

**Assessing Service Learning Using Pragmatic Principles of Education:
A Texas Charter School Case Study**

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Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way.

Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* (Translation by Allan Bloom)

Schools are, indeed, one important method of the transmission which forms the dispositions of the immature; but it is only one means, and compared with other agencies, a relatively superficial means.

John Dewey – *Democracy and Education*

Throughout human history, the concept and application of education has been a source of debate, frustration, and conviction. The escalating violence in some of the nation's public schools leaves little doubt that the issue of disaffected youth is one of the most urgent challenges facing our nation in the twenty-first century.¹ These tragedies add an even more critical dimension to school reform, one that calls for the participation of all members of society in restoring the sense of community that has eroded throughout the twentieth century. Echoing the sentiments expressed by John Dewey and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sandra Waddock (1995) contends that the problems affecting schools are “directly and indirectly attributable to failures in society related to deteriorating family structures, changing economic conditions, failing community infrastructures, poverty, classism, and racism” (156). In searching for new ways to ameliorate the social, political, and economic obstacles affecting education, practitioners, educators, and researchers may benefit from exploring the insights and practical theories that evolved during the Progressive movement.

The literature of the Progressives, reflected by William James, Charles S. Pierce, John Dewey, and Jane Addams, provides insight into educational constructs that incorporate real-life experience to help individuals connect with society. Building on the concepts established by Plato, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and his contemporary colleagues, Dewey (1916) realized that education needed to help children integrate into the larger society by offering them the opportunity to interact with the community.² According to the Progressives, an active “community inquiry” helps build social cohesion and increases understanding of natural phenomenon through the testing of ideas.³ In Francis Fukuyama's (1999) opinion, the task of school reform is to recognize that social order and values change as social values shift from an agricultural focus, through the industrial period, to our current age of information (55-80). These changes have brought about certain advantages that offer greater choice, comfort, and technological advancement, but have also caused disruption in our social kinship. The effects of modernization on social relations were a key concern in the Progressive Movement, and Pragmatism, with its emphasis on experiential education, was seen as a vehicle of social change that could increase democratic activity.

This research explores the following question: *If the dynamics of modernization still continue to threaten social kinship, is it possible to reintroduce the theory of pragmatism as a guiding principle in*

education reform? Applying Dewey's vision of a pragmatic school to the current structure of education is challenging, however, since most schools remain isolated from their communities and struggle with issues of overcrowding, drugs, and inequitable distribution of resources (Bean 1998). On the other hand, perhaps pragmatic principle can help assess a schools' community focus. In an effort to create a more supportive environment and explore alternatives to the current public education paradigm, some charter schools, a growing trend in school reform, are implementing new educational models such as service learning that offer students the opportunity to reconnect with their community.

*One Texas charter school, The American Youth Works (AYW), has endorsed service learning as an educational model and will serve as the focus for this single case study.*⁴ This research explores the similarities between service learning and pragmatism using surveys to gather the attitudes of staff and students participating in the school. *The purpose of this research is twofold: First, it assesses the AYW's practice of service learning using pragmatic principles of education; Secondly, it describes AYW's student perceptions of support and motivation using the Search Institute Survey on Developmental Assets.*⁵

In light of the declining moral state of today's schools, many educators feel it is time to rekindle Dewey's concept of schools. In Laurel Tanner's (1997) opinion, there are "lessons yet unlearned about things that deeply concern us - educating children in the problems of living together as a community, nation, and world, and creating a new curriculum that is matched to child growth" (1). Waddock (1995) agrees, stating that "fundamentally, the new assumption, the only possible one given the reality of problems of education...is that education is a shared responsibility" (158). As Leffert et al. (1998) points out, "the role that communities play in adolescent development is a relatively recent line of inquiry that has been driven by awareness of the rising incidence of problem behavior and an interest in the role that contextual factors may play in influencing developmental outcomes" (210).

