

# **What Works in Education Reform: Putting Young People at the Center**

**by Joel Tolman with Patrice Ford and Merita Irby**

**Foreword by Rick Little**



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## International Youth Foundation®

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) was established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources and attention to the many effective local efforts that are transforming young lives across the globe. Currently operating in nearly 50 countries and territories, IYF is one of the world's largest public foundations supporting programs that improve the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. IYF's "What Works in Youth Development" series examines cutting edge issues in the field and aims to provide practitioners, policymakers, donors, and others supporting youth initiatives with insights into effective practices and innovative approaches impacting young people around the world.

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**Marshalling what we know about children and young people—and acknowledging youth as the central actors in education—defines a common starting point for varied routes to real educational change.**

**T**here is nothing easy about education reform.

From decades of steady research on young people and their schools, we have a clear picture of what youth need in order to learn and grow: caring relationships, challenging and relevant experiences, opportunities to make meaningful choices and contributions, consistently high expectations, and high-quality instruction personalized to their particular experiences and needs. From the practice of outstanding teachers and youth workers, we know that it is possible to create the conditions in which young people learn best.

Yet putting this solid research and wisdom into practice—for all children and young people, not just the lucky few in model schools and resource-rich communities—remains an elusive goal. In much of the work of the International Youth Foundation (IYF), this is a challenge of *form*—creating systems and supports for young people where none existed before. IYF’s Partner organizations work in 49 countries and territories to strengthen supports and opportunities for young people and to bring effective strategies to scale.

In the case of education, though, the task is more often one of *reform*—creating something newly effective out of systems that fail to meet the needs of many children and young people. *What Works in Education Reform: Putting Young People at the Center* is committed to facing this central challenge of our education systems: rebuilding, recreating, renewing, reinventing, and reorienting the systems and institutions tasked with helping children and young people learn. Given the difficulties and uncertainties of education reform, the phrase “what works” may be making simple and commonplace what is nearly always a messy and unfinished business. But, for IYF and its Partners, focusing on the subtitle of the publication—*putting young people at the center*—makes the work of education reform a more promising project.

Marshalling what we know about children and young people—and acknowledging youth as the central actors in education—defines a common starting point for varied routes to real educational change. *What Works in Education Reform: Putting Young People at the Center* shares a roadmap of this common starting point and these varied routes. In doing so, it zooms in on some of the innovative projects funded by the Lucent Technologies/IYF Global Fund for Education and Learning, as well as education reform efforts spearheaded by other IYF Partners. These projects—growing in reach and impact—are creating routes to meaningful careers for rural youth in Thailand and the Philippines, helping teachers develop innovative teaching

practices in Mexico and Poland, and improving student outcomes through systemic reform in Puerto Rico and Argentina. Many of these efforts are young, and all have obstacles to overcome. But all indicate promising directions for others committed to education reform.

The pages that follow represent both the individual efforts and the collective wisdom of the IYF Partner Network. The short profiles and deeper descriptions throughout this publication draw on case studies developed by the IYF partners, written for a meeting hosted by Fundación Vamos in Mexico City in July 2002 that brought together the 19 Partners active in education reform. The gathering was funded by Lucent Technologies. The text that surrounds these case studies reflects the lessons and common themes gleaned from the conversations in Mexico City, as well as from the broader field of education reform. ( For a list of IYF Partners attending the meeting see p. 108)

The IYF Partners are certainly not alone in their efforts to put young people at the center of education reform. A youth-centered perspective grows from roots more than a century old. It has been nurtured by prominent efforts such as those of the Education for All movement, arising out of a March 1990 meeting in Jomtien, Thailand. Numerous organizations and networks, working in many nations, are engaged in work similar to (and often ahead of) the efforts described in this publication. We are thankful to have such committed companions on the road to education reform. A primary aim of this publication is to add the work and voices of the IYF Partners to this growing international effort.

We are grateful to Joel Tolman, who took the lead in Mexico City and in authoring this publication, as well as to his colleagues Merita Irby and Patrice Ford at the Forum for Youth Investment—the United States Partner in IYF’s Global Partner Network—for their contributions to both the meeting and this publication. Leaders at several other Partner foundations—in particular, Teresa Ogrodzinska from the Polish Children and Youth Foundation, Teresa Lanzagorta from Fundación Vamos in Mexico, and Srisak Thaiarry from the National Council for Child and Youth Development in Thailand—played invaluable roles as an informal planning group during the Mexico City meeting, as well as advisors for this publication. While | these three partners took on particularly important roles, every participant in the Mexico City meeting was also a meeting planner and contributor to this publication. We extend our thanks to all of them. Thanks also to Nico Van Oudenhoven of

International Child Development Initiatives in the Netherlands, who offered clear and insightful comments on the manuscript. Several members of the IYF team—Carol Michaels O’Laughlin, Joyce Phelps, Christina Macy, Mary Stelletello, Damir Marusic, and Kate Tallent in particular—provided the leadership, expertise, and support that made both the Mexico City meeting and this publication possible. And finally, deep appreciation to Lucent Technologies for its support for this publication and for its ongoing efforts to improve learning opportunities for young people worldwide.

We extend our thanks to our readers, as well, for their contributions to the hard work of improving educational opportunities in your countries. And we urge you, as you take on this important task, to keep children and young people at the center of your thinking and actions.

Rick Little

Founder

International Youth Foundation







## The Puzzle of Education Reform

In Germany—a country long lauded for its commitment to education—the public is shaken awake by the results of an international assessment of student achievement that places its students near the bottom of the industrialized world.

Working with a national education system that one senior government official describes frankly as “very resistant to change,” a Mexican NGO sees a groundswell of commitment to innovative instruction among rural and urban teachers.

In Japan, the public is forced to acknowledge the hundreds of thousands of students who simply refuse to go to school. In response, policymakers pass national legislation that carves out more space for personal and social support in schools—but leaves teachers accustomed to clear national mandates with few guidelines or supports as they try to implement this commitment.

In the Philippines, the nation struggles to find roles for 12 million out-of-school young people—nearly 40 percent of the country’s youth—who have not found what they need in school and who lack the skills for work.

It is conditions like these—a mix of powerful opportunities, intractable problems, slow-moving institutions, and hopeful possibilities—that have moved members of the IYF Global Partner Network to become education reformers. As foundations and “second-floor” organizations<sup>1</sup> working with youth around the world, IYF Partners have become education reformers out of a commitment to children and young people, recognizing that education is a critical part of young people’s development and central in shaping their future possibilities.

IYF partners, like all agents of educational change, encounter an unlikely combination of impossible situations and dizzying opportunities. Any way one approaches it, educational change is a daunting and complex process. Consider three basic realities of education reform:

- The number of factors demonstrably linked to student learning, even in an over-simplified inputs-outcomes model, is surely intimidating. Community characteristics, family roles, attitudes and interests, prior knowledge, quality of instruction, teacher assets, learning context, and a dozen other elements

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<sup>1</sup> Second-floor (or intermediary) organizations, in the youth and education fields, provide the supports and the context necessary for those working directly with young people – “first-floor organizations” – to do their work. These organizations often engage in training, networking opportunities, organizational development, policy advocacy, and a variety of other roles. For an exploration of the important roles of such organizations in education reform, see the final section of this publication, “Making the Change, Nurturing the Change, Pushing the Change: New Routes to Education Reform.”

are demonstrably linked to learning outcomes for young people (Asian Development Bank, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Learning First Alliance, 2001). Nor is research consistent on how these variables relate to learning outcomes. Studies from Asia, for instance, offer conflicting evidence about the impact of such basic variables as instructional materials, class size, and school size on student learning (Asian Development Bank, 2002). All this, again, is in an over-simplified model, which likely does not take full account of young people as agents in their own learning, or of the significant differences among young learners.

- If education reform is complicated from a student learning perspective, it is even more complicated from a national or international view. Anyone committed to education reform faces an often overwhelming array of options or entry points for their work. Is whole-school reform the right focus? Should efforts aim to influence teacher training institutions? Should advocates aim to get a pilot project implemented at the national policy level? Would-be reformers can pick some “best bets,” based on the successes and failures of past efforts. But effective reform strategies are even more poorly researched and less understood than effective teaching strategies. And available experience indicates that changes in policy are only loosely coupled with changes in the educational experiences of young people.
- The array of variables connected to learning outcomes, and the variety of entry points for education reformers, can be read as “opportunities”—they represent potential foci to be chosen among. Other realities facing education reformers are less easily interpreted in a positive light. When 40 percent of Filipino



youth have dropped out or been pushed out of the school system, and when statistics reveal that only 2 to 3 out of 10 high school students in the United States will go on to complete college within 10 years after graduation (Steinberg et al., 2002), both the need for and challenges inherent in education reform become clear. Statistics about excluded young people sit side-by-side clear indications that schools are not consistently preparing young people for community, work, and family life. Employers in many countries call for communication, decision-making, and critical thinking skills that are seldom addressed in traditional school curricula, (Murnane & Levy, 1996; SCANS, 1991; OECD, 2001a). Speaking to young people's preparation for citizenship, a recent 28-country study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) indicates that students' civic knowledge and preparation for democratic life is "superficial." Whether they retain students or not, then, schools are not consistently meeting the needs of young people.

In the face of a laundry list of options, and an equally long list of challenges, education reformers have to make hard choices. And, to be effective, they must also make their decisions in the context of a bigger picture of possibilities and routes to change. In the absence of this bigger picture, there is little hope of real improvement.



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## Reformers' Key Questions

Reformers set their sights on changing the answers to the most basic of educational questions—about the what, how, when, where, and who of education (see Figure 1). It is in offering different, compelling, workable, and worthy alternatives to the current way of “doing education” that reform efforts make their mark.

■ **What is the content?** In most education reform conversations, the discussion of the “what” of education revolves around curriculum, standards, and assessments—what do we hope students will learn, and how will we measure their success. Perspectives on essential content vary somewhat across national contexts, and shift across time. Still, the focus is usually around what fits inside the notion of “academic competence”—a set of knowledge and skills linked to a set of core subjects. Studies like the 29-country Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, push on this definition. PISA works from a definition of verbal, mathematical, and scientific literacy that stresses the ability to apply content and skills—but still tends to remain focused on a set of cognitive/academic competencies.

■ **How is learning being supported?** The instructional encounter—the interaction between students, teachers, and the learning context—is generally understood to be the locus of learning. For good reason, then, many education reform efforts focus on shifting the practices of education. The routes through which reform efforts target instruction vary and include, for example, changes in the



certification of teachers, shifts in policies to foster or demand innovative practices, and the introduction of new curricula that bring along changed pedagogy. Yet, the impact of each of these routes to instructional change is not clear and depends on a host of contextual factors. Moreover, the environmental and structural context that surrounds the teaching encounter—the policies that affect it, the school structures in which it is embedded—are a critical part of the answer to the question of how learning is being supported. How these systemic factors affect learning is even less well understood.

■ **When and where is it happening?** Whether they constitute real restructuring or simply rearranging deck chairs on a sinking ship, changes in the facilities, structures, and schedules—in the when and where of learning—represent a third path to education reform. Changes in the length of the school day (growing in many East Asian countries, though now shrinking somewhat in Japan, according to a 1999 synthesis by Larson and Verma), in length of time students spend on a subject or with a teacher, and in pressure for “time on task” are central aims of many school reform projects. The notion that school facilities can support or thwart education reform and student learning has also gained value among policy makers and educational facility designers. Available research justifies paying attention to these basic contextual factors; U.S.-based research, for instance, indicates that the physical structure of schools accounts for a significant part of variation in student achievement, and that deficits in students’ physical environments are often responsible for poorer learning outcomes (Schneider, 2002; Moore and Lackney, 1993; Lyons, 2001; Tanner, 2000). Similarly, huge disparities in how much time students spend in schools across and within nations justify a focus on issues of time in education reform (Larson and Verma, 1999).

■ **Who is involved, and what roles do they take on?** Keeping students in school and ensuring equal access to education are central educational issues in both the developing and developed nations—whether related to unequal opportunities for girls, school refusal in Japan or dropouts in the United States, or promotion of students before they have mastered academic skills. Similarly, the debates about the “who” of teaching—related to qualifications, certification, recruitment, retention and the like—are critical aspects of many education reform efforts. Shifts in roles—teachers taking on roles as professionals, facilitators, decision-makers, and coaches; administrators fulfilling their roles as instructional leaders; students becoming engaged actors in their own learning—are among the most important themes of reform efforts (Newman, 1991; Murphy, 1991).

In many cases, education reform efforts focus in on one piece of the larger

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puzzle. Reformers aim, for instance, for a particular curricular change, a pedagogical innovation, a shift in school schedules. While understandable and critical, these targeted reform efforts beg larger questions. First, what are the critical entry points? Some pieces of the puzzle are almost certainly more powerful routes to reform in



a given context than others—more likely, that is, to bring about lasting and fundamental changes with significant positive effects on young people’s learning. Second, what is it that links these pieces together, and what do these efforts add up to? Changes in curriculum and assessment in the absence of supports for changed pedagogy, as experiences in many countries demonstrate, are unlikely to create real change in schools. Similarly, innovative teaching strategies mean little if few young people have access to educational opportunities in the first place. This second question, in turn, drives another: what is it that binds these pieces of the puzzle together into something coherent? What, in other words, drives a cohesive approach to reform? Without something to connect the pieces, perhaps the most critical question of reform—the why question, about the purposes and aims of education—is too easily left off the table.

Answering these questions about entry points, connections, and coherence demands something more than piecemeal approaches to education reform. It requires a galvanizing focus, a big idea, a standard against which to measure success. It requires an answer to the “why” of education reform. It requires, in short, a new piece of the puzzle.

## New Answers to Old Questions

The Lucent Technologies-sponsored workshop in Mexico City in 2002 made clear that IYF Partners share common answers to the most basic of reformer's questions. They promote a vision of student success that transcends the often-narrow confines of academic achievement. They support shifts in instruction to emphasize student engagement, relevance, and the creation of safe and supportive learning environments. They recognize the central role of community-based actors in supporting students' learning, and in education reform. These common answers are no coincidence. They stem from shared experience and expertise in children's development, and grow from a common commitment to promote the well being of children and young people. They reflect, in short, a youth-centered approach to education reform.

Children and young people are at the center of education.<sup>2</sup> This is a statement of fact. Walk into any school, and upwards of 90 percent of the people one sees are young. It is young people's learning for which education systems are held responsible. It is young people's individual experiences, common developmental circumstances, and shared identity as a generation that teachers encounter every day as they teach. As members of their school communities, young people are central actors in whether schools flourish or flounder.

More than stating a fact, however, saying that young people are at the center of education is a value judgment. It reflects a commitment to take young people—their perspectives, their individual experiences, their developmental needs and processes—seriously in the educational process.<sup>3</sup>

Contrast these facts and commitments with the realities that greet young people in many of their schools. In even the most “developed” of countries, many young people come to school without the most basic developmental “inputs”—sufficient food, access to basic services, a safe and supportive environment— and schools are seldom in a position to meet these needs (Dryfoos, 1990; Delisle et al., n.d.; Learning First Alliance, 2001). Too often, what Paulo Freire<sup>4</sup> has described as the “banking system of education,” in which students are passive repositories for teachers' knowledge, pervades classroom practice, even though research indicates that active engagement is critical to their learning. A 28-country study, for instance, found that in no nation did more than 39

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<sup>2</sup> This publication, like the work of the International Youth Foundation and its Partner network, focuses primarily on young people between the ages of 5 and 25. The phrases “youth-centered,” “children and youth,” and “young people” are used throughout this publication to refer to that age range, with children referring to primary school-aged populations, and “youth” or “young people” referring to the entire age range. Individuals within this age range are incredibly diverse – in terms of their experiences, progress along a developmental trajectory, and identity. Putting young people at the center of education reform involves both addressing this diversity and focusing on the common developmental experiences of all young people.

Work to improve educational opportunities during early childhood is no less essential than the efforts described here. However, that work is not the expertise or primary focus of IYF and its partner network, nor of this publication's authors.

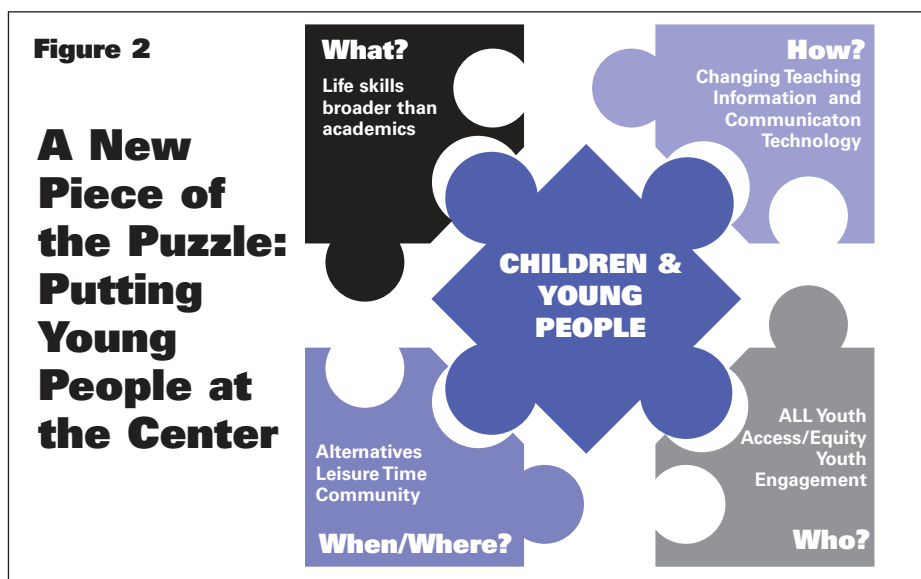
<sup>3</sup> In one sense, the international community has already made a commitment to putting young people at the center of education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by nearly every country in the world, guarantees that “the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”

<sup>4</sup> See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's 1970 treatise on popular education, an educational methodology that aims toward an end to political oppression. Bell Hooks (1994), in *Teaching to Transgress*, also offers a useful discussion of the banking system of education.



percent of students feel they were “often encouraged in their schools to make up their own minds, encouraged to express their opinions, free to express opinions that differ from those of other students and of the teacher, and are likely to hear several sides of an issue.” (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In another international study, only slightly more than half of students reported that the teacher “shows an interest in every students’ learning” in most or all lessons (OECD, 2001b). Unfortunately, teachers and schools have neither the resources nor the commitments to know what goes on in the rest of students’ lives.

