Building Citizens for the Future: A Case Study of 4-H Members' Experiences During the Citizenship Washington Focus Program

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Abstract

In recent decades, numerous approaches have been used to promote the development of youth's civic identity. Evidence of the success of these approaches, however, is insufficient. In response, this case study sought to document the outcomes of Louisiana 4-H members who participated in the Citizen Washington Focus (CWF) program. Through our analysis of the data, five themes emerged: (1) Positive Sparks, (2) Learning About Self and Others, (3) Youth-Adult Partnerships, (4) Program Engagement, and (5) Practicing Civic Skills. We interpreted findings through the lens of Arnold's 4-H Thriving Model, which provided insight into how the 4-H members experienced civic identity development as a result of the CWF program. We concluded CWF served as a powerful way to assist youth in developing their civic identity. For example, participants discussed building skills and practicing such during the program, which improved their self-efficacy. The 4-H members also highlighted bill writing and civil discourse as skills they transferred into their lives after returning home. Going forward, implications and recommendations are offered for future research, theory, and practice.

Introduction

Youth development programs targeting the acquisition of life skills exist in communities across the nation (National 4-H Council, 2020). One of the largest youth organizations that facilitates youth development programming to more than 6 million members in the U.S. is 4-H (National 4-H Council, 2020). 4-H consists of three focus areas: (1) STEM and Agriculture, (2) Healthy Living, and (3) Civic Engagement. The National 4-H Council (2020) suggested through its involvement in the program focus areas, 4-H members have "taken on critical societal issues, such as addressing community health inequities, engaging in civil discourse and advocating for equity and inclusion for all" (para. 1). As a consequence, it is critical to understand better the experiences of youth who participate in such programming, particularly those, which promote the development of civic identity. One such program is the National 4-H Council's Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF) program. Each summer, high school 4-H members from across the U.S. visit the nation's capital to participate in CWF, which is "4-H's premier leadership and citizenship program" hosted by the National 4-H Conference Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, just minutes from Washington, D.C. (Citizenship Washington Focus, 2019, para. 1). Every state has the opportunity to send a delegation of 4-H members to the weeklong experience that incorporates hands-on learning opportunities on topics such as citizenship and leadership through professional development, field trips, and social events.

To this point, evidence documenting the experiences of youth who participate in the CWF program has been insufficient. As an illustration, in recent years, participants have completed an

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evaluation at the end of their experience. However, the instrument is limited to assessing participants' satisfaction with the program, rather than focusing on developmental outcomes such as civic identity development. Because CWF has the potential to create meaningful developmental outcomes for the youth who participate, a need emerged to understand the experiences of 4-H members to demonstrate the program's long-term impacts. Dedicating six weeks every summer to programming, CWF is one of the largest programs the National 4-H Conference Center hosts annually. On its website, the National 4-H Council noted, "CWF is a tradition that dates back more than 50 years and is the only national citizenship and leadership program designed and offered exclusively to 4-H members" (Citizenship Washington Focus, 2019, para. 2). However, the literature capturing this experience is lacking. Despite this, Hoover et al. (2007) did feature the CWF program in their historical review of leadership development in 4-H and FFA in which they provided a chronology regarding how the program evolved:

> At the national level, the National 4-H Club Camp was first held in Washington, D.C. and visited by Eleanor Roosevelt. It later became the National 4-H Conference, which was located at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Citizenship Short Course (now Citizenship Washington Focus) was also held at the 4-H Center. Both the conference and the short courses incorporated leadership skills into their programs. (p. 103)

Although Hoover et al. (2007) referenced the program's changes regarding its name and location, no evidence was reported regarding the impact the experience had on students. Similarly, Scholl and Paster (2011) offered a historical account of leadership programming for 4-H from 1911-2010. Regarding CWF, Scholl and Paster (2011) provided a limited description of the program and detailed the findings of one unpublished study conducted in the 1970s to demonstrate the program's successes. These deficiencies in knowledge inspired the current investigation.

