TOWARDS A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM IN SRI LANKA: LESSONS FROM THE YOUTH IN TRANSITION PROGRAM

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Abstract

This thesis is about a group of young people in southern Sri Lanka, a relatively successful youth program – the Youth in Transition Program (YITP) in this part of the island, and the concept of “youth development”.

It is about a university student’s attempt to use YITP as a case study to illustrate just how interactions between a program and its participants could create a set of “youth development” meanings important to a country like Sri Lanka and the well-being of Sri Lankan youth.

It seeks to capture young people’s own conception of “youth development” in Sri Lanka as it happens locally during and after their participation at YITP. Such conception hints towards the need for an integrated youth development paradigm in the country, both now and in the future.
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Photo at the title page:
“Youth at YITP Outdoor Activities”
Courtesy of Carleen McGuinty
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4H</td>
<td>Head, Hearts, Hands and Health (A youth organization in the U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6Cs</td>
<td>Competence, Character, Confidence, Caring, Connection, Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYD</td>
<td>Community Youth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>JVP</td>
<td>Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or People’s Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAITA</td>
<td>National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYP</td>
<td>National Youth Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYSC</td>
<td>National Youth Service Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRET</td>
<td>Project for Rehabilitation through Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYD</td>
<td>Positive Youth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>Support, Opportunity, Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Sexual Transmitted Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTA</td>
<td>Vocational Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEDC</td>
<td>Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YITP</td>
<td>Youth in Transition Program</td>
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<td>WUSC</td>
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background
The turn of the 21st century saw more attention paid to the area of "youth development." Various actors ranging from international to national, global to local, public to private, and governmental to non-government are enthusiastically talking about it and coming up with measures and ideas to promote youth-development work. The adoption of the World Program of Action for Youth in 1995, which emphasizes that "every State should provide its young people with opportunities for obtaining education, for acquiring skills and for participating fully in all aspects of society, with a view to, inter alia, acquiring productive employment and leading self-sufficient lives" (United Nations Department of Public Information 1997), rightly set up a youth-development agenda calling for international support and national actions to improve the status of youth around the world. Subsequent reports by the World Bank (2007) and the United Nations – 2005 and 2007 World Youth Report – continue to make strong arguments for increasing investments in youth development and the cultivation of supportive environments for youth’s healthy development (WYR 2007). In North America, "youth development" began largely as a social movement which is now becoming a professional field and intellectual area of study, attracting wide interests among scholars from various disciplines (Hahn & Raley 1998; Benson & Pittman 2001).

Thus, the significance of "youth development" in transforming youths' lives and unleashing their potential for the development of society has begun to be recognized world-wide. People see the importance of investing in youth; providing them with opportunities such as freedom for personal development and responsible actions, so that they are prepared for adulthood and beneficial to themselves, their families and their communities (Brown et al. 2002, WYR 2007). Young men and women are increasingly valued for their ideals, energies, imagination and skills they bring to society.

However, despite the frequent use of the term "youth development," the term and its meaning remain obscure to the public. This has led to various intellectual concerns and efforts to define and distinguish “youth development” as an exclusive research area worth studying of its own (Pittman 2000, Delgado 2002). To many scholars, finding languages and models to describe the term not only encourages more knowledge to be generated around the youth’s development and their well-being, but also legitimizes “youth development” as a field of practice. Such legitimacy can further raise the profile of “youth development” in the public, and attracts funding and support needed in this area for the ultimate benefit of young people.
Regardless of the increased efforts in determining what exactly “youth development” is, these efforts are still highly concentrated within western intellectual circles. Across the globe, interests in "youth development" research are gradually picking up, but there remains a lack of cross-cultural literature on this subject (Benson 2007). This is attributable to several reasons: first, youth-development is a newly emerging field of inquiry started in the West and most institutions and individuals pioneering youth-development research and concepts are from this region, time is therefore needed for youth development to have more research attention from other parts of the world; second, because "youth development" can take on so many different names and forms in a variety of places without actually being labeled "youth development”; identifying and explicating what youth development is and where it happens is itself challenging.

The gap within global/cross-cultural inquiry of the term "youth development" points towards a great opportunity for the subject to be explored further at different national/cultural settings. The lack of language to describe the idea should not deter any endeavor to explore and understand the term. Cross-cultural studies can enrich the evolving youth-development field by giving their vantage points of views. They play an important role in contributing to the growing literatures that aim at building healthy and happy youth.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: AN ELUSIVE YET RELEVANT CONCEPT IN SRI LANKA In May 23, 2007, Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Youth Affairs released the country’s final draft of the National Youth Policy (NYP) and the public was asked to revise it. Apparently, Sri Lanka’s NYP plagiarized heavily from the South Africa’s version of NYP (Zuhair 2007). In those parts that showed stark similarities, the phrase “youth development” was constantly evoked without much clarification or integrity. As Zuhair (2007) stated in the English newspaper the Daily Mirror: “A comparison of the two policy documents shows that the identification of issues concerning youth in Sri Lanka has been largely misplaced due to the great reliance on the South African policy statement,” while a term like “youth development” looked as if it had been cut and pasted to the Sri Lankan NYP, raising serious questions of ethics and contextual applicability. It seemed that “youth development” had been naturalized in its meanings to facilitate its extensive and uncritical use in the national policy paper. This event points towards the need to examine and interrogate the term “youth development” in that country.

Contemporary youth development theorists and advocators have reminded us tirelessly that if we are serious about improving young people’s well-being, it is absolutely essential that we know what we mean when we talk about youth development. What's more, as youth populations are never homogenous and each individual is distinguished in his or her own ways, discussions of their development necessarily take into consideration the specific context – socio-cultural, political, economic, education – they occupy.
Similarly, the discussions would invite youth’s inputs since youth are probably the ones who have the most updated perspectives on their own developmental needs. In short, any meaningful studies and debates on youth development ought to be clear about what they mean by youth development, to whom this youth development is intended for and where youth development is taking place. "Youth development" should not be an implicit notion taken on almost exclusively by adults, intellectuals or policy-makers without the contribution of young people.

Funding and resources are increasingly being channeled to the "youth development" sector in Sri Lanka (according to OneWorld (2008), in 2006, the country's Youth Affairs and Sports Ministry allocated Rs. 50 million\(^1\) for youth development programs across the island). Thus, there is no better time to emphasize and promote youth development as a matter of study in the country. In this process, youth should be actively involved and consulted. As the term youth development seems to be still ambiguous in the country, attempts have to be made to elucidate what the term means in the context of Sri Lanka, and particularly what it means to the Sri Lankan youth. To explicitly mention, discuss, and debate how "youth development" should look like in Sri Lanka’s 21\(^{st}\) century is utterly important if the country is sincerely concerned about the future of its youth population.

1.2 Thesis Statement: Statement of Intent
Against this background, this research paper seeks to (re)contextualize and (re)conceptualize the notion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka, specifically through:

1) tracing how the term “youth development” has been manifesting itself, debated, and discussed over time within the Sri Lankan academia; and

2) how an evaluation of a relatively successful youth program – the Youth in Transition Program (YITP) – under a youth development framework and based on its participants’ viewpoints and reflections of their experiences during and after the program, can contribute its lessons to the theories and practices of “youth development” in Sri Lanka.

I will show that the concept of “youth development” is not foreign to Sri Lanka; it has been officially in use since the 1960s. Moreover, a trend is discerned in the Sri Lankan intellectual circle, expressing a preference for more positive inquiries into the notion of “youth development” in the country. This trend, nevertheless, remains inconclusive due to certain dialectical, conceptual and political constraints discussed in this paper.

Although not much research has been done on examining “youth development” in action, i.e. how

\(^1\) 1 USD is around 100 Sri Lanka Rupees.
the concept is being carried out in Sri Lanka, a careful study on a youth program like YITP demonstrates its ability to generate valuable “youth development” insights for the advancement of the “youth development” agenda in the country. Through analyzing and interpreting YITP, as well as its youth participants’ experiences of and meanings to the program, a youth development paradigm – one that reflects the world-wide trend in youth development and Sri Lankan youth’s developmental needs – can be constructed to facilitate both present and future youth development endeavors in the country.

1.3 Organizational Overview
The rest of this chapter talks about the significance of my research in addition to its implications on “youth development” in Sri Lanka. In Chapter 2, I will discuss my research methods, procedures and boundaries while mentioning the challenges encountered during the research. In Chapter 3, I will give an overview of the existing academic response to the notion of “youth development”, highlighting the important concepts and trends that characterize the flourishing field of “youth development”. Chapter 4 will embark on a journey of tracing the term “youth development” within the intellectual terrain of Sri Lanka. It will examine how “youth development” has been represented, discussed, implied, and assumed among scholars in the country. It shows that there is a shift towards promoting “positive-youth development” although such shift is incomplete and full of loopholes.

After interrogating the concept of “youth development” and situating it under the national context of Sri Lanka, I will then move on to Chapter 5 and introduce the YITP case study. Given that it is important to understand YITP’s background in order to appreciate its implications on “youth development” in the country, I will present a detailed account on the program’s history, including a description of the young people who have participated at YITP and engaged in my research.

The following two chapters – Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 – are significant parts of my thesis. They provide the empirical evidence that show how important it is to turn positive youth development ideas into reality in the country. Through carrying out a youth-development analysis on YITP, Chapter 6 will delineate the key principles that underlie the program’s success in promoting positive youth development among youth. Chapter 7 will further elaborate on YITP’s impacts on youth development by interpreting and discussing young people’s experiences during and after the program.

In the Conclusion, I summarize YITP’s lessons to “youth development” in Sri Lanka, emphasizing its insights on youth development programming/practices in the country. Pulling together all my research findings, I end my paper by proposing a youth development paradigm desirable in Sri Lanka.

1.4 Research Significance
The intellectual significance of understanding a relatively successful youth program – YITP – and its implications on youth development in Sri Lanka goes beyond the academia and touches upon a practical need – to incorporate YITP’s lessons-learned and best practices to various youth-development settings and policies that are central to Sri Lankan youth positive development and especially their transition to adulthood (given that YITP is a program targeting transitional youth).

It is said that the transition from adolescence to adulthood (usually defined approximately age 18 to age 25) is important as it sets the stage for an individual’s adult life (Benson & Scales 2004). Negotiating this transition successfully has positive consequences on a person’s human development trajectory. The transition periods also serve as turning points, providing opportunities for change from negative to more positive developmental pathways in subsequent developmental period (Benson & Scales 2004). In Sri Lanka, the importance of supporting Sri Lankan youth to transition smoothly into adulthood has been long recognized. Much effort has been put to help youth negotiate their transitions, especially transitions between schools to work. Nevertheless, the results of these interventions and endeavors remain vague and inconclusive as many Sri Lankan youth still face challenges – unemployment, poverty, discrimination, violence – that limit their potential to become responsible, innovative and productive adults in the society (Hettige et al. 2004, Ibarguen 2005). An applied research on YITP is therefore timely as it shares the many insights YITP has gained when serving transitional youth in Sri Lanka. Perhaps, YITP’s lessons on “youth development” are something other individuals, groups and institutions would like to consider and apply in their own work with young people in the country.

In addition, given that YITP is planning to expand its programming in Sri Lanka, a case study of itself, under the topic of youth development, would help the program identify their strengths (and weaknesses) and improve their operation in other parts of the country. Having the theoretical foundation of YITP – that of youth development – delineated and studied also allows the formation of a YITP “program theory” that enables the program to carry out more informed steps in serving Sri Lankan youth effectively.

Finally, the study tells the stories of the learning and growth experiences of those who I met and befriended at YITP. They eagerly shared their lived experiences, dreams, happy moments and frustrations with me during the course of my research, and had hoped that I write about them in my thesis. In presenting this thesis, I have tried my best to understand and convey what brings us together as young people despite our dissimilar backgrounds and nationalities. The quest to see ourselves under the light of youth development in some ways explains these similarities shared between us. The search shall continue as there are still lots of complexities within the notions of human development and humanity. What I hope to do in this study is to at least show that young people are special, dynamic and distinctive in their
own ways. Young people are agents of their own development and they demonstrate strengths in negotiating the many worlds they live in.
Chapter 2
Research Methodology, Limitations and Boundaries

This thesis is the result of an 8-month periodic field research in Sri Lanka on the Youth in Transition Program (YITP) between November 2006 and June 2007, followed by a textual analysis on youth-related research circulated among intellectuals in the country. Readers should be reminded that my initial intention to study YITP was not to find out the meanings of “youth development” in Sri Lanka, but to explore and examine the best-practices of the program through qualitative case study methodologies. I did not realize the youth-development significance of YITP until I left the country and started analyzing and interpreting my field notes and data while encountering a wide range of literature on the notion of youth development. In this chapter, I show the research methods and procedures that have led to the formulation of this thesis. By hook or crook, they have enabled my inquiry into the notion of youth development in Sri Lanka.

2.1 Textual Analysis on Youth-Related Research in Sri Lanka
Part of my attempt to contextualize and conceptualize “youth development” in Sri Lanka involved tracking the intellectual history of youth development in the country. As such, I gathered all the youth-related research papers I could get, identified, collated, and analyzed the idea of youth development, which has been sparsely located in these research literatures. Most of the scholastic work that have a youth-development connotation were published in 1990s and 2000s. Claudia Ibarguen’s literature review on the trend in youth-related research in Sri Lanka had greatly aided my textual analysis of the notion of “youth development” in the country (Ibarguen 2004).

The research papers used for this specific research task are all published in English. While I am aware that the notion of youth development might have been discussed and examined in the country’s local languages – Tamil and Sinhala – I am inclined towards finding out the meaning of “youth development”, as it was formulated in English within the Sri Lankan academia. This also delimits my research study and situates it under the discussion of “youth development,” which is still largely western based.

2.2 Qualitative Case study on YITP
I undertook the research on YITP in Sri Lanka between November 2006 and June 2007 while I was on an internship placement with a Canadian Non Governmental Organization (NGO) – World University Service of Canada (WUSC) – as a student from University of Toronto. My main work responsibility was
to assist WUSC’s vocational training project in Sri Lanka especially on the area of gender mainstreaming. While working full time at the WUSC-Sri Lanka office in Colombo, the country’s capital city, I was able to take time off to conduct my research project on YITP.

My study of YITP has been conducted mainly through 1) fieldwork participant-observation, 2) non-structured, individual and group interviews with YITP youth and adults (i.e. YITP staff and resource persons2), and 3) reviewing YITP documents. It adopts primarily qualitative research methods in order to capture YITP’s stakeholders’ – especially the youth’s – own meanings and experiences of the program, as well as the program’s components, processes, mechanisms and outcomes. Due to my limited ability to communicate with my research participants in their local language (Sinhala), translation helps were sought after and during the course of research.

I always found participating and observing this youth program eye-opening, entertaining and inspiring, not to mention helpful for my own personal and intellectual growth as a 22-year-old individual. I also found communicating (in my limited local language skills) and interacting with YITP youth (many of them became my friends while I was in Sri Lanka) during my research enjoyable and reflective. In many ways, fieldwork and interviews became a window for me to view and comprehend Sri Lanka better.

The backbone of YITP was its numerous individual workshops, carried out in three southern districts of Sri Lanka – Matara, Galle and Hambantota (see Appendix 1 for a map of Sri Lanka). In 2006, for example, YITP had conducted 33 workshops in total (YITP Phase II Proposal for UNICEF n.d.). Each YITP workshop was seven days in length and was aimed at having 25 young people participating in the workshop. In 2006, most of the youth who joined the program were from the Tsunami-affected coastal areas of Matara, Galle and Hambantota (e.g. Bentota, Ambalangoda, Weligama, Balapitiya, Tissamaharama, and Hikkaduwa, to name a few). From 2007 onwards, many YITP youth came from more interior southern parts of the country like Sooriyawewa, Neluwa, Nagoda and Thihagoda. My research was carried out at a time when YITP was about to end its services to youth from the coastal belts and enter another phase of program delivery to young people from the remote areas of the southern districts of Sri Lanka.

Early on, I had a very ambitious research plan – to conduct a comprehensive qualitative case study on YITP, relying heavily on participant-observation at individual YITP workshops, and interviewing many YITP participants both at the workshops and at their homes. The intention was to comprehend YITP holistically, in order to realize what was working and not working in YITP. However,

2 During my research, YITP had 5 program staff and 20 resource persons (I was not one of them. I did my research on YITP as an “outsider”). Both staff and resource persons were responsible in the delivery of the program. Whereas YITP staff were responsible for the administration/managerial part of the program delivery, YITP resource persons were responsible for conducting specific educational sessions during YITP. Both YITP staff and resource persons worked closely with each other to make sure the program achieve its goal and benefits the young people. More on YITP staff and resource persons in Chapter 5.
as I became more occupied with my work as a WUSC “gender” program assistant in Colombo, I encountered a great dilemma – not having enough time to conduct research on YITP expansively. The need to search for a good translator, who was willing to aid with me in the realms of fieldwork and interview translation, further hampered my capability to conduct rigorous and frequent YITP research. In the end, I had to re-adjust and condense my research plan according to time and “language’ constraints without losing sight of the greater complexities and dynamics of YITP. My fieldwork therefore was sporadically spread out between November 2006 and June 2007. I traveled between Colombo and southern Sri Lanka doing participant-observation and interviews at selected field sites whenever time and situations allowed me to do so.

My primary field sites were the YITP workshops in Matara, Galle and Hambantota and my secondary field sites were the homes of YITP youth and the YITP office in Matara. At all sites, participant-observation and individual/group interviews were carried out:

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AT YITP WORKSHOPS**

The purpose of conducting participant-observation at YITP workshops was to gain a holistic understanding of YITP – components, processes, mechanisms – as well as how young people participated and experienced the program. As such, seven days were spent together with YITP youth at the workshops, participating in and observing the program’s activities and youth interactions. Extra attention was paid to the changes of group dynamic and peer to peer and youth-adult relationship at the workshop.

I attended three YITP workshops – one in Matara, one in Galle and the last one in Hambantota – for my seven-day fieldwork participant-observations. The reason for choosing one workshop at each district was to ensure fair representation for each respective district. However, three visits could not satisfy a comprehensive/representative understanding of YITP, thus, I had to employ other measures to gain profound insight into the program – e.g. in-depth interviews with YITP staff and youth, YITP reports and documents reviews, short visits and selective participant-observations at additional YITP workshops. Some of these measures will be discussed later.

During participant-observation, I would usually position myself as a Malaysian born Chinese university student, who was studying at the University of Toronto. I would tell the workshop participants about myself, my family background and interests in hopes of gaining their friendship and rapport. Knowing that YITP was a program that focused on building the confidence of young people, I scrutinized my comportment and dress in order for these characteristics to mirror the youths with whom I interacted with. I attempted to present myself as approachable to the youth, and not interrupt the flow of the program (although I am still not sure how much I was able to do so).
The methodology of participant observation could not have been carried out without the aid of my research assistants or research peers – Manori, Shalini and Amal. These three individuals were similar in age as me – between 22 and 26 years old. Manori helped me with my participant-observation at the Matara workshop in January 2007. She is slightly elder then me and just came back from working in Singapore when I met her for the research. Shalini has an undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Colombo and was introduced to me by a professor at the university. Shalini helped me with most of my research activities in June 2007. Although it took us some time to adapt to each others’ working style in the beginning, we became very good friends after our field research experience. It was Shalini who taught me more about the situations of youth in Sri Lanka. Amal, the only male research assistant, had vast experience in organizing youth activities in the country. Amal was interested in my study on YITP and volunteered one weekend to help my research at the Galle workshop in June 2007.

At a workshop, Manori, Shaline or Amal would sit beside me and help me comprehend “Sinhala” happenings. Sometimes, instead of just being my translators, they would become my research partners. In the end, we were all engaged in participant-observation activities at YITP. In fact, I often found having local research assistants who were youth themselves in the research an empowering and beneficial process for the researcher, researcher assistants and the research “subjects”. Research in the end became more like an exchange among young people of different backgrounds and an avenue for us to learn about ourselves and each other.

**INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP INTERVIEWS AT YITP WORKSHOPS**

While conducting participant-observation at YITP workshops, I would normally conduct a series of interviews with YITP youth, staff and resource persons. I took advantage of Manori’s, Amal’s and Shalini’s presence at these workshops and ask them for help in translating non-English interviews. There were times when my interviews with youth were also assisted by Mr. Hasitha, the project team leader of YITP, who would spend time translating them from Sinhala to English for me.

Three types of interviews were usually carried out at a YITP workshop: 1) Group Interviews with “current participants” (they were the young people who were participating in the same workshop I was observing); 2) Group Interviews with “past participants” (they were the youth who had already participated in a YITP workshop before my interviews with them); and 3) Individual interviews with YITP staff and resource persons.

The purpose of conducting group interviews with the current YITP participants who were still going through the same workshop where I was, was to understand their daily experiences of the YITP as they progressed from Day 1 to Day 7. Informed consent was obtained from those who wished to volunteer their time and participate in the interviews. Initially, my plan was to track how current participants
experienced YTIP everyday. Later, that method proved to be difficult to carry out pragmatically. First of all, the 7-day workshops were already pretty intensive; getting young people to participate in my interviews meant taking away time they could have used to interact with other YTIP youth or participate in program activities. Second, most of the group interviews could only be done at night. After a lengthy day of active participation, the youth, my research translators, and I, the participant observer, were deprived of energy to conduct in-depth interviews. The result of the inability to find good timing, with respect to conducting group interviews with current participants, was asking them general questions about their workshops experience. For instance, posing questions such as, “how do you [current participants] feel today?”, and “What did you learn?”. Also, I found posing questions helpful as it helped me understand the participant-observation I conducted during the day at the workshops. Hence, questions that were related to “boys’ and girls’ relationship,” “growth experiences,” “well-being,” and “safeness” at the workshop were asked to cross-check my own observations during the program.

Occasionally, during participant-observation at YTIP workshops, I would take time off to interview past YTIP participants. These interviews attempted to understand past participants’ experiences – especially their growth and learning experiences – during and after YTIP.

Finally, during my stay at YTIP workshops, I would interview the staff and resource persons about their points of view and experiences of YTIP. Conversing with YTIP organizing personnel not only provided me with a holistic understanding of YTIP’s components, processes, personnel, and dynamics, but also permitted me to crosscheck my own observations and comprehension of the program.

**PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS AT YOUTH’S VILLAGES & HOMES**

My full seven day stay at a YTIP workshop enabled me to form close relationships with a couple of YTIP youth, who would not only become my Sri Lankan “brothers” and “sisters,” but also my in-depth research participants throughout the course of my research. Through interacting with these young people, I gained a profound understanding about young people’s experience – especially post-workshop experience – of YTIP. I would usually refer to these young people as my YTIP friends because they were the only people who were close to me in age and who I intimately knew during my work placement in Sri Lanka. I had many adult friends at WUSC, but it was always a pleasure to interact with younger friends. I benefited from my immersion of their youth culture and learning to sing the pop song I often heard on the radio.

The cultural difference (or similarities) between my friends and I, however, made each of my encounters with them filled with “ethnographic” curiosity. Despite our similar age and “common YTIP experience,” which brought us slightly closer to one another, my YTIP friends and I were nonetheless nurtured in fairly different societies and cultures. Every visit to my friends’ homes and villages became a cross-cultural experience for me, as I tried to learn how to behave as a visitor/university
student/researcher: “sudu” or foreign friend. My eagerness to understand and participate in the lives of my friends made me feel as though I was conducting participant-observation at their homes and villages. My friends’ living environments and neighborhoods inevitably become my research field sites in addition to the YITP workshops.

Sometimes, I would conduct open-ended/unstructured interviews with my friends at their homes. However, among all these interviews, only three were successfully conducted. Others were usually interrupted by lunch breaks and the need to go to the seaside to engage in peer gathering activities. The interview topics during home visits usually covered broad themes such as “friendship,” “youth concerns,” “education.” My intention was to interrogate in depth some of the phenomena observed during YITP workshops. Also, there were instances where I conducted life history interviews with individual friends, although these interview accounts have not been used in this thesis.

An understanding of my friends’ familial and personal background allowed me to situate their subjectivity during interviews. Comprehending the subjectivities of my respondents, however, was superficial. My YITP friends are diverse and dynamic, thus it would be too naïve and ignorant for me to state that I have understood them completely.

**DOCUMENTS REVIEW AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AT YITP OFFICE**
The YITP office is located in Matara District in Southern Sri Lanka. I visited the office often during my YITP research for two main purposes: 1) to collect YITP program report, photos, and any relevant information about YITP workshops from the office file cabinets, and 2) to interview YITP staff and resource persons.

