

Riviera Theory of Youth Development:

Aims, Strategies, Ethos, Activities and Outcomes

David J. Riviera

University of Minnesota

Jennifer A. Skuza, PhD

YOST 5956 Organizational Approaches to Youth Development

November 14, 2016

Abstract

Youth development is the process of teaching the process of learning to growing youth. Parents bring children into a world, and hope the child is raised according to their traditions, and carry on their morality. However, youth will discover at some point that they have agency over their development path. When this realization creates conflicts between the world prepared for them, and their discovered beliefs, the skills instilled in the youth at a younger age may dictate their success or failure, and influence the resilience and ability to adapt. The people who have a role in the young person's development, and the environment that relationship is exercised in, have significant impacts on the outcomes. Focus needs to remain on the youth, and helping them identify their own needs and concerns as they grow. Building resilience, adaptation, and communication skills will ensure positive youth development. There are situations that require specialized development plans, such as impoverished youth, when working with those with physical or mental challenges, and supporting youth who have experienced traumatic events. Developing competence in a variety of life skills will result in efficient transition to adulthood.

Keywords: youth, development, theory

Riviera Theory of Youth Development:
Aims, Strategies, Ethos, Activities and Outcomes

Introduction

Somehow, over the years, I've learned a great deal of inner strength and resilience. I want to capture that, and learn how to teach it to others. Especially to youth, and to those who can teach it to youth. That is why I'm in Youth Development Leadership.

Child are born into a world defined by their parents and community to prepare them for who they may become. They begin to mimic their parents at a very young age to learn language and social skills. Transitions occur as they transform from child to adult; sometimes dictated by age or development, and at others, by systems like education and healthcare. Traditional milestones include graduating high school, leaving their parents' home, developing a personal relationship, and forming a career (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011, p. 757).

At some point, youth will experience a realization that they are in control of their development and path in life. Conflicts are created by a collision of the preparation of parents and community, and the realization of the youth's own true path. Kenneth Keniston defined this "tension between self and society" (as cited in Arnett, 2000, p. 470) as a period where the young person experiments between adolescence and adulthood. Regardless of education, youth find it necessary to reexamine beliefs, and develop those that align with their personal experiences (Arnett, 2000, p. 474).

This "coming of age" is often shrouded in mystery during the upper teens and young twenties. An individual may not see themselves as an adolescent any longer, but they may not have taken on the identity of an adult, either. Society has no name for a person in this age range

(Arnett, 2000, p. 471). An adult is legally 18 years old or older, but you must be 21 to drink alcohol. As you will see, age is not a definitive definition of one's development stage.

Instilling a process of learning and understanding is a fundamental function of youth development. Teaching youth how to identify, resolve, and adapt to conflicts is the core motivation for creating a positive youth experience. Despite significant adversity, individuals who have attained resilience are able to effectively adapt to the world (Burt & Paysnick, 2012, p. 493).

Two examples of youth engagement that affect this learning process are the authority-youth relationship, and the environment this relationship is exercised in. Olson and Goddard (2015) explain that human behavior is affected by interactions between the individual, their immediate environment, and the social and cultural contexts around them. Protective factors separate a young person from risks, while exposure to risk factors result in more negative outcomes (p. 224). Based on experiences in family, work, school, and play, the youth's perspective defines the effectiveness of the youth development efforts placed upon them. The influence of personal and environmental factors on each other, and their impact on development, has been the new focus of research, rather than how these factors influence the youth independently (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011, p. 761).

When discussing youth development, I prefer to think of efficiency rather than success. Are the inputs and resources put into the effort utilized to their full potential? I find it difficult to say that a young person has failed in transition to adulthood. Rather, they were not able to fully utilize the resources presented to them. Discovering the impact of these influences is not immediate, and may not be apparent for many years after becoming an adult.

Definition of Theory

Before you can develop a theory, you need to understand what a theory is, and how to apply it to the practices you implement. Abend (2008) asks three questions regarding the meaning of theory: What is theory? What is a good theory? What is theory for (p. 174)? In defining these questions, which they identified as ontological, evaluative, and teleological questions, they also discovered the *semantic predicament* (SP), or how ought the word theory be used (p. 174)? To answer that, Abend defined the *semantic question* (SQ): What does “theory” mean? These questions demonstrate that the word “theory,” then, has multiple meanings. I will summary Abend’s definitions here:

Theory₁. A system to relate two or more variables. These relations are general in nature.

