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The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change

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INTRODUCTION: Thrive Foundation and Thriving

The Thrive Foundation for Youth of Menlo Park, California, has developed a theory of change model for youth development that has been used in mentoring programs and is being expanded into other forms of youth development programming. The Thrive Foundation developed this program in collaboration with several developmental researchers and has produced materials for its use with young people. The ultimate goal of the Thrive theory of change, also known as Step-It-Up-2-Thrive, is for youth to move forward on trajectories of positive development toward their full potential.

During the late 1990s and into the 2000s, youth development research and programming has moved from an approach emphasizing deficits and negative behaviors toward assets and positive outcomes. As Pittman, Irby & Ferber noted in 2000, "Problem free is not fully prepared." Young people need positive trajectories to lead a successful life; failing to have negative outcomes is not an adequate goal. Thriving may be seen as perhaps the ultimate outcome of positive development. A relatively recent concept within positive youth development research, the notion of thriving has new implications for policy and programming and expands the conception of positive youth outcomes.

This monograph provides an overview of the Thrive Foundation's theory of change that provides a framework to facilitate young people's movement along trajectories of thriving, including summarizing the research on thriving, the research behind the different components of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, and implications for research and practice.

Thriving

The concept of thriving has emerged as a new lens through which to view research, theory and practice in youth development. How is thriving different from other positive youth development concepts? While positive youth development theory has often focused on resiliency and competence with the goal of adequate adaptation and survival, thriving goes beyond competence toward full potential. The concept of thriving has been defined in varying ways by a number of researchers and theorists, including thriving both as a status and as a process. Thriving as a status is conceptualized as youth who are successful in a variety of domains, such as academic, social, out of school activities, and professional or career. In contrast, the process orientation conceives thriving as a process or trajectory toward full potential.

The use of the term "thriving" originated in the medical field to describe infants who were growing and developing at a normal pace, contrasted with those who did not grow adequately and were diagnosed with "failure to thrive" (Riley, Landwirth, Kaplan & Collipp, 1968). Its use in youth development work has broadened the scope of the term considerably, and thriving in this sense has been measured in a variety of ways. Although there is not yet full consensus among researchers on the individual indicators that represent thriving, an increasing body of research is adding to this discussion. The following section summarizes this recent literature.

Scales, Benson, Leffert and Blyth (2000) defined thriving as the absence of problem behaviors as well as indicators of healthy development. They identified seven thriving indicators using Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (PSL-AB) survey data. Their seven indicators included school success, leadership, helping others, physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity. These indicators were modeled as outcomes using the PSL-AB data. In statistical models Benson's 40 Developmental Assets were found to be moderate predictors of the seven thriving indicators. These indicators were explored further by Dowling, Gestsdottir, Anderson, von Eye & Lerner (2003) in a factor analysis; results showed that parental rules, a moral compass, personal values, a future orientation, a search for one's own identity, school engagement, and sentiments of equity and diversity were all associated with the thriving indicators.

Thriving youth are discovering their unique talents and interests and finding a way to express those. They are on a journey toward an exemplary adulthood.

According to Richard Lerner, "a young person with healthy positive relationships with his or her community and on the path to idealized personhood" can be said to be thriving (Lerner, 2004, p. 86). Thriving is conceptualized as an ideal process of human development. Lerner (2004) described the six Cs of youth development as indicators of thriving in adolescence. (These Cs, which have been outlined and developed by a number of researchers, include competence, confidence, connections, caring, character, and contribution; contribution was added later than the others, so the list is sometimes referred to as the five Cs.)

In a qualitative analysis of youth development practitioner, adolescent, and parent interviews around their conceptions of thriving, King et al. (2005) found that self-esteem, future orientation, connections with others, communication skills, external supports, and social and academic success were some of the most commonly identified factors associated with youth thriving. The qualitative responses were clustered into eight categories, similar to those that have been identified in prior research: the five Cs of youth development (character, competence, confidence, connection, and caring), in addition to assets, self-control and regulation, and positive emotions.

Theokas et al. (2005) focused on thriving as a process, rather than a trait or status. This definition focuses on the importance of an individual's goodness of fit within his or her context. Youth who are thriving are flexible and able to adapt to a variety of circumstances. These authors used a factor analysis of PSL-AB data to examine the same thriving indicators that were used in Scales et al. (2000). Results showed that both internal and external assets predicted the seven thriving indicators, but internal assets were a more robust predictor of thriving.

