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Youth Policy Conference: A Summary

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Youth Policy Conference

Youth Policy Conference: A Summary

By Ron Jenkins

On January 25 and 26, 1991 in Eugene, Oregon, approximately 200 people attended an unprecedented state-wide training event. The purpose of the gathering was to discuss and debate the question: *How best to promote/increase the participation of youth in Oregon's decision-making activities throughout Oregon.*

By design, the conference was an accredited college course, offered by the University of Oregon for approximately 100 of its graduate/undergraduate students. Other attendees were adults and youth affiliated with a variety of Oregon's youth agencies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE:

- To involve participants in processes that are and/or could be analogous to youth participation situations in work-a-day settings;
- To generate a body of information that describes the questions, barriers, issues, and possibilities that the participants agree deserve examination;
- To produce a youth policy framework consisting of a series of policy statements that can be used as a model for planning and discussion, by communities and programs.

It was anticipated that everyone involved including the University of Oregon students majoring in human service fields would:

- Learn the fundamental principles that make youth/adult partnerships work;
- Participate in exercises in how to include youth in policy formulation and decision-making;
- Join with national and local experts to make recommendations on implementing policy statements as well as identify strategies, issues and barriers.

Several co-sponsoring organizations joined the university in the planning/staging of the event including:

- Associates for Professional Development
- Kenneth Viegas
Director of Corrections
Master's Program
Department of Human Services
University of Oregon
- Oregon Children and Youth Services Commission
- Oregon Youth Development Alliance
- Youth Policy Institute

Those involved in the planning understood that the statewide conference would be a starting point for accelerated efforts to promote youth empowerment themes. One of the primary products would be a formulated set of guidelines that would be used for planning a follow-up training session.

FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCE

After a series of introductory presentations, attendees participated in a series of rotating, small group work sessions. In these sessions, adult practitioners, youth and college students became resources to one another. The topics discussed in separate sessions were:

- I. Increasing youth participation within communities.
- II. Increasing youth participation within youth-oriented

- agencies/organizations.
- III. Selecting, formulating, prioritizing positive youth policy statements.
- IV. Recommending next steps.

A diverse array of experts and resource people were recruited to help stimulate and facilitate the process including:

- Dorothy Stoneman, Director, Youth Build Coalition, Belmont, MA.
- Samuel Halperin, Study Director of Youth and America's Future, The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work Family and Citizenship, Washington DC.
- Teresa Hogue, Coordinator, Positive Youth Development Project, Oregon Children and Youth Services Commission.
- Michael Holroyd, President, Oregon Youth Development Alliance, Corvallis, OR.
- Ron Jenkins, Consultant and Senior Editor, Youth Policy Institute, Washington, DC.
- Drinda Lombardi, U.S. Forest Service, Pacific NW Region, Portland, OR.
- Richard Sagor, Assistant Professor of Education, Washington State University, Vancouver, WA.
- Dawn Hanson Smart, Planning and Developmental Specialist, Human Services Strategic Planning Office, Executive Department, City of Seattle, WA.
- Kenneth Viegas, Director of Corrections Master's Program, Department of Human Services, University of Oregon.
- Pastor Doug Williams, Our Saviours Lutheran Church, Lake Oswego, OR.
- Elizabeth Chandler, Director, Associates for Professional Development, Eugene, OR.
- Richard Doughty, Regional Director for Post-Program Services, Joint Action in Community Services, Seattle, WA.
- Tony Freeman, Instructor, Human Services, Chemekta Community College, Lake Oswego, OR.
- Michael Grice, Public Information Specialist, Portland Public Schools, Portland, OR.

THEMES OF THE CONFERENCE:

During the course of the conference, several themes were consistently articulated:

- 1) Children must have the opportunity to participate in democratic decision-making activities as early in their lives as possible, i.e., in the first grade.
- 2) If adults truly want to convey to youth that they (youth) are valued, creating accessible and appropriate opportunities for participation is one of the primary ways to express this conviction, including:
 - A. providing youth the necessary skills that will enable them (the youth) to work as partners with adults;
 - B. resolving the institutional, attitudinal, logistical barriers that inhibit the involvement of youth in decision-making activities;
 - C. creating policies/procedures that ensure that adults will be accountable for the promises, commitments, and guarantees they make to the children/youth they care for and/or serve.

