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Powerful Partnerships: A Community Program for Low Income, High School Dropouts and a University

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Powerful Partnerships: A Community Program for Low Income High School Dropouts and Two Universities

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Problem 1

∞ YouthBuild Evansville, IN

- Needed help with GED portion of their program
 - GED practice packets all day
 - 1 full-time tutor with no background in education
 - 3 AmeriCorps tutors from social work, undergraduate program
- GED pass rates lower than national YB average = 58%

Problem 2

- ∞ Pre-service Teachers are underprepared to work with at-risk and diverse populations of students.
 - Mindsets affect teaching and learning
 - Study 1: How teachers and students think about what it means to be smart has serious implications for student engagement, effort, and achievement.
 - YouthBuild Students as *Teachers of Teachers*
 - Students lacked opportunities working with diverse student populations.
 - K-12 Special Education Certification (IN)
 - Most students were elementary focused and feared secondary field placements
 - K-12 schools are getting more restrictive in allowing early field experiences

YouthBuild



What is YouthBuild?

- Youth and community development program that addresses core issues facing low-income communities
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Crime prevention
 - Leadership development

There are 273 YouthBuild programs in 46 states, Washington, D.C. and the Virgin Islands engaging approximately 10,000 young adults per year.

<https://youthbuild.org/>

Who are the participants in YouthBuild?

- Young people
 - Between 16 and 24 years old
 - Without a high school diploma or GED
 - Resident of the city
 - Low income
 - Interested in construction
 - Goal - drug free
- All students are low income and many have had experience with
 - foster care
 - juvenile justice
 - Welfare
 - homelessness

National YouthBuild Demographics

- ∞ 100% low income
- ∞ 94% enter without a high school diploma
- ∞ 71% are men; 29% are women
- ∞ 53% African American; 22% White; 20% Latino; 3% Native American; 2% Asian American
- ∞ 32% are court-involved
- ∞ 45% have received public assistance

What does YouthBuild do?

- ✎ In YouthBuild programs, young people
 - Work toward their GED or high school diploma
 - Learn job skills
 - Serve their communities by building affordable housing
 - Transform their lives and roles in society



Programming

- ✎ Strong emphasis is placed on leadership development and community service. Participants receive:
 - OSHA training
 - CPR & First Aid
 - NCCER Pre-Apprenticeship in construction
 - A stipend for their work on the construction site

Outcomes

- Since 1994, more than 120,000 YouthBuild students have produced over 22,000 units of affordable, increasingly green housing in rural and urban communities across the U.S.
- National Data (2010):
 - 78% of enrollees completed the program
 - 63% of these obtained their GED or diploma
 - 60% went on to postsecondary education or jobs averaging \$9.20 an hour
 - 25% enrolled in postsecondary education
 - Recidivism rates for court-involved YouthBuild students are 40 percentage points lower than the national average

Study 1

- ∞ Elo
- ∞ How do students at YouthBuild make sense of smartness and their academic identities from when they were in school?
- ∞ Spent 1 year at sight getting to know students and co-teaching GED classes.
- ∞ Interviewed 14 participants
 - Demographics
 - 8 – males
 - 2 – females
 - 50% - African American
 - 50% - White

Findings

- ∞ “Anybody can be book smart. You can sit down and read a book and say, “Oh I know this and that.”...You got to get that experience. You have to have had a hungry mouth to be street smart.” – Jeremy
- ∞ “When I was in high school, I didn’t believe in being smart, because you know, the hard I tried, doing work and stuff, the more I failed...so I just stopped...like forget it...maybe I’m not smart.” -- Sheena
- ∞ Academic Identity
 - Every student that is a part of the institution of schooling develops an academic identity that helps to shape who we think we are, who others think we are, and who we think we should become.

Findings: Book Smarts

∞ Artifacts of smartness

- Make smartness appear “real” and begin to influence student perceptions of others and themselves.
- Grades, “papers” (i.e. diploma), labels (i.e. gifted or honors), standardized test scores, books, large vocabulary, and participation in college prep math courses.
- How is smartness defined in your school? In your classroom? What would your students say?