Is there an alternative? What would it mean to take young people seriously in education reform, and in their own education? Putting young people at the center of the puzzle of education reform lends new clarity, and new directions, to reform—with implications for all of the other pieces of the puzzle (see Figure 2):



■ **What?** A youth-centered view begins with the most basic question: what are our hopes for young people and what are their goals? Clearly, academic skills and knowledge are a critical part of the answer. But most people would likely name a broader set of goals. Most hope that young people will be ready for work, citizenship, family, and lifelong learning—that is, that they will be free of serious problems, prepared for life, and ready to engage. Words like competence, confidence, character, connections, and contribution begin to capture a better sense of our hopes for young people. The public has good reason to back this broadened picture of educational achievement. Outcomes like these are demonstrably connected to young people’s long-term success in life (National Research Council, 2002), and also to the academic outcomes for which students and schools are traditionally held accountable (Resnick et al., 1997; Zill, 1990; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2000).

■ **How?** What we know about young people and their development also calls for shifts in the practice of education. Among the most critical shifts is to treat the environment in which learning occurs as a priority on par with instruction itself—recognizing that students must be in safe, supportive, engaging environments in order to learn (Learning First Alliance, 2001; Melaville et al., 2003). A youth-centered approach also necessitates changes in instruction and pedagogy itself, in order to ensure that instruction provides the basic “inputs” all young people need in order to learn and grow. A synthesis of research in education and youth development indicates that personalization, high expectations, relevance, and autonomy are the basic principles of effective instruction—forming the core of a youth-centered approach (Forum for Youth Investment, 2002). These changes in instruction and environment, in turn, require significant shifts in the structures, policies, and beliefs that guide educational systems.

■ **Where and When?** Efforts must continue to ensure that all young people have access to high-quality schools. But school reform efforts are no more important than work to create high-quality learning opportunities outside the school building and school day. Education and learning are phenomena too big—especially when the “what” of education is re-defined broadly—to be contained by schools. Young people are continuously learning, and intentional supports for learning can and should be available throughout their waking hours. Similarly, young people learn in all the settings where they live, work, play, and contribute, not just inside school building (CCSSO & Forum for Youth Investment, 2001; Falk & Dierking, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Larson & Verma, 1999). Moreover, young people’s learning is part of a life-long process, not something that stops with school completion. These realities demand what Jacques Delors, chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, calls “an education society,” recognizing that “every aspect of life ... offers opportunities for both learning and doing.” Youth-centered education reform efforts seek to expand public commitments to fill this broader space in which learning happens, and focus particular attention on blurring the lines and building connections across time and settings (Pittman, Yohalem, Tolman, 2003).

■ **Who?** In a youth-centered vision of education reform, all those involved in the educational process—students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members—take on a new set of roles. Nowhere is this shift more significant than when it comes to the roles of young people themselves. First, youth-centered education reform is rooted in a commitment to learning opportunities for all youth—especially those typically left out or pushed out of education systems. Achieving the goals of adequacy and equity in education requires that educators address the developmental and identity

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differences among their students—and work toward high quality learning opportunities for girls as well as boys, an end to achievement gaps between students of different economic and social backgrounds, and experiences matched to students’ developmental readiness and realities. One essential aspect of youth-centered education reform, then, is not treating young people as a singular, homogeneous group. Second, the roles and responsibilities that young people take on inside a youth-centered vision of education reform are far more active and robust than in traditional education. Youth engagement is understood as critical to both the process and products of education reform—recognizing that engagement and active roles are an essential feature of any effective learning environment (Deci and Ryan, 1991; Finn, 1989, 1992; National Research Council, 2000).

Putting young people at the center of education reform, then, offers a guiding framework for answering the most fundamental educational questions. Young people are not the only element to put at the center, and this is not the only means by which to lend clarity and cohesiveness to reform efforts. Academic standards or centralized curriculum, community and social needs, democracy, and a range of other public ideas can serve as viable anchors for school reform efforts—and as viable answers to the “why” question of education reform. Yet, a youth-centered view offers a powerful response to the realities facing schools, and a route to genuine educational change. It acknowledges that young people are the central actors in the education process. It allows us to build on what we know about how young people learn and grow. It keeps the focus where it should be—on those doing the learning—and forces conversations on structural and policy issues to demonstrate their impact on the bottom line. It offers, in other words, an answer to the guiding question for this publication: What works in education reform?

### **Four Routes to Youth-Centered Reform**

Within this context of youth-centered education reform, there are likely key targets for change efforts—entry points that are particularly promising in moving a youth-centered agenda. The IYF Partners’ efforts, and this publication, focus on four: *education for life, teacher learning and quality, information technology, and youth engagement*. These four “levers” are the topics of the chapters that follow.

Why these four entry points, out of all the potential foci for education reform efforts? They are certainly not the only options pursued by youth-centered reformers in and outside of the IYF Partner Network. Yet, each offers a response to one of the basic questions of reform. Education for life (as opposed to education for academic achievement) represents a broadened answer to the “what” of education reform, and teacher

quality a route to a changed “how,” for instance. Because they address basic reform issues, these entry points pick up on important themes in mainstream education reform efforts. When youth-centered reformers talk about teacher quality and information technology, for instance, they speak to the concerns and interests of other reformers, rather than creating a distinct (and potentially divisive) agenda.

More importantly, each of these “key levers” offers an opportunity to act on what we know about young people and their development. Education for life represents one route to a broader picture of educational outcomes, one that emphasizes the competencies that young people need in order to succeed now and in adult life. Strategies to improve teacher quality and shift teacher practice get to the core of students’ learning experiences—and thus provide an opportunity to align instruction with what research tells us about how young people learn. Information technology provides the possibility (though not the guarantee) of supporting youth engagement, personalizing young people’s educational experiences, and reaching those young people most often neglected by the formal school system. Youth engagement, an important feature of effective learning environments, is perhaps the most fundamental principal of a youth-centered approach to school reform.



Pragmatically, these “key levers” are the areas in which IYF Partners have chosen to focus their efforts, and where they have made the greatest progress in moving a reform agenda. It is in these areas, then, that IYF Partners’ work yields stories ripe for sharing.

Among the growing cadre of organizations committed to youth-centered reform, others can speak from deeper and longer experience about entry points like whole school reform, community organizing, and advocacy work with elected officials. Their efforts are also critical parts of “what works in education reform”—but are outside the scope of this publication.

While each of these levers for change is an important starting point for youth-centered educational change, none is a comprehensive reform strategy on its own. A fundamental aspect of youth-centered reform is a focus on the range of factors influencing young people’s learning and development. Recognizing this fact, members of

the IYF Partner Network use these levers as the entry points for comprehensive reform strategies. They start somewhere, but quickly end up addressing the full range of aspects of education reform (See *Connecting the Pieces: An Example from Argentina* below). To reinforce the connectedness of reform strategies, each of the chapters that follows ends with a case study that aims to “connect the pieces,” focusing in on a reform effort that goes particularly far in advancing a multi-faceted reform strategy.

### **Making It Happen: Systemic Strategies and Outside Actors**

Enacting comprehensive, youth-centered reform—whatever the initial entry point—will require actors outside of the formal education system. External change catalysts—organizations with deep connections to formal education, but with an independent base of support and close ties to communities, are central actors in such reform efforts.

It is as change catalysts that the IYF Partners enter into the work of education reform. Their efforts, and those of other external catalysts—aim at three essential ingredients of change. Sometimes IYF Partners roll up their sleeves and

#### **Connecting the Pieces: An Example from Fundación SES in Argentina**

The education reform work of Argentina’s Fundación SES begins with a commitment—to improve young people’s opportunities to exercise their right to education, especially among disadvantaged young people—and a process—to engage communities in developing local education strategies that link and improve learning opportunities throughout the localities. From the start, then, the Foundation’s work is committed to changing the “who” and “where” of education. Both equity and engagement are part of the Foundation’s answer to the “who” question. In the words of one foundation staff member, “disadvantaged youth are those we want to focus our work on, and with whom we want to work toward change.”

The “where” of education naturally follows from the commitment to engage disadvantaged young people—it requires that educators think broadly, involving different settings for learning. Given that the public school system will have to do much work on its own before it can meet the needs of disadvantaged young people, the Foundation’s effort focuses on the range of educational institutions in the community—teacher training institutions, local colleges, NGOs, community libraries, small local organizations, businesses, the mass media. With the creation of a community of learning as their shared aim, these stakeholders use a participatory community study as the starting point for a community planning

process that brings young people, families, government, businesses, schools, and others to the table. A focal agency in each community coordinates this data gathering and planning process, and manages the implementation of the range of changes that result. SES has re-framed its programs and strategies to respond to these local planning efforts. It now offers a range of “inputs”— leadership training, crafting education policies, helping bring efforts to scale, organizational development, developing networks of youth-serving organizations—which are the support structure for community planning.

Community actions and foundation supports reflect an attention to each of the other basic education reform questions. The communities have focused on creating and strengthening a range of learning opportunities, such as leadership and life skills development, and programs that help to develop job and entrepreneurial skills, that broaden the “what” of education. To support change in the “how” of learning, the Foundation is helping localities craft and pursue proposals for changes in teacher training institutions, and is documenting innovative educational practice to share with others. This, and a range of other changes being forged in several communities across Argentina, all emerge from the central focus on disadvantaged youth and creating education policies that support community-wide commitments to learning. The results so far: an increased array of community-based learning opportunities, more efforts specifically focused on the needs of vulnerable young people, and stronger networks and greater collaboration among community stakeholders. This increase in the quantity, quality, and continuity of opportunities is a strong foundation for improved youth outcomes.

This and the short profiles throughout the publication are based on case studies prepared by IYF Partners.



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**It is as change catalysts that the IYF Partners enter into the work of education reform.**



get into the on-the-ground business of creating youth-centered learning environments. Second, and more importantly, these organizations help build the capacity for change—by supporting educators, strengthening organizational capacity, building networks, and sharing know-how. But however great the capacity of reform, purposeful and deep change is unlikely without continued pressure and encouragement from the outside. Thus, external catalysts play an important role in creating a climate conducive to change—generating public demand, securing adequate resources, building systems of accountability. As a package, these strategies add up to a coherent recipe for educational change.

### **Contributions of the IYF Network**

A commitment to cohesive, youth-centered reform is a critical part of “what works in

education reform.” But it is not the only critical ingredient. As a network of educational changemakers, IYF Partners, whose stories are featured throughout this publication, contribute additional inputs to education reform efforts worldwide.

## **A Global Perspective**

The IYF network brings a commitment to its education reform work: to cross the boundaries that normally separate efforts in different countries and contexts. This is not always easy work. Trading lessons across “developing” and “developed” world divides often requires significant translation (and not simply because of language differences). Sharing experiences and building shared strategies are nearly as difficult within these two “worlds,” and even within individual countries, where disparate educational realities sit side-by-side.

But there are reasons to work across these divides. Sharing stories, strategies, and structures opens up remarkable possibilities—often precisely because of the different experiences and frames of reference that individuals in different contexts bring to bear. More often than not, Partners find common themes and pressing issues across the most disparate contexts. Partners in Poland and Thailand can share strategies for responding to federal policy openings that push for a broadened picture of educational success, in large part because they are accustomed to pursuing different strategies for influencing policy. Organizations in the Philippines and Great Britain can find ways to share costs of moving information and communication technology into schools, despite differences in the technological infrastructure in those two countries. As experiences like these indicate, there is no need to reinforce pre-existing divides by carrying on fragmented education reform conversations.

There are even more pressing reasons for the Partners to overcome the challenges of working across borders, however. In short, the challenges of education reform demand global thinking. Tasks like engaging massive numbers of disengaged young people, integrating technology into classrooms, and bringing about genuine instructional innovation require concerted action across as well as within countries. Education is becoming a global activity, influenced by forces larger than any one country. In the words of Dr. Luis Morfin, Director of the Center for the Study of Education in Mexico, “We cannot stay where we are to start with.” He continues, “If we don’t put together our work, globalization is a threat. But there is a process to participate and transform globalization.” Morfin is not arguing, as many educators do, that students must be prepared to adapt to a globalizing world. Instead, he puts the weight on the shoulders of educators to



shape and influence the course of globalization through their work—a more challenging, but no less critical, goal.

### **About This Publication**

As this summary indicates, the lessons shared in this publication grow out of the work and experience of the IYF partners—specifically out of a 2002 workshop in Mexico City funded as part of the Lucent Technologies/IYF Global Fund for Education and Learning. In the sense that it reflects and reports conversations in Mexico City among IYF partners, this publication is something of a meeting report. Its aim, in part, is to explore and share what arose when Partners came together to discuss their common approach to education reform work. As a product of conversations, this publication inevitably contains loose ends, unanswered questions, and claims deeply felt but not fully backed by evidence. *What Works in Education Reform* is also a collection of stories—an anthology of projects and initiatives supported and spearheaded by IYF Partners. The sidebars that appear throughout the text should not be seen as peripheral to the text, but as the experience in which the reflections and arguments that surround them is grounded. The result is a publication that describes both the practice and the theory of education reform, as it is pursued within the IYF Global Partner Network.

Though part meeting report and part case study anthology, *What Works in Education Reform* has more ambitious aims, as well. Its purpose is to chart a course that—while not without its travelers—diverges from the mainstream of education reform. While more a travelogue than a how-to guide, its avowed intention is to encourage shifts in the current of education reform. Its central message: that answering the question, “what works in education reform,” demands that children and young people always be kept at the center of the work.





## Education for Life, In School and Out

“I have to ask myself: are we actually being prepared?” This question was posed by a young person in his last year of secondary school, speaking to an audience of education reformers (Tolman, ed., 2000). As a starting point for education reform efforts, this question immediately broadens and raises the expectations. For this question to be answered in the affirmative, education systems cannot be content with raising the academic performance of their students. Putting young people’s current needs and aspirations for the future at the center of education reform demands that we push toward a fuller and more ambitious definition of learning.

### Common Ground, Higher Expectations

In the past two decades, researchers, educators, and advocates have moved a long way in outlining and advancing a broadened picture of the outcomes of learning and education. These broadening efforts have come from various starting points—the demands of life, the capacities of the human brain, a study of personal assets that help young people succeed—but are increasingly converging on a common definition of what it means to be “fully prepared.”

■ **Capacities for life** Dozens of efforts have honed in on the core skills that young people will need in order to succeed in the workplace. A review of these efforts sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines a common core of such skills, relevant across professions and cultures: communication, mathematical, problem solving, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and technology skills (Binkley et al., n.d.; OECD, 2001a). Other research—asking about what it takes to succeed in a broader set of aspects of life, including citizenship and family life as well as work—confirm and broaden this basic list of skills. Looking at these three arenas of adult life, for instance, a U.S.-based effort has named a list of “generative skills” that will support success across work, family, and citizenship roles. The resulting skill domains—communication, interpersonal, decision-making, and lifelong learning—are remarkably similar to those identified in the OECD effort (Merrifield, 2000). Young people themselves, asked what skills are most critical, name a similar list. A Scottish study, for instance, finds that young people name communication, interpersonal, technology, problem-

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**A Scottish study, for instance, finds that young people name communication, interpersonal, technology, problem-solving, physical, and creative abilities as those most important in their lives.**

solving, physical, and creative abilities as those most important in their lives (Powney and Lowden, 2002). Young people in the Philippines, cooperating with local experts and staff of the Consuelo Foundation, say they seek a similar set of outcomes.

■ **Cognitive and psychological capacities** Starting from a very different place, cognitive scientists have come to focus on a similarly broad range of aspects

### **Capacities for Human Rights and Dignity: The Children and Law Initiative**

A recent survey of Russian children spoke volumes about the need for education in human rights—and the role of human rights education as a fundamental part of education for life. Depending on the age group, between 15 and 80 percent believe it is impossible to have their rights protected. Nearly 50 percent of children know little or nothing about their rights. Depending on the age group, 50 to 80 percent of children say their rights are frequently violated.

It is in this atmosphere that the Children and Law Initiative, a program of the New Perspectives Foundation, uses the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an innovative organizing tool for life skills education. The survey of children just described acted to kick off the effort, both verifying the need for children's rights education and establishing a baseline against which students' progress could be measured. Through a series of workshops, NPF tested an active and integrated approach to children's rights education—rooted in students' own experiences of their rights; teaching through games, role plays, and other active pedagogies; and linked to social, legal, and psychological support for those young people who need it. These workshops, conducted first with school staff, and then with individuals working at orphanages, extracurricular programs, and community-based organizations, created enough demand to justify the development of a widely-disseminated manual on children's rights education. A follow-up study with young people who experienced this approach to human rights education demonstrated gains in both student knowledge of rights and in their know-how about protecting their rights.