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3) Adults must find ways to help empower and network youth/teen leaders/representatives in arenas beyond individual programs, community settings, and systems so that youth can:

- A. more effectively advocate for their own agencies, learning from and becoming empowered by one another;
- B. have the opportunity to interact and negotiate with peers from differing socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds;
- C. have access to external information that broadens their perspective of the choices/options available to them and/or validates the information being given to them in their own system;
- D. receive credit for their contributions, thereby reducing the risk of having their efforts usurped by adults wishing to advance their own careers.

4) Adults who believe in the concept of youth participation must redouble their efforts in the following ways:

- A. make sure that deserving youth are given adequate recognition for their efforts by affected adults in the community;
- B. demand that participation is based upon a commitment to *inclusivity* (not an idea solely reserved for one segment of youth, i.e., achievers at risk);
- C. do the work of collecting the information (research) that clearly documents the *benefits* of involving youth, plus establish ways to measure and monitor the status of youth participation in relationship to measurable objectives;
- D. be prepared to remain involved with youth in supportive roles, not abandoning youth at the first signs of success;
- E. act as liaisons to the larger community by reminding adults that being a *novice* in participatory activities is often an intrinsic value unto itself; that not every action need be accompanied by a measurable pay-off, nor tied to organizational output.

And finally,

For those in attendance, it became increasingly clear that when an agency, organization, and/or community *does not* have policies in place that affirm/promote the participation of young people in decision-making, there is little likelihood that anything beyond "tokenism" will take place.

SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The following is a synopsis of the ideas, suggestions, and recommendations that were generated by the more than twenty interactive small group sessions. The below format reflects the sequencing of how participant discussions evolved from programmatic analysis to policy considerations to strategic planning.

I. INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The assigned group task was to imagine that:

[Your local city is planning to develop a set of policies that are intended to improve the city's ability to meet the needs of its children and youth. Suggest ways your city might involve youth in the process of policy formulation.]

Suggestion:

I. Create a task force of youth representatives.

- 1. Have adults (counselors, youth workers) help identify/recruit potential youth leaders.
- 2. Be sure task force is representative of youth groups and cross section of youth i.e., socio-economic, ethnic.
- 3. Encourage youth to self-identify, volunteer to help.

4. Task force should develop *youth teams* that would go to schools, group homes, treatment centers, and inform youth of this process.

5. Help individual schools and groups to select/elect student representatives who would act as liaisons, delegates, and advisory board members.

6. Set goals, i.e., two youth on every local board such as the following:

- School Boards
- Youth Service Center
- Youth Commissions
- Parks and Recreation Boards
- CSD Branch Advisory
- Police Advisory
- Fire/building Committees
- Churches
- Health Department
- Library
- Youth Agencies, i.e., 4-H, Scouts, Campfire

7. Involve youth representatives in developing assessments, speak-outs, surveys. Find out what young people of the community are concerned about.

8. Identify ways youth can be involved in helping solve community problems; suggest options, roles, examples; provide regular feedback on assessments and options to various youth representatives.

9. Contact a youth-oriented system that can help the task force with its work, i.e., community actions, alliance, etc.

Youth Involvement:

Strengthening Community Through Partnership



June 27-29, 1991

National Conference Sponsored by

Partners
FOR YOUTH
LEADERSHIP

On the campus of the University of Colorado,

Boulder, Colorado

Youth Policy Conference

Suggestions for adults/city to help in developing task force:

1. Support/promote the idea that boards and advisory committees will include youth.
2. Create positions on city council for youth and/or create an advisory youth/adult committee to city council (more youth on committee than adults). Ensure that youth will have a voice and have specific powers.
3. Provide funds to help youth cover costs of travel/expenses.
4. Initiate training for both youth and adults that will help each group learn to work together, including training that:
 - A. is designed for adult managers of public systems to learn how to include youth;
 - B. addresses negative attitudes/stereotypes youth and adults have about each other;
 - C. helps adults learn how to increase and motivate youth's willingness to be involved;
 - D. teach youth/adults how to work as partners;
 - E. teach adults how to restructure meetings so that youth can attend and will be interested and involved;
 - F. sponsor ongoing awards and recognition for youth who participate; make sure media is aware/involved in city's effort to increase youth participation;
 - G. actively recruit the support of the business community, i.e., give youth employees support and time off to participate;
 - H. set up systems/procedures that make sure that city promises/commitments made to youth are kept; hold adults accountable for decisions that have been made.

