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Insights from youth workers regarding young people's engagement in out-of-school-time youth development programs

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// Résumé

L’objectif de cette étude exploratoire était de mieux comprendre, du point de vue des animateurs/animatrices qui œuvrent auprès des jeunes, le phénomène de l’engagement des jeunes dans les programmes parascolaires. Des entretiens qualitatifs ont été entrepris à cette fin avec six animateur(trices). Plusieurs obstacles à l’engagement ont été identifiés, la plupart étant extérieurs aux jeunes. Quelques actions et attitudes spécifiques des animateur(trices) ont été relevées comme importantes pour aider les jeunes à surmonter ces obstacles. De plus, la structure et le contenu du programme, ainsi que l’environnement de groupe, jouent des rôles primordiaux. Les dimensions soulevées par les animateur(trices) ont permis d’enrichir et rendre plus holistique un modèle d’engagement qui a été développé à partir d’une recension des écrits dans ce domaine. Finalement, les implications pour la formation des animateurs(trices) et pour la structure des programmes pour les jeunes ont été explorées.

Mots-clés : engagement des jeunes, programmes parascolaires, développement des jeunes, animateurs/animatrices

Abstract

The objective of this exploratory study was to better understand young people's engagement in out-of-school-time youth development programs from the perspective of front-line youth workers. Qualitative interviews were carried out with six youth workers to this end. A number of obstacles to engagement were identified, the majority of which are external to youth. Positive dispositions towards youth by youth workers were found to be key in overcoming some of these obstacles, although program content and structure, as well as group climate also play an important role. The key dimensions of engagement the interviewees raised led to an elaboration of a current model of engagement found in the literature, making it more holistic. Implications for the training of youth workers and the structure of youth programs are discussed.

Keywords : youth engagement, OST programs, youth development, youth workers

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List of Abbreviations

21st CCLC: 21st Century Community Learning Centre

CABQ: Centre d’action bénévole de Québec (Volunteer Action Centre of Quebec)

CDÉC: Corporation de développement économique communautaire (Community Economic Development Corporation)

CLSC: Centre local de services communautaires (Local Community Services Centre)

COCDMO: Coalition des organismes communautaires pour le développement de la main d’oeuvre (Coalition of Community Organizations for the Development of Human Resources)

COCo: Centre des organismes communautaires (Centre for Community Organizations)

CPÉR: Comité plurifacultaire d’éthique de la recherche (Multi-faculty Research Ethics Committee)

CSSS: Centre de santé et de services sociaux (Health and Social Services Centre)

CTROC: Coalition des tables régionales d’organismes (Coalition of Regional Tables of Community Organizations)

DA: Developmental Assets

ESM: Experience Sampling Method

OST: Out-of-school-time

PYD: Positive Youth Development

QCGN: Quebec Community Groups Network

RCJEQ: Regroupement des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec (Network of Youth Employment Centres of Quebec)

RMJQ: Regroupement des maisons de jeunes du Québec (Network of Youth Centres of Quebec)

ROCAJQ: Regroupement des organismes communautaires autonomes jeunesse du Québec (Network of Autonomous Youth Community Organizations of Quebec)

RQ-ACA: Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome (Quebec Network of Autonomous Community Action)

SACAIS: Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (Secretariat for Independent Community Action)

YMCA: Young Men's Christian Association

YD: Youth Development

To my wife, Jessica, who laboured in more ways than one while this thesis was being written, and to my daughter, Zarrin, who was born during the process.

Introduction

The healthy and positive development of young people has long been a critical public concern—whether out of a genuine desire to see youth transition successfully into maturity or a fear for public security—particularly since their discretionary time increased substantially over the course of the twentieth century. Some researchers have found that this abundance of discretionary time is often associated with non-productive and at times delinquent youth behaviour (Larson, 2001). In recent decades, an approach to the study of adolescence that focuses on identifying the developmental assets that assist youth to flourish (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004) has gradually emerged. Scholars associated with this approach have become increasingly interested in studying the role of youth programs in promoting the healthy development of young people after school.

In Quebec, the provincial government is currently in the process of recasting its youth policy, which, among other things, encourages community organizations to develop or continue implementing programs that provide opportunities for young people to gain experience through community service (Government of Québec, 2014). Out-of-school-time (OST) youth programs are therefore considered to be one of the contexts in which young people can flourish after school. It is clear, however, that simply attending such programs is not enough to ensure that the promised benefits of quality programs are experienced. Several authors suggest that youth engagement is the key to unlocking the benefits of participation (Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005). They argue that if researchers are better able to understand what engagement is and how to foster it effectively, a greater number of young people will be able to benefit from OST programs.

Engagement has been described as one of the most critical components of participation, while at the same time the least researched and understood (Weiss et al., 2005). The few studies conducted in this area suggest, among other factors, that front-line youth workers play a critical role in fostering youth engagement through the care and support they provide for their program participants (Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013). This study is intended to shed further light on dimensions of youth engagement that matter yet that may also

be challenging for youth programs to meet. Through qualitative interviews of front-line youth workers, the study aims to offer insights about youth engagement as experienced and lived by youth workers in a set of youth development programs in a major urban city in Quebec. Of particular interest are obstacles to youth engagement and how these are negotiated and overcome in practice. It is hoped that this approach will help create a more holistic model for youth engagement in the context of OST programs.

The first chapter briefly examines the development of OST programs for youth and a discourse about their effectiveness in order to situate the study. The relevance of studying engagement in the context of OST programs and from the perspective of youth workers, and the importance of the subject itself, are also discussed. Organizations offering quality programs and the various types of activities they provide are then briefly described in a somewhat selective manner to offer a general overview of the field—with particular attention given to the province of Quebec, the setting of this research project.

The next chapter reviews the pertinent literature regarding the concept of youth engagement. The psychological interpretation of engagement is first explored, and then reconsidered in the context of Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory and programming. A few additional dimensions of engagement are then examined, such as youth workers and obstacles, leading to the elaboration of a more holistic and ecological model (Figure 2, p. 54). Finally, the specific research questions are presented. The third chapter describes the approach of the study, the qualitative interviews that were conducted, and the manner in which they were analyzed. The following chapter offers an overview of the results in light of the research questions. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the results in light of the literature on youth programs, exploring various implications for the model of engagement elaborated in Chapter 2. A more comprehensive model of engagement is then presented (Figure 4, p. 138). Finally, next steps for further research are suggested and the significance of my findings for youth development programming and the training of youth workers are explored.

Chapter 1

A variety of factors led to greater interest in OST programming for youth in North America over the twentieth century. Authors cite, for instance, the reduction in child labour and the expansion of public education in the early 1900s (Walker, Gambone, & Walker, 2011). The following decades saw a flourishing of various organizations and clubs led by adults concerned with the health and well-being of young people, such as the YMCA and Boy Scouts of America. The years following World War II witnessed the increased presence of women—both married and un-married—in the workforce, leading to a greater demand for afterschool care for children and youth (Hynes & Sanders, 2010). Not all young people were able to attend structured afterschool activities, and the amount of unsupervised time available to youth during afterschool hours increased considerably. The hours following 3pm also came to be associated with higher crime rates and incidences of youth delinquency, fuelling a growing anxiety over the moral condition of young people (Larson, 2001). Intervention programs based on the so-called 'medical model', aiming to fix these problems of youth, became prevalent. In general, there was a concern to 'keep kids off the street', implying that, left to their own devices, young people would naturally turn to deviant behaviour (Walker et al., 2011).

In reaction to such prevention-oriented approaches, the last three decades of the twentieth century saw a gradual rise in interest in programs that focused on the development of youth by building on their strengths and providing them with a nurturing environment. The term 'youth development' began to appear in government reports in the 70s, although it was used in a variety of ways in the ensuing decades and meant—and continues to mean—different things in different contexts (Walker et al., 2011). Some authors have called this approach "Positive Youth Development" (PYD), a term coined by Benson (1997). Benson and his colleagues (Leffert et al., 1998) promoted what they called the developmental assets approach, which, as a research program, sought to identify a list of assets that contribute to the health and well-being of youth. From this perspective, young people are not understood as problems to be fixed; rather, there is a conviction that they are among a community's most

important resources and, if they are given the appropriate attention and opportunities, will develop and prepare for their future in a healthy way (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Over this same period, the scientific study of adolescence began to draw increasingly on perspectives emerging from developmental science, which, in general, pays close attention to environmental influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2011). The scientific community, then, was increasingly interested in youth programs as another learning environment that nurtures development.

In the closing years of the twentieth century, a rising concern with the academic performance of young people countered this shift to a youth development perspective in youth programming. This concern put increased pressure on schools—often encouraged to 'stay open longer'—to create space for extra-curricular programming to assist young people with basic academic competencies. The government of the United States began implementing the 21st Century Community Learning Centres (21st CCLC) program in 1997, with a heavy focus on increasing academic achievement among young people through afterschool programming (Hynes & Sanders, 2010). The pressure on schools began to extend to out-of-school-time programs; expectations began to form about the outcomes associated with continued participation in them. A host of questions emerged about the effectiveness of programs and indicators to measure their success, particularly in terms of increased academic achievement.

The new attention being given to youth programming was received in different ways by scholars and practitioners. Many were eager to begin evaluating afterschool programs in order to prove their worth. Studies that focused on changes in academic outcomes resulting from participation in OST programs became widespread. Some scholars, however, questioned the value of this approach. Roth (2004) mentions, for example, that increasing pressure on OST programs to deliver academic outcomes may lead them to provide simply more school after school. She argued that "extending the school's curriculum and approach to the after-school hours robs them of the chance for more appropriate, rewarding, and development-enhancing opportunities and supports advocated by those in the youth development field" (Roth, 2004, p. 3). Halpern (1999), a major advocate of afterschool programs, was especially

cautious about imposing upon them the expectation that they should necessarily enhance academic performance in a measurable way.

If youth programs should not be expected to necessarily improve academic outcomes or, at least, should not be evaluated by their ability to do so, what role then do they play in the lives of young people? First, a wide range of benefits are associated with participating in youth programs. For example, studies conducted on youth programs in Quebec suggest that attending certain OST programs may assist young people to avoid the use of alcohol and the development of depressive symptoms in high school (Denault et al., 2009); to increase their level of academic success (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur, & Tarabulsy, 2010); to advance in their ability to use a second language (Mady & Arnott, 2010); to better understand and address issues of violence in their communities (Lekes, 2007); to transition from precarious situations into productive employment (Colombo, 2013; Lanctôt, 2010; Perreault, Laurier, Mousseau, White, & Ferrari, 2008); to enhance their scientific capabilities (Rahm, 2006); and to become empowered in the context of transitioning to a new country (Rahm, Lachaîne, Martel-Reny, & Kanouté, 2012).

Second, and perhaps more importantly, youth-serving organizations offering appropriate programs for young people are also widely acknowledged as an important resource for youth development, complementing the efforts of families and schools. Especially in cases when the latter two are not particularly effective for various reasons, OST programs for youth play a critical role in ensuring that young people are able to successfully transition into adulthood (Heath & McLauglin, 1991). In fact, community organizations themselves are sometimes described as 'families' that support the development of youth.

Given the potential benefits of attendance, many studies have been directed at the question of access, since some youth lack opportunities to participate in OST programs (Borden, Perkins, Villarruel, & Stone, 2005). Such studies examine, for example, the reasons that certain youth choose not to enrol in youth programs or various barriers that may exist to youth participation. Although the question of access remains an important concern, in the context of Quebec where some 88% of young people in the province attend OST programs

(Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2005), it is clear that other dimensions of youth programs could be a focus of research.

In this connection, while it is wonderful that many young people attend youth programs in Quebec, scholars have argued that attendance alone does not necessarily ensure that desired developmental outcomes are being met (Weiss et al., 2005). Many studies have therefore sought to go beyond questions of access and attendance to investigate the question of program quality. This area of research explores questions such as what kinds of programs retain youth and what dimensions of programs make them successful in light of the Positive Youth Development perspective mentioned above. Quality of experience, in fact, may be just as, if not more, important than the amount of time spent in afterschool programs (Shernoff, 2010).

In the context of this discussion, some researchers have turned to the notion of engagement to underline that the form of participation rather than mere attendance matters. Researchers have argued that there is a need to explore the form participation takes in order to make any claims about its benefits. Some studies have conceptualized participation in OST programs as a three-part "equation", composed of enrolment, attendance, and engagement (Weiss et al., 2005). Each component of the equation is important to examine in order to understand or assess participation, but engagement seems to be the most clearly connected to Positive Youth Development outcomes. If one were to only measure enrolment, this would be a misleading assessment of participation since many youth will register for a given program but do not end up attending it. Attendance itself is somewhat difficult to measure. At times, it is reduced to a 'yes' or 'no', which does not differentiate between a young person who attends once a week versus another who attends four times a week. Such binary measurements also do not distinguish between a youth who attended for two weeks of the year and another who attended every week for the entire year. Even if a very sensitive and sophisticated measurement of attendance is employed, the question of engagement remains. Two youth, for instance, may attend the same program for the same amount of time over a similar period (in other words, receive the same dosage), but one may become highly engaged while the other will not. The former will likely benefit much more from attending than the latter. To take

another example, a youth may attend two different programs over the same period of time and only engage in one of them. Enrolment and attendance, then, do not provide much information in relation to how youth participated in a given program.

Engagement, on the other hand, provides information about the form of participation or involvement. Those who study youth engagement in the context of OST programs often approach it from a psychological perspective, emphasizing its affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions (see, for example, Bartko, 2005). From this perspective, youth who are engaged in an OST program are those who enjoy its activities, are actively involved in them, and exert mental effort to meet their objectives. Viewed as a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses these different kinds of involvement in OST program activities, engagement goes beyond enrolment or attendance. Since measuring enrolment and attendance is not enough, studying engagement helps researchers understand how youth benefit from participation—a key question for practitioners, OST funders, and policymakers (Weiss et al., 2005).

To understand engagement, authors have suggested that "program activities and features that encourage young people to be active participants" need to be studied and articulated (Weiss et al., 2005, p. 20). The same authors mention that "engagement is the least researched yet perhaps the most critical component of participation" (p. 23). Engagement is clearly a complex, multi-dimensional, and vital phenomenon that requires significant elaboration and unpacking. Studies such as the one I am proposing are required to help better understand the phenomenon of engagement itself, to investigate any obstacles to it, and to determine how youth could be assisted to overcome them. This kind of approach will also help identify additional dimensions of engagement in order to develop a more holistic model of the way it operates within the context of OST programs.

Studying youth engagement in the particular context of OST programs is relevant for at least three reasons. First, Larson (2000) has convincingly demonstrated that young people experience (at least potentially) a unique combination of high intrinsic concentration and high motivation in structured OST activities; this, in contrast with the school setting and unstructured afterschool activities, with the former offering only high concentration, and the

latter high intrinsic motivation. The particular combination of high intrinsic concentration and motivation experienced in OST programs has subsequently been associated with the concept of engagement—particularly its cognitive dimension (Shernoff, 2010). Afterschool programs, then, seem to generally provide an opportunity for young people to become cognitively engaged (see, for example, Bartko, 2005). Thus, this makes them an ideal setting in which to examine the phenomenon of engagement.

A second reason to study engagement in the context of OST programs is that, due to the fact that young people are not obliged to attend, quality OST programs tend to be designed to sustain genuine interest and therefore how they do so is worth exploring. This is in contrast to academic programming, which, as Shernoff (2013) has indicated, does not usually concern itself with sustaining high levels of motivation in students because it assumes a context of mandatory attendance. OST programs, on the other hand, are attended voluntarily by young people, and are therefore often explicitly designed to elicit and sustain engagement. This makes them an interesting context in which to study the phenomenon.

Finally, because attending OST programs is not mandatory, those involved in youth programming are generally concerned with the question of ensuring that youth become engaged from the outset of their attendance. Otherwise, an initial experience that is perceived by a young person to be negative may result in their reduced attendance, which creates challenges for program delivery (Akiva, Cortina, Eccles, & Smith, 2013). Thus, there is a keen interest among those implementing OST youth programs to learn about engagement in the context of their programs. Studies that investigate this phenomenon can help meet this important need of the OST youth program sector.

Although much remains to be said about how engagement has been defined and studied by scholars (these questions will be more thoroughly explored in the following chapter), the above paragraphs should give an indication of the importance of studying it. Engagement is clearly a key concept for practitioners, academics, and policy makers who have an interest in programs aimed at youth development to investigate and understand.

The current research project, then, is focused on the *engagement*—as distinct from attendance, enrolment, or participation defined simply as attendance—of young people in youth programs and situates itself in the context of a rich conversation, both in the public and scientific spheres, about the quality of youth programming. In this chapter, the experience of Quebec with youth-serving organizations and programs will be explored to help elaborate the context of this study and further explain the need for such a study to be carried out. This exploration is followed by a brief description of the research project itself and its general objective.

1.1 Organizations Carrying Out Youth Programs in Quebec

Many factors influence the engagement of young people in OST programs. The entities directly responsible for designing, implementing, and offering these programs certainly mould, to a great extent, the possibilities for youth engagement. Briefly describing the origins, approaches, and structures of these entities—often described as youth-serving organizations—will help provide a sense of the context within which youth programs operate. This section offers a brief history of community organizations in Quebec, as well as their general characteristics, which shape the range of organizations that offer youth programming. It also explores the various ways community organizations organize themselves, as well as different types of youth-serving organizations that operate in the province of Quebec. This exploration will help set the context for the current study, and further justify the need for the kind of research project I am proposing.

1.1.1 A Brief History of Community Organizations in Quebec

Lamoureux, Lavoie, Mayer and Panet-Raymond (2002) have treated the topic of the rich and diverse history of community organizations in Quebec in some depth. They demarcate four time periods—roughly associated with each decade since the 1960s—corresponding to four 'generations' of community groups.

The 1960s, during which the citizen committees were established, were distinguished by the 'pressure' approach employed by several different groups that competed to have their interests heard. These citizen committees were symbols of local democracy, demanding from

the government the right to be consulted on all decisions related to collective life. The endeavours of these committees to respond to local problems were largely fuelled by the efforts of volunteers. Concerning intervention strategies, it seems that this first period was distinguished by 'social action': the citizen committees were dedicated to the social development of certain neighbourhoods, often demanding that community centres be established to deliver social services.

The 1970s, on the other hand, witnessed the gradual emergence of class struggles and added attention being given to social structures. The citizen committees increasingly turned to political action and several new groups dedicated to human rights emerged, as well as Marxist groups. The community centres of the 1960s led to the creation of the Local Community Services Centres (in French, Centre local de services communautaires, CLSC) and several social services were institutionalized. This new arrangement favoured strategies of 'social planning' as opposed to the 'social action' strategies of the previous decade.

During the 1980s, in the context of an economic crisis, a new wave of social problems, and a liberal government, the state suddenly gave increased attention to community concerns. Popular groups were replaced by autonomous community groups whose interventions were modeled after local development practices, benefitting from the services of volunteers. In general, community practice diversified. At all levels, thought was being given to social and economic structures, instead of blaming and isolating individuals for their unfavourable personal conditions. The movement from a deficit-focused to an asset-based perspective of young people echoes this shift. The deplorable conditions of several urban neighbourhoods became arenas for community action. The economic crisis generated several projects aimed at local economic development and the Community Economic Development Corporations (in French, Corporations de développement économique communautaire, CDÉC) were born.

Finally, the fourth generation of community groups, associated with the late 1990s, were influenced by increasing globalization and the aggravation of social problems. However, the collaboration between community organizations increased, as did the cooperation between public services. Moreover, the Secretariat for Independent Community Action (in French, Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales, SACAIS) and a

fund dedicated to independent community action were created. The SACAIS is responsible for making government resources available to community organizations, managing the aforementioned fund, and implementing government policy regarding independent community action. At the level of intervention practice, a model dedicated to the prevention of community problems crystallized (Lamoureux et al., 2002).

The year 2003 onwards saw a further increase in collaboration between government service providers and community organizations, as seen, for instance, in a 2003 reform that invited health and social services centres (in French, Centres de santé et de services sociaux, CSSS) to engage in partnerships with community organizations in order to deliver their services more effectively (Savard & Proulx, 2012). 'Collaboration' with the government in the delivery of services is thus a key theme in the history and present day condition of community organizations in Quebec. However, there are some critiques of the degree to which collaboration goes beyond the exchange of services and focuses instead on joint action, intervention, and problem solving; some argue, for instance, that existing collaborations may best be described as coexistence, or perhaps as a 'supplementary' relationship (Savard & Proulx, 2012).

1.1.2 Roles, Structures, Challenges, and Areas of Work of Community Organizations

The Secretariat for Independent Community Action (SACAIS), guided by its founding policy document (Government of Quebec, 2001a), continues to offer advice and support to community organizations. At the level of principle, the policy affirms the importance of these organizations and the critical role they have played and continue to play in defending community and democratic values, and, of course, contributing to the social and economic development of communities across the province. It also underscores the value of independent community action itself. Community organizations that fall within the scope of this policy meet the following four criteria: they should be non-profit, community-based, associative and democratic, and free to determine their missions, orientations, approaches, and practices (Government of Quebec, 2001a, p. 21).

Regardless of their particular missions, the structure of most community organizations consists of a Board of Directors, often elected at the annual general meeting by the members

of the organization; an Executive instance, such as an Executive Director or Committee, formed from among members of the Board, or others; the organization's staff and volunteers; and the larger body of its membership (The Centre for Community Organizations, 2012). The Board of Directors may take various decisions in terms of the direction of the organization, establish policy, and ensure that the finances of the organization are in order. Depending on the size of the organization, the Board may be more or less involved in its day-to-day work. Often, the Executive instance of the Board may take care of the daily work of the organization and may even be salaried. The responsibilities of the Executive instance are to ensure that the decisions of the Board are carried out, and may include the designing in detail of certain programs, the hiring of staff, and the management of finances. A large number of the OST programs offered to youth, then, are conducted by organizations that adhere to these ways of functioning.

Turning to the contemporary landscape of community organizations, it is interesting to note how these organizations are often grouped into, or are members of, regional or provincial associations or networks. A few examples of such associations include the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN: www.qcgn.ca), the Centre for Community Organizations (COCo: coco-net.org), the Quebec Federation of Family Community Organizations (www.fqocf.org), the Coalition of Regional Tables of Community Organizations (CTROC: www.ctroc.org), the Quebec Network of Autonomous Community Action (RQ-ACA: www.rq-aca.org), the Volunteer Action Centre of Quebec (CABQ: www.cabquebec.org), and the Coalition of Community Organizations for the Development of Human Resources (COCDMO: www.cocdmo.qc.ca). These networks allow their members to come together for various seminars or colloquiums, provide them with technical assistance, and may also aid them to secure financial assistance for their particular activities (Comeau, Duperré, Hurtubise, Mercier, & Turcotte, 2008). In fact, some function almost as 'consultants' for their memberships. They are usually grouped by area of activity, which may be broad or relatively narrow.

A survey carried out in 2004 among 211 community organizations in Quebec revealed three challenges that most of these organizations face: the identification and mobilization of

resources, securing financial assistance, and establishing working relations with the media (Comeau et al., 2008, pp. 18–19). Scholars report that these issues tend to overshadow most of the efforts of community organizations, and at least one of them tends to surface when one discusses current challenges facing an organization with its youth workers.

The services offered by community organizations are diverse, spanning from services rendered to infants and their families, to social housing, to environmental activist groups, to offering training for a variety of human resource needs. However, it seems that the majority of community organizations in Quebec operate in the area of social services and health (Savard & Proulx, 2012).

1.1.3 Youth-Serving Organizations Operating in Quebec

Youth-serving organizations, a particular subset of the community organizations in Quebec, operate in the broader context of the provincial government's youth policy and action strategy, overseen by the Youth Secretariat (in French, Secrétariat à la jeunesse). The Youth Secretariat is itself a major source of funds for youth-serving organizations across the province. At present, the government is in the process of preparing a new youth policy to replace its previous one, which was established some 13 years ago (Government of Québec, 2001b). A white paper—entitled "A generation with many aspirations"—was recently released after seeking the views of youth across the province to guide parliamentary discussions regarding the new policy. Its demographic and socioeconomic analysis of the youth in Quebec indicates that their proportion is decreasing and will continue to decrease over the coming years, highlighting the importance of preparing young people to contribute to the social and economic development of their region (Government of Québec, 2014).

Some 30 youth-serving organizations were consulted before the elaboration of the white paper. Among other things, the paper discusses the role played by community organizations that serve youth and their families in implementing the overall youth policy of the government. It seems that organizations are being encouraged to develop or continue implementing programs that, for instance, promote the health of young people, decrease incidences of bullying, enhance their commitment to school, increase their employability, provide opportunities for them to gain experience through community service, and develop in

them a spirit of entrepreneurship (Government of Québec, 2014). Given the current public concern regarding the new youth policy and the important role laid out for community organizations in this context, it is clear that generating insights into the engagement of young people in community programs—to ensure they actually benefit from their participation—is an important area of research.

It could be said that the types or forms of community organizations that serve young people in Quebec fall along a broad spectrum. Along this spectrum, at least three broad types of youth-serving organizations can be distinguished. Since the 1970s, a number of organizations have offered a vast array of services to youth, particularly those 'at-risk', to respond to their many needs, especially in the areas of schooling, health, and employment. These organizations could be said to follow an 'intervention' approach, and include those dedicated to housing youth, youth centres, youth employment centres, most of the structures associated with street workers, etc. (Schäppi, 2008). Another prevalent type of organization includes those that follow a 'prevention' approach, usually in connection with the areas of physical health and social assistance (Schäppi, 2008). A number of organizations that offer social assistance, for example, aim at preventing youth from dropping out of school. Yet another type of youth-serving organizations prevalent in Quebec—quite distinct in fact from the latter two—are those that involve youth in decision-making and policy. Their approach usually places emphasis on the voice of youth and the rights of young people in general. For example, regional youth forums are part of this movement (Schäppi, 2008), as well as an array of community organizations that seek to stimulate the direct political involvement of youth (voting, participating in political debates, or even directly in partisan action, etc.).

Just as in other areas of activity, community organizations dedicated to youth also form regional or provincial networks. The Network of Youth Centres of Quebec (in French, Regroupement des maisons de jeunes du Québec, RMJQ, www.rmjq.org), for instance, pulls together youth centres across the province. These 'youth centres'—which have existed since the 1970s—aim to create an open space for youth of all backgrounds. Through the close mentorship of adults, it is hoped that these youth will develop critical thinking skills and a strong commitment to the well-being of their communities. Some 50,000 youth across Quebec

regularly attend these centres. A recent thesis included an inventory of the different approaches used by a particular youth centre and found that it offered the following activities: theatre, sports, cultural evenings, film projects, and a variety of outings (Schäppi, 2008). Youth are also able to join certain "councils" with decision-making powers regarding the youth centre (Schäppi, 2008).

Another example of a grouping of community organizations dedicated to youth is the Network of Youth Employment Centres (in French, Regroupement des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec, RCJEQ, www.rcjeq.org). These centres assist young people to integrate into society by assisting them to continue their studies or find meaningful employment. In general, they hope to contribute to the development of young people, socially and economically, and, to this end, often offer a variety of programs in some communities. Finally, an example of a network that appears to belong to the third approach discussed above, is the Network of Autonomous Youth Community Organizations of Quebec (in French, Regroupement des Organismes Communautaires Autonomes Jeunesse du Québec, ROCAJQ, rocajq.org). Many of the organizations belonging to this network are more concerned with youth voice and the involvement of youth in a global movement of community-oriented development. The network itself is dedicated to raising awareness of the general population in Quebec regarding various youth issues and promoting collaboration among its members.

This section has helped set the context of the current study, exploring the landscape of different types of youth-serving organizations in Quebec. Understanding how youth engage in their programs would clearly be of great benefit to this wide range of youth organizations, as well as the policy-makers that support them. The present research project is also particularly relevant at this critical time when the Quebec youth policy is being recast.

1.2 OST Programs for Young People in Quebec

While many organizations are dedicated to young people, not all of them offer "programs" in the sense of a set of related and structured activities with specific content and a coherent aim over a defined period of time. Most OST programs for youth consist of a number of recognizable elements: an animator or youth worker who delivers the program; regular—often weekly, or several times a week—participation of young people; and the development of

a group with its own identity and dynamics (Denault & Poulin, 2008). This section, then, describes some of the different types of OST programs offered by a certain range of youth-serving organizations in the Quebec region, with particular attention given to the Greater Montreal area. The categorization of these programs is followed by a brief look at what research exists on youth programs in Quebec. Investigating these questions will help contextualize my study and justify its relevance as a contribution to the literature.

1.2.1 Types of Youth Programs Offered in Quebec

Given my interest in the study of youth engagement in the context of OST youth programs, I now offer a rough outline of the kinds of programs offered in Quebec. In order to reduce the range of the programs reviewed in this section, I will exclude international cooperation programs, as well as programs that are exclusively concerned with developing specific skills in young people such as sports training camps, sport leagues that train youth to compete, and music programs. Many of the youth programs that are mentioned below may include healthy recreation, sports, and music among their activities, but their objectives are generally broader. The distinction being drawn here is between programs with an intention to train youth to a performance or competition level in a particular area, and programs that may use the development of skills in these same areas to achieve more general aims.

- Summer and winter camps: While camps are not always considered to be programs, many of the longer running ones do take on the characteristics of one. The vast majority of camps for youth take place during school holidays. Some, for instance, may run for an entire summer, while others may only last for a week or two. Activities offered during these camps vary a great deal, from outdoor activities and sports to museum visits and artistic activities. Outings to amusement parks and special workshops on various themes are also common elements of camps. Camps are offered by a wide variety of institutions and may even be a smaller part of a larger program. The staff of these camps are usually young people themselves, who are trained to function as camp counsellors.
- Homework help, mentoring, and school reinsertion programs: A vast quantity of youth programs exists solely to assist young people with their homework, usually in the block of one or two hours after school hours. These programs may even be offered at schools, usually in partnership with other organizations, or in community centres. Typically, older youth in their final years of high school, college, or university volunteer or are paid to supervise and assist the participants with their assignments. Once the youth have completed their homework, they can spend some time socializing with one another, or playing with a variety of equipment or games that are often

available in these settings. The entire group of youth who attend such programs may also do certain activities together, such as outings or fundraisers. Homework help may be offered four nights a week, or sometimes only once or twice. A closely related type of programming is also focused on academic assistance, but through the mobilization of mentors, who provide more one-on-one assistance. The work of these mentors may sometimes be incorporated into a broader program with a related set of activities. Finally, there are many programs that exist in order to help youth clarify their aspirations for their studies and reintegrate into the school system if they have dropped out.

- Youth groups organized by certain community centres or religious communities: These programs usually place a great deal of emphasis on the collective identity of the youth group—often described as a group of friends—and undertake a variety of activities to reinforce it, such as discussions, social gatherings, and outings. They also often invite guest speakers to their groups or arrange special workshops to help their participants navigate adolescence. While many such programs do not have a particular focus, others do, such as music, sports, or arts. Some may even be organized around particular ethnic, religious, or cultural identities. These youth groups are often facilitated by an older youth or young adult who may take on the role of a mentor for his or her group.
- Outreach programs for street youth: In addition to offering one-on-one services and the interventions of outreach youth workers, some organizations dedicated to serving street youth offer them particular programs, aimed at assisting them in various ways. They may, for example, expose them to healthy forms of activity, help them discover their talents and interests, or open space for them to explore their issues together.
- Alcohol and drug prevention programs: While many prevention programs only consist of a few, isolated workshops, some of them include weekly meetings of a group of youth constituted to raise awareness of the impact of drugs and alcohol use. The group may also participate in other activities, such as outings and sports. Some programs also train youth as leaders to promote awareness among their peers in a structured way.
- Volunteering programs: A number of programs function simply by matching interested youth to volunteer opportunities. They may do this on a local level, attracting youth residing in a particular area to certain volunteering activities, or they may carry this out at a provincial level, registering youth more formally in a program that matches them with an opportunity to volunteer for a few weeks or months in a different part of Quebec. These programs offer various levels of support to the youth in their volunteering "assignments", often helping them, individually or collectively, to reflect on the services they are offering.
- Cadet and Scouts programs: While these two youth programs differ in their source, they generally offer similar activities with similar aims. They both hope to develop leadership skills in young people and engage them in physically demanding activities, often outdoors. Both programs also value volunteerism. The Cadet Program is offered by the National Defence Department of Canada, and leads many interested young people to become involved in the Canadian Armed Forces. The Scouts program is offered through Scouts Canada. Scout groups differ in their activities, but some may include weekly meetings with content similar to the youth groups described above, as well as the outdoor activities for which they are well-known. These programs are often staffed by individuals who have 'graduated' from the program themselves.