Service Learning

Bridging the gap between school and the community should be one of the primary goals of school reform. With this in mind, advocates of community service education hope to create a sense of civic responsibility and greater democratic participation among younger populations. Service learning allows individuals to participate in projects that benefit the community while providing a forum for reflection and reciprocity (Brandell and Hinck 1997). Unfortunately, research on service learning has been sparse and inconclusive, and some critics contend that service learning does not meet some educational goals, such as improving academic performance (Alt, 1997). Advocates, on the other hand, emphasize that the value it holds for improving student social skills and self-esteem can offset potential criminal and destructive behavior (Ciaccio 1999). Joseph Ciaccio (1999) argues that the advantage of service learning is that it is "interdisciplinary - a whole experience that is greater than the sum of its parts - in sharp contrast to the fragmented, isolated, single-subject orientation of the learning process in most secondary schools" (64). This

is what Dewey (1938) referred to as the “philosophy of experience,” a teaching method that allows students to develop their particular interests and potentials; in this sense, service learning closely resembles pragmatic principles of education (10).

The key to pragmatic education, according to Beane (1998) is a curriculum that treats students with respect, strives to preserve the individual’s heritage, is relevant to the real world, and encourages inquiry. He emphasizes Dewey’s belief that the work students perform in school should, “involve more making and doing, more building and creating, and less of the deadening drudgery that too many of our curriculum arrangements still demand” (11). According to Martha Naomi Alt (1997) experiential learning includes four key steps. First, the event is experienced or observed. Second, the individual reflects on the experience. Third, concepts are developed to generalize the experience to real-world situations. And fourth, these concepts are tested out in various situations (9). She points out that “service learning was developed partly to produce benefits associated with an experiential-based learning model.” Nevertheless, it differs from this model in two ways: 1) participants volunteer in activities that help meet a community’s needs; and 2) the service is integrated into the curriculum in a way that helps participants reflect on the experience (9).

Some schools help children learn cooperative and community-building skills by having them work on individual and group projects, and then presenting them at monthly community meetings (Nathan 1996, 18-20). Others incorporate children in the maintenance of the school by picking up garbage and cleaning up graffiti (Ciaccio 1999, 64). Service learning is gaining more attention because it attempts to integrate the individual *and* the school into the community. Students participate in the community in a variety of ways that may include gathering information for a particular agency, interviewing community members, and participating in some capacity in solving some of the community’s problems. Schaps and Lewis (1998) believe that these community-bonding strategies take into account that “schools inescapably influence children’s civic development through the content they teach directly. Perhaps more importantly, they influence this civic development through the hidden curriculum of relationships with others, classroom management and discipline, and organizational climate and policies” (24). Although some educators do not necessarily develop their curriculum with the ideal of promoting democratic skills, more and more educators are realizing that greater attention should be given to the role of the individual in society.⁶

Philosophy of Education

Rousseau exposes the quandary of education and the alienation of the intellectual man as he sets forth on his hypothetical mission to facilitate the education of his imaginary pupil, Emile (Rousseau 1979, 33). Resembling a Socratic treatise on childhood education, Rousseau allows Emile to use his senses to explore, and discover for himself, the world around him.⁷ Through this process, he unravels his belief that a child’s natural temperament and biological predisposition helps him develop knowledge naturally and that any state-imposed educational style would stifle this development. Like many children in today’s society,

Rousseau had a fragmented childhood with little formal education to help him develop his intellect. Fortunately, the influence of the Enlightenment Era and Rousseau's natural curiosity and love of reading eventually led him into a career of writing. His writings are poignant in that they provide insights into the paradoxical human struggles between the intellect and primitive impulses, nature and society, idealism and reality, and between the individual, their family, and the state.

Rousseau's views resonate with the political ideals of personal liberty espoused by Hobbes and Locke but delve further into the human psyche by exposing - through his own personal struggles - the process of psychological development and its relation to society (Melchert 1991, 37-39).⁸ This focus is an underlying concept of pragmatic education, which is why Dewey (1958) saw Rousseau as "the real author of the doctrine of the forgotten man and the forgotten masses. His influence was quite as great in literature as in politics" (126).

