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Reconciling Adaptation and Fidelity: Implications for Scaling Up High Quality Youth Programs

Yolanda Anyon[1] · Joe Roscoe[2] · Kimberly Bender[1] · Heather Kennedy[1] · Jonah Dechants[1] · Stephanie Begun[3] · Christine Gallager[1]

Abstract

In the field of prevention science, some consider fidelity to manualized protocols to be a hallmark of successful implementation. A growing number of scholars agree that high-quality implementation should also include some adaptations to local context, particularly as prevention programs are scaled up, in order to strengthen their relevance and increase participant engagement. From this perspective, fidelity and adaptation can both be seen as necessary, albeit mutually exclusive, dimensions of implementation quality. In this article, we propose that the relationship between these two constructs may be more complex, particularly when adaptations are consistent with the key principles underlying the program model. Our argument draws on examples from the implementation of a manualized youth voice program (YVP) in two different organizations serving six distinct communities. Through a series of retreats, implementers identified examples of modifications made and grouped them into themes. Results suggest that some adaptations were actually indicators of fidelity to the key principles of YVPs: power-sharing, youth ownership, and engagement in social change. We therefore offer suggestions for re-conceptualizing the fidelity-adaptation debate, highlight implications for measurement and assessment, and illustrate that the de facto treatment of adaptation and fidelity as opposing constructs may limit the diffusion or scaling up of these types of youth programs.

Keywords Youth programs · Fidelity · Adaptation · Implementation · Measurement · Scale · Prevention

✉ Yolanda Anyon
yanyon@du.edu

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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Introduction

In recent years, attention to issues of implementation quality in prevention programs with children and adolescents has increased exponentially. Funders expect that youth-serving organizations monitor and strengthen their implementation of research-informed approaches, and peer reviewers frequently request implementation data be included in efficacy and effectiveness studies. Although there is growing evidence of the importance of implementation quality on youth outcomes, challenges in definition and measurement persist. In particular, scholars have extensively debated the concepts of fidelity and adaptation. Over the past few decades, however, a growing number of researchers now consider both fidelity and adaptation to be necessary for high quality implementation (e.g., Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Substance & Mental Health Services Administration, 2002). Such assertions suggest that commitments to traditional conceptualizations of fidelity should be balanced with an understanding that some modifications increase the relevance of, and participant engagement with, prevention programs.

However, this notion of fidelity-adaptation balance may not be as applicable to Youth Voice Programs (YVPs), which are defined by the unique principles of power-sharing, youth ownership, and engagement in social change. Drawing on examples from the implementation of two YVPs, each guided by the same program manual, we argue that fidelity to these principles requires adaptation. Challenging the prevailing wisdom of a fidelity-adaptation tension, we demonstrate that for YVPs, many adaptations are actually indicators of fidelity, not counterweights to it. We then discuss implications for measuring fidelity in YVPs and scaling up this empowering approach to working with children and youth.

Concepts of Fidelity and Adaptation in Implementation Quality

Interest in implementation science has grown as evidence mounts that a range of contextual factors shape how a program is delivered and the impact it has on participant outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Although scholars have identified many constructs and related measures of implementation quality, fidelity and adaptation have arguably been the subjects of greatest scholarly contention. In general, fidelity captures the extent to which practitioners implement a prevention program as it was designed (McIntyre, Gresham, DiGennaro, & Reed, 2007). Some scholars differentiate among several forms of fidelity, including compliance and competence fidelity. Whereas compliance fidelity measures adherence to a program manual, curriculum, or set of procedures, competence fidelity measures the level of skill with which an implementer delivers these activities (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Friedman, 2005). Evidence from a variety of studies suggests that higher fidelity to program protocols are associated with better participant outcomes (Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, 2008; Forgatch, Patterson, & DeGarmo, 2005; Wang et al., 2015).