- Employment assistance programs: Often offered through specific employment assistance organizations or in community centres, these programs aim to assist youth to advance in their careers and, in some cases, further their education. While some centres may only offer drop-in or one-on-one services, certain programs have also been created that involve the formation of a group of youth that come together regularly. Such programs usually involve workshops aimed at helping the youth improve their résumés and learn how to conduct themselves during a job interview, and may give them regular access to computers to seek employment and even assist them to find internships.
- Community or civic involvement programs: These programs emphasize a few key concepts such as leadership skills, community service, civic participation, and youth voice. Youth groups formed with this focus engage in discussions, often have workshops, and, crucially, engage in youth-led planning and action. Some of them explicitly favour political involvement, while others may be more focused on the immediate betterment of community conditions through concrete action, fundraising, or consciousness raising. Staff for these kinds of programs are often youth workers with some experience with various forms of social action or popular education, though this differs from program to program.
- Language programs: More than a few youth programs in the Quebec region are focused on helping youth learn French in order to integrate into the life and culture of the province. Newcomers to the region or youth from other parts of Canada who wish to immerse themselves in a French environment often attend these programs. In many cases, a number of other activities are offered in tandem to learning French, such as outings, camps, periods of time dedicated to socializing, outdoor activities, etc.

These categories cover a large portion of the kinds of programs offered to young people in the province of Quebec. Given this plethora of programs, it would be beneficial for families, youth organizations, and policy-makers to understand which ones are more likely to be conducive to youth engagement and how young people engage in them and therefore benefit from them. A study such as the one I am suggesting would therefore meet the needs of these stakeholders.

1.2.2 What is Known About OST Youth Programs in Quebec?

Having generated a list of different types of OST programs offered in Quebec, what does the scientific literature regarding these programs say about them? In other words, what is known about youth programs in Quebec? How have they been studied? Would a study about engagement in them be a valuable contribution to the literature on such programs?

While several studies carried out in Quebec examine the effectiveness of specific youth programs (Colombo, 2013; Lanctôt, 2010; Larose et al., 2010; Lekes, 2007; Mady & Arnott, 2010; Perreault et al., 2008; Rivard & Mercier, 2009) and a few others explore broad types of programs—such as employment integration support programs (Lendaro & Goyette, 2013; Vultur, 2005, 2009) or drug and alcohol prevention programs (Laventure, Boisvert, & Besnard, 2010)—less is known about engagement in youth programs in Quebec.

To understand how OST youth programs are generally studied, it is worth mentioning a study conducted by Denault, Poulin, and Pedersen (2009), typical of much of the research conducted on OST programs. The authors examine the correlation, over time, between the participation of Quebec youth in different types of afterschool activities and their "adjustment" in high school—measured through school grades, the use of alcohol, and symptoms associated with depression. While this article provides interesting information regarding the influence of participation in different OST activities, this is not the theme of the current research project. Further, this study does not examine the inner workings of youth programs, which would be necessary in order to understand how they foster the engagement of their participants.

In sum, many of the recent studies on Quebec youth programs are focused on prevention-type programs, with fewer of them emphasizing the notions associated with youth development (for example, Rahm et al., 2012). A mere handful of these articles mentioned youth engagement, and none were explicitly focused on it. Research that would shed light on the engagement of young people in youth programs in Quebec, such as the present study, would therefore make a valuable contribution to the literature.

1.3 The Research Project

Having reviewed the state of youth programming in Quebec and identified certain gaps in the literature that the present study could fill, I can now return to the question of studying youth engagement itself. Of particular importance to a research project on youth engagement are the factors that contribute to it. A relevant question to ask in this connection is what is known about youth workers and youth engagement.

Several authors have identified links between youth workers and the engagement of young people in OST programs. One study, for instance, found that youth who felt that OST program staff were caring and competent were more engaged (Greene et al., 2013). Another study determined that youth workers can support youth engagement by creating and maintaining a group environment that is welcoming, helping youth understand issues of injustice, challenging them, and supporting them closely in their efforts (Pearce & Larson, 2006). Other research has suggested that certain relational strategies used by youth workers, such as minimizing the perceived distance between them and the youth, help promote youth engagement (Jones & Deutsch, 2011). Youth workers, then, have an important role to play in supporting youth engagement. Hence, it would be interesting to examine how youth workers understand youth engagement and to explore how they help youth become engaged or overcome obstacles to their engagement in program activities.

In light of the fact that youth workers are not only critical to fostering youth engagement in OST programs, but are also invested and experienced practitioners in this area, it is suggested that a valuable perspective from which to examine youth engagement would be from the youth workers themselves. Since youth workers struggle with the issue of engagement on a regular basis in a very concrete way in the context of OST programs, it would be pertinent to glean insights from their experiences. For instance, interviewing youth workers who have worked with groups of young people over time—say, for one or two years—may be an effective means to gain insight into youth engagement. The perspective of youth workers represents a pertinent starting point for understanding this phenomenon.

The present research project, then, consists of a series of qualitative interviews with youth workers associated with OST programs with a youth development orientation that are based in the Montreal area. The major objective of the project is to explore, from the perspective of these youth workers, the insights accumulated with regard to, and the challenges associated with, the engagement of young people in the context of such programs. This approach will help contextualize the phenomenon of youth engagement and develop a more holistic model of how it operates and what dimensions influence it.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by briefly introducing the origins of OST youth programming, the emergence of an approach to young people that emphasizes their assets, and a discourse about the quality of youth programs. In this context, it was argued that youth engagement in OST programs is an important component of participation and that it is key to unlocking the benefits of attendance (Weiss et al., 2005). Engagement is usually interpreted as a three-dimensional construct with affective, behavioural, and cognitive aspects (Bartko, 2005). Scholars have called for additional research in order to better understand engagement and its various dimensions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Weiss et al., 2005). OST programs were suggested as an appropriate context within which to examine the phenomenon of youth engagement—particularly due to the fact that program activities are usually designed to retain youth because attendance is generally not mandatory. The next few sections of the chapter were dedicated to exploring the landscape of youth organizations and programs in Quebec, and the pertinence of a study on youth engagement in OST programs in this context. The current study is considered timely since the province is in the process of reviewing its youth policy. It is also a relevant contribution to the literature on youth programs in Quebec. The chapter concluded by introducing the idea of exploring the question of youth engagement from the perspective of front-line youth workers, who are key contributors to youth engagement themselves. It was suggested that a series of qualitative interviews with youth workers would reveal insights into the phenomenon of youth engagement in OST programs

The next chapter explores the psychological interpretation of engagement, recasts it in the context of Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory and programming, examines various dimensions of it in this context, and elaborates an ecological model of its relationship with various factors. Examining these ideas will allow me to outline my specific research questions.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I explore how engagement has been defined and studied in the literature. First, I examine engagement from a psychological perspective and offer illustrations of how it has been defined and studied by authors grounded in that approach. To build on this model, I turn to the literature on Positive Youth Development (PYD) and review studies about quality youth development programming. Several additional aspects of engagement are then examined, in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the key dimensions of engagement. I also explore the question of obstacles to engagement, which constitutes yet another dimension of engagement. An ecological model of engagement is then presented. The chapter concludes with the specific research questions of the current research project.

2.1 The Study of Engagement: The Psychology Perspective

The present section explores the psychological interpretation of engagement, its three dimensions, and how it is generally measured. The psychological approach to engagement has achieved broad acceptance (Shernoff, 2013), and is used to study engagement both in school and in the OST context. Examining it here will provide a foundation upon which a more holistic conception of engagement can be built.

The previous chapter described the growing anxiety about the way young people were using their afterschool time (Larson, 2001) and how this prompted the creation of a host of programs that adopted a 'medical' approach towards fixing the problems of youth (Walker et al., 2011). A parallel concern, regarding the performance and behaviour of youth during school hours, gradually emerged over the same period, leading in many cases to a similar model of intervention in the context of the school system. Over the past few decades, various studies indicated that young people were less and less motivated to be actively involved in, as well as committed to, school. This phenomenon has often been associated with school dropout, student alienation, and disengagement, particularly among youth in middle and high school. This trend, combined with a steady rise in the concern over academic achievement, fuelled a growing interest in the study of student motivation and engagement as a potential solution to these problems. It was clear that—as was described in the previous chapter in

relation to engagement in OST programs (Weiss et al., 2005)—simply being present in a classroom was not sufficient in order for young people to learn and develop. Engaged youth participate actively in the process of learning, enjoy it, and demonstrate a commitment to educational objectives. A psychological approach to conceptualizing and studying engagement gradually emerged, building on previous research focused on the conduct, attitudes, and values of students, as well as their motivation (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Although there are earlier variations, engagement is most often conceptualized by scholars as a multi-dimensional construct that combines affective or emotional engagement, behavioural engagement, and cognitive engagement (Shernoff, 2013). Far from being isolated aspects of a simple construct, these three dimensions are thought to dynamically interact with one another (Wang, Willett, & Eccles, 2011). The construct as a whole is intended to give an indication of the quality of a young person's interactions with a learning environment and, as such, is "embedded within the individual" (Wang & Eccles, 2013, p. 13). The following subsection examines the three dimensions of the psychological interpretation of engagement. Although most of the references below will be taken from studies examining student engagement, several scholars who study engagement in the OST context offer similar descriptions of these three dimensions of engagement (see for example, Bartko, 2005; Bohnert et al., 2010; Grossman et al., 2009).

2.1.1 The Three Dimensions of Engagement

Affective engagement. Affective or emotional engagement—associated with the research of Finn (1989) and Voelkl (1997)—encompasses young people's emotional interactions, positive and negative, with learning environments. For example, young people who are happy, interested, and excited in class would be referred to as emotionally engaged (Shernoff, 2013). The feeling of belonging in school (Fredricks et al., 2011) and the extent to which one values learning are other important elements of affective engagement (Wang et al., 2011). Boredom and apathy, on the other hand, are associated with emotional 'disengagement'. Some authors include sadness and anxiety among a range of negative reactions to school (Shernoff, 2013). Fredricks et al. (2004) mention that the literature on emotional engagement echoes earlier work on students' values, attitudes, interests, and

motivation. However, these previous studies were more elaborate, and differentiated between, for example, situational and personal interest, which are associated with different kinds of motivation. In general, some of the research on emotional engagement tends to ignore these finer distinctions that were drawn in previous studies regarding how students feel.

Behavioural engagement. Finn (1989) is also known for having contributed to the definition of behavioural engagement, which consists of observable student behaviour associated with participation. Youth who are engaged in this way are actively involved in school—for example, ask questions during class—and put in extra time to attend extra-curricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). Consistent effort and concentration, and demonstrating behaviour of which teachers typically approve—being on time, following the rules, and avoiding trouble—are also associated with behavioural engagement (Shernoff, 2013). Due to its close relationship with attendance and observable 'good behaviour', this dimension of engagement is relatively easier to measure compared to the other two (Grossman et al., 2009). However, there are many examples of students simply 'going through the motions' of attending school, without actually engaging, which demonstrates the importance of taking into account the other dimensions of engagement.

Cognitive engagement. The final component, cognitive engagement, has been elaborated in the work of many scholars, such as Zimmerman (1990), and seems to be the most complex dimension of engagement. It is often associated with the idea of investment and willpower (Fredricks et al., 2004). Intrinsic motivation to learn is also connected with cognitive engagement by some scholars (Shernoff, 2013). In general, several links can be drawn between the literature on cognitive engagement and research in the area of motivation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitively engaged students exert mental effort to tackle activities that are intellectually challenging (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Zimmerman (1990) has highlighted the role that certain meta-cognitive strategies plays in this regard. In order to accomplish tasks that demand mental energy, students often need to plan ahead, conceptualize their work in stages, and reflect on their thought process to refine it. Carrying out these meta-cognitive tasks is associated with cognitive engagement.

Still regarding cognitive engagement, some authors (for example, Shernoff, 2013) associate it with 'flow theory', which was proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). These authors equate 'deep' cognitive engagement with the mental state described as 'flow', which is achieved when an individual is involved in a task that is perceived as both meaningful and matched to their skill level in a way that accomplishing it is not too easy, nor too hard. Shernoff (2013) has defined engagement as a whole (and not just its cognitive dimension) by drawing on Csikszentmihalyi's work, describing it as "the phenomenological combination of *concentration, enjoyment,* and *interest*" (p. 64). Due to the presence of 'enjoyment' among the factors associated with flow, Csikszentmihalyi's work is sometimes drawn on to define emotional engagement as well (Fredricks et al., 2004). Commenting on the particular combination of ideas associated with cognitive engagement, Fredricks et al. (2004) feel that some of these concepts are not very well integrated. For instance, a student can be intrinsically motivated to learn, but only during activities that present little challenge.

As mentioned above, these three dimensions are dynamically connected, and together constitute the construct of engagement, which emerges as a broad and inclusive concept (Fredricks et al., 2004). However, the three dimensions do not always follow the same trend. For instance, a student may be highly engaged behaviourally and cognitively, but not affectively. This could be the case, for example, for a student who, while engaged in his or her work, is disconnected from fellow students and the teacher. Would such a student be considered engaged? How would his or her engagement be assessed? The same has been mentioned in the context of research on engagement in the OST field. Bartko (2005), for instance, argues that one needs to look at all three dimensions at once, since they influence one another. This inherent complexity reinforces the need to examine how engagement is actually measured. The next subsection explores some of the methods used by scholars to measure engagement.

2.1.2 Measuring Engagement

Fredricks et al. (2011) evaluate 21 instruments that have been developed to measure engagement in middle and high school. They include student self-report questionnaires,

teacher reports on students (also in the form of questionnaires), and observational measures of students and classrooms. Student self-reports are intended to give voice to the perspectives of young people themselves on their engagement. Only five of the 21 research tools measured all three dimensions of engagement, all of which were student self-report instruments. Besides asking students to complete questionnaires during class time, another method used to measure engagement is the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), in which students are randomly prompted at different times during the day to answer certain questions that are meant to assess their engagement. Researchers who associate engagement with the state of 'flow' often use ESM (Shernoff, 2013).

A number of instruments have been developed to measure all three dimensions of engagement. Wang and Eccles (2011), for example, have developed and tested a student self-report survey, in which responses for each item are rated along various 5-point scales. The survey assesses behavioural engagement by measuring attentiveness (the extent to which students pay attention in class) and school compliance (the extent to which students break school rules, such as skip class). Emotional engagement includes two factors: belonging (the extent to which students feel accepted by their school) and valuing (the extent to which students identify with statements that express the importance of education, generally-speaking). Finally, the measurement for cognitive engagement touches on self-regulated learning (the extent to which students demonstrate the ability to self-monitor and evaluate their work) and cognitive strategy (the extent to which students use strategic approaches to learning). Engagement was therefore conceptualized as having six first-order factors (two factors per dimension of engagement), grouped into three second-order factors (the three dimensions of engagement themselves). Since the surveys were administered to the students themselves, all of these scales measure the students' self-perception of these factors. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation, and suggest that future studies could combine the use of the survey with interviews and observations, and also draw on parents and teachers as sources of information.

In their critical review of various methods used to measure engagement, Fredricks et al. (2004) found that the majority of studies only assessed one of the three dimensions of

engagement, and only a small number of them examined two of the three. In other words, studies such as Wang and Eccles (2011), that examine all three dimensions, are the exception rather than the norm. Fredricks et al. (2004) also note that most studies use survey methods, which conceptualize engagement as an individual trait. Further research, they suggest, should take advantage of the multi-dimensionality of engagement. They also identify a number of issues that complicate the measurement of engagement, such as the fact that it varies significantly in relation to a host of individual factors. Bohnert, Fredricks, and Randall (2010) carried out a similar review of different measurements of engagement, but in the context of OST activities. They also highlight a number of additional challenges in relation to measuring engagement, including the fact that it varies in relation to time and that it may be connected with specific OST program features rather than all of them at once (Bohnert et al., 2010).

As several of the above authors have suggested, engagement is a complex construct—difficult both to define and to measure. In fact, identifying some of the issues regarding its measurement reveals additional dimensions that need to be accounted for, such as the influence of different program features. In order to build on the psychological approach described above, broaden our understanding of engagement, and further contextualize it for the present study, the following sections will examine additional dimensions of engagement. This will build towards a more holistic view of engagement, which goes beyond conceptualizing it as an individual trait (Fredricks et al., 2004); I will consider various factors that influence it, grounded in an ecological perspective. In addition, as suggested by Shernoff (2013), examining additional factors related to engagement may help avoid placing blame upon the youth themselves for not engaging.

2.2 The Study of Engagement in the Context of Youth Programming

Unpacking engagement in the context of youth development programs—the setting of the present study—reveals some of its additional dimensions. First, in order to 'free' engagement from its relatively narrow use as a tool to reverse student boredom, alienation, and disengagement, the theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD) will be examined. The literature on PYD will offer a somewhat different conceptualization of engagement, re-defining it as a form of interaction with one's environment that helps youth to "flourish"

(Leffert et al., 1998). Next, the features of quality youth programs that translate this theory into practice effectively—known as youth development programs—will be examined. This will also help delineate the kinds of programs that are of interest in the present study. A final subsection will be dedicated to examining a few additional dimensions of engagement that go beyond program features, such as the influence of the characteristics of individual youth. These additional dimensions will be incorporated into an ecological model of youth engagement in OST youth development programs, which will be presented in the following section.

2.2.1 Positive Youth Development Theory

As described in the previous section, academic interest in student engagement emerged partly from a concern with student boredom, apathy, and dropout, reminiscent of the deficit-focused approaches to youth programming. In order to recast engagement in a broader and more positive context, it will be situated within the Positive Youth Development (PYD) movement. This is particularly appropriate given that the present research project will examine engagement in the context of OST youth development programs.

As was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the youth development perspective emerged in reaction to a deficit-focused approach to the work with young people. By articulating an alternative image of young people, the history of research on youth entered its second phase (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). This new perspective has been called youth development (YD) or Positive Youth Development (PYD) (the former term is at times used to refer to the process of the development of youth in general, and not in reference to a particular set of assumptions about young people's development). In any case, PYD is intimately associated with Peter Benson (2003; 1997). From 1985 to 2011, Benson was president of the Search Institute (www.search-institute.org), which developed the framework of Developmental Assets (DA) for young people in 1990. In keeping with the philosophy of PYD, the framework of DA contains a list of some 40 skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviours that allow young people to transition successfully into adulthood; this, in contrast with frameworks that would place emphasis on the negative behaviours that should be weeded out in adolescents.

For scholars who identify with the PYD approach, young people are not predisposed to negative behaviour. Rather, they have the developmental potential to demonstrate both positive and negative traits. The environment of young people and the decisions they make influence their behaviour. In other words, for these scholars, crisis is not the defining characteristic of the period of youth. From this perspective, then, “youth are not broken, in need of psychosocial repair, or problems to be managed. Rather, all youth are seen as resources to be developed” (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005, p. 10-11). Of course, they are not “resources to be developed” in the economic sense; rather, young people represent the future of our society.

PYD is connected to developmental systems theory and ecological theories on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These two ‘human development’ theories tend to avoid the traditional dichotomy between the human being as, on the one hand, a completely autonomous agent and, on the other hand, completely determined by his or her genetic code and historical-cultural context. To avoid this dichotomy, these theories propose that “systematic change in behavior exists as a consequence of mutually influential relationships between the developing person and his or her biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, culture, physical and designed ecology, and historical niche” (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 11). Thus, the positive changes that are sought are the result of certain interactions between the individual and his or her environment that contribute to the improvement of both. This implies an ecological perspective, in which the individual and environment are inextricably intertwined. With this assumption in mind, one can go beyond preventing undesirable behaviour in youth, and also promote the direct development of certain desirable qualities, attitudes, and behaviours (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Lerner et al., 2005).

Using these ecological and systems theories as a theoretical framework, engagement can be recast as a certain form of interaction with one’s environment. Taking Shernoff’s (2013) lead, I argue that engagement is “particularly sensitive to the variations in developmental assets provided by school, community, or other environmental contexts and amenable to intervention efforts” (p. 17). Viewed in this way, engagement becomes associated

with flourishing, a key concept for PYD (Leffert et al., 1998). Shernoff (2013) offers the following comments about engagement in this context:

> Key to flourishing is engagement with the resources of families, schools, and communities that foster physical safety and security, developmentally appropriate structure and expectations for behavior, emotional and moral support, and opportunities to make a contribution to one's community … Of all the assets that have been systematically examined, time spent in quality out-of-school time (OST) and other youth programs was the most influential factor influencing the thriving of youth due to opportunities for youth to be engaged in meaningful activities such as community projects with adults …. (p. 17)

Placing engagement in this context helps redefine it as *a certain form of interaction with one's environment that leads to flourishing*. In youth development programs, the engagement of young people is influenced by a particular set of factors. Investigating these different dimensions will help develop a more holistic and ecologically grounded model of youth engagement in OST programs.

OST programs that seek to translate the theory of PYD into practice are a potent means of fostering engagement, which, following the definition articulated above, contributes to the flourishing of young people. The positive changes that are sought by programs that embrace the PYD approach are known as the 'five Cs':

1. competence in academic, social, and vocational areas;
2. confidence or a positive self identity;
3. connections to community, family, and peers;
4. character or positive values, integrity, and moral commitment; and
5. caring and compassion (Roth, 2004).

When programs are designed with these outcomes in mind and place youth at the centre, they are called youth development (YD) programs. I am interested in such programs in the context of the current research project and will interview front-line youth workers who are employed by organizations who carry out YD programs.

Operating within the PYD perspective and investigating engagement in the context of YD programs, Heath and McLaughlin (1991), in their seminal work on quality youth

programming, attempted to document quality features of youth programs across the United States. They were interested in investigating the elements that distinguish effective programs supportive of young people's development. They sought to answer some of the following questions: What kinds of activities and programs can engage young people and respond to their needs in this period of transition? What do these programs have in common (Heath & McLauglin, 1991)?

According to this study, organizations that align their programs with the interests and talents of young people, create a feeling of ownership among youth for the program, and establish a clear set of rules in a flexible environment all seem to engage young people and prepare them to transition towards maturity. Other key elements that were identified include seeing youth as resources to be developed as opposed to problems to manage, involving them in activities that lead to some kind of 'production', trusting them, investing in the local community, creating programs that are tailored to the needs of specific communities, and constantly adapting to the dynamic reality of the neighbourhood. Organizations that are learning to include these elements in their approach seem to be better able to create a family-like environment (Heath & McLauglin, 1991). The following section explores the work of other scholars who have examined features of quality programs, which will help further contextualize the question of engagement in youth programs and clarify how it helps youth flourish.

2.2.2 Features of Quality Programs that Foster Youth Engagement

One common approach to discussing quality YD programming is to draw on theories of motivation in order to identify elements of effective programs that help attract and sustain the interests of youth. Engagement in youth programs is thus affected by the extent to which various elements of quality youth programming are present.

Anderson-Butcher (2005) identifies a number of these elements. Her list is fairly comprehensive and includes many program features described by other authors I reviewed. She places the elements she identified into three categories: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. It is useful to note that competence, autonomy, and relatedness are identified as

basic human needs in a theory of motivation known as 'self-determination theory' (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2003). This theory is often evoked by scholars who study engagement in the context of OST programs (see for example, Dawes & Larson, 2011; Kuperminc et al., 2013; Larson & Walker, 2006) and it is therefore fitting to categorize the elements of quality youth programming according to these three human needs. Anderson-Butcher (2005) explains that program activities should help youth develop and demonstrate competence in a given area of activity and present the right degree of challenge. Second, youth need to feel ownership of program activities. Finally, youth must be provided with opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with their peers and, crucially, youth workers. The elements from her list of quality program features—as well as a few additional features from other articles I reviewed—are captured in the following table:

Table I. *Features of quality youth development programs*

Category	Program Features
Competence	Design activities that optimally match youths' skills and needs with appropriate levels of challenge
	Develop skill-building activities in areas that are meaningful and interesting to youth
	Offer activities and opportunities that youth have not been exposed to before
	Provide informative, contingent, and specific feedback as youth learn new skills so they are able to correct errors and experience mastery and success
	Help youth make linkages between the effort they applied over time, the successful mastery of skills, and resultant experiences
	Acknowledge that it is okay to make mistakes as youth learn and try new things; in other words, make it safe for risk-taking
	Provide a quality learning experience through direct instruction, modelling, pacing, and allotting appropriate amounts of time to complete tasks; realize that some youth will need more time to develop skills
	Provide opportunities for guided and independent practice and application; assist youth in generalizing their skills to other achievement domains
Autonomy	Allow youth to have 'a say' in how programs are structured and how activities are offered; involve them in decision making and program planning, incorporating their ideas, interests, and needs into program activities
	Encourage youth to take responsibility for themselves, exercising personal control
	Provide opportunities for youth to serve as leaders, display responsibility, and experience independence
	Provide youth with choices and freedoms, allowing them to exercise personal control and power in relation to their involvement
	Find out what activities motivate youth to participate; try to understand what types of things excite and engage them
	Provide structure and consistency, allowing youth to understand expectations and experience stability within the program context
	Encourage youths' needs for independence by designing programs that foster identity exploration and development
	Develop self-management and monitoring skills, promoting the use of self-rewards and internal regulation
	Allow youth to see the linkage between their decisions/actions and outcomes
	Teach youth how to set realistic goals and how to accomplish these goals through effort and perseverance
Relatedness	Have staff to get to know youth personally and learn all participants' names
	Develop positive adult-youth relationships based on caring, trust, and respect
	Adults should have high expectations of young people and ask from them a certain level of commitment
	Involve adult staff actively in all aspects of the program
	Strive for all youth to feel welcome, supported, and included by ensuring cultural sensitivity, appreciating diversity, and using inclusive language

Create opportunities for youth to experience a sense of belonging
Provide opportunities for team building, cooperative learning, and sharing
Help youth develop and maintain positive peer friendships; provide opportunities for youth to hang out, socialize, and network
Encourage youth to socialize with peers who would ordinarily be outside their social networks, increasing empathy and appreciation for those that may be different
Develop pro-social identities and connect them with positive opportunities
Provide social approval by having significant adults and peers recognize, reinforce, and validate involvement in the program
Provide opportunities for youth to help and serve others, developing a sense of community, a caring family, and related social capital

Note. Adapted from "Recruitment and retention in youth development programming," by D. Anderson-Butcher, 2005, *The Prevention Researcher, 12*(2), p. 4-5. Copyright 2005 by Integrated Research Services, Inc. Adapted with permission.

The following paragraphs expand on each category of elements identified by Anderson-Butcher (2005)—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—and draw on other relevant literature to further explore the features of quality YD programs.

Competence. Anderson-Butcher (2005) explains that developing and demonstrating competence in a given area of activity seems to motivate young people. Program activities therefore need to follow a certain logic in order to facilitate learning and skill building (Grossman et al., 2009). However, they should also present the right degree of challenge in order to motivate young people. In this connection, Anderson-Butcher (2005) suggests that youth workers could provide constructive feedback as youth gradually develop new abilities so they are able to improve and, in time, experience success. Walker (2006) adds that program activities should promote "goodness of fit with individual youth, resulting in high levels of engagement and increased chances of good developmental outcomes" (p. 76). Goodness of fit, in this context, refers to the extent to which program activities are matched to the skill-levels and interests of youth.

In general, it is clear that program activities should help youth nurture their talents and develop new skills by challenging them appropriately. Although youth may indeed learn a great deal by attending program activities, youth development programs are not school-like in terms of their pedagogy and goals. The actual activities offered by youth development programs vary greatly, depending on the needs of the youth and their particular circumstances. Community service, however, is highlighted by Roth (2004) as an activity that allows youth to meet many of the goals of youth development. Community service activities are also mentioned by Lauver and Little (2005) as a major source of motivation for continued attendance. In addition, Table I (p. 40-41) includes a suggestion to program staff to provide youth with opportunities to serve others. In selecting youth development programs to examine in the context of the present study, then, only those that included community service among their activities were considered. The selection process is described in the next chapter.

Autonomy. In relation to the question of autonomy, Anderson-Butcher (2005) explains that young people need to feel ownership and some level of independence in the course of program activities. It is recommended, for example, that youth have some form of influence

when it comes to determining the nature and structure of the activities offered and that they should be allowed to understand what is expected of them within a consistent program structure (Anderson-Butcher, 2005). The importance of a clear program structure is not always apparent. Research indicates, however, that program environments structured through certain agreed-upon rules that are not viewed as totalitarian and allow youth to express themselves have a positive impact on youth development. Positive social norms, having high expectations of young people, and asking for a certain form of commitment from them is beneficial for their overall development and should be part of any quality program (Larson et al., 2004).

In general, youth workers need to be receptive to the opinions of the young people in their programs and, if possible, provide them with opportunities to contribute to program content and direction (Roth, 2004). Grossman et al. (2009) connect this idea to the question of program delivery, arguing that high quality delivery is achieved when youth workers adapt content creatively to the program participants, seek a certain degree of feedback from them, and elicit organized youth involvement. The authors further suggest that youth workers need to learn how to balance, on the one hand, controlling and structuring participants' experiences with rules and guidelines and, on the other hand, taking into account youth interest and promoting youth involvement in decision-making and peer interactions (Grossman et al., 2009). In a recent study on a similar theme, Ward and Parker (2013) found that the strongest predictor of engagement, from the perspective of young people themselves, was enjoyment, and that this factor was related to several elements, including a relaxed program structure. The 'relaxed program structure', in this case, referred to a structure that allowed program objectives to be met while accommodating the autonomy of the youth. Maintaining this balanced atmosphere—a task referred to as an 'art'—was accomplished by capable youth workers. Flexibility was highlighted as a relevant quality in this respect.

Cater et al. (2013) have also found that consciously incorporating youth voice into OST programming, thus creating an environment that supports autonomy, can enhance youth engagement. They recommend regular conversations between program participants and youth workers "which allow for reciprocated feedback, guidance, and opportunities for reflection" (p. 10). Reflection, they emphasize, allows individuals to imbue experience with meaning.

Further, when program participants trust those around them, they are better able to have such conversations.

Relatedness. As for the final category of elements of quality YD programs, relatedness, Anderson-Butcher (2005) explains that it is sought by all young people—with their peers and with caring adults. This component is connected to a variety of elements of youth programs. A welcoming environment, for example, created by other program participants as well as youth workers, is one such element and is known to foster youth engagement (Pearce & Larson, 2006). Defining characteristics of a positive and safe environment include a sense of personal safety, supportive relationships with caring adults, and opportunities to socialize with peers (Greene et al., 2013; Weiss et al., 2005). In general, research demonstrates that activities that involve youth in positive interactions with their peers as well as with youth workers are more likely to be conducive to engagement (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007).

Bartko (2005) describes how young people become affectively and cognitively engaged in OST programs when they are able to socialize with new friends in a warm and empowering environment and are supported by competent, knowledgeable, and accepting program staff, who also implement strategies for behavioural control and have high expectations for them. Walker (2006) argues that if programs intentionally embrace an 'ethos' of youth development—characterized by vibrancy, inclusivity, positivity, and justice—they will be better equipped to foster engagement. Understanding and empathizing with young people as holistic individuals (and not just program participants) is key to embracing the ethos of youth development, along with being responsive to their community and cultural environments. If program features include opportunities to foster meaningful connections, youth may experience increased motivation.

The following diagram, while simple, helps situate the psychological approach to engagement within the broader context I have begun to explore in this section:

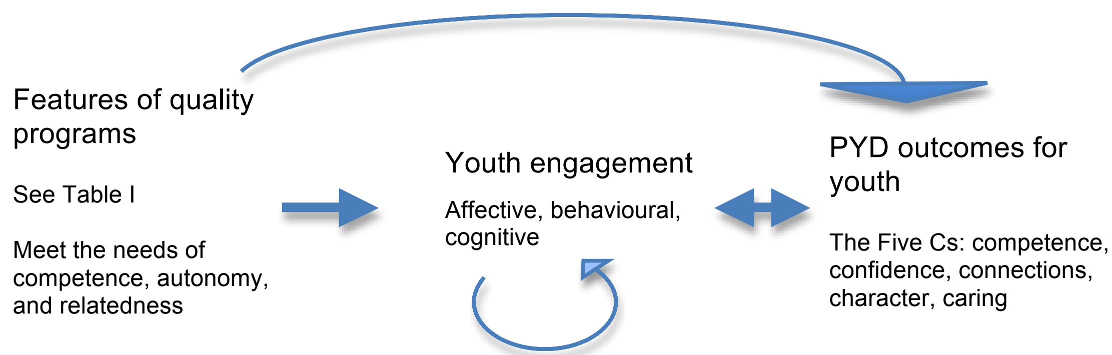

Figure 1. *Conceptual model of engagement within the context of quality OST programming*

As explained in the previous subsection, linking youth engagement and the Five Cs of the PYD approach helps recast engagement in a broader context that serves the flourishing of youth. As youth become engaged, they experience the outcomes associated with PYD. As they feel more competent, confident, connected, caring, and develop their character, they are also increasingly likely to engage. Features of quality programs, which were captured in Table I (p. 40-41), stimulate youth engagement, and contribute directly to PYD outcomes, since they meet the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Finally, in an ecological perspective, youth engagement also feeds itself in a positive cycle (Shernoff, 2013).

