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Bloom - Youth Empowerment and Development Through a Practice of Emotional Leadership

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Youth Empowerment And Development Through A Practice Of Emotional Leadership

Andrea Andrade

University Of San Diego
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✿ Preface

In the early light of 2016, through a social media platform, I was invited to be part of a group that fostered kinder ways of sharing ideas and expression. As an election year, this space, more than necessary, was the thin thread of hope for shared *Appreciations, Inspirations, and Sacred Moments*. Beginning the year, as we all commonly propose ourselves with resolutions, this group decided to do something different; to ask the question *What Is Your Word?* At this moment I should say that living in a world of chaos, summarizing my life's aspirations in one word, did not seem possible. But there was one that was lingering on the back of my mind, and reflective to the work I was ready to invest my time, mind, body, and heart to. *Bloom*, was not just a word, but a feeling, a movement, an evolving force that was inspiring me and fueling my whole self to become much more than I was. *Bloom* is alluding to the moment of full splendor that a seed takes upon after a journey underneath the surface. Parallel to the timing of this graduate program, was the culmination of what I have been working on for the past few years. The flourishing and taking shape of my ideas into something tangible and actually possible, was the process that I wanted to celebrate, but more that, I was having this desire to share it with others, much like a flower blooms to beguile a garden. This *becoming*, a passing into another phase in my own personal and professional growth, is what I am working to cultivate with younger people.

However, a seed, in order to bloom, needs soil, water, sunlight, and working hands. To say that this journey was done by myself, would be to fail to recognize all those who kept me grounded. This work, more than personal, is a collection of experiences, conversations, adventures, realizations, even frustrations and failures. To all those who sparked an interest in my words, and to all those who did otherwise, this is because of you.

To the teaching of Dr. Zachary Green, your guidance and wisdom will run through my words and throughout this document. From *Of Love and Leadership* to *Organizational Change*, your



authentic instruction to what it means to cover leadership in the full spectrum is exceptionally inspiring. You are the embodiment of your words and philosophy, and that is what every leader should strive to become. I am forever grateful to have danced around the grace of your melody and I hope that my future work will continue to carry the tones of every experience I had the pleasure and fortune to share with you.

To all the talented people I encountered at the University of San Diego-- faculty, members of my cohort, friends-- this time and space in my life was truly dedicated to the celebration of the brilliance of humans, shared knowledge, and community resilience. It is because of your encouragement, support, and coaching I remain eagerly passionate to become a leader for change.

This work is also in dedication to my close and oldest of friends, my tribe, whose patience and encouragement would shine unlimitedly, thank you for grounding me; to my siblings, the strongest hands to hold me regardless of the prickly vine or soft stem that I tried to reach out with; to my father, whose loyalty, and unconditional trust and support has been the foundation of my continuous efforts and perseverance to keep fighting; to my beautiful mother, whose life story has been a monumental reminder of what a warrior looks like; and more importantly to every young soul I encountered throughout my practice, especially at the New Alternatives Inc. residential facility, I am inspired because of you; your life, your pain, I am here to honor it. Your fight is not in vain, you are the seed, and you are here to Bloom.



The power of what I do is in the people that I serve. My capacity to exercise leadership with others is in the journey of making sense of what it means to grow as emotional and sentient beings -- to feel, to love, to create, to empower. Through dialogues and shared experience, I intend to embrace the collective development of resilient young people. (March, 2017)



❖ Introduction - *The Seed*

This document is written with the sensitivity of the work in itself. The lives and personal experiences that inspired me are present in each and every word I chose to use throughout this document. I invite you to dive into the following with *open mind, open heart, and open will*. The intention carried throughout this paper is not only for you to grow more aware of what I am trying to accomplish, but for you to think critically along my side and perhaps challenge me as well. This is an invitation to a collective performance for the betterment of, and investment to, the youth in our community, our future. This seed that I wish to plant in my community is by no means the work of one, but the work of all. It is not a fixated model, but something that will be forever transforming, evolving, growing. *Bloom* is my passion, my word, my practice of leadership, my purpose embodied. Now, to not give too much away in the first few sentences, let's dig into this and please allow yourself to get your hands dirty, for the soil will always welcome the working hands of those who seek to plant seeds that will *Bloom*.

Awakening:

As I began to extend my roots at the University of San Diego, I was not aware of how committed I was to search for purpose. My curious nature, and perhaps the insisting child inside of me, is constantly encouraging an exploration to a different perception of the world. It seems as though this child is never satiated with a mediocre question, but more of a boundless sense of inquiry of every process in life. The richness of facing the world through different experiences, has me involved in a myriad of undertakings that I



know will challenge me into becoming a better person for the young people I am serving and will serve. It is indeed passion what shapes my purpose. I believe that once I became aware of what my purpose was at this moment and in this program, everything else began to fall into place. When an idea starts to take shape, the passion that I find within it, supports the purpose of every action. To this extent, I intend to share this passion with others as I exercise leadership in my community.

My capacity to adapt in different situations has developed in me the ability to relate and connect with people from different backgrounds. A quality that I value in my leadership philosophy is this, the capacity that one has to adapt in the demands of an environment in constant flux. It is human nature to adapt to an environment, we are not meant to be still or stagnant, but to survive we must evolve *with* what surrounds us.

As a native to the Tijuana/San Diego region, I pride myself of being part of this small part of the world. It is this particular dichotomy in my identity that is both the curse and the blessing of my upbringing. I was born in San Diego, California but proudly raised in Tijuana, Baja California, México. I share the richness of a bicultural region that is constantly competing and seeking innovating ways to attract people from all around the world. We are the hub for young entrepreneurs, small businesses, and the new wave of education through bilingual/bicultural competency. As I was given the option by my parent to pursue a career in both nations, I chose to stretch my roots to San Diego. At an early stage in higher education, I was lost in love with science as a biology major, but what captivated me the most was the way our brain functions. At this time, I was unaware of a mind-body connection, yet I felt that beyond the physical science, there was something



else that defined us as humans. If, as rational beings, our brains is what differentiates us from any other species in this planet, then I proposed to myself to dig deeper into this field. I opted then for a career in psychology, because studying the science behind human behaviors was my way to dive into a deep inquiry of what it means to be human.

Discovery:

After graduating from San Diego State University in 2012 with a BA in Psychology, I started working in a residential facility that fosters at-risk youth. In this facility I took many roles; as a educational behavioral specialist, I was focused on working with youth in developing effective coping skills that would support their emotional regulation in a classroom setting; as a unit supervisor/caregiver, I was working with youth in a more home-like setting, I was in charge of a team of 5 staff and a caseload of 13 youth per unit. Aside from the logistics of managing a unit, my intention was also to develop a safe environment for youth to exercise typical teen activities while still engaging in a wellness program; lastly, as a case manager, aside from making sure every client's file was at quality standards, I was working in liaison with clinical therapists to hold 1:1 sessions for youth who were focused on more goal-oriented techniques towards wellness.