In contrast, scholars define adaptation as any deviation from fidelity, including additions, deletions, or enhancements of program content (SAMHSA, 2002). Much of the scholarly interest in adaptation pertains to its utility in facilitating

comprehension, stimulating participant motivation, or otherwise improving the ecological validity of a prevention program (Bernal, Bonilla, & Bellido, 1995; Castro, Barrera, Jr., & Martinez, Jr., 2004). Justifications of the use of modifications have not gone uncriticized, however. Some assert that the perceived need for adaptation is often peremptory and exaggerated, and that claims of poor community buy-in may have more to do with lack of practitioner savvy than the need for modifications (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). Whereas advocates of adaptation consider local context an essential implementation consideration, advocates of fidelity often see it as a barrier to implementation quality.

In response to these debates, an emerging concept of fidelity-adaptation "balance" reflects a growing perspective that implementation should involve some tailoring to context, provided that implementers adhere to a program's core components (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; SAMHSA, 2002). Still, the notion of balance assumes that fidelity and adaptation are opposing ends of a continuum, a paradigm that we challenge using the case of Youth Voice Programs.

Youth Voice Programs

The complex relationship between fidelity and adaptation in the field of prevention science is perhaps most evident in Youth Voice Programs (YVPs; Edwards, Johnson & McGillicuddy, 2003; Kohfeldt, Chun, Grace, & Langhout, 2011; Larson & Angus, 2011). YVPs include approaches such as participatory action research, youth-led inquiry, and youth organizing, all of which involve young people in identifying, understanding, and addressing social justice issues through youth-adult partnerships. Research suggests that YVPs increase youth's connections to adults, critical consciousness, political engagement, and skills related to advocacy (e.g., Conner & Strobel, 2007; Harden et al., 2015; Ozer & Douglas, 2013). Some have described these competencies as "amplifiers" of other positive developmental outcomes, particularly for underserved low-income children and youth of color (Ginwright & James, 2002; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Travis & Leech, 2014).

Compared to traditional PYD programs, YVPs are less likely to be manualized, instead consisting of a set of principles that guide practice, including power-sharing, youth ownership, and engagement in social change (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Ginwright & James, 2002; Ozer & Douglas, 2015; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Given both rising interest in YVPs and increasing fiscal emphasis on implementation quality in routine practice, researchers must come to some agreement on the roles of fidelity and adaptation in YVP delivery and evaluation. Yet few studies use pre-defined measures to assess the quality of delivery of a manualized YVP (for an important exception, see Ozer & Douglas, 2015). A much larger body of primarily ethnographic research has inductively analyzed how key principles of YVPs play out in practice (Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Tilton, 2013) or has considered the factors that shape the delivery of these approaches (Dupuis & Mann-Feder, 2013; Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013; Ozer et al., 2010; Phillips, Berg, Rodriguez, & Morgan, 2010). However, intensive qualitative approaches are difficult to scale and are usually less feasible for practitioners than

traditional implementation monitoring checklists. More broadly, the YVP literature is rarely "in conversation with" implementation or prevention science frameworks that are reflected in a growing number of funding and research agency expectations.

For these reasons, we believe the interrelationship between adaptation and fidelity requires further conceptualization in the field of prevention science. Such theoretical work is especially important for issues of measurement and scale. Without clarity about the definition of implementation quality in prevention programs that prioritize participant self-determination and target ecological systems change, these programs are not eligible for many funding sources that would allow them to be taken to scale, limiting their potential impact on the well-being of young people, their schools, and communities.

Methods

Program Context

This article draws on examples collected during the implementation of one youth voice program, Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL), in two different organizations (The Bridge Project and Urban Peak) serving youth in six distinct communities in Denver, Colorado. The YELL program manual (Anyon et al., 2007) was developed by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities at Stanford University to support the implementation of youth-led action research projects. It outlines activities to facilitate the three typical stages or key components of youth-led action research: topic selection, data collection, and presentation of findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders. The original handbook's 58 sequenced lessons are 60–90 min in length, organized into three units on communication, leadership, and action research. Quasi-experimental studies, pre- and post-test research, and qualitative evidence suggests that YELL participants increase their participatory behaviors, socio-political awareness, critical thinking, problem solving, and public speaking skills (e.g., Conner & Strobel, 2007; Harden et al., 2015; Kirshner, 2008; Ozer & Douglas, 2013).