5. The city will need to help young people develop ways to perpetuate ongoing youth participation. For example:
 - A. have youth mentor younger age youth;
 - B. have representatives "befriend" other youth, i.e. at-risk youth;
 - C. help support ideas such as a youth speakers bureau, youth presenters directory;
 - D. create a fundraising mechanism to raise funds for special events/projects that promote participation;
 - E. help "match" experienced youth/adults with students wanting to learn how to participate—give time to adults (city employees) who work to work with youth committees, etc. and make this part of staffs' job descriptions;
 - F. work with local school districts to find ways that students can receive credit for participation, plus encourage schools to offer more "democratic" experiences for all youth from 1st grade on; create closer linkage between education and civic participation;
 - G. establish ways to assess the status of youth participation in the community and set yearly objectives; involve youth in the process of setting and meeting objectives;
 - H. give recognition and/or funding preference to groups/agencies that are showing progress in meeting youth participation goals;
 - I. develop ways to "hire" young people as consultants—resource people for specific youth related tasks; let out bids to youth groups to do specific tasks for the city, i.e., tutoring, recycling, etc.,
 - J. refer specific budget items to city's youth for a vote, i.e., specific recreational expenditures.

A message to all adults interested in youth involvement and all young people interested in their communities and schools.

Please join us for the 2nd Annual National Partners for Youth Leadership (PYL) Conference!

Your participation at this National PYL Conference. "Youth Involvement: Strengthening Community Through Partnership," is an opportunity for you to learn about and strengthen your commitment to youth involvement. Youth involvement programs are providing opportunities for young people in partnership with concerned adults to play significant, meaningful roles in their families, schools and communities, and are reducing and preventing a wide variety of destructive behaviors by providing options for healthy choices.

Keynote speakers, clinics, workshops, and social activities will provide occasions for learning about:

- Youth involvement and its effectiveness
- Keys to successful programs
- Youth potential in community programs
- Program implementation
- Keeping your program alive and vibrant
- Diversity
- The national perspective in working with youth

The approach is simple — make young people part of the solution. The results are significant — young people take responsibility for their lives, their education and what goes on in their communities.

Partners For Youth Leadership (PYL), a national program that promotes, supports and reinforces youth participation, designed this conference with a committee of individuals from other youth organizations to:

- Demonstrate that youth are valuable and often untapped resources in solving community problems
- Demonstrate that youth involvement programs are effective in the prevention of destructive behaviors, including alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, school disruption, delinquency, gang involvement and others.
- Show that youth involvement programs build competencies — in communication, goal setting, decision making, and problem solving.
- Give adult/youth participants the opportunity to experience the power of youth involvement in hands-on interactive workshops.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jon Amsterdam, Director of Field Operations, **City Year**, Boston, Massachusetts

Elaine M. Andrus, Project Coordinator, **Carnegie Middle School Project**, Denver, Colorado

Jim Corbo, Corps Member, **City Year**, Boston, Massachusetts

Elaine Fritz, Project Director, **Partners for Youth Leadership**, Boulder, Colorado

Cathy Berger-Kaye, Director, **Youth Service Consultants**, Santa Monica, California, Education Consultant, **StarServe**, Washington, D.C.

Diane Landis, Senior Associate, **YOUNG AMERICA CARES! Volunteer and Outreach Services United Way of America**, Alexandria, Virginia

Kathleen Scrimgeour, Counselor, **Angevine Middle School**, Lafayette, Colorado

Maura Wolf, Youth Service Coordinator, **Points of Light Foundation**, Washington, D.C.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Call Elaine Fritz or Rudy Pucel at
PYL 1-800-972-4636 or
1-303-443-5696

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II. INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS, AGENCIES AND/OR ORGANIZATIONS.