In the past year, 15 grants have supported projects benefiting more than 14,000 young people, teachers and professionals. Children have brought interest and enthusiasm to their learning and parents, who are often hesitant, have themselves become more involved in the educational process. As a result, participants are better educated and able to protect their rights in real life situations. Pustolyakova E.V., project leader notes, "Work in the project made it possible to see the link between the school studies and the outside world and taught the children to present and publicly protect their rights."

of intelligence and cognitive ability. Likely the most widely known of these models of cognitive functioning is that developed by Howard Gardner (1983, e.g.), which identifies logical-mathematical, spatial, linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, and musical intelligence based on a range of empirical investigations. It requires little effort to find parallels between each of Gardner's aspects of intelligence and the domains of skills identified as critical to success in life.

■ **Assets that support youth development** The cognitive domain is not the only one in which young people develop and become “fully prepared,” and thus not the only potential target of education. The study of young people's development has contributed an understanding of the other aspects of their growth, honing in on a list of the personal assets that support positive youth development. A recent report from the National Research Council (2002) of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, for instance, offers a synthetic framework based on existing research: young people are developing in the physical, social, and psychological/emotional, as well as intellectual, domains. Again, it is striking how closely this list parallels those from other sources. The intellectual domain includes critical problem-solving skills, social assets and intrapersonal/communication skills, which are closely linked.

Life skills educators begin with the question, “what does it take to succeed in adult life?” Cognitive scientists start by asking, “what are the aspects of intelligence and cognitive functioning?” Experts in youth development pose yet another question, a mix of the two: “what personal assets support youth development, and what are the areas in which young people grow and learn?” Yet, all three questions yield strikingly similar answers. It is hard to imagine a sturdier and more well-substantiated goal on which education reformers might set their sights.

Embedded in the broadened picture of learning created from this synthetic look at educational outcomes are several important changes in thinking—each moving closer to a youth-centered approach to education reform:

■ **From academic knowledge to learning for life** Academic knowledge and skills are critical to success in life—but they are not sufficient on their own. Other capacities—for communication, social interaction, self-understanding, and the like—are also necessary. These capacities spread across a range of domains: cognitive, social, emotional, vocational, civic, ethical, and physical.

■ **From skills to a full picture of capacity and learning** Life skills are not

the only assets necessary to be prepared for life. Beliefs, values, and personal characteristics are also critical. Competence, then, is not enough. Confidence, character, connections, and contribution are also valuable educational outcomes. For a young person to have the capacities they need—for them to be empowered, in that they have the power to shape their lives and communities—much more than skills are necessary.

■ **From education for survival to education for dignity and change** In many discussions of life skills and education reform, the focus is on helping young people “make it” in a complex and changing world. This is indeed a critical outcome of any educational program. But education can and should do more than help young people survive. It should support their human dignity and human rights, as the work of the New Perspectives Foundation exemplifies (see “The Children and Law Initiative” p. 28). And it should equip young people to shape the changes taking place in their world, as active political and social participants.



This broadened picture of learning is, not by coincidence, closely aligned with the vision of “learning throughout life” described by the International Commission for Education in the Twenty-First Century in their 1996 report to UNESCO (Delors, 1996). The Commission reiterates the importance of “learning to know”—the traditional educational mandate, including both general knowledge and subject-specific expertise. But it also names three other pillars of education: “learning to do,” the capacity to succeed in a broad range of settings; “learning to live together;” and “learning to be,” the continuing development of one’s individuality and personality. This is the new vision of basic education, embraced by the international community, and built on the 1990 World Declaration of Education for All:

Basic learning needs... comprise both essential learning tools... and the basic learning content required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.

This is the picture that youth-centered reform advocates put forward when asked to state the outcomes they seek from their efforts. This is the bigger answer to one of the fundamental questions of education reform “what do we teach?”

### **Everywhere Young People Go**

Education reformers and classroom teachers, already struggling to help students succeed academically, are almost certain to balk at an educational mandate that includes this broadened range of positive outcomes. They are right to do so.

Yet, public schools should, at minimum, be obligated to follow a basic principle of medicine and “do no harm” to aspects of young people’s learning for which they are not primarily responsible—their commitments to political participation, their social skills, and their physical and emotional health (CCSSO and the Forum for Youth Investment, 2001). Moreover, it is in the best interest of schools, even if they are concerned only with academic achievement, to pay attention to the non-academic aspects of young people’s learning and education. Youth outcomes like connectedness, civic commitment, mental health, and social skills are key determinants of whether they will succeed academically, and schools that invest in these non-academic outcomes have shown significant improvements in academic outcomes. And, recognizing that

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## Changing the Practice in Formal Education: Two Examples from Japan and Spain

**Japan Initiative for Youth Development (JIYD)** Cultural norms are shifting in Japan. Many young people are neither conscious of protecting the societal rules nor giving service to the society. In addition, young people are having difficulties managing their interpersonal relationships. As a result, the government has called for significant shifts in education. Beginning in April 2002, middle schools throughout Japan designated 70 hours per school year for the study of life skills. Unlike other curricula, teaching materials for these class hours are totally left to the ingenuity of individual schools and teachers. In many schools, teachers feel lost and powerless due to the change from the traditional “teacher-to-student/top-down” teaching style and uncomfortable having to cover non-traditional subject matters, such as ethics and basic life-skills, in classrooms.

Yet at Shiba-higashi Junior High School, the reception has been much more positive—due largely to the outside support of the Japan Initiative for Youth Development. Last year, JIYD began to pilot a version of the Lion-Quest Skills for Adolescence curriculum, adapted to the culture and language of Japanese schools, at Shiba-higashi. Training, opportunities for reflection, and support from an outside agency throughout the bumpy process of implementation have transformed the government mandate from a burden to an opportunity. As the school’s principal notes, “The attitude of the teachers has been changing as they are more flexible and accepting of new ideas. This program is not only good for students, but acts as good training for teachers as well.” The impacts on students are beginning to emerge. In reflection, a student remarks, “I have always tried to get my way no matter what the circumstance. Now after taking the life skills class, I have begun listening to other people’s opinions.”

**Fundación Esplai, La Aventura de la Vida (The Adventure of Life)** As in many other contexts, the real life challenges faced by Spanish adolescents often have been either left outside of educational time, or simply treated as one more academic area. This reality led to the birth in 1989 of La Aventura de la Vida, a health education program with a focus on values formation and life skills training.

The program, designed to be implemented among boys and girls between the ages of eight and eleven, focuses on self-esteem, life skills, drug use and information, and healthy habits. The program’s curriculum is built around this content, as present in the three settings for child socialization: family, school, and community. The premise and structure of the curriculum is straightforward; students read, discuss, and work out solutions to a series of realistic scenarios, developed specifically for their age group and dealing with challenges

they are likely to experience in their own lives. The program's emphasis on simplicity, and on active engagement with high-quality, visually engaging materials seems to pay off. A large-scale evaluation carried out in 10 Latin American countries has proven the approach to be a successful one.

"The Adventure of Life" was first implemented on a trial basis in schools in four municipalities in Spain in 1989. Today the program is nationwide and international, spreading throughout 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. With more than 10,000 participating educators, it reaches 400,000 students and their families per year. The program's creators attribute the successful spread of the program to their careful focus on making it accessible to both teachers and students. "At times, there is this idea that many educators are not interested in developing skills for life," comments Esplai staff member Juan Carlos Melero. "Programs like these are so demanding that people in charge of applying them often feel intimidated. There are certain programs in Spain that are very valuable, but they involve so much training and engagement that teachers do not implement them. We've tried to avoid this risk with 'The Adventure of Life.'"

non-academic outcomes are important factors in young people's success in life, policymakers and the public in many countries have expanded the mandates of schools to include them.

For all these reasons, public schools may choose to broaden their visions of education to include the range of outcomes important to success in adult life. But traditional public education systems cannot bear this burden on their own. A broadened set of educational outcomes requires a broadened set of educational actors. The World Declaration on Education for All puts it simply: "The basic learning needs of

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**Education for life needs to be a central focus of the range of settings where young people live, learn, work, play, and contribute; education reform must expand to include this range of settings.**



youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems” (UNESCO, 1990). Education for life needs to be a central focus of the range of settings where young people live, learn, work, play, and contribute; education reform must expand to include this range of settings. While the practice of education for life will look different in each of these settings, there are ways to connect and align efforts to add up to a coherent youth-centered approach to education reform.

### **Education for Life in the Formal School System**

Making a broadened set of educational outcomes the work of traditional schools is—for reasons already made clear—a difficult task. Yet, in a variety of contexts, youth-centered reformers are managing to integrate a more robust set of outcomes into their nation’s school systems. Efforts by members of the IYF Partner Network demonstrate a number of promising strategies:

■ **Supporting schools as they respond to policy mandates** Youth-centered reformers can play a key role in tracking policies that support broadened educational outcomes—and responding quickly to the need for technical support they generate. In Japan, for instance, a new national policy demands the integration of “comprehensive study hours”—focused on their non-academic development—into every public school. Provided with little guidance or supports, both school administrators and classroom teachers struggle to make this mandate a substantive one—creating a demand for technical assistance providers and high-quality curricular models.

■ **Starting at the periphery, moving to the center** Often, broadened educational outcomes and the innovative teaching strategies that accompany them start at the margins of a school or school system—in a summer school program or leisure time activities held inside the school, for instance. When teachers and administrators have a chance to experiment with and see the effectiveness of these models in an environment conducive to innovation, they often bring these innovations back with them when they return to their “regular” classes and roles (e.g. Germany’s school clubs—see page 87).

■ **Putting broadened outcomes in service of academic bottom lines** In contexts where an academics-only agenda is dominant—in the United States and Canada, for instance—educators must often demonstrate that the outcomes they believe are important support the core academic mandate of schools. By combining rigorous research, common sense arguments, and compelling anecdotes, reform advocates have successfully implemented life skills curricula, school-based health centers, ethics education programs, and a range of other strategies that broaden educational outcomes.

Moving education for life—part of a larger youth-centered approach—from the margins to the mainstream is a critical task. But it is also a risky one. It is only when action to build public will, teacher competence, and policy mandates work in concert



## **Life Skills in Non-formal and Leisure Settings**

### **Jantje Beton in the Netherlands**

In the school a circus performance is held: an old clown, Tobias, gives his last performance. He is tired of traveling the world. When Tobias is asleep, he dreams about a performance with artists from all over the world: clowns from Africa, diabolo players from Morocco, puppeteers from Indonesia. As he awakes he realizes he would like to see a world circus once more. But there are no artists. Maybe some children would like to help...?

Thus begins the Circus Project, a leisure time program supported by the Jantje Beton Stichting Nationaal Jeugd Fonds. It is aimed at 6- to 8-year-olds at 'het Mozaïek', a school in a high-poverty, immigrant-rich community in the Netherlands. The experience begins and ends with a performance, while in between the young participants create the costumes, scripts, and choreography that will make up the circus. Coaches from the circus theater Poeha join the school's teachers as the facilitators of the experience.

This project is more than learning tricks; education for life is its aim and result. Children gain new experiences, not only verbal and cognitive, but also emotional, social, and physical. Through public performances, children gain self-confidence and take new risks. Children perform in an act that represents a country, an atmosphere, based on objects, holidays or other cultural expressions of that country. At the same time, they experience and see other cultures. Creativity, physical exercise, and agility are encouraged.

## **Life Skills in Non-formal and Leisure Settings (cont'd from page 35)**

The program's relationship with the school in which it is located is a model one. Central goals—helping students learn to live in a more diverse society, and developing social skills—are shared between the school day and leisure time program. The school and program also share key pedagogical and organizational practices, like a common discipline method, and some key teaching staff. Yet the two environments are far from identical. Specialized staff from the community—circus performers—join classroom educators as co-teachers. The pedagogy that results is rooted in children's normal leisure time activities—play— rather than traditional classroom instruction. And less emphasis is placed on purely academic knowledge and skills when children are in the Circus Project.

The expanded definition of education, blending play and learning in a way particularly suited to leisure time, is no accident. It is the guiding philosophy behind the project's chief funder, Netherland's Jantje Beton Foundation.

Understanding that leisure time is as an important developmental opportunity, Jantje Beton provides youth with alternative educational opportunities that complement, but do not mimic, what goes on at school. As at the Circus Project, children and young people seem to thrive in the range of programs animated by this common commitment.



that changes in educational mandates are likely to stick around. One IYF Partner tells a sobering story:

We were so successful in convincing the authorities that the coordinator's office became part of the central educational system. It was so successful that it died there. This is a lesson and a warning, in terms of what convincing the authorities means. It's something to be done with great care. It needs to be integrated into the mindset of teachers in a long-term way.

### **Education for Life in Leisure and Out-of-school Settings**

Leisure time—the hours when young people are out of school and engaged in neither household nor paid work—has always been a vital space for young people's learning and development. Whether spent in organized programming and activities (McLaughlin, 2000; Larson, 2000), or in less structured learning opportunities (Falk and Dierking, 2002; McLaren, 2002), young people's leisure time is demonstrably linked to all of the educational outcomes mentioned above: cognitive, social, intrapersonal, physical, and civic. The question is how to most effectively support education for life in out-of-school and leisure settings.

The same research that points to the value of out-of-school time demonstrates a number of the critical factors of leisure time learning opportunities. They share the features of all effective learning environments, cited again and again in this publication: caring relationships, high expectations, relevance, and the like. But these opportunities also look different than what goes on during the school day in important ways. Research by Reid Larson (2000) indicates that young people are much more likely to be cognitively and emotionally engaged in structured, voluntary activities than they are when either in school or just hanging out with friends. It appears that a combination of real choice and positive norms makes out-of-school learning environments particularly rich. Further, as the example of the Circus Project (see p. 35) indicates, leisure time activities provide a critical context for self-expression and creativity. These features should come as no surprise; choice, active engagement, and self-expression are consistently cited as the defining characteristics of all positive leisure experiences (United Nations, 2001; Irby & Tolman, 2002).

Unfortunately, few countries and communities have strong and well-connected networks of out-of-school learning opportunities focused on the capacities needed for success in life. To create out-of-school learning opportunities with the characteristics just described, advocates of youth-centered education reform will have to take on a less familiar role: as system-builders, rather than as system-

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**...choice, active engagement, and self-expression are consistently cited as the defining characteristics of all positive leisure experiences.**

changers. But the tasks involved—building public and political commitment, strengthening support infrastructure, building systems of accountability, for instance—will be familiar to any education reformer. These tasks—and the sorts of change catalysts best suited to take them on—are discussed in the final section of this publication.

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**In many countries, out-of-school youth can represent nearly a majority of their age group.**

### **Education for Life Among Out-of-school Youth**

For young people who have dropped out or been pushed out of the formal education system, out-of-school time is all the time. In many countries, out-of-school youth can represent nearly a majority of their age group. In other countries—like Japan—the large number of young people not enrolled in schools has only recently been acknowledged as an issue.

While all young people—not just those who have left formal schools—need structured opportunities to build capacities for life, the task of supporting education for life among young people outside the formal education system is a unique one. It requires a focus on the settings where out-of-school youth spend their time—the workplace, technical training and alternative education centers, and street corners. Further, it requires an educational approach geared to the specific needs and learning situations of out-of-school youth. Flexibility, relevance, choice, and high expectations—features of all effective learning opportunities—become particularly crucial when working with these young people

### **Building Community-wide Commitments to Learning**

For young people to become fully prepared, education reform must become a community-wide endeavor. Learning opportunities in and out of school, and available to those young people no longer in school, will need to be aligned and connected into a coherent system or network.

This is the central notion put forward by Paul Hill and his colleagues after a close study of urban school systems in the United States and other nations:

The Community Partnerships strategy is based on a radical approach to improving educational opportunities in a city. It acknowledges that the traditional



boundaries between the public school system's responsibilities and those of other community agencies are themselves part of the educational problem... the strategy opens new options for education, asking "How can this community use all its assets to provide the best education for all our children?"

There is nothing easy about answering this question. Yet we do know some of the necessary steps involved in building such community-wide commitments to learning. Community-wide connections are built when a range of community stakeholders have ongoing means for joint planning, visioning, and decision-making—as in the local education strategies developed with the support of the SES Foundation in Argentina (see page 20). Organizations and individuals whose primary responsibility is to broker connections between school and community partners—and who have credibility with both formal and informal educational institutions—are equally important. Systems of accountability that give young people academic credit for out-of-school learning, and that align expectations and curricula in and out of school, bring community-wide commitments to life. Staff development and networking structures that bring in- and out-of-school teachers and education providers together make a difference. This range of ways of building connections—planning structures, intermediary organizations and staff people, shared systems of accountability, networks among practitioners and educational institutions—together make the goal of education for life possible (Irby, Pittman, and Tolman, 2002).





## The Challenge: Missing Pathways to Meaningful Careers

At the Baan Huay Charoen School in Thailand's Chiang Rai Province, only 2 to 3 percent of the school's small 9th grade class will have the opportunity for further study. Career development, then, is at the forefront of teacher's minds as they plan their courses. Until recently, their efforts appreciated little support or resources from outside the school community. "The budget for occupational training that we received from the Ministry of Education was limited," according to Prasong Sittiwong, a teacher at the school. "It provided only enough money to hire a guest speaker to run a skill workshop once a year, and not even enough to buy materials and equipment for children to practice."

