County community members:

What issues most directly impact youth in Whatcom County?

1. What are the most pressing environmental issues in Whatcom County? How do these impact youth?
2. To what degree are youth taking action on these issues? What are some examples, if any, of how youth have taken action in this community?
3. What types of opportunities are available for youth that are interested in taking action in their communities?
4. What programs in Whatcom County are currently serving youth populations?
5. Which youth populations in the area could benefit from more programming?
6. Which populations or groups of youth would be interested in or could benefit from participating in a program focused on environmental action and civic-engagement?
7. What additional thoughts, if any, would you like to share on this topic?
8. Which individuals, if any, would you suggest that I speak to next?

Interview questions for youth program coordinators:

1. What are the main goals of this program?
2. What inspired this program?
3. Program Organization
 - How do you recruit and encourage youth to participate?
 - How often do you meet and for how long?
 - What program aspects have been most successful at fostering your intended outcomes?
 - What have been the most challenging aspects of implementing and designing your program?
 - How do you measure whether you are meeting your outcomes and how do you determine success? How do you provide peer or adult role-modeling for the youth?
4. How do you introduce youth to options for civic-engagement?
5. If the participants complete service projects during this program, how are these activities implemented?
6. How do you encourage the youth to reflect on program activities?
7. How do you foster and encourage youth autonomy in decision-making and action planning?

8. How has the program impacted the youth participants?
9. What are your main sources of funding? Are they mostly local?
10. What additional thoughts, if any, would you like to share on this topic?
11. Which individuals, if any, would you suggest that I speak to next?

Appendix E: Student Survey

**Developing an Environmental Action Program for Teens in Whatcom County
Student Survey**

Please answer the following questions. If you do not want to answer a question, you may leave it blank. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

1. During the months of February and March, which days of the week are you typically **free**? Please circle all that apply.

- A. After school on Monday
- B. After school on Tuesday
- C. After school on Wednesday
- D. After school on Thursday
- E. After school on Friday
- F. Saturday morning
- G. Saturday afternoon
- H. Sunday morning
- I. Sunday afternoon

2. During the months of February and March, which days of the week are you typically **busy**? Please provide your best estimate.

- A. After school on Monday
- B. After school on Tuesday
- C. After school on Wednesday
- D. After school on Thursday
- E. After school on Friday
- F. Saturday morning
- G. Saturday afternoon
- H. Sunday morning
- I. Sunday afternoon

3. What activities are you involved in outside of school?

4. In the past, what has prevented you from participating in activities that interest you?

5. What do you think are the most pressing issues in your community?

6. What do you think are the most pressing environmental issues in your community?

7. What are you most proud of in your community?

8. How do you take action on issues that are important to you?
9. What has prevented you from taking action on issues that are important to you?
10. Are you interested in learning about ways in which you can take action to improve your community?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
11. If you wanted to take action on an issue you care about, what kind of support, materials, or resources would you need?
12. Would you participate in a program that provides support to teenagers interested in taking action on an issue of importance to them?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

Thank you!

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

RE Sources Youth Committee Focus Group Questions*

Introduction

- Welcome and introductions
- Explain purpose of the research and how the data will be used
- Run through how the focus group will work

Opening Question

First Focus Group: Why did you get involved with this committee?

Second Focus Group: What has been your favorite part about participating in this committee?

Main Questions

Desire to Act

What are some issues you feel passionate about?

What are some aspects of [issue(s) described] that are important to know?

How would you take action on this issue on your own?

How would you take action on this issues with others?

Belief in Ability to Make a Difference

What results would you expect to see after you took action on [issue(s) described]?

How can you, on your own, make a difference in the world?

What would you do if you tried to change something for the better and it did not work?

Political Knowledge (Research shows this is linked to political self-efficacy)

Who are your political representatives and how can you reach them?

Which organizations or politicians support your causes?

How would you get involved with these organizations?

How do you stay informed about the issues you care about?

How would you make sure that your representatives are making decisions you approve of?