Review of Literature

In the literature, civic engagement has been defined as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference" (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi). Civic engagement has also been referred to as *community engagement*, although this conceptualization seems to focus more on the mutually beneficial collaboration and exchange of knowledge and resources between higher education and their communities (Brown University, 2020, para. 1). Concerning youth civic engagement programming, various approaches, including service-learning, have been used by practitioners to promote the formation of civic identity for youth (Roberts & Edwards, 2015, 2018, 2020; Roberts et al., 2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020). In response, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2016) provided five recommendations for designing effective civic engagement programs. For example, they recommended program coordinators "be explicit regarding the degree of youth participation, be relevant to young people's own interests and lived experiences, be action-oriented, value and foster analysis and reflection, [and] provide opportunities for youth-adult partnerships" (UNDESA, 2016, pp. 23-24). In a slightly different interpretation, four pillars of civic engagement have been advanced to facilitate the formation of youth's civic identity. Those pillars include:

> (1) *civic action* or participation in activities such as volunteering or service-learning to help better the community, (2) *civic commitment* or the willingness to make positive contributions to society, (3) *civic skills* or the ability to be involved in civil society, politics, and democracy, and (4) *social cohesion* or a sense of reciprocity, trust, and bonding to others [Emphasis added]. (Civic Engagement, 2020, para. 5)

Despite these differences, previous evidence has demonstrated quality youth development programs incorporate the following factors: belonging, generosity, youth-adult relationships, positive youth development, and youth engagement (Catalano et al., 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kress,

2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Further, the UNDESA (2016) reported youth who are more actively engaged citizens are less likely to participate in risky behaviors and are more inclined to make a healthy transition into adulthood. Youth who have previously engaged in civic engagement activities have also been shown to improve the public's awareness of youth voice and provide a platform for youth to be heard (UNDESA, 2016). Finally, civic engagement programs have also been found to foster the acquisition of students' 21st Century competencies such as knowledge of the economic and political processes, understanding presentations in a range of media, the ability to work cooperatively with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and positive attitudes about civics (Cambell et al., 2011). These positive outcomes served as a catalyst for the creation of the CWF program. CWF is an immersive, weeklong experience that offers 4-H members from across the country an opportunity to gain and actively use leadership and citizenship skills. According to the National 4-H Conference Center (2019), there are four main objectives of the program:

> (1) strengthen communication, leadership, and other citizenship skills on a national level; (2) understand the importance of civic and social responsibilities as they relate to the development of better citizens and leaders; (3) exchange ideas, practice respect, and form friendships with other youth from diverse backgrounds; and (4) experience hands-on learning using the historical backdrop of our nation's capital. (p. 2)

From the beginning, CWF participants are introduced and exposed to the culture of Washington, D.C. For example, youth participants are guided through historical monuments, memorials, and landmarks of the city and surrounding areas, providing them with an opportunity to see where history was made. Attendees also participate in various workshops throughout the week to build upon their citizenship and leadership skills. The workshops include a general introduction to citizenship, civil discourse, congressional issues, and bill writing (Citizenship Washington Focus, 2019). The educational tours and hands-on workshops allow youth to prepare for an immersive learning experience culminating in a day on Capitol Hill. During this experience, 4-H members have an opportunity to tour congressional offices, meet with congressional and legislative staff to express opinions on policy and ask questions, as well as attend congressional committee hearings when possible (Citizenship Washington Focus, 2019). Finally, youth conclude by visiting museums and other cultural points of interest. As a result of these experiences, CWF strives to provide youth with a greater sense of cultural, historical, and social context in which they begin to develop a more mature civic identity.

Emergent Conceptual Lens

The research on civic engagement often highlights the progression of one's identity through civic development (Crocetti et al., 2012). "As youth develop, they create meaning, identity, and a sense of themselves in the world by using a variety of sources" (Rubin, 2007, p. 450). In the U.S., youth are provided with opportunities to develop their civic identities through an assortment of sources extending beyond textbooks and traditional classroom instruction (Rubin, 2007). "Students can be engaged in a range of activities to draw upon their own experiences and develop their understanding and critiques of the world, activities that can take many forms and cover a range of content and skill-related material" (Rubin, 2007, p. 475). Through participation in these diverse activities and experiences, youth are given a safe space to explore and discuss issues important to them, ultimately strengthening their civic identity (UNDESA, 2016). 4-H, in particular, can promote the enhancement of civic identity through participation in programs that emphasize creating physically and emotionally safe environments for youth to interact with their peers and caring adults (Crocetti et al., 2012).