The result from having different roles in this organization was that it allowed me to not only learn, but to discern what youth wellness and development entailed in the different aspects I was involved. Each position offered a different perspective of how to work with, and grow with at- risk youth. I kept curious and intrigued by the functionality of our minds, but in this environment I was exposed with the darker side of our own



mental capacities. What our brains are capable of doing in the midst of trauma, abuse, neglect and other myriad of hurtful inhumane situations presented in the early stages of life. Regardless of applying skills and techniques to the treatment and wellness of this population, I felt that there was something occurring where we were not engaging with them in a meaningful way, that regardless of every certification, training, or capacitation we received to engage with these young people, nothing was happening in order to provide them the appropriate and caring tools to heal. I decided to explore this a little further and start conversations with the young people that we were serving. Lingering in each conversation was a theme of belonging and purpose. Naturally, this hit home. I knew that these young minds were still trying to figure their way in this world like everyone of us, however, they had a series of traumatic events to accompany, or more like haunt, them each step of the way. As behavioral therapists, psychiatrists, case managers, child care workers, we were failing to acknowledge their voice into the healing process they required. This process was not a generic stamp we could use to treat all. But more of a deeper search for connection into one's individual process and journey to heal and become resilient. The idea of this project began after this realization.

Stimulation:

I am interested in challenging this concept, of reducing the amount of neglect we are facing with people whom we believe do not provide much to the growth and productivity of our society. This model begins to challenge our views with youth who, in our sometimes judgemental eyes, seem unmotivated, disengaged, helpless, and hopeless. I



propose to explore whether this model will be a more effective way to connect and engage young people purposefully and significantly into their lives, so to become successful participants and responsible and more conscious civil members in our communities.

What I have seen in different organizations working towards similar goals, I am not satisfied with the level of inclusiveness that these organizations have upon the people that they serve. One of my goals is to reduce to a minimal the gap between the decision-making process that adults have over youth. To use their voice and experiences as tools for healing, and changemaking. Whether that would be in residential facilities, schools, or after-school programs, I am curious to see what young people has to say about being involved, and how including them into the designing methods of a program, will allow them to become authentically engaged and even more accountable to the outcomes.

From my experience working in education, especially in special education, I am aware that it takes a team for the rearing of a child into becoming a successful and self-sufficient adult. It is the efforts of a collaborative and supportive group of people for a child to grow in a nourishing environment. I am willing to explore into what will emerge if we include the young people in our community to be part of the decision-making process. Rather than just stakeholders, consider them as partners.

Cultivation:

Bloom is a seed, that I intend to expand into becoming a space for youth. As I will explain the model later in this document, my vision of this project is to create a space for youth where they will be able to identify, understand, exercise, and expand their potential.



To recognize that each one of them are their own agents for change, to instill hope and trust, and to empower young people to exercise their strengths. To perceive, recognize, and accept their weaknesses as tools to become better and successful students, employees, community members, siblings, daughters or sons, but most of all beings. By designing this model as a threefold, youth will be part of a program that will stimulate and engage them in the different aspects of what it takes to become more present and authentic with themselves. Firstly, by asking the question “*What does it feel to be you?*”, I expect the individual to become self-aware of what makes them who they are now, who they will be, and what entails the gap in between. Secondly, by recognizing their capacities as individuals, this will then explain more fully who they choose to be surrounded by. I hope to support young people into identifying their community and how to become better together. Lastly, as they become aware of self and others, I hope they will then choose to practice this work for others; to transform them into the teachers and masters of their own trade and therefore mentor those who are seeking their support and guidance as peers.

The idea of *Bloom* is to plant a seed, nourish it, connect with others by sharing the soil and intricacy of their roots, and support each other to grow into the light of action. Utilizing this mutual support to help others grow up and out at their own shell. As one blooms, the essence of their resilience will spread; a bee comes and benefits from the fruits of a flower, spreads the life and continues to generate new and emerging ideas. Once that task is done, the flower dies, but now begins a new cycle. To go back into the soil and nourish yet another seed, another idea, another dimension of what it means to be forever evolving. *Bloom* is just a seed at this stage, it is the vision of my experience through



this cycle itself, my passion in words, pictures, actions and ideas. *Bloom* will become more than that, in due time, the seed will take its journey and flourish with the intention to give life, meaning, and purpose to those willing to explore what it takes to grow.

Along the lines of this document I will describe the foundations of my style and philosophy in leadership, the theories that inspired my work, a brief description of the design that I wish to implement, who will benefit from this model, what kind of organizations are doing similar work and what my expectations are.

✦ My Leadership Philosophy - *The Roots*

Defining what leadership means to me, is related in terms to what it means to be a leader physically, emotionally, spiritually, and collectively with others. The fundamental nature of my leadership consists of cooperative learning, collaboration, integrity, authenticity, innovation, and adaptability. Following, I will explain how these foundational factors are what sustain my capacity to exercise leadership in my practice.

Cooperative Learning:

Cooperative learning is defined as the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). It is a strategy utilized in classrooms in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject, interdependently. This shared experience of knowledge transference amongst the members of a community with different perspectives, serves to



develop the capacity of the collective. As applied in organizations, cooperative learning can address a positive interdependence, individual accountability, and promotive interaction among all team members (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Part of exercising leadership is to celebrate the unique characteristics and capabilities of each member to provide tools and specific expertise to the achievement of goals. Similar to the students in a classroom, each member of an organization is there to provide each other support and the knowledge necessary to succeed together.

As part of my philosophy, cooperative learning is a form to make clear that we are all here to learn with and from each other. That as part of a community, each individual member brings forth an idea, a skill, or knowledge necessary for the greater success of the collective. As a leader, it is my responsibility to recognize that everyone will bring something valuable to the surface.

Collaboration:

Parallel to cooperative learning, collaboration is also necessary to give rise to collective success. Rather than a leader characteristic, collaboration is more of a process in which leadership is carried out. It implies that each and every member of an organization is at an equal footing and working together to solve a problem, create something new, or to run an initiative.

According to David Chrislip and Carl Larson, in *Collaborative Leadership*, "if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the



organization or community." (1994). I would add, that aside from bringing the appropriate people together, it is bringing people together with the right intention, which will make for collaboration more meaningful for the collective.

As a leader, practicing a process of collaboration means to let go of the control of the group and power of authority. It is to guide and coordinate the process by which the collective decides upon and carries out actions to accomplish certain goals that will work in favor of the organization's successful development. Collaborating with the members of a team also means to share the authority when it comes to the decision-making process. It is to dismantle the power to control and restrict the participating members of a team that could give rise to valuable information and ideas.

Integrity:

Going back to leadership as a characteristic of the individual, integrity comes in play at the very heart of understanding what it means to practice leadership. Whether it is defined as a means for character or personality, integrity suggests wholeness and coherence; it becomes the righteous nature of one's act, a sense of moral soundness (Mangham, 2004). The latter, to me, is significantly important to my development of leadership. The root of integrity is a sense of consistency or congruence between seemingly distinct elements. To have integrity means that things fit together in a coherent form (Moorman, 2009). Integrity involves the alignment and consistency among all elements that make up a person's profile, such as values, beliefs, words, and actions. Keeping consistency into all existing forms of what makes a person whole is important to



convey a sense of trust and reliability to the work that a leader brings forth. In Spanish we refer to someone who has integrity as “íntegro”, which literally translates to whole or complete. Therefore, it takes a certain level of awareness to understand the wholeness of one; it is not only the harmony of all things that make the leader, but the product that comes from each and every source when put together.