Having described the features of quality youth development programs and their relevance to the study of engagement, I can now proceed to examine a few other dimensions of the engagement of youth in OST programs. Again, exploring these additional dimensions will clarify the complex and multi-dimensional nature of engagement and further contextualize it.

2.2.3 Additional Dimensions of Engagement in Youth Programs

While Figure 1 (p. 45) places engagement in the context of youth programs and Table I (p. 40-41) provides insight into various features of quality programs that influence engagement, there are additional dimensions of engagement that, if explored, would yield a more holistic picture of engagement. Some of these dimensions are explored in the present subsection, namely, attendance, the characteristics of individual youth, and the special role of youth workers.

Attendance. While literature on participation in OST programs differentiates between engagement and attendance, it does not ignore the links between the two (Weiss et al., 2005). A young person cannot engage in program activities if he or she does not attend them. In turn, frequent (or intense) and longer bouts of attendance have been shown to contribute to engagement (Bohnert et al., 2010; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008), although this depends on other factors. For instance, frequently attending a program that is of low quality is not likely to contribute to a young person's engagement—it may even decrease it. Nevertheless, empirical studies have found a two-way relationship between attendance and engagement for certain kinds of programs (Akiva et al., 2013).

In relation to the intensity of participation (frequent and lengthy attendance), it is worth noting that even when a certain activity is highly engaging—affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively—it does not necessarily mean that a young person should be involved in it without interruption. It needs to be remembered that, over the course of a given day or week, young people, just like anyone else, require some time to "unwind" (Dilles, 2010, p. 53). In general, OST programming should not simply become an extension of the school day (Roth, 2004), although the other extreme—assuming that youth do not enjoy engaging in intellectually challenging activities—should also be avoided. This assumption is characteristic of paternalistic attitudes towards youth. On a related note, youth attending programs should be involved in a diversity of activities that together engage them in different ways. In other words, not every activity young people attend needs to engage them affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively all at once. The most effective programs allow young people to attend a diversity of activities that engage them in different ways (Lauver & Little, 2005).

In sum, it can be assumed that attendance plays a mediating role between quality program features and engagement. Without some form of attendance in a diverse range of program activities, youth will not engage. Further, more intense participation can, under certain circumstances, increase the level of engagement. However, as a mediating factor, the link between attendance and youth outcomes is made through engagement.

Characteristics of individual youth. While general patterns and trends can be identified, in the final analysis, each youth is unique, and carries with him or her a particular

life experience and inherent traits. An individual youth's background will necessarily influence his or her engagement in program activities. Fredricks et al. (2004), for example, point out that young people attending the same class often "respond differently to the same antecedents" (p. 86), and it is not clear why. It is clear that a host of individual factors are at play. Our ecological and systems theory framework would suggest that this should be expected, and that an individual's inner condition and context influence one another over time. The factor of time also has a number of implications for the interactions between quality program features and the characteristics of individual youth. A few examples will help clarify the implications for our model of engagement.

One of the key ideas explored above in relation to quality program features that increase competency was that program activities should be tailored to the skill-level of participants. Youth will enter a program with different levels of competence in various areas of activity. For instance, one youth may be particularly good at writing, but lack the courage to speak in public. Another program participant may be comfortable on stage, but lack the eloquence to compose a speech. Without taking into account these different needs, programs will not succeed at engaging their participants. Neither will the issue be solved by offering completely individualized attention to program participants; even if this was possible—which is unlikely given the lack of resources available to youth programs—the program may end up reinforcing isolation instead of relatedness. One possible solution would be to have the youth work together in teams, so that their different strengths can complement one another and contribute to the realization of a single project. Such agility requires highly capable youth workers who are familiar with the strengths and interests of the different youth in their programs.

Beyond accommodating the different skill-levels of program participants, youth workers need to also be sensitive to the development of these skills over time. One would expect that a quality program actually enables its participants to gradually develop certain skills—some broad, others more discrete—and that, as a result, an increasingly large range of tasks would become easier for them, both individually and collectively. If programs do not take this into account, they will eventually lose the interest of their participants. Also, initially,

if skill-levels are low, the program participants may need extra assistance from youth workers with certain tasks. Over time, increased competence would allow the youth to take on more responsibility—assuming the youth worker is sensitive to this new reality and changes strategies accordingly. If not, the youth's sense of autonomy may be compromised.

These two examples suffice to justify why taking into account the different and evolving skill levels of program participants is important; but youth are clearly much more than a set of changing competencies that require autonomy and relatedness. Youth also have a set of individual beliefs, values, and attitudes that have a bearing on their engagement, particularly over time. These individual youth characteristics were alluded to under the discussion about emotional engagement, where it was mentioned that the literature in this area is somewhat limited in its discussion about values, attitudes, and beliefs, as compared to previous research in the field (Fredricks et al., 2004). Yet, there is compelling evidence that program activities can shape and direct youth's individual convictions, which can have a substantial impact on their engagement. If youth are able to connect with program objectives and, over time, internalize them, their engagement deepens and program activities become opportunities for enjoyment, appropriate challenge, and feelings of efficacy (Pearce & Larson, 2006). Dawes and Larson (2011) found that youth became engaged when they discovered a connection between the skills being developed in the context of program activities and their personal life goals. Young people also became engaged when they internalized program goals that transcended their own self-interest, for example, in relation to social change. Forming these personal connections with program objectives seems to increase engagement. Thus, while engagement might initially be low, or weigh heavily on the relationship with the youth worker, over time, young people can develop an internal connection with a program that deepens and sustains their engagement.

In brief, the above points indicate that it is important for the individual characteristics of youth to be taken into account when considering their engagement. Further, while engagement is context-dependent, it has the potential to become increasingly less context-dependent over time, as the youth develop more competency or profound connections with

programs (Fredricks et al., 2004). This is yet another dimension of engagement that needs to be taken into account in our model.

Youth workers. Youth workers carry out a particular set of functions or roles in fostering engagement. Many of these roles relate to ensuring that the program features described in Table I (p. 40-41) are translated into practice. For example, youth workers need to be caring, tolerate mistakes, ensure the safety of program participants, and attend to the learning experience (Greene et al., 2013). The relatively large percentage of program features from Table I (p. 40-41) that depend on youth workers' skills, abilities, knowledge, attitudes, or qualities brings to the fore their critical role in fostering youth engagement. In the final analysis, the most well designed program in the world will not engage youth by itself; youth workers are required who can tend to the learning experience with a high degree of patience, tolerance, flexibility, understanding, and care. These individuals also need to be able to connect with young people and become rapidly familiar with their relational contexts. An effective and competent youth worker who is able to foster youth engagement should combine all of these capacities. The following paragraphs further explore the role of youth workers in relation to engagement.

Jones and Deutsch (2011) outline a number of 'relational strategies' utilized by youth workers to foster the engagement of young people in youth development programs, including minimizing relational distance, active inclusion, and attention to proximal relationships. Youth workers increased youth engagement by minimizing their authority, discussing interests they had in common with program participants, deliberately connecting with youth, promoting an inclusive atmosphere, and encouraging positive peer interactions. This, the youth workers were better able to do when they paid close attention to and nurtured youths' relationships with each other and with their families. Implementing these relational strategies, the authors argue, also contributes to the outcomes associated with Positive Youth Development.

Larson and Walker (2006) emphasize how youth workers can foster youth engagement in program activities by 'balancing' the apparently conflicting demands of youth ownership and program structure. This is particularly challenging in the context of new activities being experienced by program participants. These activities have the potential to be unsettling for

youth, but, if adequately dealt with by youth workers, could be developmentally beneficial instead. In intervening, however, they must avoid the loss of perceived ownership on the part of the youth. Effective interventions balance these two concerns. Similar conclusions were reported by Larson and Angus (2011), who propose that the role of youth workers is to assist youth to manage their challenging experiences—which have the potential to develop strategic thinking in program participants—through 'nondirective' interventions that help them "keep on track, stretch, and exercise agency in expanded domains" (p. 292). Their interventions, the authors emphasize, should always be aimed at maintaining youth ownership over their program experiences.

Several authors (Larson & Walker, 2006; Larson & Angus, 2011; Larson et al., 2009; Walker, 2011; Ward & Parker, 2013) repeatedly stress that the key to the engagement of youth is a balance between, on the one hand, encouraging youth ownership or autonomy and, on the other hand, providing structure or close support in challenging program activities. One of the implications of the image of a 'balance' is that, the less support provided, the more autonomous young people will feel and, conversely, the more support is offered, the less young people will experience autonomy. Support and autonomy are thus seen as opposites. However, when other dimensions of engagement are introduced, such as the characteristics of individual youth, one can imagine how a young person may at first require very close support in order to experience success and increased efficacy and that, over time, the nature of this support could evolve as a young person enhances his or her capacity to accomplish tasks. In addition, upon entering a program, young people have a variety of strengths in different areas, and may thus require more close support in one area than another. Considering additional dimensions of youth engagement may help youth workers understand and integrate the various demands of quality programming.

On a related note, it may also be worth examining the assumptions about the nature of power in human relationships underlying the claim that autonomy and support are concerns that need to be balanced. For instance, it may be assumed that youth experience autonomy when youth workers 'transfer' to them their power to determine program activities, or that if youth workers 'retain' their power they are stifling the autonomy of program participants.

While this analysis has a certain range of validity, it does not adequately account for how individuals can exert their power to, for example, act together for the betterment of their community (Karlberg, 2005). In other words, there are other ways of exercising power—beyond simply over one another—to which youth workers and program participants have access. This broader conception of power may help resolve, at least at the level of theory, some of the tensions referred to by some of the authors mentioned above (Larson & Walker, 2006; Larson & Angus, 2011; Larson et al., 2009; Walker, 2011; Ward & Parker, 2013). Perhaps instead of balancing autonomy and support, youth workers could learn, over time, to harmonize and integrate these two exigencies of youth engagement.

The above paragraphs demonstrate that capable youth workers are more than just one among several program features that foster engagement. The relationships they cultivate with program participants and their direct, day-to-day role in managing the various dimensions of engagement require that their placement in our model of engagement be reconsidered. After all, their important role in engagement is one of the reasons they will be interviewed in the current research project.

To summarize, in addition to considering program features that influence the engagement of young people in OST youth development programs (illustrated by Figure 1, p. 45), I explored a few other dimensions of engagement in this context. First, attendance acts as a mediating factor between program features and youth engagement. Second, the characteristics of individual youth, which evolve over time, determine appropriate program features and also have a dynamic relationship with engagement. Finally, youth workers have a more prominent role in fostering the engagement of young people in OST programs than that shown in Figure 1 (p. 45), in which youth workers were simply one among other quality program features. Taking into account these additional dimensions of engagement is a step towards a more holistic model of youth engagement in OST programs.

2.3 Obstacles to Youth Engagement

Although our model of engagement has already been significantly broadened, at least one more dimension needs to be examined. I suggest that considering the question of obstacles to engagement will reveal yet another angle from which it can be studied, helping move

towards an even more holistic notion of it. This further contextualization will help clarify why youth may not engage in some cases, despite the presence of favourable circumstances.

In order to approach the question of obstacles in a holistic manner, I turn to the work of Karlberg (2004), who distinguishes between two different dimensions of 'culture'—a distinction that this research project uses to analyze the obstacles faced by young people in their engagement in youth development programs. He suggests that,

> [o]n one hand, culture can be analyzed in terms of *structures of human consciousness* (i.e. internal structures of the human mind). On the other, it can also be analysed in terms of *structures of social organization* (i.e. external institutional structures). (Karlberg, 2004, p. 5)

The first dimension he labels as *psycho-structural*, and the second as *socio-structural*. Obstacles to engagement would therefore exist at each of these two 'levels'. Further, these two dimensions have a dialectical relationship: they are "inseparably linked and mutually informing" (Karlberg, 2004, p. 6). Psycho-structural obstacles would refer to, for example, attitudes or perceptions that the individual possesses. Socio-structural obstacles would refer to the dimension of social organization.

Beyond simply facilitating categorization of obstacles, the advantage of this framework lies in the emphasis it places on understanding the relationship between the two dimensions, and the way in which assumptions about reality or certain social forces can influence them. For example, Karlberg (2004) describes a widely held assumption that human nature is inherently competitive and individualistic. This assumption, he argues, generates social forces that have a profound influence on both the psycho-structural and socio-structural dimensions of culture. For instance, these forces have led to the creation, in many societies, of an educational system based on students competing with one another to achieve the best academic results. In the environment thus created, it becomes difficult for young people to develop attitudes of altruism that encourage mutual support and assistance. The behaviour of the students in the school then reinforces the structures in place, and so on. Shernoff (2013) makes a similar point, noting that these competitive values may impede engagement in certain

activities. This rich analysis demonstrates the utility of Karlberg's distinction between psycho-structural and socio-structural dimensions of culture.

Examples of psycho-structural obstacles include internalized self-perceptions of youth. For instance, they may have come to believe that youth of their age do not generally become involved in community activities, thus causing them to shy away from certain programs (Lekies, Baker, & Baldini, 2009) that may have the potential to engage them. Another self-perception could be fatalism: that whatever one undertakes as an activity is doomed to fail. Such assumptions become self-fulfilling prophecies when small challenges present themselves. Instead of persevering beyond these challenges, fatalism would create a tendency to quit and attribute failure to one's self, most probably stifling engagement.

On the socio-structural side, obstacles could include, for example, lack of understanding and support on the part of parents, as was found by Goodkind et al. (2012). Such socio-structural factors, of course, may influence psycho-structural conditions. Following Karlberg (2004), I would place factors such as poverty on the socio-structural side since they clearly originate outside of the consciousness of the individual, although they impact it greatly. It is important to remember that, in the final analysis, it is impossible to draw a rigid separation between psycho-structural and socio-structural factors, since they are mutually dependent dimensions of culture.

Having examined a few examples of obstacles at both levels, it is clear that each program participant both carries with them and faces various obstacles to their engagement. They also have access to a number of tools and resources that can help them overcome obstacles to their engagement and foster it. Their interactions with other participants, youth workers, and the climate created during program activities contribute to changes that take place in relation to various obstacles and their engagement. The following diagram is an updated version of Figure 1 (p. 45), which now incorporates several other dimensions of engagement that were explored in the preceding sections:

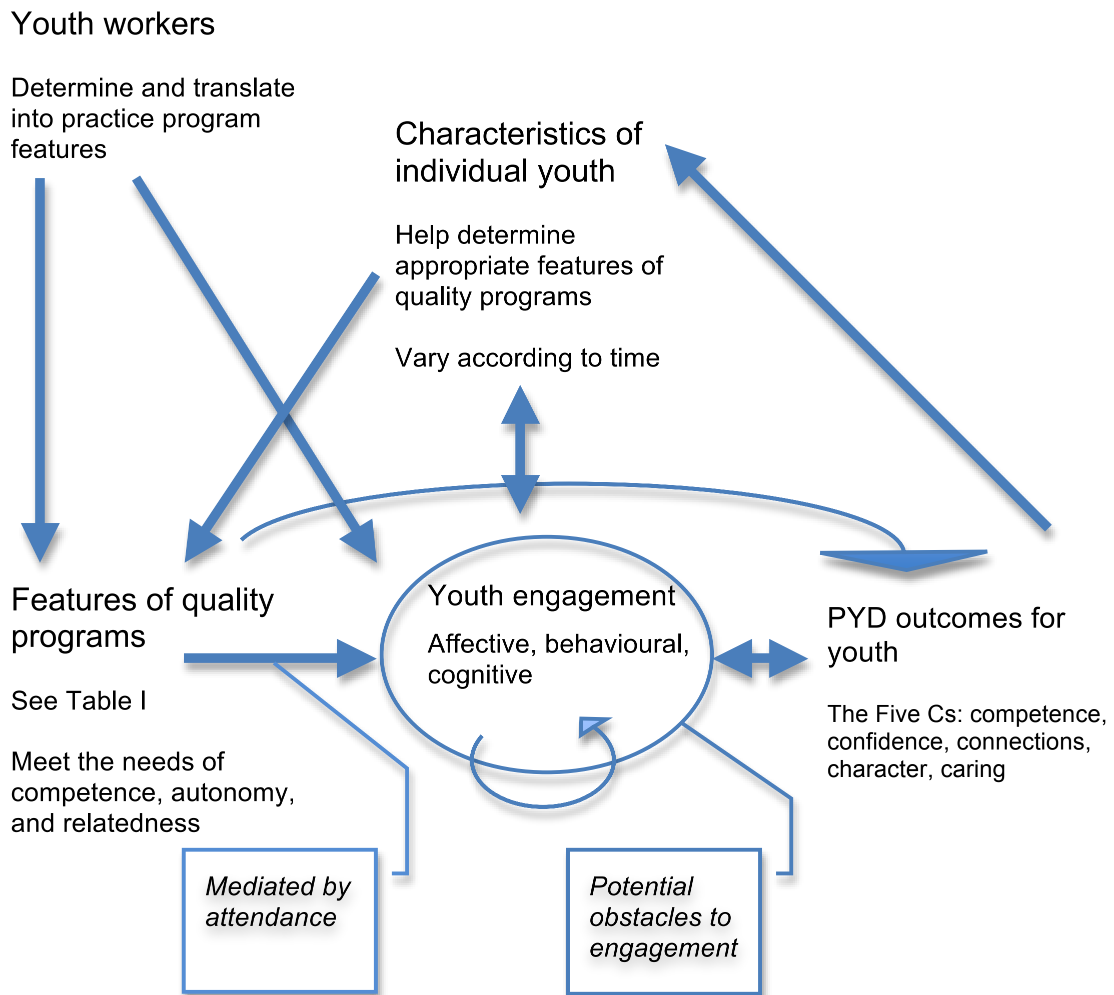

Figure 2. *Conceptual model of engagement with additional dimensions*

The diagram now includes attendance, the characteristics of individual youth, youth workers, and obstacles to engagement. The latter is somewhat challenging to illustrate, and therefore is simply represented by a circle around youth engagement, indicating that obstacles may prevent the surrounding factors from fostering engagement. The line from youth workers to the features of quality programs indicates the important role youth workers play in relation to translating these features into practice. Youth workers also impact engagement directly. Characteristics of individual youth are perhaps the most complex. They vary over time and have a reciprocal relationship with engagement. They also help determine the features of quality programs. In addition, these characteristics undergo changes as young people experience the outcomes associated with PYD programs. Finally, attendance acts as a mediating factor between the features of quality programs and engagement, and does not have a direct impact on outcomes. As a whole, this diagram represents an attempt to take into account youth engagement's multi-dimensionality and complexity next to its context and can therefore be understood as an ecologically grounded model of youth engagement.

2.4 Specific Research Questions

Given the inherent complexity of engagement, I suggest a qualitative study that helps unpack the phenomenon of youth engagement in OST youth development (YD) programs. Further, taking into account the critical role of youth workers in fostering engagement, I propose that investigating this phenomenon through the eyes of frontline youth workers—who have gained significant experience in assisting youth to negotiate obstacles to engagement and creating program experiences that foster it. Having youth workers talk about engagement, obstacles to it, and ways to overcome them will help me address the complex nature of engagement.

Building on the literature and key concepts described in this chapter, the current research project consists of interviewing youth workers to gain insights from them about the engagement of young people in OST YD programs. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do youth workers describe youth engagement?

2. What are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers—at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels?
3. How are obstacles to youth engagement negotiated or overcome by (a) programs, (b) youth workers, and (c) the youth themselves?

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter 2 consisted of an exploration of the key concepts of youth engagement by reviewing the relevant literature in the field. The psychological interpretation of engagement was first presented, which describes it as a three-dimensional individual trait, encompassing affective, behavioural, and cognitive aspects. This notion of engagement was then recast in the context of Positive Youth Development theory and programming. Having re-contextualized engagement, additional dimensions of it were examined, including features of quality youth development programs, youth workers, attendance, individual youth characteristics, and obstacles to engagement. Considering the phenomenon of engagement in this greater context helped introduce a more holistic and ecologically grounded model of youth engagement in OST programs (Figure 2, p. 54). The next chapter will be dedicated to presenting the methodology the current research project will employ to answer the three research questions enumerated above.

Chapter 3

To gather insights from youth workers regarding young people's engagement in out-of-school-time youth development programs, I propose an exploratory study of youth workers' perceptions on the issue. In this chapter, the methods employed to answer the specific research questions of this project will be justified. Next, the procedure taken for the selection of organizations, programs, and youth workers interviewed will be explained, and the final sampling will be summarized. Descriptions of the interviews themselves, how they were arranged, and how the analysis was carried out will follow. Finally, the advantages and limitations of the project will be discussed.

3.1 Justification of the Approach

The objective of the current research project is to explore and better understand the phenomenon of youth engagement in OST YD programs through the perspective of front-line youth workers. As a reminder, the specific questions this project will address are:

1. How do youth workers describe youth engagement?
2. What are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers—at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels?
3. How are obstacles to youth engagement negotiated or overcome by (a) programs, (b) youth workers, and (c) the youth themselves?

These questions are clearly explorative. By their very nature, such questions demand a qualitative approach, which aims to understand and imbue a given phenomenon with meaning (Savoie-Zajc, 2013). A qualitative approach to research seeks to generate insights that "enrich the conceptual density" (p. 8, personal translation) of a given phenomenon. It is hoped that, by listening to the voice of youth workers and exploring their perspectives, the phenomenon of youth engagement in OST YD programs will be better understood and the relevant concepts unpacked. By further contextualizing youth engagement, a more holistic picture of it, as well as its relationship to various factors, will emerge.

Qualitative approaches also give importance to the voice of those who participate in the research process (Savoie-Zajc, 2013). A qualitative approach, then, is relevant to the present inquiry, which seeks to understand the phenomenon of youth engagement *from the perspective* of youth workers. This approach will help me listen to front-line youth workers with practical experience serving youth, treating the interviewees as "meaning makers" rather than as passive containers from which information is being extracted (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Given this conceptual framework, the particular tool utilized to collect data was qualitative interviewing. The following paragraphs justify this choice.

Qualitative interviewing is one of the primary tools used in educational research and is especially fitted to a research project that is exploratory in nature and that aims to explore perceptions of actors in the educational field (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). The qualitative interview provides access to a depth of understanding, especially important in the field of education. This field, Tierney and Dilley (2002) remind us, refers not only to the familiar context of the school, but can include a wide variety of spaces in which learning takes place. This is precisely the case for the current research project, which is concerned with a very specific context: programs offered to young people, outside the context of school, with explicit youth development aims.

Interviews are often carried out in the field of education for one of the four following reasons: to better understand a subject that has not been widely studied and thus to fill a gap in the literature; to explore certain theoretical issues; to offer recommendations for practice or policy; and, finally, to contribute to the empowerment of the interviewee by offering him or her a space to reflect on their thoughts and actions (Tierney & Dilley, 2002, p. 466). This project aligns most closely with the first objective—clarifying a vital phenomenon that is not well understood—but will certainly contribute, at least indirectly, to the other three. For instance, developing a more holistic model engagement will also help shed light on certain theoretical issues. This study also hopes to yield a few recommendations for practice in policy in light of the insights shared by youth workers.

Although the goals of education have traditionally been defined by those in charge of administering it, Tierney and Dilley (2002) suggest that interviews with a broad range of

individuals involved in the field may allow for the objectives and form of education to be informed by a wider and more diverse body of insights. Thus, interviewing youth workers who work directly with young people (and not only at the level of administration) may contribute to further enlighten our understanding of objectives and forms that make youth programs particularly effective and supportive of sustained youth engagement.

Finally, qualitative interviews, as Warren (2002) has noted, provide the researcher with the opportunity to delve into the 'world' of the interviewee. This 'world' consists of their experiences as well as their interpretation and understanding of these experiences and the forces acting in their environment. The insights shared by the interviewees, because of their experience or particular characteristics, are considered a rich source of data (Warren, 2002).

3.2 Selection of the Programs and Participants

This section presents the selection criteria that were used to identify potential organizations to approach for interviews with their youth workers, the procedure utilized to select these organizations, and a summary table of the final list of interviewees. A short summary of each program represented by these interviewees follows the table.

3.2.1 Selection Criteria

The term 'youth workers' is used to refer to those who work directly with young people—sometimes referred to as front-line youth workers—in the context of programs offered by youth-serving organizations. In the case of the current research project, I am interested in youth workers who implement OST youth development programs with a community service component. In order, then, to find and recruit potential interviewees from this specific population of youth workers, I first established the following criteria—based on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter—for the selection of appropriate programs:

- The program focuses on youth between the ages of 12 and 19 (i.e. programs focusing on youth between the ages of 11 to 15, 13 to 18, or 15 to 21 would all be acceptable). This age group was chosen because it includes those in middle and high school and it is well known that engaging these 'older' youth is a more challenging feat than engaging their younger peers (Deschenes, Little, Grossman, & Arbreton, 2010) and therefore might yield interesting data in relation to obstacles to engagement.
- The program operates in the region of Montreal.

- The program operates 'out-of-school', meaning that its activities do not take place during school hours and that participation is voluntary and not a required component of an academic curriculum. In terms of the location of programs, I did not distinguish between those held off or on school grounds—programs held in either were selected.
- The program is more than a conference, an event, or a series of workshops of short duration. Specifically, the program extends over at least a whole semester, and preferably over a year or more. Intensity and duration of exposure to program activities, as explained in the previous chapter, may contribute to higher levels of engagement (Akiva et al., 2013). Eliminating programs of short duration will help focus on those that involve interactions between youth workers and young people over a longer period of time, thus ensuring that the youth workers I interview at least potentially have experience sustaining the participation of youth in program activities and fostering their engagement.
- The program goes beyond simply providing activities for young people and explicitly articulates Positive Youth Development goals, which are to develop competence, confidence, connections, character, and compassion in young people (Roth, 2004). More specifically, the program incorporates a reasonable number of the characteristics of quality youth development programs as synthesized in the previous chapter (Table I, p. 40-41). I use the term 'reasonable' because, in practice, not all YD programs are able to include the full list of characteristics (Roth, 2004). This criterion eliminates, for example, programs that are limited to homework help or those consisting of participation in a sports team (or solely focused on sports). It also excludes youth drop-in programs.
- The program includes among its activities some form of community service or volunteering, although it need not be its primary focus. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, such activities allow youth to meet many of the goals of youth development and are a major source of motivation (Lauver & Little, 2005; Roth, 2004). Further, involvement in 'real-world' tasks is associated with cognitive engagement (Kirshner, Pozzoboni, & Jones, 2011). The chosen programs will thus be more likely to provide an appropriate setting to study engagement.

3.2.2 Procedure for the Selection

Having elaborated the criteria used to identify appropriate programs, I can now describe the sequence of steps that were taken to identify the programs that might meet these criteria. Two strategies were used:

1. I undertook a number of Internet searches using the Google search engine. I used different combinations of the following words: community, volunteering, service, leadership, Montreal, program, and youth. I also used the equivalent French terms in my research. This search allowed me to find lists of youth programs that were evaluated against the criteria described above.

2. Building on the previous strategy, I used a strategy described by Warren (2002) called "snowballing". In the context of qualitative research, Warren explains that it is acceptable, having identified a few interviewees that fit one's criteria, to then find additional interviewees through these initial contacts. This strategy acknowledges the fact that one's target population for a study is often highly interconnected, and networking within that population can allow one to identify additional interviewees. Given the exploratory nature of the study, adopting the snowball sampling method was appropriate. The target population for my study—youth workers who work directly with young people—effectively form a community of sorts, and through their personal networks additional organizations were identified. Even if an organization I contacted did not carry out a program that fit my criteria, they were often able to point me in the direction of others that might.

Given my position in this field, the final selection of programs was also influenced by my own knowledge of the field and contacts I had already developed within the community of practitioners. Using these search strategies, I was able to compile a list of 15 programs that met the criteria listed above. In some cases, I was unsure if a program met my criteria, since I often only had access to the organization's website. In order to double-check that they indeed met my criteria, I communicated with a representative on the phone or by email. In several cases, information on their website was outdated, but this was clarified when I was able to speak to someone directly. Interviews were arranged with six youth workers who agreed to participate. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews to be conducted, the sample size seemed appropriate.

3.2.3 Summary Table and Descriptions of the Six Programs of the Youth Workers Who Were Interviewed

The following table was compiled using information gleaned from the organization's websites, as well as from the interviews themselves. It has been organized in such a way that it illustrates how the programs meet the criteria listed above. The names of the programs are kept anonymous, simply represented by a numbering system (1 to 6), which was also used for the six interviews. Programs 2, 4, and 6 are explicitly aimed at reaching marginalized youth,

although all six of the programs include young people from underserved communities. A brief summary of each program follows the table. Programs 1, 3, 4, and 6 are part of the English communities of greater Montreal with programming being offered in English only, while program 5 situates itself in the French speaking community and is offered in French only, whereas program 2 offers activities in both French and English. Accordingly, the programs that were selected are representative of the kinds available in the area serving both the English and French communities and with some offering activities in both languages, while my own positioning as an Anglophone minority in Quebec did influence to some degree the selection.

Table II. *Summary table of the programs that were selected*

Program	Age range	Objectives of the program	Examples of activities	Meetings	Group size	Duration of program
1	13-17	To prepare youth for the life ahead of them, including work. To help them to understand themselves, to work with others.	Cooking, fundraising, hiking, volunteering with seniors, CV and interview workshops, job shadowing	At least twice a week, for 2 to 3 hours; for projects, up to 5 hours	Between 6 and 15 youth	September to June
2	14-21	To get youth involved in their community. To assist youth to create a community project. To empower youth. To reach isolated or marginalized youth.	Planning a community project, skill-building workshops, volunteer projects	Once a week, for 3 hours; special volunteer projects once or twice a month	Between 10 and 13 youth	October to May
3	12-17	Leadership building. To build the confidence of the youth. To allow them to express themselves and develop their musical talents.	Community music performances, fundraisers for the program, collecting bottles and cans	At least twice a week, for 2 hours;	About 20 youth	September to June
4	14-18	Leadership building. Assisting the youth to accomplish projects they design themselves.	Applying for grants, carrying out projects to help others, trips, workshops on various subjects	Once a week; for projects and outings, several hours	Between 7 and 10 youth	Mid-October to June
5	12-17	To develop the self-esteem of youth, help them recognize their strengths and build on them, build certain skills, and expose them to new activities.	Volunteer opportunities with younger children or seniors, social activities	Once a week for the volunteer activity; social activities once a month	(No defined group; about 80 youth are enrolled)	September to December and January to June (two sessions)
6	18-25	To help youth explore and enhance their leadership skills in a safe space.	Civic participation, volunteer activities, workshops, trainings, fun outings	Twice a month; special activities, several hours	Between 7 and 16 youth	Year-long (January to December)

Program 1. This program was designed and created by the youth worker who was interviewed. She also coordinates all other teen activities held at the community centre where the program is based. Her focus, however, is the teen leadership group for which she was interviewed, which consists of a group of youngsters between the ages of 13 and 17, generally recruited through word-of-mouth and networks of friends who attend the community centre. This group meets with the youth worker at least twice a week and sometimes for additional time on the weekend for special outings or in order to carry out service projects. The purpose of the program is to help the youth prepare for their future, including employment. There is a focus on developing certain skills, such as cooking, planning, CV writing, and learning how to conduct one's self during a job interview. An important element of the program is the involvement of the youth in various volunteering projects, such as catering for a senior's line-dancing evening. Effort is made to ensure that the youth commit to the program activities from the beginning of the school year until the end. Several youth attend for subsequent years until they are in their final year of high school.

Program 2. A community research project undertaken in this neighbourhood a few years ago concluded that young people felt their voice was not being sufficiently heard or taken into account. This program emerged as a response to the results of that study. Two youth workers are directly responsible for coordinating and carrying out the program, one of whom I interviewed. A group of youth is recruited from schools and community centres shortly after the beginning of the school year. The group meets weekly for about three hours. The focus of their meetings is the gradual conceptualization, design, planning, and execution of a community project. For example, during a previous year the project consisted of creating a proposal for a new basketball court for the neighbourhood. Various workshops aimed at developing certain leadership skills that the youth workers feel would be helpful are included among the program's activities.