Conclusion

Do you plan to continue/start taking action?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

*As noted in the supplemental questions, some questions may be removed or added due to the flow of conversation and the structure of focus groups. Questions will remain consistent to the theme of political self-efficacy.

Appendix G: YEP! Application

Application Re Sources for Sustainable Communities Youth Action Committee

Have you had a project in mind, but you need more resources? Are you interested in taking action on an environmental or social issue that is important to you? Do you want to meet other teenagers interested in the same causes? Apply to be part of the Youth Action Committee at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities! We are accepting applications **until Feb 21, 2018**.

About the committee: This is the first year of the Youth Action Committee! The purpose of this committee is to create a space for youth voice. This committee will be tasked with finding creative ways to involve other young people in action projects. This year, the committee will concentrate on planning and hosting a spring event for teenagers from across Whatcom County. The event will focus on bringing attention to an issue the committee members have chosen.

Why apply? Youth voice matters and when young people take action, communities are improved. Serving on this committee will be an opportunity for you to develop the skills needed to create positive change in the world. You will have the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded teens from across the county on issues that are important to you. You will also get the chance to work with adults that have experience taking action. Finally, this is something you can talk about on a college application or during a job interview, but we know that is not the only reason you will apply. You want to make the world a better place!

Requirements

- You must be in high school (9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade) to apply.
- You must be able to attend a weekly two-hour meeting starting in late February until the end of April (excluding spring break). You may miss 1 meeting/month. The meetings will typically take place at the organization's office in Bellingham, but alternatives will be considered for students that do not have reliable transportation.
- You must live in Whatcom County

Please Note: This is a new committee and is currently designed to last from February until April. The committee will have the option to continue meeting after April. Applications will reopen yearly.

Ready to apply? Please complete the application on the next page.

Applications are due by February 21

Please return this application using one of the following methods:

Drop-off or Mail:

ATTN Priscilla Brotherton

RE Sources for Sustainable Communities

2309 Meridian Street

Bellingham, WA 98225

Email Sahar Arbab:

arbabs@wwu.edu

Subject: Youth Committee

Questions? Contact Sahar Arbab: arbabs@wwu.edu or 412-527-4197

Your name: _____

High School: _____ Grade: _____

Your email address and cell phone #: _____

How would you like to be contacted? _____

How did you hear about this opportunity? _____

Please describe why you are interested in serving on the Youth Action Committee:

What issue(s) are you interested in taking action on?

If selected, would you be able to attend a 2-hour meeting 1/week starting in late February and ending in April? The first meeting will take place on Wednesday, February 28 from 6 pm to 8 pm at RE Sources' offices in Bellingham.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Will you be able to attend the the spring youth action event on Sunday, April 29?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Which days of the week do you have the most availability? Please check all that apply.

Monday after-school	Weds. after-school	Friday after-school	Saturday morning
Monday evening	Weds. evening	Friday evening	Saturday afternoon
Tuesday after-school	Thursday after-school		Sunday morning
Tuesday evening	Thursday evening		Sunday afternoon

Please include the name of a reference. This person could be a teacher, supervisor, youth group leader, coach, etc.

Reference Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____





Youth for Environment and People (YEP!)
2018 applications are now open!

DEADLINE: February 26th

YEP! is a committee for high school students interested in taking action on an environmental or social issue important to them. If you need more resources to make it happen, or if you want to meet other like-minded students with a passion for similar causes, then this program is for you! [Apply today!](#)



YEP! is for supporting young peoples' voices

This program is designed for young people who want their voices heard. We want to support people in 9th – 12th grade who are interested in learning how to work towards change in their communities and beyond. This is the first year of YEP!. Its purpose is to create a space for youth voice. This year, you and your peers will be tasked with planning and hosting a spring event for teenagers from across Whatcom County. The event will focus on bringing attention to an issue the committee members have chosen.