My purpose is to show every angle of what makes my intention whole, to promote the uniqueness of all members including myself and utilize that as a means to connect with each other, with respect and humility. Integrity is not a value acquired at birth, but a social construct, it is the responsibility of us as adults to instill the ethical demeanors of what it means to be a complex human with integrity as a tool to become more authentic.

Authenticity:

When leading, it is important to show yourself truthfully by being in congruence with the person you are and the leader you choose to be. It is one of the hardest qualities to achieve as a leader, because it entails self-awareness and balanced processing (Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2014); a process that requires the recognition of who you think you are in contrast to who other see you as, and therefore to become cognizant of the dissonance between the two. Behaving authentically involves developing an identity of character and personality, and acting true to what you stand for. The self-awareness component is keeping in mind your weaknesses and strengths and knowing when to use them for the purpose of the overall success of your team.



When working with youth, behaving authentically is an important part to developing trust and meaningful relationships. In my experience working with adolescents, at a first glance they are mostly resistant, they've tested boundaries, and they will challenge me in every way they possibly can. At times, the pressures of these behaviors, pushes any adult that works with youth to adhere to their style. But conforming to a style that is not consistent with your own, might hinder the ability to show yourself as authentic. The key to practice authenticity when building relationships with youth is to listen, view resistance as protection, and to acknowledge that healthy boundaries must be set to work more effectively (Center for Adolescent Studies, 2017).

Authenticity becomes a building block in my leadership philosophy because it means to develop relational transparency and honest conversations, it allows me to recognize when and where I should show myself as vulnerable, and how to utilize these two to create an impact with the people I serve.

Innovation:

Leadership effectiveness also entails holding on to a vision that will serve for a successful achievement of goals, as well as doing everything possible to make this vision a reality. For this, it is important to maintain a constant sense of innovation -- as the driving impulse for growth and survival (Bobadilla & Velasco, 2008) -- when it comes to developing the vision of an organization. That regardless of the initial commitment, a leader must develop a plan of work with an open mind and willingness to alter, shift, adapt, and promote for new ideas. A leader must be able to take a longer range



perspective, to be able to offer options and collaborate with team members and even stakeholders when it comes to problem-solving and goal development. To be able to identify what behaviors and actions are not generating new ideas, and work together to shift productivity. Ambition, and a strong commitment to keep innovating goals as something larger than what is already offered, is important to keep the market and team members captivated and engaged in the work by doing so creatively. Being committed to something bigger than yourself creates for a leader the kind of power that replaced need for force (Erhard, Jensen, Granger, 2010). This open mentality and vision beyond what is already present, allows people to strive for their ideals, and celebrates the potential to success in different terms. It suspends the resistance to change or the stubbornness that comes with a closed mind that would hinder creative and sustainable leadership practices.

Adaptability:

Successful leadership often depends on the leader's ability and courage to face the facts in a particular situation, interpret the facts in light of the demands of the situation, and consequently follow the appropriate and most effective course of action. This brings forth the capacity to think strategically. In the different roles that leadership may take, it is important to recognize the specific roles are necessary in each situation. Whether that be to serve as a manager, a coach, or a mentor, a leader should have the capacity to know the difference between each one and when to take on the required role depending on the demands of those being served. This adaptability to the demands of the environment, will exercise a full practice for leadership for change.



Becoming a Leader

Becoming a leader is not all I need to attain my personal goals and objectives. For me becoming a leader is not a career, it is not something that I call myself, but more of a lifestyle, a way of being, and the responsibility that I choose to take on. Leadership, to the extent of my own belief, is identifying your human obligation and the passion to share it with others. What that means to the environment you are choosing to practice leadership in, and how to emphasize on each individual's potential for the greater success. There are numerous positions of authority and power, yet these roles do not entail the capacity to be a leader. In my pursuit for leadership, I propose to myself the goal to influence, help and guide people who are passionate, and those that share the same aspirations as me; to explore the human capacity through resilience, dialogue, and a willingness to learn and grow with each other. Embracing actions for cooperative learning and collaboration among members; emphasizing the integrity and authenticity at both individual and organizational levels; capturing the importance of the sustainability and innovation of ideas; and adaptability to circumstances that are foreign to our practice. With this I intend to become a stronger figure to support the people in my community.

At the University of San Diego, I have received the education necessary to extend this capacity within me to practice leadership. I have been challenged to question my own beliefs and paradigms, enough to enrich everything that I stand for now. With a curriculum, lead by extraordinary scholars cultured in the understanding of the aspects of human awareness in leadership, I am inspired to continue this Work under the foundations of their teachings and philosophies, as well as with the following theories.



🌿 Theoretical Roots - *Nourishment*

The work and philosophy that I am choosing to delve into has its influence in a myriad of theories and practices from great leaders in the field of human development and organizational change. Should it not be apparent already, I see leadership more as an exploration to the magnitude of human potential and growth, rather than to become a manager or a figure of power and authority. The selection of theories listed in the following section will emphasize what I mean by this.

Theory U

After learning about the work of Otto Scharmer and his colleagues, I was soon off to developing the blueprint to this project. This theory provided me the depthness into, not only what I wished to see my career turn into, but what I wished to explore personally. Theory U provided me the ability to look at all the dimensions and the path in which I was choosing to practice leadership. I perceived this theory as a guide for developing the essential capacities to become a leader in a world of chaos. Learning about this theory, encourages stepping into an emerging future by integrating science, consciousness, and profound social change methodologies (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizations Learning, SoL, 2007). As explained by the Presencing Institute, Theory U proposes that the quality of the results that we create in any kind of social system, is a function of the quality of awareness, attention, or consciousness that the participants in the system operate from (The Presencing Institute, 2015). In which, what we are willing to invest