We grounded this investigation in the 4-H Program Leaders Working Group's (2021) 4-H Thriving Model, which seeks to describe how 4-H members grow and evolve as they engage in youth development programming. In particular, the model describes how high-quality youth programming that emphasizes key developmental contexts leads to thriving youth who, through participation and

engagement, can achieve desired outcomes (Arnold, 2019a). The components of the 4-H Thriving Model include the developmental context, the youth thriving trajectory, developmental outcomes, and long-term outcomes (see Figure 1). Arnold (2018) argued when all of these elements are combined in 4-H programming, one could more easily understand how the developmental context of the program leads to positive outcomes. For this study, emphasis was placed on the developmental context, i.e., the CWF program. The developmental context is composed of three elements: (1) youth sparks, (2) program quality principles, and (3) developmental relationships (Arnold, 2019a). Essentially, the developmental context serves as a launching pad for creating high-quality youth development experiences that are essential for youth to begin their trajectory of thriving, eventually achieving desired developmental outcomes (Arnold, 2018). Further, the developmental context provides an opportunity to create and evaluate high-quality programming, which enhances the youth development experience. In the current study, we exclusively used the developmental context of the 4-H Thriving Model to describe participants' outcomes.

Figure 1

The 4-H Thriving Model
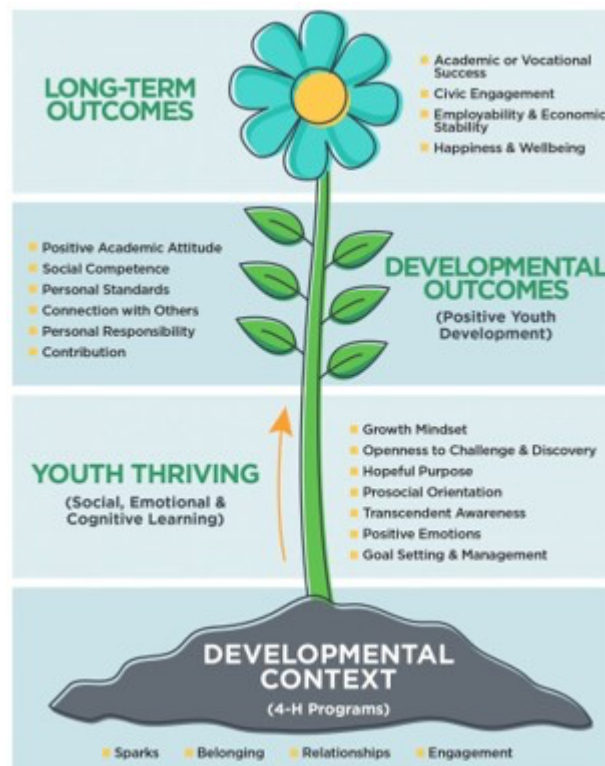
Note. Reprinted from *4-H Thriving Model of PYD* (para. 10), by 4-H Program Leaders Working Group, 2021, National 4-H Council. Copyright 2021 by National 4-H Council.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to document the outcomes of Louisiana 4-H members who participated in the CWF program. Specifically, this study examined the lived experiences of three 4-H members from West Carrol Parish who attended CWF in July 2019 with the Louisiana delegation. One research question guided the study: In what ways did participation in CWF influence 4-H members'

sense of civic development? Because this study examined the change in civic behaviors of youth, it aligned with the American Association for Agricultural Education's National Research Agenda Priority 6: *Vibrant, Resilient Communities* (Graham et al., 2016).