Dewey agreed with and admired Rousseau, but recognized that education needed some semblance of organization in order to provide the benefits of education to all individuals and society in general. Dewey's progressive view of education attempts to reconcile Plato's almost authoritarian concern for a stable society and Rousseau's liberal, nearly anarchistic, concern for the individual by acknowledging the combined value of nationalistic goals for social efficiency and self-actualization. Dewey maintains that, "the full development of private personality is identified with the aims of humanity as a whole and with the idea of progress" for society (96). Yet he points out that "the conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind" (97).

As school reform continues to evolve in the twenty-first century, it is important to realize that efforts to introduce innovative concepts of education have met with political resistance. Finding a balance between public interest and private interest will be a focal point in restructuring education.⁹ John Abbott believes that "the Knowledge Age" offers new possibilities and that technology encourages a different interaction between education and the economy (Abbott 1997, 15). He sees formal schooling as the "start of a dynamic process through which pupils are progressively weaned from dependence on teachers and institutions," and where "they are given the confidence to manage their own learning, collaborate with colleagues as appropriate, and use a range of resources and learning situations" (15). He joins Dewey, and Rousseau, in advocating a style of education that emphasizes "reflective intelligence" (14).

Pragmatism and Education

More than a century old, the theory of pragmatism is still considered by some contemporary scholars to be of value as an organizing principle for understanding policy implementation and in serving as a link between the theoretical world of academia and the real world of the practitioner (Shields 1996, 393).¹⁰ Some educators are re-examining the utility of pragmatism and emphasizing a more functional approach to education.¹¹ Dewey (1916) argued that schools were an ideal forum for practicing and creating a more

democratic society if guided by the goal to create greater awareness of mutual interest.¹² It made sense to Dewey that if a democratic society desired an educated vote, it would have to establish schools that inspired shared learning or “associated living” (e.g., *collaborative learning*).

Dewey’s ideal school incorporated social learning, in an integrated, interactive format. As society moved from an agrarian system to an industrial system, Dewey anticipated that the economic changes would negatively impact family dynamics and disrupt communities. The new competitive market left parents with less time to spend with their children, and steadily eroded the cooperative spirit prevalent in agrarian communities. Anticipating the potential for alienation and stratification, Dewey argued that a pragmatic education, based on organized, cooperative inquiry, could bridge the gap between the individual and society (e.g., *community education*).

Dewey’s (1958) observation of the educational system as a “patchwork whose pieces do not form a pattern” still describes today’s system of education (88). As an educator, Dewey observed that the education system was disjointed, and segmented in its curriculum, social value, and administration. Dewey noticed that new and old ideas of teaching existed simultaneously without relevance to their impact of social significance (e.g., *testing out new teaching methods and social significance of subject matter*). He realized that the Industrial Revolution set off a series of problems for education that dramatically increased student to teacher ratios (e.g., *class size*) and stifled students’ intellectual and personal growth with a mechanistic curriculum that deprived students of social understanding.

Dewey did not blame teachers - he viewed the educational structure as the problem - but he did feel badly for the students who completed their education and came out feeling disoriented, confused, and insecure about their capabilities and their future (e.g., *practical education*). Dewey believed teachers were fully capable of instilling democratic values by having students participate in school responsibilities. According to Dewey (1916), “absence of participation tends to produce lack of interests and concern on the part of those shut out,” in addition, “habitual exclusion has the effect of reducing a sense of responsibility for what is done and its consequences” (64-65). Dewey saw teachers as the direct link in guiding the process of student self-actualization and felt strongly that they should function in an integrative way in developing curriculum and forming school policies (e.g., *collaborative teaching*). Unfortunately, he believed, the educational system often takes teachers’ power away causing passivity and a lack of responsibility. In Dewey’s opinion, it was important that teachers have a clear understanding of the world they live in, be aware of the issues in society, and be able to sort out the influences of the past. Self-reflection on the part of the teacher is essential to helping students develop self-reflective skills, and is a key element of pragmatic education.