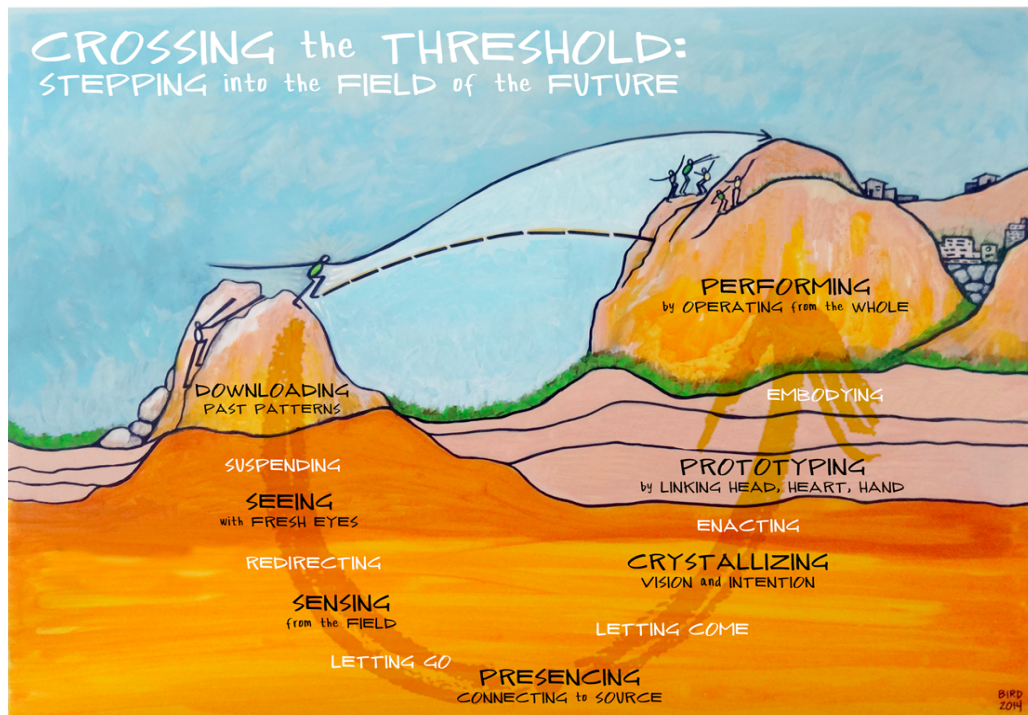
consciously and perhaps even unconsciously, is directly related with the condition in which the outcome will be presented. This is aligned with the essence of my work. Our mind, I consider the engine to any human effort. It is when we propose to ourselves to become fully present in all dimensions of our being, that we will manifest authentically and fully into any action.

As the name proposes, Theory U (Figure 1) literally takes you down and above a U shape journey that progresses only with the willingness of an *open heart, open mind, and open will*. It starts with *downloading* the information that we hold is true, our experiences, preconceived notions, and other aspects that tailor our current actions and reality. It is acknowledging these and *suspending* them to begin *seeing* with fresh eyes as we dive into the process of the U. After paying attention to what the environment is offering us, the next step is to *re-direct* our senses from the field, which allows *Letting Go* of that which is not useful. As we let go of all the possible factors that would hinder the process of change, comes *Presencing*, found at the bottom of the U. This is a decisive moment in the U, because it becomes the stage in which we are engaged in a higher level of awareness and we begin to connect with the source of all ideas, inspirations, and will. Otto Scharmer then asks the questions, *Who is my Self? What is my Work?* This invites the system -- person, organization -- in the journey to let go of the non essential and *Let Come* the new aspects of a future Self, it is identifying the deep intention and vision of the work that follows in this transformation and therefore have the will to act on it. Often times, by crossing this threshold we begin to function as an intentional force to the future that is ahead, the vision of the journey then becomes *crystallized*. The *enactment* of this intention therefore



promotes the *prototyping* of this new future Self. Once we've determined what the need is, that which we let come, we begin to observe and adapt based on what happens next, and provide for solutions accordingly for the prototyping of these real more intentional needs. It is the point in the U where we explore the future by doing rather than by thinking and reflecting. It is the *embodiment* of these new ideas into *performing* by operating from the whole.

Figure 1



(Presencing Institute, 2015)

I would like to acknowledge, that this entire process is not something that is easy to manage or that there are no setbacks along the way. In my own journey throughout the U, I experienced the opposite side of this journey called *absencing*. This is when we lose

ourselves to the fear of letting go and get stuck in old patterns of downloading. We begin to experience the fragile nature of a current reality not only in personal relationships, but also on the field of global development and change (Presencing Institute, 2015). It is almost like being torn in between the old and the current reality, and consumed by doubt for the future. Also, throughout this journey I experienced the *voice of judgement*, *voice of cynicism* and *voice of fear*. I will recognize that I was responsible for giving rise to these voices, and to some extent I believe that they were necessary for my transformation. I utilized these as a tool to remain humble and respect the fact that I am human, that in order to keep a balanced mind, heart, and will, the force of the opposition is so valuable and necessary to keep motivated and focused, yet recognizing that too much of these voices would mean to abandon my focus to reach a place of presencing. Therefore for the concise purpose of this document, I want to encourage the system to focus more on how to discern when this journey is becoming destructive, reaching a point of absencing, and learn how to strengthen the beckoning of presencing.

Going through the process of this theory and experiencing a level of awareness that was causing me to shift my own actions, is the quality of experience I would like to extend to young people. To explore what would it mean to raise the awareness of youth to act and participate more consciously. What would it mean to the development of a society if younger generations acted more purposefully and collectively aware of their environment? My expectation would be that as they grow to become more aware of their actions, behaviors, and tendencies, the more they would develop the capacity to shift away from negative, destructive and non-essential aspects of their future lives. And therefore align



youth to be more integral and intentional with their visions and goals, whether that be to develop meaningful relationships with friends, family and members of their community; strive for a career that is significant and relevant to their identified capacities and skills; and/or overall life wellbeing.

Ontological Model; Being a Leader

When searching for other theories that are willing to tap into defining leadership in terms of a way of being rather than a practice, I was fortunate to have been introduced to this model by a colleague and dear friend, whose work is veined in love and leadership.

Creating Leaders: An Ontological/Phenomenological Model by Erhard, Jensen, and Granger is a paper that is speaking to the practice of the actual nature of being when one is being a leader, and the source of one's actions in the exercise of leadership (Erhard, Jensen, & Granger, 2010). More than a theory, this model is enticing the way of being and acting as one, correlated to the situation that is occurring in the moment. Also, taking into consideration context, the capacity of one's successful leadership is dependent on the leader's natural self-expression in dealing with a situation. It alludes to the point of when you learn a specific trade so fully, as you develop an epistemological grasp of it, it becomes you. You cease to think about the actual doing, and it simply becomes "second nature" to you.

I relate this theory closely to the meaning of *flow*. According to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, flow is an optimal psychological state that people experience when engaged in an activity that is both appropriately challenging to one's skill level, often



resulting in immersion and concentrated focus on a task. This can result in deep learning and high levels of personal and work satisfaction (1990). In relation to this ontological model, I see the practice of leadership as the collection and constant practice of task that which becomes the person that you are, it is a profound focus and connection to the task that the leader becomes the work.

Relative to Theory U, I chose to sustain my practice in leadership and this project under this ontological model because it spoke to something that I was searching for, a meaningful and more integral alignment to the work I was doing and the passion that was inside of me. I was struggling to put words and make meaning of this deep urge I had to act on the things that I was passionate about, yet this model, by proposing that it is not only an exercise but a way of being, is when I began to find my own identity in the field of leadership.

What this would mean to the work I want to dedicate for our youth, is that teaching the development of one's own potential and desires can be transformed into an effective leadership practice, in due time and with the conscious willingness to do diligent work. However, more than teaching about leadership, it is about creating the leader that they are already fostering through their own self-expression. It is a representation to an organic correlation between the ways of being and acting with those of being a leader and exercising leadership. It is about allowing them to develop their identity and finding their exercise in leadership and what it means to be a leader in their own independent terms.