Barriers that were listed:

1. There are a variety of laws, rules and regulations that do not allow youth a voice and/or vote on important decisions that affect them.
2. Adults and taxpayers are resistant (distrustful) of sharing power with young people. Many adults see youth as (a) disinterested, (b) irresponsible, (c) uninformed, (d) immature, (e) lacking the discipline to study the issues.
3. Most youth "buy into the idea" that they have nothing to contribute, that their opinions do not matter.
4. Meetings, schedules, logistics are tailored to meet the needs of adults.
5. There is a lack of clarity, consensus as to how youth of varying ages might have input into planning decisions.
6. Youth are not regularly provided the training/skills necessary to equip them to participate as partners in decision-making activities with adults. Therefore, reinforcing adults' perceptions of youth as non-contributors.
7. There is a lack of roles throughout the community wherein youth participate in problem-solving activities (participation is not a community norm).
8. Most adults were not afforded opportunities to participate when they were young. Hard for them to see benefits/reasons due to their own lack of experience.
9. Adults see adolescence as a period of transition, "turn over" of youth members as a negative factor.
10. Many adults need training in how to involve youth as partners in problem-solving; adults unaware of their own biases and inhibiting attitudes.

Benefits with youth participation:

Benefits for Youth:

1. Youth will gain increased sense of being "valued," being competent and of belonging.
2. Increased understanding/appreciation of democratic principles. (Part of their civic education.)
3. Decisions will be more closely linked to youth needs and circumstances.
4. Will gain increased respect—encouragement from adults (parents—teachers—community).
5. Will learn how to effectively promote policies, procedures, systems that affect their lives.
6. Have real life opportunities to gain leadership skills and self-efficacy skills.
7. Learn how to advocate for themselves and others, learn value of service.

Benefits for An Agency/Organization:

1. Better informed decisions as to youth needs/opinions.
2. Reduction in discipline problems and/or

- programmatic issues, i.e., runaways, absenteeism, etc.
3. Increased support of parents, volunteers, community leaders.
 4. Improved ability to assess staff performance.
 5. New source of "untapped" volunteers (youth) to help, i.e., tutors, mentors, etc.
 6. Better ways to "orient" new enrollees, referrals, to the workings of the program.
 7. Larger pool of future staff and/or board members with leadership skills, increased constituency willing/able to advocate for the agency/organization.

Benefits for the Staff:

1. Increased understanding of the staff's roles/responsibility by the youth. Less disruption/resistance to curriculum, program plans, and rules.
2. New avenues of communication to administration via youth/student leaders.
3. Heightened positive expectations of youth will accelerate learning and/or participation in programmatic pursuits.
4. Increased opportunities for staff to have input (participate) in administrative decision-making due to shift in organizational philosophy.

Benefits for the Community:

1. More youth will feel a part of the community and will be more knowledgeable about crucial issues. With an increased sense of



3-Day National Workshop on

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

June 26, 27, 28

Boston Area

The Workshop will focus on two questions:

- 1) How do you build youth leadership development into a youth program?
- 2) How do you develop a youth decision-making and governance group?

Content will include sessions on:

- Adulthood & the Oppression of Young People
- Leadership Theory
- Cultural & Racial Identity Issues
 - The Art of Promoting Leadership
 - How to Facilitate Successful Meetings
 - The Practice of Youth Decision-Making
 - How to Build Support Groups
 - Dealing With Pitfalls, Mistakes, & Disappointments

Sponsored by YouthBuild U.S.A.

- For Youthworkers, Trainers, and Youth Program Operators from around the country - (not primarily for young people)
- Led by Staff of YouthBuild U.S.A., (including Dorothy Stoneman, John Bell, Kevin Tarpley,) and youth members of the YouthBuild Coalition for \$200 Million and the Youth Policy Committee of YouthBuild Boston

Youth Policy Conference

belonging, feeling valued, youth will become more responsible, thus reducing vandalism, etc.

2. Youth will develop a level of respect for the need/value of citizen involvement, public service volunteerism. Pool of future community leaders will be assured and expanded.

BRAINSTORM IDEAS — Other Things Youth Can Do:

1. Become involved in political and legislative work to change present laws, roles that limit youth participation.
2. Ask local youth commission to help create (fund) a model youth participation project at your school and organization/agency.
3. Create "ad hoc" school board composed of interested youth; formulate plans your group endorses; present to adult board and ask for their feedback to your "board."
4. Seek to establish a youth advisory board to district superintendent's office.
5. Identify exemplary model where students have a say in the school; invite your school, i.e., in-service training, assembly.

