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ABSTRACT
                Both the school-to-work system and youth development theory
emphasize preparing youth for adulthood. They share the following
characteristics: prevention of problem behaviors, a belief that young people
develop by learning actively and in context, a conviction that young people
need opportunities to interact with and be respected by adults who regard
them with high expectations and broad local partnerships. The youth
development perspective offers an important resource for local and state
school-to-work practitioners and policy makers, and school-to-work
practitioners are recognizing and integrating into their systems the
principles and strategies of youth development, such as the following: (1)
opportunities for active and self-directed learning; (2) opportunities to
take on new roles and responsibilities; (3) ongoing emotional support from
adults and peers; (4) ongoing motivational support from adults; (5) ongoing
access to strategic support and social networks; and (6) community
partnerships. An example of effective school-to-work practice with a youth
development perspective is the Fort Pierce Central High School program in
Fort Pierce, Florida, which has developed a performance-based diploma program
in response to a school dropout crisis and vocationally ill-prepared high
school graduates. (A resource section contains 14 publications and lists or
describes 6 organizations.) (KC)

★RESOURCE ★ BULLETIN

MARCH 1996

Incorporating a Youth Development Perspective Into School-to-Work Systems

What is the youth development perspective? Youth development is a term that broadly describes the processes through which young people learn and mature during the stage of human life called adolescence. It advocates human development as its ultimate goal, and providing opportunities and support to young people as essential strategies. The youth development perspective offers a set of ideas and principles about who young people are and what types of developmental experiences they require in order to move successfully through adolescence into young adulthood.

Who is a successful young person? Policy makers and practitioners often emphasize traditional outcomes--problem prevention and status achievement--in answering this question. The traditional view defines the successful young person as someone who avoids problem behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and early sexual behavior, and achieves the traditional benchmarks of high school graduation, stable employment, and postsecondary enrollment. The youth development field identifies a third category for success, developmental outcomes: a positive sense of self, a sense of connection and commitment to others, and the ability and motivation to succeed in school and to participate fully in family and community life. Ultimately, young people who acquire these developmental outcomes are more likely to succeed according to the traditional measures of achievement and prevention.

Both the school-to-work system and youth development theory share an emphasis on preparing youth for adulthood--not simply preventing their engagement in problem behaviors, a belief that young people develop by learning actively and in context, and a conviction that young people need opportunities to interact with and be respected by adults who regard them with high expectations. They also both emphasize creating broad local partnerships.

The youth development perspective offers an important resource for local and state school-to-work practitioners and policy makers. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act offers the opportunity for states and local communities to design and implement systems which prepare young people for high-wage careers and for further education and training. At times there is an inevitable tendency for the emphasis on occupations and employment to overshadow the developmental needs of young people. But the underlying mission of the Act is to prepare young people to be lifelong learners and productive members of society. Because the vision of the school-to-work process is to help young people grow up to be contributing members of families, communities, and workplaces, school-to-

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work systems should go beyond integration of school-based, work-based, and career-oriented elements. To provide the opportunities and supports necessary for all young people to become contributing adults, requires that school-to-work systems incorporate many of the essential elements of the youth development perspective.

School-to-work practitioners are recognizing and integrating into school-to-work systems the principles and strategies of youth development. They design networks and opportunities through which adults support, nurture, and lead young people in positive directions.

Opportunities for Active and Self-directed Learning. Instruction, whether formal or informal, contributes to positive youth development when it offers young people opportunities to be active learners and critical thinkers: to receive information from various sources and experiences, to manipulate and test it, to make their own meaning of it, and, finally, to express its implications.

Opportunities to Take on New Roles and Responsibilities. Active and experiential learning promotes sound youth development most readily when young people perceive the purpose of that learning as relevant to their lives. Challenging roles and responsibilities motivate young people to capitalize on opportunities that arise, rather than letting them pass by. They experience challenge by belonging to organized groups, contributing to and influencing their peers and their communities, and engaging in meaningful part-time work.

Ongoing Emotional Support from Adults and Peers. Although the strongest potential source of emotional support is the family, young people also benefit from the support of other adults-- teachers, relatives, youth workers--who consistently demonstrate acceptance, affirmation, warmth, interest, and a sense of fun.

Ongoing Motivational Support from Adults. Young people benefit when adults expect them to abide by high standards and clear rules, and encourage and guide their efforts to achieve high expectations.

Ongoing Access to Strategic Support and Social Networks. Young people achieve more when they are involved in social networks, either through their families or on their own. Extended social networks--consisting of relatives, religious counselors, school teachers, youth workers, neighbors, and other adults--provide significant and strategic support. This is especially true for young people in vulnerable situations, for whom extended networks and strategic support provide information and resources more readily accessible to advantaged populations.

Community Partnerships. Community-based organizations are among the constituencies suggested by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act for inclusion in local partnerships. They offer extensive networks of support that may be absent from the personal worlds of young people. Their leadership often mirrors the background of the young people they serve. Their participation at an early stage of school-to-work system building enables them to contribute their knowledge to the system's design and implementation. For all these reasons, school-to-work leaders should invite youth development practitioners to become active members of local and state school-to-work partnerships.