Meetings and issues we'll work on

We will work alongside you to choose an issue that everyone agrees on and that the organization believes they can support. This means that you will come into the first meeting willing to hear different perspectives and ideas. You will meet at RE Sources once per week from February 28th to April 29th. We will not meet during spring break or on holidays. You will be working together to plan a spring event on April 29th for teenagers from across the county which will provide information on the issue you have chosen and training for how to take action on it. We will support you through weekly workshops on topics such as:

- Civics 101
- Local government
- Conflict resolution
- Collective organizing
- Outreach
- Public speaking

- Home
- ▼ About Us
 - Contact Us
 - News
- ▼ Get Involved
 - Employment
 - Internships
 - Volunteer
 - Membership
- ▼ Events
 - Green Drinks
- ▼ Clean Energy
 - Washington Goes Solar!
 - Tesoro Anacortes Xylene Proposal
 - Stand Up To Oil
 - Power Past Coal
 - Clean Energy Blog
- ▼ Clean Water
 - North Sound Baykeeper
 - Become a Citizen Scientist
 - Cleanup Site Updates and Water Quality Permits
 - Sustainable Agriculture
 - Clean Water Blog
- ▼ Sustainable Schools
 - Youth for Environment and People (YEP!)**
 - Elementary Green Classrooms
 - Waste Rangers
 - Young Water Stewards
 - Middle and High School Programs
 - Schools Blog and News
- ▼ Low Carbon Living
 - RE Patch Community Garden
 - Room Rentals
 - The RE Store

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Appendix I: Program Outline

YEP! Meetings

- I. Introduction to YEP!:** The first day will largely focus on the YEP! members getting to know each other. We will also spend time introducing RE Sources mission and various projects the organization is working on.

Date: March 8 • **Time:** 4 pm – 6pm • **Location:** REI Community Room

- A. Ice Breakers
- B. Introduction to RE Sources
- C. Guest Speaker on Community Solar
- D. YEP! Presentation and Overview of Youth Organizing
- E. Discussing Plans for Next Week
- F. Focus Group 1

- II. Starting a Campaign:** This meeting will provide an opportunity for role-modeling by a visit from a previous teen organizer. Next, the members will participate in a workshop which introduces them to aspects of organizing. We will end with pitching ideas to take action on and then voting on them.

Date: March 16 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library

- A. Ice Breakers
- B. Visit from previous member of Alaska program
- C. Campaigning 101
- D. Idea Pitching
- E. Idea Voting *
- F. Discussion
- G. Debrief

- III. Campaign Marketing:** This meeting will be focused on learning strategies for engaging others in a campaign. We will also continue planning the various action steps we will take on the issue the YEP! members have chosen.

Date: March 23 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library

- A. Ice Breakers
- B. Skype with Member of YEA! MN
- C. Campaign Marketing Workshop
- D. Campaign Planning**
- E. Debrief

- IV. **Introduction to Civics:** This meeting will focus on learning about our various branches of government, who our representatives are, and how to influence decision makers. We will spend the remainder of our time working on our own campaign and planning for the April, 29th event.

Date: March 30 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library

- A. Ice-breaker
- B. Civics Workshop
- C. Education on Issues
- D. Campaign Planning***
- E. Debrief

- V. **Team Building:** At this meeting we will have a workshop on group decision-making and team building which will help us evaluate the current group dynamics. Then, we will spend the remaining time planning for the upcoming event.

Date: April 13 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library ****

- A. Team Building Workshop
- B. Campaign Planning
- C. Debrief

- VI. **Event Planning:** The meeting is intended to simply provide time for the members to continue working on planning for their event.

Date: April 20 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library

- A. Planning
- B. Debrief

- VII. **Event Planning:** The meeting is intended to simply provide time for the members to continue working on planning for their event. The last focus group will also be conducted.

Date: April 27 • **Time:** 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm • **Location:** RE Sources' Library

- A. Last Focus Group
- B. Planning

*Voting did not occur, as the members decided to wait until all members were present.

**Planning did not occur, as the members were still deciding on an issue. After this meeting I emailed out a poll

*** The poll was tied, so the members worked to find an issue they could agree on. Once they decided on the service/volunteer requirement, we only had minimal time for planning.

****We skipped a week due to the students' spring break