Methodology

Constructivism served as the epistemological position used to guide this investigation (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism supported the goals of this study because the focus was on understanding how participants made meaning of their lived experiences through their interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, an instrumental case study was determined to be the best approach to understand the experience of three youth participants who attended CWF in the summer of 2019 (Stake, 1995). Case study research "involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Meanwhile, Stake (1995) described case studies as a bounded system rather than a type of methodology. This study used a mixture of both conceptualizations of case study by investigating experiences in which the participants, or cases being studied, were bound by time and place and involved multiple sources of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, we used an instrumental case study because it allows "the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98). For this study, the case was bounded by time and place. For example, we examined the CWF program that occurred in July 2019 and the experiences of 4-H members from the same county.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify the most appropriate participants for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The youth participants consisted of three females between the ages of 15 and 16 from West Carrol Parish who attended the same CWF trip in July 2019 with the Louisiana Delegation. The data collection was limited to these three individuals because they were the only 4-H members from West Carrol Parish to attend the 2019 CWF program. The lead researcher also served as the county 4-H agent for the participants, which created a level of trust between the researcher, participants, and parents/guardians. This also allowed the lead researcher to serve as a participant-observer during the collection of data (Stake, 1995).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data sources for this investigation included: (1) participant journal entries, (2) individual interviews, and (3) observations and field notes. The journals were captured during the CWF program and included a prompt for each entry. For the first entry, the prompt asked participants to respond with their expectations for the experience and what they were looking forward to most. During the CWF program, youth were instructed to provide daily reflections on a thorn (frustration), a flower (something they learned), and a bud (something they looked forward to). Then, for the final entry, the participants were instructed to return to their initial entry and decide if their expectations were met and to expand on any other takeaways. Interviews were also conducted with all three participants. The questions were selected to provide deeper insight as to what the 4-H members' experiences were during the CWF program. Questions asked during the interview included, but were not limited to: (1) what made the youth decide to participate in the program, (2) what was something the youth learned as a result of participating, (3) how did youth interact with other participants, (4) how did the adult leaders influence the experience, and (5) how did youth plan to practice something they learned during the experience. After interviews, the data were transcribed verbatim. Then, transcripts were shared with participants, i.e., member checking, to ensure accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection resulted in 18 journal entries, verbatim transcriptions of recorded interviews with the 4-H youth, and observations and fieldnotes captured by the lead researcher, which collectively allowed us to achieve data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, pseudonyms were applied to the participants interview and journal entry responses.

Creswell and Poth (2018) described three strategies to facilitate qualitative data analysis: (1) preparing and organizing the data, (2) reducing the data, and (3) representing the data. Therefore, we compiled all data sources and reduced the data using procedures advanced by Saldaña (2016). The first cycle of coding consisted of descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and emotion coding, while the second cycle of coding consisted of axial coding and theoretical coding. Descriptive coding was the starting point for analysis in the first cycle of coding, which consisted of an "open-ended approach" to coding the data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 121). Beginning with descriptive coding provided us an opportunity to break down and organize the data while still remaining open to emergent concepts. In vivo coding was then used to honor the participants' voices by creating codes using the 4-H members' words (Saldaña, 2016). The final coding technique used during the first round was emotion coding. Applying emotion coding was important due to the social nature of the CWF program and our desire to capture how the youth were feeling throughout their participation (Saldaña, 2016). It was through this first cycle of coding that initial categories began to emerge. After the first cycle coding approaches were completed, second cycle methods were applied. The importance of second cycle coding is to take the coded data from the first cycle and "reconfigure to eventually develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 227). Specifically, axial coding was used to "reduce the number of initial codes while sorting and relabeling them into conceptual categories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 237). This process allowed us to determine which codes were more dominant and which were less important regarding the purpose of the study. Finally, theoretical coding was used to connect all emerging categories and interpret them through the lens of the 4-H Youth Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018). In addition to coding, analytic memos were kept throughout the data analysis process to allow for personal reflection during the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). Analytic memos are not field notes based on observations during the experience; rather, they serve as a place for a researcher to track the relationship of the emerging codes and the phenomenon being investigated (Saldaña, 2016). Through the use of analytic memos, we were able to understand the emerging codes better as they evolved into the themes.