Findings: Street Smarts

∞ Street Smarts vs. Book Smarts

- “A street smart person would know not to let a cop search their car without probable cause. Someone without that knowledge, maybe someone with school smarts, the police can get over on, and it’s just not going to happen to someone that has street smarts.”
- Street smarts were defined as being able to maneuver and survive against obstacles such as poverty, the police, street culture, and abusive people in their lives.
- Street smarts represented the power they had to survive despite immense obstacles where book smarts was something *done to them* and another obstacle in their lives.
- How can we connect street smarts to book smarts as a way to help students succeed both in and out of the classroom?

Findings: Turning Points

- ∞ Turning Points (combined data)
 - Students dropping out of school early is a long process that can start as early as elementary school.
 - Examples
 - Key moments
 - examples
 - Turning points can be positive too. Students need turning points to get back on track, to receive the support they need.

Study 2

FORMATIVE EXPERIMENTS (design research):

- ∞ Approach aimed at studying promising interventions in authentic instructional environments (Reinking & Bradley, 2008)
 - Taking into consideration the complex interacting variables
- ∞ Implement packaged intervention
 - Evidenced-based practices
- ∞ Collected both quantitative & qualitative data related to pedagogical goals
 - Continuous review of data to identify factors that enhance and inhibit progress toward the pedagogical goals
 - Modifications made based on data
 - Observation data of the outcomes of the modifications
 - Unanticipated outcomes of the intervention
- ∞ Intentions for Year 3
 - Experimental study based on results of 2 year formative experiment

Pedagogical Goals

- ☞ Increase opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply evidence-based practices in authentic & diverse learning environments
 - Increase opportunities to apply culturally responsive teaching practices in pre-service teachers
- ☞ Increase academic outcomes for participants in YouthBuild
 - Improve GED pass rates
 - Increase graduation rates
- ☞ Identify components of effective campus-community partnerships

Participants Year 1

YouthBuild

∞ n = 14

- 9 male (64%)
- 5 female (36%)
- 7 White (50%)
- 6 African American (43%)
- 1 Native American (7%)

University

∞ N = 13

- 11 female
- 2 male
- 100% White



Participants Year 2

YouthBuild

∞ n = 7

- 5 male
- 2 female
- 4 white
- 3 African American

University

∞ N = 20

- 19 female
- 1 male
- 19 White
- 1 Asian

TABE (Pre-test)	Reading	Math: Comp	Math: App
Mean (G.E.)	7.21	5.88	7.58
Range (G.E.)	2.2 - 12.9	2.6 - 12.9	2.8 - 11.3

Partnership Timeline

∞ Year 1: Fall – pilot

- 1 student completing an independent study in SPED 418: Instructional Strategies for Secondary Students with Disabilities

∞ Year 1: Spring – formative experiment

- SPED 418 – traditional on-campus class
 - 4 Learning Modules – 2ndary teaching strategies
 - Literacy
 - Mathematics
 - Content Areas
 - Learning Strategies
- SPED 422 – All 12 students completed secondary practicum course at YouthBuild
 - Required to design & teach 4 lessons (1 per learning module); and
 - Create & teach 1 unit plan (4 – 6 lessons) in pairs (co-teaching)

∞ Year 2: Fall (10 students) & Spring (9 students)

- SPED 418 met at YouthBuild – after 2 weeks on campus
 - Learning modules online
 - Students worked in pairs to create & teach unit plan (identified areas of need)
- SPED 422 – practicum in traditional middle or secondary high school

Schedule

- ∞ Mid August – End of May
- ∞ Week 1 – Mental Toughness Training
- ∞ Weekly schedule
 - Monday/Wednesdays – Construction training
 - Tuesdays/Thursdays – GED Prep
 - Fridays – Community Service
- ∞ Last Week - St. Louis/Bike Trip



Intervention Package

- ✎ Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS)
 - Rapport – ice breakers, bio assignment
- ✎ Data-based decisions
 - Pre-test
- ✎ Explicit Instruction (choice, relevant, authentic)
- ✎ One-on-one tutoring in areas of need
- ✎ Learning Strategies Instruction
 - Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS): A Reading Strategy for High School Students
 - Keyword Mnemonics – SAT Vocabulary
 - Goal setting/Self-monitoring
 - Possible Selves – UK Center for Research on Learning