Program 3. This program is among many offered by a community centre. It is an add-on to a wide range of drop-in type activities. Youth are recruited from the drop-in space to participate in this more structured program, focused on developing their confidence and other leadership skills through musical practices and performances. The teen program coordinator

who was interviewed runs this music group personally. Effort is made to develop a positive group dynamic, and high standards of behaviour are required for youth to be able to participate. The group meets at least twice a week for about two hours for practice and other activities. They prepare for community performances together, as well as undertake, from time to time, fundraising projects or service activities in the neighbourhood, such as bottle and can drives.

Program 4. A fairly large organization is behind this program, which is coordinated and co-animated by two youth workers, both of whom participated in the interview. A youth group is formed every year shortly after the school year begins, usually by recruiting through specific schools. The youth meet once a week and receive school credit for their participation. The youth group itself determines much of the content of the program and the activities it undertakes. There is a focus on skill-building, workshops based on the youth's interests, and community projects. Examples of community projects undertaken in the past include efforts to improve the lives of homeless individuals in downtown Montreal.

Program 5. This program was the only one that was not organized around the concept of a youth group, although the youth who attend the program often socialize with one another. Youth are recruited through nearby schools and are matched, according to their interests, to a regular volunteer opportunity, which they assist with once a week, usually with the help of a youth worker. Enrolment is typically for an entire semester, although many youth continue for several semesters. These volunteer activities include, for example, organizing activities for young children and helping with a senior's program. In addition, social events are organized about once a month for all of the youth volunteers. Another important element of the program is follow-up meetings with the youth to get feedback from them regarding their volunteer work and in order to make any necessary adjustments. When the youth have conducted a certain number of volunteer activities (say, 25, 50, or 100 etc.), special events are held to recognize their contribution to the community. The interview was conducted with one of the youth workers who is heavily involved in recruiting the youth, as well as in the direct work with the youth in their volunteer activities.

Program 6. This program is one among a number offered at a community centre for youth from a minority population in Montreal. It consists of a team of youth who are slightly older than the young people enrolled in the other programs described above. This team assists the community centre with fundraising and informs the general programming available at the community centre. They are often involved in event planning and meet at least twice a month. A variety of workshops are offered to them, according to their interests. They are also occasionally involved in projects to better their community as well as fun outings. The youth worker who was interviewed for this program coordinates and conducts the regular activities of this team of youth.

3.3 Data Collection

Having explained the selection criteria and sampling method, this section describes how the interviews were carried out, as well as relevant ethical considerations.

3.3.1 Interview Questions

In the case of the present research project, my position as both a youth worker and a researcher was, in a sense, also a methodological 'tool' and considerably influenced the form of the interviews that I carried out. My personal involvement in working with young people in educational programs aimed at empowering them to contribute to the betterment of their communities has been ongoing, since I was a teenager myself. More recently, I was assisting, as a youth worker and, for a period of time, as a coordinator, with a youth program in Montreal. I therefore became familiar with the landscape of youth organizations in a number of the neighbourhoods across the island. The youth workers I interviewed could thus be considered, in a broad sense, my colleagues.

In the majority of traditional research that utilizes the interview method, it is assumed that the researcher and the interviewee do not belong to the same social circles and that they will not see one another after the interview (Platt, 1981). However, in the context of the current research project, those whom I interviewed, although not necessarily known to me prior to the interview, became, in many cases, part of my personal network of friends and colleagues, due to the fact that we are in the same field of youth programming.

My position could be described as that of a ‘practitioner-researcher’, defined by De Lavergne (2007) as a “professional and a researcher that conducts his or her research in his or her own professional field, or a related field, in a professional world with similarities or links to his own environment or domain of activity” (p. 28, personal translation). De Lavergne argues that a ‘double identity’ is created for the practitioner-researcher, and, in the best cases, a dialogical relationship is formed between each of these identities and their respective systems of knowledge and practice. Thus, using the tools of a researcher allows the practitioner-researcher to view his or her professional world from a new perspective that will allow him or her to glean new insights into it. In turn, the practitioner-researcher hopes to bring the lived and rich experience of his or her world to the attention of the community of researchers.

Having established my membership in this ‘community’ of youth workers in Montreal—most of us young people ourselves, all striving to contribute to the positive development of youth through engaging programs—it can thus be said that I researched my community of practice. In this context, the researcher often shares with the interviewees a relatively large body of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as certain attitudes and perspectives (Platt, 1981). The subtleties of such an interview are well described by Platt (1981). She alludes to the informal nature of such interviews, which stems, at least partially, from the friendship that extends across the conversation. This friendship also prevents the researcher from manipulating, even in subtle ways, the interviewee through his or her questions. The equality that dominates interviews between colleagues demands that questions be clearly and honestly presented, without a hidden agenda. The attitude of the researcher should be one of humility, in which one seeks simply to explore the knowledge and experiences of one’s colleagues. The interviewer and his or her chosen methodology, Platt (1981) emphasizes, should be highly flexible, for these kinds of interviews rarely follow a rigid set of questions.

Another implication of researching one’s own community is that, as described above, one does not and should not pretend to come empty handed to the interview, knowing nothing. Of course, qualitative interviewing itself has a reflexive element: “the interview unfolds

reflexively as each participant looks at the world through the other's eyes, incorporating both self and other into the process of interpretation" (Warren, 2002, p. 98). Thus, especially in the context of researching one's own community, the interview becomes a collaboration between the researcher and the interviewee (Ellis & Berger, 2002). 'Collaboration', in this context, would include, of course, offering suggestions or advice if the interviewee seeks it, and vice-versa. This kind of interview is also meant to empower its participants. Instead of a simple transfer of information from the interviewee to the researcher, the interview becomes an authentic form of collaboration that helps both parties gain insight into the topic under examination (De Lavergne, 2007).

Research methodologies that describe the interview as a collaborative process exist on a spectrum. Ellis and Berger (2002), for instance, describe four types of interviews along this spectrum: reflexive dyadic interviews, interactive interviews, mediated co-constructed narratives, and unmediated co-constructed narratives. The reflexive dyadic interview resembles most closely the traditional interview, in the sense that the researcher still asks the interviewee questions. However, the researcher feels free to add his or her reflections on these same questions, as well as on the process of collaboration in general. In the interactive interview, the researcher becomes almost entirely a participant and a small group of individuals explore the research questions together. The mediated co-constructed narrative resembles a therapy session for two or more individuals, where the researcher facilitates an intimate discussion between the participants. The unmediated co-constructed narrative resembles the mediated one, although the researcher actually becomes one of the participants, reflecting on his or her experiences with the other individuals. The interviews I carried out, in order to situate myself along this spectrum, resembled most closely the reflexive dyadic type. I stopped short of becoming entirely a participant; the interview was semi-structured using a list of questions, which I posed. The reflexive dyadic approach to interviewing allowed me to draw upon my own experiences and insights during the interview, thus fostering a spirit of collaborative research, while still remaining identifiable as the researcher.

Reflexivity, in the particular case of a practitioner-researcher, is, of course, an important concern. However, De Lavergne (2007) points out that reflexivity is not necessarily

more important for practitioner-researchers than any other qualitative researchers. All researchers bring their own subjectivity to their work; the practitioner-researcher simply adds another layer—what could be considered a 'third identity': the professional identity—in addition to his or her individual and research identities. In qualitative research, De Lavergne (2007) concludes, the researcher needs to integrate a form of personal questioning into his or her work.

Since I was seeking to understand the perspective of the participants rather than accumulate a list of physical characteristics or facts about them (hair colour, level of education, etc.), the interview process needed to be sensitive to each participant and open enough to capture the varied insights that emerged in the context of the interview. Therefore, I was flexible with my list of questions, using it as a guide or a framework rather than a rigid set of steps to follow, regardless of what the interviewee shared. Warren (2002) identifies three types of questions: main questions, follow-up questions that help the interviewee clarify his or her answers, and questions that can explore related lines of inquiry to the main questions.

The interviews I carried out followed this same basic pattern, although I added some demographic questions at the beginning in order to familiarize myself with the interviewees. A few concluding questions were also added in order to ensure that the interviewee was given enough space to contribute his or her thoughts. The list of questions that served to guide me during the interviews is in Annex 1. Naturally, the main questions were closely related to the specific research questions. Below are the three main questions I asked during the interviews:

1. What obstacles prevent youth from participating?
2. How do young people overcome these obstacles? What tools or resources do they utilize to overcome them?
3. What aspects of your program facilitate (or impede) youth engagement?

These questions opened up a conversation about participation in general, which led to a more profound discussion about youth engagement—the research objective of this project. Starting with questions about engagement, it was felt, might prove counterproductive since it is used in a very specific way in this research project. The interviewee's conceptions of engagement might not be the same as mine—in fact, the first research question is aimed at

understanding their perspective on engagement. It seemed important, then, not to define engagement—as it is used in this research project—*for* the interviewees at the outset, which would undermine my first research question. Rather, it was felt it would be best to let the conversation flow naturally into engagement by first considering the more general concept of participation. The following table summarizes the main parts of the interview, their purpose, and their connection with the research questions:

Table III. *Summary of the main parts of the interview*

Type of questions	Interview questions	Aim of the questions	Connection with research questions
Introductory questions	1. Introduce yourself and describe the program with which you are working.	To familiarize myself with the interviewee and his or her program.	Better understanding the program will help clarify how it helps youth engage.
	2. What are the objectives of your program?	To further familiarize myself with the program.	Better understanding the program will help clarify how its helps youth engage.
Main questions	3. What obstacles prevent youth from participating?	To introduce a conversation about participation, leading to engagement. To understand the obstacles to youth engagement.	What are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers? (Q2)
	4. How do young people overcome these obstacles? What tools or resources do they utilize to overcome them?	To understand how young people themselves overcome obstacles to their engagement.	How are obstacles to youth engagement negotiated or overcome by the programs, youth workers, and the youth themselves? (Q3)
	5. What aspects of your program facilitate (or impede) youth engagement?	To understand how programs and youth workers help youth engage.	
Concluding questions	6. Would you add any other obstacles that, in general, prevent young people from participating and being engaged?	To give the interviewee space to add additional obstacles.	What are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers? (Q2)
	7. Do you have any suggestions or advice for other youth workers in relation to engaging youth?	To give the interviewee space to express themselves. To add to how youth workers engage youth.	How are obstacles to youth engagement negotiated or overcome by youth workers? (Q3)

3.3.2 Arranging the Interviews and Ethical Considerations

This subsection describes how the interviews were arranged and carried out. It also includes relevant ethical considerations. As described above, a list of 15 programs was compiled based on the criteria that were set. When speaking directly with an organization in order to verify that its program met my criteria, I started by introducing myself as a graduate student in the faculty of education at the University of Montreal and briefly explained the purpose of my research project. I then shared how I had come to learn of their organization and explained some of my criteria for inclusion in my research project, finally asking if the program I was inquiring about met these conditions. If the program did indeed meet my criteria, I proceeded to arrange for an interview with a youth worker who worked directly with young people in the context of the program that was of interest to me. Several of the programs did not answer my calls or emails and others were not available for an interview.

As mentioned above, six interviews were arranged. One interview was completed with one youth worker from each of the 6 programs that were retained during the sampling process. In one case (program number four from Table II, p. 63), two youth workers offered themselves for the interview, and the interview was thus conducted as a conversation among three individuals: two interviewees and the researcher. The interviews generally lasted an hour, although some were close to two hours and others were just under an hour. The length of the interview allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the themes under consideration.

As for the 'logistics' of the interview itself, Warren (2002) draws our attention to the fact that situations are so varied that no one formula can be adopted and the researcher should instead evaluate each case and decide for him or herself how to organize the interview. In general, I tried to be as flexible as possible with regard to the meeting time and place, agreeing in some cases to meet the youth worker at their work place, at home, or at a café. The interviewees were generally appreciative of my mobility.

For each interview, I brought with me the list of proposed questions in order to follow them to some degree and remain consistent across the interviews (Annex 1), two copies of the consent form (Annex 2), a notebook, and my electronic tablet, with which I recorded the

interview using an application for voice recording. Before beginning the interview, I introduced the consent form to the youth workers, explaining its purpose and contents. The consent form makes explicit the objectives of the research project and explains various aspects of the interview, as well as considerations relating to confidentiality and ethics. By signing the form, participants agreed to an interview of about 60 minutes (give or take 30 minutes, according to their availability). All of the youth workers I interviewed were first given the option (verbally) of not being recorded. This option is also mentioned in the consent form. All those I interviewed agreed to be recorded. The form also explains that steps will be taken to ensure that the data collected during the interview will remain confidential. The names of the youth workers as well as their programs would remain anonymous. Finally, participants were informed that they are allowed to remove themselves from the interview at any point without having to justify themselves. The researcher and the interviewee(s) both signed two copies of the consent form, so that each had a copy for their own records.

My project, along with the consent form, was approved by the *Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherché* (CPÉR) of the University of Montreal as a part of the research project of my supervisor, Dr. Jrène Rahm. A copy of my ethics certificate is in Annex 3.

Written notes were taken during the interview to capture the primary ideas that emerged from the conversation, as well as to take note of particularly significant moments. During the interview, I often noted the time (minute and second) of such moments by quickly referring to my electronic tablet, and inscribing it in my notebook beside the relevant section of notes; this, for the purpose of connecting the written notes and the recorded interview in order to facilitate analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

This section describes the method and procedure used to analyze the data collected during the qualitative interviews described above. The interviews, recorded using an application on an electronic tablet, were first transferred to a computer and then transcribed verbatim. The transcription process itself allowed me to carry out an initial review of the content of each interview. An excerpt from one of the transcripts can be found in Annex 4. Basic information for each organization and/or program was collected, creating a concise

profile. Short paragraphs summarizing these profiles were included above in Section 3.2.3. A largely inductive approach characterized the analysis of the interview data (Boeije, 2002; Thomas, 2006). No theoretical models were explicitly drawn upon during this stage of the research project. I analyzed the data according to the three specific research questions.

The first question (How do youth workers describe youth engagement?) demanded an understanding of the whole of the interview. Relevant dimensions of engagement were identified by reading and re-reading the transcripts, as well as doing word searches within them for certain key concepts that seemed to emerge. Each interview was first analyzed separately to understand the different dimensions of engagement raised by the interviewee. For instance, while re-reading interview 1, the concept of dedication seemed to emerge several times (it can be found over a dozen times in the transcript itself). The dimension of dedication was therefore retained, and I read the other transcripts to see if the same dimension emerged, acknowledging that it might be discussed in a slightly different way, perhaps using a different word. In fact, interviewee 6 referred to the concept of commitment in a very similar way, and thus the two concepts became associated with a single dimension. In this way, a number of dimensions were identified that cut across several interviews. The dimensions that were retained for the analysis as it is presented in the following chapter were the ones that were found in at least half (three) of the interviews. The final product of the analysis describes four dimensions by highlighting the different aspects of these dimensions emphasized in different interviews, and draws on relevant quotes to illustrate these nuances of meaning. A summary table was then created, illustrating which dimensions were found in which interviews. I also carried out a general analysis of the four dimensions.

In order to analyze the data associated with the second and third questions, the interviews were carefully coded. Sentences and passages from the transcripts were assigned codes that emerged from reading and re-reading them. A single passage could be assigned multiple codes. Textual passages that were not related to the second or third question were omitted from this coding process. Only passages from the interviewees were coded, but one interview had two speakers, so it was found necessary to distinguish between the two with a simple lettering system. The sentences and passages that were coded were then transferred into

an excel sheet which indicated the interview from which they were taken, the speaker, and the assigned codes.

The coding process itself consisted of several stages. Interview 1 was read, and a variety of codes were assigned to various passages. When I came to the end of the interview, I reviewed the codes and made several modifications, grouping some together, and breaking down others. Interview 2 was then coded, using a similar approach, but the list of codes was then compared with the one for the first interview, and additional revisions were made. This continued for each of the six interviews. As the coding process advanced, certain themes—consisting of groupings of codes—emerged (Boeije, 2002). A first theme that quickly emerged was "obstacles to youth engagement"—directly associated with the second research question. Codes that were grouped under this theme consisted of obstacles that the youth workers mentioned, such as 'peer pressure'. Further, some of these codes could be grouped together under a more general code, still under this theme of obstacles to youth engagement. In these cases, a new code was created, and all of the codes that had been grouped together under this new code now became 'sub-codes'. For example, a number of codes including "lack of continuity in staff members" and "program structure" were eventually changed to sub-codes and grouped under a new code, "programmatic obstacles".

Other themes emerged during the process, most of which were associated with the third research question. Once several revisions were made, the most important themes that remained were: how youth workers help engage youth, how program structure helps engage youth, and how the group's climate helps engage youth. Each of these themes corresponded to one of the three parts of the third research question. What emerged, then, was a 'family tree' of passages and sentences (from the transcripts) that were each assigned one or more themes, codes, and, in some cases, sub-codes. The following table is an excerpt of a few lines from the excel sheet, to illustrate how the passages were coded:

Table IV. *Sample from coding sheet*

Interview	Speaker	Quote	Theme	Code	Sub-code
1	B	But I'm letting them pretty much plan. Cause it's their trip their project so they plan, they're going to plan what we'll be doing.	How youth workers help engage youth	Letting youth lead and direct the project	
2	L	I think, for youth getting involved, obviously there's, I mean, there's a ton of systemic issues that have to do with, you know, youth having to work, work after school jobs …	Challenges for youth	Other commitments	Work
4	I	… to me, it's just like, if you're not going to be real, you're not going to be open, you're going to set … they're going to feel it …	Qualities required for youth work	Being open/real	

It is worth mentioning that, in the case of the second question (What are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers—at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels?), there are at least two theoretical constructs within it: 'psycho-structural' and 'socio-structural'. However, neither of these concepts was used or referred to during the coding or analysis stages. The discussion chapter responded to the latter half of this question by categorizing the obstacles as either psycho-structural or socio-structural.

Once the coding process was complete, I carried out the analysis associated with the second and third research questions that is presented in the following chapter. In relation to the second research question, nineteen unique obstacles were identified, and nine of these were present in more than one interview. These nine obstacle codes each received a short analysis, discussing how the various interviewees viewed this obstacle and how it prevented the engagement of youth. Relationships among the obstacles were, in certain cases, examined, and relevant quotes were drawn upon in order to explain the analysis. I concluded the section with a summary table that reports which interviewees mentioned which obstacle codes, as well as an overall analysis of the nineteen codes and the relationships among them.

With regard to the third research question, the analysis that was conducted in the following chapter highlighted relationships between the various codes under its three themes and the obstacle codes associated with the previous research question. Relevant quotes were drawn on to illustrate the ideas that were explored. A model to understand the interaction between the three themes associated with this question was also elaborated during the analysis (Figure 3, p. 103). This section also includes a frequency count of codes for each theme, as well as an overall analysis of each of the three themes.

3.5 Advantages and Limitations of the Research Project

This section briefly describes some of the advantages and limitations of the approach adopted for this research project. In general, stating my position as a researcher at the outset of the project and clearly articulating the theoretical framework of the study helped increase its internal validity (Merriam, 1995).

My own experience and research position was a limitation—in that I am a youth worker myself and I bring numerous personal interpretations to the research data. However, my common experience with the interviewees was also an advantage in that I could relate to them more readily, which may have assisted them to be open with their answers (De Lavergne, 2007). In general, being from the same field and sharing similar experiences helped us understand one another. This, in turn, increased the intersubjective validity of the data that was collected. Sharing a common background with the interviewees allowed us, as peers, to check the validity of our conclusions against our personal experiences (Merriam, 1995).

As described above, each of my steps was meticulously documented, from the interview all the way through the analysis and discussion. This documentation, sometimes called an “audit trail” (Merriam, 1995), helped increase the dependability of the present research project. The clear distinction between the inductive analysis (Chapter 4) and the discussion (Chapter 5) helped ensure a level of descriptive consistency (here, the term consistency is used instead of reliability, which some authors, for example Merriam, 1995, hesitate to use in the context of qualitative research) since there was less chance of distorting the data by imposing on it certain theoretical categories before having had a chance to analyze it on its own. This also led to a higher degree of interpretive consistency, in that the words and

concepts used by the interviewees themselves were the primary working material in the analysis, as opposed to theoretical constructs taken from the literature. This was appropriate in the context of an exploratory study such as this one.

A clear limitation for the research project was the scope of the inquiry. Additional time may have allowed me to gather extra interviews, extend their length, or even do repeat interviews with the same individuals, strengthening validity (Merriam, 1995). It would also have been interesting to interview some of the youth who attended the programs these youth workers were discussing; this would have added yet another perspective on youth engagement, this time from the youth themselves. Another interesting route would have been to interview individuals who worked at higher levels within the organizations offering the YD programs, such as program directors—who usually do not interact directly with youth all that often—to hear their perspectives on youth engagement. Such additional interviews may have provided opportunities for triangulating the data and increasing the validity of the study (Merriam, 1995). In sum, the limitations of scope inherent in a Masters research project restrained its internal validity in certain ways.

The external validity of this research project, however, was enhanced by providing rich and thick descriptions of the data in the results and analysis chapter (Merriam, 1995). A number of longer quotes were included in that chapter in order to provide a more adequate picture for the reader of the content of the interviews. The sample excerpt from a transcript contained in Annex 4 also helps the reader in this regard. Again, clearly separating the analysis and the discussion helped ensure that others reading the present study will be able to determine whether my findings can be transferred to their own particular research context. The differences between the six interviewees also provided a degree of external validity, although this was not done systematically. If it had been taken into account at the sampling stage, it may have increased the external validity of the research project.

Finally, all of the youth workers were very eager to discuss their experiences with youth engagement and many even expressed an interest in continuing this conversation and learning from others. It seemed as if, for many of the interviewees, there was an unmet need to be heard—to have a space for reflection (Warren, 2002). Some of these youth workers were,

in fact, operating somewhat on their own in their respective organizations, without a team with which to reflect and consult. Thus, an advantage of the approach used in this research project was that the interview might, in some cases, have served to meet the need of the youth workers to voice their questions and challenges in a safe space, contributing to their empowerment (Tierney & Dilley, 2002).

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the different methodological choices and dimensions that are pertinent to my project. The current study is exploratory in nature and draws on the method of qualitative interviews in order to answer its three research questions. Six programs were selected according to criteria drawn from relevant literature that was examined in Chapter 2. Interviews were arranged with youth workers from these six programs. These interviews were influenced by my position as a youth worker, which was described as both a limitation and an asset (De Lavergne, 2006). Transcriptions of the interviews were made, and passages from them were coded and analyzed according to the three research questions. I turn now to the presentation of the results and conclude with an interpretation of the results in light of the literature reviewed previously.

Chapter 4

This chapter presents the results of the inductive analysis of the six interviews carried out with front-line youth workers regarding youth engagement in their programs. The three first sections in this chapter each address one of the specific research questions of this project. The final section summarizes some of the main conclusions of the analysis.

The quotes that are extracted from the transcripts in order to illustrate the emergent themes are numbered according to interview, from one to six, using the same numbering system as that used for the programs (i.e. interview 1 was conducted with the youth worker from program 1, etc.). Unless otherwise indicated, the quotes are taken from the youth worker in the interview. Interview 4 involved two youth workers, so if both are speaking in the excerpt, they are distinguished from one another.

4.1 How Youth Workers Describe Youth Engagement

Although the interviewees were not directly asked to describe their conception of youth engagement, they discussed their work during the interview in a way that made their conception of youth engagement quite clear. Four dimensions emerged from the interviews as tied to youth engagement as understood by the youth workers, each of which was present in at least three of the interviews. These four dimensions were leadership and associated skills; interest; self-esteem and self-confidence; and commitment and dedication. Each interview also contains at least one reference to a minimum of two of these dimensions.

4.1.1 Leadership and Associated Skills

Five out of six interviews contained references to the dimension of leadership and certain skills that enhance the youth's ability to demonstrate leadership, although most discussed this dimension in different ways. For example, when asked to describe their engaged program participants and to contrast them with other youth, the youth workers in interview 4 described a particularly engaged girl and how she demonstrated leadership and initiative:

> *Youth worker 2*: You know, [she] bring[s] out that leadership and energy …

> *Youth worker 1*: … she really takes everything that she can during the workshops, she really looks for like digs into the workshop and … “this is what I got from it”, and really searches and listens, and gives everything that she has into like learning …
>
> *Youth worker 1*: if you come in there with a certain, if you’re really looking for something, you’re more likely to look for the tools to get it, you know what I mean? Like she came in, she didn’t really have any friends, outside of the group, you know, she’s not friends with any of those girls, so she brought it upon herself to really build that as a safe space for her, and as an environment, to learn and to grow, and she really took leadership to take everything that she could, that’s what I’ve found. (Interview 4)

Thus, youth workers described engaged youth as leaders who mobilize particular skills in the course of their program participation, which other youth may struggle to do. Other interviewees associated engaged youth with the ones who possessed a certain set of skills, often described by the youth workers as leadership skills. These included maturity, the ability to delay gratification, the ability to plan and schedule one’s time, punctuality, and forethought:

> *Interviewer*: … thinking then of the youth who are very engaged, how did they become engaged? What’s the difference [between them and the other program participants]?
>
> *Youth worker*: … I think the ones who don’t miss because they have an exam are the ones who have scheduled their time a little bit differently, right, I mean honestly, that’s what it is, and to a certain extent what I see, there is a level of maturity, right, I know like, in sociology we always talk about this idea of delayed gratification, and that one sort of topic that is difficult for children and youth to engage in is the idea of delayed gratification, and that grasping that concept shows, it happens as you grow up, and so for a lot of the youth that I see who are always on time for example, and are always present, and don’t miss because they have exams, are able to schedule their time in a way that, they’ve reached that level, I know that I want to go to [program name], so if I do my studying on Wednesday night, I can go to this project on Thursday, and I think it’s the same thing. One of the huge things that we run up against every week is lateness, so we only have 3 hours, and there is a handful of kids, four of them, who are always late, and close to 30 minutes late, so out of three hours, is a lot, you know, and, but the interesting thing is, two of them are always late, because they always get detention, because they’re always late for school, so they’re late for school, so their teachers keep them after school, and then they’re late for the meeting, so, again, I liken that to an idea of, “well I know if I get up early enough to get to school on time, I can get to my meeting on time” it’s this like

> forethought that I see that honestly I think comes with age and maturity … (Interview 2)

Several program activities, usually described as trainings or workshops, were aimed at developing these and other skills:

> … so it's [the program] a leadership program and the goal is to help them enhance the skills that they already have, leadership skills that they already have and really give them a safe space to kind of explore those skills and to gain more skills, and so we focus on providing workshops and training, we focus on fun outings and activities, civic participation, and fundraising. (Interview 6)

The following quote contains a concrete example of such program activities, and the way the activities mediate the forms of youth's participation and engagement:

> They're finally thinking for themselves, and … I make them, I make them plan their monthly schedule, I mean, we have, I have a guideline, they have to do certain things, but they, they plan it, they put it on which days they want it, and stuff like that, so it also, it helps them too, I guess, in a way, because they're planning their schedule, they're seeing what they're putting in, you know, I, they understand that we have to plan goals and stuff like that, but, they also get to put in whatever they want also, you know, so it's not like "tell me what you want and I'll put it in the schedule", it's "what do you want and what day do you want to do it on", you know, so if they don't come on those days, you know, for the fun things for example, then it's not my fault, you know, they chose it, they put it on the schedule, so, you know, there's nothing really I can do after that, so, it, I feel like once they see that the schedule is done, they're like, "well, I planned this month, we've been planning these schedules, this is my work", and then when they do the different activities, you know, I take pictures of it all on the way as well, to show them their progress and it's, I kind of make it as fun for them as possible, without them, so that they don't see the work until the end, you know, so it's fun, and then they're like, "oh, well hey we just, we just did X" or whatever … (Interview 1)

Finally, one of the interviewees who emphasized the idea of leadership skills the most also highlighted the critical role that youth workers play in identifying the skills young people need in order to overcome obstacles to engagement, and designing activities that help youth develop these skills:

> I feel like once they're [the youth] within the group, I really feel like it's the responsibility of the animators … to make obstacles [to their engagement] disappear. If it's because they don't think they have the skills to do it, find out what those skills are and then teach them, you know, they're there, they're with you, you have this chance … (Interview 2)

This same youth worker also described how designing and carrying out a project for the betterment of their community in the context of her program helped youth further enhance these leadership skills and, therefore, their ability to engage.

In sum, youth workers described engaged youth as leaders—autonomous, highly motivated, and mature. According to the youth workers, being a leader allowed a young person to engage. Further, the skills the youth workers associated with leadership, and therefore engagement, were also the ones developed in several of the program activities.

4.1.2 Commitment and Dedication

Four interviews contained a reference to the dimension of commitment and dedication. Each interviewee raised different dimensions of it. One of the youth workers who drew extensively on the concept of dedication (it is mentioned at least 11 times in her interview) used it in several different ways. For example, in the following passage, she appears to use it in a way similar to how engagement was conceptualized in the first chapter—something beyond attendance and participation:

> … they have to be committed to the program, you know, if they want … to have the reference letter at the end of the year in June. … So if they're dedicated and they complete the program, they get this letter, I think that's what they work for, but through the dedication and the work they grow and then they see themselves growing and it's kind of a bonus you know and then they're more okay with the dedication. But they also know that if they're not dedicated and if they don't come in then I'll have to kind of suspend them from the program or take something fun away so you know, as a punishment I guess you could say. (Interview 1)

The participants in this program do not achieve its objectives by simply attending it. They are required to work and put in effort. From the perspective of this particular youth worker, dedication to the program was important at every stage of youth engagement: those who were

more dedicated were more likely to join the program in the first place; dedication was what helped them continue with the program; their dedication grew as they carried out positive actions in the community; and their dedication was associated with their consciousness of the long-term benefits of the program.

Some of the youth workers saw a link between commitment and attendance, particularly since attendance was not obligatory for any of the programs that they run:

> … actually I'm quite surprised with their attendance to be honest. In the past when I've done this [program] we have struggled a lot more with attendance but this is a very committed crew. It's um, yeah, I'm surprised actually by their commitment. (Interview 2)

Finally, one youth worker related her own experience as a former participant in the program for which she now works, connecting the idea of dedication to motivation:

> … we [the former program participants] were only three, we were very small and very dedicated, all three of us. We joined, it was like, with a real intention, "I'm going to change the world", even though, you know, like, you really can't, but like, you know, we were going to Africa in our heads, "We're going to Africa and travel over and help everyone". Like unrealistic, but motivated, you know? We were really motivated, like, over-motivated, it was good. (Interview 4)

The youth workers used the concept of dedication and commitment in reference to engagement in different ways. Youth workers described engaged and committed youth as the ones who attended program activities more regularly. Interviewees also used the concept of dedication to refer to intrinsically motivated participants. In another case, a youth worker described how dedication grew over time and as youth participated in community service activities.

4.1.3 Interest

Three interviewees mentioned another important dimension: 'interest'. Tapping into the interests of youth when planning program content was connected to their engagement. One youth worker discussed the challenges associated with maintaining participants' interest in the program, which is tied to engagement:

> … we need to keep them, you know, active so that's where all the community engagement comes because we cannot want them to be there when we need them, and how do we keep them interested? And this is where the creative part of it comes and what are the activities that we do every week, how do we decide what we're going to do with them and why, how are we going to you know take in consideration their voices and go away with their interests … (Interview 4)

For this youth worker, capturing and keeping the participant's interest was both a challenge and something that kept them in the program:

> … that's the thing with this group, you have to find something to start their interest, and then they're in, but it just takes a little something, and you know, like it's nice, to see them laugh, and like really enjoy themselves is like, it's so nice, cause it's not something you catch often … (Interview 4)

Capturing their interest, however, was clearly not an easy task, given the many competing activities and information that youth have access to and the climate of instant gratification:

> … unfortunately with that climate, that social climate of instant gratification, and you know, because of the speed in which information travels nowadays, they're bombarded with information, bombarded with things, everything has to happen fast, right here, right now. It's becoming really hard to find what the carrot is, that thing that's gonna catch, you know? Because there's so much information all the time, you know? So it's like, really, like almost like an art of genie, you know, to kind of find what is this thing, but once you find it, it's really, it works like, it's very powerful, because they are offered so many things, it's almost like they're not offered that much, you know … (Interview 4)

According to these youth workers, engagement is tied to a match between the participants' interests and program activities. Therefore, youth interest should modify program content. One youth worker shared how she tried to tap into youths' interests by having them describe their interests, which she also saw as helping them gain a better understanding of themselves:

> … I have like a getting to know you period, where they fill these questionnaires and I'll ask them different things, like what are they interested in, top three interests, top three workshops that they're interested in doing, you know, learning, or topics that they're learning, or that they're interested in learning um, top three careers, so they have to think about themselves also, what are they interested in, because a lot of teens are like "Well, I don't know", but if

> they have to fill these out, then they have to actually think about it. It helps them learn more about themselves, you know, it helps them think about it. (Interview 1)

Another youth worker described how, when planning specific community projects, he draws on specific youth to get involved that also show interest:

> … we'll like target the responsible ones, that really show the interest and true sincerity towards a project or a campaign, and then we'll work with them, we'll guide them … (Interview 3)

This interviewee also described these youth as different in that they came with higher expectations for participation yet were also willing to put more into the activities:

> … those ones that are coming more often is … I've learned … bottom line, they want more, and they're going to do more to get more, so they're going to ask more questions, they'll come in more, they'll give more, they'll … more equals more, you know? (Interview 3)

In sum, youth workers raised a number of different dimensions of the concept of 'interest'. Youth described as being engaged in program activities were the ones demonstrating genuine interest. Conversely, other youth workers found ways to identify and build on the interests of youth by designing appropriate programmatic content that got them engaged in the program.