Emotional Leadership

For the past year or so, through the experiences of this program, I've been trying to hone a path in emotional leadership. Though I still do not understand to its full effect what this means, I feel it. I feel it is the calling to my work, and the core of my leadership comes from the power and use of emotions. As I try to define emotional leadership, the theories and models that I've mentioned earlier are what surrounds this idea of emotional leadership. If I break down what I mean by emotions is that I am referring to everything that we feel as sentient beings. Every spark of happiness and sadness, of victory and defeat, vitality and exhaustion, it is love and heartbreak, it is every feeling in the spectrum between negative and positive that we perceive out of a response from any and all life's circumstances. I perceive emotions as energy that fuel our actions, what determines our behaviors, and what makes us hesitant to commitment, or what motivates us to thrive. My life has been about sensing emotions, mostly within me, and trying to figure out how to utilize them as tools to create something useful and beneficial for the growth of my being and those around me.

I am not satisfied with what the current research is on emotional leadership, because leading emotionally is more than just acquiring a proficiency on emotional intelligence, which is what most authors describe. It is in fact about inspiring, and utilizing emotions to empathize and connect with others, yet I am not referring to emotional regulation and perception as one quality of a leader, but as an embodiment of those emotions, owning them, and reflecting them in the work that you do.



I am referring to the way of how we, individually, utilize our emotions not to connect or empower others but to do so for ourselves and therefore embody the resiliency that comes with the effort to understand our ways of being, regardless of the circumstance. I am trying to figure out a way that we can embrace those negative emotions that we commonly and societally see as weaknesses, and transform them into what motivates us to become better humans. That within our weaknesses lie our strengths, that our weaknesses become the steel foundations to more purposeful and integral meanings of what we do, who we are, and what makes us, us.

To help you understand what I mean, I invite you to think about Frida Kahlo and Jean-Michel Basquiat's pain through paintings, Nise Da Silveira's work and determination to heal "helpless" schizophrenics, Leo Buscaglia's passion for LOVE to transform lives, Krista Tippett's infinite curiosity to discovering what it means to be human, Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent civil disobedience for equality, or Steve Jobs' arrogance for quality assurance, the list can go on and on. What I see in common in all of them, is that they used adversity and waves of disadvantages to create powerful tools, art, theories, and movements for the greater success and development of themselves which then transcended to all those around them and more. They became leaders in their field because of the impact they caused through by disrupting taboos, paradigms, and silence using what they felt, the core passion of their belief, to convey a message. I believe that each one of us carries within the sensational capacity to evoke emotions on others, whether that be to hurt or to heal. Whether we are aware of it or not, what would it mean to develop this capacity for individual and collective growth. How can we use our emotions



as the source to connect with the work that we do? Perhaps this will be something to explore in the future, but I am focused and determined to make sense and use of my emotions to convey my message, purpose, and intention of my work with youth.

Not too long ago, I was listening to the song “Together” by The XX, and even though I still can’t put exact words to my thoughts on emotional leadership, this song made me understand what it feels like. The song is a very soft and slow melody, monotone to an extent, but close to the end an orchestra plays and raises the tone with a powerful harmony of strings. That! That is what leadership should be and feel like. This is as close as what I mean by emotional leadership, raising the temperature to the point where you feel the power in which the source is coming from. To feel connected even though you cannot understand where that connection is coming from, but then you feel this sense of trust and desire to know more. To act from the heart and share the power, love, and wisdom that is within, and cultivate the individual as much as collective growth.

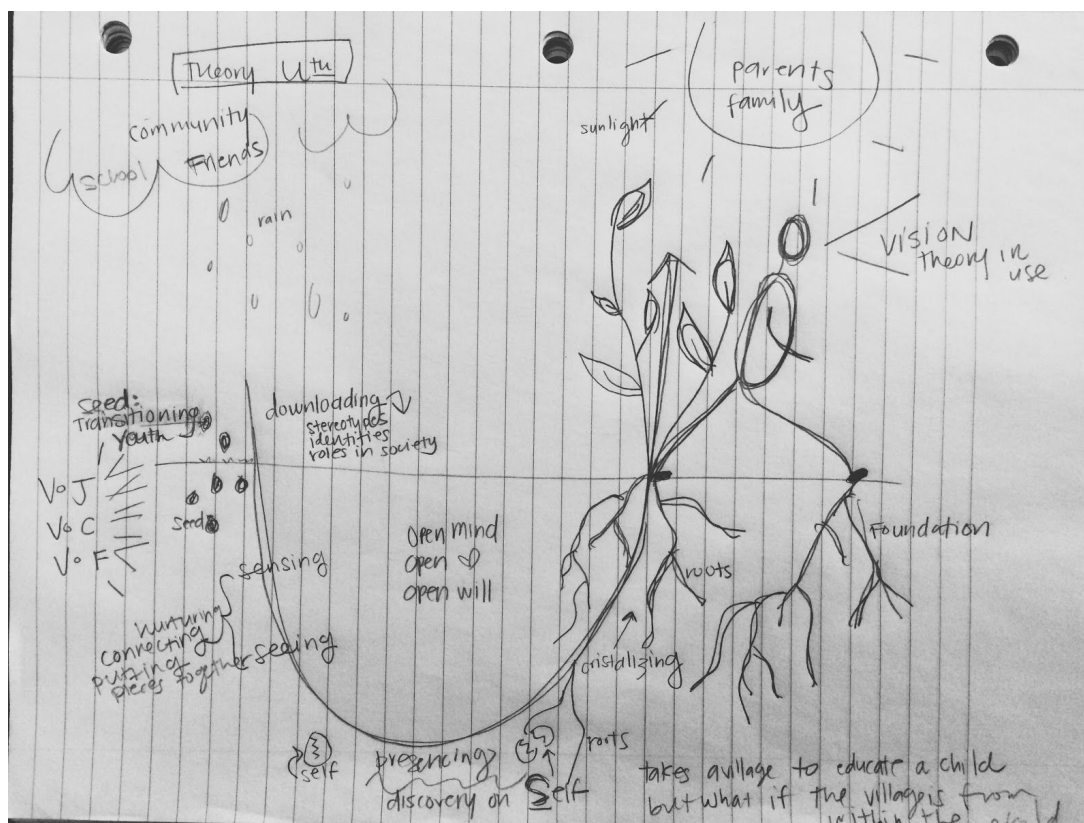
Theory Uth

My question was then, how do I translate all this into something that youth can understand, relate to, and utilize to facilitate complex life experiences. Because I was designing this program to be something relating to growth, I kept thinking about connecting my model with nature, something organic and related to earth’s ways. One morning I woke up with this vision of how I can relate Theory U with my work -- alluding to youth, I decided to call it *Theory Uth* (Figure 2). This theory is based very closely to Scharmer’s Theory U, yet it integrates the theories and models that I’ve mentioned above.



This model proposes the basis of my work with youth, my blueprint, but more so, as a primitive foundation of how I would like to engage with youth.