The Bridge Project began implementing the YELL program in 2013 as one component of the afterschool academic enrichment services it offers youth living in four public housing neighborhoods. YELL participants at this organization were primarily low-income middle school students of color, between the ages of 11–15, who identified as Black, Latinx or Asian. Over the past 5 years, participants have focused on a range of social issues from police brutality and discrimination towards the LGBTQ community to Islamophobia and human trafficking. At the Bridge Project, YELL participants choose their research methodology, which has involved surveys, focus groups, photovoice, and documentary videos. In most cases, youths' social action activities have involved presenting research products to local decision makers and sharing their work with peers or staff members at the Bridge Project. University researchers have evaluated implementation quality of YELL at the Bridge Project using structured observations, field notes, surveys, and fidelity forms.

Urban Peak began implementing YELL in 2015. Urban Peak is in an emergency shelter for homeless or unstably housed young adults that offers short-term stay, meals, and referral to education, employment and health services. The target population consists of racially diverse low-income youth ages 18–21 with overrepresentation of Black and LGBT youth. At Urban Peak, the YELL program focuses on the methodology of photovoice; youth are provided with cameras and supplemental skill-building opportunities in photography. The youth groups focused their work on understanding and creating community awareness around stereotypes, stigma, barriers, and inequity experienced by homeless young people. Their culminating projects have involved exhibits for community stakeholders. For the initial two cohorts of participants at Urban Peak, two observers took qualitative field notes regarding youth engagement and adaptations made to the activities outlined in the YELL program manual.

Data Collection and Analysis

Over a four-month period, a group of faculty, program assistants, and doctoral students who were involved in the implementation of the YELL program manual in these two organizations gathered for a series of 2-hour "retreats" aimed at generating ideas about issues of adaptation and fidelity in YVPs. The four retreats involved three general phases: (1) compiling a list of adaptations made to the YELL program manual during implementation at the Bridge Project and Urban Peak; (2) sorting these adaptations into categories predetermined by an initial review of field notes and fidelity forms (Roscoe, Anyon, & Jenson, 2016); and, (3) reducing examples into themes (Huberman & Miles, 1983) based on their alignment with the three core YVP principles. This iterative process was conducted collaboratively by establishing consensus and resolving any uncertainties that arose in each phase in order to increase rigor and reduce bias as much as possible.

Does Fidelity to Youth Voice Program Principles Require Adaptation? Examples from the Field

To demonstrate the limits of the notion of fidelity-adaptation balance, and to illustrate the ways adaptation and fidelity can be one and the same, this section will first describe the key principles guiding YVPs and then provide examples of modifications to YELL at the Bridge Project or Urban Peak which reflected fidelity to these principles. In other words, we focus on changes to activities or deviations from protocols outlined in the YELL program manual that were motivated by youth voice principles, such that the adaptations resulted in greater fidelity to these tenets. These modifications did not remove any key components of a youth voice program (i.e., issue identification, information gathering, and advocacy) but did, at times, involve providing them differently, iteratively, or shortening or lengthening them.

We are not arguing that fidelity to core components is unnecessary. Instead, we conceptualize core components as "what" should be done in a prevention program,

whereas the core principles guide "how" practitioners should deliver them. These are distinct but related constructs, both of which are essential to implementation quality in youth voice programs. The core principles alone, in absence of the core components, are not a cohesive approach; they consist only of ways of interacting with young people. On the other hand, the core components alone, in the absence of core principles, could involve rigid adherence to steps in a program manual, without sufficient incorporation of youth voice. Thus, we are proposing that fidelity to these principles requires an openness to the use of adaptation, and that high-quality implementation involves fidelity to a program's core components and underlying principles. The main implication of this claim is that adaptations which align with core principles should be considered indicators of fidelity, rather than deviations from it.