Data Sources

University Students

☞ Qualitative

- Lesson plans
- Observations
- Teacher evaluations
- Focus groups



YouthBuild Participants

☞ Quantitative

- TABE
- GED exam
- Pre-post test GED practice tests

☞ Qualitative

- Observations
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Work samples

Results



YouthBuild Year 1 Results

- ☞ Original participants = 20 (17)
 - 3 didn't return after mental toughness training
 - 2 removed – drug use
 - 1 incarcerated
- ☞ 14 regular attendees
- ☞ 14 graduates
- ☞ 12 received GED (86%/71%) – NA (63%)
- ☞ 7 transitioned and are attending college (50%/41%) – NA (25%)
- ☞ 11 currently employed >\$9.20/hr - (79%/65%) – NA (63%)
- ☞ 13/14 students increased TABE scores pre-post overall
 - One student scored lower in 3 areas, math computation, applied math, and reading
 - One student scored lower in reading at post
 - One student scored lower in applied math at post

YouthBuild Year 2 Results

- ☞ Original participants = 15/12
 - 3 never returned after mental toughness training
 - 2 removed – behavioral issues/drug violations
 - 2 released for nonattendance
 - 1 incarcerated
- ☞ 7 regular attendees
- ☞ 7 graduates
- ☞ 5 received GED (71%)
- ☞ 3 transitioned and are attending college/trade school (43%)
- ☞ 6 currently employed (86%)
- ☞ 5/6 students increased TABE scores pre-post overall
 - One student scored lower in applied math, and reading
 - One student scored lower in applied math at post

Findings Effective Partnerships

∞ Components of effective maintenance:

- Invitation from community partner
- Commitment/Engagement
- Regular communication
- Shared responsibility/leadership
- Shared problem solving
 - Data-based decisions
- Mutual respect
- Mutually beneficial outcomes
- Administrative support

Qualitative Findings University Students

- ∞ Increased comfort/confidence using team/co-teaching
- ∞ Increased confidence in teaching diverse students
 - Reduced fear
 - “I have to be honest, Dr. R., one of the first days when you sent me up to help that Americorp tutor with 3 of the guys in the class, I was scared to death, but now I love those guys; they’re totally my favorite students there.”
 - Breakdown in stereotypes
 - “When Mr. F. came and talked to us about some of the kids have been to prison already, I hate to admit it, but I judged them before even meeting them. Learning about their lives and how much they have overcome, and to see how dedicated they are to making a better life for themselves, it almost makes me cry to remember how I judged them, and I’m ashamed.”

Qualitative Findings University Students

- ∞ Increased evidence of culturally responsive teaching in planning & delivery of lessons
 - Ex: lesson on figurative language, multiple examples from both rap and country music based on interest & culture of YB participants
 - Math lesson on calculating percentages based on real-life budgeting issues in their lives and communities
 - Persuasive writing topic choices included current & relevant topics
 - Ex: Trayvon Martin

In Their Own Words: Pre-service Teachers

- **What have you learned about teaching secondary students at YouthBuild that you may have not experienced in a traditional high school setting?**
- “I learned not to make assumptions about students and don't go off of first impressions.”
- “The students we worked with...the “traditional” high school obviously did not work for them, so we were encouraged to think outside-the-box and to teach content and curriculum in a way that was effective for the YouthBuild students.”
- “You always say (Dr. R.H.) that establishing rapport with each and every student is the key to being an effective teacher, but I saw this first hand at YouthBuild because it was like they really didn't trust us or what we had to say until we took the time to get to know them as individuals.”

In Their Own Words: Pre-service Teachers

- ∞ How did your preparation of lessons differ? How did you alter your teaching strategies to better meet the needs of the students at YouthBuild?
- “It was nice to be able to co-teach because we learn about it at USI, but never really get to do it, so we had to make time to meet and work together. Plus it was nice to be able to use their individual mentors during guided and independent practice, but this is something we didn’t have in our practicum lessons.”
- “It was really important for us to tie GED concepts in with real life scenarios since many of them are out in the real world already. Our main objective was to teach the students something they could use on the exam and in their lives outside the classroom.”

What Have You Learned About Being A Good Teacher?

- “Being a good teacher is not something that is achieved, and it's done; it's something to work towards, achieve, and maintain. I'm still working towards it.”
- “A good teacher should become familiar with a variety of strategies and use them accordingly. A teacher should implement more than one strategy to meet the needs and variety of learning styles/abilities for all students.”
- “Prior to YouthBuild I thought a good teacher was prepared, experienced, etc... and while all these things are still true, my “definition” of a good teacher has slightly changed. I am now a strong believer a good teacher is fearless, as far as attempting something new, as well as can learn from their mistakes.”