Figure 2



Beginning with planting a seed or seeds, youth will visualize the path of this theory through the journey that a seed takes underneath the surface before it blooms. By seeds, I am not referring to the youth themselves, but their ideas, experiences, unanswered questions, and other factors in their life that they are willing to explore as to find the meaning or acceptance of. *Theory Uth*, begins with identifying those voices - insects, bacteria, viruses - that will come all throughout this journey to cripple the growth. This is

a crucial step early in this process, to identify how these voices of judgements, cynicism, and fear will show up in the different levels of growth throughout. Seeing and sensing follows the journey of this seed in which youth will begin to identify what is in the soil, in the environment, that is welcoming to the growth of the plant, and whether it be to sustain, suspend and/or to let go of it. Similarly in the place of Presencing, this is when the seed begins to transform from a closed shell to an open shell, which implies the letting come process of theory U. Crystallizing alludes to the germination of the seed as it begins to show its roots and hold space for the journey up to the surface. As the roots begin to enact their position in the soil, represented by the sprouting of the young plant is prototyping, which is seen by making it's way above the surface. The culmination of this process is the embodiment of the work underneath the soil, the bloom.

In figure 2 you can observe that as the blooming stage, the model depicts the youth to be moving forward with a vision of theory in use. This is referring to Argyris & Schön (1974) “theory of action” perspective on what we say, as compared to what we do -- *espoused theory*; the worldview and values people believe their behaviour is based on, vs. *theory-in-use*; the worldview and values implied by their behaviour, or the maps they use to take action. With this application, along with a firm foundation on Theory U, I am looking to explore that, through this journey, youth will be able to develop themselves in congruence with what they believe and think as true to themselves and how it compares to what they are actually feeling and doing. As well, to be able to recognize and give attention to the discrepancies and dilemmas that arise from the dissonance that may exist between the two. The application of this model will invite youth into an exploration of self to the



capacity they are ready to go into, with an open mind, open heart, and willingness to find the potential within themselves to serve and act with intention and purpose to their goals and commitments. It is finding a way to support young people into discovering what their true potential is, through a conscientious practice of leadership in terms of their own ways of being. Whether that be to act congruently in their family system, school, or in the community, this process will allow them to make sense of the emotions attached to the patterns, habits, and tendencies that they are forming for themselves and guiding them into their own ways of making these emotions into effective, healthy, and productive actions as they grow older and into a life of adulthood.

✦ Design - *Landscaping*

Throughout this document, I have explained the roots of how I came about this passion of youth empowerment and development, however I have yet to describe exactly what this will look like. Following is a guided explanation of this working model. *Bloom* is a threefold model, that intends to support youth through their personal, academic, career, and social development. It is designed to work in three stages: Self For Self, Self With Others, and Self For Others (Figure 3).

1. Self For Self-

This portion of the program tends to the needs of young people in the search for their identity, by asking the question *What does it feel to be you?* As the foundation to this component, I would like to explore what does it mean for youth to define themselves,



aside from the stereotypes or labels they are given in the community they are part of. This portion of the program is inviting youth to delve into what it means to explore their development in terms of capacity building. By going through *theory Uth*, I am looking to guide participants into the path of self-exploration and a more defined search for purpose and belonging.

2. Self With Others-

In my culture, we have a saying; “Dime con quien te juntas y te diré quien eres”, this translates literally into “Tell me who you socialize with and I will tell you who you are”. When designing this part of the program, I kept this saying present in mind, because to some extent I believe we all live by this. It is simple to group and categorize people in terms of the social groups they are part of. Shall it be possible to integrate this dissonance into our interpretations of “us” rather than “them”, and what would that mean in a larger scale of who we are together rather than separate. After understanding where we stand at an individual level, it is important to recognize who we stand with and what that means to the person that we are, to the values that we embody, and the work that we enact. Collaboration among people may as well be the key to express the potential of the collective. In this section, youth will become more skilful in team building and purposeful collaboration, as well as to define the nature of leadership roles in groups as systems. I intend to emphasize the importance of supporting all members of a team, that the consequences of doing otherwise, a team will fail to be successful.

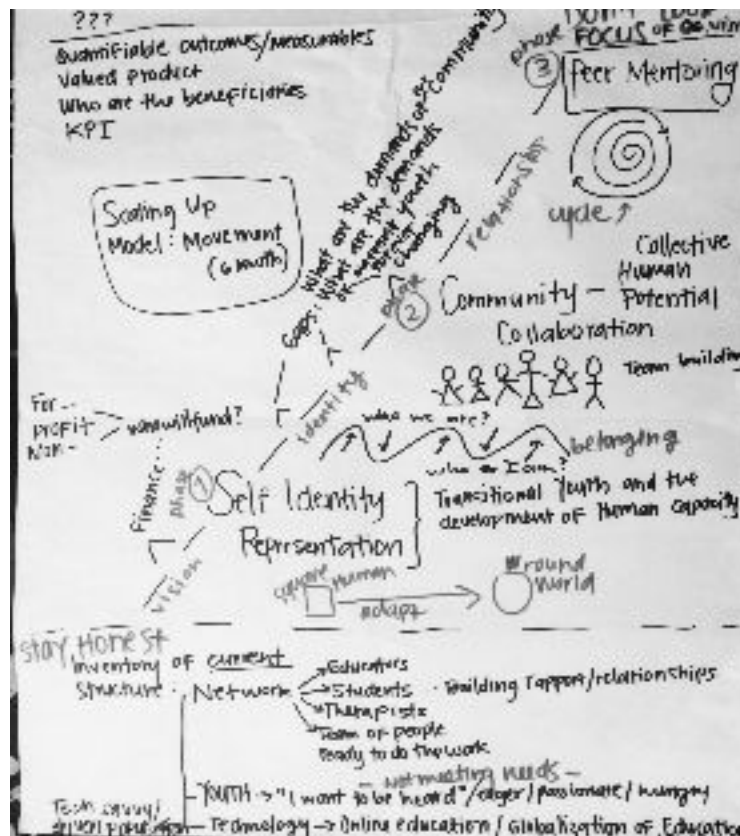


3. Self For Others-

After recognizing what it means to take care of yourself, and yours (team), youth will then be able to acknowledge what it takes to value the mentorship of others going into similar journeys. In part, this program is not only to engage by participating, but to engage those out in the community who are not. My concept of education is that training for a specific trade should be implemented in a way that the student will then practice, master, and teach others how to do such trade. It is not only about acquiring the experience and knowledge, but what it means to share this capacity building to others as a means to develop a stronger support system. This being said, part of this program is for youth to be able to exercise every component of this training of self and others, and guide people into this way of being. Young people at the stage of adolescence are highly influential with each others (Glob J Health Sci. 2012) therefore it is important to monitor this aspect when youth are interacting. After going through the previous components of this program, one will be capacitated to identify those in similar situations of where they were when they started, and positively influence them into a greater path. This is the actionable component of the program, where the participants will be able to give back to their communities by helping the support of their peers struggling in similar demeanors they found themselves at the beginning of this program.



Figure 3



Where a program or model like this will work is dependent on the group of participants I will work with. As of now, I am carrying out sections of this model into my internship experience at a project based public charter school in San Diego, CA. Yet I intend to give rise to my own community center for youth to have a space to explore this theory and practice. As I continue to see the ways that I still need to improve and sharpen this idea, I am focusing on where I can begin to stand on my own.