Theory₂. An explanation that uses factors and conditions to define a particular phenomenon (p. 178).

Theory₃. This theory examines why a phenomenon happens. It is the discussion of reality (p. 178).

Theory₄. The discussion of the meaning and interpretation of studies can be recursive, detailing how the thinking has changed over time (p. 179).

Theory₅. This type of theory is a *Weltanschauung*, or a holistic view of looking at and interpreting the world. It looks at how the theorist looks at the event, rather than the event itself (p. 179).

Theory₆. Looking at the etymology of the word, you will find it is translated as “to look at,” “to observe,” “to see”, or “to contemplate” (p. 180). This implies detachment and outside vision of the entity.

Theory₇. Unlike theory₄, this theory looks at specific “philosophical” problems facing the researchers, and a conceptual analysis (p. 181).

With the wide variety of definitions, it will be difficult to develop a single definition of “theory” that encompasses all aspects of the definitions provided. As Abend calls out, the answers may not be the problem, but instead, the question needs to be revised (p. 184). To answer the SP put forth above, Abend declares that a theory must be as general as possible, with as few conflicts between the way we know things (epistemology) and what things are (ontology) (p. 195). Clarence Leonard (Kelly) Johnson, former Corporate Senior Vice President of Lockheed Advanced Development Co., coined the phrase “Keep it simple, stupid—KISS—is our constant reminder” (Rich, 1995, p. 231).

Components of the Riviera Theory of Youth Development

Aims

For this theory to achieve maximum effectiveness, the details need to be focused towards the desired outcomes. The people involved with the theory—in implementation, execution, and assessment—need to look to the youth they are working with. Always keep in mind the purpose of what you are doing: to help the youth achieve a point of elevated development so they can better transition into their adult life and contribute to a greater society.

Youth must be your primary aim. Just as an archer looks down their arrow at the bullseye, youth development needs to focus on the direction the child needs to take. Your personal beliefs, faith, and perspectives need to be contained to allow the youth to discover their own way to relate to the world around them.

Parents do have the responsibility to pass morality and social standards to their children. The role of parents cannot be negated, and they are, in fact, the most important player in the

youth development arena. The greatest and most consistent risk factors are commonly found within family: negative family structure, family conflict, and poor communication. These factors lead to increased depressive symptoms (Olson & Goddard, 2015, p. 226). The prepared world parents create for their children needs to allow for the youth to discover their own beliefs. Burt and Paysnick (2012) indicated that the *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)* found poor communities with adversity, and negative parental support, resulted in lower educational success and early entry into adulthood, including early pregnancy or high school dropout (p. 497). Insight to development processes by researchers and transition coordinators needs to be explained and disseminated to families and youth (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011, p. 759).

One concept we have discussed through our Youth Development Leadership progress over the past year has been defining—or not defining—the age definition of youth. Arnett (2000) details how the median age of marriage has increased from 22 in 1979 to 26 in 1997 (p. 469). This new age range of development, which Arnett calls *emerging adulthood*, is distinct from childhood and from adulthood. Whereas childhood implies dependency, and adulthood defines independence, *emerging adulthood* provides a range of possible life in terms of love, work, and social investment. This is a time where these young adults may start to make cognitive decisions, but cultural norms limit the extent of which emerging adults can exercise that freedom. (Arnett, 2000, p. 470).

Residency seems to be one of the most volatile aspects of emerging adults. While most adults leave home by age 18 or 19, they experience diverse and rapidly changing living quarters in the following years. College dorms, fraternity or sorority houses, apartments, or shared apartments are all options, and these young adults may change between them frequently. They

experience semi-autonomy, taking on responsibilities of independent living, but relying on parents for more traditional needs (Arnett, 2000, p. 471).