How Has Working at YouthBuild Increased Your Involvement and Understanding of Others Who are Different From You?

- “I find it extremely motivating to witness the drive and desire that a lot of the students at YouthBuild have for succeeding. I respect the students at YouthBuild and everything that they have gone through in their lives.”
- “Youth Build has given me a good meaning to the phrase 'second chance.' These young people are fighting to provide the best for their families and want a second chance to make something of themselves by getting their GED. I really admire individuals who want to give it their all to get a good education.”
- “I went into YouthBuild thinking that these students would have a bad attitude and would not want to be there, like most high school students. I learned that these students are actually grateful for the chance to get a good education. It definitely changed what I thought about people who don't finish high school.”

Qualitative Findings: YB Participants

☞ Motivated by money

- Stipend comparison from year 1 to year 2

☞ Connectedness

- “When Mr. Flowers started talking about YouthBuild Family, I thought he was crazy. I looked around and thought no way... but, we really did become family.”
- “Our USI mentors were cool. They were younger, so they could relate to us better. They were more like helpers and not over us – not like bosses, more like partners.
- “I liked the one-on-one training, and we can talk to them (USI mentors). Got to know them a lot more than like regular teachers. They would go outside and chill with us.”

☞ Relevancy of program to life & life goals

- “I was here for the on the job training and the job placement part, but I did the other stuff to help get me to that goal of getting a good job because I knew it all would help.

Qualitative Findings: YouthBuild Participants

∞ Shifts in identity & self-efficacy

- “I look at school differently. I will give college a chance now, but coming out of highschool, I wouldn’t have considered it.”
- I always liked cooking, and work as a cook, but until I came here, I didn’t know I could go to culinary school, and study the culinary arts.

∞ Reciprocity of teaching & learning

- What advice would you give future teachers to prevent students from dropping out:
 - “Care about them. Don’t stereotype. Some teachers stereotype when you walk in.”
 - “Interact with them – some teachers just give out papers and say do it.”
 - “Never give up on us.”

Factors That Inhibit Progress Toward Pedagogical Goal

YouthBuild

- ☞ Lack of structure & consistency
- ☞ Lack of regular attendance
- ☞ Loss of funding
 - Loss of pay for YB participants
- ☞ Poor choices
- ☞ Attrition
- ☞ Once YB students passed their GED, reduced motivation in academic lessons (years 1 & 2)

University

- ☞ Lack of supervision/scheduling (year 1)
- ☞ Lack of structure & consistency (year 1)



Factors that Enhance Progress Toward Goals

YouthBuild

- ☞ Strong leadership
 - Mr. Flowers
- ☞ Increased structure & consistency
- ☞ Focus on goal oriented behavior
- ☞ One-on-one mentoring
- ☞ Personal connections
- ☞ Presentation of different strategies by different teachers

University

- ☞ Team teaching
- ☞ University professors there to provide immediate feedback (2nd year)
- ☞ Other university students on hand to assist one-on-one w/lessons



Unanticipated Positive or Negative Effects of Intervention

- ∞ Increased evidence of culturally responsive teaching both in planning and delivery
- ∞ YouthBuild participants began skipping their breaks to contribute feedback after lessons
- ∞ USI students volunteered at YB outside of class
 - Friday service events
 - Fundraisers
 - Bike training
- ∞ Once YB students passed their GED, decreased attendance and motivation for some.
 - Shifted to transition activities
 - Higher Ed/Trade School applications
 - FAFSA applications
 - Job applications
 - Mock job interviews

Future Research

- ∞ Implement with another YouthBuild program which has similar needs as YouthBuild Evansville
- ∞ Implement intervention as experimental design with pre-post survey on diversity/cultural responsiveness
- ∞ Find ways to increase attendance and funding for YouthBuild students
- ∞ Possible partnership with counseling and/or other programs to provide education and services to help YouthBuild students begin to make better choices (drugs, alcohol, safe sex, etc.)
- ∞ Provide additional training to University students in culturally responsive practices prior to placement at YouthBuild.

Questions?

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