Reflexivity

In staying true to the qualitative approach, we recognize our backgrounds could have shaped our interpretation, and, as a result, we "positioned [our]selves in the research to acknowledge how [our] interpretation flows from [our] own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). For example, the lead researcher previously worked at the National 4-H Conference Center as a program assistant in 2017. During her time at the National 4-H Conference Center, she did not work directly with CWF participants, but did observe program activities, lived with program assistants who served as facilitators for the program, and assisted with preparation for the program. Although she did not actively participate in the program during this time, she had great knowledge of what took place and knew the in-depth detail of activities. Further, the lead researcher currently serves as the 4-H agent for the youth in this study. The second researcher is a faculty member at Louisiana State University and has worked extensively with youth programming and citizenship initiatives. Therefore, our personal experiences and relationships introduced several sources of bias.

Qualitative Quality

To ensure quality was built into our study, we applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) standards for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The first technique, confirmability, refers to highlighting any biases, which may affect the outcomes of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability we fully described the recruitment of participants and how data were collected and analyzed and were forthcoming about personal experiences, which could cause biases during data interpretation. The second technique, dependability, represents how the study was conducted consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To uphold dependability, we created a specific research question

that guided the investigation and maintained an audit trail that was reviewed by a fellow peer researcher. The third technique, credibility, seeks to ensure the study's findings align with existing literature and theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established by creating thick descriptions, triangulation of data through collecting and analyzing different data sources, and keeping analytic memos throughout the coding process to ensure conclusions reflected the findings. The final technique, transferability, seeks to promote the transfer of this study's findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved by linking the data and emerging themes to theory, fully and accurately describing the connected theory, and by providing conclusions that could be used in similar contexts.

Findings

Through our analysis, five themes emerged that represented the 4-H members' sense of civic development: (1) Positive Sparks, (2) Learning About Self and Others, (3) Youth-Adult Partnerships, (4) Program Engagement, and (5) Practicing Civic Skills. We interpreted findings through the lens of Arnold's (2018) 4-H Thriving Model, which provided insight into how youth experienced civic development as a result of the CWF program. We provide a narrative of each theme, with supporting evidence, next.

Theme #1: Positive Sparks

"Oh my gosh, this is going to be so much fun*"* – Amy. Even before embarking on the trip, Amy explained she "heard some really good things about it." She continued: "I was just ready to go." When describing their experiences in journal entries, the 4-H members consistently used the phrase they were "looking forward to" the CWF program. For example, Katy wrote, "I'm looking forward to the museums and memorials." It was assumed the use of this verbiage was due, in part, to the journal entry prompt that required each daily entry to include a "bud," or something the youth were looking forward to during the CWF program. However, interviews also captured this concept as well.

As a result, the theme aligned with the youth sparks component of the 4-H Thriving Model because it served as a source of intrinsic motivation for their learning experience (Arnold, 2019b). In their journals, the participants used adverbs that placed specific emphasis on their excitement for the program with phrases such as: "really excited" and "super fun." Their enthusiasm for the program continuously emerged in our analysis of the data. From their initial excitement, while loading the bus, to the activities they were looking forward to each day, the participants voiced how fortunate they felt to have been able to live this experience. Katy stated: "I loved Washington so much." Whereas Amy suggested: "it was definitely a once in a lifetime" opportunity. Further, all three of the youth participants expressed they were grateful for this experience and were appreciative they were given the opportunity to attend CWF. With the internal spark ignited, it provided a launching point for their growth in knowledge, skills, and encounters with others (Arnold, 2019b).

Theme #2: Learning About Self and Others

"I was pretty, just, comfortable where I was" – Amy. The 4-H members described this trip as an opportunity to get outside their comfort zones. All three participants described deciding to participate in the CWF program as outside of their comfort zone because it forced them to travel outside of their home state. For example, Amy stated: "I've never gone far away from home." Although this was a significant physical and personal journey, the three participants discussed one of the reasons they decided to attend the trip was for an opportunity "to just get away" (Mary) and to "meet new people" (Katy).