AND/OR:

6. See if there are other agencies/organizations similar to your own that have strong youth participation programs. See if your staff would be willing to try the same approach.
7. Ask staff in your agency if there is a policy on youth participation. If not, see if they would help bring about such a policy.
8. Talk to news reporters and see if they would do a feature on youth participation issues.
9. Meet with adult staff in your agency to discuss possibilities of youth being involved:
 - as part of hiring processes
 - in designing evaluation activities
 - as resources in staff training
 - as participants in budgeting plan
 - in other areas of program operations

III. POLICY STATEMENTS:

Participants were provided a non-prioritized list of 26 positive youth policy statements. Statements excerpted from various programs and writings from across the country. Working in small groups, participants ranked the statements in priority order. Below are the top five statements that reflected broad consensus; followed by sample statements that were formulated during the working sessions.

Rank Order:

1. Youth deserve to be treated by adults in ways that convey to the youth that they (youth) are valued and respected as individuals.
2. Youth should be assured the right to develop their individual capacities to achieve their physical, social, emotional and economic well-being.
3. All youth deserve the right to retain and share their unique ethnic heritages.
4. Youth deserve the opportunity to grow up in a relatively safe and nurturing environment.
5. Youth have a right to expect that adults will provide the needed services to ensure each youth's health and safety needs will be met.

Sample Statements Composed In Work Sessions:

- Youth are a resource who should be assured the right to develop their own individual capacities to achieve their physical, social, emotional and economical well-being in a safe and nurturing environment.
- Youth have the right to basic human rights, housing, food, etc.
- All youth deserve to receive and show respect and trust by adults.
- Youth have the right to retain and share their own unique individual nature as well as their unique ethnic heritage.
- All youth deserve the safety and respect that are afforded all members of society.

IV. PLANS FOR NEXT CONFERENCE

A) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YOUTH POLICY CONFERENCE

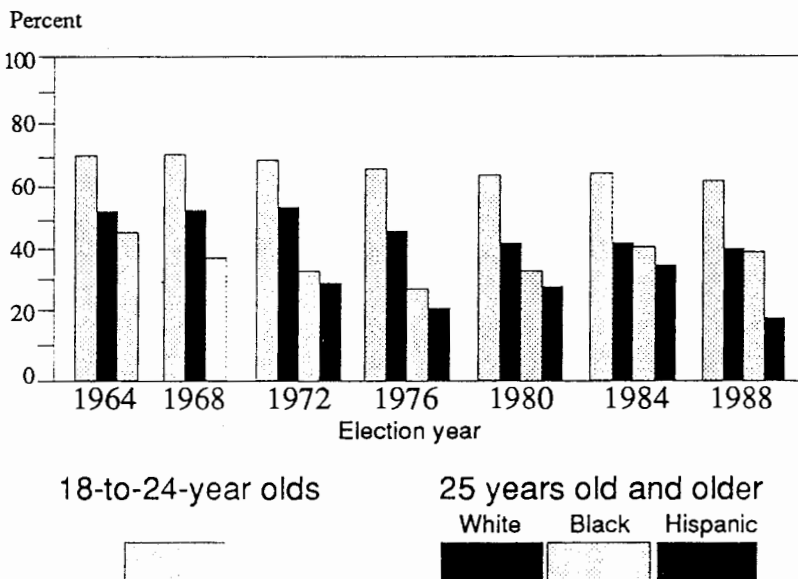
(To be held February or March 1992)

Basic Guidelines

- Ensure that youth and college students are involved in conference planning activities including:
 - format and design
 - content/issues
 - selection of presentations

Voting

Percentage of eligible population voting in presidential elections, by age and race ethnicity: 1964 to 1988



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

The proportion of youths who vote in presidential elections is low and has been declining. About 36 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds voted in 1988 compared with 61 percent of people 25 and over. In addition, the voting rate of youths declined more rapidly than the rate of older adults. In 1988, the proportion of black youths voting was about the same as the rate for white youths, but only 17 percent of eligible Hispanic youths voted.