4.1.4 Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

Self-esteem and self-confidence was another dimension related to youth engagement that was prevalent in the interviews. Several of the youth workers described youth as having great talents and abilities. However, often because of outside pressure or criticism, youth lose confidence in their inherent worth, which then becomes a barrier for engagement:

> ... every kid and every teen that I worked with, or you know, had a chance to talk to, or do anything with, every single one was super talented, super bright, and just a super, super special person, every single one. But they all have a story to tell. Which leads them to the obstacles, or the doubt, or the fear, but, every single one has something special in them, a positive light, you know what I mean? (Interview 3)

By building on what youth bring into programs and positioning them in positive ways, this youth worker tried to draw them in and keep them in the program. Program activities sometimes also helped participants develop self-confidence:

> … even through group sessions and stuff, she [one of the program participants] has expressed that she's not shy anymore, or she's not as shy as she used to be, she doesn't get nervous when people talk to her, you know, she said, she's a bit more confident, and you can see it, just she feels a bit, she knows she's a bit more confident and you can just see it in the way she is in her demeanour … (Interview 1)

The youth workers described youth who lacked self-esteem or self-confidence as disengaged. The process of gradually developing self-confidence—often through a welcoming group climate—was described as 'breaking out of their shell':

> … one girl in particular that I met was literally holding herself, like that's how much she was in her shell, like she would sit holding herself, like this, and like she couldn't even say her name, like she was whispering her name, I was like "Pardon me? Pardon me?" … And she worked with us with our … group for about six weeks before she actually even sang a song. But she came to the room, but sat in the corner while we were practicing over here, she was in the corner. And next time, she came a little bit closer, but still alone, then she came a little closer, so it took about six weeks to get this girl integrated. Now, she's my go to person. If there's a …, I know I can call her and like "There's something going on. Hey, you wanna do this" and she's the first person to be like "Yup" she['s] … ready, she's … So it's amazing to see that part of it. How they break out of that shell, you know? (Interview 3)

According to another youth worker, a young person's ability to navigate life is directly related to the extent to which they are conscious of their own strengths:

> … les jeunes ils ont tous des forces, y'ont beaucoup de forces, c'est juste que y'a personne pour dire, que, "hé, est-ce que t'avais remarqué que t'as cette force-là?" Donc le fait de se le faire dire, le fait de prendre connaissance de ces forces, après ils vont être plus outillés pour l'école ou pour se trouver un emploi, pour avoir un groupe d'amis tout ça …
>
> *Translation:* … the youth all have strengths, they have many strengths, it's just that there's no one to say "Hey, did you notice that you have this strength?" Thus the fact of being told it, the fact of becoming conscious of these strengths,

> after they will become more equipped for school or to find a job, to have a group of friends all of that … (Interview 5)

Their self-esteem increases and they are empowered once they feel that they are respected and come to recognize their own strengths and accomplishments:

> … nous on essaie vraiment de valoriser le jeune, c'est "Ok, j'ai vu aujourd'hui que tu as fait l'effort d'animer un jeu," juste pour le jeune de se faire dire ça, quand ça t'a tout pris, quand ça t'a pris toute ta force intérieure pour faire l'animation, et qu'il y a une adulte qui vient te voir et qui dit: "Wow, bravo, j'ai vu ce que tu as fait, c'est excellent! T'as vu comment les enfants y'ont aimé ton jeu?" Donc ça c'est vraiment le fun de se faire reconnaître au moment présent de tes forces, puis de tes réussites; y'en a beaucoup qui vivent des difficultés, voire des échecs, puis de se faire dire, "hé, t'a fait une réussite, et c'est grâce à toi, c'est toi-même qui est responsable de ta réussite", c'est valorisant pour le jeune …
>
> *Translation:* … we really try to value the youth, it's like "Ok, I saw today that you made an effort to animate a game," just for the youth to be told that, when it took him everything, when it takes you all of your inner strength to animate, and then an adult comes to see you and says "Wow, good job, I saw what you did, that's excellent! Did you see how the children enjoyed your game?" So that is really fun to be recognized when your strengths are present, when you have succeeded; there are many that experience difficulties, even failures, and to be told "hey, you succeeded, and it's because of you, you are the one responsible for your success", that's empowering for the youth … (Interview 5)

According to several youth workers, recognizing the strengths that youth bring with them assists youth to gradually develop self-confidence and to stay engaged. By recognizing and building on these strengths, youth become more equipped to move forward in their lives. Hence, engagement is also related to the level of self-esteem and self-confidence that young people develop through respect and encouragement by youth workers and others and through participation in quality programs over time.

4.1.5 Summary Table and Overall Analysis

Although each youth worker identified several different dimensions of youth engagement, four of them were apparent across the data set. The following table summarizes the frequency counts for the four themes:

Table V. *Summary of the dimensions tied to engagement*

Dimensions	Interview Number						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Totals:
Leadership and its associated skills	1	1		1	1	1	5
Commitment and dedication	1	1		1		1	4
Interest	1		1	1			3
Self-esteem and self-confidence	1		1		1		3
Totals:	4	2	2	3	2	2	15

At least three interviews contained a reference to each of the dimensions. The dimension of leadership, and the skills associated with it, was mentioned most frequently. The first interview contained references to all four dimensions.

Returning to the research question: how do youth workers describe youth engagement? Youth workers raised four dimensions in this connection: leadership and its associated skills; commitment and dedication; interest; and self-esteem and self-confidence. They described youth who were engaged as leaders. Those with so-called leadership skills were also more likely to engage in program activities. In turn, many of these activities are designed to develop these same skills in young people. The concepts of commitment and dedication were also used to describe engaged youth. In addition, youth workers referred to engaged youth as those who were interested in program activities and identified tapping into the interests of youth as a key means to ensure engagement. Finally, the interviewees tied the concept of engagement to the self-esteem and self-confidence of youth. Given the variety of dimensions raised by youth workers, youth engagement is clearly a complex phenomenon.

Some of these dimensions could also be described as factors that foster engagement, such as the development of leadership skills, tapping into the interests of youth, and enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence. In this sense, these dimensions may be relevant to the section below regarding how youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. Other dimensions seem to refer to individual characteristics of program participants, such as commitment, dedication, interest, or leadership. These individual characteristics either distinguish exceptional young people prior to attendance or are gradually acquired through sustained participation. In the

case of commitment, dedication, and interest, these three words appear to have generally been used as synonyms for engagement by the interviewees. In other words, a youth who is engaged in program activities could just as easily be described by youth workers as committed, dedicated, or interested.

Interviewees most often mentioned leadership and its associated skills. This might be in part due to the fact that most of the programs of the interviewees explicitly aimed to develop leadership skills in youth. In fact, many youth programs rely on funding from donors that require that program activities support the development of such skills in young people in order to prepare them for the job market.

Four different youth workers raised the dimension of commitment and dedication. This is interesting because this dimension was also connected to the idea of attendance in at least two cases. According to some youth workers, attendance is therefore correlated with engagement to some degree. A possible explanation for this is that, in a program in which attendance is not obligatory and in which some program activities are not typically associated with 'fun' (community service, volunteering, etc.), youth attending voluntarily and regularly is a sign of profound engagement.

4.2 Obstacles to Youth Engagement According to Youth Workers

Over the course of the six interviews, the youth workers identified a number of obstacles to youth engagement. Although it was, in some cases, difficult to code and distinguish some of them, I coded 19 references to obstacles with some being mentioned repeatedly. I describe below the nine kinds of obstacles that were mentioned most often and that stood out. The final sub-section presents a summary table (Table VII, p. 117) of all of the obstacles, along with frequency counts across the interviews.

4.2.1 Peer Pressure

A common obstacle that was discussed by the informants was peer pressure. It seems that even when a youth is interested in a program or an activity, a friend who does not desire to participate can discourage him or her to express or continue their engagement:

> "Aw, I'm not going to pick up cans and bottles, like are you crazy? What if someone sees me?" Like there's that, there's the cool factor! Which they feel sometimes it's not cool to stand up and fight for what you believe and they sometimes feel that it's just better to go with the flow and go with the ones that aren't involved in much and "I'm just going to hang in the park and do nothing", so that's an obstacle. It's the peer pressure from outside. And what I've noticed is that even the ones … I can see in their eyes or even in hearing them talking, that they want to do it, they want to join, they want to be part of the project, they want to help their community, they want to help their family, it just takes that one friend saying "Aw, I'm not doing that, that's boring …" And right away they'll kind of fall into that, pressure, and trap, and "Oh no, no, I'm not going to do it" "How come?" "Oh I just don't feel like it" But the truth is, it's because their friend said, "it's boring" or something, you know? (Interview 3)

The same youth worker suggested that a youth might discourage his or her friends from participating in youth programs because he or she feels that if they become involved they will advance in life and leave him or her behind. A fear of losing one's friends may therefore cause some youth to pressure their peers not to become involved in youth development programs.

Two of the interviewees suggested that volunteering or helping one's community is 'not cool' among many groups of youth and that this also constitutes an obstacle to youth engagement. It appears that the image of volunteering is not in favour among youth:

> … [un des obstacles c'est] … le préjugé envers le bénévolat, parce que c'est pas nécessairement cool de faire du bénévolat, l'image du bénévolat, c'est pas valorisé de la part des jeunes …
>
> *Translation:* … [one of the obstacles is] … prejudice towards volunteering, because it's not necessarily cool to volunteer, the image of volunteering, it's not valued by young people … (Interview 5)

The interviewee goes on to suggest that this may be because of broader social forces of individualism and consumerism, stemming from the influence of assumptions underlying the 'American way of life'. There is a tendency, then, for groups of young people to encourage one another to avoid volunteering based on a certain way of looking at the world.

4.2.2 Negative Feedback from Adults and Stereotypes

Negative feedback from adults also emerged as an obstacle. Although similar to peer pressure, the interviewees pointed to how this kind of feedback in particular imposed certain roles or identities on young people during their formative years. The identity of a community leader seems out of reach for youth who have been so often told that they are troublemakers:

> I think the other [obstacle] that I see but I feel that this is a little more abstract to try and describe, but I see this obstacle of kids feeling like not smart enough to do things like this, like a sort of "oh, that" I don't know like, this is a little more difficult to describe, but I've had conversations with youth where it's like, they didn't see themselves, they didn't see that they could be in that type of role, that type of role of leadership of change … I do think that a lot of youth have been told that they're not that kid, they've been told that they're the troublemaker … maybe they have been profiled and they get stopped by the cops every second afternoon on their way home from school … that they're not smart enough or good enough to be in like a community leadership project … (Interview 2)

Stereotypes about youth—that they are not good enough to succeed or to be a leader or that they are the kind of kid who always gets into trouble—often create significant obstacles to their engagement, particularly when these stereotypes are being promoted by adults in influential positions, such as parents or teachers:

> … this is a true story, … so I had a chance to work with a lot of kids at … High School, and they were telling me about some of their teachers, some are great, and then others were just horrible stories where the teachers were actually telling them, "No, You can't be this" or "you'll never do that" … So one kid told me they had a career day. And the question was, obviously, what do you want to do when you grow up, or what's your aspiration, what are you dreaming to be, and this kid tells me, "I stood up and I said I want to be an engineer" And the person running the career day, which was obviously an adult, told that kid, in front of everybody else, "Oh no, you'll never be an engineer, you're not smart enough, you can't do it" ... that's terrible. This is what's going on! Sometimes, in schools. The teachers, the adults, they'll burst their bubble, and it's a crucial bubble to burst because even though later, they're saying it not to be mean, or not to ... sometimes, it could be the reality, you know, because sometimes the teacher is working with that kid, and maybe the teacher just knows that, at this point time, this student is not ready to go be and engineer, or can't handle the work it takes to be an engineer, but they're saying it in the wrong way, and that's bursting the kid's dream. So there's a way of explaining it, and that's where, I think it's just a miscommunication

> thing maybe. Because I would hate to think that teachers are doing that on purpose … but they burst bubbles so that's one of the obstacles too, is that hearing from people you know and people you might look up to that are telling you "No, you can't", or "Why are you doing that?" They're putting a negative kind of spin on it, so right away, a kid or a teenager hearing that from an adult, they look up to, or a friend or a family member they look up to, they might say, "You know what, naw, forget that." (Interview 3)

This quote demonstrates how influential adults, sometimes without further reflection, position youth in ways that are damaging to their identity as learners and leaders. The self-confidence they bring with them can be negatively affected, which can then hamper their future engagement.

4.2.3 Social Media

Three of the youth workers described social media as a potential obstacle to youth engagement, although each highlighted different dimensions of its influence. Although these interviewees admitted that it was possible to use social media in constructive ways, they felt that the negative impact often outweighed the potential benefits. One youth worker described the use of social media and video games in the following way:

> … les jeunes sont souvent portés aussi, bon, … la génération jeux vidéos, tu sais, pourquoi j'irais m'impliquer quand je peux rester chez nous à faire des jeux vidéos à toute la longueur de la journée, y'a personne qui me dit quoi faire, j'ai pas à me prendre la tête, je fais des jeux vidéos, ou je suis sur Facebook, puis je parle avec des amis qui l'ont toute, toute ma soirée. Y'a ça aussi qui est un gros obstacle je trouve ... … je sais pas le nombre de temps que les jeunes passent en avant de l'ordinateur mais ce que j'entends c'est que c'est beaucoup, c'est énorme, …
>
> *Translation:* … youth are also often taken, well, … the video game generation, you know, why would I go and get involved when I can stay at home and play video games all day long, there's no one telling me what to do, I don't need to bother myself, I'm playing video games, or I'm on Facebook, and I'm speaking to my friends who all have it, all evening. There's also this that's a big obstacle I find … I don't know how much time youth are spending in front of the computer but I hear that it's a lot, it's huge … (Interview 5)

She explained how staying at home and entertaining one's self with video games or social media is perhaps more attractive to young people because it does not require much effort and

will not result in a restriction of their freedom. To distract them and get them away from such media, a program needs to be very engaging.

Interviewees described how young people were becoming 'addicted' to social media, and preferred to spend time using them as opposed to interacting with their peers or attending youth programs. Consequently, two youth workers mentioned that the increased time spent using social media had been accompanied by a steady decline in the ability of many youth to converse with others, to develop a variety of social skills, and to become involved in their communities:

> [We were] more connected [before the coming of social media], because you actually had to go out and ring somebody's bell to see if they were home, because even the phone, we weren't on the phone, like that was for mom! Go out and play! Go by your friend's balcony, so we like, we, it was so direct, it was more personable, and I find now, the obstacle is the social media, the internet, it's taking away the kid's oral skills, big time! They do not know how to converse, or to open conversations, even the guy, girl relationships, they're struggling with that, all they know how to do is to text something. Or Facebook me or inbox me, there's no actual real convo going on, you know? So I think that leads to the fact where they might not want to do other things too, that involve actually going out and being seen in the public and actually having to talk to somebody and saying "Hi, Sir, my name is so and so, and we're doing a fundraiser for this cause, and …" They have trouble even saying that! Because they're just used to putting it on, typing it, you know what I mean? So they're not comfortable approaching new people or doing new things. And it's because of their habit or whatever you want to call it! (Interview 3)

Thus, according to the interviewees, social media has a significant effect on youth engagement. In some cases, it keeps youth entirely away from program activities. Over time, it may also prevent the youth from developing certain social skills required to engage in program activities.

4.2.4 Lack of Interest in Doing Things for the Community

A lack of interest in doing things for the community was referred to in three separate interviews as an obstacle to youth engagement:

> … when I got the program there was a group of teens who came back. But I think because … there was no responsibility or you know anything involved

> before I got the program, they kind of all dropped off cause I don't think they were interested in that aspect. They didn't want to have any kind of responsibility or volunteering or anything like that. (Interview 1)

However, this obstacle appears to be tied to peer pressure, as discussed before. Thus, if a youth has a lack of interest in doing things for the community, this may in many cases be an effect of peer pressure or of a broader feeling that volunteering is 'not cool':

> I would say the obstacles are just kind of maybe lack of interest, and that stems from, and this is from what I've observed with my own eyes, is that some teens feel it's "uncool" to do good things, or to help their community, or to be a leader … (Interview 3)

One way of conceptualizing the mechanism through which young people lose interest in doing things for the community would be that a culture of consumerism and individualism causes this lack of interest, as well as a feeling that volunteering is 'not cool'. These two are exacerbated through peer pressure among youth who may otherwise be interested in contributing to the betterment of their communities.

4.2.5 Lack of Understanding of the Parents

Two interviewees dwelt on the lack of understanding of parents as an obstacle to youth engagement. A number of parents seem to be unaware or unappreciative of the objectives and methods of youth programs:

> … a lot of parents think it's [the community centre] just a place for them to come and hang out, which I did, I had a drop-in program I developed, I developed a drop-in program for those at-risk youth who didn't want to be a part of the program, so at least they're still off the streets, but, I mean, it was hard to get them to come, so a lot of the parents are unsure, you know, they think that they're just coming in to hang out and play video games, whereas they're coming in to, you know, actually do work and better themselves, so once their parents understand that part of the, the community centre and the program, then they're more okay with their kids coming. (Interview 1)

In some cases, there is a misunderstanding among parents about program goals. Not all parents understand what is being done in programs and what significance these activities may have for their children's educational success and general well-being.

> … t'as les parents … qui savent pas trop, "C'est quoi cet organisme-là, t'as pas le temps de faire du bénévolat, reste ici, occupe-toi de tes petits frères, tes petites sœurs", donc, c'est pas souvent, c'est pas toujours bien vu que les jeunes fassent du bénévolat parce qu'ils ont d'autres choses à faire à la maison pour les parents, pour les aider …
>
> *Translation:* … you have the parents … that don't know much, "What is this organization here, you don't have time to do volunteering, stay here, take care of your younger brothers and your younger sisters", so, it's not often, it's not always well-seen that youth volunteer because they have other things to do at home for their parents, to help them … (Interview 5)

Most youth workers, however, would argue that their programs contribute meaningfully to the hopes and aspirations that parents have for their children. If the parents do not share this understanding, they can become an obstacle to their children's engagement.

4.2.6 Work

Youth workers highlighted 'work' as an obstacle four times in four different interviews, although for different reasons. In some cases, it was seen as another commitment, competing with their attendance in youth programs:

> … it's hard to engage youth specially that age [in the final years of high school] in the summer, they tend to do a lot of travelling, work, stuff like that, the project kind of, goes like a bit dormant during the summer … (Interview 4)

In other cases, youth might not need to work at all and do so simply because of the pressures of consumerism, exacerbated once again by peer pressure:

> … vers 15, 16 ans, les bénévoles, les jeunes, y pensent à travailler, donc ils veulent avoir de l'argent, "moi je veux pouvoir m'acheter un téléphone, je veux pouvoir acheter le dernier pantalon qui est trop à la mode, les souliers, ça, ça", ils pensent plus à travailler que de faire du bénévolat …
>
> *Translation:* … around 15, 16 years old, the volunteers, the youth are thinking about working, so they want to have money, "me I want to be able to buy a phone, I want to be able to buy the latest pants that are so in fashion, these shoes, that, this", they think more about working than about doing volunteering … (Interview 5)

In yet another case, certain youth might be forced to work because of the precarious financial situation of their families:

> … there's a lot of, you know, obstacles surrounding financial needs in the families, which is just really something that I heard from a few youth, but in a very like … in centers or in schools, when I would chat with them, you know they'd say, oh I'd love to, but I can't, I have to work, and it wasn't something that I heard kids say with pride, if that makes sense, my guess on that is because probably they're working because there's a financial need in the family, and maybe that's something they wanted … (Interview 2)

Youth programs appear to compete with work, thus constituting an additional obstacle to engagement.

4.2.7 Youth not seeing or understanding the benefits

In a similar way that parents may not understand the purpose of youth programs, youth themselves may struggle to appreciate the benefits that can accrue from sustained engagement in a youth program:

> I think an obstacle is maybe not seeing the value in some of the things that we're offering. So, for example, the … there were some students who … offered to give a workshop here on well-being, so mental health and whatnot. And we got like a solid, we got like seven youth out, but this is an issue that I think all the youth could benefit from, like mental health, how to cope with stress and whatnot, and I think that because they're in stressful situations, they feel like they don't have, I don't know, they don't they might not acknowledge it as something that you can rectify or cope with or this is interesting to like learn about. I feel like they don't see the potential value in some of the things that we offer. (Interview 6)

Not understanding the value of an activity was often connected to the capacity of young people to see the long-term benefit of their participation in a program and to the challenges they faced resisting activities that promised instant gratification:

> I think it's also the dedication of the program, you know they don't... a lot of teens are lazy, I'm going to say, because you know they'd rather just go home and watch TV and talk on their phone or on Facebook than come out and do more work. It's like, I feel like they see it as more school after school. You know they're not getting paid for the program; they're not getting anything immediate out of it. You know they're not getting paid they're not getting any

> rewards until the end of the program. I mean, they don't see the rewards. (Interview 1)

4.2.8 Programmatic Obstacles

A number of obstacles that were mentioned by youth workers related to the structure, content, and other aspects of the programs themselves. In one case, a youth worker felt that ever since youth were offered school credit to attend the program, their motivation had become different:

> … so it [attending the program in the past, before it became associated with school credit] was a matter of how can I succeed? And how can I grasp control of something in a positive way, without hurting myself? Whereas, that was kind of lost once it became for credit, you know? Like … not to take away that some of these girls are going through things, but they're not looking at the program in the same way, they're not as inspired by it … (Interview 4)

She felt that the engagement of young people before this new structural element was introduced was somehow more authentic.

Another obstacle in this category relates to programmatic content. The youth worker in question wondered whether the program activities are always well matched to the interests of the youth and relevant to their lives:

> … maybe there's a disconnect from what is relevant to us or what we think is relevant to them and what they think is relevant for them. Like they might want to do something and find value in something else and we're just, we're kind of … thinking like this is what's good for you ... paternalistic ... saying this is what is good for you. So yeah, perhaps we're not offering what they want … (Interview 6)

This raises an interesting question: what are the 'true interests' of youth if they are shaped by a myriad set of pressures from the outside, many of them negative? Nevertheless, if the youth's interests are not taken into account when designing program activities, youth engagement may be compromised. The question of youth interest is explored again in the next section.

Other obstacles tied to program design and activities include staff turnover, which may negatively impact the engagement of certain youth who become attached to particular youth

workers. Interviewees also mentioned that a given neighbourhood or sector may have too much programming for youth, thereby causing the youth to be overwhelmed with options and preventing them from dedicating themselves completely to any one program.

4.2.9 Need for Instant Gratification

Finally, the need for instant gratification was another obstacle that emerged a few times in the interviews:

> … when I was talking in the beginning like the culture, like the instant gratification, what am I getting out of it, you know, that I can touch and feel, you know what I mean, it's like we're getting so much out of it, yes, but what is it exactly, right? (Interview 4)

The interviewee described this need for instant gratification as a challenge for some young people, as well as an aspect of our contemporary culture, which affects youth in particular. This need may cause young people to ignore the long-term benefits of attending youth programs. It may also influence young people as an aspect of culture, perhaps drawing youth's interests away from doing things for the community.

4.2.10 Summary of the Obstacles and Overall Analysis

The following table provides a frequency count of the obstacles described above by interview, providing totals for each obstacle and each interview:

Table VI. *Summary table of obstacle codes and their frequencies across the interviews*

Obstacle code	Interview Number 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totals
External obstacles (sub-totals)	*4*	*4*	*8*	*5*	*9*	*2*	*32*
Peer pressure			4		3		7
Negative feedback from adults and stereotypes		3	1				4
Social media	1		2		2		5
Lack of understanding of the parents	2				1		3
Work		1		1	1	1	4
Programmatic obstacles (sub-totals)				*2*	*2*	*1*	*5*
Motivation through school credit				2			2
Disconnect between what youth workers think will be relevant and the interests of youth						1	1
Staffing problems in youth program					1		1
Too much programming					1		1
Lack of a positive role model			1				1
Information overload				1			1
Social life	1						1
Youth becoming overwhelmed				1			1
Personal obstacles (sub-totals)	*2*	*2*	*1*	*3*	*1*	*1*	*10*
Need for instant gratification				2			2
Lack of interest in doing things for the community	1		1		1		3
Youth not seeing or understanding the benefits	1					1	2
Shyness		1					1
Youth feel they don't have the skills		1					1
Fear of failure				1			1
Totals:	6	6	9	8	10	3	42

These obstacles can be further grouped into a few different categories. For example, 13 of the obstacles could be described as 'exterior' to the youth themselves: peer pressure; negative feedback from adults and stereotypes; social media; lack of understanding of the parents; work (in most cases); the four programmatic obstacles; lack of a positive role model; information overload; social life; and youth becoming overwhelmed. These obstacles are exterior in the sense that they do not 'originate' from the youth themselves. Conversely, the remaining six obstacles—lack of interest in doing things for the community, youth not seeing or understanding the benefits, the need for instant gratification, shyness, fear of failure, and youth feeling they don't have the skills—could be considered 'personal' or 'interior', although some of them could still be caused by exterior factors. The fact that there were fewer 'interior' obstacles (and that they were among the ones that were mentioned less frequently) may imply that most of the interviewees were not inclined to identify the youth themselves as the primary obstacles to their own engagement.

The obstacle of 'work' was included in the external category in Table VI (p. 100). However, as was mentioned in the section above that described how the interviewees discussed work as an obstacle to engagement, in some cases it could be classified as an internal obstacle. This is the case, for example, when there is no pressing financial reason for a young person to work, but they become excessively influenced by a culture that glorifies wearing certain expensive brands of clothing or owning certain accessories (such as an iPhone, etc.). In these circumstances, work could be considered an internal obstacle. In the majority of cases described by youth workers, however, young people were simply required to work for financial need, which is why it was included in the category of external obstacles.

Peer pressure, negative feedback from adults, and the stereotypes they impose on young people seem to constitute especially powerful obstacles to youth engagement. Ensuring that the climate of a given youth program is free from these obstacles is therefore an important task. It is in fact quite likely that many young people will join youth programs having already faced these obstacles. These obstacles might be temporary, but it is also possible that youth have profoundly internalized them, making it difficult to break free from their influence. The latter case might need to be overcome with targeted interventions.

The idea that certain aspects of, or assumptions underlying, contemporary culture negatively influence young people emerged several times while the youth workers described obstacles to their engagement. These aspects could be described as social forces that shape society at large and the culture among youth in particular. These include the forces of consumerism, materialism, and individualism. According to youth workers, these forces are promoted by social media, might enhance the youths' desire for instant gratification, cause a lack of interest in doing things for the community, prevent youth from seeing or understanding the benefits that accrue from attending youth programs, attract them to work in order to generate income to purchase brand name items, overwhelm youth, and generally foster an environment of information overload. While not constituting tangible obstacles in and of themselves, it seems that these assumptions and forces create or cause many of the obstacles mentioned by youth workers. If these negative assumptions are indeed as pernicious as youth workers seem to indicate, the implications for the field of youth development programming may be important.

4.3 How Obstacles to Youth Engagement are Overcome

Having reviewed various obstacles mentioned by front-line youth workers, I can now consider how some of these obstacles are negotiated or overcome by (a) program activities, (b) youth workers, and (c) the youth themselves.

The youth workers described three elements that were chiefly responsible for fostering the engagement of young people and helping them overcome obstacles: (a) program content and structure, (b) the actions and posture of youth workers, and (c) the youth group's climate and dynamics. Interestingly, these three elements mirror the three parts of the third specific research question of this project.

Generally speaking, most of the youth workers felt a great deal of responsibility towards fostering youth engagement. In many cases, youth workers were also directly responsible for the content and structure of the program they offered and played an important role in providing the right kind of group climate and dynamics. Therefore, it was difficult at times to distinguish between the three elements' impact on youth engagement.

The following diagram, although somewhat simplistic, helps illustrate some of the relationships described above and assists in structuring the presentation of the analysis in this section:

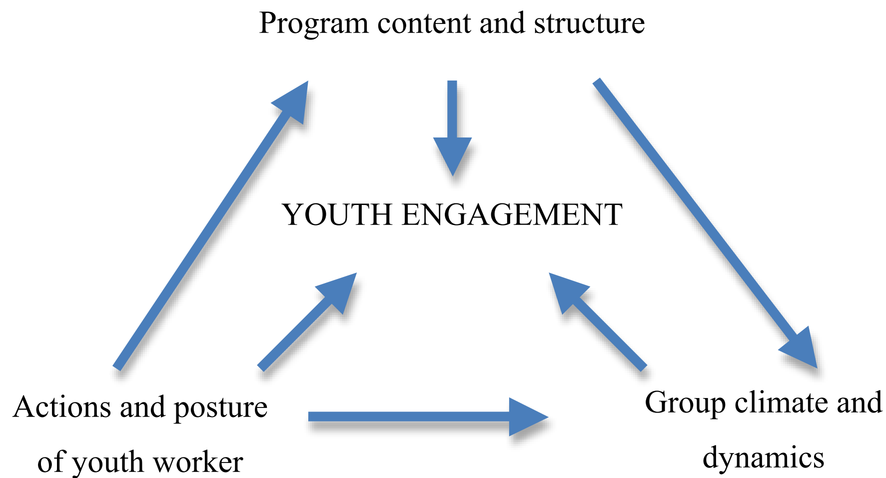

Figure 3. *Suggested relationship between program content and structure, the actions and posture of the youth worker, group climate and dynamics, and youth engagement*

In this diagram, the arrows from the three outside elements towards youth engagement at the centre indicate that these outside elements are able to positively affect youth engagement, as well as remove obstacles to it. The arrows between the three outside elements themselves indicate how these elements influence one another. For instance, the youth worker is able to alter program content and structure, which in turn can influence the youth group's dynamics and climate. Youth workers also directly influence the group climate.

This section has three sub-sections, one for each of the three elements that help youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. Each sub-section discusses groupings of codes related to the theme under consideration, and presents a few pertinent quotes from the interviews to illustrate these codes. This is followed by a short exploration of how the element in question helps overcome some of the obstacles listed in the previous section. The relationships suggested in the diagram above are also explored in more detail.

4.3.1 Program Content and Structure

Although several different codes emerged that described ways in which program activities helped engage youth, the next few paragraphs will focus on describing the ones that were encountered in at least two interviews.

Providing youth with opportunities to be involved in positive actions in the community. Every interviewee highlighted the importance of involving youth in activities that benefit the community. Below are some examples of these types of activities:

> We have some flex hours that we use to promote community involvement. And so we try to choose one to two activities every few months that the kids can volunteer at, with us of course! So we did the … food drive in the summer, which they really enjoyed. We did food sorting at the Church … and soon we'll do, in March we are doing the, we are working with the Canadian Cancer Foundation to do some daffodil sales. So the kids will set up tables and do that. So yes, we have some flex hours were we encourage them, every so often, to do an extra activity … that's one way that we promote community involvement with them. (Interview 2)

According to the youth workers, participating in these kinds of activities helps young people become engaged. While some youth may at first be sceptical of the idea of working for the benefit of others during their free time, their opinion often changes after a few experiences, as the following quote explains:

> … at first they come into the program, they're unsure of the program, they're unsure of themselves, they're unsure of the dedication and work, and then, they'll do one thing, and they'll see that it's not just work, it's fun too, you know, for example, the social club, at first they really didn't want to do the social club dinners, because why do we have to work with the seniors, and what is that going to do for us, and, you know, stuff like that, but then they do it once, and the first time they're a little bit nervous, they're nervous about delivering the food and stuff like that and then they see that they can do it, and that encourages them in it, it builds their confidence and then they want to do it again the next time so it's you know, "When's the next social club, how come there's none this month, why is it only next month", you know, "why we do we have to wait so long". With the fundraising, at first they don't want to do it, and it's "Yeah, but it's the weekend, and it sucks", and then, they say, you know, "It's fun" … and then they're a little bit more excited about it the next time that we have a fundraiser. So, their dedication grows in that too, that, you know,

> they see what they get out of it after the first couple of times that they do whatever it is, so, then they're more interested in it the next time. (Interview 1)

An apparent lack of interest in doing things for the community or a certain lack of self-confidence can be overcome by simply going through the experience of undertaking a few positive actions for others. By carrying out these positive actions, the youth are drawn into a culture of service, which changes the climate of the group and in turn leads to a new group dynamic. It is also to be expected that this kind of community involvement may gradually erode the need for instant gratification. One youth worker mentioned that being involved in these positive activities helps young people feel empowered: they feel "like leaders in the community" (Interview 3). This kind of experience may be particularly powerful for youth who do not see themselves as the kind of young people who contribute to positive social change in their community. As described in the previous section, the obstacle of socially imposed stereotypes is powerful; however, 'trying on' the identity of a community leader by being provided with opportunities to be involved in positive actions in one's community through a youth program may help youth overcome this obstacle.