Examples of Principle 1: Power-Sharing

A central principle of YVPs is the transfer of power from adults to youth in decision-making. Decisions can relate to distribution of resources, planning activities or events, or selecting group goals and objectives (Larson & Walker, 2010). These choices go above and beyond those involved in many youth programs (e.g., the choice between two activities; Kohfeldt et al. 2011) and involve decisions that have a meaningful impact on the direction of the program. Throughout this process of power-sharing, youth develop interpersonal skills in communicating their views with others and making decisions as part of a team, as well as cognitive skills of thinking critically and strategically (Hansen & Larson, 2007). Because power-sharing is a dynamic process, it is impossible to fully anticipate what turns will be taken as a result, which leads to the modification of program protocols. In other words, power-sharing with young people is shaped by a wide array of individual and environmental factors that cannot always be planned ahead of time. This differentiation is difficult to build into program manuals, so it often requires deviation from program protocols.

For example, when youth in YELL at the Bridge Project determine their research questions and methodological approach, they are instructed to choose methods for information gathering that will have the most influence on their targeted decision-makers. Depending on their audience and interests, some YELL groups have chosen to create videos that highlight individual narratives, whereas other groups found it more strategic to use quantitative data and engage in survey development and aggregate analyses. It has not been possible to predict all of the research methods or funds of knowledge youth may elect to draw upon, necessitating the development of new activities beyond the most common approaches to information gathering that were included in the original program manual (e.g., surveys, interviews, and focus groups; Cammarota & Romero, 2009).

At Urban Peak, where the data collection method in YELL was prescribed by adults (photovoice), the issue identification stage also required adaptations on the part of facilitators. While activities in the YELL program manual were developed to ask youth to identify causes and consequences of concrete problems in the community (e.g., drug use or crime), the youth at Urban Peak often selected very abstract

problems (e.g., boredom or stereotypes), which then required longer and more complex conversations to uncover their causes and solutions. In such cases, adaptation of program protocols was consistent with the underlying YVP principle of power-sharing.

Examples of Principle 2: Youth Ownership

The second principle guiding YVPs is that participants should have some ownership of program activities. A common practice among YVPs is to involve former youth participants as facilitators or staff members in subsequent years. This principle involves fading adult direction, and increasing youth responsibility for program activities (e.g., running a meeting, making a presentation, leading a workshop, or negotiating a mediation; Larson & Walker, 2010; Soleimanpour et al., 2008). By leading activities, youth strengthen their skills in problem-solving, organization, and facilitating discussions with their peers. This often looks like decreased structuring by adults, and increased participation by young people.

However, adult fading and youth responsibility for program activities can lead to curricular modifications as young leaders adjust content based on their personal experiences or simplify exercises to address their emerging facilitation skills. For example, at the Bridge Project, former participants have been trained to facilitate community-building exercises at the start of each lesson plan. In order for the youth to have ownership over their role as a facilitator, adults encourage youth to make their mark, and avoid stepping in if they make adaptations in the moment. Otherwise, youth would feel their authority had been undermined, which can lead to attrition in YVPs (Bragg, 2007; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Larson & Walker, 2010).

Yet to lead activities independently, youth facilitators may need to simplify or tailor curriculum to their strengths, developmental stage, or cognitive abilities. Examples include changing the vocabulary used in an exercise to be less "school-like" and more youth-friendly, modifying role plays to be more realistic based on youth leaders' own experiences, and choosing a completely different activity than planned because it was less complicated (e.g., involved fewer steps). Moreover, disruptions in group processes and peer distractions are normative behaviors for adolescents, but are quite challenging for peer leaders to manage. As a result, exercises from a curriculum may take longer when facilitated by youth. In several instances, activities that were allotted 15 min lasted twice as long.

