Introduction

Foundations Of Positive Youth Development

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RESILIENCY

Historically, research on low-income youth and families stemmed from a medical, "problem-focused approach" to research, focusing on "disease, illness, maladaptation, incompetence, deviance" (Benard, 1991, p. 1). Families and youth were viewed as problems that needed remediation (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993), and interventions were created as solutions to the problems. This approach was challenged by researchers who noticed in longitudinal studies of children growing up in environments such as war, genocide, abuse, and neglect that a surprisingly large number of children ended up as productive, healthy individuals rather than as what had been expected of them—i.e., drug-addicted, abusers, and worse (Benard, 1991, Werner & Smith, 1982).

The researchers identified a range of competencies and protective factors they attributed to what was called *resiliency*. Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen (1984) noted that factors supporting resiliency tend to fall into three general categories: qualities of the child, characteristics of the family, and support from outside the family. Individual attributes and competencies were identified as

- *Social competence:* flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, a sense of humor, and other pro-social behavior.
- *Problem-solving skills:* ability to think abstractly, reflectively, and flexibly and to be able to attempt alternative solutions for both cognitive and social problems.

- *Autonomy:* a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment.
- *Sense of purpose and future:* healthy expectancies, goal-directedness, success orientation, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and belief in a bright future. (Bernard, 1991, p. 7)

Protective factors in the environment (family, school, community) were also identified. These included

- *Caring and support:* The opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one person who provided them with stable care. In the community setting, this can include access to resources such as adequate childcare.
- *High expectations:* The belief that children can achieve and succeed, usually aligned with structure, discipline, and clear rules and regulations.
- *Opportunity to participate:* The opportunity to contribute and feel a valuable member of a group (Bernard, 1991).

Positive Youth Development

Resiliency theory became the basis of a philosophy of positive youth development. This framework, rather than starting with the deficits of youth, uses competencies and developmental assets as the baseline for thinking about young people's needs. It looks not only to the individual but also to the environment for factors that can either foster or hamper healthy development. While youth development can take place in a range of community settings, not every setting supports youth development (Delgado, 2002). Programs and services for youth that do not spring from a youth development perspective are usually geared narrowly toward intervention to prevent behaviors, such as teen pregnancy.

In the last twenty years, there has been a great deal of work on youth development, in particular the work of the Youth Development Institute of the Fund for the City of New York and the Search Institute.[1] These organizations have helped identify, articulate, and codify a set of principles and practices for youth development programming. They have identified youth development programs as those which are aimed toward broad-based, normative, developmental goals, and encompass outcomes such as the acquisition of social, emotional, civic, artistic, and intellectual competencies. Other features identified in youth development programming include a "sense of safety; challenging and interesting activities; sense of belonging; supportive relationships with adults; leadership; input and decision-making; and community service" (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997, p. 2).

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[1] For more information, see www.fcny.org and www.search-institute.org.

WHAT ARE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?

Youth development programs in the United States have been around for at least a century, emerging in response to societal needs to address changing economic circumstances, such as the childcare needs of single parent families (Halpern, 2002). Programs have been held in a range of settings, including community centers, schools, churches, and ethnic clubs. They provide a variety of offerings, which may be grouped into broad categories including (1) performance and self-expression, (2) recreation, (3) self-enhancement, (4) educational enrichment and career exploration, (5) citizenship, and (6) comprehensive services (Merry, 2000, p. 27). These categories subsume activities such as graphic and visual arts, theater and dance, sports and athletics, community service and youth leadership, employment and training programs, and health care and mental health counseling. These programs have been aligned with school reform efforts (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996) and participation in Out-of-School Time (OST) programs has been associated with school success (Vandell & Lee, 1999).

Academic achievement has not, historically, been the preoccupation of OST programs. OST programs have, over the years, emphasized sports, arts, and leadership opportunities because they have a profound understanding of the needs of youth during the out-of-school time, as well as knowledge of what engages and draws youth to programs. Activities or projects at OST programs often involve the creation of end products, such as advocacy campaigns or theatrical productions, geared for wide audiences, including parents, other youth participants, funders, community residents, and government officials (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Merry, 2000).