Taking into consideration youth interest. Several of the youth workers mentioned the importance of taking into account the interests of the youth in planning program content and structure. Program structure directly facilitated this process in one case:

> … on a des rencontres de suivi aussi à …, parce que, en fait, … quand tu fais quatre à cinq activités, on te rencontre après … tu remplis un questionnaire avec elle [ma collègue]. Qu'est-ce que t'aimes dans ton activité? Est-ce que t'aimes ton activité premièrement, qu'est-ce que tu veux améliorer, c'est quoi être bénévole pour toi, donc tout ça on prend le temps avec le jeune, pour savoir, ok, qu'est-ce que t'as compris de ton rôle de bénévole, si le jeune nous dit, "Moi je déteste mon activité", bien, mon Dieu, on va te changer d'activité … on va pas te laisser dans une activité que tu aimes pas …
>
> *Translation:* … we have follow-up meetings also at …, because in fact … when you do four to five activities, we meet with you after … you fill our a questionnaire with her [my colleague]. What do you like in your activity? Do you like your activity first of all, what would you like to improve, what is it mean to be a volunteer for you, so we take the time with the youth, to know, ok, what have you understood about your role as a volunteer, if the youth tells us,

> "Me I hate my activity", well, my God, we'll change your activity … we won't leave you in an activity that you don't like … (Interview 5)

Many youth workers stated that they tried as much as possible to let the youth influence program content and choose the types of activities undertaken by their groups:

> So like, at the beginning pretty much of every school year we like talk to the girls. We get a list of like … what are you into this year. What can we work on. So we get their general interests, what they want to learn, and then we try to work around that. And then you tend to see as the year goes on after they've learned something their interests switch. Like you didn't see like if they're leaning more towards something. They choose the projects, essentially. (Interview 4)

However, it was an assumption for many of the youth workers that the interests of the youth modify the types of activities undertaken as opposed to determining them. For instance, one of the programs involves young people in volunteering their time for others; in this case, the interests of youth determine *the kind* of volunteering activity into which they are placed, and *not* whether they will be involved in volunteering activities. In this sense, 'taking into consideration youth interest' is not the same as 'letting youth determine everything'. Youth may have certain natural inclinations, which, for the sake of their engagement, should be taken into account when designing program content; but regardless of their particular interests, it is clear that youth workers ensure that young people are involved in the kinds of activities that lead to their positive development. There is also a firm conviction among youth workers that, as young people become increasingly involved in positive activities, their interests will gradually align with forms of activity that are generally healthy for them.

Providing space for youth to express themselves. Closely associated with the idea of taking into consideration youth interest, three of the youth workers highlighted the importance of providing space in their program structure for youth to express themselves freely. The following quote is representative of what they would say:

> … we really open up the floor to their opinions of things. I think that generally our approach to … is one where we value their opinion and it's really led by them, it's about their process. And they have a voice. (Interview 6)

Providing space seemed to serve at least two purposes. First, it seems important for youth to generally feel free to speak their minds and for their voices to be heard. These spaces, youth workers emphasized, should be safe and non-judgmental. This may be a space in which young people can avoid the kind of negative feedback they may be used to hearing from adults, and eventually 'break out of their shells', overcoming the kind of shyness that can be an obstacle to their engagement. Second, ensuring that such spaces are a part of program structure also helps youth workers hear and take into consideration the interests of the youth, modifying program content accordingly.

Making expectations of youth explicit when they join. Two youth workers emphasized the importance of dedicating time—when youth first join their programs—to explaining very clearly what is expected of them if they are to continue to participate. This is how one of them described this element of his program's structure:

> … first, what I do with anybody that comes to the group as a new member, they get the speech, well that's what I call it, they get to hear from me and they get to hear from the group. So, I speak first and explain what the group's about, why we get together, what good it's going to do, what good it does for them, what it does for me, what it does for the community. So I give them all the … advantages, disadvantages, whatever, and then I have the group talk. And then the group kind of gives their testimony on how they feel in the group, what they feel in the group, and what their experience has been in the group, and this and that, but at the end of that speech, I let them know, also, to stay in this group, there are things that need to be done, and followed. First and foremost, school. I'm a huge, huge advocate of education, so they know from right off the jump, with me, I check their report cards, now it's to the point they bring me their report cards, I don't even have to ask anymore, you know "Here's my report card", Whether it's good or bad they want me to see it, because they want to talk to me about it, so they know right away that you have to be passing in school, you have to be respectful at school, and at home … and if those things aren't followed, then you're not in this group, or you're not performing with us … (Interview 3)

If program structure does not provide space to make expectations explicit, it can be challenging to keep the youth engaged. In general, it seems that most youth desire structure in their programming, although they may not express it as such. By having clear expectations, youth can then consciously choose to join a group of friends who are encouraging each other to meet these expectations and growing and learning together in the context of program

activities under the guidance of a youth worker. One interviewee mentioned that clear expectations have to be linked to clear consequences if these expectations are unmet. Without this, the structure of the group seems to falls apart and disorder often sets in. Establishing clear expectations at the outset of a young person's participation in a given program may also help youth understand the benefits of participation, thereby overcoming yet another obstacle to youth engagement.

Teaching leadership skills. Several of the youth workers highlighted the fact that their programs taught leadership skills. While the term 'leadership skills' did not consistently refer to a clearly defined set of skills, it appeared to include certain capacities such as becoming independent in one's personal affairs and work, event-organizing, public-speaking, interacting with adults, and taking advantage of various services available to citizens. According to some of the youth workers, youth engagement is facilitated when young people are assisted to develop some of these capacities. Program content, then, should include activities that will help youth obtain a selection of these skills, perhaps according to the interests of the youth:

> … it's a leadership program and the goal is to help them enhance the skills that they already have, leadership skills that they already have and really give them a safe space to kind of explore those skills and to gain more skills, and so we focus on providing workshops and training … (Interview 6)

Such workshops also help them overcome obstacles such as feeling they don't have the necessary skills to become involved.

Other programmatic elements that were mentioned that could help overcome some of the obstacles listed in the previous section include the following:

- Activities aimed at learning how to plan: By learning how to plan their time, youth could be assisted to overcome the obstacles of work and a busy social life. Learning to plan is also connected to the basic set of leadership skills mentioned above. (Interview 1)
- Activities that help youth see the change in themselves over time: These types of activities help youth understand the benefits of attending the types of programs described in this project. 'Activities that help youth reflect on their actions' was a closely related programmatic element that emerged. (Interview 1)
- A welcoming and positive climate: This is a critical element in helping overcome the obstacle of peer pressure, as well as the negative feedback from adults. Program

structure that fosters this kind of climate may also eventually help certain young people overcome shyness and fear of failure. (Interview 3)

- Consistency in program structure: A basic level of consistency in the structure of the program, sometimes referred to as a 'routine' by youth workers, may help youth negotiate the obstacle of staffing problems, which organizations often encounter. (Interview 4)
- Recognizing the youth's accomplishments: One youth worker in particular highlighted this element as critical to her program's structure. This would, of course, help youth overcome previous experiences of negative feedback from adults and contribute to changing their self-perception. (Interview 5)

4.3.2 Actions and Posture of the Youth Worker

The paragraphs below each describe a set of codes that emerged in more than one interview in relation to how youth workers help engage youth and overcome various obstacles:

Building responsibility in youth and having high expectations. An idea that emerged in four of the interviews was the importance of youth workers deliberately building responsibility in youth and consistently having high expectations of them. As was mentioned above, this element was also integrated into the structure of some programs. In addition to this, the interviewees emphasized that it is important for youth workers to hold onto a profound conviction that each of their program participants has many strengths and is capable of experiencing success. Interviewee 3 described how, in his experience, this conviction has repeatedly proven to hold true.

The interviewees also mentioned that youth are no longer children and will soon face—or are already facing—important responsibilities:

> … I find that at that age, it's important for them, because I'm trying to also build in them responsibility in them, because 18 is coming fast for all of them, and that's when life really gets real, you know what I mean? No one's going to hold your hand anymore when you're 18, you got college, you're not even a name, you're a number … (Interview 3)

That youth workers have high expectations of young people and help them meet these expectations assists program participants to overcome negative feedback they may have received from other adults. Whereas some adults may tell these same youth that they are 'troublemakers', youth workers can reverse these imposed stereotypes by remaining

convinced of the potential of youth to be responsible if they are given opportunities and are properly accompanied along the way. When youth workers consistently encourage responsibility, the inertia of peer pressure is also eroded.

Having conversations with youth and encouraging them. Three of the interviewees highlighted the importance of youth workers having meaningful conversations with youth and being encouraging. Since youth workers often give individualized attention to youth, it is important that they understand the youth attending their programs. One youth worker in particular emphasized the importance of speaking to youth and understanding why they attend the program. These conversations help youth workers gain insight into what youth are seeking through their participation:

> Talk man. Talk and listen. Give feedback. Be there consistently. And just mean what you say. Don't make promises you can't keep. If you know you can't be in on that Tuesday, or you can't do the show with them on the Saturday, just let them know what it is. But overall, the best advice is just to not give up on them. As hard as that might be sometimes, because you might even know already, teenagers or kids, they'll break your heart. They will, they'll break your heart. And sometimes they might even turn on you, they'll play the other side of the game, but you can't give up, you know what I mean? You gotta understand where the behaviour is coming from, and you'll only understand that through talk, that's why I always say, talk! Talk, talk, talk! Get to know these kids! Hear them out, hear their story, tell your story! You know what I mean? Don't make them feel like it's just, let them know, you know what, "Yeah, me too, I was there too! I loved a girl when I was 15 and she broke my heart!" Like let them know, like "Oh yeah? For real?" They gotta know it's not just them. With a little bit of self-discretion, it doesn't have to be your whole life story, but, give a couple of things to them they might take home and say "Wow, okay, he went through that too, and look at him now, he's still ok" At least, they'll have hope! A little bit, you know what I mean? Talk, talk and listen. If you can do that well, with sincerity and really care, and with passion, yeah, we can break through. (Interview 3)

When they are able to understand the young people attending their programs, youth workers can then tailor the form of their encouragement and design appropriate program activities that respond to the real needs of the participants. Further, as the quote above implies, genuine and open communication—characterized by constant conversation and listening, as well as keeping promises—appears to be key to developing the kind of relationship that lends

itself to collaborative work. This approach may help youth overcome their shyness, their lack of social skills due to excessive use of social media, and also generally provide a positive role model, as youth workers share insights they have gained from their own lives.

Helping youth understand themselves, identify their strengths and interests, and reflect on their actions. As youth workers strive to understand the youth attending their programs, the youth who participate are also in a process of self-search. One youth worker shared how surprised she was that many youth, when asked what were some of their strengths, were incapable of naming one:

> … c'est pas tous les jeunes qui vont faire "Ok, moi je suis bonne en ci, moi je suis bonne en ça", souvent les jeunes vont avoir de la difficulté à nommer leurs talents, "euh, je suis bon en quoi, je sais pas", ils vont se questionner entre eux, tu sais, si jamais j'inscris deux ou trois amis ensemble, ils vont faire, "euh, moi en quoi je suis bonne?" Tu sais, ils vont même pas se questionner eux-mêmes, ils vont demander à leurs amis, donc, des fois ça mène à des sujets de conversation, "Ok mais attends, toi t'es pas capable de te nommer les forces? En quoi t'es bon, quand qu'on dit que t'est bon, tes parents ils disent que t'es bon en quoi?", "euh, je sais pas", "Ben regarde, c'est ça qu'on va travailler à … tu va t'en trouver des forces, c'est pas tes amis qui sont supposés d'être capables de te nommer les forces, c'est toi-même" …
>
> *Translation:* … not all youth will say "Ok, I'm good at this, me I'm good at that", often the youth will have difficulty to name their talents, "um, I'm good at what, I don't know", they will ask each other, you know, if ever I'm registering two or three friends together, they will say, "um, what am I good at?" You know, they don't even ask themselves, they will go ask their friends, so, sometimes this brings conversation subjects, "Ok but wait, you're not able to name your strengths? What are you good at, when we tell you you're good, your parents they say that you're good at what?", "um, I don't know?", "Well look, that's what we will work on at … you will find your strengths, yourself" … (Interview 5)

She described that when speaking to such youth she would try to connect the objectives of the program to the aim of getting to know one's strengths and building on them. According to the youth workers interviewed, if young people are consistently assisted to reflect upon their goals and actions, they gradually develop an interest in doing things for their communities and begin to understand the benefits of doing so. In the following quote, a youth worker shares how she helps youth reflect in this way:

> So what we often do is a feedback form. So we do an event and we ask them to reflect on what they learned from it. So, to kind of name one thing that you learned during this event. … We also debrief a lot. So for the … Day, so we had these meetings and then the event and then we would debrief and kind of look at each person and ask them what worked what didn't work, how did you feel, what did you learn. ... And so we are reflecting, just like looking back at ok what was my task, how did it go, what could have gone better, you know and just really we're practicing that constantly and even something as simple as a feedback form but makes you think of what did I learn at this thing, what was this about, and how does it apply to me and in my life. (Interview 6)

Letting youth lead and direct the project, avoiding being authoritative, and not forcing the youth to participate. Five of the six interviewees mentioned a number of important ideas regarding the ideal posture of a youth worker and the implications it has for the relationship between youth workers and program participants. The youth workers were eager to distance themselves from the traditional image of an authoritative teacher:

> It's different from a school setting. I'm not their teacher. I'm not necessarily the authority figure, so they respect me a bit more also than their teachers. They've also explained this whole thing to me cause I didn't understand why they were so good with me. But they're in the program because they want to be, it's not forced, they sign up themselves. They're here because they're interested in the responsibility and in the dedication and what it gives them pretty much. (Interview 1)

Clearly, youth workers should not have to force youth to participate in the activities of their programs. Although they need to ensure that certain expectations are met—and if they are not met, that rational consequences follow—they all felt that they should not act as disciplinarians. The interviewees expressed that by adopting this posture they would be able to gain the trust of the youth. The ideal relationship was described as a friendship, but one in which advice could be provided if needed and that demonstrated a positive role model.

From this perspective, letting youth lead and direct the project comes to the fore. However, the youth workers were clear that this did not mean that they did not have a role to play in providing the structure within which the youth were free to lead the project:

> … we'll work with them [the youth asked to work on a project], we'll guide them, we like for them to lead though, so we don't like to just say "Ok, you do

> this, you do that", we like them to kind of create their own role and let them be the leader, let them direct it, let them coordinate it, while obviously, you know, giving them a little bit of advice and take out ideas that aren't the best, but we try our best to let them be leading their own, you know, their own show … (Interview 3)

The role of youth workers seemed to consist of outlining a broad path and a general direction, but letting the youth chart their way along that path. This path is wide enough to admit small mistakes, but defined enough to help the youth avoid serious errors. For example, although a group of youth may be given the latitude to consult about designing and carrying out a fundraising project of their own conception, the youth worker is still with them throughout the process and ensures that the more extravagant ideas are shelved and that discussion is focused on the more plausible options.

Creating the right group climate that fosters trust. Almost all the youth workers emphasized their role in creating the right kind of group climate and the idea of trust often emerged in this context:

> … how do we keep them interested? And this is where the creative part of it comes and what are the activities we do every week, how do we decide what we're going to do with them and why, how are we going to you know take in consideration their voices and go away with their interests just so we're sure that we can create that space where there's trust and there's like there's a sense of belonging and then we can use their expertise. (Interview 4)

Creating the right group climate is intimately connected with many of the factors explored above and also in the next sub-section. As the following quote explains, one of the youth workers felt that once a youth joins a program, the responsibility to increase his or her engagement basically falls on the youth worker:

> I think within the group, like, you know, once they sort of get started, I think the obstacles shift quite significantly, and I see that the animators have a lot more room to address and negate those obstacles, so if there are obstacles like for example … youth are shy, or less likely to speak up, in a group of people, then it's the responsibility of the animators to find ways to make people feel comfortable, I think, of course, that's not always possible, but there are things you can do to ensure that people are treated respectfully and feel comfortable to speak and how to create that kind of atmosphere in which to do so, yeah,

> honestly, I feel like once they're within the group, I really feel like it's the responsibility of the animators and the coordinators to make those obstacles disappear … (Interview 2)

There was a general feeling among the youth workers that, although exceptional youth may by themselves overcome obstacles to their engagement, one should not expect young people to do so without any assistance. This may be connected to a conviction among the interviewees that the climate in which youth find themselves influences them a great deal. When youth attend a youth development program, the youth worker and the program structure together basically determine the climate. Since many youth workers, in the final analysis, are responsible for their program's structure, youth workers bear a great deal of responsibility for the type of climate that is created in their programs. The right kind of climate, then, can help youth overcome myriad obstacles to their engagement.

It seems that youth often lose trust in others, perhaps by succumbing to peer pressure and negative feedback from adults. In a radically different climate created by a competent youth worker, they can gradually begin to trust again. Over time, some may 'break out of their shells'—an expression used by several of the youth workers when describing their success stories with certain youth.

A number of the youth workers also listed personal qualities that enhanced their work. The following qualities emerged in a few interviews: consistency, passion, flexibility, patience, dedication, and being authentic. They described how these qualities helped the youth trust them, increased the youth's engagement, and generally influenced the kind of climate created around a given youth worker.

The following list includes other themes that emerged (but were mentioned in only a single interview) in relation to how youth workers help engage youth and overcome obstacles to engagement:

- Being conscious of systemic injustices faced by youth: One youth worker highlighted how broadening her vision of the struggles faced by youth helped her understand them and their behaviour at a more profound level. With this understanding, stereotypes can be more consciously combated. (Interview 2)

- Working with the parents, school, and friends of youth: This approach allows youth workers to raise the understanding of parents, who may sometimes be an obstacle to their children's engagement. In general, working across these different fronts allows the youth worker to influence a number of different climates, beyond the program's itself. (Interview 5)
- Reminding youth of their leadership role in the community: One youth worker mentioned that youth should be reminded of the fact that their younger peers look up to their example. These reminders help the program participants feel more responsible and take on the identity of a community leader. (Interview 3)
- Helping youth appreciate long-term benefits: When youth workers try and assist young people to appreciate the advantages gained by attending the program over time, it helps youth overcome the obstacle of not understanding the benefits of participating in youth programs and activities to better their communities. (Interview 6)

4.3.3 Group Climate and Dynamics

Five of the youth workers assisted with a program that organized its activities around the concept of a youth group. In addition to the overall program's climate, a certain dynamic and collective identity was created among the group of youth, guided by the youth worker. Together with the youth themselves, the youth worker moulds to a large extent the group's climate, which in turn exerts an influence on youth engagement.

Youth workers described the ideal group climate as being characterized by, among other things, "unity" (Interview 3), and "like a little family" (Interview 3), which creates a sense of safety, a "sense of belonging" (Interview 4), and "trust" (Interview 4) among the youth who are members of the group:

> I find, for me, it's like the most important step is really that trust, once the trust is created and the circle became an intimate safe space, it's like one big step, then they can really be themselves totally, you know? And that's like already a plus, that there's a place where you're not judged, and you can totally be yourself, with perfections and imperfections. (Interview 4)

Once youth workers create a safe space built on trust, the climate itself encourages young people to exert a positive influence on one another. Youth in this kind of climate encourage each other to develop new skills and to overcome their shyness:

> So, my teenagers, some of them have never performed ever, and now they're on stages six times, five times, so it allows them to come out of their shells and express theirselves [*sic*]. It also, what it really does, is it helps also avoid the

> out-casting and bullying that goes on. Because now there's a group of everybody that's kind of like a little family now, and there's no more of that: "Oh no, I don't want to sing because he's in the room". Now it's like they all understand, no, we're all in this room to sing, we're all in this room to rap or dance, so we're all going to at one point show what we can do, so there's no more of "aw you suck, or you can't dance". It's more like "Yo man, let's do this, you know what I mean, like we're a crew now", so it kind of builds a nice unity with the kids, and the teenagers, and it avoids, like I said, that out-casting and "you're not welcome" and "this is not a group for you" and so it helps with the bullying and stuff, you know? (Interview 3)

Without collaboration and mutual respect, the youth would never be able to carry out this program's objectives. In this sense, youth seem best able to overcome obstacles to their engagement in a climate of mutual support and assistance, which a capable youth worker can contribute to creating.

An interesting point raised by one youth worker was a tension between wanting to expand the youth group and achieving the desired group climate:

> It's kind of like bittersweet [when new group members join], because, when it's a bit close, and that trust arrives easily, you know, they develop new friends, they've talked to people they never thought they would talk to before, and then they realize they have so much in common, and then they, you know, so it's like ... it's kind of bittersweet, we don't want to close it, because we want to be inclusive, we want to create this thing … (Interview 4)

It seems that youth workers need to learn how to create a group dynamic that is both inclusive and maintains a high degree of unity and closeness. In this regard, it appears to be important to think of the group climate as something dynamic that requires continuous effort to improve and advance over time, and not as something static that is only addressed in the early stage of a group's formation.

4.3.4 Summary Tables and Overall Analysis

This subsection presents tables with frequency counts for the codes associated with the three categories explored above—how program content and structure, the posture and actions of youth workers, and group climate help engage youth. Each table is followed by an overall analysis of the category of codes.

Table VII. *Summary of codes related to how program content and structure help engages youth*

Code	Interview Number						Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Providing youth with opportunities to be involved in positive actions in the community	1	1	1	1	2	1	7
Taking into consideration youth interest				1	2	1	4
Providing space for youth to express themselves		1			1	2	4
Making expectations of youth explicit when they join			1		2		3
Teaching leadership skills		2				1	3
Activities to help youth learn how to plan	1						1
Activities to help youth see themselves change	1						1
Welcoming and positive climate			1				1
Consistency in program structure				1			1
Recognizing youth's accomplishments					3		3
Totals:	3	4	3	3	10	5	28

Interviewee five's program stands out in this category. As was described in Chapter 3, it is more structured than some of the other programs. In fact, it seems that several of the concepts coded above were explicitly incorporated into the design of this particular program in order to facilitate youth engagement. For example, the youth worker described how follow-up sessions with young people were specially designed to check-in with them and to capture their feedback. It is evident that program structure can be adapted to include various programmatic elements that have proven to engage youth.

In relation to the first code in the table, every program provided youth with opportunities to become involved in positive actions in the community, as this was a criterion for their inclusion in the research project. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the youth workers consistently described how these activities, although they were at times initially considered 'not cool' or unappealing by the youth, eventually became a great source of enjoyment and motivation for those who regularly participated.

As described above, this observation modifies our understanding of the importance of taking youth interest into consideration. Simply letting the youth do 'whatever they want to do' may be fruitless or even harmful in some cases, particularly when negative assumptions about young people or the forces of consumerism, materialism, and individualism have played a major role in determining their interests. Youth development programming should help

youth discover their true strengths, talents, and interests, and channel them into healthy and constructive activities, pursuits, and aims.

Table VIII. *Summary of codes related to how the action and posture of youth workers help engage youth*

Code	Interview Number						Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Building responsibility in youth and having high expectations		1	1		1		3
Having conversations with youth	1		3		1		5
Encouragement	1		1		2		4
Helping youth understand themselves	2				2		4
Helping youth identify their strengths			1		3		4
Identifying a key interest			1	5			6
Helping youth reflect on their actions					2	1	3
Letting youth lead and direct the project	2	1	1	1		1	6
Enforcing consequences and discipline	2		2				4
Avoiding being authoritative	2			1			3
Not forcing the youth to participate	1		1				2
Creating the right group climate		1		1		1	3
Creating trust			1	2	1		4
Being conscious of systemic injustices faced by youth		1					1
Working with the parents, school, and friends of the youth					1		1
Reminding youth of their leadership role in the community			1				1
Helping youth see the long-term						1	1
Ongoing support in their volunteer activities					1		1
Recognizing the youth's accomplishments					1		1
Totals:	11	4	13	10	15	4	57

The high frequency counts for codes in this category (57 compared to 28 and 5) seem to suggest that, of all three elements, the youth workers viewed their own role as especially critical to the engagement of young people. After all, youth workers often design program content and structure and are at least partially responsible for creating the right kind of group climate.

In relation to having high expectations, it was clear that some of the youth workers felt that by expecting more from the participants, they were eager to meet those expectations. The challenge seems to be to create expectations that are realistically attainable, but still challenging enough for the youth. There is clearly a need for a certain kind of 'fit' between the evolving expectations set by the youth worker and the growing ability of program participants to meet them.

Several of the above codes highlight the importance of communication, talking and listening to youth. It is clear that effective youth workers are able to connect with young people and assist them to navigate this period of their lives—a process that seems to take place largely through the medium of conversations, although it is also conveyed through certain attitudes and qualities.

Assisting young people to better understand themselves implies helping them appreciate their strengths. However, this is often not a straightforward task since negative pressures or influences around them may be telling them that they are incapable or have no strengths. To counteract these negative influences, youth workers need to be adept at helping youth distinguish between stereotypes that are projected onto them and their real strengths.

The set of codes above that includes enforcing discipline and consequences brings to the fore the idea of providing a space within which the young people are free to act. As was described under program structure, it is clear young people do not thrive in a chaotic climate where everyone is free to do as they please. Youth workers need to be able to outline a reasonable framework that gives young people adequate room to express themselves and lead program activities, without falling into a kind of rigidity that would cause the participants to see the youth worker as an authority figure in a negative sense. The interviewees also referred

to specific qualities and attitudes that facilitate a youth worker's task of keeping young people involved, such as patience and consistency.

In sum, these observations place high expectations on the training and ongoing support youth workers need to receive in order to effectively engage young people in program activities. Quality training would assist youth workers to develop a certain set of qualities and attitudes, help them develop a particular set of skills and abilities, as well as understand a series of interrelated concepts in relation to the themes above, such as freedom and the negative influence of certain cultural forces and assumptions about youth.

Table IX. *Summary of codes related to how group climate helps engage youth*

Code	Interview Number						Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Unity of the group			1				1
Sense of belonging the group fosters				1			1
Sense of trust in the group				3			3
Totals:			1	4			5

Group climate was not an element that was present in all programs, nor was it a factor that was considered in selecting the youth programs. However, it was clearly another element that helped engage youth and was partially the responsibility of the youth worker to create and maintain. A united group climate fostered trust and allowed the group members to engage in program activities and to encourage one another in their participation.

4.4 Conclusion

Youth workers mentioned four dimensions of engagement: leadership and associated skills; dedication and commitment; self-confidence and self-esteem; and interest. In some cases, these dimensions were described as factors that foster engagement. For instance, developing leadership skills, taking into account the interests of youth, and increasing self-esteem were all described as contributing to enhancing youth engagement in OST programs. In other cases, these dimensions were associated with characteristics of individual youth who were already engaged, or who had become engaged over time through participation. As individual youth characteristics, they were at times used as synonyms for engagement. For example, a youth engaged in program activities could just as easily be described as dedicated,

committed, or interested in program activities. The question of attendance was also associated with the youth workers' descriptions, particularly in connection with the dimension of commitment and dedication. The next chapter will determine if the dimensions raised by the interviewees in relation to the first research question are adequately captured in the ecological model of engagement presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, p. 54).

In relation to obstacles to engagement, most of the ones identified by youth workers were external to young people. This implies that youth workers generally do not blame the youth themselves for their lack of engagement and rather identify external obstacles to their engagement. This is consistent with the fact that the programs I chose were situated in a youth development perspective and confirms that most of the interviewees also operated within this perspective. Further, the obstacles identified by youth workers were often associated with certain negative assumptions about young people or forces operating in contemporary society, such as individualism and materialism, which shape the culture in which young people find themselves. Chapter 5 will discuss these results in light of the distinction made by Karlberg (2004) between the psycho-structural and socio-cultural dimensions of culture.

Finally, with regard to the third research question, the actions and postures of youth workers are the main factors that help youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. Although program content and structure as well as group climate and dynamics certainly play a role, in the final analysis, youth workers also have a large role in shaping them. One of the points raised by the interviewees was that youth interests should be taken into account, but should not wholly determine program activities. Youth workers also emphasized the importance of certain qualities and attitudes, such as patience and consistency, in helping engage youth. They also underscored how youth workers need to have faith in the positive potential of every single program participant. Interviewees also described how certain group dynamics, in particular those distinguished by unity and trust, are conducive to youth engagement in program activities. The implications of these findings will be thoroughly discussed in light of the literature in the field in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Having presented the results of the current research project, in this chapter I discuss these results in light of the literature on youth programming and engagement and models explored earlier in Chapters 1 and 2. As a reminder, the objective of the research project was three-fold: to understand how youth workers describe young engagement, what are the obstacles to youth engagement as perceived by youth workers, and how these obstacles are negotiated or overcome by programs, youth workers, and the youth themselves. The data used to answer these questions was collected using qualitative interviews grounded in an exploratory research framework.

I first summarize the findings of my research project, and then examine their implications in light of the model of youth engagement in OST programs elaborated in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, p. 54) and as such hope to develop further a holistic conception of engagement. Next, I suggest ways in which further research could contribute additional insights into youth engagement and its theoretical conceptualization. Finally, the chapter concludes by enumerating some of the limitations of the current project, next to addressing its implications for youth program design and the training of youth workers.

5.1 Review of the Findings

In this section, I offer an overview and interpretation of the research findings, organized in three sections in light of the three research questions. The following section then explores the implications of these findings for the development of a more holistic model of engagement.

5.1.1 How Youth Workers Describe Engagement

The first research question focused on how youth workers describe engagement. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, four primary dimensions of engagement emerged from analysis of the six interviews: (a) leadership and its associated skills; (b) dedication and commitment; (c) interest; and (d) self-confidence and self-esteem.

Interviewees described engaged youth as leaders. In some cases, leadership was described as a characteristic possessed by certain program participants, which caused them to be intrinsically motivated to 'autonomously' engage in program activities A leader is a youth that shows a profound level of engagement according to some youth workers (Interview 4). Other skills mentioned include being organized in terms of time spent as well as public speaking skills. Interviewees emphasized that the development of these skills leads to autonomy: "They're finally thinking for themselves" (Interview 1).

Youth workers also described youth engagement in terms of commitment and dedication. In one case, dedication was explained as a youth characteristic that determined their likelihood to join program activities in the first place. Certain youth, then, were dedicated, and others were not. However, this youth characteristic was also reinforced through participation in positive program activities: "… they're a little bit more excited about it [a fundraising activity] the next time … So, their dedication grows [over time]…" (Interview 1). In another case, the concept of dedication was associated with commitment to certain program objectives: "… we [the former program participants, including the youth worker] were … very dedicated … We joined, it was … with a real intention, 'I'm going to change the world'" (Interview 4). This group of youth seems to have internalized the program objectives. Such youth were described as engaged by youth workers.

Youth workers discussed the dimension of interest in different ways. First, engagement was described by some as a condition of enjoyment that can be created in youth when they are exposed to program activities that match their interests (Interview 4). In this case, then, 'interest' is used as a noun. Another way in which the concept of interest was described was as a youth characteristic. Engaged youth were described as "interested" (Interview 3); in this case, 'interest' is used as an adjective. In this context, the concept of interest draws a distinction between youth who are interested and those who are not. Those who were described as interested attended program activities regularly, asked more questions, and generally reaped more benefits from their participation (Interview 3).