Teachers working with few resources and little training in career support did the best they could. "Before, we chose careers for children," Mr. Prasong continues. "Our decisions were based on their family background—for instance, if a student's parents owned a vegetable plantation, we would advise the child to attend agricultural skills classes."

The situation of Baan Huay Charoen School and Prasong Sittiwong tells the story of Thailand's youth in shorthand. Three quarters of youth, ages 15 to 25, live in rural areas. The vast majority of the nation's teenagers—most with only a primary education—are engaged in the labor force. Statistics like these make career development a necessity in the nation's rural schools. While Thailand's government has written a career counseling system into its national education plan, and 52 offices spanning 5 ministries offer a wide variety of career development services, the patchwork of supports only ends up covering 300,000 slots in short-term vocational training in a country where 2 million young people, ages 13 to 19, are part of the workforce. Even more daunting, a recent study of these short-term skill training programs in one federal department indicates that only 1 percent of youth applied the knowledge and experience obtained from the training in real work. As a result, many of the country's teachers and students continue to share Prasong Sittiwong's struggle.

## The Response: A Child-centered Approach to Career Counseling

At the Baan Huay Charoen School, students continue to face uncertain educational futures. "I am not sure if I will further my study or if I will have to quit," says Walanee,

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<sup>5</sup> Based on a case study written for the International Youth Foundation by Srisak Thaiarry and her colleagues at the National Council for Child and Youth Development.

a 9th grade student who took part in a cooking class supported by NCYD. “If I have to work, cooking can be the first choice. I want to set up my own food stall in the village.”

Still, students and the school have new reasons to be hopeful. Wanalee is confident that she will be able to manage her own small business. Her confidence is due in part to the new recipes and newfound abilities to adapt her cooking to match available ingredients, gained from her cooking class. But she has other reasons to be sure of herself, as well. The small food stall she set up in school during lunch—with the support of the school’s career development program—has turned a healthy profit. It has also taught her the real-life skills of calculating income and expenses, and understanding of the demands of the local market. “It’s a great learning for me,” Wanalee says. “Before, when I bought food, I had never thought about capital and profit. But now I know something about that.”

Stories like Wanalee’s emerge from an approach to career counseling that its supporters at the National Council for Child and Youth Development (NCYD) and its growing core of practitioners call “child-centered.” Recognizing that short-term training in vocational skills in high school amounts to “too little, too late,” NCYD’s strategy starts young—when students are still in elementary school—and focuses on flexible skills and dispositions, rather than trade-specific competencies. Through a process facilitated by newly-trained teachers, these children explore their abilities, interests, skills, and values to develop their own career directions—rather than having the choice thrust on them by program priorities or staff assumptions. Teachers then build their vocational curriculum—which they offer several days each week—around these emerging interests. Children do not make these decisions without support, however; the strategy makes developing decision-making skills, and the skills to find and analyze information about potential careers, two of its central activities. As young people chart their career pathways, experiences like Wanalee’s—a blend of engaged coursework and student-developed enterprise—are the material for learning.

Putting this new approach into action has required careful strategy and ongoing hard work. Building on existing relationships, NCYD began by bringing on board key departments and commissions within the Ministry of Education, paving the way for its acceptance as part of the government career development strategy. On the ground, NCYD has worked closely with provincial education offices, teachers, community organizations, and a range of individual catalysts from the public and private sectors. Inside each of the 20 schools involved in the project pilot, cultivating principal commitment and identifying interested teachers

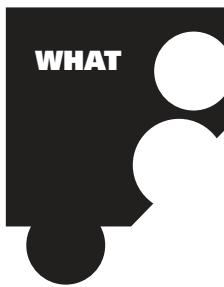
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**NCYD’s strategy starts young—when students are still in elementary school—and focuses on flexible skills and dispositions, rather than trade-specific competencies.**

has been key, as has finding or creating flexibility within often-rigid curriculum management processes.

### **Start Somewhere, Go Everywhere: An Integrated Solution**

NCYD's effort—Developing Effective Career Counseling in Rural Schools—defies an effort to label it as “life skills education,” “vocational preparation,” or “teacher re-training.” While education for life is its major theme and aim, the project's creators recognize that the surest path to this goal is an integrated, child-centered approach that builds toward systemic change.



NCYD's venture into career counseling began with a simple question: what do rural children need in order to make their way toward meaningful, viable career paths? The answer to this question was far from either the traditional academic curriculum or traditional occupational skills training. To make good decisions about careers, NYCD argued, children need to know themselves better—their skills and interests, values and personality—and use this as the basis for career decisions. Just as importantly, they must become critical consumers of career options—able to research, analyze, and make good decisions, drawing on both what they know about themselves and what they've learned from research into the economic conditions of their communities. The result is a focus on the range of positive youth outcomes: analysis and decision-making skills (competence), self-awareness (confidence and character), and real-life experiences (yielding connections and contributions), transferable to a range of situations beyond work.

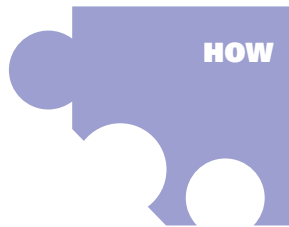


Children develop these newfound competencies and growing self-awareness through experiences that re-orient their roles in the educational process, and in the process change the “who” of education. Child participation is a guiding tenet of both teacher training and classroom practice. The result is the largest departure from traditional career counseling: students choose what they will study, and teachers build their instruction around these develop-

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**To make good decisions about careers, NYCD argued, children need to know themselves better—their skills and interests, values and personality—and use this as the basis for career decisions.**

ing interests. In the process, teachers hope to shift the “who” of education in another sense, as well—creating educational opportunities that work for the marginalized rural majority of youth.



These changes in the “what” and “who” of education do not come without concerted focus on the practice—the “how” of education. For most teachers in Thailand, a child-centered pedagogy is anything but familiar. The teacher development model used to orient educators to this new approach, developed by a working group of experts and refined through feedback from the teachers who use it, walks a fine line. It is a robust treatment of child-centered career counseling, necessary to support teachers with almost no experience in either giving young people choices or preparing them for work. At the same time, though the model is aligned with and endorsed by Ministry of Education, it is far less rigid than Thailand’s general curriculum, making it adaptable to local circumstances. More important than the teacher training model, though, is the context for its implementation. Four or five teachers from any given school participate in the training, chosen based on their diverse capacities—creating a community of support during implementation. Further, teachers are taken seriously as catalysts for these changes in practice. In a move emblematic of this attitude, teachers from the pilot phase will be responsible for training and supporting those implementing the project’s second phase.



Creating a curriculum model adaptable to local circumstances is just one of the ways in which NCYD supports education that is rooted in the community that surrounds the school. The project is grounded in the belief that children—instead of seeking jobs outside their hometown—should be able to work in their community, and thus play a role in local development. Based on this commitment to education that is grounded in community, each site

welcomes community participation in a range of ways.

Community members are invited to a workshop to introduce them to the project; they participate in committees that advise the effort and allocate project funding; they act as resources during the training process; and they are asked to contribute to the fund that supports children as they develop their careers. The community is treated as the local market for children's ventures, and the local implementing agencies are charged with surveying community needs to inform young people's choices. In all these ways, NCYD and its local partners are stretching the "where" of education to include the entire community.

### **Unfinished Business, Lessons Learned**

NCYD's strategy for career counseling amounts to both a significant departure from familiar forms of vocational training and a substantial act of education reform. It is no surprise, then, that the effort has run up against barriers familiar to any reform advocate. Few teachers have the experience to facilitate child-centered learning, requiring consistent and sustained investments in these educators. Students, too, have to re-orient themselves to the new educational practice, as they often lack the confidence and communications skills to raise their voices in the classroom. National challenges match these local ones. Though in many ways buoyed by national commitment, the effort may have been diluted somewhat as communication filtered from federal ministry to federal department, and on to provinces before reaching schools.

None of these challenges, however, can compare to the early successes of NCYD's efforts. From national policy commitments to powerful gains in student learning, their career development initiative is pushing a concrete and far-reaching form of youth-centered reform.



## Teacher Quality and Learning

The instructional encounter—the interaction between teacher, student, and learning environment—is generally understood to be the core of the formal learning process. Recognizing that changes in that encounter is a bottom line of reform, educators have charted many routes to improved teaching. Whether framed as professional development, pre-service education, changes in teacher certification, teacher training, or any number of other strategies, these routes to quality teaching beg two questions. First, where are they headed? What is the image of quality teaching on which they are based, and is that vision rooted in what we know about how young people learn? Second, do they really get us there? Do they genuinely provide a roadmap and engine for progress toward better teaching?

### A Shared Picture of Quality?

What is good teaching, and who are good teachers? This question elicits no shortage of responses. Comparative researchers on teacher quality offer one set of answers, backed by a mounting number of empirical studies and a growing body of theoretical work. This research allows us to say some things about good teaching with relative certainty:

The literature on school effectiveness suggests that students (particularly those with a low level of performance) benefit from teaching practices that demonstrate teachers' interest in the progress of their students, give the clear message that all students are expected to attain reasonable performance standards, and show a willingness to help all students to meet these standards (OECD, 2001b).

Still, the research community hardly speaks with a single voice. Quantitative research compiled by the Asian Development Bank (2002), for instance, indicates uncertainty about whether basic teacher characteristics—years of experience, amount of time spent preparing for class, and years of schooling—have any significant effect on student learning. A recent synthesis of research on the impacts of various approaches to teacher preparation by Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) reveals promising but inconsistent findings about the influence of content area coursework, pedagogical preparation, and practical classroom experience on student achievement. Further, while this and similar research speaks to the baseline attributes of teachers, it says little about the teaching process itself.



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**Young people are (unfortunately, but predictably) seldom part of the conversation about effective teaching. Yet they speak with clear and convincing voices about the kinds of teachers for whom they are looking.**

Other frameworks for teacher quality look more closely at the process of teaching, but again send mixed messages about the characteristics of good teaching and good teachers. Looking at the characteristics of beginning teachers, for instance, Tatto (2000) identifies four sets of indicators of quality teaching: content area knowledge, pedagogical practices, teacher disposition and beliefs, and participation in education reform. Fenstermacher and Richardson (2000) offer a somewhat different frame, drawn out of the comparative teacher quality literature; they identify content knowledge, age-appropriate methods, moral judgment, and a focus on important competencies as the important variables, then go on to identify logical, psychological, and moral domains of good teaching.<sup>6</sup> The Asian Development Bank publication mentioned above adds yet another set of features to the growing list, putting higher ordered thinking skills, reflectiveness, motivation, collaborative skills, and management skills alongside content knowledge, teaching skills, and instructional strategies. Confusing matters further, the way that various instruments measure individual aspects of teacher quality varies dramatically, as terms like “content knowledge” and “motivation” can be constructed and measured in significantly different ways. As the list grows to include more and more skills and features, questions posed by R.M. Torres (1999), an international expert on education and teacher quality, seem more and more relevant:

Assuming the feasibility of creating such an “ideal teacher”—never mind how much it stretches the limits of the human endeavor—what educational and social model would it reflect? Are these skills and values universally accepted and sought after in the various societies and cultures? Are they part of a coherent educational model, or do they respond to different models perhaps at odds with each other?

As Torres argues, it is impossible to define good teaching in the absence of a clear picture of what schools and the education system should do—that is, without a coherent “educational and social model.” In the absence of a clear consensus among researchers, and taking into account Torres’ critical questions, it is valuable to re-frame our initial query. The question is not, “what is quality teaching” in some abstract sense, but “what sort of teaching is appropriate to a youth-centered vision of education reform?” Finding credible answers to this question requires bringing another set of voices to bear: those of young people themselves, of youth development researchers and practitioners, and of the diverse communities in which young people grow up.

Young people are (unfortunately, but predictably) seldom part of the conversation about effective teaching. Yet they speak with clear and convincing voices about the kinds of teachers for whom they are looking. Pulling together contributions of children from around the world, a recent publication from the International Consultative

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Teresa Tatto (Michigan State University), and Gary D. Fenstermacher and Virginia Richardson (University of Michigan), contributed papers on definitions of teacher quality, responding to commissions by the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education of the National Academies/National Research Council.

Forum on Education for All (n.d.) synthesizes many voices into a few simple statements. In their words, a good teacher: *is a friend who loves all of us equally. A good teacher likes the job, is clear and competent, and not too strict. A good teacher is a role model to us who helps us grow and develop and guides us to the future.*

These words indicate a vision of good teachers with several familiar characteristics: caring and equity, motivation and commitment, teaching skills, mastery of subject matter, moral judgment. The words are different in tone, but not significantly different in content, than those that arise from the research cited above. But the distinctive part of this definition comes at its end: "...who helps us grow and develop and guides us to the future." This definition of good teaching expresses a clear and broadened end of good teaching, to match the specific means described. The aim of teachers, in these children's minds, is to support the developmental work of young people, and to help them along the pathway they are travelling through youth and toward adulthood.

### Child and Youth Voices on Quality Teaching

When asked about what they want from their teachers, young people offer clear and compelling answers. In the United States, for instance, What Kids Can Do, a national organization that documents and promotes "powerful learning with a public purpose," has recently asked students in urban high schools to write and speak about their expectations of teachers. The result: *Fires in the Bathroom*, a guide for new and experienced teachers, now making its way into teacher education programs and schools around the United States (What Kids Can Do, 2002). One of the many powerful statements from these young contributors is what they describe as "a bargain with our teachers:"

<b><i>If you will . . .</i></b>	<b><i>Then we will . . .</i></b>
Show you know and care about the material	Believe the material can be important for us to learn
Treat us as smart and capable of challenging work	Feel respected and rise to the challenge of demanding work
Allow us increasing independence but agree with us on clear expectations	Learn to act responsibly on our own, though we will sometimes make mistakes in the process
Model how to act when you or we make mistakes	Learn to take intellectual risks; learn to make amends when we behave badly
Show respect for our differences of opinion and individual styles	Let you limit some of our freedoms in the interest of the group
Keep private anything personal we tell you	Trust you with information that could help you teach us better

The same combination of broadened ends and clarified means characterizes the contributions of youth development research and practice to the discussion of quality teaching. For well over a decade, community-based organizations and researchers have been testing and clarifying an approach to working with young people that is

### **Features of Positive Developmental Settings (and of Effective Teaching)**

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to belong
- Positive social norms
- Support for efficacy and mattering
- Opportunities for skill-building
- Integration of family, school and community efforts

Source: National Research Council at the National Academy of Sciences

rooted in what we know of their development. One result of this work is a short list of “inputs” essential to young people’s development, which translate relatively easily into features of effective teaching and learning environments. International documents ranging from the World Health Organization (WHO)-sponsored Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health (WHO, 1997), to *Adolescence: A Time That Matters* from UNICEF (2002), to country documents like New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002) *Youth Development*

*Strategy Aotearoa*,<sup>7</sup> lay out a common set of critical features. Research and synthesis by McLaughlin (2000, April, e.g.), Connell, Gambone and Smith (2000, May), the Forum for Youth Investment (2001, e.g.), and most recently by the National Research Council (2002) confirm that this common core of principles is relevant for learning that goes on both in and out of school. These features closely reflect those voiced by young people.

A second result of this research and practice in youth development—equally relevant to a discussion of quality teaching—is the broadened picture of positive youth outcomes described in the previous section, “Education for Life.” Echoing children and young people’s request for teachers “who help us grow and develop and guide us to the future,” the youth development field has identified a variety of areas in which young people are learning and developing: in confidence, character, connections, and contributions, as well as competence. In a discussion of quality teaching, this broadened set of outcomes represents two things. On the one hand, it represents the goal of good teaching; teachers are effective if they focus on and support the development of young people in this range of areas. At the same time, these outcomes can be read as the features of effective teaching.

<sup>7</sup> Aotearoa is the traditional Maori name for New Zealand.

This is the vision expressed during a recent discussion among IYF partners working in the area of teacher quality:

Good teachers have the 5 Cs—Competence, Confidence, Character, Connections, and Contribution—an awareness of the need of young people to have the 5 Cs, and the capacity to enable young people to develop the 5 Cs in ways to which they can relate and respond.

This continuity between desirable youth outcomes, teacher goals, and teacher characteristics—all putting an emphasis on the integral nature of youth and human development—lends a new coherence to the discussion of teacher quality. It is also a vision of quality teaching aligned with a youth-centered approach to education reform, providing an answer to Torres’ critical question, “what teacher education model for what education model?”

Since it is rooted in both educational research and voices from outside of formal education, such a vision of quality teaching is broad and powerful enough that it speaks to both school settings and less formal community-based learning environments. A range of individuals who support young people’s learning—youth workers, social service staff, family members, and peer educators—could set their sights on such a vision, without diminishing the different roles and responsibilities they take on.

As committed as IYF Partners are to this common definition of quality teaching, their experiences make clear the importance of a back-and-forth between these big picture principles and local realities. Diverse educational contexts demand diverse approaches to teaching. Further, local communities—experts in their particular educational context—deserve a place at the table when “good teaching” is being defined. Unfortunately, community voices are nearly as neglected as those of young people in the discussion of teacher quality. But as the examples and strategies that follow indicate, these local voices are central to “what works in education reform.”