Even when youth are not in charge of facilitation, their increasing ownership may come in the form of feedback about how to make the program more responsive to their needs and interests. For example, at Urban Peak, youth reported they felt more engaged during group discussions than when completing interactive exercises involving very structured steps to achieve a goal (e.g., brainstorming ideas on sticky notes before identifying common themes as a group). Facilitators subsequently modified structured exercises to be discussion-based, but these conversations tended to take more time. Thus, in both cases, increasing youth ownership led to extended implementation of some activities that then limited the time available for others.

Example of Principle 3: Engaging in Social Change

A third principle of YVPs is that youth address social problems and collectively take action to create change in their environments, thereby facilitating opportunities for involvement in the democratic process (Ginwright & James, 2002; Harden et al., 2015; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Travis & Leech, 2014). The focus is then on helping youth develop their understanding of the way they exist in the world and their potential for transformation within it (Wagaman, 2015; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Common approaches include dissemination of products that share youths' research and recommendations via presentations, videos, exhibits, or other types of events to raise awareness of an issue and highlight youths' ideas about how it can be solved (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Larson & Walker, 2010; Soleiman-pour et al., 2008; Wagaman, 2015).

The focus on creating social change in YVPs often leads to program adaptations because advocacy activities are highly dependent on shifting historical and organizational contexts (Ginwright & James, 2002; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Travis & Leech, 2014). As our understanding of social problems changes and different social movements take hold at different moments in time, YVP programs must adapt their content accordingly. For example, when one YELL group at the Bridge Project chose the topic of police brutality in 2015, the facilitator regularly adapted sessions to incorporate ongoing media coverage of excessive use of force by police officers and related court cases across the country. These newspaper articles and videos proved to be more useful in helping youth understand structural inequalities and social movements than the activities in the curriculum designed for this purpose, which involved participants reading and analyzing vignettes about youth-led social justice campaigns to promote education reform. Moreover, they helped youth understand how their work could be connected to broader efforts that could increase their group's impact on the community.

A YVP's course of action and related learning opportunities are also different depending on decision-makers' level of support for the youths' ideas and recommendations (Larson & Angus, 2011; Larson & Walker, 2010). For example, at Urban Peak, one group of youth felt that the shelter unfairly used certain restrictions as consequences for forbidden behaviors, yet the shelter held firm that the restrictions were in place for safety reasons and were not negotiable. This conflict made it necessary for youth to return to their data and choose a different focus. This iterative process was aligned with the overall goals of the program, to help youth develop critical thinking skills, but it required flexibility in the order in which sessions occurred and the time spent on each phase of the curriculum. More specifically, the group had to return to activities in the program manual related to topic selection, which constrained the time available to develop and disseminate recommendations related to their new issue.

These examples illustrate that strict adherence to a program manual does not allow for the incorporation of participants' perspectives in major decisions, ownership over program activities, or engagement in social change. Instead, fidelity to the unique principles that define the YVP model necessarily involve adaptation.

Implications for Research and Practice: Alternative Approaches to Measuring Fidelity in Youth Voice Programs

If "fidelity" to the principles of YVPs requires modifications that are traditionally conceptualized as "adaptation," instruments like quantitative checklists that measure adherence to a static manual will not capture implementation quality in these types of approaches. In fact, somewhat ironically, rigid adherence to an adult-developed curriculum would be an indicator of poor fidelity to the principles of youth voice. We therefore argue that adaptations consistent with program principles can actually *be* indicators of fidelity in YVPs. In other words, fidelity and adaptation can be one and the same, rather than opposing ends of a continuum. In this section, we describe the implications of such a conceptualization for program manuals, assessment, and related instruments.