YITP’s office is modest in size but it possesses a good collection of official background information about YITP. In June 2007, before leaving Sri Lanka, the office became a key field site for Shalini and I to gather YITP youth feedback about the program (written on evaluation forms) and their personal profiles. We also conducted several important interviews with individual staff and resource persons or YITP on their teaching and working experience at the program.

**REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY**
I am aware that my position as a Malaysian born Chinese female youth, who was a student the University of Toronto and volunteering at a Canadian based NGO in Sri Lanka, influenced my research procedure and findings. My intellectual background in International Development Studies and Socio-Cultural Anthropology, and personal belief that young people are resourceful and full of potential directed the kinds of questions I posed during my interviews. For example, when I asked young people about their frustrations and concerns, I always made sure that my next question to them was related to something
positive about youth e.g. “what makes you happy?,” “how do you handle difficult situations?,” (assuming that young people have the strengths to meet challenges). Also, having learned in my university courses that international work and research can be viewed sometimes as exploitative to the “locals,” I paid extra attention to the notion of power and knowledge sharing during my research. Hence, I would try as much as possible to make sure that the research process was a beneficial experience for my research participants. I recognize my limitations and realize there are areas that need to be improved upon in order for my research to truly benefit my youth subjects.

**A NOTE ON TRANSLATION**
Most of the research interviews were conducted in Sinhala with the help of my research assistants, and sometimes the YITP project team leaders, Mr Hasitha. My research assistants helped me translate Sinhala dialogue into English for my understanding. I tried to formulate simple and straightforward questions that would make it easier for Shalini, Amal and Manori to pose the questions to my research participants (these questions were less open-ended). However, there were instances when Sinhala-English-Sinhala translation became difficult to undertake, thus, I allowed Shalini, Amal and Manori to assume the role of interviewer (with the questions I had given to them) in order to finish the intended interview in Sinhala. After they conducted the interview, I was debriefed about the interview from my research assistants. I found this latter strategy, of debriefing, more efficient as the questions were structured and clear-cut.

At the end of my research, I did develop some Sinhala speaking skills and could have basic chats and informal interviews with my YITP friends. However, I still felt more comfortable with the presence of language assistants when trying to understand my friends’ experiences and meanings of YITP.

**2.2 Research Limitations**
In many ways, the attempt to contextualize the meanings of “youth development” in Sri Lanka has been a daunting challenge, partly because the term has been so sporadically and ambiguously situated within the academic literature and has been evolving in multiple directions that sometimes oppose each other. Such difficulties in tracing “youth development” in Sri Lanka and delineating its meanings suggest an absolute need for more systematic inquiries on “youth development” within the country.

Also, as mentioned earlier, I was limited by my inability to conduct a more comprehensive study on YITP. My lack of language skills, time availability, and research experience in qualitative case study restricted my capability to produce a better, more thorough study on the program. I believe that if I had more time, I would have been able to pay more full visits to more than six YITP workshops (instead of three), in order to obtain a good sense of the program. I attempted to counter this limitation by presenting,
as detailed as possible, my observations of the program while soliciting all the data sources I could get for my research.

Lastly, during my field study of YITP, I was unaware about the concept of “youth development.” My primary research task was to find out why and how YITP was so successful. Although some of the questions I posed during my fieldwork contributed to the theme of “youth development,” I believe that had I been more well-versed in this notion, I would have found out more about my current research objective – the local meaning of “youth development” in the country. I would like to return to field in order to verify some of my initial findings presented in this thesis. I believe more can be done with respect to defining and examining the notion of youth development in Sri Lanka.

2.3 Research Boundaries

YITP is primarily a program, which targets “less-advantaged” “transition” youth in Sri Lanka (more on the background of YITP in Chapter 5). The youth development meaning generated from a study on YITP, therefore, might be more inclined towards reflecting the developmental needs of a specific group of marginalized Sri Lankan youth. Nevertheless, the basic principles that underlie this meaning are said to be applicable to the development of all youth, irrespective of whether they are in Sri Lanka or other parts of the world. Readers are advised to keep in mind this youth development context of YITP when reading about the program and its implications on youth development in Sri Lanka.

Also, when writing this thesis, the focus has been on revealing the strengths of YITP given its roles and values in informing the concept of youth development in Sri Lanka. The strength of YITP, however, does not mean that it is flawless. There are still many areas where YITP, as a youth development program, can improve. Highlighting successful qualities of YITP is nonetheless important because the current youth services sector in Sri Lanka needs to be enlightened about other good practices that support and work with youth.
Chapter 3

Definitional and Theoretical Dimensions of “Youth Development”

In the Introduction, I mentioned that “youth development” has attracted a multitude of peoples concerned with building competent, healthy and successful youth, to come together and turn the notion into an academic exercise, grounded in theory and practice (Benson & Pittman 2001). What we see today in the numerous debates and discussions on youth development are the results of many decades trying to clarify and qualify what youth development could mean, in order for it to evoke the best in young people and contributes positively to their own development.

In this chapter, I present some of the important lessons youth development "experts" have learned in their inquiry on youth development, highlighting the core concepts and principles that have characterized and concretized youth development as a professionalizing field. Readers are advised to keep in mind these “youth development” ideas when reading my paper as they form the conceptual background for my discussion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka.

Before starting our quest on youth development, it is good to remind ourselves that youth refers to a time of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood, but rather somewhere in between. Described by Fornas (1995:4-6), it is at once a physiological development characterized by the commencing of puberty that ends with a more or less fully-grown body, a psychological life phase extending through the different phases of adolescence and post-adolescence, and a social category framed by particular social institutions – especially schools, and certain rituals and social acts like marriage, leaving home, forming a family, getting educated and finding a profession. "Youth is also culturally determined in a discursive play with musical, visual and verbal signs that denote what is young in relation to that which is interpreted as respectively childish or adult" (Fornas 1995:5). A person would be called a youth if he or she fits into the age limits identified by the particular society he or she lives in. The United Nations for example has set the age range for youth as between 15-24 (United Nation 2007). In Sri Lanka however, the National Youth Services Council – the country's largest youth-servicing body – defined youth as young men and women between the ages of 14 and 29 (NYSC 1998). It is important to know that the age limits for youths are socio-culturally specific and vary from context to context.

3.1 "Youth Development" and its Three Inter-connected Meanings

Writers like Edginton and deOlivera (1995) and Hamiltons and Pittman (2003) have come up with a simple but precise framework that helps us discuss the multifaceted nature of "youth development." According to them, the term "youth development" is used in at least three main ways: 1) a natural process
of human growth and development, 2) a *philosophical orientation* with sets of principles and approaches, and 3) a *programmatic framework* for youth-focused services and practices. All three are logically related and are important if we want to understand youth development more holistically.

### 3.1.1 Youth Development: A Natural Process of Human Growth and Development

According to Hamiltons & Pittman (2004:3), "Youth development has traditionally and is still most widely used to mean a natural process: the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on the environment." As such, youth development is perceived as a part of the human development continuum. It is age specific and involves several stages of development – early adolescence (ages 9-13), middle adolescence (ages 14-16) and late adolescence (ages 17-19) (ETR 2007). In the process, a child goes through significant physical/sexual maturation and develops self-consciousness, a sense of personal identity, capacities in concrete and abstract thinking, and new ways of behaving and relating with others. An older adolescent is said to have more complete physical development, enough life experience to evaluate choices and make decisions, a better refined value system and more harmonious ties with families than a younger adolescent (ETR 2007). He or she also has a different set of developmental tasks that need to be fulfilled.

Some main theories on youth development also state that to grow into healthy and responsible adults, a young person needs to go through and achieve developments in seven core domains - health, social, emotional, cognitive, physical, personal/cultural, moral/spiritual (Yohalem & Pittman 2001; Delgado 2002). Optimal development in youth in these seven domains, during transition from childhood to adulthood, enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life as youth, and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, to engage in civic activities, to nurture others and to participate in social relations and cultural activities (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004:3).

As a process, youth development is also dynamic, uneven and complex. The natural unfolding of youth's lives is influenced by both heredity and environment influences and their inter-actions with others. Also, people can actively shape their own development through the choices they make and interpretations they place on their experience (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004:3). Such understanding of youth development as a natural yet multifaceted process, with young people playing a defining, agentive role in it, serves as the foundation for youth development principles and practices – the other two interpretations of what youth development can be.

### 3.1.2 Youth Development: A Philosophy, Theoretical Framework, and Set of Principles/Approaches

Starting in the 1990s, "youth development" came to mean a philosophy and a set of principles and approaches that emphasizes active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals,
organizations, and institutions, especially at the community level (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004:4). It arose as a counterbalance to the earlier deficit youth paradigm that categorizes youth according to their deficits to remedy them in problem prevention and treatment programs. The commitment is to enable all young people to thrive, emphasizing the principles of universality or inclusiveness (meaning all youth are the subjects of discussions) and a positive orientation building on young people's strengths (thriving) (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004:4).

There are two key conceptual pillars that underlie the philosophical orientation of youth development – “Positive Youth Development' (PYD)” and “Community Youth Development” (CYD). PYD and CYD are not entirely dissimilar from each other and both have their roots in a strong understanding of young people's developmental process and their potentials and capacities. Both see young people as assets to be invested in rather than "problems" to be managed, and recognize the existence of adversities and developmental challenges facing youth, but refuse to conceive youth developmental process as mainly overcoming deficits and risks (Pittman et al. 2001; Delgado 2002; Villaruel 2003; Damon 2004). Both begin their talk on youth development with the vision of a fully able youth, eager to explore the world, gain competence and acquire the capacity to contribute (Damon 2004). The only (slight) difference between CYD and PYD is that CYD uses PYD as its theoretical basis and brings forward the role of communities in its discussion of youth development.

Combining PYD and CYD, we have a youth development theoretical framework under which a set of principles that integrate values, assumptions and knowledge – both experiential and theoretical – about youth development emerge. To illustrate this intellectual terrain of youth development, let me elaborate further the two notions of PYD and CYD and explain how they contribute to the contemporary youth development theoretical framework.

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD) & COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (CYD)**

PYD and CYD have their origins in earlier research, especially the work by Garmezy, Werner and Smith on the issue of resiliency in children and youth (Delgado 2002; Villaruel 2003; Damon 2004). Garmezy (1983), Werner and Smith (1982) found that many children and youth were resilient and had the ability to withstand stressors in life and challenges that affected their healthy development. Their findings were extended by Benard (2004) who claims that all children and youth are born with innate resiliency and the capacity to develop their inborn resiliency traits. All these studies on resiliency laid the foundation for contemporary discussions of youth development, which very much emphasize the idea that all young people have the innate capacity to thrive even though they live in high-risk environments, e.g. families where parents were mentally ill, alcoholic, abusive, or criminal, or in communities that were poverty-stricken, war-torn or disaster shred.
PYD and CYD share the same positive outlook on youth and their potentials but each takes a slightly different approach in elaborating the concept of youth development: PYD focuses more on the engagement of youth individual in self-development, stressing the idea of positive "developmental assets" in helping young people to enter successful adulthood (Villaruel 2003; Benson 2007; Silbereisen & Lerner 2007). There are two types of developmental assets – internal and external (see Appendix 2 for a comprehensive list of these developmental assets). Internal assets reflect the personal competencies, attitudes and values in youth such as a commitment to learning, positive values, social skills and positive identity; external assets comprise of factors in a young person's environment like positive relationship in families, friendship groups, schools and communities (Benson 2007).

Both internal and external assets are positive experiences and qualities essential to raise successful young people. They are said to be able to influence choices young people make during their critical growing-up periods and help them become "healthy, caring, and responsible" individual citizens (Search Institute 2007) as well as adults. The more assets a young person accumulates, the more positive his or her development trajectory will be and less likely will engage in risky behavior (Villaruel 2003; Benson 2007). The PYD agenda is to sustain, build upon and maximize these internal and external strengths within and surrounding youth, rather than evoking the maladaptive tendencies of young people even though these tendencies are recognized (Damon 2004). As such, organized youth development programs that purposefully nurture a broad range of positive youth's assets can be very helpful in furthering this PYD agenda.

In addition to the realization that youth development essentially means building positive assets in youth, PYD theorists notice that youth exercise individual agency in regulating their own growth and development. In other words, youth development, as it happens in an individual, does not occur passively. Young people as active agents would act on the context and negotiate their developmental pathways themselves without simply receiving whatever comes their way. "The fact that change is inevitable does not have to mean an obligatory and passive acceptance of change; one might instead adapt, like the surfer, riding the waves of change with confidence and finesse and harnessing their force so as to shape one's own path through the waters. Human beings are not puppets on life's stage; they are agents of their own development," says Cotterell (2007:13) when he describes youth and their development. Young people, while growing up, seek to meet their developmental tasks and needs, acquire and consolidate assets, competence, attitudes, values and social capital necessary for their successful transition into adulthood (Zarrett & Eccles 2006).

It is noted however that positive development in youth can be constrained and challenged by societal changes and cultural expectations on them (Silbereisen & Lerner 2007). For example, changes brought by the forces of globalization which get translated into economic policies or labor laws can
sometimes halt a young person's positive development, limiting their opportunities to expand their potential. Gender discrimination in a society that assumes what a young man and woman's roles and responsibilities are can constrain a youth's capabilities in self-development. PYD, in its attempt to promote positive youth development, therefore would consider these societal and cultural factors.

Building on top of PYD, CYD emphasizes the notion of communities in its conceptualization of youth development. While PYD takes a relatively individualized approach to positive youth development, CYD highlights the importance to not only build assets in youth (i.e. nurture youth personal development), but engage young people as partners in building these assets through their involvement in the communities. What's more, opportunities and environments need to be purposefully created to provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationship sustained over time between youth and their members, both adults and peers, in the community (Villaruel 2003). Under the CYD framework, youth and their development are seen to be tightly connected to the communities in which youth reside. The objective of youth development extends beyond the individuals and preserving social order but rather to involve youth in changing the social order and take ownership of their own development through actively removing the environmental barriers in life. "Community" under the CYD is therefore both, "a source of strength, purpose, a vehicle for achieving change" for youth and "a focus of change" by youth (Delgado 2002:41)

Bringing together the concepts of resiliency, PYD and CYD, we see the birth of an integrated youth development framework which focuses on the holistic development of youth and grounds itself in a sound understanding of their natural growth and development process. Youth development, as a philosophy, demonstrates an inherent belief in the self-worth of youth, regardless of their competencies; the importance of youth exercising control over their lives, and the possession by youth of innate capacities (Delgado 2002). It perceives the development of young people as a process in the human development continuum – ongoing, dynamic, uneven and complex – that demands long term commitment to nurture (Pittman 2007). Their different needs are therefore to be addressed in an integrated fashion through focusing on youths strengths and working with young people in the contexts of their families, communities and the society. In this process, youth are encouraged to play a part in effecting social change and community building.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES/APPROACHES**

The conceptual framework of youth development gives rise to a set of youth development principles/approaches which condense the larger theoretical discussions into clear and applicable guidelines for youth-development related work to be carried out. They shape the professional knowledge base and theoretical foundation of many youth development interventions and practices – the subjects of
In my paper, these youth development principles will be used to analyze and evaluate YITP in Sri Lanka and generate the meaning of youth development in the country. To summarize them, I have presented them in the chart below. It contains the most recent principles/approaches discussed in the intellectual field of youth development:

| Youth Development Principles |  
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1                          | Youth Development sees the development of youth as an ongoing process through which young people attempt to meet their needs and to develop the competencies they perceive as necessary for survival and transition to adulthood (Jordan & Norman 2006:1) |
| 2                          | Youth Development supports youth’s basic needs during their transition to adulthood. These basic needs are (Jordan & Norman 2006:1):  
  1. safety and structure  
  2. a sense of belonging and membership  
  3. closeness and several good relationships  
  4. experience with gaining competence and mastering skills  
  5. independence and control over some part of their lives  
  6. self-awareness and the ability and opportunities to act on that understanding  
  7. a sense of self-worth and the ability and opportunities to contribute |
| 3                          | Youth Development develop **safe and supportive environment** for youth in family, community and society. Environments that provide the conditions for the healthy growth and development of youth can be described as those that (Jordan & Norman 2006:1)  
  1. are inclusive and create connections and sense of belonging including a positive relationship with a caring adult;  
  2. provide opportunities to value and practice service for others;  
  3. provide autonomy including an opportunity for self-determination;  
  4. provide opportunity for mastering skills and engaging in learning; |

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3 The Youth Development Principles mentioned here are hugely adopted from two sources: Jordan & Norman 2006, and Pittman et al. 2001. They have been re-arranged to be presented for the purpose of this thesis.
Youth Development understands the kinds of outcomes it wants to see when working with youth and helping them to achieve the skills they need. There are 6 Cs that young people need for positive development and preparation for adulthood.

**Competencies:**

It is said that a range of skills is needed for success in adolescence and adulthood (Delgado 2002; Jordan & Norman 2006:2; Pittman et al 2001; Yohalem & Pittman 2001). Such skills/competencies include:

1. **Academic or cognitive competence:** basic skills like reading, writing, mathematics; problem solving and decision making skills; and multiple intelligences – spatial, musical, linguistic, bodily kinesthetic, logical-mathematical intelligences (Pittman et al 2001; Delgado 2002).

2. **Health/physical competence:** having the appropriate knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure current and future health (Jordan & Norman 2006).

3. **Personal/social competence:** personal skills such as an ability to understand one's emotions and practice self discipline: and interpersonal skills such as working with others and developing and sustaining friendships (Jordan & Norman 2006).

4. **Knowledge, reasoning and creativity competence:** a broad base of knowledge, knowledge application skills, life long learning skills and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression (Jordan & Norman 2006).

5. **Vocational competence:** Understanding and awareness of life options and the steps necessary to accomplish them. Adequate preparation for work and family life (Yohalem & Pittman 2001; Jordan & Norman 2006).

6. **Citizenship competency:** Understanding of the history and values of one's nation, community, race, ethnic and cultural heritage. Desire to be ethical and to be involved in contributing to the broader goods (Jordan & Norman 2006).

While "competencies" is important, it is not the only outcome or goal of youth development. Development theorists (Pittman et al. 2000; Silbereisen & Lerner 2007) remind us that skills either can go unused or be used in unproductive, antisocial ways if not anchored by:
• **Confidence** in whom one is becoming
• **Character** that comes from positive values, integrity and strong sense of moral
• **Connection** to self and others
• **Caring/compassion**

And from a Community Youth Development perspective, youth development should eventually lead young people to practice helping others through their own generosity (Perkins 2001, Norman & Jordan 2006). Hence, we have the sixth C:

**Contribution:** by contributing to their families, neighborhoods, and communities, it is hoped that youth are afforded practical opportunities to make use of their other 5 Cs, but also contribute their skills and competence to improve their living environments.

In summary, youth development outcomes/goals build young people that are not only problem free, but also fully prepared and fully engaged (Pittman et al 2001). Although fully aware that addressing youth problems like drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, etc. is critical, youth development sees defining goals exclusively in terms of problem prevention. Quoting Pittman et al. (2001:24) again, "we should be as articulate about the attitudes, skills, behaviors and values we want young people to have as we are about those we hope they avoid. Academic competence is important but not sufficient. Social, health (emotional and physical), vocational and civic competence are all needed to be fully prepared. Competence in and of itself is not sufficient. Young people need skills, but they also need confidence, character and connection to family, peers and community, and they must contribute to those around them".

Ultimately, anyone who works with youth and hopes for the best in young people should understand and apply the above mentioned principles. He or she would ensure that environments are set up for youth to master the 6C’s which prepares them for successful adulthood. Although these youth development principles are considered to be more or less universal and applicable to many settings, caution should still be made when incorporating or applying them in different cross-cultural contexts (Silbereisen & Lerner 2007). As Delgado (2002) argues, youth development should always be contextual and flexible; it should always reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of youth as well as their environmental circumstances.

**3.3.3 Youth Development: As Practice & Programmatic Framework**
The third use of the term youth development is to describe a range of practices in programs, organizations, and initiatives (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004:4). In this sense, youth development refers to various forms of practices which actively adopt those principles and approaches mentioned previously to foster the developmental process in youth.

As practice, youth development would exist in diverse settings – in families, neighborhoods, youth organizations, faith-based organizations, schools and a multitude of other places (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004). It also exists in various forms: career counseling; literacy; community service; employment skills; cultural enrichment; after-school program; camping; ecological education; life-skills training; arts; sports; media use; leadership education; mentoring; community-based services; internship and employment.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES**

The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (CYDPR 2007) has synthesized three main characteristics that can be found in any youth development practices. They are "Supports, Opportunities and Quality Services" (SOS). According to the Center, "Supports" in youth development practices can take many forms – motivational, emotional and strategic – but they must be affirming, respectful and ongoing. Furthermore, “supports” are most powerful when they are offered by a variety of people in the communities such as parents, close relatives, community social networks, teachers, youth workers, employers, health providers, and peers who are involved in the lives of youth.

In terms of "Opportunities", CYDPR (2007) says that youth development practices provide chances for young people to learn how to act in the world around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence. Opportunities give young people the chance to test ideas and behaviors and to experiment with different roles. It is important to stress that young people, just like adults, learn best through active participation and that learning occurs in all types of settings and situations.

Finally, youth development practices deliver "Services" to youth that demonstrate (1) relevant instruction and information, (2) challenging opportunities to express oneself, to contribute, to take on new roles, and be part of a group, and (3) supportive adults and peers who provide respect, high standards and expectations, guidance and affirmation to young people (CYDPR 2007).

In order to be successful, all SOS's should ground themselves in a thorough understanding and application of youth development theoretical concepts and principles. Whether provided to young people through youth development practices, or accrued by youth themselves in their day to day actions, SOS's are essential for youths’ healthy development (Pittman et al 2001).

**WHAT IS A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**
Among the many youth development practices, youth development programs play an absolutely critical role in providing the SOS to young peoples. Not all youth serving programs can be called a youth development program. There are certain criteria that make a program "youth development" in nature. An effective youth development program would employ certain strategies to enhance their impacts on youth.

To be qualified as a youth development program, youth development programs should first of all demonstrate characteristics below:

- Provide youth with safe and supportive environments.
- Foster relationships between youth and caring adults who can mentor and guide them.
- Support development of youth's knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, including study, tutoring, sports, the arts, vocational education and service learning.
- Engage youth as active partners and leaders who can help move communities forward.
- Provide opportunities for youth to show that they care – about others and society.
- Promote healthy lifestyles and teaching positive patterns of social interactions.

Taking the Positive Youth Development theoretical perspective, Cantalano and his evaluation research team (1999) found that youth development programs often share 15 characteristics: 1) promote bonding, 2) foster resilience, 3) promote social competence, 4) promote emotional competence, 5) promote cognitive competence, 6) promote behavioral competence, 7) promote moral competence, 8) foster self-determination, 9) foster spirituality, 10) foster self-efficacy, 11) foster clear and positive identity, 12) foster belief in the future, 13) provide recognition for positive behavior, 14) provide opportunities for pro-social involvement, and 15) foster pro-social norms. In other words, youth development programs would focus on fostering assets and competence in young people to prepare them for more successful adulthood. Youth development programs understand well that it is important to prevent youth from getting into trouble, but they choose to focus on the strengths of young people, prepare them for adulthood and engage them in their own personal development. Youth development programs consider the whole young person, not just a single characteristic or problem (Jordan & Norman 2006).

In addition to Cantalano and his colleagues, the National Youth Development Information Center (NYDIC 1998) comments on the learning aspects of youth development, saying that youth development programs necessarily meet three primary criteria: 1) to conduct activities with a primarily nonacademic focus, 2) to use active and experiential learning methods; 3) to promote the competencies in youth through group and one-on-one activities. Providing another way of looking at youth development programs, Perkins and Borden (2003:328) describe development programs as "any structured learning
activity offered during the out-of-school hours". They say that quality youth development programs "offer young people a context in which to develop critical life skills and competencies," and if designed appropriately, "youth programs offer a safe environment that provides opportunities for young people to explore their world, develop skills, and gain a sense of belonging with peers and adults as well as within themselves" (Perkins & Borden 2003:328).

The keywords here for youth development programs are "fun," "relevant," "creative," "youth-focused," "youth participating" and "youth-adult partnership." Youth development programs complement the formal school system in providing young people a different learning experience based on the idea of empowerment. Youth development program activities do not have the teaching of academic subject as a primary goal. The cognitive development of young people is to be enhanced through engaging, learner-based and group-group focused activities (NYDIC 1998; Delgado 2002; Whitlock 2004). In addition to that, youth development activities encourage youth participation in decision-making, program planning and evaluation. Adults play an important role in helping youth arrive at decisions and be wise leaders (Delgado 2002).