### **Outcomes of Effective Teaching (and Qualities of Effective Teachers)**

- **Competence**
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Behaviors
- **Contribution**
  - Participation
  - Influence
- **Connection**
  - Safety and Structure
  - Membership & Belonging
- **Character**
  - Responsibility
  - Spirituality/Self-Awareness
  - Caring
- **Confidence**
  - Self-worth
  - Sense of Mastery & Future
  - Efficacy

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**Good teachers have the 5 Cs—Competence, Confidence, Character, Connections, and Contribution—an awareness of the need of young people to have the 5 Cs, and the capacity to enable young people to develop the 5 Cs in ways to which they can relate and respond**

## **From Teacher Training to Teacher Development**

A youth-centered approach to education reform brings with it, then, a particular definition of good teaching. Youth-centered reform also helps to shape a particular approach to building teacher quality, and specific strategies rooted in this approach. At its core is the same positive, developmental approach that characterizes IYF Partners' work with young people.

Teachers, like young people, are engaged in an ongoing, complex process of development, characterized by both general patterns and immense diversity. Individual teachers develop at different rates, and to qualitatively different end points—"each teacher has their own project," in the words of one IYF Partner. Teachers, like young people, are developing in a range of areas—some related to skills and competence, others more directly connected to commitments, connections, caring, and confidence. To grow in this range of areas, teachers, like young people, need high quality educational experiences—but they also need personal supports and significant relationships, ways to meet their basic physical and economic needs, a climate of challenge and high expectations, opportunities to exercise autonomy and take risks. Taking a developmental approach to teacher quality involves bringing to bear these basic realities of human development, and expanding efforts at "teacher training" or "teacher education" to reflect these realities.

These developmental realities give credence to some common-sense principles and widely-implemented strategies. If teacher development is ongoing, strategies should move beyond sporadic and front-end interventions to ongoing support—through mentorships, networks among educators, and structured reflection. If teacher development occurs along multiple dimensions, strategies should be comprehensive and integrated—through portfolio-based systems of teacher certification, for instance—rather than simply focused on skills and knowledge. If teacher development occurs best in the context of positive relationships and a supportive environment, then school-based professional learning communities and planning time that allows teachers to develop their own teaching materials are in order. If teacher development is triggered by participation and engagement, then strategies might usefully follow an active learning model, in which teacher's classroom experiences are the material for individual and group reflection.

Bringing about this transition—from teacher training to teacher development—is no easy task. On the one hand, it requires a shift in thinking on the part of those engaged in reform efforts. Too often, teachers are considered more as an object of reform efforts than as agents of change by those engaged in education reform. Moreover, those who work with NGOs and in the youth development field have often

resorted to “a deficit model when it comes to discussion about teachers,” in the words of Ann McCollum, evaluation consultant at the IYF Partner in the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, supporting teacher development requires action at a range of levels. The universities that train teachers, the environments they encounter inside schools, the professional communities of which they are part, the economic and cultural forces affecting their work, the reform efforts changing the schools around them, the policy climate that defines qualified teachers—all can support or hinder the development of teachers. In most cases, the structures necessary to define and support quality teaching are far less developed in non-school settings than in formal education contexts—making the challenge one of creating “form” in the first place, rather than reforming ineffective systems. The work of IYF Partners helps to identify some promising strategies for influencing this range of influences on teacher development (See “Supporting Improved Teaching: Three Approaches,” page 54).

■ **Creating environments that support teacher innovation** Focusing on the work of current teachers, several Partners have developed professional development networks—both within and across schools—through which teachers meet regularly with a group of peers and colleagues. Activities like the close examination of student work, observation and reflection on teaching situations, and discussion of topics identified by teachers themselves are the standard fare of these networks. In creating these networks, IYF Partners have discovered a vehicle for supporting lasting change in teaching practice—as opposed to the short-term shifts that often result from isolated professional development opportunities (see “Connecting the Pieces: Polish Children and Youth Foundation,” page 59).



## Supporting Improved Teaching: Three Approaches

**Reaching the Mainstream – Lions-Quest Canada.** A quarter of a million educators are scattered over Canada’s 10 million square kilometers. Disparate and independent visions of education are articulated into standards by each Province, but seldom accompanied by resources that help teachers put them into practice. The range of pre-service training institutions have little exposure to life skills education and few experiences working with outside program models. These are hardly the conditions in which one would expect to find a successful venture in life skills development with deep penetration into the public school system. Yet, in the context of a diffuse and decentralized system, Lions-Quest Canada, an integrated life skills education program that emphasizes active learning, has managed to train 42,000 teachers and make its curriculum part of the education mainstream. Three factors have proved critical to this successful effort to “go to scale” with a model of teacher development. A cascade training structure—based on expert trainers who support networks of trainers at the regional level—has allowed a broad diffusion of capable professional development staff. Objective compatibility documents, which draw parallels between the Lions-Quest model and each set of provincial education objectives, have allowed both policymakers and individual teachers to see how the model meets their existing educational priorities. Finally, through slow relationship-building and a vote of confidence from teachers, Lions-Quest has begun to make its way into the nation’s schools of education as a viable model for meeting educational objectives and a high-quality approach to teaching.

**Integrating Teacher Development into Whole-School Change – Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico.** A decade ago, a commission of experienced educators took stock of the educational opportunities available to Puerto Rico’s middle school students. According to these educators, the complexities of middle school reform required a multi-sectoral approach, engaging a range of actors in and out of schools. Based on the commission’s conclusions, the Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico launched a pilot middle school reform initiative—now firmly rooted in 15 schools—that draws on both corporate re-engineering strategies and systemic school reform models from the United States. From the start, the foundation’s effort has put faith in teachers as engines of change and catalysts for their peer’s learning. The creation of peer professional development communities—bringing together school staff for joint planning, learning, and discussion, and consistently facilitated by the staff themselves—is one of the initiative’s guiding strategies. This approach to teacher development sits alongside integrating the curriculum based on student experiences, strengthening the learning community, and the introduction of digital technologies as the initiative’s four principles. The resulting efforts have brought about significant increases in student performance and significant drops in teacher absenteeism.

**Nurturing Innovative Teaching – Fundación Vamos, Mexico.** In many countries, the gap between national education policies and local educational practice is a looming one. In Mexico, regional diversity and minimal in-service supports for teachers mean that teachers are challenged to make national curriculum “their own” – relevant to local conditions, enlivened with creative instruction. “Educators for Life” – a project of Fundación Vamos focused on applied science education in preschools – has shown that there is a way. The effort takes something of a “by all means necessary” approach to its goal of encouraging applied science teaching. It combines active workshops, site visits to interactive museums and innovative classrooms, observations by other teachers, and teaching materials linked to both national expectations and local realities. In the midst of this mix of strategies, two stand out. On the one hand, teachers are supported and given the resources to adapt and create materials unique to their local circumstances. In short, they are empowered as educational innovators, engaged in a creative process that encourages them to find new ways of teaching. Second, children’s perspectives, needs, and participation are never out of sight: workshops ask teachers to take on students’ roles, children’s feedback is central to classroom observations and the evaluation of the project, and the entire project sets its sights on content and instruction relevant to the lives of children and their communities. Evaluations over the 10-month project timeline indicate the program has met its goals; teachers adopted innovative teaching strategies and experienced increased self-confidence; students linked theoretical knowledge with concrete experiences in their own lives; projects tackled and addressed pressing community needs; and learning outcomes improved.





■ **Shifting teacher education and certification structures** Often, learning communities and professional development opportunities are marginal to other forces that affect teaching—how teachers are initially trained, and what expectations the public sector and profession place on those teachers. Advocates of a youth-centered approach to reform tend to find few entry points into the colleges and universities that train teachers, but concerted efforts and some unlikely forces appear to be allowing new headway. In Canada, for instance, Lions-Quest Canada’s sustained relationship-building efforts have gleaned regular invitations into a number of teacher training programs, inserting a broadened picture of youth outcomes into teachers’ initial preparation (see “Supporting Improved Training: Three Approaches, page 54).

■ **Taking teachers seriously within broad reform efforts** Recognizing that good teaching and active teachers are key ingredients in reform, several IYF Partners have made teachers central actors in their work. In Thailand, for instance, teachers have been recognized as the primary bridge between young people’s high school experiences and their future success, so NCYD is supporting teachers to develop skills as counselors. This teacher development strategy is the centerpiece of a systematic effort to create pathways to postsecondary opportunities—not an afterthought or marginal commitment. Teachers are also recognized as a primary vehicle for educational improvement in a middle school reform effort spearheaded by the Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico (see “Supporting Improved Training: Three Approaches, page 54). Creating professional learning communities for teachers is a driver for the initiative—a move which, together with other strategies, has resulted in decreases in teacher absenteeism and increases in student performance.

■ **Linking classroom teachers and other youth professionals** In expanding the “when” and “where” of education reform beyond the school building and school day, a youth-centered approach emphasizes that many people other than formal school teachers play roles in young people’s learning and development. Recognizing these non-school “teachers”—and workers in community-based youth organizations in particular—as experts in good teaching opens up a range of new opportunities for teacher development. Emerging efforts in a number of settings are creating ongoing and short-term professional development communities that bring together “teachers” from both formal school environments and a range of community-based learning settings. But because such efforts remain few and far between, there are many missed opportunities to connect teachers and improve teaching across the school-community divide.

Behind all of these strategies is a shared commitment and a common approach. Each aims to infuse what we know about young people into the practice of teaching—in short, to promote a youth-centered vision of quality teaching. And each aims to treat teachers as human beings involved in an ongoing process of learning and development, deserving sustained supports in order to improve their practice over time.





## The Challenge: Reforms that Never Reach the Classroom

In 1999, Poland's government introduced an ambitious agenda for reform of the nation's schools, aiming to promote a learner-centered approach to education and teaching techniques that encourage critical and creative thinking. Three years later, however, much remains the same. Schools continue to specialize in the delivery of factual knowledge divorced from its real-world applications. A focus on strict discipline, and a lack of attention to participation and decision-making, remain hold overs from the Soviet era. According to Elzbieta Soltys, the director of internationally recognized youth development efforts in Poland, the nation's schools remain focused on avoiding failure rather than achieving success. The results are hard to ignore. The recent Programme for International Student Assessment, administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001b), shows Polish students below average in all major categories, and behind their counterparts in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Perhaps most disturbing is the achievement gap between the best and worst Polish students (larger than the average in other countries), and marked differ-

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**It's the first time that I feel appreciated as a teacher ... It is so important that at last somebody treats teachers seriously.**

— Teacher-leader participating in a Teacher Self-Development Group



<sup>8</sup> Based on a case study written by Teresa Ogrodzisnka, Polish Children and Youth Foundation, for the International Youth Foundation.

ences between achievement in academically-oriented lyceums and the nation's vocational schools.

The slow pace of reform, for Soltys and many observers, has its roots in the conditions of teachers. School administrators see their main task as controlling teachers, who, aware of being controlled in everything they do, feel little responsibility for the quality of education. The changes proposed in the 1999 reforms were accompanied by only short-term training programs available to a limited number of teachers, insufficient to support lasting change in practice. The result of this lack of investment, according to a report published by the Institute of Public Affairs, is that most Polish teachers do not support the introduction of the new reforms.

### **The Response: A Focus on Ongoing Teacher Development**

Recognizing teachers as agents in the reform process, and the conditions of teaching as a primary obstacle to reform, the Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) has invested 10 years of work in various programs targeting teachers' development. Looking back on these experiences, PCYF concluded that the most critical challenge for teachers lies in applying new knowledge and skills to classroom situations. Left on their own, with no support from their colleagues, teachers exposed to new teaching approaches often return to their old, "safe" routines. It is only in the context of ongoing support and opportunities for reflection, then, that real change in teaching practice occurs.

The Teachers' Development Program is PCYF's most promising response to teacher's need for support. At the center of this program are 147 Teacher Self-Development Groups, engaging about 1,500 teachers throughout Poland in ongoing work to implement innovative teaching practices. Through regular meetings and cooperative activities, these groups tackle a range of issues—from using the Internet as a teaching tool, to developing extracurricular activities, to the state of the teaching profession—each identified as a local priority. A teacher-leader, an experienced professional identified by community-based teacher training organizations with which PCYF has an ongoing relationship, animates and facilitates each of these groups. Bolstered by 40 hours of training by the same community-based organizations, these teacher leaders—80 percent of whom are from rural areas and small towns—take on their roles equipped with skills in group work, professional development, and providing constructive feedback. The impact of the teacher-leaders and self-development groups is just now emerging, as the project is only in its second year, but the overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers,

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**Left on their own, with no support from their colleagues, teachers exposed to new teaching approaches often return to their old, "safe" routines. It is only in the context of ongoing support and opportunities for reflection, then, that real change in teaching practice occurs.**

the broad reach of the effort, and tangible products (such as new extracurricular and out-of-school opportunities) are early and clear signs of success.

### **Start Somewhere, Go Everywhere: From Changed Teaching to Youth-centered Reform**

As a teacher development strategy, PCYF's Teachers' Development Program is beginning to bear fruit. As youth-centered education reform, it is getting at the root causes of resistance to change, and has far-reaching implications for the form of education

reform in Poland. With teacher development as its starting point, PCYF's effort ends up providing cogent answers to each of the basic questions of education reform.

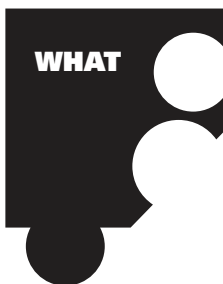
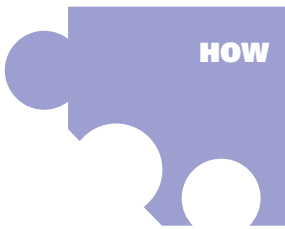
The strategic and central goal of the Teachers' Development Program is to bring about lasting and deep changes in teaching throughout Poland's schools. Teacher Self-Development Groups (TSDGs) create space for teachers to discuss and reflect on a range of new pedagogical practices. They invite specialists from outside the school, design their own educational materials, organize mini-workshops practicing new techniques before they are used in a classroom. Additionally, the Groups organize extracurricular activities and events, such as reading and spelling contests, and theater festivals.

More fundamentally, the TSDGs bring about a change in how teachers interact with innovation, making them initiators and co-creators rather than forcing them to react to outside mandates and expectations. The resulting shifts in practice have a common core: that they are responsive to children and young people's developmental reality, a central focus of the training teacher-leaders receive and of the effort as a whole. In practical and profound ways, then, the TSDGs shift the "how" of education to reflect a youth-centered approach.

Embedded in these shifts in the practice of education is a broadening of the aims and content of education. Teaching strategies that provide young people with active roles and

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**Teaching strategies that provide young people with active roles and real choices do not simply result in better learning; they result in lessons about leadership, citizenship, and critical thinking that are essential in an emerging democracy.**



real choices do not simply result in better learning; they result in lessons about leadership, citizenship, and critical thinking that are essential in an emerging democracy. They are intended to develop skills for social life—such as conflict resolution, communication, and cooperative work—as much as they are intended to develop academic skills. It is no coincidence that these are the same skills put to use inside the TSDBs. The aim is to teach both teachers and young people to be proactive and courageous, creative and innovative. The “whats” of teachers’ learning and young people’s learning grow together.



Just as shifts in teaching practice and curricular content are closely linked, changes in teaching carry along with them fundamentally different roles for young people in the learning process. For teachers accustomed to firm control of their classrooms and strict limits on students’ autonomy, one of the most fundamental shifts brought about by the TSDGs is a new commitment to active decision-making by young people. The open, democratic atmosphere of the TSDGs sets an example for a similar atmosphere in classrooms. This openness to new roles for young people is carried to its logical extension in one of the most innovative groups, where students sit alongside teachers and parents as integral players in the process.



The existence of a Teacher Self-Development Group that includes both parents and students points to one of the most interesting twists introduced by PCYF’s work: an expanded definition of the “teacher” in “teacher development.” While the majority of TSDGs are made up of classroom educators, several have expanded the group to recognize parents as important participants in the teaching process. A number of others are made up of psychologists and social pedagogues—“teachers” from non-school settings, newly welcomed as actors in education reform. Another group reaffirms that school administrators are

themselves teachers, creating a context for their development. And, as already mentioned, several self-development groups have recognized out-of-school time as part of the space of education reform and improved teaching. The message of these expansions of the Teacher Self-Development Group concept: education reform requires more people, places, and times than can be held by the school building and school day.

### **Unfinished Business, Lessons Learned**

Through a renewed commitment to teacher learning, PCYF is helping to transform well-intentioned top-down reform into a grassroots approach to educational innovation. Still, much work remains to be done, mostly related to the diffusion of innovation throughout schools and systems. The enthusiasm of teacher-leaders has, in some cases, shifted the tone of the self-development groups from discussion and professional support to training, with leaders too eager about their new knowledge to listen to their colleagues. In turn, the commitment to innovation on the part of participating teachers is often not shared or appreciated by other teachers in their schools, resulting in friction in a number of contexts. School administrators, accustomed to control over their teaching staff, are occasionally also threatened by the new autonomy and solidarity among teachers. At the same time, powerful experiences inside the TSDGs have made teachers hungry for more in a context of scarce resources—forcing PCYF and its partners to scramble to maintain teacher enthusiasm.

All of these struggles, however, speak to the central success of the program: building a core of educators fully committed to reform, and equipped to be agents of educational change. The teachers involved, it appears, are grateful and ready for their new place in education reform. A swelling rate of participation is matched by positive feedback from teachers. In the words of one educator, “The Teachers’ Development Program ... is so needed in these difficult times of introducing reform, when people feel lost and so insecure.”