Strategies

The tools and methods you will use to approach this youth development theory are your strategies. Trial-and-error, learning from mistakes, and educated guesses lead to discoveries that give youth a unique perspective of their world. The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) reports the world population to be 7,352,177,073 (and increasing rapidly; faster than I can type updates). With so many people, you have to accept that there will be a wide variety of aims, strategies, and outcomes desired by different cultures. Regional and faith-based beliefs will result in differing strategies. Whereas some cultures promote marriage at younger ages, leading to earlier transition to adulthood, Schlegel and Barry found that delayed development into adulthood was not a universal phenomenon, but is found where entry to adulthood is postponed, such as highly industrialized area where individuals need more advanced education (as cited in Arnett, 2000, p. 478).

One of the initial strategies should help the youth learn that they are learning. In a paper for my *Experiential Learning* class, I wrote, “In this time of learning, I have learned to learn from the learner, and learn what the learner is learning.” Let me explain.

People are always taking in new information and developing new knowledge. That is the time of learning. As an adult, you have learned certain skills to better succeed in life. One of those skills is to continue learning at all times, and especially from those that are learning from you. Is that young learner learning what you are teaching, as you are expecting them to learn it? It is a play on words, of sorts, but it demonstrates how learning is a continuous cycle at all ages.

Instilling resilience demonstrates a stronger ability to succeed in the transition to adulthood. Family structure, relationships with peers, academic and adult support, and beneficial romantic partners, individually or in combination with factors like cognitive ability and self-control, produce youth with more resiliency (Burt & Paysnick, 2012, p. 498).

Effective involvement of youth requires clear structures and good support. The setting must accommodate the perspective of the young people. Avoiding the imposition of “expert” opinions for the “best interests” of the youth, and rather enabling young people to decide helps avoid the conflict of adult-directed groups and addresses the real issues youth identify (Matthews, 2001, p. 311).

Olson and Goddard (2015) talk about protective and promotive factors in community and school opportunities (p. 227). Strategies that encourage meaningful opportunities for youth in schools and communities, rewarding them for productive, prosocial participation, have been found to counteract negative influences and achieve positive outcomes (p. 237).

In a growing world with technological advances in global communication, youth are exposed to more risks and negative influences online. Slonje, Smith, and Frisé (2013) define bullying as “the intentional behavior to harm another... where it is difficult for the victim to defend themselves,” based on imbalanced power, and an abuse of power. Cyberbullying, then is this behavior exerted over electronic means (p. 26). Cyberbullying carries with it a variety of differences from traditional bullying, including anonymous or indirect attacks versus face-to-face insults, a lack of immediate response, more complex bystander roles, greater audience reach, and the ability to reach the victim in more locations (p. 28). While one can block another’s email address or other electronic identification, these blocks can be circumvented. A victim can also change their own identity online, but this new identity can be rediscovered. Disclosing the

cyberbullying to a teacher or parent may help to address the root causes of the bullying, and confront the perpetrator. The latter is less common (p. 30). Strategies to address bullying can be modified and adapted to address cyberbullying, but there are additional considerations that need to be taken into account. Understanding the motives that stem from national or cultural differences need to be explored. It is important to help the bully to understand what they have done, especially in the context of cyberbullying (p. 30).

Ethos

Merriam-Webster (2016) defines ethos as, “the guiding beliefs of a person, group, or organization.” As I indicated in my introduction, I learned strength and resilience in my transition from youth to adulthood. In a very emotional and poignant email to my parents recently (in the wake of the Presidential election results), I told them I was in the M.Ed. program because, “I don't want younger kids to end up like me.” I was bullied as a kid, then became a bully to one boy. I developed depression in high school and felt suicidal. I struggled with sexuality and relationships with others, and fell into high-risk behaviors later in college. Arnett (2000) identified some of the risk behaviors emerging adults encounter to include unprotected sex, substance use, and high speed or intoxicated driving (p. 475). Programs to help youth avoid these risks, and instead achieve positive outcomes have been moderately effective strategies. Addressing mental health issues and promoting positive development have taken precedence over prevention programs (Olson and Goddar, 2015, p. 223).