Although youth development programs emphasize flexibility, their learning activities should still be structured and well-planned. They are not satisfied by just keeping young people occupied (Perkins & Borden 2004). They are intentional, carried out by consistent, competent and caring people at safe and stimulating places with full range of options for young people to learn, explore and contribute. The desired outcomes of youth programs are the golden 6 Cs advocated by youth development theorists: Competence, Confidence, Character (integrity, moral commitment), Connection (healthy relationship to community, friends, and family), Caring, and Contributions. As Delgado (2002) said, youth development programs and their activities would ultimately bring youth-development philosophy to life. Through participating in the program, youth are expected to be more prepared both now and future in the cognitive, social, physical, emotional, personal, civic and vocational domains.

Below is a comparison between youth programs that take a "youth development approach" and those that do not (Jordan & Norman 2006). For more information on the characteristics of an effective youth development program, please see Appendix 3.
Table 1: A comparison between youth programs that take a prevention, intervention and youth development approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Program</th>
<th>Prevention Approach</th>
<th>Intervention Approach</th>
<th>Youth Development Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Risks and Risk Factors</td>
<td>Risks and Risk Factors</td>
<td>Youth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Social Norms and Communities</td>
<td>Specific Audience &quot;at risk&quot;</td>
<td>Environmental Conditions Experience and Opportunities-the contexts for youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Eliminating or Reducing Problems</td>
<td>Risks and Risk Factors</td>
<td>Development of Potential, Maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Fewer Problems</td>
<td>Skills or Behaviors to cope with specific risk or problem-free</td>
<td>Maturity &amp; Individual Potential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Summary

As we can see from the previous section, debates and discussions within the field of youth development have been focusing on the definitional work of youth development – defining youth development as a natural process, as a philosophical orientation and as practice. We have learned what "youth development" is and what it is not. We have gained a bit more insight about the professionalizing field of youth development (that in the West) and what it entails. While these various angles of examining "youth development" provide us an initial entry point to conceptualize "youth development", they are said to be insufficient in advancing what youth development theorists and advocators hope to see as the overall goals of youth development – positive, sustainable, and effective support, opportunities and services to all youth to engage in self- and community development. For the most part, "youth development" is still very much engaging in definitional work and show casing examples of successful experiences and programs (Pittman et al, 2001). It has not taken root in the public and policy level to be practiced and implemented consistently and rigorously for the well-being of youth.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the latest youth development trends in the international academic scene. I have shown that youth development is indeed a professionalizing field that has generated a series of definitional and theoretical discussions and debates regarding the healthy and successful development of youth. Such attempt to delineate the concept of youth development would help facilitate our coming-up discussions on youth development in Sri Lanka and serve as a reference point for evaluating YITP's contribution to youth development in the country. In the next chapter, I will focus on exploring how
“youth development” is being played out in the intellectual sphere of Sri Lanka. Note that to some extents, “youth development” in Sri Lanka reflects the world-wide trend that call for a more positive and community approach to youth development. However, such intellectual inquiry into “youth development” in the country is still largely inconclusive and faces certain dilemmas. Given that there has not been any specific research done on “youth development” in Sri Lanka, my attempt to research on this notion in this paper is an exploratory one. It nevertheless hopes to provide some insights on how “youth development” has been discussed in a country like Sri Lanka.
Chapter 4
Tracing the Intellectual History of “Youth Development” in Sri Lanka

Two arguments are made in this chapter to show how “youth development” has been represented, implied, and assumed in Sri Lanka: First, “youth development” is not a new concept in Sri Lanka; it has existed since the 1960s as part of the country’s national development trajectory and has evolved since then, taking up new discursive meanings. Second, in the Sir Lankan intellectual sphere, “youth development” represents a constellation of loose ideas, actions, and proposals which aim to address specific national concerns on youth in Sri Lanka, especially those relating to youth unemployment and violence. Underlying these ideas, actions and proposals, a shift is observed towards seeing young people as positive assets – not as a deficit – and using the “empowering” approach to engage them in the country’s development. However, such shift remains largely inconclusive – for reasons discussed in this section

4.1 “Youth Development” and its Early Meaning in Sri Lanka

The concept of youth development can be traced back to 1960s when an Israel Youth Work Specialist, Arieh Levy, came to Ceylon to survey the youth needs in the country and proposed a program for Youth Services (Jayatileke et al. n.d.). The result of Levy’s visit was a two-part report on youth in Ceylon: Part 1, “Analysis of Youth Needs in Ceylon”; and Part 2, “The National Youth Organizations.” Based on this report, a Voluntary National Youth Service Act No. 11 of 1967 was formulated and the National Youth Service Council (NYSC) was instituted under the Act to “formulate schemes of voluntary national service for youth and to carry out such schemes either by itself or through approved institutions” (Jayatilekke et al. n.d:16). NYSC was expected to serve several functions related to “youth development” in the country. Its early mandates include fostering among youth in Ceylon “a spirit of national consciousness, a sense of discipline, an awareness of social and economic problems and a sense of the dignity of labor” as well as enlisting “continuous and active participation of the youth … in national development scheme” (Jayatilekke et al. n.d. 15, emphasis added). In 1960s, the meaning of “youth development” was largely associated with ideas like “citizenship, “nationalism” and “national development” in Sir Lanka

4.2 “Youth Development” as Evolving Ideas, Approaches and Interventions in Sri Lanka

While the seed of “youth development” was sown by NYSC in 1960s, it sprouted into different discursive meanings as newly independent Ceylon went through tremendous socio-economic, political, and cultural
changes during the late 20th century. Such emergence of meanings was mediated by the rise of several critical youth issues in post-colonial Sri Lanka, which called upon the government of Sri Lanka to intervene and the academia to react. Under this context, “youth development” saw itself representing a gallery of loose ideas, approaches, and interventions that aimed at solving and controlling national youth problems in order to ensure the state’s stability and growth. To understand what kinds of “youth development” ideas, approaches, and interventions they were, let me first illustrate those youth issues that had stimulated Sri Lankan national concerns and intellectual discussions during the second half of the 20th century.

After its independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka strived to attain modern goals of economic well-being, equity, and social justice for her peoples and enhancement of their life opportunities (Fernando & Kearney 1979). The creation of a welfare state coupled by expanded social welfare programs – pension programs, free medical care, nutrition program, subsidies of important food and fuel items – had led to high measures of social well-being on one hand, and a series of burdens and challenges the newly independent government found it had to cope with on the other (Peebles 2006). Better health services, including malaria eradication for example, had lowered the mortality rate in the country, but it had also resulted in high population growth which then put pressure on the fragile economy of the newly-independent state (Balakrishnan & Gunasekera 1977; Peebles 2006). The introduction of free education in the 1940s had contributed to rising rates of literacy and levels of educational attainment, leading to not only social mobilizations among the country’s population, but also increased aspirations and needs that demanded responsive governmental actions. Such new wants and hopes, as Kearney (1979) observed, encouraged mass participation in politics. The inability of the elected parties and politicians to fulfill these wants and aspirations led to the formation of violent politics in the country, especially among disenchanted youth.

There were three major eruptions of youth violence in Sri Lanka from the 1970s through the 1990s: 1) The 1971 insurrection in Southern Sri Lanka, led by a Sinhalese youth group, JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or the People’s Liberation Front), whose membership comprised mostly youth from lower-middle classes, peasants, and laborers of the villages and small towns (Chopra 2000); 2) The late 1980s insurgency led by the same group – JVP – from 1987 to 1991, which caused 40,000 to 60,000 dead or missing, and was said to bring the country “to the verge of collapse” (Hettige et al. 2004:12); and 3) the more widely known militant youth movement grew among the Tamil communities in the northern and eastern parts of the country (Abayratne 2004). This consisted of LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and other groups; these Tamil militants have been confronting the Sri Lankan state with armed violence for more than 20 years and were led by youthful leadership in the beginning.
For sure, Both JVP and LTTE violent politics generated widespread concerns in the country towards youth. Such concerns were well reflected in the country’s development plans, national policies, and academia. Scholars produced extensive literature examining these conflicts and the youth’s involvement in them (Ibarguen 2004; Peebles 2006). Indeed, Sri Lankan youth’s capabilities and potentials to shape the country’s history and realities intrigued scholars, who studied the issue in depth.

Many research studies came to the conclusion that both North and South youth-initiated violent conflicts, despite their ethno-political dimensions and regional-spatial disparities, were caused by socio-economic grievances which in one way or another related to youth’s disillusionment and frustrations at not having their fair share of socio-economic benefits from the State (Lakshman 2002; Mayer 2002; Abayratne 2004). Moreover, researchers claim that the two youth insurgencies in Southern Sri Lanka, one in the 1970s and another in the 1980s, were both stimulated by the entrenched problem of youth unemployment and the welfare government’s inability to supply enough jobs for the youth (Hettige et al. 2004). Plagued by long-term unemployment, youth, especially the rural educated, decided to act against the state apparatus as a measure to release their anger and express their sense of injustice.

Both youth violence and youth unemployment, apparently interconnected, dominated Sri Lankan concerns towards its youth generation starting in the 1970s. The realization that youth unemployment related closely with the issue of youth violence in Sri Lanka and was itself a key factor in influencing young people’s own well being further prompted Sri Lankan intellectuals to come up with “youth development” ideas and approaches to address this important subject. Under this context, “youth development” and its meanings tie closely to the national socio-political and economic processes of Sri Lanka and a series of measures that ensure the country’s security, stability and development.

While “youth development” at one point in the Sri Lankan history had signified a body of approaches carried out by the national government to address that widely concerned issues of youth unemployment and violence, it accrued another layer of meaning as time went by, emphasizing a more positive and empathetic view on Sri Lankan youth and a more positive and empowering way to address their concerns. Within Sri Lankan academia, such positive spin on “youth development” was reflected notably in the ways scholars conceptualized Sri Lankan youth, studied Sri Lankan youth-related problems, and proposed solutions for them. In many ways, one could trace the origin of this “positive-youth development” perspective back to the time when the second JVP youth insurgency took place in Sri Lanka in 1988/89, causing the deaths of vast numbers of people (Lakshmi 2002).

Following the insurgency, a Presidential Commission was appointed to examine “the causes of youth discontent, disquiet and unrest” and to recommend state strategies that would respond to “youth needs and aspiration” (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990:xiii). Led by a group of Sri Lankan intellectuals, the Commission produced a comprehensive investigative report with specific
recommendations to the State in favor of youth, emphasizing the need to respond to youth’s concerns with “a measure of compassion and genuine goodwill, and citing an “unflinching resolve to make appropriate changes, procedures and attitudes [towards youth]”(xiii). Realizing that most of the youth grievances stemmed from dissatisfaction with the unjust, exploitative system, the Commission advised the State to have “a change of heart” (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990:1); to commit itself to reverse the over-polarization of society; to control the misuse and abuse of political power and arbitrary political interferences in public institutions; to restructure education and employment sectors; and to integrate youth into mainstream politics (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990).

The Commission’s approach to consult with youth on their problems and perceptions was unprecedented; it set the trend for a more empathetic attitude towards youth, especially the ways Sri Lankan youth issues were being understood intellectually and being researched. Within the academia, more and more scholars wrote against the pervasive negative image of youth, arguing that youth should not be seen as individuals with “problems” but as a constituency that had their own perspectives on society (Hettige & Mayer 2002; Lakshman 2002). They showed that not all Sri Lankan youth had violent tendencies to disrupt the socio-political order, pointing out that many of them indeed demonstrated capability and strength in over-coming life’s challenges (Ibarguen 2005). What scholars and researchers soon realized was that youth became marginalized or involved in problematic activities not because of their personal deficiencies – a way of thinking about young people which had dominated earlier scholarship on Sri Lanka youth – but because of the operation of socio-economic and political processes working against them (Hettige & Mayer 2002; Hettige et al. 2004). In other words, the fact that Sri Lankan youth were jobless and engaged in violent acts was not because of a deficit in the young people themselves, but because of the serious “ills and anomalies in the society” (Hettige 2002:60) which forced them to express themselves in “anti-social” ways in society (Lakshman 2002).

The acknowledgement that young people were confident and strong and deserved understanding, care, and respect caused Sri Lankan youth researchers to conduct a study that directly collected and described young people’s viewpoints, rather than making unjustified assumptions about young people and what they wanted from life. Hence, for instance, the country-wide National Youth Survey (Hettige et al. 2002) was conducted in 1999-2000 to collect youth’s opinions on issues like politics, education, employment, values, culture, and health. This led to the next large-scale Poverty and Youth Survey in 2003 (Ibarguen 2005), which delineated youth’s perceptions, attitudes, and opinions on issues of poverty, chances in life, capacities, and future options; also, the School-to-Work Transition Survey in 2003-2004.

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4 The word “anti-social” is used often among Sri Lankan intellectuals to describe the violent acts of Sri Lankan youth. I have not changed the word use in this thesis but personally, I perceive the violent acts demonstrated by youth in the Sri Lankan history as very social – out of a specific historical, political and socio-economic context of the country.
(Hettige et al. 2004), which attempted to understand youth’s experiences of school-to-work transition, employment, and entrepreneurship. All these research initiatives demonstrate an increased willingness among elders to listen to youth.

What was significant with the production of “positive” and youth-centered knowledge on Sri Lankan youth was the generation of more “positive-youth development” approaches and interventions that could contribute to improve well-being among the youth of the country. In its current meanings, “positive-youth development” implies 1) formulating youth-oriented development policies and programs based on an “in-depth understanding of the youth in terms of their aspirations and grievances, their ideas, values and attitudes and their main experiences within the social, economic and political realm” (Hettige & Mayer 2002:18); 2) ensuring that all approaches to supporting youth and addressing their concerns entail a set of principles that “take youth seriously,” “narrow the gap between different youth constituencies,” “build capacities of youth and ensure equal opportunities,” and “combat discrimination and injustice” (Hettige 2002:61); 3) broadening and diversifying youth-related interventions (Hettige & Mayer 2002, Hettige et al. 2004); and 4) integrating into society – meaning creating space for youth and youth activities in the construction of community and in community development (Mayer 2000, Hettige & Mayer 2002:18).

All these recommendations suggest the direction “youth development” should be heading towards in Sri Lanka – one that is youth-centered, encourages their participation and engagement in pro-social activities, and addresses the structural barriers that hinder youth’s positive development in the country. They share a similar idea – that the deficit-reductionist approach to youth development belongs to the past, and that what Sri Lanka needs to do now and in the future to help build a positive environment in which youth and their development can be nurtured, promoted, and guaranteed. The recommendations signify a Sri Lankan youth-development trend in the making – one that favors young people as assets of the country and sees their development dependent on a range of supports and opportunities coming from family, community, and other institutions that touch them (Benson & Pittman 2001). In many ways, this trend reflects the one characterized by the concepts of “Positive Youth Development” and “Community Youth Development” discussed in the wider youth development literature, which were mentioned in the earlier chapter.

4.3. Inconclusive & Constrained Shift Towards the Positive

Although an encouraging sign it might be, the shift towards a positive, more empowering meaning of “youth development” is, nevertheless, full of loopholes and is inconclusive. At the core lies the fact that “positive-youth development” is still a loose, fluid and alternative concept in Sri Lanka, even within the academia that favors it the most. The concept has not congealed into a set of compelling ideas,
approaches, and strategies that take hold of the larger society. Three observations explain why this is the case: 1) There is a dialectic clash between the “positive-youth” and the “negative-youth development” discourse in the country; the negative discourse keeps on winning over the positive one, hence preventing the “positive-youth development” discourse from manifesting itself completely in the country; 2) the intellectuals are unable to convince themselves of the meaning of “positive-youth development” and broaden their inquiries on a complex term like “youth development,” discouraging ideas and approaches on youth’s growth and development from taking root in academia – never mind in the public square; and 3) the “positive-youth development” interventions confronted the local political constraints that prevent them from attaining their positive intentions of improving youth’s well-being in Sri Lanka.

The dominant “youth development” discourse in the country remains problem-oriented. The discourse portrays young people as aimless and idle, people that cannot be trusted to make their own decisions and act responsibly (Ibarguen 2004). This observation on the persistence of the “negative-youth” discourse has been expressed by Sri Lankan scholars themselves (Hettige & Mayer 2002; Ibarguen 2004) and by Sri Lankan youth workers (Kuruppu & Renganathan 2005). Scholars like Escobar who study development discourses in developing countries have found that “Development” as a hegemonic ideology can influence peoples’ sense of self and of others, making them identify themselves as constantly inferior to and “backward” from the “developed.” In Sri Lanka, if the dominant deficit-youth development discourse continues to prevail, one wonders whether it might produce a group of powerless young people, whose perception of their incompetent selves prevents them from taking an active leadership role in their own and their country’s development. As the “negative-youth” discourse permeates Sri Lankan society, the “positive-youth development” ideas and approaches find it difficult to infiltrate the public imagination, let alone generate more positive actions in support of the development and well-being of youth in Sri Lanka.

Another reason for the inconclusive shift towards the positive is found in academia, where scholars and researchers express their solidarity with youth and ideas of positive-youth – but do so in a half-hearted self-contradicting way. In other words, there is an inherent contradiction within the thinking of Sri Lankan intellectuals who advocate the idea and shape the trend of “positive-youth development,” weakening their own argument of “positive-youth development” in the country. During my literature review, for example, I realized that what underlies many scholars’ conception of “positive-youth development” is essentially the sense of insecurity towards Sri Lankan youth whose past history is shadowed by their violent acts against the state. The fear that young people, especially the rural, unemployed youth, will be involved once again in political insurgency is well reflected in some of the scholars’ own writing (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990; Mayer 2000; Mayer 2002; Fernando 2002). The imagination of the ultimate problematic youth, who need appeasement and to be occupied so
that they do not engage in anti-social behaviors, underscores the rationale for most enthusiastic talk on positive development of youth. Perhaps, it is this constant struggle between needing to perceive young people as benevolent and, at the same time, keeping a guard on their negative tendencies that has prevented a strong and persuasive “positive-youth development’ meaning/argument to land firmly in the country.

Furthermore, no matter how enthusiastically Sir Lankan scholars talked about “positive-youth development” and proposed ideas and approaches for “positive-youth development” in the country, their discussions were often liminal and focused again on solving or preventing just a few youth “problems.” “Positive-youth development” turned out to be nothing more than creating positive solutions to prevent youth violence and solve issues relating to youth unemployment. As such, youth interventions were narrowly defined to meet youth’s socio-economic needs – for example promoting vocational training among youth, linking youth with jobs, or involving youth in productive activities (Hettige & Mayer 2002) – but not to address other concerns that go beyond finding employment and trainings, for example alcohol and drug abuse; sexual reproductive health and positive relationship between sexes and gender; lack of opportunities to pursue knowledge in information technology, English and soft skills such as entrepreneurial, interpersonal and communication skills; and lack of space to express their talents and participate in the country’s development (De Silva et al. 2003; Ibarguen 2005; Kuruppu & Renganathan 2005). In essence, the “positive-youth development” argument laid by the intellectuals was still negatively and narrowly problem-based.

Many studies on youth culture and adolescent growth and development argue that young people are dynamic and complex, having developmental needs that are diverse and continuously changing (Fornas 1995; Pittman et al. 2001; Liechty 2003). Residing in a globalizing Sri Lanka where social changes are occurring constantly, Sir Lankan youth see their developmental needs or aspirations spanning various multiple domains such as health, social, emotional, cognitive, physical, personal/cultural, and moral/spiritual (Yohalem & Pittman 2001). Their aspirations, hardly monotonous and one-dimensional, seek to interact actively with their lived environments, aspirations that are constantly negotiated, shaped and reshaped by the socio-cultural, political and economic forces in their daily lives (Hettige & Mayer 2001; Liechty 2003). Any successful attempt to support the development of Sri Lankan youth would have to be broad-based and contextual. People who are concerned about Sri Lankan youth should not only understand their multifaceted needs but also recognize their agencies in negotiating and regulating their developmental pathways and meanings. The fact that the current “positive-youth development” perspective in the Sri Lankan academia has not been systematically explored and understood under the lager complexities of “youth” and “development” weakens its conclusiveness in the country.
Finally, the discussion on why the shift towards “positive-youth development” is incomplete embraces the governmental and political constraints in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, recommendations for “positive-youth development” formulated and proposed by youth experts often travel up to the governmental level and get institutionalized, managed, and manipulated by a host of government bodies that have not been historically responsive to Sri Lankan youth’s aspirations, concerns, wants and needs. As the result of the institutionalization of “positive-youth development,” which could not fulfill those positive goals it sets for itself, that is empowering youth as partners in national development and giving them opportunities to develop their full potentials.

Numerous studies have criticized the Sri Lankan government’s inability to implement youth-related policies and programs. As a group of evaluators who studied youth programs in Sri Lanka stated bluntly: “The government itself has no concept for strengthening, promoting and involving young people as active forces in change and development processes. The few programs that do exist for young people are planned and implemented top-down. There is no strategy for the fundamental direction of youth policy” (Scheu et al. 2003:2). In addition, Mayer (2000) and Bastian (in Mayer 2000) commented that the Sri Lankan political system is set up in such a way that political elites at the top prevent young people’s equal access to resources and opportunities.

In his book The Anti-Politics Machine, Ferguson (1994) raised the points that “development” interventions, despite their good internationalities and all the “expertise” that goes into formulating them, tend to fail in achieving their “development” goals when they overlook the historical and political realities of the locale where they are intended to take place. Not only would they fail, they would also lead to various unintended outcomes, including the expansion of state bureaucracy and the production of more “technical” problems that require further “development expertise” to solve them. “Development” apparatus, therefore, because of its “anti-politics” nature, (re)produces and sustains “underdevelopment” and disempowerment of the people it is intended to help.

In Sri Lanka, when the “youth development” agenda is to be largely played by an indecisive and unresponsive government, even the most benevolent youth development visions and strategies would be constrained by the paternalistic, vertically-integrated local politics. The idea that youth should be socially integrated and be the leaders of their community and the country’s development sounds positive and encouraging (Mayer 2000; Hettige & Mayer 2002), but it might be ultimately challenged by the prevailing political patronage system that is not prepared to accept socio-political participation of Sri Lankan youth. What’s more, good “youth development” intentions, when institutionalized, can become a means for the government to further their control on youth that is not conducive to their well-being. Such was the case in the country’s history when “youth development” was used as political rhetoric and a tool with which competing political parties to won youthful votes in the elections (Chopra 2000). When Sri
Lankan youth’s needs and aspirations were politically exploited for a calculating agenda and when such needs and aspirations were unmet under the unrealistic, carelessly-made “youth-development” promises, youth felt a deep sense of grievance and deception, never mind “empowerment” and “development.” In a political environment where the idea of “positive-youth development” continues to be co-opted, institutionalized, and constrained by a patriarchal and inefficient government bureaucracy, one wonders if any plausible development of youth can evolve in Sri Lanka. The shift towards “positive-youth development” may never be complete if the structural barriers on Sri Lankan youth and their development remain in the country.

4.4 Moving Forward

As I examined and contextualize the notion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka, I found that the term has at least 50 years of official presence in the country, starting in the 1960s. Within the academia, “youth development” is a dynamic and dilemmatic term that has evolved over time, accruing new meanings, especially that of the “positive-youth development,” and manifesting itself in a set of “youth development” approaches and ideas to address Sri Lankan youth concerns. In a way, those discussions dominating the Sri Lankan “youth development” scene mirror the current youth development movement sweeping the world nowadays, one that revolves around the concepts like “empowerment of youth” and “youth as assets” and “partners in development.”

What remains inconclusive in the Sri Lankan “youth development” scene is that the “positive-youth development” rhetoric, argued to be important and necessary for Sri Lankan youth’s well-being and, hence, adopted and circulated enthusiastically among Sri Lankan intellectuals, continues to be a constellation of loose ideas and approaches that have not yielded any “positive-youth development” results in the country, given the social, intellectual and political constraints in the country.