❖ Need - *The Drought*

The waves of change sweeping the world—digitization, globalization, demographic shifts, migration, and individualization, as well as the rapid degradation of social and natural capital—are giving rise to arenas of clashing forces. These clashing forces play out as tensions between multiple polarities: speed and sustainability, exploration and exploitation, global and local ways of organizing, top-down and bottom-up approaches to leadership.

-C. Otto Scharmer, 2002

I am choosing this quote as a reminder of what I am doing this work for. Scharmer describes this change at a global perspective, yet I am choosing to apply this at a more intimate and personal level. That *clashing forces* are within us, rather than around us. And as humans to this new world, we are evolving somewhat immune to the tensions that these polarities may cause. I am committed to explore a way that embraces both, to develop a way of being that perhaps could be in harmony with all forces that make us whole. It is natural to experience polarities, the work lies in acknowledging that there are dissonant forces, to value and recognize when to use them, and finding the equilibrium in between. My search to find the need is still ongoing. Though from my early observations, I will continue to describe what I have noticed and where I believe my work will be useful among youth between the ages of 15-22, which is the age spectrum I have been working with.



Why Youth?

At this developmental stage, adolescents and young adults, begin exploring themselves: who they are, what they mean in terms of the environment they are part of, and what their purpose is. We must recognize the difficulties that come with this stage in human development, and that to an extent adults fail to recognize that at once, we too were adolescents that experienced angst, confusion, and loneliness while exploring who we are and where we belong. Perhaps we can all think of a time that if we had received the support to get through a difficult time, we would be in a different place. Though, I am not disregarding the journey that one has to take to overcome adversity independently, as well as the incredible benefit one can achieve if prevailed, but what if? What if we did receive the support necessary?

As adults, educators, mentors, parents, older siblings, we recognize that we need to become positive and effective role models for younger generations in order for them to become successful in their later lives. Yet somehow we continue to see patterns of disconnection and lack of motivation caused by either the demands of a society they do not feel a part of and/or because of the complex world they are growing up in, which they do not have the control over. There is a waste of human potential that is coming from these young people that needs to be recognized and availed for the sustainability of healthy and successful communities. The more adults understand how youth see, feel, and experience the functions of their world, the more we can take preventative actions into helping them through this stage of development (“The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction”, 2011). This model is focused on enabling young people to believe in



themselves, find their truest potential, and prepare them to enter into adulthood with a vision and intention. To engage in every aspect as a means to become more self-aware of their potential and capacity to succeed individually and with others, regardless of their cultural background, socioeconomic status, and/or upbringing.

Working With Technology:

As we continue to see younger generations become more and more adapted into a technology-driven and fascinating world through screens, youth seem like they are becoming disconnected from their emotions, crippling their capacity to develop grounded and meaningful human relations with others and perhaps even with themselves. It is apparent now that youth are developing a way to remake the real by looking at it through screens. Now, I am not opposed to this amount of screen time we are spending during a day because of potential sedentary side effects, but because it is making us lose the potential to connect with the tangibility of people. When we talk to other people about real problems, we learn to put ourselves in their place (Turkle, 2016). This is what I am targeting and willing to re-engage in youth. The capacity for one to connect with others in a way that is allowing the practice for empathy and compassion to others.

As we continue to develop ourselves in this multifaceted dependency with technology, I believe we shy away from the essence of what makes us human in the first place. As emotional and sentient beings, we tend to take for granted the use of our emotions to empower ourselves and others through real life experiences, and shared-challenges. I have come to experience these past few years the richness that comes



in hand with building relationships. Connecting not only physically but mentally with others, as a way to collaborate and raise each other away from the meaningless and into the meaningful. The use of technology today has brought forth a sense of connection, but a connection that pulls us away from understanding the power of being present with one another. Current technological developments have created a link to bring together lives and cultures, but there is also the ironical ideal that this is also the reason we are growing apart from each other. The idea is for *Bloom* to not shy from the use of technology, but more so it encourages young people to become more aware of the importance of building emotional networks rather than to continue the eradication of them.

Mental Illness:

Lastly, but certainly not least, is one of the most important factors that inspired me to move forward in this career. Mental illness literally hits home, as a daughter of a woman whose life's battle has been to find mental stability and peace, I have personally witnessed and felt how destructive and toxic a mental illness can evolve into, should the appropriate and healthy measure not be in the forefront. Therefore, when it comes to developing programs for people whose lives have been consumed by mental illness, I am one hundred percent in favor. There is nothing more that I feel more passionate about than to support those who are struggling with a mental illness, whether it be themselves or someone who they love.

Mental illness should never be experienced alone, and it truly takes an army to go through the treacherous ins and outs of this illness. Especially when it is a child who is



going through it. There is still a prevalent and strong stigma towards treating mental illness, and we do not talk about it enough to develop a healthy relationship with those who are personally experiencing it. I believe that until we begin to have conversations that are accepting and allowing of mental illnesses, a supportive healing process will begin.

There is a significant rise of major depressive episodes (MDE) on young people in the United States. MDE have increased from 8.7% in 2005 to 11.3% in 2014 in adolescents, and from 8.8.% to 9.6% in young adults (Mojtabai, Olfson, Han, 2016). How are we translating this in terms of the future communities and societies we are creating? And what are we doing to prevent this from escalating even more.

Normalizing mental illnesses, such as severe depression and anxiety, is allowing people to become more aware, but more importantly, it is allowing for those suffering from a mental illness to speak up and ask for help. Teachers, parents, and other care providers are not educated, and to some extent comfortable, enough to allow this to happen in classrooms or at home. The more we give space for these conversations to show up, suspending judgement and with an open heart and open mind, the more we can support each other in the healing process.

Environmental Scan - *The Garden*

In order to begin gathering the information that will serve as the foundation for this project, I am providing an environmental scan of some of the existing organizations, institutions, and after-school programs, that have been inspiring me to do this work.



However, what I am proposing here, is something I am producing out of the need to a more holistic approach in youth development using what I am trying to identify as emotional leadership as the core basic principle to the program. I've identified a gap in these sectors, which I am willing to reduce in due practice of my model.

As I will mention the different focuses of organizations that I have been experiencing, through research, I would like to begin with a different approach to my scan. Figure 3 shows a table that briefly describes an environmental scan using the SOAR approach.