Where did I go wrong? What didn't work out for me so that I could complete high school as a successful, and happy, young man? I was ahead in academics (I attended math competitions at the college). I was cello section leader in orchestra, and a leader in technical theatre. Yet, I feel like my youth missed out on some significant development needs. I learned how to survive, and

to overcome the challenges, so despite the depression and insufficient social skills, I did accomplish some success. This dilemma drives my interest to discover more about youth development. What can be done better? What should be done differently? Are there things that shouldn't have happened?

Activities

Flower (1999) began, "When I was a boy, I did the things boys do" (p. 64). He discovered, as he slit a cocoon from tip-to-tip, that it was not a caterpillar inside, and it was not a butterfly. It was "mush." This was his first experience of conscious incompetence. I explored Flower's four phases of competence in my paper defining youth development. He did not know what he would find as he dissected the creature, and that is what he found. He alludes that we, too, are "in the mush" (p. 64).

The activities of youth development need to teach change, how to identify it, how to adapt, and how to control change (when you can). Flower (1999) explained how a company like IBM was able to catch on to new technology, like computers and servers, and avoiding becoming a memory like typewriters. All people are experiencing change, and your willingness, or defiance, to accept that change will affect your success as getting through the challenges presented. Burt and Paysnick (2012) talked about the *Kauai Longitudinal Study*, in which it was found that youth participants who were classified as "resilient" maintained that strength into adulthood. These same participants suffered more problems than those with less adversity (p. 495). They also shared how the *Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation (MSRA)* promote organization approaches where effective management of challenges at younger ages can prepare youth for future success, even in at-risk youth (p. 497).

Afterschool activities are a growing influence on positive youth development (PYD). Smith (2007) declares agency, initiative, problem solving, and social relationship as being important components of PYD (p. 219). Effective afterschool activities with appropriate structure and curricula integration can achieve academic success and risk prevention (p. 219), but need to consider culture, race, and ethnicity, and their influences on youth concerns (p. 220).

One driving influence of the authority-youth relationship is communication. Adults are learning new technology (email, Skype, Internet), whereas “the net” is natural for younger people. The average starting age for Internet users is decreasing while the amount of time spend online is increasing. The global reach of the Internet provides benefits and risks. A world of wealthy information and learning opportunities are available, but risks of anonymous, unknown predators exist. To adapt to this changing world of communication, steps need to be taken to make the internet safer for youth, and younger people need to be taught how to protect themselves online (Amichai-Hamburger, 2013, p. 1).

Novice is a term used to denote a beginner or unexperienced person. Daniel Levinson denoted the ages of 17–33 as the *novice phase* of development (as cited in Arnett, 2000, p, 470). During this time, the young adult experiences change and instability while discovering the multitude of possibilities in work, family, and society. During this time, a person has the opportunity to explore identities in the areas of love, work, and worldviews. Adolescence has been the focus of identity formation research, but it seems identity achievement rarely happens before the end of high school, and development continues into the younger twenties (Arnett, 2000, p. 473).

Encouraging citizenship is a fundamental action of bringing up one generation of children into the realm of leadership in government. Matthews (2001) defined citizenship as “the

relationship between individuals and the state” (p. 299). The appropriateness of youth involvement in politics, doubting the capabilities of young people to participate, and uncertainties about how young people should participate are three factors that influence non-involvement (p. 300). While young people may be willing to give up time to work with adults representing groups that bring forth the youth voice, this willingness may not reflect the diversity of the larger community (p. 310).

Outcomes

As youth transition into adulthood, the effectiveness of their development becomes more apparent. The culmination of defining beliefs (ethos), strategies, and activities provided to a person will contribute to the developed young adult. How will the outcomes be measured? How do you define success, despite the failures that are inherent with growing up?

The value of youth involvement is evaluated by the outcomes produced. Genuine communication need to be heard, and feel that they are listened to and their opinions are seriously considered. When youth input is provided, they deserve appropriate feedback so they understand the decisions, and why or why not their desires were addressed (Matthews, 2001, p. 313).

Ultimately, I think the primary factor to measure is the person’s own self-assessment of how they feel in the world they have matriculated into. Do they feel like a productive member of society? Do they feel respected, and are they recognized for their contributions to the community?