One might argue that given the stark realities and challenges facing Sri Lanka (e.g. inequality, political instability, civil war) and Sri Lankan youth (e.g. unemployment) today, it is hard not to fall into the trap of seeing young people as “problems” to be managed and controlled. Commitment to “positive-youth development” would not be the priority until other more urgent issue like poverty is solved. However, as my case study on YITP will show, “positive-youth development” has never ceased its relevance and importance in the country. For young people who are facing uncertainties in life and transitions from school-to-work (in other words, those who would be usually categorized as “problematic,” “idle” youth in under the current societal view on Sri Lankan youth), the opportunity to “positive-youth development” is even more crucial and significant to their personal growth and well-being.
In the next three chapters, I will focus on discussing the youth program, YITP, and show its implications on the idea of “positive-youth development” in Sri Lanka. I will illustrate an example of positive youth development in action in the country. Before furthering my discussion on YITP, I will first give an overview on the backgrounds of the program and its youth participants who play a central role in defining the program’s significances in youth development.
Chapter 5
Background to the Youth in Transition Program &
the YITP Youth Participants

The Youth in Transition Program (YITP) is a youth program in Sri Lanka implemented by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) – a Canadian NGO – and funded by the UNICEF. YITP serves young men and women between 16 – 19 years of age, most of whom are from less-advantaged backgrounds. YITP was first started as a pilot project in three southern provinces of Sri Lanka – Matara, Galle and Hambantota – to serve the needs of youth after the December 2004 Tsunami. Since then, the program has grown into a more mature youth program with increased staffing and programming resources. In this chapter, I present a brief history of YITP and introduce the young people who have participated in YITP as it is their experiences and realities which represent the different meanings of “youth development” illustrated in this thesis.

5.1 YITP and its Formation Stage
On December 26 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami landed on Sri Lanka, causing 38,800 deaths, one million people displaced and thousands of homes being damaged (Peebles 2006). The disaster resulted in an unprecedented outpouring of government and private aid, and Sri Lanka received pledges of approximately US$3.2 billion (Peebles 2006). About 300 humanitarian agencies descended on the island and provided much needed emergency relief (Peebles 2006). Long-term and short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction work started to sprout in the affected communities with the participation of various civil society groups, NGOs and INGOs. Against this background, YITP was born in 2006 in Sri Lanka. According to the WUSC-Sri Lanka’s country director at that time (email to author, February 29, 2008), the conceptualization of YITP involved “a bit of a team effort” based on several factors.

Following the 2004 disaster in South Asia, WUSC raised considerable funds but most went towards programming in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. WUSC therefore decided to look into program gaps in the South. Having worked in the area of vocational education and training for Sri Lankan youth since its early years, WUSC noticed a gap in post-tsunami programming for young people in addition to a lack of resources to address longer term challenges facing youth in Sri Lanka.

It was observed that even before the disaster, a main source of frustration among youth and policy makers alike is the mismatch between education and job opportunities and the youth unemployment /“unemployable” youth problem. Upon leaving the formal education system, many young people could not find a job. For those who wish to further their studies by pursuing higher education, their chances
were low because of the high competition for limited spaces in the universities. As a result, millions of young people are in their transition to adulthood without a clear plan for their future.

When the Tsunami struck the country in 2004, young people who were already in a critical juncture of their life fell into a more difficult situation. They not only had to navigate through their transition from adolescence to adulthood, school to work, but also had to adapt to the transitional times between disruptive livelihoods and normal living. The young people who were more prepared might be able to cope with the challenges facing them, but those who were less advantaged in the society found it harder to survive the transitional periods.

The need to support young people in transitions after the Tsunami was clear. However, despite that there had been an influx of NGO led short-term and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in the country, one group often excluded from these projects was in fact the young people, in particular those between the age of 16-19 years old. National organizations like the National Youth Service Council did provide support to youth of this age group prior to and after the Tsunami but they required additional support during the post-Tsunami context.

Knowing that so many youth, especially those between 16 and 19 years old – were uncatered for after the Tsunami, WUSC developed YITP as a means to help young people transition more smoothly and successfully. Specifically, YITP intended to target the less-advantaged 16-19 year-old youth e.g. school leavers, disengaged/disconnected youths and youths stricken by poverty who resided at the coastal areas of Southern Sri Lanka. These young people, according to YITP, were the most in-need youth at that time. Given that WUSC had long wanted to conduct more community outreach programs to attract youth for its existing vocational training project\(^5\) in Sri Lanka, YITP was also seen to be a perfect platform for such purpose.

The program’s objectives and modus-operandi were soon formulated. It was hoped that through being engaged in a 7-day residential workshop, Tsunami-affected young people could “be aware of and connected to the resources that would allow them to pursue their career / educational interests, be guided to find opportunities within their abilities and talents and supported to develop skills to meet their current and future ambitions, and be given a sense of social responsibility and encouraged to be agents of positive

\(^5\) WUSC’s vocational training project in Sri Lanka – Project for Rehabilitation through Education and Training (PRET) – work with local partners to deliver vocational and life-skills training poor or marginalized Sri Lankan youth that equips them to work in high-demand fields. Launched in 1989, PRET now trains almost 2,000 people each year to work in fields such as carpentry, plumbing, masonry, auto-mechanics and electronics. Their technical training is supplemented with life skills courses that include savings and small-business development, first aid, gender equality, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and nutrition (WUSC 2008). PRET’s rationale, according to WUSC, is that when people secure a steady job that pays a decent wage, or start their own business, they have the means to better support themselves and their families. It also reduces the likelihood of them being drawn into the civil war. They can serve as role models for their peers and encourage others to follow in their footsteps (WUSC 2008)
change within their communities” (YITP Power Point Slide to UNICEF 2006). YITP expected its programming to help young people recover from the social effects of the Tsunami through mobilizing and guiding youth in making informed transitions, whether it was from schooling to employment, or from disaster-interrupted livelihoods to normal livings. The focus is on building young people’s skills and competence especially those needed for long-term well-being and successful adulthood.

5.2 YITP’s Growth and Success
YITP was designed initially as a pilot project in response of the social-impacts of Tsunami on less-advantaged youth. It had never thought that it would gain so much popularity among the young people it served. After its inception in March 2006, YITP received tremendous positive feedbacks from its participants. Comments like “YITP helped me to identify my target and objectives and how to focus towards them,” “It feels that it opened a new avenue for youth nowadays,” and “YITP should be
compulsory” were given by youth (WUSC 2006). Many young people hoped that the program could be extended to the rest of the country. This motivated YITP to expand its program further to serve more youth in the country.

Starting in 2007 (nearly one year after its pilot), YITP shifted its program focus from serving young people from the coastal areas to those living in interior/rural parts of Sri Lanka. The programming points were still southern Sri Lanka due to fewer barriers in delivering the program than in other areas of the country as YITP infrastructure was well set up to meet the demands of its new beneficiaries. The program rationale and objective remained unchanged as the previous emphasis on helping youth transit from schooling and employment still very much apply to the youth situations in rural, more interior areas of the country.

Most of research on YITP took place between November 2006 and June 2007 and I had the opportunity to observe how YITP delivered its program to both youth from the coastal areas and interior parts of Sri Lanka. I should say that although YITP had shifted to serving youth who were not from the Tsunami-affected areas, it still largely followed a common curriculum and program approach. Similar programming materials were used in the three program districts – Matara, Galle and Hambantota – and they were largely approved and favored by the youth. The fact that positive feedbacks from youth participants were consistently received throughout YITP programming years and from different program regions suggested that there must be something in YITP that interested young people, regardless their background and birth-place. By the end of 2007, YITP had delivered itself to nearly 2000 young men and women in southern part of Sri Lanka.

In short, having grown from a “tsunami-triggered” pilot to a full-fledged youth program, YITP had at different times accrued knowledge and experiences that proved to meet young people’s developmental needs. This was well reflected in the young people’s positive responses and towards their participation at the program. Exploring these “secret ingredients” of YITP that had been prone to YITP youth’s development would help us understand better the notion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka. Chapter 6 in this thesis was written precisely for the purpose of revealing these “secrete ingredients” of YITP.

5.3 Introducing YITP Youth

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6 In 2008, YITP conducted pilot programs in national schools mainly to support better functioning school clubs. As I finished my fieldwork on YITP in 1997, I did not get the chance to research on this YITP 2008 pilot. This school-based interventions of YITP is therefore beyond my thesis boundary.
In youth development literature, the success of a youth development program was often contributed to the sound design/implementation of the program and/or a group of competent youth professionals. This is absolutely true because no good program can be carried out without a series of thoughtful programming efforts. What’s often left unsaid in the literature is the role young people play in determining the success of a program. In this thesis, a main message I try to convey is that youth, despite being the recipients of a program, are also actors who shape and decide the nature of the program they receive. In the case of YITP, young participants’ characteristics, background and understanding of their participation at YITP strongly correlate with the dynamics and ultimate successes of this program. While I will write more about such co-relationship in Chapter 7, I first give a brief description of who these YITP youth are in this introductory chapter. Getting to know YITP youth helps us understand why YITP was designed the way it was and how the young people’s presence during and after YITP influenced the dynamics and “successes” of the program and its “youth-development” meanings.

FROM THE PROGRAMMATIC POINT OF VIEW

As mentioned earlier, YITP youth were young men and women between the age of 16 and 19+ years old, who were affected by Tsunami (2006-2007) and/or residing in the interior areas (2007-2008) of Southern Sri Lanka. Such definition of YITP youth was officially stated in various YITP documents and it specified the targeted beneficiaries of the program. However, in order to participate in the program, youth had to meet certain additional criteria and went through an interview process with the YITP program staffs. In other words, they had to demonstrate certain characteristics that qualified them as a “YITP youth”: Normally, young people were selected for YITP based on:

1) Their education level: This includes youth who had not had proper educational background, youth who had completed or were completing C.G.E Ordinary-Level exams but did not have plans for further education/employment (school leavers), and youth who were sitting for or failed their university entrance exam – G.C.E Advance-Level Exam - and were deciding their future. In Sri Lanka, a child is required under the law to go to school until grade 9 where they will choose to either continue their studies to O-Level and/or later A-Level; or drop out and engage in apprenticeship for a job.

2) Their readiness for the future: Youth who had no clue or only some rough ideas about what they wanted to do after finishing their O-Level and A-Level i.e. formal schooling were given priority in participating in YITP. Also, young people who desired to develop their vocational skills or study skills for further education were welcome to the program.

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7 O-level is equivalent to Grade 11 in Sri Lanka and the youth are often 15/16 years old when they sit for the exam.
3) Their socio-economic background or histories in juvenile delinquency: youth from poor households were considered primarily for the program. Depending on situations, at times, youth who had had past histories in drug abuse or juvenile delinquency were also selected.

4) YITP programming capacities and gender consideration: Each YITP workshop was limited to 25 young people to ensure the quality of the program delivery. In addition, each workshop strived to have 50% male and 50% female participation. The gender balance within YITP was said to be an important element of YITP not only because it gave equal opportunities for both female and male youth to build up their skills and knowledge at YITP, but also because it fostered mutual understandings, respects and reduced gender stereotypes between young men and women who came to interact with and learn about each others during YITP.

5) Regional and district considerations: Usually, young people from the same divisions within the districts of Matara, Hambatota and Galle were placed in the same YITP workshop. Hence for example, youth participants at the Kosgooda YITP workshop would be most likely those reside within the regional boundary of Kosgooda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YITP Specific Target Group in 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Youth aged 16 to 19 years, male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Living in or near tsunami-affected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School leavers up to G.C.E. A level who are under-employed or unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desire to learn a vocation or start a career according to his/her ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equal number of boys and girls will be selected, total of 25 youth per workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviews will be conducted after screening application form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, youth who showed that they were in multiple situations of transition and uncertainties yet could flourish and thrive if given proper supports and guidance were the principal concerns of YITP. They ended up participating in YITP workshops where they would meet other young people of different ages, genders, socio-economic orientations and educational and family histories. Some of them might have known each other as neighbors in their local communities, but many of the youth made new friends in YITP. The synergy created out of their interactions with each other during the workshop and to some
extents after the workshop has ended, significantly influenced the nature, dynamics, and “successes” of YITP and their meanings of “youth development.”

FROM YOUTH’S OWN POINTS OF VIEWS
The young people I interviewed and interacted with in my research demonstrated those characteristics listed under the YITP participant-selection criteria. If not, I would not have met them at YITP and engaged them in conversations at the first place. These young people might have been traditionally labeled in the society under the categories of “disadvantaged,” “at-risk,” “jobless,” “idle,” “poor” youth or “school drop-outs.” Yet, it would be always interesting to hear in persons how my YITP friends talked about themselves as Sri Lankan youth.

YITP youth considered themselves as “people that have some kind of knowledge,” “can take responsibility,” “understand what’s right and wrong,” “smart, innovative, friendly and have good, big dream” and if “given proper guidance, can flourish.” In addition, youth “have lots of strength” and are “committed and dedicated people” – “if they say they do something, they will do it.” However, the young people of YITP are also aware that “they are able to do very negative thing in the society,” but again “this possibility can be reduced if given guidance.” They “want to be trusted and supported by others in the society.”

Also many YITP youth said that their goal in life was to be “a good citizen.” When probed further what they meant by that, they told me that “good citizenship” meant “behaving well in the society,” “sharing what they have learned with others, give to others and respect elders” and “listening to elders and parents.” What’s interesting with these youth’s definitions of “citizenship” was that they contradicted with current societal view of Sri Lankan youth as being idle, useless, troublesome, impolite and disrespectful to elders. Perhaps, Sri Lankan youth did aspire to be a good and useful person to their communities and country, and understand that there were certain values appreciated by larger society that need to be adhered to and practiced.

When asked what young people liked to do or were doing nowadays, my YITP friends often told me that “some [young people] are studying, some working, most looking for jobs … more young people are interested in social services and organizing community fund-raising activities but they are still in the minority.” In fact, “many youth are not engaged in works that are positive e.g. drugs abuse, disobeying parents, not helping parents, smoking, etc.” Most of the young people like “high tech gadgets” like mobile phone, “especially the boys.”

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8 I would not rule out the possibility that YITP programs and YITP adults might have influenced YITP perceptions about themselves since most of these discussions about “who YITP/Sri Lankan youth are” happened under the context of YITP.
The last account from my friends was particularly important as it reflected Sri Lankan youth’s aspirations in the era of globalization when rapid information flow and communication have tremendous impacts on human’s lifestyles, identity and ways of living. YITP youth often expressed their fond of “meeting the international standard.” If my interpretation was correct, “international standard” meant the ability to speak English, have social mobility, use modern technology, listening to western music, live in urban areas, have foreign (mostly western) contacts and have good interpersonal and communication skills to my friends. I was able to guess this meaning from their attempt to associate me – a Malaysian-born Canadian university student, working with WUSC, a fluent English speaker and a good computer user – with the notion of “international standard” as well as from my numerous chat with my friends.

While aspiring to achieve the “international standard,” many YITP youth also realized the bad implications “western cultures” might have on the society. Hence my friend Ranga for example would tell me the importance of practicing and following closely one’s own religion in a changing world. According to him, “the present world is like a train, always running, running, running, and very competitive and busy. People are very bound to money, education, fashion. However, at one point, people would get fed up with science and technology and material life and realize the advantages of simple life style.” Ranga thought that at the moment, Sri Lankan youth (especially those in villages) are becoming very interested in understanding religion, and attending religious counseling program. Many young people are tired of being bounded by the materialistic life and try to seek solace in religion (in his case, Buddhism).

Indeed, YITP youth had at different occasions expressed who they were to me, not in words but in performance and actions. I want to summarize what YITP youth had been trying to tell me about themselves using a reflection piece I wrote at the end of my fieldwork. If I had not interpreted wrongly the many feelings and reactions I had when interacting with and listening to YITP youth, it seemed YITP youth tried to say (and I put this in 1st person narrative):

_We want our freedom as youth. We are resourceful, creative and adaptive to change. We want to be respected and we yearn for good elders to guide us. We do recognize that we have weaknesses - sometimes too emotional, sometimes not being respectful to the elders - but we are willing to change. We understand how you (the adults) see us. We don’t really blame you if you have negative views on us. But you shouldn’t generalize us. Sometimes, we can’t help it to make mistakes but deep in ourselves, we want to be better, if you just give us a bit more chance. We see globalization/modernization in our daily life. Sometimes, we really long to enjoy the goodness globalization/modernization has to offer us. Yet, most of the times, we don’t have the resources needed to reach the standard of globalization (international standard)…. But mind you, one day, some of us would make ourselves there - we are using mobile phones in the most innovative way_
you have even known. We get frustrated when we don’t understand something – why things have to be in certain kinds of ways, with rules and rigid structure? We get frustrated but we tried to find ways to deal with it. Maybe, the techniques we used were not right... yet we are innovative ones who are willing to try out new solutions. Our friends are our best buddies...it is some important to have good friends because that’s where we learn to be good. Friends are important to us and from their supports, we have more motivation to develop our dreams and hold positive views in life. How nice would it be if the society is full of caring adults, good friends, and safe space for us to be ourselves and develop our potentials? So far, some of us are trying to cultivate such space, and your [adult] support would be a plus to us. We still have that trust in you and hope you trust us too...we love our country and peoples! We want to be good citizen of Sri Lanka.

FROM YITP ADULTS’ POINTS OF VIEWS

My interviews with YITP program staffs and resource persons helped me understand another dimension of YITP youth – that from the adults’ points of views.

Having interacted with YITP youth on a constant basis, YITP adults equally realized that YITP youth were a resourceful group of people. Additionally, YITP adults felt that YITP youth were a constantly changing and complex entity. Young people who participated in YITP had multiple layers and feelings and many of them had experienced tremendous hardship and uncertainties in their life. Ms. Vinaya, a YITP staff for instance, said that “young people smiled and laughed by inside themselves, they had sad feelings and problems.”

What YITP adults further recognized were the larger societal barriers young people faced and the weaknesses they had in transition to successful adulthood. YITP adults were concerned about how many Sri Lankan youth had no goal or practical skills needed for the working world after leaving their high schools. YITP’s resource persons Mr. Nimal further said that youth in Sri Lanka nowadays go for too many training courses. After getting their course certificates, they nevertheless do not have any practical skills to put theoretical knowledge into practice. What Sri Lankan youth need today is the ability to discover themselves, their goals and interests and enhance their characters, values and skills to transit into adulthood.

Given that many YITP youth I talked to come from either the coastal areas or the more interior parts of Southern Sri Lanka, I was also curious to know if they demonstrated different characteristics according to their regional backgrounds. I therefore asked several YITP adults if they had seen any behavioral differences within these YITP youth. Here is what they answered me: Despite that both coastal and inland youth shared many similar interests as youth and showed great desire to improve their skills and receive guidance at the workshops, the young people from the coast tended to be more “modern,”
keen on dancing and singing (popular songs), and more emotional (or easy to get angry) compared to their inland counterparts who were said to be more “gentle” and “innocent.” YITP adults said that the Tsunami might have had an impact on how youth – especially those from the coastal belts and tsunami affected communities – expressed themselves. Coastal youth were more prone to showing their inner emotions and feelings when participating at the YITP workshops whereas the young people from remote areas did so in a less significant way.

All in all, YITP adults were able to give interesting descriptions of YITP youth based on their observations. While their words might not represent fully the multifaceted characteristics of YITP youth, they nonetheless suggest the diversities and complexities existing within YITP youth and the perceived developmental needs of these young people.

What’s important with all these descriptions of YITP youth – from the programmatic, youth’s and adult’s points of view – is that they allow us to appreciate the kind of youth who participated in and interacted with YITP and who actively produced “youth development” that of their owns as well as for Sri Lanka. YITP/Youth in Transition Program is essentially a program for “transition youth.” However, when we define what we meant by “transition youth,” it is always important to take a holistic and contextual approach. YITP youth might be individuals who are “in transition” from school to work, disaster-interrupted to normal living, adolescence to adulthood, as defined by the program. But they are just as much “transitional” like you and me in a changing world – always coming up with interesting ideas, new wants, new aspirations and new needs. Understanding the multilayered, “transitional” dynamics of YITP youth help programs to be more responsive and effective in serving them.

Henceforth, whenever the term “YITP youth” is used in the thesis, it implies a group of dynamic and diverse young men and women from southern Sri Lanka (either from the coastal or inland areas) who had come to YITP as the result of their desires or interests to get certain guidance and support in growing up. It chooses to see YITP youth as highly capable, talented, agentive and resourceful young people, although it does recognize the stark realities, constraints and challenges facing them in life. Readers are invited to keep in mind this definition of YITP youth when reading my analyses on YITP and youth’s experiences of the program.

Having said that, let us now turn to the next chapter and take a closer look at YITP, its program structure, components, processes, and personnel. We will examine how YITP had pieced itself together to deliver programming that suits youth’s developmental aspirations and needs.
Chapter 6

A “Youth Development” Perspective to
YITP’s Logic, Modus Operandi and Personnel

In this chapter, I describe and analyze YITP’s program model under the theoretical framework of youth development. Although YITP was not initially designed under the guidance of any youth development theories, it demonstrates many features of a good youth development program put forward by scholar and developmental theorists. This chapter highlights the underpinnings of “youth development theory” within YITP, specifically its manifestations in the program’s logic, modus operandi and personnel. The views of YITP adults (i.e. staff and resource persons) are emphasized to present an analysis of YITP at its programmatic level.

6.1 Youth Development Theory in YITP’s Program Logic

Mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, “youth development” as a philosophy is made up of two major theoretical concepts: Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Community Youth Development (CYD). Together, PYD and CYD give rise to a more unified, comprehensively defined “youth development” theory, which emphasizes a strength-based – instead of a deficit-based – approach to building youth capacities, potentials, reducing risks, increasing youth’s thriving behaviors and resiliency, and engaging young people as partners in self-development and community development. Under this framework, positive support, opportunities and services are to be provided to or acquired by youth to build competencies, and fulfill their developmental needs and developmental tasks. The ultimate goals of “youth development” are to go beyond preventing youth problems towards nurturing fully prepared, fully engaged youth. Quoting again Karen Pittman and other youth-development critics; “Academic competence is important but not sufficient [in youth development]. Social, health (emotional and physical), vocational and civic competence are all needed to be fully prepared. Competence in and of itself is not sufficient. Young people need skills, but they also need confidence, character and connection to family, peers and community, and they must contribute to those around them” (Pittman et al. 2001). All in all, “youth development” as a theory takes an integrated approach to young people and their development, recognizing the role of the “positive” and the community in fostering their well-being.

A “YOUTH DEVELOPMENT” DISCUSSION ON YITP’S PROGRAM LOGIC

If we look at YITP’s program logic – purpose, objectives and expected outcomes, we see that it in many ways touches on the concepts of PYD and CYD as well as the notion of the youth as resilient. In its first
phase of programming (early 2006 till end of 2006), YITP’s overall purposes were two-fold:

- Short-term Purpose: To provide female and male youth, aged 16-19, from tsunami-affected areas of Southern Sri Lanka with support for their short-term recovery from the social effects of the tsunami.
- Long-term Purpose: To provide youth with a foundation of knowledge and skills that will enhance their awareness of self-development and ability in accessing career development opportunities (WUSC 2006:1)

In order to fulfill this overall program purpose, YITP committed itself to 1) build confidence in youth affected by the tsunami, 2) motivate and encourage tsunami-affected youth to be productive members of society, and 3) provide knowledge and information about available links to other opportunities such as vocational training, credit, further studies, and employment. Once these three objectives were met, YITP expected to bring about changes in the lives of its target group such as 1) change in the perception of life and setting goals for life, family and society, 2) increased awareness of leadership qualities and enhanced leadership abilities for the achievement of their goals, 3) increased understanding of career potentials, 4) setting up career goals and identification of milestones for career development, 5) changed perception of gender equality and good citizenship, 6) enhanced awareness among youths of community development.

In its second phase of programming (between early 2007 till June 2007 when this research was conducted), although YITP added an extra dimension to its program purpose – to follow up its youth participants from the Phase 1 programming and make sure that they are supported and engaging in meaningful activities, as well as changing slightly the selection of its target group – rural youth and tsunami affected youth at urban centers, not those residing at the coastline – its program logic remained largely unchanged. YITP still saw its responsibilities as supporting the positive development of Sri Lankan youth, many of them marginalized in the society, in their transitions from adolescence to adulthood, study to work, tsunami-affected livelihood to normal living; doing so using strength-based, community-based youth development approaches. YITP aimed to build youth’s “confidence,” resiliency and competencies that would help them transit more smoothly to successful adulthood. Not satisfied with just strengthening youth’s personal development, YITP also aims to “encourage” and “motivate” youth to be responsible citizens, partners and actors in their local community development.