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**Through a renewed commitment to teacher learning, PCYF is helping to transform well-intentioned top-down reform into a grassroots approach to educational innovation.**





## The Challenge of Applying ICTs Effectively

For each of a reformer's questions—where, how, who, what—information and communication technologies have an answer. Computers and other instructional technologies offer new learning environments, with different features than classrooms, youth organizations, and other settings. They offer new ways of doing learning, as well—new forms of instruction and teaching, different roles for students and teachers, and varied forms of interaction and feedback. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) seem to hold potential for reaching young people for whom other educational approaches have proved unsuccessful, providing a means of expanding the “who” of learning. And, as skills for communicating, using information, and using particular technologies are of growing importance in most contexts and countries, ICT is a central part of the evolving content students need to learn.

The question for education reformers is whether information technology offers good and powerful answers to their basic questions. The unfortunate but not unexpected answer is, of course, that it depends. These technologies need not support real learning, and often do little more than replicate ineffective teaching practices in a new medium. They do not inevitably respond to young people's unique needs as learners, nor help us move toward an educational model in which young people are central. On the other hand, they can do all these things, and seem to hold significant potential as a set of tools for youth-centered reform.

### A Source of Power

Model efforts—large and small, new and long-standing—demonstrate that, in many cases, new technologies are indeed a source of power for youth-centered reforms, and indicate that these technologies are particularly important in some settings and for some young people.

**■ Connecting young people and their teachers with other classrooms, better content, and richer learning opportunities** For young people and their teachers in rural China, many educational opportunities are simply out of reach, due to more limited course offerings, fewer organized out-of-school learning opportunities, and teachers forced to be generalists by the small size of schools. In these communities, where the digital divide often has its most profoundly negative effects, teachers and children are using Internet- and satellite-based technologies to tap into a growing pipeline of high-quality educational

programming and websites. An up-front investment in multimedia labs, teacher education, and a centralized source for high-quality content is creating a technological bridge across the gap of isolation (see “Putting Information Technology to Good Use: Three Examples,” page 68).

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**Like all out-of-school learning opportunities, those enabled by technology should look different—more rich in choice, more interactive, more closely tied to young people’s daily lives.**

**■ Supporting free-choice, self-paced, autonomous learning opportunities is especially appropriate for learning that goes on outside the school day and building.**

When the Children and Youth Partnership Foundation asked young people in the UK what they wanted from a new educational website, their response was—in essence—to avoid creating such a site. They asked instead for a youth portal that would let them dive deeper and deeper into content as they wanted to learn more. Like all out-of-school learning opportunities, those enabled by technology should look different—more rich in choice, more interactive, more closely tied to young people’s daily lives. The website that has emerged from young people’s input puts these principles front and center, and also provides its users with a range of real learning opportunities in the creative sector—music business, sound engineering, video film-making, and information technology. Young people will be able to explore the site on their own—the ultimate in free-choice learning—or inside the support and structure of youth organizations that are making the site the basis for youth career development programs (see “Putting Information Technology to Good Use: Three Examples,” page 68).

**■ Providing a viable alternative model of education**

For the 40 percent of Filipino youth who have left the formal education system before completing secondary school, mainstream schools simply have not worked. Educational opportunities need to teach skills that provide a relatively clear pathway out of poverty, and be flexible enough to accommodate students’ obligations to family and work. Enter the eSkills project of the Consuelo Foundation, a computer-based vocational education program in the Philippines that allows students to learn



new career skills that they choose, at their own pace, and on their own schedule (see “Connecting the Pieces: The Consuelo Foundation,” page 73).

**■ Building important skills, especially for those with relatively few employment opportunities** If you were asked to conjure up images of the next generation of IT experts, visions of young people without permanent homes, recently released from detention centers, and living in low-income rural communities would probably not be the first pictures that come to mind. Yet these are the focus populations of efforts funded by the Foundation for Young Australians aimed at increasing young people’s access to information technology, especially among rural, disadvantaged, and aboriginal young people. Young people engaged in these programs learn music and multimedia skills, and take part in internships that use and build high-tech skills. The initiative thus supports youth as they develop their own ventures, provides technology certification—and in the process—develops viable routes to success in work and life (see “Putting Information Technology to Good Use: Three Examples,” page 68).

In each of the stories told here, new technologies bring with them basic changes in how education takes place. One of the most significant shifts made possible by these technologies is a change in the way that teachers and students relate to one another, in the instructional encounter that defines the educational experience. Introducing a computer—or a video camera, or any of a number of forms of ICT—into a classroom has a way of breaking down the usual hierarchical relationships that exist between teachers and students. This is true in part because students are often more savvy in the use of these technologies. Suddenly, young people have the chance to act as experts, teaching their peers and their teachers how to navigate the new technology; the roles of teacher and student are shifted, shaken, and reversed—potentially in lasting ways. At the same time, ICT allows students to take greater control of their own learning—to navigate material on their own, at their own pace, and in a format that suits their needs. Students are pursuing knowledge, rather than waiting for teachers to hand it to them. The result can be a classroom where teachers are facilitating students’ interactions with technologies, a basic change from how traditional teaching has occurred.

### **Being Alert to Kinks in the Wiring**

As stories from the Philippines, the UK, China, and Australia demonstrate, information and communication technologies provide the voltage that fuels a range of education and education reform efforts. But, again, none of this is the inevitable result of

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**Introducing a computer—or a video camera, or any of a number of forms of ICT—into a classroom has a way of breaking down the usual hierarchical relationships that exist between teachers and students.**

## **Putting Information Technology to Good Use Three Examples**

### **Jacob's Ladder: A Site for Self-Guided Learning**

Each year, approximately 160,000 of the United Kingdom's youth, ages 16 to 18, are left out of education, training, and employment simultaneously. Jacob's Ladder—an emerging educational website—is rooted on the belief that these youth, and others disenchanted with formal education, will learn more effectively with an integrated collaborative learning model than in a structured classroom setting. The new site aims to create an innovative informal educational online community that supports a young person in his/her transition to work and explorative learning. The Children and Youth Partnership Foundation plans to launch Jacob's Ladder in 2003, which will offer a place for young people to develop ideas around street culture, music, film and information technology. It will also offer training programs in areas such as music business, sound engineering, video film making and information technology. And it will network youth clubs around the United Kingdom so that they can communicate and have a wide range of youth oriented information. The enthusiasm already generated by the website can be attributed in large part to the central role of youth surveys and focus groups in its development.

### **Youth Online, The Gap Youth Centre: Reaching Remote and Rural Youth Through IT**

**The Challenge:** Design and implement an information technology initiative that provides appropriate content and access to some of Australia's least advantaged young people in the most geographically remote areas.

**The Response:** Youth Online, launched in January 2001, was designed in collaboration with indigenous and rural young people. The two stage education and empowerment program includes IT training and production of a radio program through the local community radio station. In addition, partnerships among organizations provide for technology-related vocational training and employment opportunities. As a result of participation in Youth Online, youth have higher self-esteem and self reliance; improved access to and retention within formal education; improved literacy, numeracy and computer skills; enhanced employment prospects; basic Web design skills; and a greater understanding of how the Internet works and its relevance to young Aboriginal people. Youth Online is demonstrative of the broader work of the Foundation for Young Australians to make community organizations hubs for high-tech learning—especially for those young people with limited access to high-quality learning opportunities like those at Youth Online.

### **Project Hope, Hope Net School: Overcoming the Barriers to ITC**

By 1998, Internet-aided education had found application in about 60,000 primary and secondary schools in China, with 60,000 to 70,000 computer teachers instructing 10 million students. These schools owned up to 1 million computers. But few of these computers had reached China's rural communities. Even many well-equipped schools have had a difficult time making computer-aided education central to their work—in part because teachers have little support in using the available technology, and in part because the wealth of hardware is not matched by a similarly rich supply of educational content adapted to computers.

The solution—pioneered by the China Youth Development Foundation—takes on both problems. The Foundation's Hope Net School project provides rural schools with multi-media labs equipped with computers, satellite receivers and educational disks. These schools, along with others looking for quality educational content, are now able to watch educational TV programs received from satellite receivers, play disks related to curriculum or other educational resources, and download digital courses and educational information provided by the Hope Net School Central website. A central hub of high-quality, easy-to-use resources overcomes the struggles of both isolated rural schools and teachers new to incorporating technology into their teaching.

The start-up costs are high, but so are the payoffs—particularly in overcoming the gap of isolation. Teachers use the labs to prepare for classes by obtaining synchronized teaching and learning resources from the central website and additional education materials via the Internet. In the process, the labs have changed the closed-door teaching model and helped rural teachers to share educational resources with others.

putting a young person in front of a computer, nor do these benefits come without a set of inevitable challenges. Divides, it appears, exist within rather than between communities—between older and younger generations, rich and poor residents, between races or genders.

Other challenges grow from less familiar roots. Often, educators and reformers assume that the very fact that an educational option is technology-driven will make it desirable to young people. Yet, young people are clear that not all technological solutions meet their needs as learners, or capture their interest sufficiently to engage them. It is no coincidence that successful efforts in Australia and the United Kingdom began with in-depth research into young people's interests and expectations. These early commitments to engaging young people are ideally continued throughout an effort—

in the development of courseware or websites, in the creation of the content for learning, and in the evaluation of the technology. The principles of youth participation and voice are particularly critical given that young people usually engage in technology-based learning by choice, and so can simply choose to stay away from learning opportunities that don't reflect their needs.

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**Unless informed by what we know about how young people learn, and by the broad principles of youth-centered reform, technologies—as already indicated—will simply replicate outmoded and ineffective educational approaches.**

The importance of youth engagement in the success of technology-based reforms points to a larger issue. ICT is best treated as part of a larger education reform strategy, not as a reform on its own. Unless informed by what we know about how young people learn, and by the broad principles of youth-centered reform, technologies—as already indicated—will simply replicate outmoded and ineffective educational approaches. More than this, though, technology as a stand-alone reform—without similar changes in teacher development, structure of educational institutions, content, and the setting in which learning happens—is unlikely to result in any significant improvements in learning. If anything, increased access to information and communication technology heightens the importance of real-world social networks. As information becomes much more widely accessible, its value actually drops—especially in comparison to interpersonal connections and social capital.

But when embedded within a broader youth-centered reform strategy, implemented in such a way that dismantles rather than reinforces existing educational disparities, and driven by young people's needs and desires, ICT can be a valuable force for educational change. The case study that follows—focused on an effort that crosses many educational divides—provides one example of how this can happen.







## The Challenge: A Cycle of Poverty and Inequity for Out-of-school Youth<sup>9</sup>

Rafael Balena is an 18-year-old farm worker in Santo Domingo, Albay, a rural community in the Philippines about 500 kilometers south of Manila. He was forced to quit school six years ago. Although he was enrolled in a public school that does not charge tuition fees, his parents could not afford to defray the attendant costs of his education. He therefore had to give way to two older siblings also attending high school. Since he only has a year of secondary education, he ended up working as a hired laborer in the rice farms of their neighbors, where he earns US\$1.50 a day. His dream of going back to school is likely to remain just that: a dream. Without further education, and in a tight job market, Rafael's chances for better employment were virtually nonexistent.

Raphael is just one of the twelve million 7- to 24-year-old Filipinos forced to quit before they complete high school. For most of these young people, two forces—poverty and shortcomings in their educational opportunities—combine to force them out of the mainstream school system. In many families, household poverty and the need to contribute to family income simply override the concern for education.

At the same time, the education system faces challenges related to equity, access, quality, and relevance. The increase in the number of schools has yet to catch up with the increase in the number of those who need to be in school. In addition, transportation and other costs often make existing schools inaccessible to low-income students. Even if students do have access to schools, the educational system has been criticized for not producing the types and quality of manpower needed by the local industries. Courses often are not attuned to the needs of the market. The lack of high-quality school facilities and equipment coupled with teaching staff with few supports and little training all contribute to the deteriorating quality of education. Alternative schools, government-funded training programs, and organizations do their best to fill the gaps—but have to make do with whatever is available in terms of expertise, equipment, and curriculum.




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**In many families, household poverty and the need to contribute to family income simply override the concern for education.**

<sup>9</sup> Based on case studies written by Nic Torre and Luis Morales, Consuelo Foundation, for the International Youth Foundation. The Consuelo Foundation was formerly known as the Children and Youth Foundation of the Philippines.

### **The Response: A self-paced route to usable skills**

In October 2000, Raphael's chances for a better future took a positive turn. When he learned that the Center for Enterprise, Livelihood and Technology Development (CELTD) would open a skills training program in his community, he was one of the first to apply. Much to his amazement (and initial anxiety), he soon found out that his Building Wiring course would be delivered via a computer. Though he had never touched a computer in his lifetime, his fear soon turned to enthusiasm as he easily navigated through illustrations, graphics, video clips, explanations, and quizzes.

Raphael only reported for his e-skills sessions on weekends. The CELTD was able to convince a local high school to give them access to five of their computers when they were not in use by the school. For twelve weekends, Raphael would go to the local high school to learn the "theory" portion of the Building Wiring course, working with the support of CELTD staff. After finishing this phase of the program, he went for the required 3-months of on-the-job training (OJT). He was able to finish his course in nine months, and immediately after, the person with whom he had his OJT hired him as a construction electrician. Today he earns \$US95 a month and still works with the same outfit.

Experiences like Raphael's are the tangible products of the eSkills Learning Project, an ongoing effort of the Consuelo Foundation to provide relevant, high-quality learning opportunities to out-of-school young people. By bringing to bear advances in computer technologies, the project converts the theory portion of technical training into multimedia, computer-based interactive formats, linked to hands-on learning experiences in real job settings and supported by face-to-face experiences with teachers. For a growing network of technical skills training centers—particularly those in remote regions and with few resources—the courseware developed by the Consuelo Foundation (formerly the Children and Youth Foundation of the Philippines, CYFP) and its technical partner allows an expansion in the quantity, diversity, and quality of



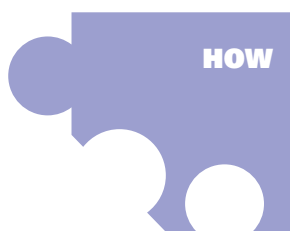
learning opportunities they are able to offer out-of-school youth. Though still in its pilot phase, the effort has already yielded powerful outcomes: significant increases in the variety of courses available, much higher rates of certification in particular professions, substantial cost savings for training institutions, and—most importantly—routes to skilled employment for youth with few opportunities.

### **Start Somewhere, Go Everywhere: From high-tech learning to a youth-centered alternative education**

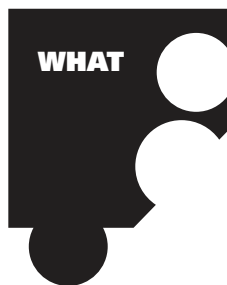
At first glance, the work of the Consuelo Foundation looks to be an effective and growing approach to vocational training for out-of-school youth—certainly a valuable effort in its own right. But in another light, the eSkills program can be viewed as a solid example of youth-centered education reform. In the process of building technical skills, this effort addresses each of the fundamental questions of education reform, and makes young people the centerpiece of each of its answers.



At its core, eSkills is an attempt to provide educational opportunities to out-of-school youth. It begins, then, with an alternative answer to the “who” of education reform, putting those who have been marginalized by the formal education system at the center of its work. For the Foundation, education reform has not been successful until it meets the needs of this population—suiting their schedules (available on a flexible basis, around young people’s work hours), needs (focusing on relevant, real-world skills that result in a route out of poverty), and locations (through a diffuse network of training centers that reach isolated areas where schools often do not exist). Beyond building these young people back into education reform, the Foundation welcomes them as real partners in their learning and the project itself. Young people experience a great deal of choice and autonomy inside the program. This is no surprise, given that young people’s voices were built into its design. Surveys of young people let the Foundation know why young people were leaving school, and what they wanted from skills training programs.



Given its understanding of this population of young people, the Foundation recognized computer-based training as the logical means to the end of relevant learning opportunities. The courseware they developed provides a friendly environment for young people with few computer experiences, along with an interactive experience that engages them as active learners (markedly different from many computer-based, skill-and-drill programs). Perhaps even more importantly, eSkills was designed to link computer-based learning with hands-on job experiences and time with “real” teachers—usually staff of the technical training centers and community organizations that offer the program. The result is a form of computer-based instruction that provides the basic “inputs” of effective learning environments: autonomy, challenge and relevance, meaningful relationships, hands-on learning opportunities, and personalized instruction.



The content of this high-quality learning experience is usable skills and knowledge that will prepare young people for well-paying jobs. With this in mind, the curricula are aligned with the expectations of a particular field and profession. At the same time, CYFP knows that vocational skills are not the only things that young people need to move out of poverty and into adulthood. In many of the same technical training centers that offer the eSkills, out-of-school youth can take part in life skills learning opportunities, adapted by the Foundation to meet their specific needs. Thus, out-of-school youth have access to a broader “education for life”—focusing on decision-making, interpersonal skills, creative thinking, and empathy, for instance—alongside vocational skills preparation.



## WHEN/WHERE

Given these goals and the realities of out-of-school youth, the Consuelo Foundation pushes their education reform efforts beyond the school day and school building. Youth who have had negative experiences with mainstream schools, and who have been forced out of them by the need to work, are unlikely to respond to educational opportunities available at the time and place offered up by public education. Thus, technical training centers—spaces designed for out-of-school youth and close at hand in their communities—and flexible scheduling—to avoid interference with work and family commitments—are the context for the eSkills project.