Benson & Scales (2009) noted that thriving young people "make full use of their special gifts in ways that benefit themselves and others" (p. 90). Thriving youth are discovering their unique talents and interests and finding a way to express those. They are on a journey toward an exemplary adulthood. In their definition of thriving, Benson and Scales include two significant components: 1) a representation over time of a sense of energy and specialness that is supported by the environment of the young person; and 2) a balanced movement or direction towards an intended outcome (what Damon calls "purpose" [Damon, 2008]). This concept of movement incorporates both a young person's current level of development and their position or progress along a path towards idealized personhood. The young person's movement toward ideal development may be catalyzed through "sparks," special gifts or interests that can help a young person focus, gain skills, make positive choices, and move onto a thriving trajectory (Benson, 2008); the sparks concept is discussed further below.

Bundick, Yeager, King & Damon (2010) draw threads from a number of these researchers to define thriving as a process involving an individual interacting in a mutually beneficial way with his or her

environment. According to this view, thriving is intentional and purposeful. It connotes optimal development across a variety of life domains, such as social, academic, and professional/career development, toward a positive purpose.

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Theory of Change

Drawing from the recent literature on thriving and positive youth development, as discussed above, The Thrive Foundation for Youth created a program model to facilitate young peoples' progress on a trajectory of positive development and thriving (Thrive Foundation, 2010). This model, described as the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, may be used within youth development organizations to facilitate thriving among youth participants, with the ultimate goal being measured improvements at the individual level on indicators of thriving. The model involves four steps for the young person to pursue, with assistance from or the involvement of an adult. These steps include:

1) Identify and develop sparks;
2) Learn about brain development and adopt a growth mindset;
3) Reflect on the 12 indicators of thriving, as well as one's own strengths and challenges, and identify indicators for further development through conversations with adults; and
4) Build goal management skills through goal selection, pursuit of strategies, and shifting approaches in the face of challenges.

The ultimate goal of this program is for young people to progress along the indicators of thriving which range from exhibiting healthy habits to gaining a sense of purpose that leads to making contributions to society. This monograph describes these steps and the research behind each component of the model.

1. Identify and Develop Sparks

In the first component of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, young people are asked to identify their sparks by responding to a short survey. In addition, adult mentors are trained to help them develop these interests by becoming spark champions.

Peter Benson has conceptualized thriving as being driven by a young person's interest, skill, or passion, which he identified as their "spark" (Benson, 2008). This concept connotes a young person's excitement around one or more particular interests. The spark might be a particular sport, playing a musical instrument, writing stories or computer programs, or counseling others; there are a wide range of possibilities for what a spark can be. A spark is something that motivates the individual to participate in activities that lead to contributions and positive outcomes for the individual and for society. Sparks can provide a positive direction or purpose for youth, and they bring joy to the young person's life. Participating in one's spark can provide young people with the opportunity for skill development in one or more areas, a future orientation, and energy to develop in positive directions.

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According to surveys by Search Institute, approximately two-thirds of 6th-8th graders and three-quarters of 10th-12th graders say they have at least one spark (Benson & Scales, 2009). This finding indicates that youth can readily understand and relate to the spark concept, but also that not all youth have identified a passion within themselves. Sparks have been statistically validated as being associated with thriving in youth by Benson's survey research with 6th-8th and 10th-12th graders (Benson & Scales, 2009).

The concept of sparks is closely associated with the psychological concept of intrinsic motivation. Internal motivation is an important quality for education and success (Davidson et al., 2007). Motivation toward identified goals has been demonstrated to be associated with self-regulation, positive behavioral outcomes and behavior change (Salmela-Aro, Mutanen, Koivisto & Vuori, 2009). Thus, internal motivation is an important characteristic for youth in moving toward a thriving trajectory.

In her book "Mindset: The new psychology of success," Dweck (2006) generalizes her work by emphasizing that an incremental view, or growth mindset, can lead to opportunities to thrive.

Adults can play an important role in helping young people develop their sparks. In his book (2008), Benson describes the importance of parents, teachers, coaches, and other interested adults in serving as a young person's "spark champion." Youth who have an interest they are passionate about need help from adults in developing those interests, such as helping the young person participate in a sport, take art or music classes, or encouragement to join student government.

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change sees a young person's spark as a catalyst. Identifying one's spark or sparks is an initial step that may help young people to focus on long term goals and embark on the trajectory toward thriving.

2. Learn About Brain Development and Adopt a Growth Mindset

The second identified step in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change is learning about brain development and adopting a growth mindset. Within this component, young people fill out a survey that helps to identify whether they have a fixed or growth mindset. Following this, they are led through a workshop on brain development that emphasizes the plasticity of the brain and how new neural networks are formed. In addition, they are shown the difference between fixed and growth mindset and related characteristics.