Dewey believed that schools should be designed to reflect a community’s structure where students learn about their roles in the community and receive individualized instruction in a small group setting (Tanner 1997, 166).¹³ The key to implementing such a school structure, according to Dewey, depends on a

curriculum that considers the child's physical and psychological development, is adaptive to accommodate students' evolving needs, and fosters self-motivated learning. In his opinion, the role of the teacher is just as important as that of the parents in guiding the child into adulthood. Ideally, teachers should be experts in their field; able to integrate social reality into the curriculum, and work collaboratively with universities and other educators to develop a cumulative, evolving curriculum (e.g., *teacher expertise and collaboration*).

Some educators today yearn for the kind of school setting Dewey described, but they realize they must contend with social and political forces that resist and constrain the development of progressive education (Beane 1998, 11). Although the current emphasis on testing and accountability reveals a dismal national academic performance (Magnusson 1996), there is little emphasis in assessing schools' relevance to the community. While some educators want to emphasize the fact that children have both unique and universal qualities that correspond to various social, biological, and psychological dimensions, the administrative and political pressures on schools continue to impose a standard for assessing schools solely on the attainment of rote academic skills (Elkind 1997, 241-244). This research takes these "universal qualities" into account by using the developmental framework designed by the Search Institute to assess student attitudes about their own development and desire to learn.

Developmental Assets

The impact of environmental factors on children and adolescence is gathering greater attention as educators learn to deal with an increasing level of violence in schools. Millions of children go to school suffering from the effects of neglect and abuse. As Perry Passaro et al. (1994) points out, "these students usually experience little, if any, success in school because of the psychosocial factors that intrude on their lives"(3). Facilitating the personal development of each student is a great challenge that requires a restructuring of educational goals. In fact, Conrad Farner (1996) insists that reformers should consider shifting the emphasis on traditional, academic basics to more personal developmental basics. The first item on Farner's list for helping at-risk students succeed is "belonging," followed by "mastery," "independence," and "generosity" (27).¹⁴ A key to creating a sense of belonging is having students participate in tasks that are valuable to the school and community such as involving them in fund-raising activities or volunteering at an area nursing home or hospital (28). Schaps and Lewis (1998) claim that, "the higher a student's sense of community, the more likely the student is to show a wide range of positive characteristics, including many which are directly related to the major dimensions of citizenship, such as empathy, concern for others, kindness and helpfulness, skills in conflict resolution, altruistic behavior, and social competence" (25).

In an attempt to synthesize the many psychological and social factors affecting youth today, the Search Institute has developed a framework made up of forty assets as a tool for assessment or policy development. The Search Institute points out that much of the social policy designed to improve the well-being of children and adolescents follows a "problem-focused paradigm" that targets the reduction of

external risks and behaviors (Leffert et al., 1998, 209).¹⁵ Unfortunately, problem-focused programs often have limited long-term success due not only to lack of funding but also to a lack of emotional investment. The Search Institute challenges the problem-focused paradigm and proposes a developmental paradigm that “promotes core elements of human development known to *enhance* health and well-being” (209; italics added).

The goal of the Search Institute is to “mobilize and unite community based efforts to promote core developmental processes, resources, and experiences for children and adolescents” (Leffert, et al., 1998, 209). Their research describes eight developmental categories that serve as a benchmark for identifying positive developmental factors and as an instrument for predicting at-risk behavior. Table 1 describes the eight developmental categories. Each of these categories is further subdivided into specific characteristic, referred to as assets, that define positive benchmarks of support.

Table 1 Developmental categories identified by the Search Institute that contribute to healthy maturation.

Support - Young people need to experience support, care and love from their families and many others. They need organization and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments	Commitment to learning - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
Empowerment - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.	Positive values - Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
Boundaries and expectations - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are “in bounds” or “out of bounds.”	Social competencies - Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
Constructive use of time - Young people need constructive, enhancing opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home.	Positive identity - Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.