In short, throughout its program life cycle, YITP had been practicing a kind of youth-development theory that believed in the strength of youth, specifically those who came from less-advantageous backgrounds. YITP saw youth as productive, resourceful members of the society to be guided and invested in; human beings that can grow and thrive if given chances. Compared to the
inconclusive national discourse of “youth development” in Sri Lanka (discussed in Chapter 1), YITP took a more down-to-earth, less problem-based and comprehensive approach to addressing youths’ concerns and potentials. YITP was aware of the difficulties young people face in their multiple transition situations, and the wrongdoings they might have committed when growing up. Its way of helping youth find a job, as addressed in its long term purpose: “to provide youth with a foundation of knowledge and skills that will enhance their awareness of self-development and ability in accessing career development opportunities,” is broad-based, and aims at building a range of soft skills necessary for youth to get a job such as “positive self perception,” “setting goals for life, family and society,” and “leadership.” Such an approach to youth development underlies and influences the working of YITP program’s modus operandi and personnel, and consequently its processes, dynamics and outcomes. This will become more clear in the next few pages when I talk about YITP’s modes of operation and peoples in detail.

6.2 An Overview on YITP Modus Operandi and Personnel

**YITP MODUS OPERANDI**

The selected method for YITP to inculcate knowledge and skills, foster development and induce changes in youths was *a 7-day residential workshop* through which the young people would undergo a transition of self-perception, develop career goals and enhance their responsibility towards community development. Included were *lectures* using interactive learning and teaching methods, *group work* and *indoor-outdoor activities* on the following subject areas – life skills, leadership, entrepreneurial skills, career development, women and gender, reproductive health, drug prevention and First Aid. Cultural performances showcasing youth talents were also carried out during some of the evenings at the program. (YITP Final Report 2006:2).

A typical YITP workshop, therefore, would begin with YITP youth arriving at the workshop, followed by a welcoming/opening ceremony where YITP field staff introduced the program to the youth. Each of the following seven days then dedicated itself to a specific theme e.g. life skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurial skills, etc. in which a pair of YITP resource people would present each theme to the youth.

**Themes of the Week**

Day 0: Arrival, Introduction/Opening Ceremony
Day 1: Life Skills
Day 2: Leadership Skills and First Aid
Day 3: Entrepreneurial Skills *
Day 4: Career Development *
Day 5: Women and Gender
Day 6: Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS
Day 7: Drug Prevention, Discussions with Vocational Providers
Closing Ceremony

* There could be some small flexibility here in terms of sequencing—Day 4’s theme ‘Career Development’ might happen on Day 3 and vice versa. This change was seen to have little influence on the general dynamic and flow of the workshop.

The sequencing of the themes were pre-fixed into an order that was felt to produce the best learning outcomes among the participants (the sequencing of the themes for Day 3 and Day 4 is less rigid). It started with youth looking inwards and learning about themselves (Life Skills and Leadership), and ended with youth looking outwards and accruing a series of skills and knowledge that can be used in daily life and community development (First Aid, Gender and Development, Awareness on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, Adolescent and Adolescent Behavior, Reproductive Health, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS). Each theme contained a series of sessions or learning/teaching points that would be delivered to youth based on pre-designed modules. Table 2 shows these thematic sessions according to its daily order as well as their objectives and methods of delivery:

Table 2: Daily Themes and Sessions in a 7-day YITP Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Thematic Sessions</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1 Life Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session 1</strong></td>
<td>A session that provides opportunities for youth to look inward, experience self, share that with others.</td>
<td>Introduction, Individual exercises, Open forum discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self disclosure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session 2</strong></td>
<td>A session to provide opportunities for personal goal setting and developing action plans</td>
<td>Introduction, Individual exercise, Group exercise, Open forum discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goal/s for life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 3</strong></td>
<td>Change is inevitable. This session intends to give participants a chance to learn and identify changes and to see what impact these changes have on them</td>
<td>Discussions, Role plays, Worksheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 4</strong></td>
<td>Participants develop an understanding of different</td>
<td>Presentations, Individual exercises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>feelings. Good and bad. Positive and negative</th>
<th>Role Plays, Open forum discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Management of anger</td>
<td>Anger as a negative feeling and develop skills to control anger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Day 2 Leadership & First Aid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 6</th>
<th>Team work</th>
<th>Participants develop understanding of team work</th>
<th>Presentations, Games : Broken squares, Open forum discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
<td>Leaders and leaderships</td>
<td>Participants identify the need for leadership.</td>
<td>Presentations, Group work, Group exercises, Open forum discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Qualities of leadership</td>
<td>Participants identify qualities of leadership.</td>
<td>Brains storming, Role plays</td>
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<td>Session 9</td>
<td>Can I be a leader?</td>
<td>Participants identify leadership qualities in themselves.</td>
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<td>First aid</td>
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**Day 3 Entrepreneurship Development and Know your Business**

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<th>Entrepreneur and the business</th>
<th>To generate an understanding of entrepreneurship to effect attitudinal changes among youth.</th>
<th>Introduction, Brainstorming, Group discussions, Handouts</th>
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<td>Session 12</td>
<td>Entrepreneur qualities</td>
<td>To generate interest in business</td>
<td>Business games, Discussions</td>
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<td>Counseling for generating business ideas among participants</td>
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<th>Identifying the world of work and the trends.</th>
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<td>Session 22</td>
<td>Women and Development</td>
<td>Generate an understanding of the role that women can play in development</td>
<td>Developing a profile of women’s contribution to development. Group activity</td>
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<td>Session 23</td>
<td>Violence against Women and women’s rights</td>
<td>Generate an understanding of violence against women and the laws and international laws to protect women</td>
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### Day 6 Reproductive Health & Awareness on HIV/AIDS

<p>| Session 24 | To generate an understanding of youth and sexuality | Brainstorming, Case studies, Group |</p>
<table>
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<th>Thematic Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Methodologies</th>
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<td><strong>Session 25</strong></td>
<td>Generate an understanding of sexually transmitted diseases.</td>
<td>Role plays, Drawings, Presentations, Group discussions, Hand outs, Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually transmitted diseases</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 26</strong></td>
<td>Inculcate an understanding of HIV/AIDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Printed materials, Pictures and paintings, Samples, Group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 28</strong></td>
<td>Identifying individual role and responsibilities of preventing HIV/AIDS and Sexual Transmitted Diseases</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention of Sexually transmitted die seas and HIV/AIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Day 7 Drugs Prevention and Panel Presentations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Session 29</strong></td>
<td>Drug prevention, alcoholism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drugs prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session 30</strong></td>
<td>Discussion with vocational training providers, VTA NAITA, Southern Development Authority, NYSC, JobsNet and WUSC regarding opportunities available for young people and how to access these opportunities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The thematic sessions formed the backbone of daily programming at a YITP workshop. They were carefully planned and well-designed in order to induce changes in YITP youth. Many of the modules used for the sessions were borrowed from WUSC vocational training projects and they had been tested, experimented and improved upon in order to suit the context of YITP as well as the life situations of YITP youth. They were born out of the rationale that contemporary Sri Lankan youth – especially the less-advantaged youth in transition – need to gain a set of knowledge and soft or practical skills to set smart goals for themselves and be prepared for the adult world. Given that the country’s formal education system was not providing such knowledge and skills to the youth (personal communications with YITP staff).

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9. WUSC’s vocational training project is based on the concept of a vocational training cycle. Within this vocational training cycle, youth trainees not only learn about the technical sides of their chosen vocations but also soft skills like life skills, entrepreneurial skills, gender (how to work with women and men in a respectful way and eliminate gender stereotypes about women in non-traditional trade e.g. electrical wiring, carpentry, motor mechanics etc), safety, HIV/AIDS etc. The purpose is to prepare youth in a more holistic integrative way for the adult working world.
staff), YITP would fill the gap and provide these relevant skill sets and attitudes to youth. YITP youth would be given the opportunities to 1) learn about themselves – their emotions, interests, career goals, leadership qualities, talents and hidden potentials; 2) learn about and practice ways of interacting and working with others – including peers, adults and opposite sex/gender 3) learn about means to protect themselves from drugs, diseases, violence, and negative emotions and 4) enact an optimistic outlook and a sense of direction for the future. Even though they might be a forgotten group in the society, YITP youth deserved quality services and support to help them be confident owners of their personal development and the development of their communities.

The thematic sessions were mainly carried out at classroom/lecture hall settings where assigned resource persons would use various teaching methodologies – e.g. interactive lectures, group works, group discussions, role plays, and games – to engage young people in a range of learning activities. They were to be complemented by other activities like outdoor/outward bound activities\(^\text{10}\), morning exercise & meditation, daily reflection & reviews, youth-led cultural performance & talent shows, and educational film-watching to enhance youth learning experiences at YITP. A full 7-day YITP workshop with thematic sessions and other activities combined would therefore follow a planned routine/schedule. Here, I present the summarized version of this schedule together with those common activities and components it normally entailed (Table 3). Certainly, this schedule was by no means fixed. Depending on the nature of the participants, their learning progress and dynamic, and the working styles/availability of the YITP staff and resource persons delivering the workshops, the schedule could change. However, the core components and structure would remain unaltered.

\(^{10}\) The idea of Outward Bound came from a German educator, Kurt Hahn, who felt that the classical school curriculum was inadequate to develop a well-rounded individual. Outward Bound activities/programs/trainings aim to foster the personal growth and social skills of participants by using challenging expeditions in the outdoors. They use experiential learning, that is, "learning-by-participating", which is a powerful tool for developing and sustaining critical attitudes, skills and behaviors. Outward Bound’s success is based on creating a dynamic and engaging environment in which participants take ownership for their learning and growth. The experiential learning process of "Plan, Do, Review and Apply" is as follows: Plan: The great outdoors resembles the changing and unpredictable world. Teams are presented with different challenging activities and problem-solving situations; Do: Through planning, doing, co-operation, support and encouragement, the close-knit teams experience a series of physical, mental and social challenges under the watchful eye of experienced trainers. However, none of the activities are beyond their capacity. Review: Sharing and reflection on behaviours, attitudes, feelings and results. Apply: Link and transfer those insights and discoveries to real-life situations for application (this succinct description of Outward Bound is adopted from the Hong Kong Outward Bound webpage n.d.). In YITP, the Outward Bound modules had been revised and improved to suit the context of YITP young men and women. Most of the time, those Outward Bound activities that challenged young people yet did not jeopardize their confidence and comfort level were carried out.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Subject/Activity</th>
<th>Objectives/Key Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrival Day/Day 0</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Upon Arrival at 6.pm</td>
<td>Registration, Orientation</td>
<td>- Self introduction through games</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- Matching expectations with objectives of the workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Pre-training assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Developing a profile of youth in the present society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction to outward bound activity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Appointing two day leaders (1 male, 1 female) for Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1 – Day 7</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00am – 8am</td>
<td>Meditation, Flag raising ceremony/assembly, Outdoor activities</td>
<td>- Reflective activities, stretching and physical exercises to maintain physical and mental health of youth</td>
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<td>- National anthem sung at the morning flag raising ceremony followed by leaders of the day giving “key note” speeches to the group.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- YITP resource persons share with youth their observations about the group behaviors, interactions and dynamic, and suggest areas in which the youth can work together to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00am – 8.45am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.00am – 9.30am</td>
<td>Evaluation/Review learning points from the day before, Thought for the day</td>
<td>- Refreshing youth’s memories of their learning at the workshop, and assessing their learning progress</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reminding young people of what to expect during the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30am – 12.30pm</td>
<td>Delivery of daily themes and sessions (with morning tea break in between)</td>
<td>- Involving youth in learning about life skills, leadership, First Aids, entrepreneurship, gender, career development, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30pm – 1.30pm</td>
<td>Lunch*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.30pm – 5.00pm</td>
<td>Continue the delivery of daily themes and sessions (with afternoon tea break in between)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5.00pm – 6.45pm | Outward Bound Training & outdoor activities relating to the themes of the day, Evening closing assembly | - An ideal Outward Bound Training would engage YITP in prescribed unfamiliar outdoor activities/games, along with a small group of team mates, who will face with a series of incremental, inter-related problem solving tasks (most probably relating to the themes of the day) that requires the team to come up with coping strategies in order to accomplish them. It is expected that youth master a set of competencies in the process and the cumulative effect of these experiences lead to a young people’s reorganization of self conception. With new insights, attitudes, knowledge and skills gained through Outward Bound, youth would continue to be positively oriented to further their learning and development experience during and after YITP (Walsh & Golins 1976).  
- Wound up at the closing assembly and appointing of leaders for the next day |
| 8.00pm – 10.00pm | Dinner followed by cultural performance, talent shows, singing sessions, debate sessions, pop quiz, and/or movies depending on the nature of the group |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 10.00pm       | Good Night                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

*Note: Day 7 is the departure day for YITP youth. Its thematic sessions (on drugs prevention) usually end before lunch. After lunch, youth have discussions with vocational training providers, various community based organizations, National Youth Services Council personnel and youth councilors to learn about post-YITP self-development and career opportunities. The day ends with the giving away of certificates, closing thank you notes and a workshop evaluation session.*

**YITP PERSONNEL: STAFFS AND RESOURCE PERSONS**

YITP staff and resource persons were the people who drove the YITP modus operandi. Without them, YITP was just a great idea on paper. At the time of research, the YITP project team was comprised of five staff members – team leader Mr. Hasitha, administration assistant Ms. Dilani, field-based coordinators
Ms. Vinaya, Mr. Jeevan and Mr. Omesh and Uncle Achila, the program’s chauffeur. The team was intergenerational with the eldest member around sixty years old and the youngest person in his twenties. In addition to the project team, approximately 20 resource persons were contracted to deliver specific components of YITP e.g. educational workshop sessions and outdoor activities.

Mr Hasitha’s main roles were to support the team, monitor the program process and oversee finances. When programs were being implemented at YITP workshops, he would usually visit them and stay there for a couple of days. According to Mr. Hasitha, he preferred to work in the field instead of at his Matara office not only because it was fun having direct interactions with youth participants, but also because he could give immediate support to the field coordinators.

As field-based coordinators, Ms Vinaya’s, Mr. Jeevan’s and Mr Omesh’s main responsibilities were to recruit, interview and select workshops participants, be at the workshops they were in charge of, make sure everything – logistics, workshop schedule – went according to plan, and write up program reports after each workshop was completed. They also conducted pre-workshop home visits to affirm to the parents that YITP was a safe program and that their children’s safety was guaranteed. The account from Mr Omesh showed what a field coordinator usually did and the kind of responsibilities they held at a YITP workshop: “During the workshop period, I make sure that food, rooms, workshop sessions are running smoothly. I have to ensure the security of the participants, check if the sessions at the workshop happen timely - when the food is coming, when the session should happen etc. Every morning and night, I will conduct reviews with the youth. The review session is to refresh participants’ memories of the previous day’s learning, it is also a form of evaluation. Usually the participants will see me as their father. Every night, I will wait until all participants switch off their lights, then go to bed.”

Of course, the YITP would not be running smoothly without the presence of some competent and dedicated resource persons. YITP resource people were assigned to deliver the thematic sessions and Outward Bound Training at the workshops. Some of these resource persons had been long term consultants for WUSC’s vocational training project in Sri Lanka and others were recruited based on their experiences and expertise working with youth and on the specific subject areas in YITP. Most resource persons were from the same areas where YITP youth come from and hence had basic understandings of the youth situation in the region.

6.3 “Youth Development” in YITP Modus Operandi and Personnel

11 I have used pseudonyms here to ensure their privacy.
12 Before a YITP workshop could take place, a series of activities including community outreach, parents’ awareness program, participants interviews and selections and if necessary, home visits, were carried out. Among these activities, great emphasis were put on out-reaching to parents as they tend to be the ones who gave permission for their sons and daughters to attend the YITP workshops. The purpose of home visits were as such, to more directly aware and affirm the parents about YITP’s programming.
During my fieldwork at YITP, I had the chance to ask the YITP staff and resource persons about their points of views of the program. I was curious to find out how they experienced YITP and perceived the program – both its strengths and weaknesses\(^\text{13}\). I was also concerned about the validity and reliability of my understanding of YITP, and thus wanted to crosscheck my research findings with. My numerous conversations with YITP staff and resource persons led me to realize, and later confirm that YITP was indeed a unique youth program in Sri Lanka (at least between 2006-2007 in Southern parts of the country). Triangulating YITP staffs’ and resource persons’ accounts with my own observations of the program and interviews with youth, I was able to identify the youth development program characteristics – as defined by various youth development theorists – of YITP. In fact, YITP showed many features of a youth development program that is tuned towards the needs of “at-risk,” “vulnerable,” “transitional” youth, according to the youth development literature. It was also a youth development program that was staffed by youth development personnel.

If we can recall our discussions on youth development in Chapter 1, a youth development program is a program that:

- Provides youth with **safe and supportive environments**
- Fosters **relationships between youth and caring adults**
- Supports development of youth’s **knowledge and skills in a variety of ways**
- Conducts activities that are primarily **non-academic focus**, using **active, experiential learning** methods, and through **group and one-to-one activities**.
- Conduct activities that encourage **youth participation in decision-making, program planning and evaluation**.
- Engages **youth as active partners and leaders** who can help move communities forward.
- Promotes **healthy lifestyles** and teaching **positive patterns of social interactions**.
- Is intentional, carried out by **consistent, competent and caring people** at safe and stimulating places

On the last note, Yohalem (2003:260-361) further says that a successful youth development professional necessarily possesses the following knowledge, skills, beliefs and characteristics that allows him/her to transform, influence and motivate youth in their transition to adulthood:

- The ability to build and sustain meaningful relationships with and on behalf of youth and

\(^{13}\)for the purpose of this thesis, I have largely discussed the strength/potentials of YITP; areas that need to be improved within YITP are mentioned in the end of this thesis.
 families

- An understanding of relevant theory (i.e. educational, ecological, social) and current cultural trends affecting youth
- The ability to create and maintain positive, safe learning experiences and environments in which youth have meaningful roles and responsibilities
- Is optimistic and sees youth as positive, productive contributors (or potential ones) rather than problems or liabilities
- Is consistent yet flexible
- Is passionate about their work and committed to young people.

In YITP, it is not hard to find all these criteria of a youth development program at work. One can compare them with the aforementioned YITP modus operandi and see them reflecting each other. Since it might take pages to provide all the evidence that support this comparison, I have decided to present the more crucial ones here. I will focus on showing the youth development elements, personnel and mechanism that have been commented on by YITP staffs, resource persons and youth as “uniquely” YITP.

**YOUTH-CENTERED CURRICULUM CONTENT THAT PERTAINS TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

According to YITP resource persons, one of the unique features of YITP was its program content. They constantly told me that a big difference between YITP and other youth programs in the country was the diverse subject matters it delivered in a workshop. Mr Dushantha for example said that “YITP is a good program because it touches on various subject matters. Other agencies are not really doing this.”

More importantly, these diverse subject matters were relevant to contemporary Sri Lankan youth and their development. Topics like life skills, leadership and gender were not taught in the formal school system, expressed Mr Dushantha and Ms Padmani, a gender resource person at YITP. Yet they were important because they built young people’s knowledge, attitude and skills to navigate their adulthood and function as socially aware and responsible citizen for the country. Ms. Padmani added on that and commented on YITP’s ability to show young people the “reality” in the society e.g. sex, pregnancy, child birth, violence against women, the values of motherhood (these topics were taught in Day 5 gender and development sessions). She felt that YITP were able to nurture a group of young people who could become change agents in their communities – important roles that future youth generation should play in the country. Mr. Dushantha re-emphasized that one of the lessons YITP can share with other youth programs is the program’s emphasis on covering “knowledge, skills and attitudes, everything together in the program … YITP teaches young people all three of these, very important.” In a country where there is a lack of venue of young girls and boys to learn about working together in mutual partnership, the YITP
curriculum with its emphasis on gender makes it all the more important in nurturing young people who would be aware of and overcome those gender stereotypes that might inhibit their personal development and well-being.

Finally, according to Sri Lankan scholars like Hettige and his colleagues (2004), professional guidance on career choices and development is an important service that needs to be given to Sri Lankan youth today as it helps them transit from school to work and be more employable/employed. Such guidance services nevertheless are still hugely lacking in the country. Yohalem and Pittman (2001) stressed the importance for youth development programs to provide career guidance to transition older youth, (YITP youth fit the writers’ definition of transition older youth. They are between 16-19 years old, school drop outs, and demonstrate characteristics of “vulnerability” as defined by Yohalem and Pittman), emphasizing that good career preparation would greatly help these young people develop and thrive in the society. YITP, with its curriculum content that emphasizes career guidance and development (Day 3), reflected well this need and relevance to deliver career guidance to Sri Lankan youth, especially older young people in transition. In short, YITP’s ability to provide timely support, advice, services and opportunities to YITP youth who were in “multiple-transitions” and critical life-junctures made it a significant youth development program to be noted in the country.

**SEQUENCE OF DAILY THEMES/SESSIONS COMBINED WITH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

Another unique quality of YITP is the thematic sequence in its curriculum. What’s more, the ways and methods this thematic sequence was carried out – through active, experiential learning using interactive lectures, group activities, outdoor/outward bound training – were repeatedly highlighted as a strength of YITP by its staff and resource persons. Below is an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Mr Hasitha, asking him about the thematic sequence and learning activities at YITP:

**Y:** The sequences of the program ... why do you put life skills in the beginning and certain activities, in a certain sequence?

**H:** Well you see, this is in general, a personal development program. That's how I feel. When you are doing a personal development program, we must let [youth] know, who am I ... So Life Skills is very important. Once he understands his potential, his ability, general ability, so he/she can start from that stage. That's why we put Life Skills there [Day 1]. Then at that time [Day 1 Life Skill sessions], he comes to know about the human being, as a human being, what are the qualities, what are the potentials within him, and what are the feelings, how to manage the feeling, that's the first day. So, once you understand all those things, we are taking him to the leadership [Day 2], every where when you are living within your life time,
once a while you have to be a leader, even within the family, outside the family, even when you are going on a bus sometimes you have to be a leader. So we let them know about the leadership quality also, and the qualities they identify first day are carried out further and developed. So that will go on like that. Then normally, we are talking about what's called, career guidance [Day 3]. From life skills, they will understand about the life goals, and then leadership, then for every men and women need a career goal, so we are taking them towards the career goal, and it is attended with [an] individual action plan ... you can find when they are preparing their career goal, you find there are people who want to do vocational training, self-employment, then (A-side tape finished)

**Y:** so you focused more on entrepreneurship ... 

**H:** Next day [Day 4]. Yeah. So the people who chose the self employment [as their career choice] will be aware of the entrepreneur quality [on Day 4 Entrepreneurship sessions]. And besides that, the skills and the characteristics of entrepreneurship like creativity (unclear, phrases omitted, I think Mr Hasitha tried to say that entrepreneurial qualities like creativity, risk taking, ability to network with others are skills that all youth should possess no matter whether they want to be self-employed or not. Hence Day 4 sessions were catered towards this need) ... This is the main impact. These subject matters [life skills, leadership, entrepreneurship etc] gain we are putting [them] to practical life, for example, through the out door activities. And the youth are very very happy to engage in outdoor activities, because what they learn at the day, they can realize from that – whether thy have ability to do it with the group within the real [life] situation.

**Y:** They can test it out (H: test it out), and also see if they can do that (H: they can do) ... And how bout the design of the gender and development course [Day 4]?

**H:** Then we are going to the gender and development because sometimes actually, these young children are the people who can aware about the gender. Because even though we aware the old people about the gender, they don't listen no? The traditional thinking within the brain... But with these people [young people], we can aware them and let them know how to give recognition for the female. And the lecturers are also very very fine. Actually they start it as a mother level. So it is very effective. Because everyone ... we are born because of our mother no? So once you remind them about the mothers, they will think about that ...

**Y:** Putting it on the fifth day, do you think that's the best day for the gender and development?
H: Yeah yeah, that's the best day. Because they have already prepared their target. So now they know about the gender. Then we are going for other sessions like reproductive health, drug addiction and all those things. So the sequence is there.

In addition to Mr Hasitha, resource person Mr Prasad said more about the unique experiential learning/teaching methods within YITP and their significance in Sri Lanka. According to him, “Other trainings [in the region] only focus on lectures and group discussions. This training – YITP – has outdoor activities and they correspond to the lecture [youth] learned on a particular day. In these activities, young people apply what they have learnt in the lectures and gauge if certain characteristics mentioned in the lectures [leadership, teamwork] exist in them or not. Having all these learning activities combined in a 7-day residential program is very good for the youth. [At the moment], only NYSC has residential programs. But their programs are not 7 days. YITP workshops, with its length of training, [is] very advantageous for trainees [or youth].”

In short, from both Mr Hasitha’s and Mr Prasad’s account, we learn that there are some great synergies happening between YITP sequential themes and their delivery methods. The YITP curriculum content, sequentially designed as Life Skills ➔ Leadership/First Aid ➔ Career Development ➔ Entrepreneurial Skills ➔ Gender and Development ➔ Reproductive Health/HIV-AIDS ➔ Drugs Prevention ➔ Forwarding Mechanism (youth connected to future career and community development opportunities); and the experiential methods of learning emphasizing learners’ participation, sharing, processing, analyzing, and applying the understandings gained on these thematic subjects, had promoted learning and competence in life skills critical for the healthy development of YITP youth.