The concept of a growth mindset has developed from research examining the motivations affecting learning in young children. Research from the late 1980s suggested that children developed theories of their own intelligence and that these theories tended toward either a belief that intelligence is a fixed trait (an entity theory of intelligence) or that intelligence is not fixed but can grow (an incremental theory of intelligence) (Dweck, 1986). For children who believe intelligence is a fixed trait, there is a tendency to seek approval for their intelligence (Heyman & Dweck, 1992). Children with an entity theory of intelligence tend to have *performance goals*: to get positive feedback and avoid negative feedback for their competence and ability. Children who believe intelligence is not fixed tended to have *learning goals*; they want to increase their competence. Children with learning goals are less likely to be dissuaded by their failures at tasks; they focus on their own progress and mastery through their effort rather than on external approvals (Dweck, 1986).

An internal focus on ability and judgments based on ability can result in children not challenging themselves and even withdrawing from a challenging situation out of a fear of failure. Children who received praise for their intelligence tended to make global negative self-attributions when facing a difficult situation because if success meant they were intelligent, then failure meant they were not (Dweck & London, 2004). The end result can be maladaptive motivational patterns in children as they may feel their ability has to remain high in order to complete a challenging task. Maladaptive patterns (e.g., feelings of helplessness or anxiety) have been found to be associated with a failure to set reasonable goals and a movement toward goals (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). The focus is not on what the child needs to do, such as trying other strategies, in order to improve their skills (Heyman & Dweck, 1992).

Children who focus on effort tend to be excited rather than discouraged by challenge. In this context, failure is not seen as a personal deficiency but rather as an opportunity to guide learning (Heyman & Dweck, 1992). This orientation tends to result in active engagement in, enjoyment of, and effective persistence on challenging tasks (Heyman & Dweck, 1992).

These theories of intelligence have been demonstrated to have lasting effects across junior high school grades in mathematics (Blackwell, Trezsniewski & Dweck, 2007). Students with an incremental theory of intelligence (i.e., a growth mindset) exhibited fewer ability-based, helpless attributions and more

positive strategies, leading to improved grades. They were more likely to believe working hard was necessary and effective in achievement than were students with a fixed mindset. Furthermore, an intervention demonstrated that teaching an incremental theory of intelligence can impact grades. After students were taught how the brain changes by forming new connections, showing how the brain is malleable, they showed more positive motivation and effort in the classroom.

In her book "Mindset: The new psychology of success," Dweck (2006) generalizes her work by emphasizing that an incremental view, or growth mindset, can lead to opportunities to thrive. The intent of including training on growth mindset in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change is to instill the idea of success being cultivated through effort. Youth will learn that while people may differ in their initial talents and aptitudes, everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

3. Reflect on Indicators of Thriving

The Thrive Foundation has drawn from research in a number of areas to develop a list of twelve thriving indicators. In the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, a young person, in partnership with an adult, identifies one or more indicators that they want to improve. The Thrive Foundation has developed tools that adults working with youth can use to start conversations, to help adults and young people discuss the thriving indicators. These conversations are meant to aid in reflection so that young people are able to identify relevant indicators for improvement and set goals around these areas. Conversations with adults may help the young person recognize the importance of developing one or more thriving indicators as a means of reaching their ultimate long-term goals, or recognize that there may be indicators that are currently serving as an obstacle to reaching goals. Likewise, the sparks conversation may help young people to focus on the ultimate outcomes and changes they wish to see.

The following sections describe some research behind each of the identified thriving indicators.

The twelve indicators of thriving in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change include love of learning; life skills; healthy habits; emotional competence; social skills; positive relationships; spiritual growth; character; caring; confidence; persistent resourcefulness; and purpose. The twelve indicators are organized to fall within the categories of the six Cs of positive youth development.

Step-It-Up-2-Thrive Indicator Wheel

These twelve indicators are based on a wide range of research on factors associated with positive development in young people. Beginning on page six through page eight is a brief summary of each indicator and some related research.