Effective Practice

The Performance-based Diploma Program (PBDP) at Fort Pierce Central High School in Fort Pierce, Florida, was developed in response to a school dropout crisis and vocationally ill-prepared high school graduates. The 1987 St. Lucie County dropout rate was sixty percent, the highest in Florida and one of the highest in the nation. It was evident that the number of disinterested, unmotivated, and discouraged high school students was increasing. Many of these youth, although of average to above average intelligence, were functionally illiterate and unacquainted with the responsibilities, demands, and rewards of the work world.

The Port St. Lucie Chamber of Commerce gave $1000 to the school board to show community commitment to the project. The Fort Pierce/St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce trained mentors through their "Leadership St. Lucie" program and their education committee, as well as working actively to enlist other business partners for this new endeavor. The private industry council developed a performance contract that made $100,000 available to the county for students proving successful through this program. The final commitment, which enriched vocational offerings, was the dual enrollment agreement established with the Indian River Community College. With the community, business partners, and the school system working together, the Performance-Based Diploma Program plan was born.

Performance-based education is built on the idea that each student is unique and that each student learns through an individualized plan for the delivery of information for life. No two people are alike and no two people take exactly the same steps to success. Once a person leaves the public school environment, that person is free to seek his or her own path for life and career development.

The St. Lucie County PBDP has striven to create a program that could truly serve each student by personalizing their school experiences to meet their individual needs. The program uses a highly individualized, nontraditional approach to education. At the onset, students are assessed to determine their knowledge and needs. An educational plan is developed jointly with the student, counselor, and parents. Students master academic studies in a computer lab.

Those involved with PBDP credit several elements with its success: its organization as a school-within-a-school on a comprehensive high school campus; flexible scheduling of classes and work experience; flexible enrollment and transfer dates; alternative assessment that allows immediate crediting of work completed; graduation at any time with a regular high school diploma; and a variety of options for occupational training.

By June 1994, the PBDP had cut the dropout rate to less than two percent. More than ninety percent of its graduates go on to college, enter the military, or take entry-level employment. There are also significant improvements in attendance, GPAs, and first-time honor roll students. For further information, contact: Claudia G. Van Patten, Lead Teacher, St. Lucie County Performance Based Diploma Program, Fort Pierce Central High School, 1101 Edwards Road, Fort Pierce, FL 34982. (407) 468-5880.

Publications

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Organizations

Youth development is the special concern of the **Academy for Educational Development's Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (CYDPR),** whose mission is the definition and promotion of national and community-based strategies and standards for positive youth development, strategies that establish clear expectations for youth and for their communities. Through research and recommendations, the Center aims to persuade policy makers, practitioners, and the public to support the development of competent, committed, and assured youth.1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009-1202 ★ 202-884-8000 ★ @aed.org.

Alternatives, Partners with Youth, believes in the value of youth and the power of partnerships. A leader in the field of youth development, Alternatives is dedicated to improving the quality of life for young people through the advancement of youth/adult partnerships. Alternatives provides dynamic learning opportunities that give young people and adults the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work together to influence positively their peer groups, schools, neighborhoods, and community. Alternatives believes that young people are assets to the community and when brought together with adults for the purpose of solving community problems, the benefits from the strengths of each are realized. 2013 Cunningham Drive, Suite 104, Hampton, VA 23666 ★ (804) 838-2330.

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) is an independent, international, nongovernmental organization devoted to the positive development of children and youth, particularly in developing countries. Its mission is to identify, strengthen, and expand effective programs that promote positive youth development and to encourage greater understanding and application of knowledge about "what works" for young people. IYF is establishing a global network of indigenous, self-sustaining, grant making foundations which have a common emphasis on children and youth. By the year 2000, IYF expects to enter into partnerships with national or regional foundations involving up to twenty countries. To foster shared learning and strengthen the efforts of effective programs, IYF has established YouthNet International, which profiles programs that illustrate effective strategies and approaches and have excellent potential for wider application to other settings. 67 West Michigan Avenue, Suite 608, Battle Creek, MI 49017 ★ (616) 969-0033

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve youth policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests, and studies initiatives that increase support and access to opportunity for teenagers in low-income communities, and provides training and technical assistance to practitioners and programs in the youth field. P/PV, Communications Department, 2005 Market Street, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103 ★ (215) 557-4465 ★ PPVKIDS@AOL.COM.

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of children and adolescents through scientific research, evaluation, consultation, and the development of practical resources. Much of Search Institute's work involves in-depth research exploring the issues and needs of children and youth, and the effectiveness of programs that address those needs. Search Institute translates research findings into useful programs, services, and resources. Products include a quarterly newsletter (*Source*), research reports, books, videos, curricula, study guides, and workbooks. In addition, Search Institute provides consulting, technical assistance, and training in systems change and visionary planning for community coalitions and organizations dedicated to children and youth. Thresher Square West, 700 South Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415 ★ (612) 376-8955.

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