Flexible Program Manuals

This reconceptualization of fidelity among YVPs has implications for practice and research. In a practice context, curricula need to be flexible, offering multiple choices across each session of the curriculum. In doing so, it may be more useful for YVP manuals to define the core components of the program, provide a variety of activities that are philosophically aligned with key principles, and then allow facilitators and young people to decide how they will meet their goals. The "choose your own adventure" model of children's books provides a useful analogy for how manuals could provide a menu of activities that could support YVP goals at different stages in the process of issue identification, information gathering, and advocacy. These manuals should clearly define specific activities and steps that need to be completed, but allow for enough flexibility that adult facilitators can incorporate youth input, give participants responsibilities for programming, and respond to the unique dynamics involved in any social action campaign. Furthermore, manuals and facilitators should plan for fading the role of adult facilitation over the course of the program. As young people develop greater skill and step into leadership roles, adults should plan to step back and share more power with youth participants, stepping in only to make suggestions primarily when the group deviates from the guiding principles or core components of the program.

Multifaceted Measures of Implementation Quality

In terms of research, measures of implementation quality in YVPs should be multifaceted and multi-method, involving both qualitative and quantitative data sources. They should assess the degree of fidelity to YVP principles (power sharing, youth ownership, engaging in social change), which includes making adaptations, along with core components (e.g., issue identification, information gathering, advocacy). This process is often more time intensive and costly than a checklist of activities completed. For example, at the stage of issue identification, indicators of fidelity would not only include the choice of a topic, but also the degree to which youth

were involved in choosing that topic (e.g., power-sharing). Other measures could assess whether specific activities are aligned with broader indicators of quality that are relevant to all types of youth programs, such as sequenced, active, focused and explicit opportunities for skill development (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).

Of course, we recognize that not all types of adaptations are aligned with the underlying principles of YVPs and their core components, or even the goals of particular sessions. Several types of adaptations could negatively impact program outcomes if they undermine power-sharing, youth ownership, or engagement in social change. For example, facilitators at the Bridge Project would sometimes overrule decisions youth made to protect them from manageable failures, which could constrain students' development of strategic thinking (Hansen & Larson, 2007). Moreover, YVP implementers should carefully consider "logistic" adaptations (Moore, Bumbarger, & Cooper, 2013), which can attenuate positive outcomes if they lead to reduced dosage or involve skipping core components (e.g., skipping information gathering and going from issue identification to advocacy). In other cases, facilitators have used punitive behavior management approaches that are counter to youth voice and autonomy. To differentiate between "good" and "bad" adaptations, scholars from other fields have developed taxonomies of implementation quality that include measures of both (Stirman, Miller, Toder, & Calloway, 2013). In the case of YVPs, it is rarely possible to anticipate all the implications of youth's decision-making, so constructs that are time-ordered (e.g., reactive) are less appropriate than those that focus on the content of the adaptation and the degree to which it is aligned with YVP principles and components.

To be certain, flexibly adapting YVPs to adhere to youth voice principles, while not inadvertently removing key components of youth voice programs, requires a great deal of skill on the part of adult facilitators. In this sense, competence fidelity, or the degree to which facilitators deliver a program skillfully, also plays an important role in implementation quality. Like any prevention program, adult facilitators need training and technical assistance to ensure they have the competencies they need to successfully implement this approach to working with youth and their schools or communities. However, consistent with our primary thesis, such facilitator supports should emphasize not only skillful implementation of core components, but also the strategic application of key principles.

Available Instruments

Several of such instruments have been developed to assess implementation quality in afterschool programs for school-age youth. Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010) summarize nine different tools that measure quality as a function of fidelity to positive youth development principles, rather than adherence to a specific program model. These instruments capture the degree to which a program reflects the principles of being strengths-based and relationship-focused, and whether activities have been completed that establish positive group norms or provide structured opportunities for applied skill building. Few of these tools include indicators of youth voice and choice, but work by Ozer and Douglas (2015) provides an example of how

implementation quality could be assessed in the specific context of YVPs. These authors developed the YPAR Process Template (YPT) to assess the implementation quality of a youth participatory action research program delivered by teachers as part of credit-bearing elective courses in four high schools. Rather than a checklist of lesson plans or activities, the measure was designed to capture adherence to key YPAR principles (e.g., student input in research and action decisions) and core components (e.g., original data collection). Instead of a checklist, the observer provides quantitative rankings on these dimensions, supplemented by qualitative notes. With rubrics that provide detail about the type of practices that are, and are not, aligned with the principles of YPAR, this tool also provides guidance about the type of adaptations that are undesirable.

