introduction to the active-participatory approach
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The Youth Work Methods are a key part of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI). The YPQI is a continuous improvement approach that flips traditional professional development upside-down: The intervention leads with performance assessment, and then engages staff in a multi-month cycle of planning and improvement.

The YPQI is built around the Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA), an observational tool that provides a set of standards for high quality instructional practices, rooted in the Active-Participatory Approach. The Youth Work Methods are aligned to this tool and are designed to strengthen the skills of youth workers.
The YPQI study, the first experimental investigation of a data-driven, continuous improvement intervention in the afterschool field, occurred from 2006-2008. We set out to understand if the YPQI could improve the quality of youth experiences in afterschool programs. Complete findings from the study are available at www.cypq.org/ypqi.

The study draws the following conclusions:

- The YPQI improves program quality, and high implementation of continuous improvement practices leads to higher quality. At afterschool sites assigned to the YPQI, the quality of instruction improved both overall and in those areas that site teams targeted for improvement.

- The length of staff employment at participating sites increased, suggesting that over time, YPQI continuous improvement practices may reduce staff turnover. Also, quality improvements were not significantly affected by manager turnover, staff education or youth-adult ratios.

- The YPQI works across different types of afterschool systems and policies. Sites implementing the model included a fee-based school-age afterschool system in a large urban district, a state network of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a coalition of nonprofit youth programs, and an afterschool system funded by a state human service agency. The study found almost no significant differences in effects between these networks.

- The YPQI appears to be a sustainable, cost-effective, lower stakes model for continuous quality improvement. The improvements set in motion by the YPQI were still present one year after the intervention ended.

This study supports the efficacy and validity of the YPQI process, but also the Active-Participatory Approach to instruction, which sets the high standards that we use to measure program quality.
Young people can **thrive** when they feel **safe and supported** to **learn and lead**.

Research on youth programs supports what we know intuitively to be true: The features or qualities of a learning setting make a big difference in the effectiveness of that setting (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Lauer et al., 2006). And we know from Weikart Center research that the quality of settings can be greatly improved by supporting staff to carry out best practices with youth (Smith et al., 2012).

The Weikart Center’s **Active-Participatory Approach** is a powerful set of methods for working with children and youth. The approach is designed to organize youth work strategies into an easy-to-use framework. It is based on five decades of youth work practice and supported by current research on learning and development (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Each of the nine Youth Work Methods emphasize a skill or set of skills based on the Active-Participatory Approach.

This guide is written for youth workers – the wide variety of people who care about and work with children and youth. The guide focuses primarily on employing the Active-Participatory Approach in afterschool centers, community-based programs, summer camps and other semi-formal settings where children and youth have opportunities for extended learning. However, the Active-Participatory Approach is for working with young people in learning settings, which can occur both in and out of school (Banks et al., 2007).

The Approach is rooted in the Positive Youth Development perspective (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006). In this perspective: (a) youth have capacity to be positive assets in their communities, they are not just problems to be fixed; (b) development happens in an ecological system (see next page) and settings like youth programs can be integral places in which youth engage and learn; and (c) youth are major actors in their own development.

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1 For timeline, see www.cypq.org/about/history

Young people can thrive when they...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>feel safe</th>
<th>Safety – both physical and emotional – is necessary for learning.</th>
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<tr>
<td>and supported</td>
<td>Sustained, positive adult-youth relationships are known to be a primary strength of youth programs. Providing positive supports is one of the most important things youth workers can do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>to learn</td>
<td>Youth programs can provide powerful settings in which youth take advantages of opportunities to learn and engage with new content, build skills, and develop.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and lead.</td>
<td>As youth are major actors in their development, youth workers can help empower them to take on increasing responsibility and leadership roles in youth programs.</td>
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The following pages describe the four principles of the Active Participatory Approach:

**Promote Safety**  
**Provide Positive Supports**  
**Create Opportunities to Learn**  
**Create Opportunities to Lead**

For each principle, you will find:

- **A detailed description:** This text breaks down the essential elements of each principle.

- **Examples from the field:** These examples illustrate the principle in action and are taken from a wide variety of contexts and age groups.

- **Connections with the Youth Work Methods:** Each Youth Work Method is a part of the Active-Participatory Approach. This section focuses on the direct relationship between each principle and the most relevant Methods.

- **Connections to Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA):** The scales indicated in each section provide quality standards that measure the application of each principle for programs that serve youth from 4th-12th grades.

- **Connections to School Age Program Quality Assessment (School-Age PQA):** The scales indicated in each section provide quality standards that measure the application of each principle for programs that serve children from kindergarten-6th grades.

- **Reflection questions:** These questions can support readers in reflecting on the extent to which the principle is present in their programs as well as think about what they might like to improve.