Meeting new people forced the participants even further outside their comfort zones. The youth described the initial icebreakers they participated in as being "intimidating." However, they also mentioned they felt the exercises helped them meet new people, and without these icebreakers, it would have taken them a lot longer to become comfortable. In particular, Mary stated: "I wouldn't normally just go up to them [new people], so I felt like that helped me." Further, Katy remarked that meeting new people and forming those relationships made her feel as though she was experiencing growth. Ironically, a self-proclaimed extrovert, Amy, discussed feeling overwhelmed when participating in icebreakers, whereas Mary, who was an introvert, described the icebreakers as being helpful. Creating this physical and psychologically safe environment for youth to discover new experiences and comfortably interact with others is an important factor in crafting a quality program (Arnold, 2019d). Although meeting new people pushed the participants out of their comfort zones, they all articulated the varying encounters when meeting new people. All three 4-H members discussed how excited they were to meet new people, not only from Louisiana, but also from all over the country. However, one topic that continuously arose was the discussion of roommates. The program leaders purposefully placed participants in rooms with three other individuals with whom they would have had very little or no previous interactions. Although some inter-roommate conflict arose, all the youth shared they still kept in touch with at least one of their roommates from the trip. Nevertheless, having the opportunity to develop and practice those social skills is important for youth as they began to transition into adulthood (Arnold, 2019d).

Finally, the participants discussed how they expanded their understandings of self. For example, Katy explained she "got to learn about [herself]." Further, Katy wrote in a reflection she learned "how to properly enjoy herself" during experiences that may be new or different. When journaling about her CWF experience, Mary concluded: "it's ok to express emotion." As such, the participants were able to find their voice, discover their passion, and felt comfortable enough to express how they felt. It should also be noted that all of the quotes in this subcategory arose in the reflective journal excerpts but not in the interviews. This may be due to the more intimate and internal nature of the journal entries versus retelling the lived experience during interviews. Nonetheless, it is clear the youth felt a sense of belonging within the CWF program, which enhanced their positive identity trajectories (Arnold, 2019d).

Theme 3: Youth-Adult Relationships

"We just kind of grew close to them" – Amy. A common component of all 4-H members' experiences were the collaborations between adult leaders and youth participants. During the CWF program, 4-H members interacted with their two trip leaders from the Louisiana 4-H State Office, adult chaperones from Louisiana and 10 college-aged program assistants at the National 4-H Conference Center. Overall, the participants recalled their interactions with their adult counterparts as being very positive. For example, Mary explained the adults helped "make it fun." The 4-H members described their trip leaders from Louisiana as being "very knowledgeable" and making the experience "more enjoyable." Amy shared a story about being in a museum with one of her trip leaders and engaging in a discussion that made her "realize some stuff" and provided her with "new ideas to explore." Meanwhile, Mary spoke about her relationship with their program assistant, stating they were full of energy and approachable, specifically stating "you could go through ideas and explore with them." In both instances, the youth spoke not only to be able to openly discuss and exchange ideas but also to consider new concepts and ways of thinking. The comfort participants had with the adults indicated that although they were challenged to expand their growth and ways of thinking, the adults provided a sense of support and shared power (Arnold, 2019c).

Theme 4: Program Engagement

"I think it was hearing it and then being able to see it" – Mary. Each day provided a new opportunity for the 4-H members to learn while at CWF. Participants often discussed learning about a variety of subjects during their trip, such as animals at the Natural History Museum, first amendment rights at the Newseum, and gothic architecture at the National Cathedral. The typical format for any historical site visit was for the program assistant to provide commentary before allowing the youth to explore. For example, upon arriving at the Lincoln Memorial, the program assistant gathered the group, explained the background and historical relevance, and posed questions for them to consider as they interacted with the memorial. Through utilizing this format, it provided youth a connection with an adult who could impart their expertise and facilitate learning and engagement, further igniting an internal spark (Arnold, 2019b).