Several of the youth workers, particularly during interviews 3 and 5, stressed the importance of helping the youth gradually internalize a strength-based self-perception, which

they described as entailing a consciousness of one's proven talents. Young people with low self-esteem or self-confidence were described as disengaged. In a few cases, youth workers described how specific program participants had gradually increased their self-esteem and self-confidence; this process was called "breaking out of [their] shell" (Interview 3). Youth workers mentioned that the characteristics of individual youth can change over time and articulated a relationship between these changing characteristics and their engagement. As youth develop certain basic skills or talents, and experience an increased competence in a particular area of endeavour, their self-esteem increases. Finally, young people's relationships with youth workers seem to be key to developing self-esteem and self-confidence and becoming engaged. For example, one youth worker's ability to create a welcoming climate was crucial for a program participant to break out of her shell (Interview 3).

To summarize, youth workers discussed various dimensions of engagement. Youth who were already engaged were described as leaders with certain associated skills, such as being dedicated and committed, interested, and possessing a high level of self-esteem and self-confidence. For other youth, frequent exposure to quality program activities—particularly those that take into account their interests and involve them in positive action in their communities—can develop leadership skills in them and increase their dedication and commitment, as well as their self-esteem and self-confidence, causing them to gradually become engaged.

5.1.2 Obstacles to Youth Engagement at the Psycho-Structural and Socio-Structural Levels as Perceived by Youth Workers

The purpose of the second research question was to have youth workers identify obstacles to youth engagement—at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels. A distinction was made in Chapter 2 between obstacles operating at these two levels, referring to the work and model of Karlberg (2004). Accordingly, psycho-structural obstacles operate at the level of "internal structures of the human mind", while socio-structural ones exist at the level of "external institutional structures" (p. 5). These two levels are also understood as complementary and mutually influencing dimensions of human culture.

As a reminder, the socio-structural dimension of culture refers to institutions, arrangements, and relationships that "constrain and cultivate human attitudes, ideas and behaviour" (Karlberg, 2004, p. 6). The psycho-structural dimension of culture refers to the "culturally shared attitudes, values, beliefs and response tendencies—or structures of human consciousness—acquired through the process of social learning" (p. 5). Both of these dimensions of culture are influenced, among other things, by assumptions human beings hold to be true about the world. Youth workers referred to several such assumptions when describing obstacles to youth engagement.

Having revisited the categories of psycho-structural and socio-structural, the 19 unique obstacles that were identified in Chapter 4 will now be organized into these two categories. The following table presents this division:

Table X. *Categorizing obstacles to youth engagement*

Psycho-structural obstacles	Socio-structural obstacles
Lack of interest in doing things for the community	Peer pressure
Youth not seeing or understanding the benefits	Negative feedback from adults and stereotypes
Need for instant gratification	Social media
Shyness	Lack of understanding of the parents
Youth feel they don't have the skills	Work (in some cases)
Fear of failure	Motivation through school credit
Work (in some cases)	Disconnect between what youth workers think will be relevant and the interests of youth
	Staffing problems in youth program
	Too much programming
	Lack of a positive role model
	Information overload
	Youth becoming overwhelmed
	Social life

Note. The obstacle of 'work' can be placed in both categories. The youth workers discussed it in different contexts, as explained in the previous chapter, p. 101.

As the table above demonstrates, most of the obstacles identified by youth workers can be classified as socio-structural obstacles, in that they are related to "external institutional structures" (Karlberg, 2004, p. 5), arrangements, or relationships that constrain, in a negative

sense, the attitudes and behaviour of program participants, creating obstacles to their engagement. Peer pressure and youths' social lives constitute socio-structural obstacles to engagement that youth may encounter. Negative feedback from adults based on certain stereotypes about young people, a lack of understanding on the part of young people's parents with regard to program objectives, and the absence of a positive role model also fall into this category, but emerge from adults that surround and interact with youth. Programmatic obstacles—all of which are socio-structural—include a disconnect between the interests of youth and the plans of youth workers, the lack of continuity in youth workers created by staffing problems, activities that attract participation based on motivation through school credit, the presence of too much programming in a given neighbourhood, and youth becoming overwhelmed by program activities. The two remaining socio-structural obstacles, social media and information overload, pertain to the overall culture in which young people are growing up today, of which most of the youth workers were highly critical.

The number of psycho-structural obstacles identified by youth workers was much smaller. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this is consistent with the fact that youth development programs were chosen—programs that treat youth as assets and perceive them as important resources and therefore would be less likely to blame them for disengagement. Hence, it is logical for youth workers in such programs to identify primarily external obstacles to engagement as opposed to internal ones. In any case, each of these psycho-structural obstacles constitutes an attitude, value, belief, or response grounded in and emergent from youths' environment. For example, the youth workers described how a common response of youth to invitations to join their programs or carry out positive actions in their communities was a statement or attitude to the effect that they did not think that volunteering was "cool".

In several cases, interviewees emphasized how certain negative assumptions or forces prevalent in society contributed to creating and maintaining obstacles to engagement. Youth workers described how these assumptions shape the values of young people, their tendency to engage, and the attitudes of adults in their immediate environment.

5.1.3 How Obstacles to Youth Engagement are Negotiated or Overcome

According to youth workers, there were three primary elements that assist youth to overcome obstacles to their engagement and support engagement: (a) program content and structure, (b) the actions and posture of youth workers, and (c) the youth group's climate and dynamics. These three elements are closely related to the three parts of my third research question: How are obstacles to youth engagement negotiated or overcome by (a) programs, (b) youth workers, and (c) the youth themselves. A diagram (Figure 3, p. 103) was offered in the previous chapter that illustrated the relationships among these three components, highlighting the critical role of youth workers in supporting youth engagement.

Program content and structure. Youth workers mentioned that program activities that provided youth with opportunities to be involved in positive actions in the community and took into consideration their interests helped youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. However, interviewees described how youth interests should not wholly determine program activities, but should be considered and shape program activities.

Another strategy to promote youth engagement that emerged during the interviews was providing spaces for young people to express themselves. This was important for two reasons. First, youth need to be provided with a safe and non-judgmental space in which they can feel free to speak and in which they feel heard; such a climate is important for their own development and engagement. Second, these spaces also allow youth workers to hear feedback from program participants so they can modify program content accordingly. Interviewee 5 emphasized the importance of weaving such dialogue spaces into the structure of youth programs. Youth workers also described how making expectations explicit when youth first join the program—in other words, incorporating high expectations of youth into the program structure itself—is important for fostering engagement (Interviews 3 and 5).

In general, identifying aspects of program content and structure that help engage youth did not prove difficult for the interviewees. The challenge is with their implementation in real-life situations.

Actions and posture of youth workers. Interviewees reported that a number of actions and postures they could take help young people engage and overcome obstacles to their engagement. In general, they placed a great deal of emphasis on their role in fostering youth engagement, and provided rich descriptions of actions they had undertaken or attitudes they had adopted to this end. For example, interviewee 3 described his profound conviction and faith in the potential of every single program participant and the importance of such a positive outlook, that then naturally leads to a certain disposition on part of youth workers that offers youth with opportunities to express and act upon their dispositions in positive ways and become engaged:

> [E]very kid and every teen that I worked with, or you know, had a chance to talk to, or do anything with, every single one was super talented, super bright, and just a super, super special person, every single one. But they all have a story to tell. Which leads them to the obstacles, or the doubt, or the fear, but, every single one has something special in them, a positive light, you know what I mean? (Interview 3)

The previous chapter also analyzed the following actions and postures of youth workers that fostered engagement: letting youth lead and direct projects, avoiding being authoritative, and not forcing the youth to participate. When the interviewees described how they should let youth lead and direct projects, the tension between support and autonomy often came to the fore. Interview 3 contained a direct reference to this idea, which was quoted in the previous chapter (p. 112-113). Generally speaking, the youth workers struggled articulating how they supported youth in planning and carrying out their projects while ensuring youth ownership of projects. In some cases, youth workers seemed to succumb to this perceived tension between support and autonomy, although most appeared to intuitively overcome it through their posture and the kinds of relationships they cultivated with program participants.

Finally, a number of qualities were mentioned by youth workers as being conducive to gaining the trust of program participants, increasing youth engagement, and, in general, creating the right kind of climate. These qualities included, for example, consistency, passion, flexibility, dedication, and patience.

The youth group's climate and dynamics. The previous chapter found that the climate of the youth group and its dynamics, determined by the youth workers and the youth themselves, have a profound influence on youth engagement in OST programs. Although relatively little data was associated with this element, it was clear from the analysis conducted in the previous chapter that it constitutes a distinct component that contributed to youth engagement (as illustrated in Figure 3, p. 103). The general model that was elaborated in the previous chapter based on my findings was that the ideal climate exerts a positive influence on the youth and, in turn, a dynamic is created in which the youth's interactions amongst each other are also positive. When these dynamics are strong, youth encourage one another instead of bullying each other and they help one another to overcome obstacles to their engagement. Helping one's peers to engage may, in and of itself, also contribute to one's own engagement. The youth workers in interview 4, for example, noted that their most engaged program participant was also the most eager to invite her friends to attend the program. Even though a few of the interviewees mentioned these ideas, it was generally not discussed in detail, most likely because it was not explicitly solicited by the interview questions.

5.2 Implications for the Conceptualization of Engagement

The findings summarized above have various implications for the model of youth engagement in OST programs elaborated in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, p. 54). In this section, I describe and explain the features of the model of youth engagement as it currently stands, point out the commonalities between the views of youth workers and its key features, and then examine the dimensions that need to be added to it, based on my findings. Finally, I present the expanded, more holistic model of youth engagement developed based on this study.

5.2.1 Summary of the Model of Engagement as Presented in Chapter 2

Figure 2 (p. 54) captured a number of dimensions of engagement found in the literature. It illustrated the relationship between engagement, youth outcomes, quality YD program features, youth workers, and individual youth characteristics. This figure places youth engagement—which is often only understood as a three-dimensional individual trait, including affective, behavioural, and cognitive aspects (Fredricks et al., 2004)—within the broader context of youth development programs. Drawing inspiration from the ecological theory of

Bronfenbrenner (1979), the model also attempts to represent complex interactions between individual and environmental factors.

As a reminder, engagement was introduced as an important key to unlocking the benefits of program participation (Weiss et al., 2005). Figure 2 (p. 54) illustrates how quality YD program features listed in Table I (pp. 40-41), such as structure, consistency, and skill-building activities, contribute directly to the desired outcomes of PYD, the Five Cs: competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring, also summarized by referring to the concept of 'flourishing' (Leffert et al., 1998). This relationship is represented by the arrow drawn between these features and youth outcomes. However, Figure 2 (p. 54) also shows how these benefits are mostly experienced through engagement by placing it between the quality YD features and youth outcomes (Weiss et al., 2005). The interventions of youth workers also contribute to youth outcomes through engagement. In addition, youth workers have an important role to play in the implementation of quality YD program features in real-life situations (Larson & Walker, 2010). Arrows drawn between youth workers and other elements in the diagram represent both of these relationships. Youth engagement also feeds into itself (Shernoff, 2013), illustrated by an arrow that leaves engagement and returns to it. Individual youth characteristics are important to take into account as well, since the engagement of different youth will vary according to their individual characteristics (Fredricks et al., 2004). These individual youth characteristics, particularly their interests and talents, also help determine quality program features (Grossman et al., 2009).

The figure also accounted for the change in some of these elements over time, the presence of obstacles to engagement, and the mediating role of attendance. Youth outcomes will naturally modify individual youth characteristics over time. Further, as Fredricks et al. (2004) suggested, as youth gain more competence, the means of their engagement will gradually evolve. As for obstacles to engagement, which exist at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels, a circle drawn around youth engagement itself illustrated them. Goodkind et al. (2012), to provide an example, found that the lack of support of parents could be one such obstacle. Finally, attendance was introduced to the model as a mediating factor, between program features and engagement, since attendance is related to engagement, with

frequency of attendance leading to more thorough engagement (Bohnert et al., 2010). All of these elements together led to a conceptualization of engagement as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, grounded and explored within the context of a Positive Youth Development and ecological perspective (Shernoff, 2013).

5.2.2 Commonalities Between the Model of Engagement and the Views of Youth Workers

In general, my findings confirmed many of the elements that were already present in the model, and further confirmed the already suggested relationships among the elements.

In their descriptions of engagement itself, most of the dimensions youth workers raised can be subsumed under one of the three dimensions of the psychological interpretation of engagement, characteristics of individual youth, or features of quality programs. For instance, leadership was at times described as an individual characteristic, and the skills associated with it were often developed through program activities. Commitment and dedication, to take another example, are related to the cognitive dimension of engagement (Zimmerman, 1990), and can also be conceived of as individual characteristics of youth. Interest, yet another dimension mentioned by interviewees, is an integral part of the description of the state of 'flow' that is associated with the psychological interpretation of engagement (Shernoff, 2013). Thus, the dimensions raised by youth workers when they were describing the engagement of young people in OST programs were adequately captured by the elements of individual youth characteristics or quality YD program features that are already part of the model of engagement presented in Chapter 2 and briefly discussed above. Several of the dimensions also have some aspects in common with the psychological interpretation of engagement, particularly its cognitive dimension.

The youth workers described many obstacles to engagement, justifying the inclusion of this element in the model. Obstacles such as peer pressure and negative feedback from adults are some of the main barriers to youth engagement. While the current model implied that these obstacles exist at the psycho-structural and socio-structural levels as explored in Chapter 2, it did not clarify how these obstacles are created and maintained, which was an important dimension that emerged from the interviews.

Most of the aspects of program structure and content and of the actions and posture of youth workers that foster engagement as reported by youth workers were also captured by the model, under the elements 'youth workers' and 'features of quality programs'. Generally speaking, there was a high degree of correspondence between what youth workers reported about how program structure and content enhanced youth engagement, and what was presented in the literature, as recorded in Table I (pp. 40-41). For instance, both youth workers and scholars in the field reported that involvement in positive community action reinforced youth engagement (Roth, 2004). In relation to the actions and posture of youth workers, there was also a general agreement between my findings and the literature in this area. For example, that youth workers need to be involved in meaningful conversations with program participants was emphasized by both youth workers and researchers (Cater et al., 2013).

At a more general level, my findings confirmed the relevance of contextualizing youth engagement within a Positive Youth Development and ecological perspective. As Shernoff (2013) has argued, within the context of PYD, engagement needs to be understood in terms of its interaction with the environment that supports its emergence. The interviewees appeared to describe engagement in a similar way. For instance, youth workers generally described the engagement of program participants by referring to their potential and not in terms of a deficit perspective. Several of the obstacles to youth engagement that they mentioned—such as social media—were also clearly grounded in an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In sum, most of the insights provided by youth workers with regard to youth engagement in OST programs confirmed several of the elements of the model presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, p. 54).

5.2.3 Dimensions to Add to the Model of Engagement Based on Findings

In some cases, however, the interviewees nuanced the elements of the model in new ways, or helped shed light on new aspects. The findings from my three research questions make evident that certain dimensions are missing in the model (Figure 2, p. 54). Noteworthy among these additions or changes are (a) the more prominent role of certain 'negative' assumptions, influences, or forces in creating and perpetuating obstacles to youth engagement; (b) that the interests of youth do not determine program activities, but rather help modify

them; (c) that youth workers require more than just skills to foster youth engagement, namely a set of convictions and qualities; and (d) the role and importance of youth themselves in overcoming obstacles to their engagement by contributing to a positive group climate and group dynamic. The following paragraphs explore these additional dimensions.

The role of negative assumptions in creating obstacles to engagement. Examining some examples from the list of obstacles to engagement (Table X, p. 126) and the assumptions embedded within them, will offer a clearer picture of the kind of 'constraints' that prevent young people from engaging in OST programs. It further helps to develop a more elaborate and holistic model of engagement. It seems particularly worthwhile to discuss the negative feedback from adults and the kinds of stereotypes about youth that can undermine youth engagement. One of these is the assumption that certain young people are inherently inclined to trouble making and will not be able to succeed in school or in a given career. Interviewee 2 described the negative impact of this assumption—how many youth end up internalizing it. As Karlberg (2004) explains, such assumptions run the danger of appearing "natural and inevitable to those who have internalized them. Furthermore, that which appears natural and inevitable appears impossible to change" (p. 4). The term "naturalization" is often used to describe this problem. Thus, if an adult assumes that young people are troublemakers, any instance of trouble making on the part of youth will serve as further confirmation of the fact, and any deviation from this trend is seen as out of the norm. The effects of such negative perceptions of youth are worsened if held by adults who play a key role in youths' lives such as parents or teachers. And as suggested by the interviews, negative views of youth not only become obstacles to engagement but may lead to lasting psychological effects where youth come to see themselves as incapable and hence, an obstacle that might be categorized as psycho-structural.

In addition to constituting a socio-structural obstacle to engagement, negative feedback from adults may also contribute to the shaping of attitudes, values, beliefs, and response tendencies of young people. A youth who has been told again and again that he or she is a troublemaker and has never been entrusted with much responsibility as a result of this perception may actually end up internalizing this assumption. Once this assumption has been

internalized, it may constitute yet another obstacle to engagement, this time at the psycho-structural level. For example, it may manifest itself in a lack of interest in doing things for the community, one of the psycho-structural obstacles mentioned by the interviewees. The manifest lack of interest in doing things for the community on the part of many young people may in turn influence relationships between adults and youth and reinforce certain assumptions held by adults with regard to the potential of young people. Another crucial dimension is peer pressure, which may further undermine youths' interest in community action.

This detailed exploration of a few of the obstacles to engagement identified by youth workers at both levels (psycho-structural and socio-structural) and their relation with negative assumptions about young people helps expand our model of youth engagement in OST programs. In particular, it gives added weight to the role of negative assumptions about young people and the impact these assumptions may have on their engagement. The element 'negative assumptions' will therefore need to be added to the model of engagement.

The interests of youth help modify program activities, but do not determine them. As a reminder, the model of engagement presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, p. 54) illustrates in what ways individual youth characteristics—especially their interests—can influence characteristics of the program. This is in line with Grossman et al.'s (2009) argument that there should be a 'fit' between the interests of youth and program activities. While most youth workers referred to the important of fit (particularly during interview 4), in at least two cases (interviews 3 and 5) this idea was further nuanced, which seems to have important implications for youth program design. Some of the youth workers explained that, while youth interests should be taken into account, it is sometimes counter-productive and in some cases even disempowering if these interests determine program features entirely. One interviewee shared that, when selecting projects to raise money, for example, he would let the youth determine what they wished to do as much as possible, but would still make small interventions to remove the more extravagant ideas that were unlikely to work. In fact, this idea touches on the question of the 'balance' between autonomy and support (Larson & Walker, 2006), although the youth workers did not discuss it in this way. In any case, it is

clear that the initial model of engagement needs to be modified in order to take into account that dimension, as raised by youth workers.

Youth workers require certain convictions and qualities to foster engagement. As was mentioned above, youth workers reported that certain convictions and qualities assisted them greatly to foster youth engagement. In fact, almost every youth worker highlighted at least one quality—such as patience, tolerance, flexibility, consistency, and integrity—when discussing his or her work. As for convictions, an important one reported by youth workers was having high expectations and faith in the potential of each program participant which then leads to actions on part of the youth workers that support the development of youths' talents in a positive environment.

References to some of these same qualities can be found in the literature. For example, Ward and Parker (2013) mentioned flexibility as being an important quality. The National Collaboration for Youth has defined a list of core competencies for youth development workers that includes the qualities of respect, caring, honesty, and responsibility (Astroth, Garza, & Taylor, 2004). However, these studies do not discuss how youth workers may be trained to develop these positive characteristics and dispositions towards youth. Instead, the papers focus primarily on the kind of knowledge and skills required by youth workers. It suggests, however, that a model of youth engagement should capture the important role of these qualities and convictions of youth workers.

The role of youth themselves in overcoming obstacles to their engagement by contributing to the youth group's climate and dynamics. Expanding upon Karlberg's (2004) analysis of external forces or influences on the two dimensions of culture, it becomes evident that the group becomes "like a family" (Interview 3) and may act as a protection against potential negative influences in the wider society and exerts a positive influence on the psycho-structural and socio-structural elements of the youth group. For instance, if individual group members develop positive attitudes towards service to their community, the group as a whole may also adopt rules or regulations that promote positive behaviour. The youth worker, of course, facilitates this process, while allowing the youth to maintain ownership of it. One youth worker described this 'positive force' as "unity" (Interview 3). Another described it as

"trust" (Interview 4), and discussed how it allows young people to open up to one another without the fear of being judged.

Although the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 included references to the idea that a welcoming climate and positive interactions among program participants are conducive to their engagement (Bartko, 2005; Grossman et al., 2009; Pearce & Larson, 2006), the literature did not describe in detail how young people can help each other to overcome obstacles to their engagement. Further, Figure 2 (p. 54) did not explicitly address the role of youth themselves in overcoming obstacles to their engagement. Based on the findings of this research project, the model of engagement should be expanded to include the influence of the youth group's climate and dynamics on the engagement of program participants, and, in turn, the influence of the youth themselves on the group climate and dynamics that are created. Youth workers also have an important influence on the youth group's climate and dynamics.

5.2.4 Presentation of an Expanded Model of Engagement

The dimensions of engagement explored above—gleaned from front-line youth workers—helped build and further refine the model of youth engagement in OST programs discussed in Chapter 2. The following figure is an expanded version of Figure 2 (p. 54), whose new or changed elements are noted in red:

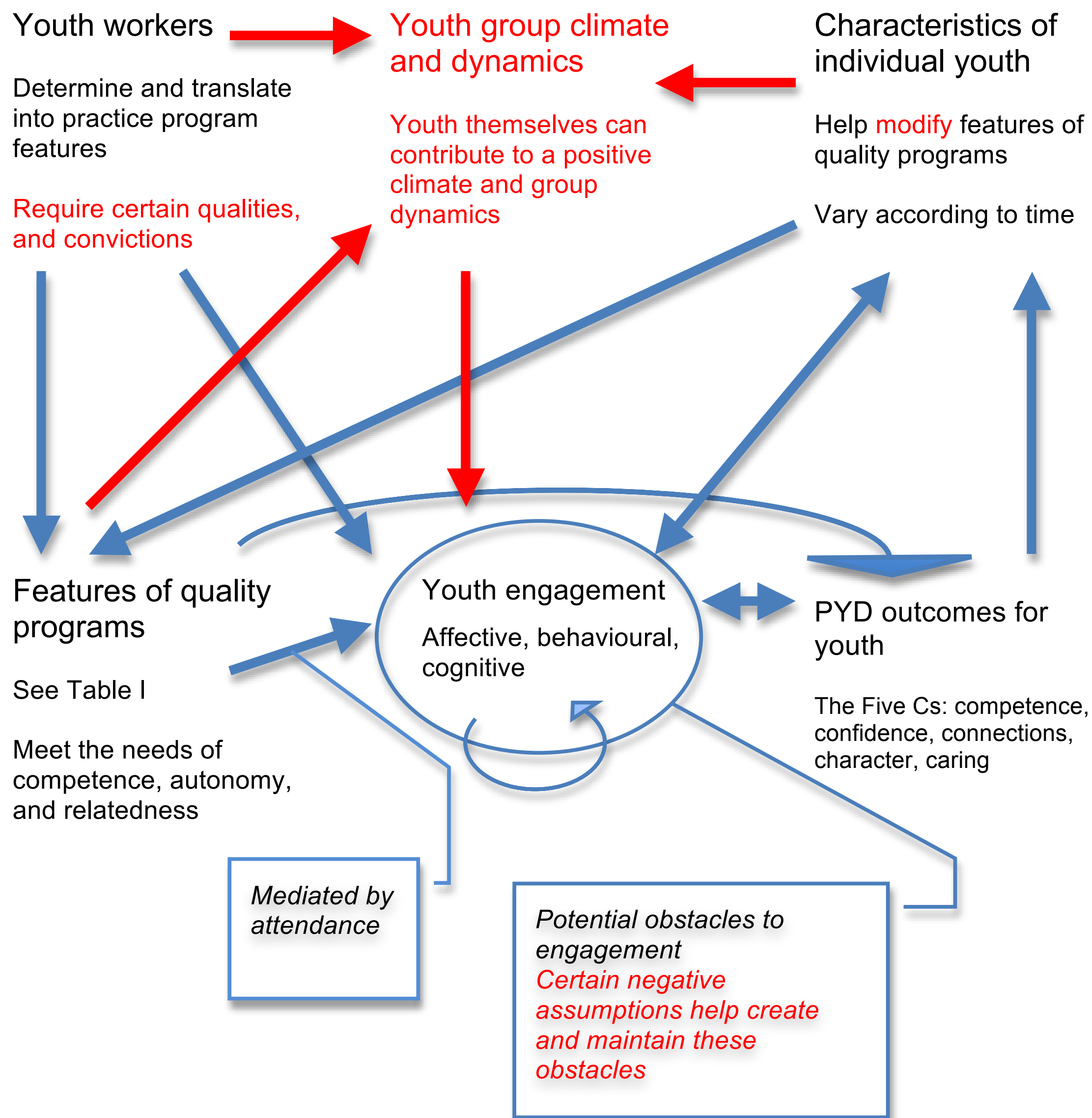

Figure 4. *Model of youth engagement in OST programs that includes the research findings*

While the relationships that were articulated in Chapter 2 between the model's primary elements remain similar, its new elements have a few implications for its functioning. The most important new feature in Figure 4 (p. 138) is the 'youth group climate and dynamics' factor, which was essentially taken from Figure 3 (p. 103). The arrows from 'youth workers' and 'features of quality programs' to this new element are also from Figure 3 (p. 103), as is the arrow from 'youth group climate and dynamics' to 'youth engagement'. The arrow from 'characteristics of individual youth' to 'youth group climate and dynamics' signifies the influence of young people's personal characteristics on the youth group.

The other added elements, also in red, take into account the nuances that were brought about by the interviewees. Since the interviewees gave rather elaborate descriptions of certain negative assumptions, particularly about young people, and the role they have in creating and maintaining obstacles to youth engagement, this element has been added to the figure. Youth workers also highlighted the fact that the interests of youth should not wholly determine program features, but should instead modify them or simply be taken into account. This precision is made by replacing the word 'determine' with 'modify' in the upper right corner of the figure. Finally, given the importance youth workers attributed to certain qualities and convictions, this element has been added to the 'youth workers' factor in the upper left portion of the figure. The skills and knowledge they require is implied in the initial description that they determine and translate into practice features of quality programs.

It is clear that fostering engagement cannot be reduced to a formula or a simple set of steps. Youth workers are raising various dimensions of engagement, demonstrating that they are not trivializing it and that they at least implicitly acknowledge its complex nature. In fact, none of the youth workers limited their description of engagement to an individual trait, as is sometimes the tendency with psychological approaches to engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). While the interviewees touched upon some of the elements that were present in the psychological interpretation of engagement, they considered a number of additional dimensions, underscoring the need to place engagement in a broader context in order to understand it more holistically. In this new context, engagement is defined as a certain form of interaction with one's environment that leads to flourishing, a process youth workers

described several times. The ecological nature of engagement was well illustrated by youth workers, particularly when they articulated how social and environmental obstacles impeded the engagement of young people. Finally, the inclusion of the youth group's climate and dynamics as an additional dimension of engagement is a testament to the youth workers' conviction in the active role young people themselves play in determining the form engagement takes and what engagement of their peers might look like. However, even Figure 4 (p. 138) is by no means a comprehensive model of youth engagement in OST programs. While acknowledging that the views of youth workers are valuable, researching the phenomenon of engagement from other perspectives would naturally add to our understanding of it.

5.3 Next Steps: Possibilities for Further Research

An additional perspective from which one could study engagement is that of the program participants themselves. This would be particularly valuable since they have an important influence on group climate and dynamics, the element that was missing from our initial model of engagement (see Figure 2, p. 54). It is quite possible that youth themselves would raise additional dimensions of engagement, creating an even more holistic model of engagement in the context of OST programs.

A few studies reviewed in Chapter 2 examined engagement from the perspective of youth themselves. For instance, one team of researchers, in addition to consulting youth workers, also interviewed the program participants, and even observed program activities (Dawes & Larson, 2011). They interviewed the youth themselves at least three times face-to-face and several times on the phone over the course of the study, which allowed them to get a sense of their changing level of engagement. Among other things, this helped the researchers gain additional insights into the influence of time on engagement and individual youth characteristics, elements that are also part of Figure 4 (p. 138). Bringing in the element of youth voice and enhancing their participation in a research project aimed at understanding their engagement is also consistent with the key principles of youth development (Kirshner et al., 2011).

By interviewing youth themselves, Dawes and Larson (2011) were better able to unpack the evolving engagement of individual youth in program activities. For instance, they found that the majority of youth who experienced increased engagement over the course of their participation in their program formed personal connections with the program. The researchers were then able to divide these personal connections into three categories: connections between the skills being taught in the program and their life goals; connections with their increased sense of competence; and connections with program goals with broad social aims. Getting to this level of detail was possible because the youth themselves were interviewed at several different stages of program participation. The findings of Dawes and Larson (2011) also allow them to confirm that engagement can emerge and develop with time, and that not all youth may show genuine forms of engagement immediately at the beginning of their involvement. At the same time, not all the youth interviewed experienced an increase in engagement either. It suggests that studies of engagement over longer time spans with multiple data points over time might be particularly revealing in terms of its conceptual dimensions.

In my study, interviewing youth workers provided an understanding of their perspective on youth engagement and their role in fostering it. The conversations also shed much light on various program features that are key in helping youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. However, although there were a few anecdotes shared about specific youth, the current research project did not systematically gather information about the engagement of individual youth over a period of time. The study described in the previous paragraph, on the other hand, was able to obtain detailed data about the engagement of individual youth. This approach allowed them to understand how young people engaged deeply in programs through different kinds of personal connections with program objectives that were gradually developed over time.

Another study (Larson & Angus, 2011) that employed similar methods—periodic interviews with youth over the course of their participation in specific programs—was able to glean significant insights into the forms of cognitive engagement among a group of young people. The researchers noted how youth developed strategic thinking through their

involvement in high quality arts and leadership programs. Further, the study found that the development of this form of cognitive engagement was enhanced when youth workers in these programs assisted the youth but did not control their efforts directly. In fact, interviewees in my own research project referred to this same strategy when discussing youth engagement in positive community action. That Larson and Angus (2011) obtained detailed data about youth engagement from program participants themselves allowed them to understand the precise mechanisms through which youth cognitively engage, therefore resulting in a list of concrete suggestions for programs and youth workers. The present research project was unfortunately unable to provide such practical advice to youth workers.

Studies conducted using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) discussed in Chapter 2 also usually allow researchers to explore engagement from the perspective of young people themselves. For example, Shernoff and Vandell (2007) used ESM to obtain data in relation to the engagement of young people in different activities over the course of two weeks. They found that sports and arts enrichment programs were more likely to be engaging than homework-focused ones. The presence of adults as well as peers was also associated with higher levels of engagement. This approach, which draws on the subjective experience of young people themselves, can help distinguish between program activities that may be more or less engaging. Although the present study led to the identification of program activities that are considered as engaging according to youth workers, the study design did not allow for a comparison among a number of different activities from the perspective of young people. Such studies are helpful in providing lists of very concrete suggestions for those designing and implementing youth programs.

In any case, it is clear that investigating the phenomenon of engagement from multiple perspectives helps further unpack it and allows researchers to better appreciate its multidimensional nature (Fredricks et al., 2004; Shernoff, 2013). In addition to better understanding when, through what precise mechanisms, and in which ways youth engage over the course of their participation in program activities, involving the youth themselves in a research project on engagement in OST programs could shed light on several other questions. For example, it could help researchers understand how youth contribute to maintaining a

positive group climate and encourage one another to engage in program activities. This is just one of many questions that could be examined by involving youth—in various ways—in a research project on engagement. It is reasonable to assume that the more participatory their role in the research project, the more the researcher(s) should be able to understand their perspective (Kirshner et al., 2011). Bringing in youth voice, then, is a logical next step in order to better understand their engagement in OST programs.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

In light of the comments in the previous section, an important limitation of the present study is that it was conducted entirely from the perspective of youth workers. Even my own position, which was described in Chapter 3, was influenced by my experience as a youth worker, which can be seen as yet another limitation. The other major limitation of the current project is related to its exploratory nature.

Having only interviewed youth workers for the current project and having been a youth worker myself, my results were coloured by these perspectives and my own position in the project. However, the explicit intention of the project was to understand the phenomenon of engagement from the perspective of youth workers. It is therefore quite natural that my findings were inclined towards the interests and concerns of youth workers. Clearly, their concerns and perspectives offered interesting insights into the phenomenon of engagement. Nevertheless, as was mentioned above, given the complex nature of engagement it is reasonable to assume that it should be approached from multiple perspectives (Fredricks et al., 2004). In this regard, examining engagement from several additional perspectives—youth workers, the youth themselves, parents, etc.—would have been valuable in unpacking it and would also have created an opportunity to triangulate the data (Merriam, 1995). Unfortunately, I was only able to approach youth engagement from one of these perspectives in the current research project. As was suggested above, bringing in the perspective of youth themselves would have allowed this project to go one step further. Looking more closely at some of the key components of engagement from their perspective would also help further unpack the details of the process of youth engagement in OST programs, thereby clarifying how youth are actually becoming engaged.