Survey results for over 100,000 sixth through twelfth grade students across the United States, indicate that the average young person only has 18 of the 40 assets and only 8% had 31 of the 40 assets (Appendix A). By capturing the attitudes and perceptions of young people with respect to their personal development, the survey serves as a catalyst to help teachers, schools, parents, and students find better ways of communicating and identifying weak areas that contribute to student failure. One of the weakest areas is the sense that youth do not feel valued by their community; therefore, the issue of belonging, with its goal of improving self-esteem and sense of purpose, is a key element in designing community-minded education.¹⁶ Although there is no evidence to indicate that there are any more disaffected children today than there were fifty years ago, one of the main differences seen in today’s youth is the lack of belief that they can make the world a better place. Ultimately, the “lacking sense of belonging” among today’s youth, if continued, breeds a cycle of disaffected, non-participating citizens.¹⁷

Charter School Setting

Charter schools are privately managed but receive both public and private financial support.¹⁸ They offer an alternative to public schools while avoiding the discriminating implications of vouchers. (Nathan 1996,17).¹⁹ Charter schools have gained support from both conservatives and liberals because they provide room for both curriculum and structural innovation, and show promise in meeting minority student needs.²⁰ But as Smith (1998) points out, “charter schools blur the boundary between public and private education,” challenging the balance between the two interests and therefore causing “lively-and often heated and contentious debate” (56). While the legal terms that define charter schools differ from state to state, all states consider charter schools to be private schools that operate under a special contract to educate children in a nonsectarian setting (Molnar 1996, 11).

Those who oppose charter schools worry that schools with a for-profit motive will cut back on services like transportation and special education intended to help disadvantaged populations (Dykgraaf and Lewis 1998, 51-53). The fact that charter school laws are so varied raises concerns about evaluating academic performance and fiscal responsibility (Pipho 1997, 489-490). Even though charter schools are more autonomous, Smith (1998) argues that accountability is localized through parental satisfaction and contractual-obligations (56).²¹ Budde (1996) agrees that school-based management strategies, like charter schools, can improve education, but also recognizes the disruptive potential decentralization can have on funding, curriculum, and school accountability.

“It’s impossible to say what charter schools look like,” says James Traub (1999), “with the educational marketplace jammed with competing designs, the charter school has become the blank slate on which absolutely everything can be drawn and tested”(30).²² Ultimately, Waddock (1995) believes, “mechanisms for change will arguably be neither fully hierarchical, totally market based, nor completely collaborative or coalitional. A combination of strategies will be necessary if schools are to become catalysts and heroes rather than villains and victims” (157).

The American Youth Works Charter School

The American Youth Works (AYW) Charter School was among the first sixteen Texas open-enrollment charter schools initiated in the fall of 1996. Prior to its status as a charter school, AYW was a private educational enterprise that provided GED preparatory education.²³ The school was founded by Richard Halpin (AYW CEO) to offer art education to inmates in jail. The goal of the program was to help undereducated adults become more self-sufficient. AYW is a “private, nonprofit organization providing comprehensive education, employment-training and human services to dropout youth and adults lacking basic skills.”²⁴ The school offers students the opportunity to earn a diploma or a GED, as well as receive certificates of mastery in a variety of Project-Based Education programs.

AYW's Project-Based Education involves students in their community in many ways: building environmentally sound homes in economically deprived neighborhoods, cleaning up public parks, and conducting theatrical productions. Appendix B provides an overview of AYW's project-based education and student population.²⁵ Recently, AYW accomplished its goal of having a centralized location in the heart of downtown Austin, Texas. The construction of its new building allows the school to provide all its services under one roof (in addition to the project-based education, it offers health care, career development, counseling).

Research Method

Case studies encompass a broad scope of inquiry distinct from traditional scientific inquiry. Although case study, descriptive narratives, are seen by some in the scientific community as a prelude to serious scientific research, they are well suited for studying sociological conditions that are either well established and difficult to examine in their active state, or newly formed and needing examination. According to Robert Yin (1994), case studies are often used to better understand social, psychological, or political situations because they "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events - such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries"(3). Case studies are useful because they provide new insights and examine existing sociological theories that have garnered scientific support.²⁶

Yin distinguishes survey research from case study research but maintains that case study is flexible enough to include "more than one strategy" (9). Generally research that focuses on 'how' and 'why' is best suited for case studies alone. On the other hand, research questions that seek answers like 'what,' 'who,' or 'where,' are best suited for surveys. Yin does mention that the two can be combined. Therefore this research uses surveys as part of the case study design, and in doing so, assesses: 1) *how* the practice of service learning compares to pragmatic education principles; 2) *how* students attending AYW compare to students in the Search Institutes' study and 3) *what* do students and alumni think of the school. The goal of this case study is to better understand the practice of service learning and provide a developmental profile of the AYW student population.