As a person transitions from adolescence to adulthood, they undergo a change in worldviews. Commonly, young adults will be exposed to education that opens their perception of the world, and they start to question the worldviews instilled in them by the world prepared by

their parents and community, as defined in the introduction of this paper. Effective youth development will result in an adult who continues to be open to future changes in worldviews (Arnett, 2000, p. 474).

Special Situations

No theory of any kind can apply and define effective means to accomplish effective development. At-risk populations need special consideration to accommodate the specific needs and barriers presented. Youth aging out of foster care who lack on-going family support, chronic mental or physical illness, lower socioeconomic status, children of opiate-dependent parents, and youth who are mourning the loss of a parent face more challenges than their more fortunate peers (Burt & Paysnick, 2012, p. 501).

Children with conditions that previously limited survival or development, such as chronic health conditions or disabilities, are now surviving longer because of advances in health care. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has concluded that a basic standard of care to support this increased survival has not yet been fully implemented (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011, p. 757).

Youth who experience traumatic events may need to take a different course of development post-event. The loss of a parent through separation or death, serious illness, and other adverse life events can create deep depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that result in intrusive thoughts, images and memories later in life (Meiser-Stedman, Dalgleish, Yule, & Smith, 2012, p. 71). Adolescents who experience depression will relate their adverse memories in a greater extent to their autobiographical identity than never-depressed youth (p. 72). Meiser-Stedman et al. (2012) found that intrusive ideas and memories are relatively common, and are not necessarily dependent on traumatic events. Fear, sadness, and anger are

some of the emotions that influence intrusive memory frequency. They found that greater depressive symptoms would result in more frequent intrusive memories (p. 76). In a cyclical manner, ongoing memories of a negative event may perpetuate ongoing depression (p. 77).

Conclusion

Throughout the development of a youth, they will ultimately learn the phases of competence. I think one of the greatest measures of success is the competence in desired skills. In my definitions of youth development paper, I introduced the four phases of change-induced defined by Flower (1999): unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. At any one point, a well-developed individual will realize that there are skills and knowledge at each phase at all times. They will be aware of the change occurring around them, and they will have the ability to adapt successfully.

Achieving positive, appropriate life experiences throughout childhood and adolescence development, along with opportunities for inclusion and participation, prepare youth for adulthood. Advocacy for the youth, and creating the ability for effective self-advocacy, coordinated with person-environment interactions and improved care philosophies, will benefit children as they transition to adulthood (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011, p. 762).

References

- Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of 'theory'. *Sociological Theory*, 26, 173–199.
doi:10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00324.x
- Amichai-Hamburger, Yair (2013). Youth internet and wellbeing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(1), 1-2. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.023
- Arnett, J.J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469
- Burt, K. B., & Paysnick, A. A. (2012). Resilience in the transition to adulthood. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(2), 493–505. doi:10.1017/S0954579412000119
- Ethos. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethos>
- Flower, J. (1999). In the mush. *Physician Executive*, 25(1), 64.
- Gorter, J. W., Stewart, D., & Woodbury-Smith, M. (2011). Youth in transition: care, health and development. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 37(6), 757-763. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2214.2011.01336.x
- Matthews, H. (2001). Citizenship, youth councils and young people's participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4(3), 299-318. doi:10.1080/13676260120075464
- Meiser-Stedman, R., Dalgleish, T., Yule, W., & Smith, P. (2012). Intrusive memories and depression following recent non-traumatic negative life events in adolescents. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 137(1-3), 70-78. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2011.12.020
- Olson, J., & Goddard, H. (2015). Applying prevention and positive youth development theory to predict depressive symptoms among young people. *Youth & Society*, 47(2), 222-244.
doi:10.1177/0044118X12457689

- Rich, B. R. (1995). Clarence Leonard (Kelly) Johnson. *National Academy of Sciences Biographical Memoir*. Retrieved from <http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/johnson-clarence.pdf>
- Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisé, A. (2013). The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(1), 26-32. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.024
- Smith, E. P. (2007). The role of afterschool settings in positive youth development. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 41(3), 219-20. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.06.010.
- United States Census Bureau. (2016). U.S. and world population clock. *Census.gov*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>