Several observations at the YITP workshops had allowed me to find out the mechanisms that underlined those synergies between YITP’s curriculum content and experiential design. They also touched upon the nature of a youth development program.

First, a safe and supportive space had to be nurtured right at the beginning of the workshop with YITP adults expressing their high expectations of youth and stressing the importance for them to participate actively, share with and respect each other in the workshop. Adult’s high expectations of youth allowed young people to feel that they were counted on and valued as dignified and resourceful human beings. Youth’s ability to share with and disclose themselves with each other enhanced the safeness and youth’s interaction within the program.

Then, opportunities had to be created for youth to be engaged in a series of “learn-by-doing” activities, where they experienced tasks that were unfamiliar to them and pushed them beyond their comfort zones (these opportunities could be seen in group-work/problem solving activities and outward bound training). Because caring adults and safe environments (with understanding peers) had already
been in place, youth were less afraid of failing or falling behind. They would try to challenge themselves, initiate something new, overcome those uncomfortable situations and further develop their skills, knowledge and attitudes during the 7-day workshop. Throughout the process, YITP staff and resource persons were constantly present to guide the youth in sharing, reflecting, discussing, generalizing and applying their learning in planned, structured and safe environments.

Finally, the degree of synergy within a YITP workshop depended on: 1) the bonding between YITP adults and youth: If adults and youth developed rapport and trusted each other, the youth development process at the workshops would be more successful; 2) the bonding among YITP youth, especially how both girls and boys could work together in a supportive, interactive and respectful ways, and 3) each young person’s motivation to apply “theoretical knowledge” into “practice.” For example, in a workshop where all youth were excited about connecting the conceptual ideas they learned on Day 1 and Day 2 (setting goals, working as a team, exercising leadership, managing emotions) to actual practices like interacting with peers and solving problems at various group-work exercises, the workshop turns itself into a more stimulating environment for young people to engage in self development. The texts below present three scenes observed during my fieldwork at YITP workshops which I hope can illuminate some of the discussed mechanisms for synergy.

**Scene 1: YITP adult’s trust and high expectation of youth on the first day of workshop, emphasizing the importance of active participation**

Around 7.45pm, welcoming session started. Throughout the introduction, Ms. Vinaya, the Galle YITP workshop coordinator, was like a big sister. She was stern yet friendly. In front of everyone, she introduced WUSC-SL, and talked about the history of the program. Ms. Vinaya asked the participants to actively participate in the next few days of programming. Asked them to share. She asked the youth to identify their aims: "We give chances for you to identify your aims and life skills.” In ending her talk, she told the youth, “Please remember that we are all between the ages of 16 and 20. We can't stay like this all the time. We will change from youth to being adult. We will grow up. We have to find permanent life foundation. When we grow up, we will have more responsibility and will need to be more responsible. Don't waste life time. There are barriers of course, we will point out the way but you need to take the action and go for your way.” Ms Vinaya told the students that the YITP was a golden opportunity for them. It's very important that they took the opportunity to learn as much as they could. Finally, she hoped that on the last day of the workshop, they all could be new persons.

**Scene 2: YITP adult’s held high expectations of youth on the first day of workshop, set up a safe
environment and encouraged young people to do so by themselves
7.30pm Mr. Prasad, the outdoor activity couch, introduced the Ice-Breaker activity. It was a game that allowed participants to move around and introduce each other. Participants had to find their partners through pairing pieces of torn papers. They had to draw each other’s portraits and ask each other questions about themselves and their background. Some boys were shy when they realized that their partners were girls.

Participants were then asked to go to the front to present their partner to the rest of the group. Movements were going on. Somebody’s hand was shaking when presenting his partner. After allowing youth to finish their introduction of their partners, Mr. Prasad started speaking. He said during the session, one weakness he observed was that some people would laugh at the presentation. This was not right. When others’ spoke, the rest had to respect them. Mr. Prasad then mentioned that we were one nation, one family at the workshop. We shouldn’t see each others differently and laugh at each others’ actions. Some people drew picture carelessly and this was disrespectful to others. The hall was quiet. (Mr Prasad’s respecting-each-other “advice” had played a role in setting a respectful, positive environment for other activities that followed up. Mr Prasad was quick to point out youths’ mistakes, engage them in thinking about their performance, and told them the kinds of attitudes and behaviors they should have during the rest of the workshop.)

Scene 3: Youth reflect, share, discuss, and generalize learning experiences under the guidance of YITP adult and through this, engaged in development & growth
Around 9.20pm, the life skill session started. As usual, Mr Sampath was there for the life-skill session. He introduced a bit about himself, his background, the YITP program and then asked the youth “What are life skills.” (Mr. Sampath asked youth to brainstorm but there was no response from the students) He reminded the participants that as young people, they had to speak and be active. He asked the question again and youths said that life skills are associated with experience in life, and are about ability. Mr Sampath said that in 2007, the education system in Sri Lanka had a big change. In general, students were lacking communication, interpersonal, leadership, and thinking skills as well as conflict resolution skills. No proper attention had been put into improving these areas. There was an effort to improve this (e.g. YITP).

That said, the first session was about self-disclosure. The youths were to understand themselves, their skills and weaknesses. “We will be talking not only ourselves, but deeply about our skills, capabilities as well as our weaknesses … Your life is like a book. There are cases, incidents, events, characteristics, conflicts, happy and sad moments. We can create 25 novels with 25 life stories. You should now write your story as if you are writing a novel. From people's life story, you can learn
from each other and share skills with each other,” explained Mr Sampath in a gentle, fatherly way. (Youth wrote their life stories and shared them with their peers. Some youth were sobbing after telling their stories)

After the round presentation, Mr Sampath asked them what they had learned. They said they were able to learn from each other. Now, they knew each other closer than before. Because of this, they were closer to each other. Now they understand each other’s experience, each other's background in such a little time. They realize that they have experienced quite a lot of things, some positive and others negative. They could get much experience from this session. First time, they understand each other's feeling. They were very happy to get the opportunity by participating. It's important to get together and share.

Before the session ended, a female participant stood to the front and shared further her stories. She was telling about how she was able to overcome her life challenge. She encouraged her peers to not to be afraid and be brave.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION
Besides practicing youth development in its curriculum, YITP made sure that it involved young people in its program design, implementation and evaluation. In this case, youth were seen as youth-development partners and leaders.

According to Mr Hasitha, YITP ex-participants or graduates were often invited to the annual program review sessions. There, they were encouraged to give their comments about how the program could be improved. Similarly, at the end of every YITP workshops, YITP youth were asked to evaluate the program. Their recommendations and suggestions would be incorporated into future YITP programming.

In many YITP workshops, YITP graduates were also involved in delivering the 7-day workshop programming. Their perspectives, personal network and leadership abilities were valued and used to improve the efficiency and impacts of the program. During my participant-observation at YITP Galle workshop, I often saw YITP graduates assisting the workshop coordinator in supervising the flow of the week. Having participated in a workshop before, they owned a wealth of experience and resources which the current participants could refer to and learn from. As the graduates were about the same age like other participants, they helped bridge the communication gap between the adult workshop coordinator and the youths that might be due to cultural and generational differences. In a workshop, the YITP graduates not only lightened the work load of the workshop coordinator, but also found a space to exercise their leadership and interpersonal skills through serving as the role model to their peers.
In addition, it was said that YITP graduates had been extra helpful in recruiting youths for the program at times when there was less institutional support in the district. “Ex-participants, they are there. Because that's their strength … normally ex-participants will recommend their friends, even for their sisters and brothers to come for this program. [When there is a lack of participants] she [Ms. Vinaya] gives call to ex-participants like can you bring from this area, this is the area our target people from this area, you go there and find this and this waiting list participants and bring them here,” said Mr. Hasitha.

All in all, YITP youth had been largely treated as partners in YITP decision-making, program planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

**CONSISTENT, COMPETENT AND CARING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSONNEL**

Within YITP, it was not hard to see “optimistic,” “consistent yet flexible” and “passionate” adults working with youth. Some of my discussions thus far have shown such characteristics in YITP staffs and resource persons. Indeed, to ensure the success of the program and that young people could return home with a new sense of self and future, the staff members and resource persons worked hard to build positive, safe and transformational-learning environments for YITP youth to be the owners of their personal and community development. They in many ways met the “youth development professional” standards described by Yohalem 2003. During my fieldwork in Sri Lanka, I learned that:

1) **YITP adults were committed to build confidence in youth:** Almost all YITP staffs and resource persons who I interviewed were aware of the main goal of the program – to build confidence in youth (regardless whether they were affected by Tsunami, “at-risk” or from disadvantaged backgrounds). They not only articulated this awareness in words during interviews, but also made sure that the confidence-building endeavors with youth were “mainstreamed” in every stage of YITP programming. To them, YITP youth’s confidence needs to be built because it served as a buffering wall that protects young people during times of difficulties and transition.

   One of the ways YITP personnel built confident YITP youth was through creating friendly and safe environments that encouraged youth to participate actively and challenge themselves with tasks that they had never done before, supported them to accomplish these tasks and led YITP youth to realize their hidden potentials and feel good about themselves (e.g. Day 1 self-disclosure session). They also made sure that those elements that would thwart youth’s confidence were removed from the program so that a real positive space could be made for youth to enact a sense of self-worthiness.

   Resource person Mr Prasad for example told me that a confident-building program like YITP needs to consider even the smallest detail like the issue of “clothing” if it hopes to truly empower youth. According to him, there still exists a rich-poor gap among YITP participants and this is shown in the ways
young people dress. When the have and have-not compared with each other materialistically, it is easier for the less well-off to get frustrated. To him, YITP youth’s self-esteem would be best fostered when all components of the program, no matter how minor they are, gear towards building it. Clothing that does not jeopardize youth’s self-esteem should be encouraged for consistent confidence-building in youth. Mr Prasad reminded me of YITP adults’ awareness and commitment to build confidence in youth.

2) **YITP adults saw young people as assets, cared about them and trusted them with expectations and responsibilities:** Among YITP personnel, there was a general recognition that young people are the assets of the country and their voices and opinions are valuable. YITP personnel believed that if they looked at youth positively, they would also behave positively. Seeing youth positively also meant trusting their abilities in fulfilling important roles and responsibilities and making decisions.

   Hence within YITP, youth were given important tasks to carry out such as being the daily leaders, making their own tea, washing their own dishes and clothes, and organizing cultural shows. While letting young people to take up important roles and responsibilities, YITP adults did not forget to guide them in the process and give them constructive advice about how to further improve their performance and skills. In general, they wanted young people to believe in themselves, develop their own potential yet feel that they could always turn to somebody for help, support and a second chance; they were never let alone in YITP.

   One main lesson that YITP adults learned during the programming was the significance of treating YITP youth as their sons and daughters and showing their genuine care towards them. Ms Vinaya, the Galle field-based coordinator for example, emphasized the importance of creating close relationships with young people at a YITP workshop. “Talk to them like a mother,” she said, “after building the trusts among each other, young will come up with their feelings.” It was through understanding the inner world of the YITP youth that adults could deliver better services in support of youth. Also, YITP adults knew the value of being youthful when interacting with YITP young people. Mr Prasad for instance, told me that “always when he works, he doesn’t think himself as higher than youth. He tries to give advice to youth but always behave like youth.” Such willingness to understand and make themselves closer to youth was constantly felt and appreciated by YITP participants. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

3) **YITP created & maintained a vibrant institutional dynamic that led to smooth and effective programming:** YITP had a very vibrant institutional dynamic characterized by mutual collaboration, great team and high team spirits between YITP staff and resource persons. Throughout my fieldwork at YITP, I often noticed the support and constant feedback YITP personnel gave to each other so that a high
quality program could be delivered for the benefits of YITP youth. In fact, YITP staffs and resource persons worked so closely with each other that they often called themselves a YITP family.

YITP personnel were also given lots of freedom to carry out their tasks and be creative in delivering the program workshops, as long as all efforts geared towards meeting the objectives of YITP programming. The importance of YITP personnel having freedom to create and “own” YITP was emphasized by the team leader Mr Hasitha, as he said “if a staff member understands the main objectives, if his/her style does not harm the objectives, it’s better to give the freedom to work … so they will work freely, and creatively.”

Due to positive spirits, atmosphere and relationships at the institutional level of YITP, YITP programming was able to be effectively carried out. YITP personnel felt a strong sense of belonging to and ownership of the program. Mr Hasitha was especially pleased about YITP resource persons’ acknowledgement of the values of YITP. He said, “The resource people that come here [YITP], normally start telling the participants about the importance of YITP [even though they are not working full time for YITP but just as consultants]. They also have some kind of recognition regarding YITP. That is a good trend, because everyone is on the same line achieving the target. Even Mr. Miran, he is from NYSC, at the beginning and end of his session, he told the youth that they will never get this type of activity [YITP] from anywhere else. Even if he is working at NYSC, which provides services for the youth, he said, this [YITP] is the only program [where youth] can get this type of information and this type of quality program [YITP]. So he is also praising it. So that is a good trend among the resource person.”

Certainly, a kind of community of practice was happening among YITP staffs and resource persons that boosted up their enthusiasm and commitment to working at YITP and with young people. What’s more, when such passion for their work got translated into a series of programming actions that impacted young people positively, and when youth showed their gratitude and appreciation towards their YITP teachers’ guidance in return, YITP staff and resource persons felt a higher degree of motivation to dedicate themselves in serving youth and making a difference in them. Indeed, there seems to be a positive transaction between YITP youth and adults that led to the development and well-being of both groups. The adult/professional development of YITP staff and resource persons was linked tightly to the personal development of YITP youth. An interview account from Mr Hasitha puts this mutual adult-youth relationship nicely in words. I will end this section with his views and I show how youth development characteristics of YITP can never be complete without YITP adults and youth influencing each other in programming:

**Y:** The most significant part of YITP ...
**H:** As a person I have a sense of satisfaction, because what I'm doing, what I'm engaged in, is giving some kind of good result (smile on face). So it gives some kind of self-satisfaction for myself.

**Y:** Like the motivation and then to see the young people really going towards...

**H:** ...a good path or a good direction. And when I die I can be with (jokes, couldn't hear clearly)

**Y:** You have lots of children hahaha

**H:** (raises voice) And we happy, actually it's a good. Sometimes I think about there is only a short time for me to live no? So when I'm dying, I can remember all those things and that's a merit for me. It's a pleasure for me.

**Y:** When you look at the young people engaged and, you feel happy yourself?

**H:** Of course. It's like my own sons and daughters. Something like that.

**Y:** So that definitely is also one thing that you feel about the program.

**H:** Next thing is that when we meet on the way, they will say sir I'm doing this thing, so it's very happy moment. Because we see, I can see that there is something, there is something ... how can I say it ... important advantage from the YITP. It's a good advantage, especially for young people.

**Y:** And that's something that really motivates you.

**H:** Of course, that's why most of the time, I try to do it, within my capacity I'm trying to do it accurately. The motivation itself came from them, they motivate me ...

**Y:** So we see this interaction and interrelationship between the youth and the YITP group and staff and resource persons, everybody is like interacting with each other, including ...

**H:** Of course, of course, even at the leadership training, they [resource persons] are also using more methods, more more more more improved methods to deliver their components [they are very motivated to get involved in YITP]

4) YITP organizing team established good relationships with parents and community members that enhanced the functioning of the program as well as community youth development: YITP organizing team was aware that for YITP to produce the results it wanted to see, it needed the support from the communities – parents, local governmental and non-governmental organizations. Hence, the YITP staff made sure that a local support network was established, not only for outreach and recruiting young people for the program but also to ensure that after finishing the program, YITP youth continued to be supported and to develop in their lived communities.

Before a workshop could take place, YITP staff would build up their rapport with parents as they were largely the ones who gave permission for their sons and daughters to attend the YITP workshops.
YITP staff learned that communicating and building trustful relationships with Sri Lankan parents was important, especially in getting enough female participants for the program\textsuperscript{14}. In addition, to ensure that the impacts of a YITP workshop were sustained among its participants for a longer term, YITP staff would form collaborations with other youth services and organizations in the community that would keep track of YITP graduates’ developmental needs. Some of these services and organizations like JobsNet and National Youth Services Council have large networks and contacts that could provide or link YITP graduates with further youth development and/or career opportunities. It was hoped that young people’s development would not only stop at the end of the program, but carry on in the community.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the youth-development theoretical foundation of YITP’s program model. I have shown that between 2006 and 2007 as I carried out my research, YITP was indeed a youth development program that was based on the philosophical orientations of positive and community youth development (PYD and CYD). As such, both the program’s modus operandi and personnel reflected and practiced a set of youth development criteria that have been intellectually recognized for promoting development and well-being among youth.

During my fieldwork, I was constantly told that the program was unique and valuable because there were not many other programs like this in the country – serving transitional young men and women between the ages of 16 and 19, through a co-ed, 7-day residential workshop, and delivering a series of subject matters that were extremely relevant and conducive to the well-being of Sri Lankan youth, with a combination of experiential learning methods and activities. It seems that YITP program model might be significantly meaningful to the youth development scene in Sri Lanka, not only in the southern parts but also other regions in the country. To affirm the magnitude of YITP in Sri Lanka, we certainly need to understand the kinds of impacts YITP had on youth. The next chapter is therefore dedicated to understanding young people’s meanings and experiences of YITP and the program’s implications on their development. It also tries to capture a locally produced youth development meaning desired and aspired by youth.

\textsuperscript{14} This was because under the Sri Lankan context, many parents – if not informed properly – would feel reluctant to let their daughters participate in a residential and co-ed program conducted by a foreign NGO. Given that female youth deserve equal opportunities for self-development, it was considered important to build relationship with parents and understand their concerns.
Chapter 7
Youth’s Meanings of “Youth Development” – Reflections of their Experiences During and After YITP

“Tell them about us in Sri Lanka!”~ Matara youth

“Maybe, develop the program [YITP], maybe through WUSC, schools, other institutions, with the government...there are other youth in the country like us [in similar situations], so give this program to more youth.”~ Balapitiya youth

Our discussion of YITP and its implications on youth development in Sri Lanka would be incomplete if it does not invite its youth’s inputs. After all, it is the YITP young people who had the most updated perspectives on their developmental needs and the ways YITP had been able to meet these.

A review of YITP’s official reports in the years of 2006 and 2007 shows that the program had been consistent in achieving its program objectives – to increase youth’s confidence, promote a sense of community responsibility in youth and to build their linkages to further career and personal development opportunities. Many of them mentioned youth’s positive feedbacks about the program – “YITP has helped me to establish my targets,” “Worn out my past life, had no aim, but now I have an aim which gives me self-satisfaction,” “After YITP, now I can face any challenge & do anything,” “YITP chased our fears away,” “It developed my mind with positive attitudes,” and “YITP turned a new page in our lives.” The 2007 program proposal also stated the kinds of activities YITP youth were engaged in after the workshops: “Overall more than 60% of the trainees [i.e. YITP youth] used the knowledge and skills obtained during the program within three months of the end of the program [in 2006]. Many of them were engaged in developing their career path – taking vocational training courses, pursuing higher studies, working as employees or starting their own businesses. Many also left the program with a strong sense of community responsibility – more than 50% of ex-trainees [YITP youth] were involved in community development work, i.e. secretary of the Samudi Children’s Society, member of an NGO tree planting project, member of the filarial and drug prevention program” (YITP Phase II Proposal for Unicef; n.d: 3-4). Certainly, the YITP reports have given us an encouraging picture of YITP and its impacts on YITP youth. However, what’s missing in them were the reasons explaining why young people felt what they felt – e.g. fearless, satisfied, transformed – during the workshop and did what they did after YITP. No
In this chapter, I seek to explore the reasoning behind youth’s opinions about YITP. Specifically, I would like to find out youth’s understandings of their experiences during and after YITP workshops. I show that as young people reflected upon their important YITP moments during interviews, and interacted with and acted upon their life’s world in various post-YITP settings, they produced a meaning of “youth development” exclusively young-people owned. Such meaning not only signifies YITP’s short term impacts (during workshop) and long term impacts (after workshop) on the young people, but also informs the larger notion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka and what youth development in Sri Lanka should entail. In many ways, young people’s perception of their experiences during and after YITP gives us a contextual/local understanding of YITP’s youth developmental needs that could be used for future youth development endeavors in the country. The first half of this chapter presents youth’s meanings of their experiences during the workshop and their connections to a set of youth development outcomes and principles. The second half of the chapter talks about young people’s experiences after YITP and their implications on the Sri Lankan youth development scene.

7.1 Youth’s Experiences during YITP and their Meanings of Youth Development

Field Diary November 3, 2006 – the day before departure from the Galle Workshop: Outward Bound Training

Sun was setting. 24 young participants, girls and boys, gathered at the usual evening site, for their last fun game at the Youth in Transition Project (YITP) workshop. Coach, Mr. Wasantha, divided the young peoples into two groups. Each group was given some PVC tubes and “pabalu” (glass pebbles). Team members were to work together and pass all the gulils through the PVC tubes, under the conditions that only one hand from each person could be used for manipulating the PVC tubes and pebbles. All pebbles had to travel through all the tubes. The more pebbles group members were able to get from one end to another, the more successful the group was. After six days of learning and practicing team building, leadership, communication and personal development skills, the game expected these young people to utilize all the knowledge, skills and attitudes they had gained since the beginning of the workshop into practice. Mr Wasantha was there to observe how the groups plan and accomplish the task assigned. He would not say a word nor give a hint. The stage was theirs today, to demonstrate their learning progress at the YITP workshop through pebbles and tubes.

15 I have edited the note (mainly grammar) to make it more presentable.
I stood aside quietly, eyes moved from the tubes, to my young friends, to Mr Wasantha, back to the tubes. Time passed, ten minutes, fifteen minutes... Some boys began to show signs of impatience and frustration on their face but they tried to calm themselves down. Both groups were able to pass a couple of pebbles through the tubes, though there were still a lot to go.

I realized that the game tested the youths’ persistence, patience and concentration besides their ability to work as teams. Like my friends, I yearned to see more peebles coming out from the end of the tubes. Those boys became agitated in the middle of the game. Having stayed with the group from the first day, I understood why those boys became inpatient (very complicated reasons...)

It was getting dark and mosquitoes started to bite ferociously.

Mr Wasantha called an end to the “fun game” and gathered the youths for a debriefing session. The session went alright with youth participants reflecting upon their performance and pointing out areas to improve, until Ajith burst out crying and the rest of the group followed. Ajith’s and a few other boys’ crying became more severe during the next one hour while the girls wept. Ajith’s cry was filled with pain and agony – from howling, to breathless crying to sobbing. The atmosphere of the workshop was so intense and sad as if somebody had just passed away.

Mr Wasantha and the workshop coordinator, Miss Vinaya, tried to stop the group from crying. It took them around three hours to ease the tensions. However, the crying happened on and off again that night and the day after.

I learned later that the young people cried because they felt too sad to part with each other as the workshop was coming to an end. Miss Vinaya told me that it was hard for the young people to say goodbye because they have been living in a safe haven for the past few days. Leaving meant returning to their normal living environment where conditions were not necessarily conducive to their well-being.

At the dinner table I found the food hard to swallow. There were too many questions, emotions, and thoughts about the YITP workshop in my stomach that held me back from enjoying my rice and curry. The shock from the crying scene was lingering in my head. I was equally sad and bothered by the friends’ crying. I wanted somebody to tell me what had happened at the workshop that made the young people so emotionally attached, why they cried so hard, why a person like me who hadn’t even participated so fully in the workshop ended up crying like them?

Before I could digest everything, I was fed by my friends with mouthfuls of rice from their plates. Miss Vinaya told me that usually people do this in their families on special occasions to show affinity and affection to each other. I felt honored to be recognized as a member of the YITP youth family...
Upon bidding my friends farewell, I told myself and my friends that this YITP workshop would not be the end but only the beginning - beginning of new friendships, goals, aspirations, commitments and opportunities to them, as well as me.

There is a deep symbolic meaning in young people’s arrival at and departure from YITP. To many YITP youth, coming to YITP meant entering a safe space where they would learn and grow, cry and laugh, fall and be picked up again, dance and sing, meet new “true” friends and be guided by caring adults. Leaving YITP meant having to leave a safe environment and part with a group of friends they had learned to share everything with during a 7-day workshop. The crying scene described above was said to be one of the most significant incidents during YITP’s 2006 programming in Galle. As far as resource person Mr Wasantha could remember, it was the most extreme case where youth cried so hard during the last few days of the program. In other YITP settings, young people might cry at the end of the workshop but never as hard. Crying not withstanding, the key questions we should ask are: What made YITP youth cry on the last few days of the YITP workshops? What made them feel so attached to the program? Was it because of their incredible experiences during YITP that made them feel hard to say goodbye to the program? If yes, what kinds of experiences had they had to have such feelings towards YITP?