Dewey saw schools as the laboratory that explored certain 'working hypotheses' connecting the relationship between psychological development and education (Tanner 1997,15). Using this example, the literature on pragmatism provides a theoretical framework for the working hypothesis guiding the collection of evidence in this study. *The four general principles of pragmatism extracted from the literature to describe pragmatic education include: collaborative teaching, collaborative learning, community education, and practical education.*²⁷ *In addition, the eight developmental areas found by the Search Institute to support healthy maturation are used to assess the presence of internal and external assets recommended for success.*

Table 2 and Table 3 outline the descriptive categories that support the two working hypotheses guiding this research.

Table 2 Summary of Pragmatic Principle

Pragmatic Principles
Collaborative Learning
Collaborative Teaching
Community Education
Practical Education

Table 3 Summary of Internal and External Developmental Assets

Developmental Assets	
Internal Assets	Support
	Empowerment
	Boundaries and Expectation
	Constructive Use of Time
External Assets	Commitment to Learning
	Positive Values
	Social Competencies
	Positive Identity

These descriptive categories are articulated in two working hypotheses that guide the collection of empirical evidence. The first working hypothesis compares service learning to pragmatic education using four sub-hypotheses to examine the extent of collaboration practiced by students and teachers. The second working hypothesis examines student attitudes using three sub-hypothesis to assess the level of internal and external assets perceived by the students.

First Working Hypothesis: The service-learning model offered by the American Youth Works reflects various principles of pragmatic education.

- WH 1a:** AYW practices collaborative learning activities.
- WH 1b:** Teachers participate in collaborative teaching activities.
- WH 1c:** The school promotes community education.
- WH 1d:** The AYW offers practical education.

Second Working Hypothesis: Students at American Youth Works express external and internal assets that indicate school satisfaction and a desire to succeed.

- WH 2a:** Students express external assets that support student success.
- WH 2b:** Students at the AYW express internal assets that indicate feelings of bonding to the school and a desire to succeed.
- WH 2c.** Alumni of the AYW believe that school made a difference in their lives.

Evidence for this single case study provides a comprehensive view of the AYW that is reinforced through various sources such as limited participant observation, formal classroom observation, and surveys of the staff, students, and alumni of AYW.²⁸

Surveys: The Search Institute survey on developmental assets is a tool used for examining a sample of the school’s student population. Developmental assets describe forty variables conducive to healthy maturation. All surveys are constructed so that they provide evidence to test the working hypotheses. The Search Institutes’ survey of developmental assets provides the primary framework

for the anonymous student survey used in this study (some questions were modified to accommodate AYW’s uniqueness).²⁹ The survey is made up of 120 Likert-type questions with more than one question per asset (forty total assets). A Likert scale ranging for “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” provides a 5-point measure for analyzing survey responses. Anonymous surveys are also given to teachers, counselors, and curriculum developers.³⁰ Most questions are Likert-type, while a few are open-ended. In addition, four classrooms were observed and alumni were interviewed over the phone. Time constraints on this research did not allow for pre-test, post-test examination of student and staff perceptions.

Sample Populations: Student participants were sampled based on attendance at time of survey and teacher approval. This judgmental selection of classroom and student populations is appropriate for initial observations and because it is the least disruptive means of studying students in their classroom (Babbie 1995, 225). Most students attending AYW are considered at-risk of dropping out of school, although some choose to attend the school as an alternative to traditional public education. The entire population of teachers, counselors, and curriculum developers were available and able to complete the survey. A mix of Likert-type and open-ended questions were used in staff surveys. Table 4 summarizes the sample populations involved in this study and Table 5 summarizes the classroom observation samples.