While schools are the primary spaces where OST programs are now held, there is a long history of community-based organizations providing afterschool services. Community-based organizations are unique, and valuable, institutions, with the potential to establish "creative partnerships among education institutions, communities, and businesses" (Heath, 2001, p. 11). Community-based organizations, if utilized wisely, are a middle ground that can be an important vehicle linking school and home. They do so stemming from "traditions of community advocacy and organizing" (Hill, 2004), as well as by the fact that staff often come from the local community and have long-term relationships with children and families. There is a growing recognition of this important role, as the federal funding requires that schools have linkages with community-based organizations that are, in turn, contracted to provide services in schools.

Delgado (2002) conducted a comprehensive review of youth development theory and practice in an attempt to synthesize the range of understandings regarding what is, and isn't, a youth development program. He identified some salient features that can serve as a comprehensive and informative framework for designing and evaluating programs. According to Delgado, excellent youth development programs

- Deepen creativity, provide critical tools for negotiating developmental stages, and provide multiple avenues for the processing of cognitive information;
- Provide youth with opportunities to succeed and contribute to their community;
- Build on youth assets and what youth value;
- Have multiple clear, high, and realistic expectations for participants;
- Are voluntary and provide youth with decision-making powers in shaping programming (Delgado, 2002, p. 80).

LEARNING STANDARDS

Learning standards are key to school reform efforts. Standards-based reform is an approach to school improvement that states "plainly and clearly what results schools *should* produce and what skills and knowledge students *should* acquire as they pass through school" (Finn, Julian, & Petrilli, 2006, p. 8). That is, it is an approach where the success of a school is determined by its performance measured against "clear, commonly defined goals" (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999).

A slow groundswell over the past 20 years in the learning standards movement occurred as a result of several phenomena, beginning with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The next major impetus came with the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) called the Improving America's Schools Act, as well as Congress's Goals 2000 Act, both federal incentives for standards-based reform. An additional pressure for reform came with the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which tied funding with school achievement outcomes. An additional impetus was fueled in part by federal law, passed in 1996, requiring states that receive federal Title 1 funds to develop standards.

As a result of this burgeoning legislation, states are now required to create and implement content standards and use them to guide school assessment. As of now, there is no nationwide set of standards, but national organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have identified standards, which often serve as a template for state standards. There is almost a standards "overkill" situation, and there have been at least 200 identified standards (Marzano & Kendall, 1998). There is ongoing debate over how much time during the school day can be devoted to covering specific standards and whether the school day should be lengthened to do so.

Criticism has been leveled again "bad" standards, that is, standards that are too vague, which privilege skills over content (Finn et al., 2006). There have been calls for national standards and national tests aligned with standards. Several states, in response, have revised their standards

to become more specific, calling them "academic content standards" and have worked toward curricula and assessments that are aligned with state standards. In addition, there are now clearinghouses, such as Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (MCREL[2]), which have collated states' standards and which provide additional resources as well as technical assistance and training in curricula-based standards.

Whether state-based or national, standards are here to stay and will be an ongoing presence in the lives of school districts, teachers, and children. Standards-based school reform is increasing in importance, particularly to school administrators, as schools are often approved or denied accreditation based on standards. As well, states are now developing and using academic content standards for a wide variety of evaluations and school improvement initiatives. For example, they are now used as the basis for end-of-course examinations at the high school level, for grade promotion in the elementary level, and to define the minimum skills needed to graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma (Rabinowitz, Roeber, Schroeder, & Sheinker, 2006).

Many OST programs currently offer activities that support academic outcomes which are aligned with state standards. These activities, however, are often wholly embedded. That is, they are not intentional—on the surface one cannot easily discern the ways that OST activities support learning standards. In addition, OST programs often do not do a good job of articulating to school personnel the value of their offerings or of demonstrating the ways that their activities support state standards. This has, at times, created a tension between school administration and OST programs, where the two institutions have similar goals yet do not fully understand each other's history and purpose. On the other hand, schools do not fully understand or utilize the range of community supports that can help them with their mission. A deeper understanding of the links between youth development, OST programs, and school success is needed for both schools and OST programs to achieve their goals.

This book will provide concrete models and a clear direction for how schools and OST programs can be natural partners in the effort to close the achievement gap. It will demonstrate how OST programs can further align their activities with learning standards, but in ways that are appropriate to their social and historical context—as youth development agencies.

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[2] For more information, see www.mcrel.org.

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