Thriving Indicator and Five Cs Domain	Summary
Competence	
Love of Learning	The Thrive Foundation considers love of learning to be a character strength. Love of learning, in this definition, includes mastering new skills and knowledge. It goes beyond curiosity to include the tendency or drive to add systematically to what one knows (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Love of learning is an indicator of thriving because a passion for learning ensures a life-long process in which an individual develops both mentally and socially. A love of learning is indicative of having a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008). Curiosity, included in the Thrive Foundation's definition of love of learning, includes the tendency to recognize and pursue new knowledge and experiences; having an open and receptive attitude toward the focus of attention. The existence of intense curiosity has been found to lead to cognitive development during the formative years (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009).
Life Skills	Life skills are everyday competencies young people need to learn to help them succeed as an adult. A set of 35 life skills commonly used in 4-H was developed by Patricia Hendricks of Iowa State University (Hendricks, 1996). This set of skills, or a subset thereof, has been used in a number of 4-H program evaluations (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). The concept of life skills includes a variety of constructs, from practical skills such as critical thinking, keeping records, goal setting, and planning to more socially related concepts such as empathy, sharing and teamwork. The Thrive Foundation includes under life skills money and time management, organizational skills, goal management, skills for negotiating transportation, home management, work skills, and communication skills (Thrive Foundation, 2010).
Healthy Habits	Healthy habits include eating nutritious food, exercising, sleeping enough, visiting the doctor and dentist regularly, and avoiding unsafe behaviors and activities (Thrive Foundation, 2010). These are basic and necessary behaviors to remain healthy. Many of these and related behaviors, such as getting enough sleep, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and reducing fat consumption, increasing access to health care, and reducing adolescent violence and substance use, are included in the national Healthy People 2020 objectives for youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Several of these health indicators, such as avoiding risk behaviors, have been demonstrated to be associated with thriving and positive outcomes for young people (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000).
Emotional Competence	Emotional competence refers to being able to manage emotions, cope with stress and delay gratification (Thrive Foundation, 2010). Emotional competence also refers to being able to adjust one's emotions to be sensitive to other people's feelings and concerns. Well-developed emotional competence promotes a sense of self-efficacy (Buckley, Storino & Saarni, 2003). Individuals with greater self-efficacy trust that their feelings are in emotional balance and are better able to focus on learning new information and developing their talents rather than being preoccupied with self-defeating attitudes.

Social skills	Social skills include knowing how to interact with different kinds of people, including both verbal and nonverbal communication (Thrive Foundation, 2010). Social skills are critical for positive relationships with others; connections to others are important resources for young people and are one of the five Cs of positive youth development (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2003). In addition to improving interpersonal relationships, programs that promote social skills acquisition can result in improvements in young people's school performance and self-perceptions as well as reductions in their rates of problem behaviors and drug use (Durlack & Weissburg, 2007).
Connections	
Positive Relationships	Positive relationships refers to connections with others (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). There is extensive research on the important role of positive relationships for healthy adolescent development (Benard, 1996). Relationships with others may include family, schools, and community members, such as parents, other family members, peers, and other caring adults such as teachers, youth program volunteers, neighbors or coaches. Connection is experienced when youth feel encouraged and supported by others (Phelps et al., 2009). These positive relationships help support youth in their development.
Spiritual Growth	Spiritual growth refers to the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. Shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices, it can be a driving force in the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). Spirituality is often measured using indicators of importance, commitment, belief or religious participation (Roehlkepartain, Benson, Ebstyne King & Wagener, 2006; Benson, Scales, Sesma, & Roehlkepartain, 2003).
Character	
Character	Character denotes a sense of right and wrong or integrity, and respect for social rules and for correct behaviors (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Character has been identified as one of the five Cs of youth development (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Moral character can be demonstrated by doing the right thing even when it is not easy (Thrive Foundation, 2010). Character is typically measured by questions around conduct and the young person's propensity to do the right thing (such as the importance of honesty), as well as valuing diversity, having personal values and having a social conscience (Phelps et al., 2009).
Caring	
Caring	Caring has been defined as a sense of sympathy and empathy toward others (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Caring, such as reporting feeling sorry for the sadness of others, has been validated as a construct by Phelps et al. (2009). The Thrive Foundation includes honoring and protecting living things, standing up for fairness and freedom, and sharing skills to improve the lives of others as examples of caring (Thrive Foundation, 2010).