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- hosting/staging of event
- social events/food service

• Have the conference feature leadership roles by young people:

- workshop presentations
- facilitators
- panelists
- keynote addresses

• Involve a *diverse* array of youth and adults including socio-economic and ethnic.

• Include models and programs from throughout Oregon that exemplify youth as participants in decision-making activities. Programs that:

- are representative of various youth populations
- illustrate how positive policies work
- can be done in other areas

• Provide training for participants that gives practical “how to” information, i.e., how adults can involve more youth by involving youth as partners.

—Seek to involve adult policy-makers who will attend the conference for the purpose of learning more about youth participation issues.

B) SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE PLANNING THE NEXT CONFERENCE:

1. Explain to attendees how the conference was planned and what the purpose is.

2. Have a variety of topics and workshops from which people can choose.

3. Use small group interactive sessions as much as possible.

4. Build in times for social, get acquainted activities, perhaps the evening before conference.

5. Use plenty of visual aids to supplement training.

6. Use conference as arena to give youth recognition and awards for work well done in community.

7. Pick time, length, location that is best suited (agreed upon by youth) to ensure maximum youth participation. Make sure adults commit to fully participating in the events the youth plan.

8. Find ways to keep the costs to youth and college students to a minimum. Get agencies to commit stipends/scholarships to assure cross section of youth participation.

9. Share with attendees the progress that has occurred since last conference. Feature efforts that have come about as a result of the Eugene conference.

C) IN THE INTERIM:

Between now and the next conference it was suggested:

1. A periodic newsletter be sent to those who attended the last conference.

2. A committee of University of Oregon

students establish liaison with a group of interested Oregon State University students to explore ways to help.

3. Interested volunteers begin to do fundraising to develop scholarship funds to ensure youth will be able to attend, monies for lodging, food, etc.

4. More youth groups be contacted and invited to become involved in the planning for the next conference.

5. A planning committee (sponsors) be immediately organized to begin working on recommendations and suggestions.

6. Mini-workshops, seminars, and forums be staged in local settings as a prelude to next year's conference.

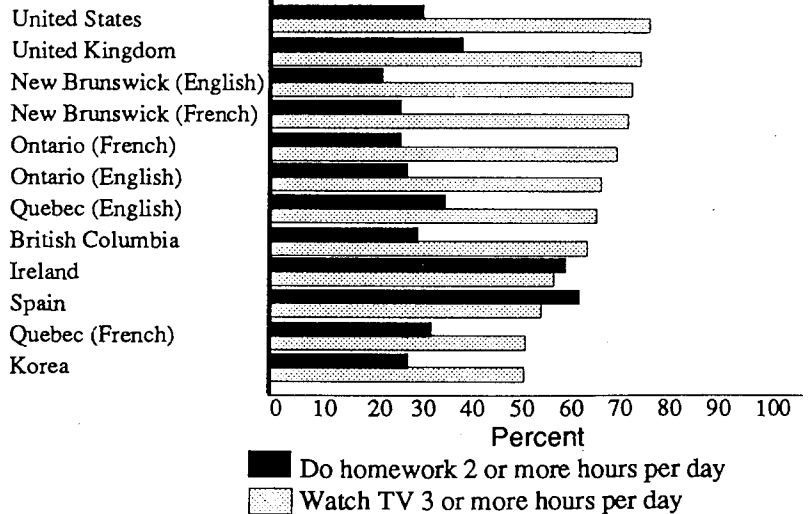
Editor:

Youth Policy Institute wishes to announce that beginning this issue, it is initiating a new series. The 12-month Empowerment Series is conceived as a companion to the recently completed Youth At Risk Series, which featured youth development themes.

We encourage you to read the introductory article by the series editor, Mr. Ron Jenkins. If, after reading the article, you feel you have materials to contribute that will answer the primary questions being raised, please contact Youth Policy Institute.

Homework and Television

Percentage of 13-year-olds spending time doing homework and watching television, in selected countries and provinces: 1988



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

U.S. students spent more time watching television than students in most of the other 12 countries and Canadian provinces participating in a 1988 study. On the other hand, the amount of time spent by U.S. students on homework does not seem to be a reason for their relatively low mathematics and science scores. Students in some countries with relatively high scores reported having lesser amounts of homework, and there was no significant relationship between time spent on homework and test performance.