The 4-H members discussed on multiple occasions, in writing and verbally, how many of the monuments and memorials they encountered "made [them] think." Amy recalled visiting the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and how it made her "realize all these people died," concluding the experience at the wall "was pretty impactful." On the other hand, Mary summarized her experience of witnessing a funeral occurring while visiting Arlington National Cemetery as making her "realize how we take for granted everything." Although purposefully planned, when youth were given the opportunity to explore the historical sites on their own, it provided a powerful opportunity for reflection and actualization.

Two of the largest outcomes the youth attributed to their participation in the CWF program were the ability to write a bill and how to argue effectively. On this point, Amy explained: "I learned to argue, but in the nice way." The 4-H members discussed learning how a bill was made and, ultimately, how they worked with a group to write their own bill. Further, they talked about participating in activities where their group acted as the government and even though they were given a topic by their program assistant, Amy argued the youth "basically had to come up with the rest of it" on their own. For example, the program assistant would provide them with a topic, the group would create a bill, a discussion would occur, and participants from outside groups would vote whether to pass the bill or not. When discussing how they learned appropriate civil discourse techniques, Mary suggested she learned to "explain [the content of the bill] so that way, other people would understand." She believed this helped "maybe change their [other peoples'] ideas or opinions about it." However, when recounting their experiences in civil discourse activities, all participants echoed a sense of "respecting their [other peoples'] opinion and expressing [their own]." Ultimately, these experiences allowed 4-H members to share ideas and contribute to their own learning, which supported their self-efficacy (Arnold, 2019d).

Theme 5: Practicing Civic Skills

"You have the right to voice your own opinion" – Mary. In this study, the 4-H members described having freedom and independence in forming their own beliefs. For instance, Amy explained their debates on bills forced them to "choose a side" based on their position. As a result, participants began to reconsider their stance on topics, reassess their beliefs, and form their views. Although it may not have changed from their original stance, participants had a better idea of why they held those beliefs and reported feeling empowered to defend for their ideas (Arnold, 2019d).

As a result of their participation in CWF, participants also discussed their increased confidence to use the skills they learned in the program (Arnold, 2019d). As an illustration, Mary shared she "practiced and learned how to efficiently discuss controversial topics." Similarly, Amy stated, "I can now have civil discourse." Further, Amy revealed her experiences learning and practicing civic-based skills "mak[e] [her] sound so smart." The participants, in particular, discussed how they have used the argumentative skills they learned at CWF to actively participate in class discussions at school. When

describing how they use the skills for in-class debates, Mary said: "I used to not do good in those [debates], I didn't know how to say 'I disagree… but now I can." In addition, the 4-H members discussed not initially planning to use the skills they learned; however, they began to integrate them naturally into their everyday life since they learned to organize their ideas better and participate in local government. Amy also talked about learning to accept others' opinions as a result of participating in CWF because *"that's how the world works."* All three participants also described learning to accept others' opinions as being one of their biggest challenges at the beginning of the program. When asked why, Mary described trying "to see what they [others] saw," but other participants' ideas sometimes felt "weird" because it did not align with her beliefs. By the end of the CWF program, however, Katy suggested: "everybody has their own opinion" and "you have to respect that."

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this investigation was to document the experiences of Louisiana 4-H members who participated in the CWF program in 2019 and describe how their participation influenced their sense of civic development. The findings of this study emerged through five themes: (1) Positive Sparks, (2) Learning About Self and Others, (3) Youth-Adult Partnerships, (4) Program Engagement, and (5) Practicing Civic Skills. Therefore, we conclude CWF served as a powerful way to assist youth in developing their civic identity. The first theme, positive sparks, highlighted how youth described their excitement to attend the program, even if it was initially viewed as a strategy to get them outside of their comfort zones and try something new. We conclude as the experience progressed, however, youth sparks emerged in other activities as well. For example, to engage the 4-H members in the program, participants toured memorials and poignant historical sites. The 4-H members often described those experiences as transformative. As such, this finding aligns with previous literature on the development of civic identity by which youth mature through interactions with a variety of civic-based sources outside of the traditional classroom setting (Rubin, 2007; UNDESA, 2016).