Confidence	
Persistent Resourcefulness	The Thrive Foundation defines persistent resourcefulness as the ability to face challenges and learn lessons from them, find creative solutions to problems, keep trying in the face of barriers, and finding people and resources who can help (Thrive Foundation, 2010). These characteristics are similar, although not identical, to previous descriptions of resilience, or successful adaptation despite challenging circumstances. Resilient children tend to be good learners and problem-solvers (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990).
Confidence	Confidence is defined as a sense of positive identity or self-worth, as well as self-efficacy (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Confidence includes self-esteem, identity, and belief in the future (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). It is sometimes measured using scaled questions such as "On the whole I like myself" (Phelps et al., 2009). Like the other components of the Cs of youth development, confidence has been associated with positive outcomes for youth in studies such as the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007).
Contribution	
Purpose	Purpose provides a deep reason, sense of inspiration, or meaning that can motivate an individual to learn and achieve (Damon, 2008). Research shows that young people with a sense of purpose have more positive youth development outcomes than those who do not (Damon, 2008). The development of noble purpose is related to moral and civic development and is associated with positive contribution.

4. Building Goal Management Skills

The final component of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change is to engage young people with the assistance of adult partners or mentors to learn how to manage goals, specifically on the twelve indicators of thriving. Progress on these indicators is encouraged by measuring the young person's level of development on a rubric specific to the indicator, setting goals for improvement, and then measuring again at a later point in time. Participants are provided with information on how to manage these goals using detailed frameworks that provide benchmarks for what constitutes effective goal management behavior. Goal management is included in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change as a way to facilitate growth on the thriving indicators. Creating forward movement toward these goals will require having adequate skills in goal management and successfully navigating challenges they may encounter along the way.

The theory behind the components of goal management originates from the research on self-regulation in adaptive aging (Freund & Baltes, 1998). As they age, older persons often must learn to cope with the loss of certain abilities they previously had. Optimal developmental processes in old age including selecting appropriate goals, optimizing strategies and resources to attain those goals, and compensating for losses (in this case physical losses in health) by adjusting their goals (Freund & Baltes, 1998). These three components known as selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) have been studied as distinct and differentiated processes that constitute self-regulatory goal management. Specifically, these are defined as:

- S – Selection of goals: the choice of goals, whether immediate or long-term, and whether narrow and circumscribed or large, positive and life-defining.
- O – Optimization: the ability to identify and obtain the resources needed to reach the selected goals.

- C – Compensation: a recognition that not every goal may be achievable, and to show resilience when the individual fails to meet a goal.

Recently, researchers have studied the goal management construct with regard to its relevance and applicability for adolescent development (Gestsdottir, et al., 2009). The SOC construct has been demonstrated to be related to positive youth development outcomes. However, the different components of SOC may not contribute equally to youth development. For instance, optimization and compensation may have stronger links to positive youth development outcomes than goal selection.

Goal management skills develop with age. Younger adolescents (in 5th and 6th grade) may not have fully conceptualized the different components of SOC (Gestsdottir et al., 2009). By middle adolescence (8th grade), however, goal management is able to be differentiated into the three constructs and by 10th grade, the differentiation increases. Gestsdottir et al. discuss these differences as both developmental as well as environmental in that while goal management is relevant for adolescents, the relevance of each of the components to adolescent's lives is influenced by their life events at that age. For instance, older adolescents may be at the point of setting career goals, and therefore may have to find strategies that will help them attain these goals and then revise their goals in the face of disappointment. Younger adolescents may be setting fewer goals, and thus have fewer opportunities to show optimizing or compensatory behavior.

The SOC concept is incorporated into the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, using instead the language of GPS (Goal setting, Pursuit of strategies, and Shifting gears). The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive model makes goal management an explicit and intentional process by having youth and adults review and discuss rubrics developed for the GPS categories. In this model, adults assess and provide feedback to young people to facilitate the development of goal management. Goal management and goal setting are not new in applied programs or in 4-H; for example, one of the skills identified in the Targeting Life Skills Model from Iowa State University (Hendricks, 1996) is goal setting. Goal setting has been a frequent component of 4-H programs, such as in the California Focus program in which youth develop plans to address issues of concern in their communities. However, the breadth and depth of goal setting within the Thrive theory of change program, including a focus on the various components of goal management and a specifically identified range of levels within each component as represented in the rubrics, are new in youth development programming. This explicit focus on the components of goal management represents a new approach to the process of achieving youth development goals.

Discussion

The recently theorized concepts of thriving and components of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, including sparks, growth mindset, reflection on thriving indicators and goal management, are not altogether new, yet together they create a new way of conceiving and actualizing positive youth development. In the following sections we discuss the implications for theoretical and applied youth development work and areas for research.

These concepts are not altogether new, yet together they create a new way of conceiving and actualizing positive youth development.

What is new about the concept of thriving in youth development?