Evidence-Based Registries and Clearinghouses

Although these instruments demonstrate that it is possible to treat fidelity and adaptation as one and the same when assessing implementation quality of YVPs, these measures are more time intensive and complex to administer than self-reported checklists of activities completed. They all involve trained observers attending program sessions for 2–5 hours; some also include multiple observers, interviews, document review, or surveys. Such investments are hard to justify when program registries and clearinghouses tend to treat adaptation and fidelity as competing dimensions of program quality. For example, to be included in the highly regarded Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development list of evidence-based prevention programs, an approach must have been evaluated by a high-quality randomized control trial, or by two quasi-experimental studies, that each included quantitative fidelity measures of adherence to manualized protocols or checklists (Mihalic & Elliot, 2015). Similarly, The Society of Prevention Research's *Standards of Evidence for Efficacy, Effectiveness, and Scale-up Research* (2015) generally frames standardization and adaptability as opposing dimensions of implementation quality.

Some of these standards do acknowledge the possibility that adaptation and fidelity can coexist within measures of implementation quality, but not until an approach has already demonstrated efficacy and effectiveness. Prior to the stage of scaling up, these standards largely ignore the value of adaptations that cannot be manualized, but do maintain fidelity to program principles. Criteria such as these emphasize the ability to replicate standardized program components across randomized groups. These requirements all but ensure that YVPs will never make it to Blueprints or be considered evidence-based, even if they are studied using experimental methods. Funders and policy-makers increasingly look to such standards and lists when determining programs to support or deliver, so these requirements can create substantial barriers to the expansion and diffusion of YVPs.

Our analysis suggests that evidence-based registries, clearinghouses, and standards should expand their definitions of fidelity to include adaptations that are consistent with a prevention program's underlying principles or theory of change. Alternatively, scholars could establish new criteria for implementation quality among approaches that are grounded in principles like power-sharing or participant

ownership which, by definition, require adaptations to manualized protocols. However, re-conceptualizing fidelity and adaptation as one and the same in these cases would require a shift in the paradigm underlying existing models of implementation quality in the field prevention science, along with a recognition that adaptations have value at the stage of testing program efficacy, not just when scaling up.

Conclusion

Just as the fidelity-adaptation debate has evolved from placing priority on fidelity to recognizing the value of adaptation, to an acceptance of both, we argue this debate can evolve even further in the field of prevention science. For YVPs, the empowerment philosophy underlying the program is at odds with enforcing fidelity to a predetermined, adult-developed manual because it not only allows, but in fact encourages adaptations based on what young people believe, want, and decide is important. Without emphasizing fidelity to youth voice principles as much as, or to a greater degree than, its components, organizations that implement YVPs may instead silence young people's voices in order to rigidly follow steps in a manual. Advances in implementation science should aim to develop multifaceted assessments of fidelity that assess quality as adherence to the key principles of YVPs while encouraging choice and flexibility in implementing key components of such programs. Such advances will aid in scaling up this promising approach while maintaining implementation quality.

Compliance With Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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Affiliations

Yolanda Anyon[1] · **Joe Roscoe[2]** · **Kimberly Bender[1]** · **Heather Kennedy[1]** · **Jonah Dechants[1]** · **Stephanie Begun[3]** · **Christine Gallager[1]**

Joe Roscoe
joe.n.roscoe@berkeley.edu

Kimberly Bender
kimberly.bender@du.edu

Heather Kennedy
Heather.Kennedy@ucdenver.edu

Jonah Dechants
Jonah.Dechants@du.edu

Stephanie Begun
stephanie.begun@utoronto.ca

Christine Gallager
Christine.Gallager@du.edu

[1] Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, 2148 S. High Street, Denver, CO 80208, USA

[2] School of Social Work, University of California Berkeley, 120 Haviland Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

[3] Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 246 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V4, Canada