In the second theme, learning about self and others, the 4-H members spoke to the importance of meeting new people and forming relationships. Although they may have been hesitant, and one participant experienced a small conflict, they created closeness with fellow 4-H members that continued after the program ended. We also conclude youth had a sense of belonging and self-efficacy as they discussed learning about themselves, finding their voice, and making their voice heard. We also concluded that belonging and self-efficacy were critical program qualities because they allowed participants to feel included and valued for their contributions, which led to an increased identity trajectory (Arnold, 2019d; Civic Engagement, 2020; UNDESA, 2016). The third theme, youth-adult partnerships, was another salient finding that was supported by existing literature on civic identity formation (Arnold, 2019c; UNDESA, 2016). Per Arnold (2019c), developmental relationships between 4-H members and adults should reflect "mutual warmth, respect, and trust" (para. 1). In many instances, the youth participants described how much they enjoyed interacting with the 4-H staff, as well as the program assistants at the National 4-H Conference Center who facilitated their learning experiences. The participants often spoke to the notion that the adults were fun, easy to approach, and made them dig deeper in their thinking and verbal reasoning. As such, we conclude the youth-adult partnerships were impactful and influential to the program's quality as well as the 4-H members' civic development.

For youth development programs to be considered *quality*, they must possess physical and psychological safety for participants (Arnold, 2019d; UNDESA, 2016). We conclude the CWF program provided a safe space for youth to express their ideas and beliefs, even if it was a differing view than others in the group. Participants also articulated they created supportive relationships, not only with adults but also with their peers (Arnold, 2019d). Therefore, we also conclude the CWF program provided participants an opportunity to practice civic skills – a key indicator of a quality program (Arnold, 2019d; Cambell et al., 2011; Ehrlich, 2000). For example, participants not only discussed

building important skills but practicing those skills and using the knowledge gained during and after the program experience. In particular, the 4-H members highlighted bill writing and civil discourse skills as the knowledge they transferred into their everyday life upon returning from Washington, D.C. For example, the participants expressed a newfound interest in local government and using the skills to make positive changes in their community, suggesting their civic identity had matured (Civic Engagement, 2020).

Recommendations and Discussion

The CWF program has a long, storied history in 4-H (Scholl & Paster, 2011). However, the current investigation provided a more granular portrayal of its outcomes for youth. Moving forward, we recommend additional research be conducted to explore how civic identity formation unfolds for participants from more diverse backgrounds. On this point, all participants in the current study were white, female teenagers from a single county in Louisiana. By more intimately exploring the outcomes of individuals from different age, cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, we could achieve a greater understanding of the program's effects on 4-H members from across the U.S. In our world's ever-changing environment, it is also imperative to ensure youth have the 21st century skills needed to transition successfully into adulthood (Alston et al., 2019, 2020). As such, CWF planners should create a strategy to collect summative assessment data from students to track their developmental outcomes better. If the central goal of the CWF program is to enhance 4-H members' civic identity, then understanding the outcomes and factors influencing such should be evaluated each year. This data could provide critical insight for CWF planners and curriculum specialists who make decisions regarding the program's budget and educational experiences. We also recommend CWF planners create learning standards and achievement goals for 4-H members regarding their civic identity development. Incorporating these changes could provide critical benchmarks by which students' civic outcomes could be assessed. Additional research is also needed to understand how 4-H members' learning, motivation, and self-efficacy may contribute to the civic-based growth they experience as a result of the CWF program.

It is also important to acknowledge that, in regard to the 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold et al., 2018), only the developmental context was explored in this study. Future studies should investigate how participation in nationally sponsored events, such as CWF, drive youth through a thriving trajectory and lead to desirable developmental outcomes. We also recommend the study be replicated to provide further transferability. As such, efforts should be made in other states to document the experiences of 4-H members before, during, and after the CWF program to examine whether parallels could be drawn between the current study's findings. We also recommend that retrospective studies be conducted with former 4-H members who participated in the CWF program to examine their long-term civic outcomes. Moving forward, CWF planners should also collaborate with state 4-H leaders to create a set of best practices in regard to supporting members' civic development after returning home.

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