At the same time that eSkills continues to grow as an alternative to the public schools, the project is slowly gaining the support and acceptance of the Philippines government. Recently, an agreement was forged with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (the national agency responsible for technical education) to make the courseware available to its 35 training institutions nationwide. Further, as Raphael's story indicates, technical training centers are forging relationships with public schools around facilities and technology use—showing a route toward changed schools and blurred lines between school and community.

### **Unfinished Business, Lessons Learned**

Given that a desktop computer costs the average Filipino one-year's salary, and the Internet reaches only 3 percent of the population, it should come as no surprise that the eSkills Learning Project has faced challenges from the start. As the first courseware development effort in the country, the eSkills project involved a trial-and-error approach to planning, relatively high up-front costs, and few support structures. Once developed, the courseware has had to overcome the uncertainty of both training centers and students. Even training institutions provided with hardware support have taken time to adopt and utilize the courseware, and teachers unfamiliar with computer technologies have struggled to adopt it into their day-to-day practice. Poor ICT infrastructure has only exacerbated these cultural barriers.

But, based on Raphael's experience and the growing presence of eSkills around the country, these challenges appear to be surmountable. When paired with human contact and real-life application, and when embedded in a youth-centered approach to learning and education, interactive computer-enabled instruction appears to be a powerful route to educational change.



## Youth Engagement and Education Reform

Young people taking on engaged, vital, and active roles in school change—this is the most tangible, and perhaps the most important, shift brought about by a youth-centered approach to education reform. Youth engagement—whether defined as active learning, the assumption of meaningful responsibilities, opportunities for choice and voice, or actions that have real impacts—is central to the work of education reform.

Youth engagement is an important product of education reform. Research demonstrates that young people learn best when they take on active roles, when they have opportunities for meaningful choice, and when they become contributors and change-makers. Unfortunately, research also indicates that opportunities for engagement and leadership actually decline in availability as young people get older (Sipe & Ma with Gambone, 1998). In particular, young people say that they are seldom engaged in their schools, either with their heads or their hearts (Larson, 2001). For all these reasons, levels of student engagement—amount of active learning, choice, and opportunities for contribution—are important benchmarks of whether reform has done its job.

Youth engagement is also, and equally, a critical part of the process of education reform. Young people's actions, voices, and contributions can and do bring about educational change, and young people can and do play decisive roles in the education reform efforts of schools and communities. Yet, if they are seldom engaged in their learning, young people are even less often engaged in real decision making and power sharing in their schools and other learning environments.

In particular, they are rarely treated or welcomed as critical actors in education reform and redesign. An examination of comprehensive school reform models indicates that only a handful treat young people as important actors in the process. In local and national reform




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**Research demonstrates that young people learn best when they take on active roles, when they have opportunities for meaningful choice, and when they become contributors and change-makers.**



efforts in most countries of the world, young people are either entirely absent or included in only token ways.

### **Making Room for Young People**

Within an enduring pattern of limited engagement, a growing number of young people are finding ways to break the mold and take on sizeable responsibilities in the process and products of education reform. These scattered examples of youth engagement, found in disparate contexts, add up to a robust picture of the ways in which education reform and support and include youth engagement. What, then, are the potential openings for young people's engagement?

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**...when youth engagement is made a central principle of pedagogy—by building in student choice, voice, active roles, and opportunities to contribute—the quality of learning improves.**

■ **Young people shape all aspects of reform** Each of the reformer's basic questions—about the what, how, who, when, and where of education—can be answered by young people, and can be answered in such a way that youth engagement is supported and strengthened. Young people can and do take on roles in shaping curricular content, and provide valuable insights into the skills and knowledge most relevant and useful to them. For instance, young people in Scotland were asked by researchers which skills they used most frequently, and found most valuable in a range of settings—generating a list of core skills substantially different from those they are normally taught in schools, which could be used as the basis for life skills curriculum development. The potential benefits of this relatively straightforward form of youth engagement—greater relevance of course content, increased student commitment, and more connections between the standards of school and other settings—indicates the positive impacts of young people's involvement in school reform. Similarly, when youth engagement is made a central principle of pedagogy—by building in student choice, voice, active roles, and opportunities to contribute—the quality of learning improves. Research makes clear that young people are more motivated to learn when they have real choice and autonomy in their own learning (Deci and Ryan, 1991 e.g.)—such as choosing among different ways to learn the course content. These opportunities to build youth engagement into the “what” and “how” of learning are mirrored in each of the other aspects of reform work (see “Charting the Openings for Engagement: All ASPECTS of Reform,” page 83).

■ **Young people influence reform efforts at all levels** In turn, it is possible to identify and create space for young people's engagement at various levels or scales of educational decision-making—from engagement in their own learning

as individuals, through national and international contexts. Their actions can hit close to home, as when young people at the Met School in the northeastern United States create individual internship-based learning plans that shape their entire school experience. Or they can act on significantly larger scales—like German young people, whose ideas for educational change are being gathered and shared with policymakers at the national level. In a vision of education reform inclusive of both in-school and out-of-school learning, these levels of reform are applicable to both formal and informal educational settings

■ **Young people employ a range of strategies to create educational change** Alongside the aspects and the levels of reform, a third dimension helps to fill out a picture of the opportunities for engagement available to young people. In any of these “openings,” young people can pursue a range of strategies and take on a variety of roles as engaged participants. They can be decision-makers, organizers, leaders, service providers, teachers, researchers, philanthropists, or simply active learners. In short, they can take on any of the roles available to adult education reformers.

These three dimensions of engagement—aspect of reform, level of reform, and type of roles—can be used to create a fuller and more robust picture of young people’s engagement in and through education reform. When numerous opportunities for engagement are available across these three dimensions, reform efforts are moving closer to a youth-centered approach. If young people have access to relatively few roles, at a limited number of scales, affecting few aspects of the reform process, youth engagement is only peripheral to reformers’ work.

### Charting the Openings for Engagement

#### Potential ROLES for Young People

- Decision and policy makers
- Organizers
- Advocates
- Leaders
- Philanthropists
- Service providers
- Educators
- Active learners
- Researchers

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**In many contexts, the general public seems to have little confidence in the ability of young people to play contributing and important roles in education reform or other change efforts.**

Talking about opening up space for engagement is an important (and difficult) step in moving young people to the center of education reform. But it is equally important to ask about the quality of opportunities for engagement opened up to young people. How much influence do young people wield, and how much real impact can young people have, given the opportunities available to them? Is youth engagement continuous and sustained, or is it more often episodic? Do the opportunities for engagement support young people's learning and development? Questions like these begin to create a set of guidelines to judge the quality of engagement opportunities available to young people, and help reformers make decisions about where to put their energy.

### **The Conditions for Engagement**

The quality of youth engagement also depends on features extrinsic to the opportunity itself. Young people need supports and motivation, as well as opportunities themselves, in order to take on meaningful roles (Irby et al., 2001). Research and practice give us a clear indication of what it takes for young people to engage as change makers, whether in schools, communities, or larger issues. High expectations from adults, peers, and communities are critical. Studies indicate, for instance, that young people who are asked to participate actively are much more likely to do so (Hodgkinson et al., 1996). While young people and organizations agree that youth can take on powerful roles, opportunities to build capacity and learn new skills are also vital for young people to make a difference (Irby et al., 2001). Young people themselves cite caring adult relationships, a safe and supportive "home base" for their action efforts, and connections to networks and role models as elements that help them become and stay involved (Tolman et al., 2001, e.g.). And young people are more likely to take action around relevant, close to home issues that touch them and their communities personally (Tourney-Purta, 2001).

Unfortunately, these are not the conditions that most young people face as they contemplate taking on roles as educational change-makers. In contexts as diverse as Thailand, Germany, Poland, Mexico, the United States, and Australia, reformers describe an educational climate where engagement is the exception rather than the rule. Teachers describe feeling ill-equipped to help students take on choice and autonomy in their own learning. Surveys of media coverage and opinion polls reveal a general pattern of negative perceptions toward young people; in many contexts, the general public seems to have little confidence in the ability of young people to play contributing and important roles in education reform or other change efforts. "Before, I had worried that it was only in Thailand that nobody listened to young people," quipped the director of one IYF Partner. "But now, I realize that it happens everywhere, not just in my country."

## Charting the Openings for Engagement

### All ASPECTS of Reform

<i>Basic Reform Question</i>	<i>Youth Engagement... In Principle</i>	<i>Youth Engagement... In Practice</i>
<b>What is the content?</b>	Young people help to shape curricular content and make decisions about which skills and knowledge are most relevant to them.	Out-of-school youth in the Philippines work with experts and educators to identify the life skills around which lessons will be developed.
<b>How is learning supported?</b>	Young people play active roles and have choices of teaching methods in their own learning, and help make decisions about what sorts of teaching practices are most effective for young people in general.	UNICEF, in cooperation with other international organizations, solicits children's insights on good teaching and publishes the results in a book that shares and synthesizes children's comments.
<b>When and where is it happening?</b>	Young people have choices about how they spend their out-of-school time, active engagement is a principle of learning whenever and wherever it happens, and youth take active roles in community decision-making about learning opportunities.	In Sacramento, a city in the western United States, young people successfully campaign for lower public transportation costs so that they can travel to out-of-school learning opportunities throughout their community.
<b>Who is involved, and what roles do they play?</b>	Young people help to engage their peers, and work to increase educational equity and opportunity in their schools.	Young people in urban U.S. schools examine data on the racial and gender achievement gaps in their schools, and organize campaigns to stop racial tracking.

## Charting the Openings for Engagement

### All LEVELS of Reform

<i>Scale of Reform</i>	<i>Youth Engagement... In Principle</i>	<i>Youth Engagement... In Practice</i>
<b>Individual</b>	Young people play active roles and have choices in their own learning.	In rural Thailand, young people choose the career path they want to study and develop small businesses that reflect their interests.
<b>Classroom/Program</b>	Young people take part in active, cooperative learning, and help make decisions about the features of the programs and classrooms in which they learn.	In human rights education programs in Russia, young people engage in role playing, theater games, and other active learning experiences, and then help to educate their peers about these rights.
<b>School/Organization</b>	Young people help to shape the course of whole-school reform efforts, and have active roles in organizational decision-making.	In Germany, students are trained in school-wide policies and laws affecting their schools, so that they can then inform others and ensure that schools are living by their rules.
<b>Community/City</b>	Young people work alongside adults in creating community-wide commitments to learning, making decision about the range of available learning opportunities.	In the San Francisco Bay area in the United States, young people involved in a youth philanthropy project of the Youth Leadership Institute provide small grants to young people throughout their city who are pursuing school reform strategies.
<b>National/International</b>	Young people are active contributors to national and international dialogues and decision-making about education and education reform, and in large-scale efforts to change schools.	In Germany, a national website invites students to share their strategies for improving schools, which are in turn shared with education policymakers.

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**In individual communities around the world, young people have managed to organize themselves into a powerful constituency for educational reform, convincing adults that they can play a substantive role.**

Still, reformers can identify conditions—some of them unlikely and unexpected—that make them hopeful about the possibility of meaningful youth engagement in education reform. In Germany, for instance, poor performance on an international assessment of student achievement seems to have opened up the country and its schools to innovations—including teaching practices that emphasize young people’s engagement. In the United States, a major urban school reform effort—spearheaded by two of the country’s largest foundations, both of which have demonstrated commitment to active roles for young people—has helped raise the profile of youth engagement among the largest school districts. In individual communities around the world, young people have managed to organize themselves into a powerful constituency for educational reform, convincing adults that they can play a substantive role. Perhaps the greatest cause for hope, though, is the cadre of community-based organizations—just emerging in some countries, already well-established in others—with a long history of supporting youth engagement. These supporters of informal and non-formal learning are often far ahead of schools in giving young people meaningful, active roles in their own learning and in organizational leadership. Research on these organizations has shown the benefits both for the organizations involved (Zeldin et al., 2000) and the young people themselves (Youniss et al., 1997). The result is a deep well of expertise and support for schools committed to youth engagement, as well as clear indication of the benefits of youth engagement.

Through a combination of desperation, well-positioned leaders, grassroots efforts, and powerful examples, then, young people are beginning to find fertile ground for involvement in education reform.

What will it take to build on this momentum, and to ensure that young people are more consistently engaged in education and education reform? A familiar list of tasks is involved, as well as a familiar set of roles for education reformers (Irby et al., 2001; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 1999):

- **Develop, document, and disseminate models that demonstrate the products and process of youth engagement**, in order to raise the profile and build understanding of the “best” practices that support youth engagement.
- **Build the capacity of educators and educational institutions to promote youth engagement** by providing pre-service and ongoing development opportunities for educational professionals, strengthening the training and capacity-building supports to educational institutions as they attempt to support youth engagement,

and supporting community-based youth engagement efforts that provide outside pressure on schools.

■ **Create a climate conducive to young people's engagement** by consolidating the evidence base that supports youth engagement, providing compelling and convincing alternatives to negative perceptions of young people, and cultivating public and political will behind youth participation.

An agenda this ambitious—aimed at elevating youth engagement as a central part of the process, and a critical product, of education reform—may seem out of reach in many contexts. But without such an agenda to make young people important actors in education reform efforts, youth-centered education reform has not made its most profound impact on the way that young people learn.



## The Challenge: Building Open and Democratic Schools

In most countries, more than a quarter of all students say that school is a place they do not want to go. Students display negative attitudes towards learning, along with a lack of engagement with school. This pattern holds true in Germany, where traditional schools have provided students with few opportunities for active engagement in their own learning, and few options for significant roles in school life. Students—along with employers and civil society advocates—worry that the content taught in school leaves students ill-prepared for participation in the world they will face after graduating. And school often feels distant from the communities in which young people grow up, with few ties to bind together students' life in and out of school.

These concerns take on heightened importance in the current German context. More than a decade has passed since German reunification, but the work of building and sustaining an inclusive, democratic nation is far from over. As the nation continues to struggle to emerge from economic recession, and as new legislation opens up Germany to newcomers for the first time in decades, tensions over immigration and xenophobia have again reared their heads. Recent elections have demonstrated the often deep divide between conservative and progressive forces in the country. And the nation's faith in its schools to solve the country's economic and political woes was shaken in 2001, as results from the PISA international assessment of student achievement showed Germany's schools were failing many of their students.





## **Youth Action for Educational Change in Germany, Mitwirkung mit Wirkung**

### **Enhancing Democratic Participation through Peer Education**

The success of the school clubs has encouraged the German Children and Youth Foundation (GCYF) to bring its principles of youth participation inside the school itself. *Mitwirkung mit Wirkung*, a two-year-old GCYF project, enhances youth action in school by showing them the possibilities of student participation and motivating students to exercise their voices in the school development process.

Through a program of peer education, students from 15 to 19 years of age from all regions of a federal state facilitate workshops for their fellow students. During these sessions, all interested students come together to tackle the concrete problems of their school. The workshops, which last between 3 to 4 hours, also help students build the know-how to tackle these problems. Through central training, peer educators have built their knowledge of local and national education policy, the rights of students and student representatives, and ways of organizing student efforts to solve school-based problems. Passing along this new-found understanding of how the education system and student participation work is a central goal of each workshop.

Students feel the benefit. “The workshop motivated me, and now I want to change some things in my school. I would like to go on in that program to learn more and more” remarks one student. The project’s results include strengthened democratic structures at many schools and greater knowledge of student participation among youth representatives. This, in turn, strengthens students’ commitment to school and to solving community problems—having positive effects not only on schools but also on other institutions. In the long term, this experience with democratic decision-making prepares young people to undertake their roles as citizens in a democratic society. As youth voices and actions continue to challenge rigid opinions and processes, the dynamics between students, administrators, and parents will also change.

### **The Response: Investing in Young People’s Participation**

In the face of these consistent struggles and immediate challenges, a long-standing effort has demonstrated its potential to improve Germany’s schools and communities. The School Clubs—now funded in 1,500 schools around the country—began in 1994 in response to the shortage of youth opportunities in

eastern Germany following the end of communist rule. While picking up the good characteristics of the old East German youth clubs that they replaced, the new school clubs were different in important respects. They have consistently provided opportunities for entrepreneurial education, social skills development, and recreational activities. But they have done so in a context that emphasizes youth-initiated projects, school-community connections, and efforts to tackle real-world problems. Students learn entrepreneurial skills by developing small businesses, for instance,

or learn ecology by remediating pollution in a river nearby school. Their efforts focus inward on the school as well as outward toward the community. For instance, the school clubs have led the effort to overcome racism among their peers, and to make non-citizens feel welcome in Germany's schools.

In this way, the School Clubs have made young people the protagonists in addressing the range of problems facing Germany's schools and communities—while also building a model of enriching, youth-centered learning that emphasizes engagement and autonomy. Just as importantly, the School Clubs have proven to be a model for reaching large numbers of young people with high-quality learning experiences. From the handful of sites started by the German Children and Youth Foundation (GCYF), the program has continued to grow over the last decade—to 570 sites in 1997 before reaching the current scale of 1,500 sites. Now, the Robert Bosch Foundation has funded a five-year program that will bring the school club model throughout Eastern Europe.

### Far Reaching Goals The School Club Mission

1. To create a new cooperation form between independent youth organizations and schools (teachers, students, and parents).
2. To foster the development of a democratic school youth culture, by lifting the barrier between school and society through practical activities. At the same time they encourage self-initiative and entrepreneurship amongst young people.