Table 4 Summary of the American Youth Works sample populations

Participants	Population	Sample	Survey Type	% of Total Population	Type of Sample
Students	250	85	120, Likert-type questions (source Search Institute)	34	Judgment
Teachers	17	17	26 Likert-type questions and open-ended questions	100	Entire Population
Counselors	10	10	15 Likert-type questions and open-ended questions	100	Entire Population
Curriculum Developers	3	3	23 Likert-type questions and open-ended questions	100	Entire Population

Table 5 Summary of the American Youth Works judgmental classroom observation samples

Classes	Class Description	Number of Students	Total Number of classes	Sample Size	% of classes observed
At AYW		250	39	4	10
Journeys	English/Literature	21	1		
Paper Trails	Journalism/Writing	7	1		
Geo-Math	Geometry/Math	10	1		
Continental Drift	Geography	9	1		

The viewpoints of teachers, students, counselors, and curriculum directors, contribute greatly to the empirical portion of this study. The student questionnaires are more in-depth than the staff questionnaires but the purpose is to present an overview of AYW as seen by those involved in the school. Unlike much of the research in school reform, this study relies heavily on the opinion of the students at the AYW. In conducting their research on school reform, Hernandez - Gantes et al, (1995) point out that “missing in both sides of the debate...is student-level information describing the impact of these reforms on learning experiences and transitional experiences upon graduation from high school” (2).³¹ This research supports the opinion that student input into the problem of school reform is essential.

Results

Data is organized in a tabular format and illustrates the response to the descriptive characteristics of the two working hypotheses. Staff and student perceptions are assessed by the rate and range of *positive* responses. Table 6 summarizes the method for assessing survey responses.³² If the rate rises above 50 percent, the characteristic are considered present. A response that range lies primarily in the 50 percent range is considered fair while a response range that is below 50% is considered poor.³³ A response range that lies primarily in the 60% range is considered good, and one that rises above 70% is considered excellent. Therefore, each descriptive characteristic is defined as either being present or not, and each category is evaluated as having an excellent, good, fair, or poor standing in the organization and student developmental profile. If there is a disparity between sample population responses, teachers are given greater weight because they interact more closely with students.

Table 6 Response assessment values

Response Rate	Assessment Value
Above 70%	Excellent
60%	Good
50%	Fair
Less than 50%	Poor

Sample profile

Fifty daytime students and 35 evening students participated. They ranged in age between 16 and 21 years old. There were 47 males and 36 females that participated in the survey.³⁴ Thirty eight percent live in two-parent homes, 31% live in one-parent homes with the mother as the head of household, and 19% live on their own. The other 10% either alternate between two homes (5%) or live with their father (5%). Forty two percent report participation in the school’s community activities, while 58% said they had not participated in community activities.

Staff surveys were administered during weekly teacher meetings or handed to the staff personally. All of AYW’s teachers, counselors, and curriculum developers participated in the study (17 teachers, 10 counselors, and 3 curriculum developers). Only 2 of the 14 full-time teachers surveyed were certified. Teachers level of experience ranged between 2 months and 22 years with an average of 7 years. The average number of years teaching at AYW was three with a range of 6 month to 10 years. Four classrooms were observed and 53 alumni were called.

Evidence: **First Working Hypothesis:** *The service-learning model offered by the American Youth Works reflects various principles of pragmatic education.*

WH 1a: *AYW practices collaborative learning activities.*

Table 7 lists the overall rate of response for each of the eight characteristics that describe collaborative learning. Most of the participants felt that AYW class size was adequate and conducive to learning. They also agreed that students have the freedom to move around the classroom and seek help from others. Students seemed to feel that teachers were more like peers than authoritarians, although counselors believed this was less evident.³⁵ Even though this descriptive category is assessed as “fair,” it is interesting to note that alumni response (see Appendix C) indicated a high level of satisfaction with teacher support.³⁶ Student satisfaction at school included a broad range of responses (64%- 86%) with 64% of students “strongly disagreeing” to the question “I feel bored at school.” In the area of school responsibilities, students believed the school was providing them with an opportunity to participate while teachers believed this area needed improvement.