In relation to my own involvement in youth work, since it was described explicitly from the very beginning of my project, it did not constitute an important limitation (Merriam, 1995). Further, as was briefly explored in Chapter 3, being from the same professional background as the interviewees may have assisted them to feel comfortable in sharing their views (De Lavergne, 2007).

As an exploratory project, the current study was limited in its ability to offer concrete and definitive conclusions, which could only be reached by testing hypotheses using a different set of methods (Kothari, 2004). Rather, it shed additional light on the multi-dimensional nature of engagement and pointed to a number of further research questions about engagement and ways in which they could be approached, paving the way for further explanatory or interpretive research (Gray, 2013). In this sense, although it offered a few important insights, the current study did not provide youth workers with a list of practical and concrete suggestions in relation to effective strategies for helping youth overcome obstacles to their engagement. Further studies, which would include program observations and interactions with the youth themselves and test specific hypotheses, would be required to determine best practices in this area. However, the current project could help orient such studies and provide some initial ideas that could guide their design.

In sum, the major limitations of my study were the fact that it was conducted from the perspective of youth workers and that it could not provide them with proven strategies to foster engagement due to it exploratory nature. However, further studies could build on the insights offered in this project to include other perspectives on engagement, as well as to develop a list of best practices for fostering it.

5.5 Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this research project have several implications for the design and implementation of youth programs, as well as the training of youth workers. In relation to the former, an important finding of the current research project was that the interests of youth should not wholly determine program activities, but need to be taken into consideration and should shape program activities. This has significant implications for the design of youth programs. Taking into account the interests of youth in designing program content has to be

balanced with an understanding of the kinds of activities that appear to support youth engagement in a more consistent manner. Table I, for instance, (pp. 40-41) lists many activities, such as those that provide opportunities for meaningful skill building or those that encourage young people to mingle with those from diverse backgrounds (Anderson-Butcher, 2005). Roth (2004), to take another example, suggests that becoming involved in positive community action leads to and supports engagement of youth. Thus, youth's interests can be taken into account when selecting a 'form' of positive community involvement (this is precisely how interviewee 5's program functions), but the fact remains that such activities promote youth engagement, whether or not youth are (initially) interested in them.

The broader issue here is the conflicting demands of the elements of quality programs. Larson and Walker (2006) describe in detail how different elements can place seemingly contradicting demands on youth workers, making their work highly complex. In some cases, certain interests of youth might actually incline them towards activities that will not be conducive to their engagement in OST programs. The way interviewee 5's program was able to incorporate certain aspects of program quality (such as providing contingent feedback, as described in Table I, pp. 40-41) directly into its structure, while accommodating space for youth to explore their interests and select their volunteer activities, is interesting to note in this respect. Program design, therefore, should take into account youth interests, but should not ignore the fact that some interests might be more productive and supportive of youth engagement than others.

Given the evident influence of certain negative assumptions about youth or forces (such as materialism and individualism) on young people, another implication for program design would be at the level of content: youth programs could strive to include workshops that help youth understand the influence of these assumptions and forces on their thoughts and actions. Such workshops or activities would not only help make explicit the causes of various obstacles to engagement, but would also provide young people with an opportunity to develop a range of skills, including critical thinking, and would generally increase their sense of autonomy. In general, carrying out meta-cognitive tasks, such as reflecting on one's thoughts and actions, is intimately associated with cognitive engagement (Zimmerman, 1990). Pearce

and Larson (2006) describe how certain skilled youth workers are able to help young people reflect on the impact of certain social forces (for example, injustice) on their immediate environments—such as school—and help them enhance their critical thinking. Becoming conscious of the various external influences around us and learning to discern between environments that are conducive to our growth and others that will have a negative influence—one aspect of a capacity that is sometimes described as 'environmental mastery' (Ryff, 1996)—would seem to be a critical element of the kind of autonomy that youth programs are intended to help young people experience (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

In relation to the training received by youth workers, a number of implications come to the fore. In general, it is clear that the expectations for youth workers are high. For example, they are expected to implement the features of quality programs (Walker, 2006), build strong relationships of trust with program participants (Greene et al., 2013), manage the complexities that arise in their day-to-day work due to the variety of factors that contribute to youth engagement (Larson & Walker, 2006), and demonstrate flexibility and patience, despite the pressures of their work. One would hope, then, that the training and ongoing support they receive would help them achieve these lofty goals.

A number of research objectives could help inform the kind of training youth workers receive. First, it would be useful to understand how youth workers maintain faith in the capacity of all young people to thrive, given appropriate conditions—despite the fact that youth workers are often presented with evidence to the contrary, whether valid or not, through the media or their own experiences. In fact, in a related study, Travis (2010) found that many youth development workers have this basic conviction—in that they believed that diminished ecological assets were the main reason some of their program participants were not thriving. Going one step further and investigating how youth workers maintain this conviction would be a valuable contribution to the literature, and would help inform training. Second, gaining further insight into how youth workers initiate and carry out meaningful and empowering conversations with program participants would be useful for those involved in designing training programs for youth workers. Phenomenological studies similar to the one carried out by Cater et al. (2013) would be helpful in this regard. For instance, among other questions,

Cater et al. (2013) asked program participants if they thought their youth workers listened to their opinions and to describe how the program staff demonstrated that they were truly listening. Such approaches can provide insight into the kinds of conversations and attitudes that empower young people. Third, further studies are needed to learn more about the personal assets and qualities of effective youth workers—such as patience and flexibility—and in what ways they could be deliberately developed. These qualities are an important part of their work; youth workers' training and ongoing support should somehow help them refine their ability to manifest these qualities, even under difficult circumstances.

While further developing some of these lines of inquiry would help clarify the content of the training youth workers should receive, a few ideas are already clear based on the findings of this research project. First, it would be useful for their training to help them connect their intuitive convictions about a strength-based approach to working with young people to the theory of Positive Youth Development. Others have made similar suggestions (see for example Huebner, Walker, & McFarland, 2003), arguing that most youth workers act intuitively and do not benefit from a training grounded in the theory of youth development. Such training would reinforce their belief that young people are generally not to blame for their lack of engagement (Travis, 2010), and would help them focus their energies on the development of a quality program and climate by working with youth, respecting them, and mobilizing their strengths while working towards success together. Second, it would also be important for their training to equip youth workers with the ability to analyze social forces that may impede youths' participation, such as time management issues, peer pressure, or parental expectations. Youth workers could then assist youth by recognizing the influence of these dimensions and somehow turn them into forces for engagement. Third, it may be helpful for youth workers to be assisted in their reflections about the apparent tension between autonomy/independence and structure/support. It would help them recognize this tension as a false dichotomy, one that they may have never questioned before. Clarifying this tension or contradiction could increase youth workers' effectiveness in fostering youth engagement. In this connection, Larson and Walker (2010) have argued that youth-serving organizations should provide spaces for youth workers to reflect on these kinds of tensions or dilemmas that they encounter in the course of their work. Reflecting on these dilemmas of practice can

enhance their critical thinking skills and their ability to make decisions that balance the apparently conflicting demands of youth development in real-life contexts.

These are clearly only a few suggestions. More substantial questions remain: what kinds of training and structures of youth programs and organizations would be most effective in developing in youth workers the capacities needed to work effectively in their field? What kinds of institutional arrangements and policies would support the work of youth workers that ensures youth engagement (see Johnson, Rothstein, & Gajdosik, 2004, for an example of research that examines some of these questions)? Long-term research projects that would work on the design of training and program structures in collaboration with youth workers through partnerships and action research would certainly be most productive in getting at answers to these questions and new models of youth program designs upon which the large-scale engagement of young people in quality programs depends. In light of the current efforts in Quebec to recast its youth policy and the vast landscape of organizations and programs explored in Chapter 1, this province might represent a fertile setting in which to carry out further research in this area and explore the implications of this study for the future design of youth programming and training of youth workers.

Conclusion

The objective of this research project was to gain insight into the engagement of young people in out-of-school-time (OST) youth development (YD) programs from the perspective of front-line youth workers, thereby developing a more holistic and ecological model of engagement. Six youth workers were interviewed in order to understand how they described youth engagement, what obstacles they perceived to it, and how they themselves or other programmatic elements helped youth overcome these obstacles.

Youth engagement in OST programs was identified as an important area of research because of the role it plays in unlocking the benefits of participation in these kinds of programs (Weiss et al., 2005). Given the large percentage of young people that attend such programs across Quebec (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2005), it was deemed important to investigate how youth engage in these programs. Further, it was mentioned that seeking insights into the phenomenon of engagement from the perspective of youth workers would be fruitful due to the role they play in fostering engagement (Greene et al., 2013). Their first-hand experience struggling with youth engagement in program activities was argued to be a rich source of data.

The first chapter described the two broad contexts for this study: first, a contemporary discourse about the quality of youth programming that arose in response to a deficit-focused perspective on youth and a rising concern about their academic performance, and second, the current situation in Quebec with regard to community organizations and youth programs. It was argued that studies such as the present one would constitute a meaningful contribution to the literature, since there are few studies addressing the engagement of young people in OST programs in the context of Quebec. Further, the province's youth policy is currently being revised, making it all the more pertinent to investigate the question of engagement in OST programs and unpack conceptually what engagement means and might stand for. Next, Chapter 2 introduced the psychological interpretation of engagement as a three-dimensional construct. Engagement was then recast by placing it in the context of youth development (YD) programs and its underlying conceptual vision of youth as assets. In this new context, it was

understood that engagement did not only imply certain psychological and individual characteristics, but also emerged from its environment, which led to an ecologically grounded model. The rest of the chapter was dedicated to delving into the literature regarding youth engagement in OST programs, highlighting various dimensions of engagement in this context. This literature was synthesized to arrive at a model of engagement that integrated its various dimensions and contextualized it. This model was then used to discuss the results of the research project in a subsequent chapter. Karlberg's (2004) distinction between psycho-structural and socio-structural dimensions of culture was also introduced as a tool to categorize obstacles to youth engagement. Chapter 3 outlined the study's exploratory approach and described the qualitative interviews that were undertaken, as well as my position as both a youth worker and a researcher. The chapter also included an explanation of the interview questions, the inductive approach taken to data analysis, and the limitations of the study.

The following chapter presented the results of the study based on such a qualitative analysis. Four dimensions were raised by youth workers in relation to youth engagement in OST youth development programs: leadership and associated skills; commitment and dedication; interest; and self-esteem and confidence. Nineteen obstacles to engagement were identified by youth workers, including, for example, peer pressure, lack of interest in doing things for the community, and negative feedback from adults. It was interesting to note that the majority of these obstacles appeared to be external to the youth, and that youth workers often raised the idea of the influence of social forces in this connection. In terms of how these obstacles are overcome, the youth workers described three main factors: their actions and posture, the program's content and structure, and the youth group's climate and dynamics. For example, youth workers assist young people to overcome obstacles to their engagement by letting them lead and direct projects, avoiding being authoritative, and not forcing youth to participate. Although each of the three factors influences engagement, analysis revealed that the role of the youth workers is particularly important since they determine, to a large extent, the program itself and the group environment.

Chapter 5 first summarized my findings and then discussed them in light of the literature synthesized in the second chapter. In describing engagement itself, youth workers

drew on a number of different dimensions, including individual youth characteristics and features of quality programs. Some of their descriptions also mentioned aspects tied to the psychological interpretation of engagement, particularly its cognitive dimension. As for the obstacles listed by the youth workers, more than half could be considered socio-structural according to Karlberg's distinction. This was in line with the conclusions of Travis (2010), who found that youth workers in YD programs generally do not blame youth themselves for their current circumstances and instead look for environmental factors. In relation to the factors that foster engagement or help youth overcome obstacles, the literature pointed to many of the same factors as the ones mentioned by the youth workers. Since the program features that contribute to engagement appear to be well known, it seems to be at the level of implementation in real-life contexts that a gap exists (Larson & Walker, 2006). The important role of youth workers in fostering engagement was also acknowledged in both the data and the literature, although the interviews revealed richer detail with regard to their role and what dimensions counted most.

The implications of these findings for the model of engagement presented at the end of Chapter 2 were explored. By comparing the dimensions of engagement described by youth workers and the ones contained in the literature (summarized in Figure 2, p. 103), I was able to further elaborate my model of engagement, ensuring it was as holistic as possible. One modification was made: that individual youth characteristics, more specifically their interests, do not determine program activities but rather modify and help shape them. Additions included negative assumptions about young people, the qualities and convictions of youth workers, and the influence of the youth group's climate and its dynamics on the engagement of its participants. The latter was the most important addition from the interviews, since it consisted of an entirely new and rather significant element with connections to several of the existing ones.

A number of possibilities for future research emerged from the discussion in Chapter 5. In relation to further unpacking the phenomenon of engagement, interviewing youth themselves may help shed additional light on the topic. In this connection, a number of studies that sought the perspective of young people themselves on their engagement were examined.

Finally, I discussed some of the implications of my findings for practice and policy, particularly in the areas of youth programming and the training received by youth workers. In relation to designing youth programs, for example, it was apparent that it would be useful to learn to introduce activities that are proven to enhance engagement while accommodating the interests of young people. Harmonizing these two objectives of youth development, however, requires competent youth workers (Larson & Walker, 2006). The training these individuals receive needs to assist them, among other things, to develop the requisite qualities and convictions that can help them resolve these kinds of dilemmas that may arise in the course of their work (Larson & Walker, 2010).

Although this research project has contributed to unpacking the phenomenon of engagement and has provided youth workers with a space to share some of the insights they have gained as they try to engage young people in OST programs, it clearly had a number of limitations, some of which were mentioned in chapters 3 and 5. It would have been both useful and interesting to interview some of the youth participating in the interviewees' programs and perhaps even observe certain program activities. This would have also created opportunities to triangulate the data and increase the validity of the study (Merriam, 1995). A challenge that emerged during the interviews was discussing the phenomenon of engagement separately from participation and attendance. Avoiding defining engagement for the interviewees ensured that no theoretical models of it were imposed on the interview, but it also made it difficult at times to distinguish between the concepts of attendance, participation, and engagement. In reality, the three concepts seem to be closely related. Further research would do well to consider how to distinguish among them without separating them completely.

Irrespective of the limitations or advantages of the particular way the research project was structured and carried out, it is clear that youth workers have gained many valuable insights from their first-hand experiences working with youth in the OST context. It is my hope that future studies can continue to learn from them and apply this knowledge to both program design and the training youth workers receive. Over time, then, and through a continuous process of action and research, environments can gradually be built that truly lead

to the engagement of young people in pursuits that contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of their communities.

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Annex 1: Interview Questions

As described in Chapter 3, these questions simply guided the interview, but were not rigidly followed if other lines of inquiry presented themselves or if the interviewee wished to discuss other questions.

1. Introduction
    a. Introduce yourself and describe the program with which you are working. How did you end up working with this program?
    b. What are the objectives of your program? How does your program attempt to meet its objectives?
    c. What are you currently learning about in your program? What are your primary challenges?
2. Main questions
    a. What obstacles prevent youth from participating? Could you give some examples?
    b. How do young people overcome these obstacles? What tools or resources do they utilize to overcome them? Could you give some examples?
    c. What aspects of your program facilitate (or impede) youth engagement? Could you give some examples?
3. Conclusion
    a. Would you add any other obstacles that, in general, prevent young people from participating and being engaged?
    b. Do you have any suggestions or advice for other youth workers in relation to engaging youth?

Annex 2: Consent Form

Faculté des sciences de l'éducation

Département de psychopédagogie et d'andragogie

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

Titre de la recherche :	Engagement communautaire des jeunes et les défis vécus par les jeunes : une exploration
Chercheur :	Ilya Shodjaee-Zrudlo, étudiant à la Maitrise en psychopédagogie, Université de Montréal
Directrice de recherche :	Jrène Rahm, professeure agrégée, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal

A) RENSEIGNEMENTS AUX PARTICIPANTS

1. Objectifs de recherche.

Ce projet vise à étudier les défis de l'engagement communautaire chez les jeunes afin de pouvoir mieux comprendre comment les impliquer de manière soutenue dans des programmes centrés sur des projets d'action communautaire et pour formuler des pistes pour mettre en œuvre des activités qui visent des actions communautaires par des jeunes.

2. Participation à la recherche

La participation à cette recherche consiste à rencontrer des directeurs des programmes ayant un tel objectif pour un entretien d'environ 60 minutes (plus ou moins 30 minutes selon vos disponibilités). Le moment et le lieu de rencontre seront de votre choix, selon ce qui vous convient le mieux. Cette entrevue portera sur vos expériences et perceptions concernant les défis reliés à l'engagement communautaire chez les jeunes. Si vous acceptez, l'entrevue sera enregistrée en audio, puis transcrite. Si vous ne voulez pas que cette entrevue soit enregistrée sur un support audio, vous pouvez l'indiquer verbalement au chercheur et il prendra simplement des notes.

3. Confidentialité

Les renseignements que vous nous donnerez demeureront confidentiels. Les entrevues seront transcrites et les enregistrements effacés. Chaque participant à la recherche se verra attribuer un numéro et seul le chercheur principal aura la liste des participants et des numéros qui leur auront été attribués. De plus, les renseignements seront conservés dans un classeur sous clé situé dans un bureau fermé. Aucune information permettant de vous identifier d'une façon ou d'une autre ne sera publiée. Ces renseignements personnels seront détruits 7 ans après la fin du projet. Seules les données ne permettant pas de vous identifier seront conservées après cette date, le temps nécessaire à leur utilisation.

4. Avantages et inconvénients

En participant à cette recherche, vous pourrez contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances et à l'amélioration des programmes offerts aux jeunes et, nous aider dans le développement de tels programmes. Votre participation à la recherche pourra également vous donner l'occasion de réfléchir sur des dimensions pertinentes à votre programme. Il n'y a pas d'inconvénient connu relié à la recherche.

5. Droit de retrait

Votre participation est entièrement volontaire. Vous êtes libre de vous retirer en tout temps sur simple avis verbal, sans préjudice et sans devoir justifier votre décision. Si vous décidez de vous retirer de la recherche, vous pouvez communiquer avec le chercheur, au numéro de téléphone indiqué ci-dessous. Si vous vous retirez de la recherche, les renseignements qui auront été recueillis au moment de votre retrait seront détruits.

6. Compensation

Les participants ne recevront aucune compensation financière pour leur participation à la recherche.

7. Diffusion des résultats

Un rapport sera transmis aux organismes œuvrant auprès des jeunes qui ont été contactés lors du projet de recherche décrivant les conclusions générales du projet au cours de l'année prochaine, lorsque les analyses auront été effectuées.

B) CONSENTEMENT

Je déclare avoir pris connaissance des informations ci-dessus, avoir obtenu les réponses à mes questions sur ma participation à la recherche et comprendre le but, la nature, les avantages, les risques et les inconvénients de cette recherche.

Après réflexion et un délai raisonnable, je consens à participer à cette étude. Je sais que je peux me retirer en tout temps, sur simple avis verbal, sans aucun préjudice.

Je consens à ce que les données anonymisées recueillies dans le cadre de cette étude soient utilisées pour des projets de recherche subséquents de même nature, conditionnellement à leur approbation éthique et dans le respect des mêmes principes de confidentialité et de protection des informations	Oui	Non

Signature : ____________________ Date : ____________________
Nom : ____________________ Prénom : ____________________

Je déclare avoir expliqué le but, la nature, les avantages, les risques et les inconvénients de l'étude et avoir répondu au meilleur de ma connaissance aux questions posées.

Signature du chercheur (ou de son représentant) : ____________________ Date : ____________________
Nom : ____________________ Prénom : ____________________

Pour toute question relative à l'étude, ou pour vous retirer de la recherche, vous pouvez communiquer avec Jrène Rahm, par téléphone à [redacted] ou par courriel [redacted].

Toute plainte relative à votre participation à cette recherche peut être adressée à l'ombudsman de l'Université de Montréal, au numéro de téléphone (514) 343-2100 ou à l'adresse courriel suivante : ombudsman@umontreal.ca **(l'ombudsman accepte les appels à frais virés).**

Un exemplaire du formulaire d'information et de consentement signé doit être remis au participant

Annex 3: Ethics Certificate

No de certificat
CPER-11-098-P(1)

Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche (CPÉR)
Facultés de l'aménagement, de droit, de musique, des sciences de l'éducation et de théologie et de sciences des religions

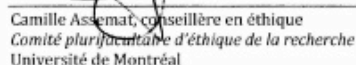
CERTIFICAT D'ÉTHIQUE
RENOUVELLEMENT

Le *Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche* (CPÉR), selon les procédures en vigueur et en vertu du formulaire de suivi qui lui a été fourni, conclu que le projet de recherche suivant respecte les règles d'éthique énoncées dans la *Politique sur la recherche avec des êtres humains* de l'Université de Montréal.

Projet	
Titre du projet	**Clubs de science-technologie et mentorat pour guider les jeunes en transition du primaire au secondaire: une recherche-action issue d'un partenariat entre université, école et communauté pour soutenir la persévérance et la réussite scolaires**
Chercheure requérante	**Jrene RAHM** (92005) Professeure agrégée Psychopédagogie et andragogie Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal
Co-chercheurs	Michel LEPAGE (professeur adjoint), Annie MALO et Jesus VAZQUEZ (professeurs agrégés), Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal Benjamin LOOMER, coordonnateur des interventions communautaires, Learn QUEBEC Gale SEILER, professeure agrégée, Faculté de l'éducation, Université Mc Gill

Financement	
Organisme	FQRSC
Programme	Programme de recherche sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires
Titre de l'octroi si différent	Idem
Numéro d'octroi	2012-RP-145019
Chercheure principale	Idem
No de compte	N.D.

MODALITÉS D'APPLICATION
Tout changement anticipé au protocole de recherche doit être communiqué au CPÉR qui en évaluera l'impact au chapitre de l'éthique. Toute interruption prématurée du projet ou tout incident grave doit être immédiatement signalé au CPÉR. Selon les règles universitaires en vigueur, un **suivi annuel** est minimalement exigé pour maintenir la validité de la présente approbation éthique, et ce, jusqu'à la fin du projet. Le questionnaire de suivi est disponible sur la page web du CPÉR.



Camille Assemat, conseillère en éthique
Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche
Université de Montréal

10 / 10 / 2012
Date de délivrance*

01 / 01 / 2015
Date de fin de validité

* Le présent renouvellement est en continuité avec le certificat d'éthique précédent.

adresse postale
C.P. 6128, succ. Centre-ville Faculté des sciences de l'éducation Téléphone : 514-343-6111 poste 4579

Annex 4: Excerpt from an Interview Transcript

Excerpt from interview 3

Researcher: Very interesting, so, you go to the, oh yeah, another question, that I had just in general because you've been involved with the … program since September and something like that, what are some of like the current sort of challenges or victories, or current learning, like what is, when you're talking to your staff and stuff like that, what are some of the kind of main things that, you know what I mean? Sort of like the main themes that come up with the work with the youth?

Interviewee: The main theme … Forget even themes, I would say the main theme is pain. To be very honest with you. There's a lot of pain, there's a lot of anger. And it stems from many different things, but by talking to boys and the girls, it always come down to lack of a father, to be very honest with you, that comes up a lot. From both boys and girls, and some say they don't care, some try and blow it off, you know, like "I don't care" But you can see even when they're saying that, you can see the pain still there, because who doesn't want a dad, we all want to have a dad, you know what I mean? So yeah, that I would say is the main theme, the family unit. The family unit, and even though there's a lot of great family units, even if it's a single parent, whether it's just the dad, or just the mom, or neither, it might be just the grandmother or aunt, there's great family units, but by talking to the teens, they're always looking for more. More love, more guidance, more encouragement. A lot of them complain about the fact that, even though they might have mom AND dad at home, mom might be working, dad's working, so mom and dad are busy sometimes, so a lot of teens, even if they have both parents that are loving, and are in the home, sometimes those parents because of their life, and you know, their busy schedules, they don't really have time to listen or talk …

Researcher: They don't know how sometimes …

Interviewee: They don't know how, exactly, yeah, so a lot of it is the communication. They feel there's a gap at home with the communication, in their family, you know. No one cares, no one wants to listen to me, I come home excited with my test, dad's telling me "Aw, talk to me after, I've got to finish this project son", or, so it's not to say that all the parents are doing it to be mean parents, it's just that they're all trying to make a living too, right? So it's, I guess it's hard to manage kids, job, social life, it's hard, it's hard, but the kids are the ones that are feeling it, because they're the ones that are coming back, saying "Oh my parents don't have time to talk to me, or," Yeah. So that's a big obstacle, the fact that they don't think people care or want to hear them out, you know? Which a lot of times is not even true, because their parents love them to death, and you know want the best for them, but just don't know how to communicate properly, or just don't have the time, or, like you said, don't even know how, you know.

Researcher: So true. Awesome, so keeping kind of rolling on this obstacles I guess, so what would you say are some of the main obstacles to youth that are participating, I mean in a broad sense, either just having to show up, cause, I mean, your, from your regulars, if they like sometimes, they can't come, and why is that, or they're coming, but they're not really participating if you know what I mean, or they're working on a project, but they're having difficulty participating, what do you think are some of the obstacles?

Interviewee: Well, what I know are some of the obstacles, and sometimes it's not even for bad reasons, it's for good reasons, it's the fact that they're busy, they got basketball at school, they have basketball on our team, they're in the Glee club at school, they're the, you know, … committee at school, so these are positives, they're well rounded, and they're doing a lot of activities, that they just don't sometimes have time, and that's a lot of their realities. "I don't have time, …! I can't make it, I want to but, I got this going on, I got that, I gotta babysit my little brother, my little sister". There's always different things. Those are the positive obstacles, is that they're busy with other positive good things for them, but on a more negative, I would say the obstacles are just kind of maybe lack of interest, and that stems from, and this is from what I've observed with my own eyes, is that some teens feel it's uncool to do good things, or to help their community, or to be a leader, or "Aw, I'm not going to pick up

cans and bottles, like are you crazy? What if someone sees me?" Like there's that, there's the cool factor! Which they feel sometimes it's not cool to stand up and fight for what you believe and they sometimes feel that it's just better to go with the flow and go with the ones that aren't involved in much and "I'm just going to hang in the park and do nothing", so that's an obstacle. Is the peer pressure from outside. And what I've noticed is that even the ones … I can see in their eyes or even in hearing them talking, that they want to do it, they want to join, they want to be part of the project, they want to help their community, they want to help their family, it just takes that one friend saying "Aw, I'm not doing that, that's boring …" And right away they'll kind of fall into that, pressure, and trap, and "Oh no no, I'm not going to do it" "How come?" "Oh I just don't feel like it". But the truth is, it's because their friend said, "it's boring" or something, you know? So I guess to answer that question it would come down to, what is it, like social status? I guess?

Researcher: What do you mean?

Interviewee: Afraid to be … You know what I mean? Like just that social … they feel like they might be a social outcast if they do these leadership things, you know?

Researcher: That's really interesting. So I wonder, so there's like two things, so there's the actual pressure from the peers … I wonder why it seems uncool to do that? Because I've seen the same thing.

Interviewee: Well it's like … when I was in high school even, I was an honour roll student, and a lot of my friends were black, and, like "You're on the honour roll again man? You're actually doing your homework? You're studying?" And it's like, "What do you mean? I'm trying to be somebody, and we have to succeed …" Also, I felt even in high school, it wasn't cool to be smart. And it's kind of still like that now, cause I work at an elementary school and I kind of see the same kind of thing, and I don't know where it comes from to be honest, it's kind of the part I haven't figure out yet, but. There's something about being the smart person, or trying to do something in your life, at that age, elementary and high school, which for some it's very cool and very interesting to do that and be somebody, but for some, there's always that group that it's not cool to do that, "What do you mean you got an 85 on

your test? Are you crazy? I got a 50. I'm happy with that!" Like, you hear these things, you know? But I don't know where it comes from, I don't know, what started that, but. That's where the issue is.

Researcher: It's interesting, no? I was thinking about while you were just talking there … but it's very pervasive. I've seen that with a lot of groups, like …

Interviewee: Like you get called geek or nerd, and like you said, I saw it in my high school.

Researcher: Is that cause maybe because people they look up to are not valuing those things maybe, or something like that? I don't know.

Interviewee: If I could take a guess, I would guess that, yeah. Yeah, maybe they don't have the right person to look up to, or the, you know, the person that's giving them the right advice or. Sometimes I would say maybe it's just because no one ever told them, "You know what? You could actually be somebody man! You could … what do you want to do in life? You could do that!" I think it comes down to that simple answer, too, sometimes it's because no one has actually put in their mind that they can actually be what they want to be, or become what they dream of becoming.

Researcher: They feel like they're stuck or something …

Interviewee: They feel like they're stuck or they feel like … "I could never be that" And I think what happens is, just a thought, maybe they feel because they're stuck in their mind, they don't want their buddy to pass them, they don't want their friend to go one and get a good education or have to say, "Yeah, I'm moving, or I'm moving to the States, and I'm going to this big school". Could be that too, could be the fear of losing their peers, you know what I mean?

Researcher: That's true, hadn't thought about that. Maybe it has a little bit to do with identity maybe … you know, this idea of like "I can't do that, maybe someone else can"?

Interviewee: Exactly. And then another obstacle, which I hear a lot is negative feedback from friends, family, and sometimes even teachers, so for example of that, a kid who wants to be an engineer, let's just say, and this is a true story, I worked, I did the … in 2011, so I had a chance to work with a lot of kids at … High school, and they were telling me about some of their teachers, some are great, and then others were just horrible stories where the teachers were actually telling them, "No, You can't be this" or "you'll never do that" or. So one kid told me they had a career day. And the question was, obviously, what do you want to do when you grow up, or what's your aspiration, what are you dreaming to be, and this kid tells me, "I stood up and I said I want to be an engineer". And the person running the career day, which was obviously an adult, told that kid, in front of everybody else, "Oh no, you'll never be an engineer, you're not smart enough, you can't do it" … Yeah, of course that's terrible. This is what's going on! Sometimes, in schools. The teachers, the adults, they'll burst their bubble, and it's a crucial bubble to burst because even though later, they're saying it not to be mean, or not to … sometimes, it could be the reality, you know, because sometimes the teacher is working with that kid, and maybe the teacher just knows that, at this point time, this student is not ready to go be and engineer, or can't handle the work it takes to be an engineer, but they're saying it in the wrong way, and that's bursting the kid's dream. So there's a way of explaining it, and that's where, I think it's just a miscommunication thing maybe. Because I would hate to think that teachers are doing that on purpose. So that's why I'm going to give them the benefit of the doubt! And say it's a miscommunication thing, but they burst bubbles so that's one of the obstacles too, is that hearing from people you know and people you might look up to that are telling you "No, you can't", or "Why are you doing that?" They're putting a negative kind of spin on it, so right away, a kid or a teenager hearing that from an adult, they look up to, or a friend or a family member they look up to, they might say, "You know what, naw, forget that". I had a girl about, she's an amazing singer, a voice of an angel. And she thought she was the worst singer in life and I asked her "why, why do you think that? Your voice is outstanding!" "Aw, My sister says I suck, I can't sing, every time I sing she tells me shut up" Well, I said "Does your sister sing?" "No, not at all". I said, "Well, could be a little jealousy! Your sister's a little jealous! And wants to sing and hears how good" … because honestly, the girl's voice was absolutely amazing, but she didn't want to sing anymore just

because her sister told her she sucked. So that's the obstacles too … the outside comments, or outside pressure, you know?

Researcher: It changes their actual self-perception …

Interviewee: Oh for sure!

Researcher: Cause then they feel the same …

Interviewee: Quick … quick. It's like a girl liking a guy and the guy tells her "You're ugly". Pshh … She's finished! Just from that! You know what I mean?

Researcher: The worst … So interesting. So, yeah that's really rich, actually. … It's helpful for me to think … how people's feedback will change your self-perception. And then, then you'll feel like you can't do something. Feel free to add stuff by the way, on previous questions … like "Oh I wanted to mention that" but we skipped ahead too fast, I don't want to … go through with it …

Interviewee: Well one, the positive thing about this overall is that every kid and every teen that I worked with, or you know, had a chance to talk to, or do anything with, every single one was super talented, super bright, and just a super, super special person, every single one, but they all have a story to tell. Which leads them to the obstacles, or the doubt, or the fear, but, every single one has something special in them, a positive light, you know what I mean?