Figure 4

S- Strengths	O- Opportunities	A- Aspirations	R- Results
<p>INQUIRY</p> <p>As an Academic Specialist, I've been allowed to practice the process of intrinsic exploration of self with young adults. This has been beneficial in providing a deeper awareness in their decision making process. In this practice I have noticed how few educators focus on a deeper level to challenge their critical thinking process.</p> <p>Developing a curriculum encompassing emotional leadership practices for Transitional Age Youth, will invite participants to become advocates for themselves by utilizing their emotions as tools for in depth learning and personal development.</p> <p>This will require further research on what exactly are the needs for Transition Age Youth in this time.</p>	<p>IMAGINE</p> <p>Partnering with Transitional Age Youth will develop a parallel understanding of the needs of both the participants and the stakeholders that are providing their continuous support.</p> <p>This awareness is necessary to develop a curriculum that will be beneficial for a shared vision and to define developmental progress as a collective.</p>	<p>INNOVATE</p> <p>My intention is to create a curriculum that will integrate several activities and workshops to facilitate individual growth and self awareness for Transition Age Youth, which will encourage participants to make conscious decisions about their careers and academic endeavors.</p> <p>Developing such programs will close the gap between the espoused theories and theories in use, meaning, I envision a program that will converge the ideals of Youth with their actual practices in school, the workforce, and in civil engagement.</p>	<p>INSPIRE</p> <p>The benefits of participating in youth leadership and mentoring programs encompass a development of skills in communication, critical thinking, creative problem solving and human relations.</p> <p>Measuring the success rate of this program will be dependent on the goals of individual participants. Whether it be to allow them access to higher education or to get a meaningful job; which depends on the goals of each participant.</p>

The table above provides an environmental scan through a positive approach that, rather than focusing on weaknesses and threats, it takes a look at the aspirations and results of the planification of my model. However, I am aware that it is important to



acknowledge the factors that would hinder my model, therefore I will dedicate a section of this document to this later on.

When it comes to analyzing a strategic plan using a scan under a positive approach, there are several factors I took in consideration. I chose this approach because I want to focus on moving forward and what is ahead, and avoid spending half of my energy to the roadblocks that I have to overcome. Shifting the focus to the positive aspects of this model, is parallel to the work I am doing with youth. It goes in alliance with the efforts to improve performance in organizations through strength based programs. It is the shifting of those encounters we tend to label as negative, but instead, thinking of them as tools to become more skillful and adaptive to unexpected change. A strength based organization does not ignore weaknesses of their team members, but rather achieve optimization, where talents are focused and built upon, and weaknesses are understood and managed (Clifton & Harter, 2003). In the following section, I will explain more in detail the SOAR approach I am taking on for this project.

As I begin to focus on the strengths of this design, there is a question that comes with analyzing the internal and external strengths and opportunities of this project. Internally, the strengths of this model lie on the capacitation and skills of my background, education, and experiences, but more importantly it is building off from those of who will be participating. Meaning that the quality of the work is directly related to the people who are involved in the program. As I've experienced during leadership coaching training, I've identified that the success of a coaching relationship depends on the amount of energy and dedication that the client invests. Parallel to this, I hold true that the effectiveness of



this program will be a combination of the efforts of those who participate and the level of creative strategies I approach this model.

In terms of stakeholders, those who will benefit from this model being exercised, I suppose that in a larger scale communities as a whole will benefit from the participants in this program. This is something that, as I begin to apply this model, I will understand concurrently the effects it will take on. However, I intend to support schools, families, and overall communities who are looking to engage their youth more fully and intentionally. A lot of criticism has gone into my generation (millennials), that we are too self-centered, not trained well enough to meet the demands of the previous generations, or because we have a false sense of reality (Alton, 2016.) I am willing to take responsibility of this, because I can attest to some extent this as true, and because instead of complaining I want to train the next generation of people that will go into the workforce with the qualities and demands of my generation, and at the same time to acknowledge and learn what qualities make theirs their own and how we can collaborate.

In the research of finding organizations that do similar work to support youth, I see myself wanting to challenge the current format. Working in academic-based program (schools, or academic after school programs), as important as I think there are measures to take in order to develop the whole-student, I am not satisfied on the approach of how this is actually occurring. Educators and administrators are still focused on developing the student under the demands of the institution in itself, meaning for the benefit of numbers and profit, rather than attending to the student as an individual component and provider of the success of the institution in itself. Far from making the student part of the



decision-making process, institutions today are not understanding the demands of younger generations because their input is not implemented. How can students come to discover their own potential under the restrictions of philosophy that is different than theirs? I believe that by implying that their opinion, or voice does not matter, is to hinder the process of collaborative excellence in the development of a child.

In terms of mental health related programs, I was able to read about an organization in San Diego that is dedicated to provide session outside of the typical setting, office or clinical building, of therapy. These therapists go out in the community to meet their clients and discuss issues that are disrupting their healthy development. By doing so, it enabled the youth to take control of the conditions external to the process that the therapist brings about the session. As I can recognize that this setting is not favorable for all, I do believe it is a positive approach to engage in a conversation that is more normative to mental health.

Much of the work done around finding purpose, empathy for others, and on personal development in terms of community building, religious affiliated youth groups come into place quite often. I am the least familiar with these organizations, however I consider relevant to mention them, as many religious affiliated programs dedicate much of their work to the betterment of youth in their community. So what does it mean to engage with and learn about these organizations, and perhaps even religions as institutions, to the development of my program. I will commit to the fact that even though religion of any kind, color, or faith, will be, without a doubt and spark of discrimination, accepted and received with open arms. Though more than religion, I want to understand



the spiritual background behind their choice and how they can connect with others by practicing certain traditions aligned with their faiths and beliefs. Without excluding our differences, I cherish the fact that we all believe in different ideals and praise different figures to seek enlightenment. This is not something that I am shying away from, rather, it is something that I want to make apparent and invite as another component that makes us unique. To my eyes, religion or spirituality is important for the development as humans in a community, therefore I will intend to include a component of this with the respect that it deserves.

❖ Conclusions and Expectations

I have been having the hardest time to write this section of my paper, because I am not done with it, nor I feel like I want to begin to propose what I expect out of it. As I mentioned in the beginning, it continues and perhaps always will be a working model. The feedback that I have been receiving from the young people I am working with now in trying to implement this model with, has been the impulse to keep me going on to the development and continuous modification of this program. I am listening and sensing where this model needs to be adjusted.

I do however, believe that at its best, this program will be considered successful, if young people turn to their responsibilities willingly and with intention. Success will be measured in terms of their participation in the different systems they are part of -- school, family, and/or their community. As our youth transitions from one developmental stage to



the other, it is my goal to support them through this process in the appropriate way they need to. This may take the form of academic support, career guidance, time management, and/or socio-emotional support. Depending on the needs of youth, I am determined to engage them in each of these practices individually and also collectively.

Aside from that, I do not have any expectations other than to dedicate this work to people who are willing to engage in a space to reach fulfillment, self discovery, and shared resilience. To collaborate with other people who are willing to do this work with me and seek the passion to develop the youth in our community. Because this work, done alone, is incredible terrifying. To explore the depthness of self can bring up darker and unwanted emotions and ideas. So as much as I want to encourage and empower youth to dive into this work, I am not done diving myself. In the words of Dr. Zachary Green, “if I am asking you to be vulnerable, it is only fair to model that vulnerability myself.” and that is what I admire. When a person is willing to go where they are asking you to go, when they’ve experienced what they are asking you to feel, and when they know where you will be once you overcome it. That it will be worth the fight. If I had to provide a conclusion to all of this, it would land on that. As much as I am creating this model for young people, I am also creating this for myself. Ultimately, my intention is to create a center for young people to find a safe environment to seek their place in this world. As loaded as this may seem, I can’t think of any other way to put it. Every human being, no matter race, cultural background, socioeconomic status, gender identity, or any other definition that describes a human, is worthy of a space for endless exploration, creative education, and care and belonging. I want to create that space to hold them as I also hold myself.





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