In many interviews with YITP youth, I asked them to describe to me their general experiences and what they had learned during the workshop, their feelings on the first day of the workshop, YITP moments when they felt they had changed personally, and their unforgettable memories during the 7-day program. Analyzing their responses, I discern an interesting pattern. Basically, youth’s YITP experiences can be summarized and categorized into two main themes:

1) Experiences at YITP = Learning
2) Experiences at YITP = Transformation/Change/Growth

Below, I elaborate on these youth’s experiences at the program and show how they were understood by youth themselves.

**Learning**

YITP in essence is an educative program that hopes to impart a series of skills, knowledge and attitudes to youth to help their transition into adulthood. It is therefore not surprising to hear young people expressing their YITP experiences in terms of learning. Table 4 shows how YITP youth from five randomly picked
YITP workshops measured their learning experience/outcomes at YITP\textsuperscript{16}. As we can see, most youth found themselves grasping the concepts YITP tried to inculcate in them at either a great extent or a satisfactory level.

Table 4: 132 Youth’s feedback on the last day of their participation at 5 randomly selected YITP 2006 workshops - Weligama, Balapitiya, Bentota, Ambalntota, Tissa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Points</th>
<th>☺☺</th>
<th>☺</th>
<th>☹</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to identify my life skills potentials</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to set goal/s for my life</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt how to face challenges in my life</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew what qualities I should have when working in a</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt who is a leader and what qualities a leader</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to look at myself and identify my leader</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt what is a business and what entrepreneurial</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualities a potential business person should have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to identify my entrepreneurial qualities</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to learn whether I could become a successful entrepreneur or not</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt about the world of work and different posts available</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{16} This data was emailed to me by YITP staff (January 8, 2008) and was adopted from YITP’s program reports.
| I learnt what knowledge, skills and experience I should have in entering into the job market | 108 | 24 | 132 |
| I learnt what can I look for according to my education, skills and experience | 115 | 17 | 132 |
| I learnt how to face an interview | 117 | 15 | 132 |
| I learnt how to use ‘nets’ when looking for employment | 56 | 70 | 06 | 132 |
| **Women, gender and development** |  |  |  |
| I understood the difference between women and gender | 108 | 24 | 132 |
| I increased my knowledge about attitudes towards women in the society | 103 | 29 | 132 |
| I learnt about violence against women | 82 | 47 | 3 | 132 |
| These sessions helped me in changing my attitudes towards women | 80 | 51 | 01 | 132 |
| I learnt that both men and women have equal rights and both their contribution to development is equally important | 107 | 25 | 132 |
| **Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS** |  |  |  |
| The sessions taught me about youth, reproductive health and sex | 104 | 28 | 132 |
| I learnt about myths relating to sex and sexuality | 105 | 26 | 01 | 132 |
| I learnt about HIV/AIDS and myths relating to HIV/AIDS | 95 | 36 |  | 132 |
| I learnt how to prevent from STD and HIV/AIDS | 106 | 26 |  | 132 |
| **First Aid** |  |  |  |
| **Outdoor activities** |  |  |  |
| Interesting | 126 | 06 | 132 |
| Useful | 127 | 05 | 132 |
| **I actively participated throughout** | 111 | 21 | 132 |
The table shows that young people were generally impressed by their learning at YITP and felt that they had gained something useful in all the topic areas, and especially in life skills (more than 105 youth out of 132 expressed their satisfaction). Youth also found outdoor activities interesting and useful. The data presented reflect many youth’s accounts I have collected during research at YITP. For example, youth often mentioned how enjoyable the outdoor activities and lectures on goal setting, leadership and team works are. They emphasized that learning in YITP is unique because it is “hands-on” and “practical.” They were happy to learn “extra-knowledge” that is not learned in their schools during the workshop. As they said, “Most things in school are in theory but here [YITP], we learn them practically. ‘Extra knowledge’ helps us go for our goals in the future.”

However, what the table does not show are the other learning activities that were also experienced by YITP youth in a 7-day workshop. The youth who spent their precious time sharing their learning stories with me said that besides practical/life skills e.g. leadership, team work, managing emotion etc. they learned about “how to behave as a good person,” “how to change, correct their mistakes and constantly improve themselves,” “how to put theoretical knowledge into action,” “social interactions with opposite gender and sexes,” “values in life,” and “self-worth” in YITP. Another important lesson they also learned, after interacting with each other in a group setting, is that “they are all humans [all youth girls and boys] and therefore are equal in that sense.” Krishanthi for example said, “In the beginning of the program, girls talked about their problems, boys about theirs, but now, we both share problems with each other. We realize we are all humans.” According to youth, they discovered such deep connection among themselves especially after Day 1 self disclosure session at the workshop. Having shared their personal life stories with each other, young people learned that each of them is unique yet similar in many ways. They learned that as humans, they all make mistakes and face barriers in life. But they all demonstrate strengths in meeting life’s challenges. They understood that only through learning each others’ strong points and helping each other improve their weaknesses can they move forward as a human being and as a team at YITP.

Of course, one should realize that there exist variations within youth’s learning experiences at YITP. Sometimes, a young person who does not participate actively in a workshop finds him/herself getting less out of the program. Other times, a person who has had past experience in a life-skills based workshop like YITP find learning at YITP less refreshing. The quality and dynamic of teaching and learning within a workshop further determines and differentiates young people’s learning experience at YITP.

Despite the variations, young people in general appreciated how learning was “so fun,” “active,” “relevant,” and “special” at YITP. They constantly told me that learning at YITP is different from that at their formal schools. As young people were asked to further tell me the reasons for these differences,
they, without realizing, developed their own meaning and furthered their understanding of YITP. I have captured the youth’s accounts about YITP in the table below. They ultimately represent how YITP youth perceived their own developmental and learning needs.

Table 5: Young people define YITP and their developmental and learning needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning in a School Classroom</th>
<th>Learning at YITP Perceived Developmental/Learning Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not allow boys and girls to express themselves freely</td>
<td>YITP allows, in fact, encourages boys and girls to interact and express themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge concentrating on theories and books</td>
<td>Knowledge that learned apply to life, practical and theoretical knowledge coexist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Co-operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s learned goes into the brain</td>
<td>What’s learned has direct impact on the brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries exists</td>
<td>No boundary / restriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students focus on books and do not socialize and understand each other much</td>
<td>Lots of friends in YITP and all understand each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students follow and perform certain duties assigned by the teachers</td>
<td>Youth take up responsibility and initiatives in performing duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure on students to perform perfectly – peer pressure and teachers’ pressure</td>
<td>Given duties and pressure is there but they don’t need to worry about mistakes or impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited knowledge passing</td>
<td>Pass knowledge about the society. Knowledge learned will help them in the society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 This table was came up by YITP youth themselves, hence demonstrating their acute awareness of the uniqueness of YITP in relationship to their learning and developmental needs.
Transformation/Change/Growth

As young people go through a series of learning during YITP, they develop and change. Hence, another big theme that came out during my interviews with YITP youth is their growth experiences at the YITP workshops. Again, there are individual variations in how young people felt and perceived the kind of changes they went through during the program. However, it seems that every youth I talked to had experienced some kind of changes during YITP. In the next few pages I present how YITP youth have understood their growth experiences based on the accounts given to me during interviews (Note that sometimes, youth learning experiences were intertwined with their transformative experiences at YITP):

How did young people feel in the beginning/on the first day of the workshop? Why?

The first day, most youth felt nervous. Ishani felt doubtful in the beginning. Darshani also felt fear. Krishanti was anxious. They were nervous because 1) they don’t know lots of people, there are lots of unfamiliar faces, 2) they have never participated in this kind of program – YITP, 3) they are concerned about their lack of ability to perform well, they are not sure how others would see their mistakes; 4) they thought about all kinds of challenges they have to meet during the program, e.g. Krishanti heard that she has to stand in front of everyone and give speeches. That made her anxious.

Hasan and friends said that the first day felt like in a prison, they couldn’t shout [jokingly].

Geetha said that she is very happy to come to YITP. Geetha has confidence because she has gone through similar workshops before. Nayomi said that she is excited because she knows she can play sports.

In short, on the first day of the workshop, youth normally feel a sense of uncertainty and the need to adjust to a new YITP environment. Their imaginings of how they will be perceived by the rest of the group produces fear and anxiety among youth. For those who have more confidence in themselves, they feel more excited and less worried about coming to the YITP. However, after a day or two, youth often become more relaxed and at ease at the workshop:

The feeling of nervousness did ease or disappear, said Ishani, Darshani and Krishanthi. This is because 1) youth understood everyone is the same (have strengths and weaknesses; 2) they felt
that people are friendly, both teachers and friends; 3) they felt like living in a family with other youth; and 4) their talk to “sirs” (YITP adults) made them feel better.

As young people experienced trustworthy and positive relationships with each other and with YITP adults, their fear slowly went away. A safe learning environment was created when people at YITP recognize each other’s ideas,listen, and respect each other’s feelings. Within this supportive space, young people felt that they could try out their ideas without being discriminated or rejected by others. The rest of the 7-day workshop therefore witnessed more changes and transformations in youth in terms of their confidence level, competence (skills and knowledge to make decisions, problem-solve), character (attitudes as leaders and team workers), connection (being able to associate oneself with others) and compassion – the five youth development outcomes desirable in a youth development program. We can learn about such changes in youth through asking them how they understand and experience their break-through moments/turning points in a workshop:

**When are the break-through moments or turning points of youth at the workshop?**

*Ishani:* At one of the Day 1 Life Skill sessions, they [YITP youth] were asked to do a role play in front of everyone. Before YITP, she was afraid of singing in front of people. But because of that role play incident, she became more confident in front of others. In YITP, she subsequently realized that she actually has potentials in singing, she is not that bad after all. She gained the confidence.

*Krishanthi:* The life skills self-disclosure session was her turning-point at YITP. During the life skills, change happened. Usually people were not used to telling confidential matters. But after the self-disclosure session, they [young people] could talk about just everything. She added that after sharing both sad and happy stories with her peers, she is free.

*Hassan and friends* said their break-through moments happened

a) During outdoor/Outward Bound activities like volleyball playing, “turn around carpet” and “magic turtle” game. At these occasions, they had to make decision and challenge themselves to think outside the box and also associate themselves with opposite sexes

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**When I asked YITP youth this question, I defined break-through/turning point moments as those moments they found themselves doing something they had never done before, and that they realized that they had pushed themselves beyond their comfort zone and overcome the challenges**
b) Being the daily leaders of the workshop was also a challenge to some of them – something that they had never done before. Through meeting those challenges facing them as leaders, and coping with them, they learned about how to respect others’ opinions as leaders.

c) When they raised the national flag in the morning assembly for the first time, there was a kind of feeling they had never had before,

d) Having to wake people up in the morning as leaders, that’s a big challenge

e) When leaders had to summarize daily sessions and thank the resource persons – that was something extra to the youth too.

Malli: Being punctual all the time was something that he had tried to push himself to do at YITP, something that he seldom committed himself to doing before. Reflecting back, he feels that it was a great exercise because now [after YITP] he is very punctual [note: at YITP, resource persons make it clear that all youth have to be on time for any schedule activities. Youth are repeatedly reminded that life is short. As young people, every minute is precious. They have to treasure the time and do useful things].

Faruk: He felt that changes happened within him when he set his target on Day 3 Career Development session. To him, it’s very important to set a career target. There is a sense of future.

Indeed, many young people are able to identify the changes that happened in themselves during the workshop and give meanings to these growth experiences. Being assigned challenging tasks that they had never done before, and given the support to try out these tasks and accomplish them led young people to discover themselves, their talents, and become more confident during the workshop. Such confidence would carry on throughout the workshop and allow them to participate more actively in building their skills, knowledge and attitudes. Also, being able to step forward and share one’s stories with others without feeling shameful about their less-advantaged background enact a sense of self-worth in youth. Young people often feel reborn into a new person when they are able to accept who they are, be respected and find their ability to influence others at the YITP workshop.

During my interviews with youth, what inspired me is that no matter how small or mundane a task is at YITP, it can have big impacts on a young person’s growth. The youth’s actions, like speaking in front of the public, raising flags, making tea, and waking people up might have been taken for granted at YITP as part of youth’s responsibilities. But to each individual young person, these “small” duties mean something significant to him or her. The educators might not realize that a simple task they asked the youth to do e.g. standing up to sing a song, or telling his stories to his friends could actually change a
young person’s life. For many YITP youth, those moments when they regain a sense of confidence, hope, energy, inspiration, motivation, and worthiness mattered in their own rights. They had enabled them to become a more confident and “better human”. They were glad that they had experienced them once at YITP.

All in all, youth’s accounts of their growth experiences at YITP again suggest that YITP youth desire positive relationships, plus safe and supportive environments in their growing up process. What’s more, they need challenging tasks, high expectations and responsibilities that can motivate them and lead them to further developmental opportunities. Now, if we could combine the aforementioned developmental and learning needs perceived by YITP youth (Table 5) with our current discussion in this section, we can generate a list of desirable elements conducive to youth’s learning and growth within YITP that are based on youth’s meanings.

1) Positive social interaction between genders
2) Positive relationship between peers
3) Positive relationship between adult and youth / teachers and students
4) Experiential learning, gaining competence and mastering skills
5) Quality teachers/instructors
6) Safe environments and structure with caring adults
7) Safe space to make mistakes and improve
8) Safe space to meet challenges, overcome challenges and grow
9) Freedom and opportunities to act and express
10) Youth are given responsibilities and control
11) A sense of self-worth and self-awareness
12) Opportunities to share and contribute

These elements are not dissimilar from the youth development principles within the YITP program model. The fact that young people were able to generate these youth development meanings after going through the 7-day workshops, which reflects YITP program intentions, proves that YITP has been largely successful in promoting youth development among its participants. YITP has managed to nurture positive relationships, establish safe space, and impart valuable knowledge, skills and attitude that are deeply felt by YITP youth when they participate at a workshop. Perhaps, it is this intensely-felt youth development experience during YITP that has led to the crying of youth people upon their departure from the program.
7.2 Youth’s Lived Experiences after YITP and their Meanings on Youth Development

If coming to YITP means engaging in positive youth development, what does it mean then for young people to leave the 7-day program? In this section, we will take a look at youth’s understanding of their post-YITP experiences and especially their implications on youth development in Sri Lanka.

Youth development as a natural process is ongoing, dynamic and changing. Pittman and her colleagues (2001:24-25) reminded us that youth development:

- **goes beyond quick fix:** Development does not stop because program terminates or funds run out;
- **goes beyond basic services:** Young people need affordable, accessible care and services (e.g., health and transportation), safe and stable places, and high-quality instruction and training. But they also need supports – relationships and networks that provide nurturing, standards and guidance – and opportunities to try new roles, master challenges and contribute to family and community.
- **goes beyond youth professionals:** Adolescence is a time of relationship building. Professionals are important but not sufficient. Parents, neighbors, relatives, business owners, non-youth-focused professionals and older youth in the community who know local youth by name have to be seen and cultivated as resources. Non-school, and ultimately non-youth-work professionals must be encouraged to view the preparation and involvement of young people as a part of their responsibility.
- **goes beyond recipients:** Young people need services, support and training. But they also need opportunities to contribute. The best preparation for tomorrow is participation today. Further, young people’s participation should not be seen only as contributing to their development. They can and do play critical roles as change agents in their families, peer groups and communities.
- **goes beyond labeling:** All young people are engaged in development. Most need additional support in navigating choices and assessing options. A growing number need significant expansion in their supports, choices and options. All may be at risk, but the risks are not equal, and risks do not define potential. Targeting is fine; labeling is not. Youth who need extra resources and support should not be seen as “less than” others in the community.
- **goes beyond pilots:** All young people need the services, opportunities and supports described. No one program or organization can or should be expected to deliver all supports to all youth in a neighborhood or even in a school or housing complex. Yet, to have a significant impact, these supports must be available to a critical mass of young people in a school or
neighborhood. Too many programs remain at the pilot level, offering services and supports to a small fraction of those who need it. And too few neighborhoods weave these small efforts together to make a web of support to more young people in the society.

YITP understands that the 7-day workshop can only do so much in providing young people the kinds of supports, opportunities and services they need when growing up. The funding and human resources are limited; and there are other youth who deserve an opportunity to participate in program like YITP (which means that YITP would serve a larger pool of youth in order to create more social impacts). The need to sustain the program’s impacts on YITP’s youth development under resource- and programmatic constraints has led YITP to create a series of strategies to support YITP youth, even after they leave the workshop. These strategies include the forwarding mechanism that connects YITP youth to youth-friendly services and institutions in their communities on the last day of the program, as well as a follow-up mechanism that tracks youth’s post-workshop engagement and their developmental needs (examples of youth-friendly services and institutions are various vocational training programs, community based organizations and the National Youth Services Council). YITP is aware of the need to link YITP participants with domains in the society which can further support their transition to adulthood and continue to build their competence, character, compassion, connection, contribution, confidence (the six youth development outcomes) in youth even though the program has ended. Following up with individual youth for a period of one year would help ensure that YITP graduates are engaged in healthy activities conducive to their own development. In short, YITP hoped that the post-YITP measures could provide longer-term supports, opportunities and services for young people to transit smoothly into adulthood.

On the first sight, YITP’s post-workshop forwarding and follow-up mechanisms seemed to be fulfilling its goal of sustaining positive youth development impacts on youth – this can be seen in the kinds of pro-social activities many YITP youth were engaged in after leaving YITP (WUSC 2006). However, when talking to and interacting with YITP youth, what I learned is that these post-workshop strategies are great but are never sufficient in sustaining the youth development momentum in youth. The fact that YITP “graduates” constantly expressed their desire to see more services like YITP where they can find caring adults and safe learning environments, and friendships they found at the workshop, peers’ and elders’ recognition and support to their contribution and involvement in the community, and continuous guidance in looking for gainful employment in the community suggests a lack of such positive youth development opportunities and support in place for youth.

To illustrate what young people meant by this, let me present several cases that highlight YITP youth’s lived experiences after the program. Note that even though a lack of resources and support were experienced, young people still demonstrated tremendous creativity and strengths in developing their own
youth-development support network and strategies. YITP youth might continue facing uncertainties and transitions in life but they exercised agency in negotiating and creating positive space for their development; and often their ability to do so was the result of their learning at YITP. Equipped with skills, knowledge, attitudes and social capital gained from YITP, YITP youths demonstrated confidence and capabilities to foster their own development pathways to adulthood. In short, their transition to adulthood might be influenced by their environment. Nonetheless, they actively acted upon their environment and shaped their own personal development.

**Rangika and Suwanthi**

I interviewed Rangika and Suwanthi one morning at the Hambantota YITP workshop in April 2007. They came all the way from their hometown (around 1-2 hours bus ride) to participate in the interview. They dressed very neatly and carried a notebook and a pen in their hands. I felt extremely honored to have them as my research participants. The YITP team leader, Mr Hasitha, happened to be there at the workshop. He helped me translate the interview from Sinhala into English. Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s words were paraphrased after the interview and arranged accordingly to fit the purpose of this thesis.

During the interview, I asked Rangika and Suwanthi what they did before and after YITP, especially the next day after YITP. Here is what they told me:

*Before YITP, Rangika said that she was only involved in a few community works like Dharma School teaching at her temple and volunteering at the Grama Sevaka (sub-district divisions) level. It was after YITP that she started engaged more in the community work. Rangika said the next day, after the YITP program, she went to Ms. Malini’s organization – Women Entrepreneurship Development Center (WEDC) – to volunteer as an entrepreneurship development officer. It was at the YITP program that she heard about the position. Ms. Malini was telling everyone at YITP about the possibility [of working at her organization]” While volunteering at the WEDC, Rangika followed a vocational training course at a local technical college. Again, she learnt about this course opportunity from the presenters on the last day of YITP. Sometimes, she would help her father at the market fair.*

*Like Rangika, Suwanthi also involved herself in WEDC as an entrepreneur development officer after YITP. Besides working at the women’s organization, she helped her father at the vegetable fair and the garden [both Rangika’s and Suwathi’s families were engaged in cultivation].*

It seemed that both Rangika and Suwathi were involved in community development and other activities
like helping their parents and taking vocational training courses after YITP. Their involvement in WEDC especially had to be contributed to the YITP’s forwarding mechanism that linked YITP participants to Ms. Malini’s organization. I then asked Rangika and Suwanthi if they could identify any connection between the kinds of work they were doing at WEDC and the knowledge and skills they learned during YITP:

Rangika replied that the important learning points she gained at the workshop were Leadership, First Aid, Gender and Development (GAD)/AIDS. She especially said that she learned how to work with others in a group setting. Also, she learned about characteristics of leaders. Rangika was able to apply what she learned in the YITP to her volunteering experience at WEDC. When she went to villages, talk to the people, share ideas and identify their needs, she was able to practice and exercise leadership (Rangika and Suwanthi’s roles as entrepreneur development officers at WEDC required them to work with local women and encourage them in loan schemes and self-employment).

Suwanthi said that her top three learning points at YITP were Life Skills, Leadership and Gender and Development\(^1\). At YITP, she also had to be a peer leader and speak in front of 25 people. Shyness had gone away during YITP and now at WEDC, she had the ability to talk to people she meets at the villages.

In YITP, both Rangika and Suwanthi learned about women and work and the concept of gender as social construct. To Rangika, working at WEDC allowed her to further understand that women could do quality work just like men (one of the messages delivered in YITP’s GAD session). In Samanthi’s case, given that everyone in her family was mostly female, gender equality issues had not struck her that much. Not until she went to the village did she relate what she had learned in the class to the real situation. She now realized that women often did more/better work than the men.

Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s accounts showed that after YITP, not only were they able to apply the knowledge and skills learned during the workshop to their community work, they were able to improve and relate them to the application processes. As such, the community served as a venue and opportunity for Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s personal development. It was through contributing to the community and being exposed to different realities in life that both young women felt further empowered and confident in

\(^1\) I am not sure if Rangika’s answer had influenced Samanthi’s response to my question. As the exercise was largely a reflective one, Rangika’s memory might trigger similar memory in Samanthi. Please take into account this consideration when reading the texts.
presenting themselves and delivering services in their communities.

What made my interview with Rangika and Suwanthi more interesting was that even though engaging in community development had facilitated Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s self-development, it did not earn much approval from the ladies’ parents. The larger societal and parental values had influenced Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s perception on their community engagement. They had also influenced their choices for future careers and adulthood:

_Rangika’s father was not happy about her involvement in the women organizations because she was not earning an income. Although Rangika told her father that she had learnt a lot from her work, she felt that her father’s words were partially true as she needed to be independent and less reliant on her parents. She said that in the future, she would find a job and earn a salary. Her aspiration was to be a nurse. Suwanthi’s father was also not really happy with her work at WEDC. Same reasons applied. However, Suwanthi had the intention to stay longer with WEDC if she got a salary. When she was asked at YITP to define a career goal, she was not really sure what she wanted to do. However, she thought a government job would be nice._

_Both Rangika and Suwanthi said that their ideal jobs would take into account the job’s salary, benefits, status/reputation, security/stability, and closeness to home. Rangika further added that she would consider her own interests in choosing her job. To Suwanthi, a recognized job was one that was acknowledged by the family, society and approved by herself. Getting a job that was recognized by the society prevents blames and bad words about her work. To Rangika, a recognized work was one that was better than her parents’ (beyond farming). However, to her, job recognition was not that a big issue in seeking a vocation._

One could interpret Rangika’s and Suwanthi’s desires to have work – whether paid or unpaid – that were approved and recognized by their communities as a longing to feel good about themselves and be supported and affirmed by others. Being approved and recognized through the work they did would increase their sense of worthiness and well-being. However, what if these societal norms and values were not conducive to youth well-being at the first place?

**Kavinda, Ravi and Friends**

I met Kavinda and Ravi, two fun and outspoken young men, when I was doing my participant observation at the Matara YITP workshop in January 2007. Both Kavinda and Ravi took the initiative to stay in touch with me. We became good friends afterwards and always kept each other informed with our news and movements through cell-phone text messaging, and sometimes emails. Interacting with Kavinda and Ravi
throughout the rest of my research months in Sri Lanka allowed me to see another dimension of youth’s experiences after YITP. During some of our casual chats, I learned about Kavinda’s and Ravi’s aspirations in life and their views on the Sri Lankan society, education system in Sri Lanka, boys-girls relationship, and politics. However, what came up most often in our conversations, which always led to more discussions on youth and society, was the talk on YITP and what they did after the workshop.