### Start Somewhere, Go Everywhere: Youth Participation as the Starting Point for Reform

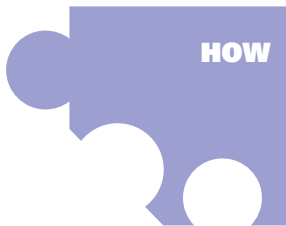
Britta Kohlberg, a long-time project leader for the German School Clubs,<sup>10</sup> has ambitious goals for the clubs as engines of school reform. “We see School Clubs not as a project, but as a cell in the school organism.” She continues, “Hopefully,

<sup>10</sup> Kohlberg served on the staff of RAA-Berlin, an organization that provides training and support to the school clubs, starting in 1992. The quotes here are from a 1999 interview with Kohlberg by the Forum for Youth Investment staff, featured in “After the Wall: Promoting Tolerance and Inclusion in Berlin,” printed in *International Insights on Youth and Communities*.

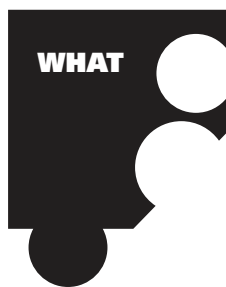


this little cell can bring a different way of thinking into the school.”

Kohlberg explains the sorts of experiences that students encounter through the School Clubs—working in teams, developing their own projects, encouraging inclusive participation—and emphasizes how different these roles are from those supported by the traditional instructional practices of German schools. Students help set up recycling programs, facilitate efforts to make foreigners feel more welcome in schools, and develop and run small businesses.



When students take on these roles in a setting closely associated with schools, the effects often begin to spill over to the school day itself. “With this as a starting point,” says Kohlberg, “you can begin to change the way of teaching lessons in the school, how the school relates to the community, how it participates in community debate.” Teachers are often involved in staffing the School Clubs, providing a relatively safe setting in which to try out new practices, and the assistance of a non-governmental organization familiar with youth-centered approaches. These opportunities, and intentional work by students involved in the clubs, according to Kohlberg, “bring up new discussions on the role of teachers, pedagogues, and social workers” with school-wide implications.



Perhaps the most fundamental and important contribution of the School Clubs is in shifting the content of schools to address important issues that are often excluded from the mainstream curriculum. In a country still building its civil society, and still coming to terms with its multicultural identity, the school clubs bring much-needed attention to issues of diversity, democracy, and tolerance. In fact, tolerance and work against xenophobia is one consistent theme that ties together all of

Germany's school clubs. The simple fact that inclusion is a central principle of the Clubs means that they are a safe, engaging place for all German students, and a model for living in a multicultural society. Beyond this, many student-initiated projects focus specifically on building more equitable and tolerant schools and communities.



The School Clubs are able to act as an incubator for innovative experiences and school reform in large part because of their unique relationship with schools and communities. Because they are based in schools, “a cell in the school organism,” the Clubs are tightly connected with what goes on during the formal school day. There is a constant give-and-take between club and school, and the Clubs intentionally work to improve school culture. But because they operate largely outside of school hours, and because they receive outside funding, the clubs are also somewhat autonomous from the schools in which they are located. This autonomy is reinforced by the central role of community-based NGOs in staffing and organizing the School Clubs, which also helps to ground the school clubs in the local community. The end goal, says Kohlberg, is “an open school”—an ideal already being realized in many small ways. Students themselves are often the facilitators of blurred lines between school and community—for instance, by bringing community partners together to create a range of small enterprises in their neighborhoods.

### **Unfinished Business, Lessons Learned**

None of the success of the school clubs has come, of course, without a great deal of hard work. Perhaps most important to the model's success is the central role of school-NGO partnerships just described, and the broader set of supports that make the clubs possible. Local organizations are involved in the development and implementation of each School Club, usually helping to staff the Clubs once they are up and running. One level up are intermediary organizations that support the NGOs through training, networking, and a range of other efforts. Outside fund-

ing from GCYF and other sources has helped the Clubs be seen as a valuable added resource to schools, rather than a drain on scarce resources.

As the effort has expanded—and as it continues to grow—the most persistent challenge has come with keeping the model true to its principles of open schooling and youth participation. In school and community contexts unaccustomed to active youth engagement, it is easy for School Clubs to become little more than leisure time programs—important resources, but not rich solutions to a range of community and school issues. As is more broadly true, it is the participation of community-based NGOs and intermediaries that helps keep the principles of the project alive. As the next chapter will show, organizations like these play a critical role in nearly all youth-centered reform efforts.

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**Implementing youth-focused improvement strategies is not the same as creating youth-centered learning environments.**





## Charting Routes to Education Reform

Youth-focused strategies are present in most education systems. Most schools and communities are home to at least some programs focusing on non-academic outcomes, instructional approaches that emphasize student engagement, and out-of-school learning opportunities. Moreover, these strategies are becoming the benchmarks of cutting-edge school reform. They are the menu items from which school districts mix and match selections to create improvement efforts.

It is not clear, however, that these youth-focused strategies stem from deeper changes in commitments and beliefs, or in the basic orientations of education systems. *Implementing youth-focused improvement strategies is not the same as creating youth-centered learning environments.* Educational policymakers and school leaders have an enormous capacity to compartmentalize change. Active student and community involvement in strategic planning may not translate into ongoing involvement in decision-making, assessment, and implementation, even if the experience was credited with creating real breakthroughs in thinking. Success with block scheduling and team teaching in alternative schools or programs for gifted students may not translate into structural changes in all schools (Pittman & Tolman, 2002).

The transition from youth-focused strategies to youth-centered reform demands more. It involves an alignment of all aspects of education around what youth need and can do, around a commitment to support young people's learning and development. Starting with a shift in the basic assumptions of education reform—the answers to educators' basic questions—youth-centered reform implicates the policies and structures, accountability and budgeting, practices and programs that make educational systems run.

What will it take to bring about educational change of this magnitude? It will certainly




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**Formal education systems often lack the expertise in children and young people's development and engagement necessary to fully realize a youth-centered approach.**



**In contexts where public resources simply aren't sufficient, or where public systems are consistently failing to support some populations of young people, external players can fill gaps in the web of educational opportunities.**

require changes in the practice and environment of the range of settings where youth learn—drawing on existing youth-focused strategies to build toward system-wide commitments and changes in orientation, and creating more learning environments rooted in these practices. These changes in the *practice of education*, in turn, depend on an increased *capacity* for change—additional resources, deeper supports, growing expertise, and increasingly skilled professionals.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most critical factor, though, is creating a climate that encourages and pushes toward change—in the form of more supportive policies and political will, public engagement and public demands for action, high standards, and compelling forms of accountability, strengthened alignment and relationships across sectors. For effective, sustainable, and large-scale educational change to occur, these three conditions are almost certainly in place and aligned.

### **Many Paths: The Roles of External Catalysts**

Enacting a youth-centered approach to education reform—involving significantly different answers to each of the basic questions of education, and significant changes in practice, capacity, and climate—is too big a job for schools to take on alone. Formal education systems often lack the expertise in children and young people's development and engagement necessary to fully realize a youth-centered approach. These systems are often under too tight resource constraints, or are too closely regulated, in order for truly significant innovation to take root. Without outside demands, formal education systems are simply unlikely to have the will to bring about deep shifts in practice and structure.

For these reasons, and many others, external change catalysts—organizations with deep connections to formal education, but with an independent base of resources and support—are critical actors in education reform. Such external cat-



<sup>11</sup> This three-part framework, which serves as the basis for the remainder of the chapter, is based on ideas shared in Pittman, Irby, & Ferber (2000); Tolman et al., (2002); and Pittman, Yohalem, & Tolman (2003).

alysts are vital at the local level; NGOs, community-based foundations, and similar institutions can provide the combination of pressure and support that individual schools and community-wide systems need. External catalysts and partners are also important on a larger scale—as policy advocates, network-builders, and resource brokers, as well as in many other roles.

It is as change catalysts that the IYF Partners enter into the work of education reform. The work of these blended organizations—part grantmaker, part intermediary, part advocate and organizer—demonstrates the variety of ways in which organizations can push and pull education systems toward substantial change. Their efforts aim at each of the ingredients of change noted above: they work directly to change practice and create better learning environments; they build the capacity of educational systems to bring about change; and they help create a climate that moves organizations toward change. In the process, they also point to the specific strategies that external change agents can and do take on in education reform work.

### **Changing the Practice of Education**

Sometimes, IYF Partners have no choice but to roll up their sleeves and get into the on-the-ground business of creating youth-centered learning environments. Partnering with local youth-serving organizations and schools, they create curricula, develop programs, and help to implement new pedagogical approaches. They—again along with others—develop websites meant to provide learning opportunities to young people. They incubate and provide management support to effective programs, and work to spread those programs that have already proved themselves effective. While they are seldom directly involved in the teaching and learning process, Partners are certainly doing the hands-on work of education reform.

Yet, NGOs and grantmakers—however deep their pockets—cannot hope to replace the public sector as the primary provider of high-quality learning opportunities for children and young people. Public education must and will remain a primarily public endeavor, publicly funded and in the public’s hands. Still, non-profit catalysts can play a strategic, direct role in creating learning environments rooted in youth-centered principles. In contexts where public resources simply aren’t sufficient, or where public systems are consistently failing to support some populations of young people, external players can fill gaps in the web of educational opportunities. External catalysts can also help to grow robust non-school and alternative school learning environments, building systems that complement

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**Within and across communities, reformers and potential reformers are seldom connected with one another—and thus suffer from missed opportunities for alignment, knowledge sharing, and joint work.**

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the formal education systems. In Australia, for instance, community-based organizations are the learning environment of choice for many youth, especially those who have experienced few successes in schools. In response, the Foundation for Young Australians has invested in a network of community-based technology centers inside existing organizations.

Perhaps most importantly, external catalysts often play a role in modeling the sort of change that can occur inside public systems, creating innovative examples ripe for broader replication or dissemination. This is the successful strategy behind the career counseling initiative sponsored by Thailand’s National Council for Child and Youth Development, where the intention was never to replace publicly-funded career counseling—but to incubate a model that would then be picked up by the public system. In Thailand, this effort’s success can be traced in part to strong relationships with national education players, and to the model’s incubation in mainstream schools—both smoothing the transition of the program to broader implementation. (See page 41 for a case study on this effort.)

### **Building the Capacity for Change**

It is as supporters of educational change—as those laying the tracks and providing the fuel and driving instructions for the moving train of education reform—that external catalysts often make the greatest impact. Building educational systems’ capacity for youth-centered change takes on a number of different forms, depending on the circumstances and the strengths of the external partner:<sup>12</sup>

■ **Supporting teachers and other educational leaders** Building the capacity of the human actors in educational systems—through “training,” but also through a range of other strategies from building peer support networks to providing release time to develop new instructional approaches—is a central part of the work of IYF Partners. Strategies such as these have the potential to make teachers and other educators innovators themselves—rather than to simply turn them into the recipients of educational innovation.

### ■ **Strengthening organizational capacity and providing management support**

Organizations and schools, like the individuals who work inside them, need a set of reliable supports and capacities in order to sustain their involvement in youth-centered change. External catalysts nurture organizations through the change process by removing distractions from the change process (e.g., by helping with operational issues), but more often by providing frameworks and support that guide planning and change, and

<sup>12</sup> The typology presented here is indebted in part to *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*, a research report by Joan Wynn (2000) of the Chapin Hall Center for Children, along with conversations among IYF partners about their organizational roles and observation of education and out-of-school intermediary organizations in the United States.

by offering technical expertise in what youth-centered educational institutions look like. This organizational capacity-building can come in very tangible forms—financial support, equipment, and the like—as well as through expertise and technical assistance.

**■ Building networks and space for exchange** Within and across communities, reformers and potential reformers are seldom connected with one another—and thus suffer from missed opportunities for alignment, knowledge sharing, and joint work. Catalysts often work as brokers and network-builders—building peer-learning networks among teachers, creating local networks of youth-serving NGOs, supporting connections across public and private sectors. While often intangible, these connections often provide the most useful support and expertise for change efforts.

**■ Developing, adapting, and disseminating knowledge and know-how** By documenting work, developing curricula and resource guides, and conducting or synthesizing research, catalysts build and package the knowledge base that makes youth-centered education reform possible. Often, catalysts are most useful as bridge-builders between research and those who can put knowledge to work—by synthesizing, packaging, and disseminating what is known, and by building lines of communication between researchers and practitioners. The work of IYF Partners demonstrates that dissemination involves more than printing and sending copies of publications to school leaders. In both the Philippines and Japan, for example, one of the major investments of the reform process was in adapting a pre-existing curriculum to meet local needs. This involved language translation, but also translation to match local cultures, realities, needs, and expectations. Organizations that are rooted in local realities, but who have strong connections outside the locality, are those best equipped to do this translation work.

IYF Partners pursue all of these strategies directly. But, as national organizations and foundations, their primary role is in building the local capacity to support change, by strengthening and supporting other capacity-builders. At Lions-Quest Canada, for instance, a cascading training structure aims to saturate the nation's regions with able, independent teacher trainers, rather than maintaining a centralized training force. Similarly, the Polish Children and Youth Foundation works largely through local NGOs who help to train teacher leaders and support teacher self-development groups. The primary aim, then, is to grow

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**Reformers identify three “publics” to engage in education reform efforts—political leaders and policymakers, organized stakeholder groups, and the public at large.**

broadened set of indigenous capacity-builders, within and outside of schools, who will continue to support systems as they move toward youth-centered principles.

### **Creating the Climate for Change**

Though critical to making educational change, supportive roles—focused on building capacity for change—only push so far. External catalysts can end up building the capacity to maintain the status quo, rather than to push toward the youth-centered reforms that they support. Alternatively, they can find themselves in a waiting game until the right policy window or educational movement emerges, hoping for a chance to support schools as they implement these plans. While taking advantage of such windows of opportunities is a large part of the work of youth-centered reformers, it is unlikely to net the substantial shifts in educational practice that they seek. However great the capacity for change, purposeful and deep change is unlikely without the continued pressure and encouragement from the outside.

**Demand**—in the form of concerted public and political will—is one essential ingredient of a climate ripe for change. Reformers identify three “publics” to engage in education reform efforts—political leaders and policymakers, organized stakeholder groups, and the public at large. Through targeted advocacy, community engagement and planning efforts, and broad-based organizing and communications work, catalysts can bring to bear each of these “publics” on the work of youth-centered reform (Public Education Network, 2001; Tagle, 2003). While difficult work, it is often the unique ability of educational change catalysts to work with and bridge these three “publics”—or to build relationships with those who can.

Closely tied to demand are systems of **accountability**—ranging from ways of collecting and analyzing data that demonstrate progress toward youth-centered benchmarks, to organized constituency groups that maintain pressure on educational institutions. IYF Partners have played a particularly important role in developing standards of quality based on principles of youth development and youth-centered reform, and in helping organizations measure their progress toward these standards—one element of building accountability. Again, it is external catalysts that help to build and maintain these systems of accountability—staffing ongoing data collection and analysis capacity, hiring organizers—or who support those who do.

Securing adequate **resources**, and aligning resources available from different sources, is another function of external change catalysts—and another element of a climate that supports educational change. IYF Partners specialize in bringing new forms of philanthropy to youth issues—for instance, the support of the corporate sector—and in building partnership across funders in public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Without exploring any of these roles in great depth, the bottom line is clear: external catalysts can contribute to educational change work in a variety of ways. Needless to say, there are at times tensions between these strategies. Wearing hats as funders, community organizers, capacity-builders, and evaluators simultaneously likely results in more problems than progress, requiring catalysts to identify what roles are most appropriate in any given situation, and working hand-in-hand with other catalysts to take on this range of roles. Yet it is as a package that these strategies add up to a coherent recipe for educational change.

### **A Common Destination: Youth-Centered Reform**

The sets of strategies just outlined—aiming to enact change, support change, and create a climate for change—are generic. They apply equally well to any education reform project that aims for lasting, large-scale, comprehensive change. Similar sets of strategies and roles are employed by intermediary organizations that focus on out-of-school opportunities (Wynn, 2000) and local foundations that focus on academic achievement for children in low-income communities (Public Education Network, n.d.). They could be employed equally well to drive a reform agenda that reinforces traditional teaching practices and a narrow definition of student success.

Yet, what we know about young people’s learning and development offers a powerful alternative to such a narrowly framed reform agenda. A youth-centered approach to education reform allows us to draw on our growing understanding, rooted in research and practice, of what it takes to support young people’s learning. It recognizes that children and young people are growing and learning in a range of areas beyond academics, and that these emerging capacities shape whether young people will succeed in adulthood. It leverages and aligns the range of settings where young people learn, realizing a vision of community-wide commitments that support young people’s continual learning process. Perhaps most of all, it asserts that young people have something to contribute to education reform—as active participants and changemakers themselves. When the set of strategies described in this section are marshalled behind this broadened and re-focused reform agenda, the possibility of real and effective reform emerges.

Clearly, there is much work to do in plotting and travelling the route to youth-centered education reform. This publication, and the work of the IYF Partners, indicates some promising directions and well-worn paths. Other international efforts, such as the Education for All movement spearheaded by UNESCO over the last decade and a half, have pushed still further along this route. We have discovered much about “what works in education reform,” but much work still remains to be done. We look forward to that challenge.



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