The notion of thriving deals with concepts that are familiar to positive youth development practitioners and researchers, yet it provides additional nuances to the concept of positive youth development. The measurement of thriving and the thriving indicators are very similar to previously used indicators of positive youth development, such as the six Cs, the 40 developmental assets, life skills, and other similar frameworks. However, thriving itself is a new approach in developmental research because of its expression of success in youth development as a dynamic state

characterized by movement, drive, direction, purpose or aspiration. It is an idealized non-static state, focusing on the person within his or her context. In this sense thriving falls within a tradition of psychological theories focusing on lifelong development towards full potential, such as Maslow's concept of self-actualization (Maslow, 1954) in which individuals strive for personal fulfillment through realizing their ultimate potential. The conceptualization of thriving is complex, which complicates its measurement (Benson & Scales, 2009). However, thriving raises the outcome expectations for positive youth development from one of competence or resilience toward achievement of full individual potential.

Thriving raises the outcome expectations for positive youth development from one of competence or resilience toward achievement of full individual potential.

What are some of the theoretical implications and areas for exploration in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change?

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change pulls together components based on recent, validated research from a number of prominent youth development researchers. As a whole, this theory has yet to be fully evaluated. In bringing together concepts such as sparks, mindset, explicit reflection about personal growth, and components of goal management, this theory of change adds self-determination, motivation and self-regulation concepts to positive youth development theories. Along with this novel approach, the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change retains the importance of positive youth-adult relationships and the role of caring adults in facilitating young people's development. However, the role of program context (National Research Council, 2002) is relatively absent from this person-centered theory of change, or perhaps a supportive program context is assumed as a given. Still, this brings up the question of whether the components of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change would work in the same way across different populations of young people from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as for different age groups.

There are many research possibilities with respect to the theoretical concepts of this theory of change. For instance, how much do each of the components of the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change (i.e., identifying sparks, adopting a growth mindset, reflecting and conversing about thriving indicators with a supportive adult, and setting and managing goals) individually influence progress on thriving outcomes? Are some components more important than others? Further research and evaluation examining the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive framework will provide the opportunity to look more closely at a variety of concepts within youth development programming that may promote thriving in young people.

What are the programmatic implications and areas for further research?

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change includes some new implications for youth development programming. The components involved in the theory of change, based on motivational and self-regulation concepts, promote movement and direction in youth programming in a very intentional way. Rather than simply providing a supportive program context and assuming that positive youth development will occur as an outgrowth of this context, the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive program model is explicit in purposefully moving young people toward a trajectory of growth and development. For instance, while reflection itself is not new and is considered a key component of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change, the reflective conversation focuses directly on how young people can move onto a path of thriving. This level of intentionality brings positive youth development concepts directly into the language of the participant rather than being part of the hidden curriculum of youth development programs.

The role of the young person is very explicit in facilitating his or her own change within this model. Youth must believe in themselves and their own potential

to grow. Youth must also be willing to do the work to reflect on the thriving indicators and be willing to set goals and participate in reviewing rubrics and the goal management process. It will be interesting to see how this level of intentionality impacts young people of different ages and contexts.

A relationship with an adult is critical to the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change. Implicit in this structure is the idea that youth cannot do their developmental work alone; they need adults to help them on a thriving trajectory. The Thrive program has predominantly used a mentorship model or adult-led classroom-based program to support young people in their journey towards thriving. While the role of relationships has been underscored as pivotal in youth development programming (National Research Council, 2002), recent research on youth-adult partnerships emphasizes the importance of flexibility in the role of adults where young people can determine whether they need adults as mentors, partners, teachers or friends (Murdock et al., 2009). Have adults realized their full potential so that they can guide young people in this endeavor? Would a partnership model where youth and adults are mutually involved in their journey towards full potential yield more successful results for both parties? These are all questions about the role of the adult in the Thrive program that can be explored further. On a related note, the role of peers has not been explored in the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive program model. This brings up a question of whether and how the program can be best implemented in group settings, and what type of peer dynamics might facilitate a young person's participation in the various components of the program.

Furthermore, the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive program brings up several questions for volunteer-based programs. Some of these questions include the skills needed by the volunteers who serve as adult mentors, the role and support of parents in facilitating young peoples' participation in the program, and the level of emotional intimacy that is necessary between the adult mentor and the youth participant.

In summary, the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive theory of change framework provides new opportunities to evaluate a program model in which youth identify their interests, are encouraged to believe in themselves and their potential, and reflect on and set goals for their own development, all within the context of a supportive adult relationship. The implementation of this program will highlight promising practices for promoting positive youth development and contribute to research on thriving. ■

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