Both Kavinda and Ravi got the opportunity to participate in the same YITP workshop. After the program, Kavinda moved on to completing his degree in Computer Science at a local university while taking business management classes. He had a strong desire to start his own business in the Information and Technology sector after defining this as his goal during YITP. Nevertheless, he said he still had to find out more if that was a good choice since he was not clear about the current market trend. Ravi on the other hand worked at a mobile phone repairing center after YITP. While working, he followed an external degree course at a local university on three subjects – Buddhist Civilization, Geography and Sinhala.

It seemed that both Kavinda and Ravi were on their way to achieving the goals they set for themselves during YITP (I checked the official YITP documents which recorded youth’s expressed goals and found no mismatch between Kavinda’s and Ravi’s expressed goals during YITP and their engagement after the workshop). In other words, there was continuity between these young men’s YITP experiences and their post-workshop self-/career-development. Yet, what made Kavinda and Ravi more excited about their post-YITP experiences was a youth club they formed with several other YITP participants after the workshop.

After YITP, Kavinda and Ravi started a youth club because of their inspiring learning experience during the workshop. They said in YITP, they learned about the values of team work and how a strong team, with unity, spirit and strength, could accomplish much in challenging situations. They thought of establishing a youth club in their village that could not only bring YITP participants together and sustained their YITP friendships, but also carry out services to the local community. In fact, during my stay in Sri Lanka, I had the chance to participate in temple event organized by Kavinda’s and Ravi’s club in their village. I was told that the event was a success as the community members, especially the elders, praised their efforts in keeping their religious values alive while contributing to the community.
In many ways, YITP had motivated Kavinda, Ravi and their friends to be involved in community development and be responsible and good “citizens.” Furthermore, it had given Kavinda and Ravi the confidence and social capital (friendships nurtured during YITP) necessary to carry out efficient community services. Working with a group of like minded friends on meaningful projects had allowed Kavinda and Ravi to nurture a sense of optimism, pride and motivation in life. Like Rangika and Suwanthi, Kavinda and Ravi found that their learning at YITP had greatly influenced their post-YITP experiences. Their ability to find opportunities to further develop those knowledge and skills learned – in this case, forming their own youth club – directly linked to their well-being during transitions to adulthood. However, Kavinda’s and Ravi’s work in the community was not without any challenges. In one of our conversations where Kavinda’s mother was also present, I learned that the youth club still needed certain community supports to accomplish bigger goals. For Kavinda and Ravi to keep their spirit high in serving the community, they also needed more guidance, recognition and skills in dealing with tricky circumstances.

Kavinda’s Amma, or mother, was very proud of her son for doing great work in the village (according to both my research assistant’s and my observation). However she showed her concern about the tension between “good youth” (like Kavinda, Ravi and friends) and local gang (those who perceived as behaving less well in the community). Amma said she was afraid that the good performance of the YITP youth would increase other local youth’s jealousy on them. She did not want her son to get into trouble and become the enemy of other youth just because he was doing good work.

While both Kavinda and Ravi understood Amma’s concerns and said that they did face such dilemma in getting local support in their community endeavor, Kavinda showed more optimism in overcoming this challenge. Ravi was a bit pessimistic about their ability to change those youth gang’s perception about them and secure their support.

What Kavinda, Kavinda’s Amma and Ravi told me in the conversation pointed towards an interesting phenomenon in the local youth development scene. It seemed that positive community youth development at some points would confront local politics (in Kavinda’s case, the local politics was between the local gang and Kavinda and friends) and diminished its own impacts in the community as well as on the youth themselves. If we believe that YITP youth’s engagement in community enables them to enhance their skills and knowledge in transition to adulthood, more supportive/safe environments have to be established in the local community for such process to happen. Young people, after their participation at YITP, deserve quality supports, opportunities and services within their lived environments, given by their peers,
parents, teachers, village elders, and just any person including you and me. Kavinda and Ravi would continue to come up with creative measures to improve their youth club and relationship with local youth; but further guidance and support to them would enhance their ability and motivation to do more great work for the Sri Lankan society.

**Dulip and Sunil**

Dulip and Sunil were both taking Vocational Training courses after YITP. These courses were conducted by the Vocational Training Authority\(^\text{20}\) in one of the districts where they lived in Hambantota.

When asked about what kinds of concerns they had as Sri Lankan youth these days (after YITP), Dulip said that he was concerned about the low standard vocational training courses in his areas. Sunil, on the other hand, was concerned about the issue of mismatch between education and job opportunities in the country, especially how young people, even after finish their higher study, could not get into the universities.

It seems to me that both Dulip’s and Sunil’s concerns touched on the larger youth development constraints currently existing in Sri Lanka – the institutional incapability to sustain and enhance youth development services, support and opportunities for Sri Lanka youth (see Chapter 4). Dulip had the will to continue his career in the vocational/technical field but he found that quality local vocational training system was not in place and the Vocational Training centers did not provide enough support for him to further his interests in the field. Sunil commented on one of the most commonly felt frustrations among Sri Lankan youth today – the inability to negotiate and benefit from the education and labor system set up in the country. Both Dulip and Sunil suggested that their personal development – in terms of career and social development – and transitions to adulthood would be greatly enhanced if the country’s systems and various institutions were more responsive to their needs.

When asked if they were getting enough support from the community to further their aspirations (in vocational education), Dulip and Sunil gave slightly different answers to the question. Dulip for example said in the areas of vocational training, some experts in the field were helping him but some were not particularly helpful. Most supports he obtained were from other elders in the community as well as from his peers.

Sunil said that he did receive supports from his parents, teachers and friends in vocational education. Parents to him were the most supportive ones. Sunil was aware of his own role in seeking the

\(^{20}\)The Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka (VTA) was established in July 1995 under the provisions of the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka Act, No. 12 of 1995, with the objective of providing job oriented training specially to the rural youth [http://www.vtasl.slt.lk/](http://www.vtasl.slt.lk/)
support he needed. He said to get the support he desired; he had to know exactly the kind of support he hoped other people could give.

Finally, I asked Dulip and Sunil if they felt YITP had been helpful in addressing their concerns as youth. Both of them said yes but only to some extent. They felt that YITP was not able to change the larger institutional and systematic problems e.g. mismatch between education and job. YITP was able to support youth but only until the point of broadening their career knowledge and options. After YITP, young people still had to navigate their ways to securing a job.

Indeed, listening to Dulip and Sunil comment about their post-YITP experience made me realize the dilemmas YITP faced in providing its services to youth. YITP’s program focus was to provide youth with a foundation of knowledge and skills that would enhance their awareness of potential opportunities. This was done mainly through building their confidence, motivating them to be productive members of society and providing knowledge regarding linkages to other opportunities such as vocational training, credit, further studies, and employment. It did not intend nor have the capability to make sure that all its participants are employed after the program. Yet, what we heard from Dulip and Sunil (and many other YITP youth I interviewed) was the importance of local facilities to guide young people continuously (especially the less advantaged one) until they find a job. Not only that these facilities have to be in place, but they had to make themselves known to and be accessible by youth. They have to encourage young people to actively seek their guidance and supports, or else, the facilities would not have a big impact on youth development.

Charuka, Navin and Friends
The previous three vignettes focused on YITP youth’s lived experiences after the workshop and especially some of the youth-development barriers facing them in the society. What I have not illustrated fully are young people’s agencies, determination and creativity in negotiating their development pathway after YITP. As we come close to the end of my thesis, I would like to tell the story of a group of YITP youth in Galle: Charuka, Navin, and friends – Eromi, Danush, Dilesh, Lushantha, Pasindu, Loshani, Kitsiri, and Nayomi. These young people have become my intimate teachers/brothers/sisters/friends during my research in Sri Lanka. We participated in the same YITP workshop in November 2006 (the one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter where the crying scene took place), and since then we have maintained close contact with each other.

In a true sense, the end of the 7-day workshop did not discourage my friends to cut off their relationships with each other. After YITP, Charuka, Navin and friends decided to sustain their friendship (this includes having me in their friendship loop). Today they actively create their own opportunities and
support network to live up the “YITP spirit” experienced during the workshop. Several strategies are used to cultivate and nurture their friendship. They are but not limited to:

1) Frequent visit to each other’s homes: Charuka’s, Navin’s and friends’ villages are close to each other. Their proximity allows the group to continue their post-YITP friendship.

2) Frequent contacts involving rigorous use of communication devices and services e.g. mobile phone text-messaging and calling and miss-calling\(^{21}\). Mobile phones are used extremely effectively organizing gatherings and casual meet-up.

3) Field trips: Trips to tourist spots and religious sites are planned and they bring youth together to have fun.

4) Taking Vocational Training courses together: After YITP, the youth registered themselves (five/six of them) together as a group with a local house wiring course. The course serves as a venue for them to continue their learning experience in a team,

5) Working at the same hospital in the capital city (Colombo): At least seven of them from the group made the decision to go to Colombo and work as nurses and assistants at a local private hospital. I was surprised by the news as I received it out of the blue. When asked why they went to Colombo as a group, Navin said “it’s good”; they can have the accompaniment of each other in addition to gaining work experience.

To me – a person who has never used a mobile phone so vigorously in her life and has slight different ways of conceptualizing and performing friendship – my friends’ creative methods of supporting and associating with each other after YITP opened my eyes to other possibilities in the terrain of “relationship.” From interacting with Charuka, Navin and friends and exposing myself to their ideas of reciprocity and friendship, I come to grasp their meanings/understanding of their experiences after YITP.

Before leaving Sri Lanka, I asked Charuka and Navin one last time about their notion of friendship, how others i.e. the local communities perceive them as a group, and how all this links to YITP. Both of them express the importance of actively forming supportive peer networks for their well-being and development. Navin said, “YITP is great but there is not enough time for us to socialize and know each other deeper. We take courses together because in this way, we can further our relationship and support each other.” He further added that creating and belonging to a “good” group allows them [him and other YITP youth] to be respected by the community. Parents and neighbors are not worried about the YITP girls and boys hanging out together because they generally trust that they have good character. Because of

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\(^{21}\) Miss-calling is a cost-effective way for youth to relate to each other. It involves a person calling another, waits for one or two ring tones and hangs up. The meaning of one-ring-tone miscall can be “I miss you,” “I’m thinking of you,” “how are you?” etc. Replying the miss-call with another miscall is a good way of reciprocating a friendship and let the miss-caller know that “things are going well,” “thank you for thinking about me,” “yes, you are still my friend” etc. One knows that the call is not “miscall” in nature, when more than 3 or 4 ring tones are heard. Miss-calling is a trend among younger generation in Sri Lanka, at least when I was there between 2006-2007.
having a good reputation in the community, they can have more freedom to do things that are conducive to their well-being without being guarded against.

Indeed, it is Charuka, Navin and friends who keep me motivated in writing this thesis and make me believe that something needs to be told about YITP youth and their development in Sri Lanka. They have shown me how young people can be so uniquely distinctive in different parts of the world yet similar in many ways – have dreams, desires, needs, strengths, weaknesses, emotions, feelings, and long for positive relationships and supportive environments to grow up. They have shown me how young people can still exercise agency and negotiate developmental pathways even though facing structural constraints. They have reminded me that “relationship” is what important in a person’s development process; and friendship can be without borders, as long as we all treasure and nurture it caringly and sincerely,

I admire my friends’ effort in carving that positive space for themselves to grow and learn while living their transitions to adulthood. Perhaps, to Charuka, Navin and friends, leaving YITP is really not the end, but the beginning of a stronger friendship that would accompany them in their exploration of their life journey.

6.5 Summary
In this chapter, we have seen how YITP youth understood and gave meanings to their experiences both during and after YITP. The lessons-learned is that youth need continuous support to thrive, reach their career goals and transit into adulthood. When support is lacking, youths will actively look for it or create it. Although differences in attitude might affect how the youth approached the issue of getting support, the ability to gather more social capital (i.e. connection and relationship) allows youth to navigate better their transition to adulthood. Communities – families and temples especially – are the main places where youth feel that they can get support. Sometimes, the environment is conducive to their development but sometimes not necessarily. Young people have a strong urge for a safe environment to express their points of view, identity, aspirations and potentials. However, it seems that such environments are still lacking in the country. As such, YITP might have been able to create a positive youth development environment for youth to learn and grow. But for its impacts to be sustainable, it requires more support from the community.

YITP participants seem to be calling for more positive youth development endeavors to take

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I have tried to present as honest as I can how I felt about this group of YITP youth and my interpretation of their post-YITP experience without over-romanticizing my relationship with them. After all, no matter how eager I want to be their friends and learn about them, I remain an outsider. I could never fully understand some of the things they did after the workshop; this inability to capture their meanings, I guess, reflects the transient nature of my friends’ lives. This again suggests the absolutely need for youth development efforts to capture the dynamic, changing nature of youth, their thoughts and aspirations.
place in the country by all members of the society. As we can see from the various case studies of YITP participants, there remains an inadequate public/societal understanding and determination in fostering positive youth development in the country. Positive youth development needs to go beyond YITP and be ubiquitously experienced by young people in their lived environments and local communities – families, villages, schools.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

The Youth in Transition Program (YITP) could have been analyzed, evaluated and studied in so many different ways, each producing a variety of different meanings and interpretations. Reflecting back to the time when I first became interested in YITP and decided to do my undergraduate research study on the program, I had no extensive background knowledge on the concept of “youth development”. The only thing I knew was the relation of the term to the notion of “growing up” and its importance in youth programming. I had yet to conceive the multifaceted nature of “youth development” and the existence of a world of scholastic inquiries on this notion. My initial attempts to determine the successes and popularity of YITP among program participants, staff and resource persons was not guided by any youth development principles or theory. However, the fact that in the end, all my research findings boiled down to a fundamental set of youth development meanings suggests that YITP, to a large extent, possesses significant implications on the notion of youth development in Sri Lanka, both in terms of youth-development theory and practice. In this concluding chapter, I first summarize briefly YITP’s lessons to youth-related programming in Sri Lanka, which I use to propose a viable youth development paradigm applicable to the Sri Lankan context and give my humble opinions on the future direction of youth development in the country.

YITP’S LESSONS TO YOUTH-RELATED PROGRAMMING IN SRI LANKA

Overall, YITP demonstrates 11 youth-development principles that any youth-related programs in Sri Lanka could practice/draw upon when working with youth. In many ways, these principles have been recognized world-wide given for its impacts in inducing positive development in youth. As my paper has shown, they are equally applicable to the Sri Lankan context and are even more crucial in supporting the development of less-advantaged, marginalized, and transitional Sri Lankan youth. These principles are as follows:

1) Recognize the challenges young people face but emphasize on young people’s strengths.
2) Be holistic and youth-centered, while having an acute and informed awareness on young people’s interests, developmental needs and dynamic/complex characteristics and personalities.
3) Provide a safe and supportive environment for the learning and growing.
4) Provide high quality instructions and services that reflect youth developmental needs and wants.
5) Promote youth’s positive relationship with peers and between genders.
6) Promote youth’s positive relationship with caring adults.
7) Provide opportunities for young people to develop healthy behaviors and life-long learning skills.
8) Challenge young people in ways that further build their competence and not destroy their confidence.
9) Be committed and consistent yet flexible in programming to adapt to the individual uniqueness of youth.
10) Encourage young people to be leaders and partners in programming (i.e. promote active participation and contribution in a program).
11) Have a dedicated team of competent personnel who manage, organize and deliver programs effectively and professionally, through trustful and reciprocal relationships.

Depending on the situation, some of these principles have to be readjusted to suit the specific contexts and circumstances of youth. However, all of them should be provided altogether in a program that aims at supporting young people; none of them should be optional!

PROPOSING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM IN SRI LANKA

In this paper, I have engaged in an intellectual process of re-contextualizing and re-conceptualizing the notion of “youth development” in Sri Lanka. The concurrence of a lack of concerted effort in interrogating the notion of youth development and its positive, multi-dimensional implications on youth, along with a great demand for positive youth development among Sri Lankan youth points towards the need to construct a youth development paradigm in the country. This youth development paradigm would not only serve as an entry point for more productive inquiries into the notion of youth development in Sri Lanka, but also as an exemplar for programs that wish to nurture successful and healthy young people in the country.

Combining all my research findings from reviewing Sri Lankan youth-related literature, examining YITP and comprehending youth’s reflections and responses to their experiences during and after YITP, I find that a youth development paradigm in Sri Lanka necessarily entails the aforementioned youth development programming principles as well as the concepts of Positive Youth Development and Community Youth Development. It precisely addresses the inconclusiveness of the current positive-youth development rhetoric in Sri Lanka (those mentioned in Chapter 4) and stresses that youth development in the country has to fully and sincerely perceive young people as strengths and assets. Any ideas, approaches and interventions aimed at solving youth “problems” have to be holistic, broad-based – not just focusing on curing specific youth’s problems but to prepare them for the larger, more complicated adult world – and aware of the multi-dimensional, changing nature of youth. Not only should positive
youth development principles/approaches be actively promoted within youth programming, they should also be practiced actively among members in the community. Finally, all talks on sustaining and supporting youth development need to be coupled with three commitments - aligning systems to ensure education and career preparation for all youths, innovations at the policy level, and changing perceptions and building public will to promote positive youth development in the country. This latter point is equally reflected in many youth development theorists’ ideals of youth development for the 21st century (Yohalem & Pittman 2001).

Yet, one might ask how feasible is this idealistic youth development paradigm in Sri Lanka given the many structural and systematic barriers that persist in the country and could hinder its full manifestation and implementation at anytime. My answer is that no doubt, it is feasible. While I recognize that sufficient funding and political commitment to promote youth development in Sri Lanka is important, I believe that ultimately, youth development touches on the simple set of youth development principles discussed in the previous page. Allowing young people to feel that they are being cared for and acknowledged as worthy human beings does not require lots of resources; it needs a genuine willingness among the masses to put ideas into practice.

The ideas of positive youth development need to be concretized and flourish in all the communities where Sri Lankan youth reside, now or never. Well-planned youth programs are good avenues to promote and practice the positive youth development paradigm and the community members should be encouraged to participate in the process. It takes a village, a community, a society, a country and an interconnected world to raise a healthy and happy youth. However, even a small gesture of care or an opportunity to participate in a good youth program can help a young person’s transition to adulthood while motivating them to be the leader of their own development and the development of their community/society. As the cliché goes, young people are the future. The time is now for Sri Lanka to put more emphasis on positive youth development. Positive youth development can happen and it has already happened in YITP. It just needs an extra push to firmly integrate itself into the general public’s mindset for the benefit of the young and the country as a whole.
Epilogue

When writing the last few chapters of this thesis, I received a phone call from WUSC and learned that YITP will be expanding its program to the northern and eastern parts of the country. It is also planning to share its lessons with other WUSC development projects that have a youth-focus in different corners of the world. Having written this thesis and understood the potential of youth development in transforming young people’s life, I encourage WUSC/YITP to keep on practicing the youth development principles it has already been implementing thus far while it expands its scale. The program’s youth development lessons should also be shared with other youth-related projects and solicit feedbacks for its further improvement.

When replicating YITP’s model, one should nevertheless remember that this program model was born out of a specific time and space in Sri Lanka for a specific group of young people in the country. Its program logic and modus operandi might work successfully in southern Sri Lanka but they might not work elsewhere. What determines the success of YITP are its underlying youth development principles, or more accurately, the synergy resulting from the interaction of these principles as they were put into practice by committed YITP personnel. My fieldwork at YITP has told me that it is the people – adults and youth – who determine the success of the program. For the replica of YITP to be equally successful in serving young people, making sure that positive relationships and partnerships are “mainstreamed” in every stage of programming is extremely crucial. While “relationships” have not been officially “measured” or “evaluated” in determining YITP’s success, it nonetheless should be considered thoroughly as the program grows and expands.
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### Appendix 2: 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Type</th>
<th>Asset Name &amp; Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL ASSETS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive family communication</td>
<td>Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other adult relationships</td>
<td>Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring neighborhood</td>
<td>Young person experiences caring neighbors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring school climate</td>
<td>School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in schooling</td>
<td>Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community values youth</td>
<td>Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth as resources</td>
<td>Young people are given useful roles in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service to others</td>
<td>Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Boundaries and Expectations</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family boundaries</td>
<td>Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School boundaries</td>
<td>School provides clear rules and consequences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighborhood boundaries</td>
<td>Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult role models</td>
<td>Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
<td>Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</td>
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<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constructive Use of Time</td>
<td>Creative activities</td>
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<td>Youth programs</td>
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<td>Religious community</td>
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<td>Time at home</td>
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<td><strong>INTERNAL ASSETS</strong></td>
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<td>Commitment to Learning</td>
<td>Achievement motivation</td>
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<td>School engagement</td>
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<td>Homework</td>
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<td>Bonding to school</td>
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<td>Reading for pleasure</td>
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<td><strong>Positive Values</strong></td>
<td>Caring</td>
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<td>Equality and social justice</td>
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<td>Integrity</td>
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<td>Honesty</td>
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<td>Responsibility</td>
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<td>Restraint</td>
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<td><strong>Social Competencies</strong></td>
<td>Planning and decision making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal competence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural competence</strong></td>
<td>Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resistance skills</strong></td>
<td>Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Peaceful conflict resolution</strong></td>
<td>Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Identity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Personal power</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-esteem</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sense of purpose</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Positive view of personal future</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix 3: Characteristics of Effective Youth Development Programming

According to Perkins and Borden (2003:334-336) high quality youth development programs often demonstrate the 18 characteristics listed below:

1. High-quality youth programs provide youth with social support by connecting youth to positive peer groups.
2. High-quality youth programs create a strong sense of belonging, with clear rules and expectations, responsibilities and flexibilities. Flexibility is the ability to adapt a program to meet the unique needs of young people in the program. Rules are embraced by youth who have direct input in their development.
3. High-quality youth programs focus on the specific needs and interest of young people. Therefore, a quality program engages youth as partners in the identification of needs, planning, the implementation, and the evaluation of the program. Youth can be engaged in these processes through various methods (e.g., focus groups concept mapping and coleadership).
4. High-quality youth programs offer young people the opportunity to hold meaningful leadership roles within the program or an organization.
5. High-quality programs also engage youth in organized service activities within the community. This affords youth the opportunities to contribute and further build their competence, confidence, connection, character and compassion.
6. High-quality youth program provide an accessible safe haven for youth, both physically and emotionally. They provide youth with a sense of a positive group experience.
7. High quality youth programs provide learning opportunities that are active and participatory. Therefore programs use experiential learning opportunities and encourage young people to take positive risks. All attempts, successful or unsuccessful, are viewed as part of the learning process. Thus learning how to take risks also involves learning how to fail courageously. This approach empowers youth to consistently take new risks without fear of being rejected.
8. High-quality youth programs focus on recruiting and retaining young people from diverse background (e.g. race, ethnicity, family income, family structure, and gender) by intentionally designing activities that address their needs. In addition, such programs do not wait for participants to appear; rather, they reach out to youth.
9. High-quality youth programs provide multiple opportunities for youth to engage in activities with their families and communities.
10. High-quality youth programs encourage parental involvement by offering a variety of possibilities for participation (e.g. social events, parental workshops, volunteer opportunities).
11. High-quality youth programs strive to assist youth in avoiding identified problem behaviors by providing them with alternative opportunities. These opportunities are designed to enhance skills (e.g. goal setting, decision making, problem, solving, and delayed gratification), civic responsibility, and pro-social behavior.
12. High-quality youth programs offer relevant skill-building activities that reinforce the values and skills linked with doing well in school and maintaining good physical health.
13. High-quality youth programs are ongoing and occur on a frequent basis (e.g. twice a week, twice a month etc.). They are at least a year in length and have built in follow-up sessions.
14. High-quality youth programs offer a variety of resources through collaboration with other youth-serving community organizations and schools.
15. High-quality youth programs have clearly stated goals that are assessed on a regular basis. These goals are linked to outcomes for youth (e.g. decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, and
conflict resolution skills) that emphasize the benefits of program participation. The evaluation strategy being used allows for midcourse corrections in the program.

16. High quality youth programs have well-trained staff, as evidenced by appropriate education backgrounds, diversity of staff, frequent staff in-services, and how staff turnover. Staff are visible advocates for youth

17. High-quality youth programs have a visible organizational structure and are well organized and managed.

18. High-quality youth programs have established strategies to recognized the accomplishments of their participants.