Class size was reasonable, with an average of 12 students. Classroom observation indicated genuine attention by the part of teachers, by the fact that they often recognized student’s ideas and referred to them by name.³⁷ Results for the descriptive category of cooperative learning indicated a low-rate of actual volunteer activity (33%) performed by the students at AYW. It is possible that this number is actually high if compared to volunteer behavior in other schools. Even so, teachers indicated that students were not participating enough in the school process, areas of focus included: participation in school responsibilities, self-evaluation, and evaluation of the school.

Table 7 Assessing the evidence from surveys and classroom observation that indicate the presence of collaborative learning features of pragmatic education (WH 1a)

Collaborative Learning Features of Pragmatic Schools	Positive Response Rate	N	Response Above 50%	Assessed Value
Classes are small enough to give individual attention to students	TS: 70%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 94%	83	Yes	
	CD: 100%	4	Yes	
Students are free to move around the room and seek help from others.	TS: 100%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 80%	85	Yes	
	CO: 100%	4	Yes	

Teachers are viewed as a “fellow-worker” as opposed to an “all- powerful ruler.”	SS: 63%	73	Yes	Fair -Good
	CS: 22% (67% said neither)	10	No	
Students enjoy the school.	TS: 76%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 64%- 86%	80	Yes	
	CS: 100%	10	Yes	
Students are given responsibilities as citizens of the school.	TS: 47%	17	No	Fair
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
	CS: 78%	10	Yes	
Students participate in the evaluation of the school.	TS: 41%	17	No	Poor
	CD: 67%	3	Yes	
Students participate in self- evaluation.	TS: 35%	17	No	Poor
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
	CS: 44%	10	No	
Cooperative learning takes place.	TS: 76% - 88%	17	Yes	Excellent
	CD: 67% -100%	3	Yes	
	CS: 78% - 89%	10	Yes	
	SS: 33% - 87%	82	No	

*TS= teacher survey; SS= student survey; CO= class observation; CS= counselor survey;
CD= curriculum developer survey

WH 1b: *Teachers participate in collaborative teaching activities.*

Table 8 describes the general practice of collaboration among teachers and curriculum directors. Most of the open-ended questions indicated that teachers interacted in both casual and structured ways, especially in the area of team-teaching.³⁸ This evidence was mostly gathered by classroom and participant observation. Many of the teachers (77%) felt comfortable in their specialty even though most were not certified. Teachers met frequently to discuss school events and curriculum but they did not work extensively with the curriculum developer.³⁹ Nevertheless, AYW seems to have an adequate level of teacher collaboration.

Table 8 Assessing the evidence from surveys and classroom observation that indicate the presence of collaborative teaching features of pragmatic education (WH 1b)

Collaborative Teaching Features of Pragmatic Schools	Positive Response Rate	N	Response Above 50%	Assessed Value
Teachers are specialists in their subject fields.	TS: 77%	17	Yes	Excellent
Teachers meet frequently to discuss events and curriculum.	TS: 82%	17	Yes	Excellent
Teachers work together with curriculum developers.	TS: 47%	17	No	Poor

WH 1c: *The school promotes community education.*

Table 9 describes student and staff perceptions of community education at AYW. There was a discrepancy between students and staff as to whether AYW helped “students develop habits of cooperation

and service to the community.” One reason for skewed results may be that less than 50% of students participated in actual community activities.

Both teachers and curriculum developers agreed that “cultural and educational institutions...enrich the curriculum.” One area that was deficient was collaboration with local universities in the area of curriculum development. This may be an area in which *both* the school and area universities can work on to increase activity. Local universities do provide extensive support with internships in counseling and as representatives on the school board’s advisory council.

AYW resembles the community in that it is located downtown. Although this environment is not necessarily family-oriented, it does provide exposure to a business and professional atmosphere.

Table 9 Assessing the evidence from surveys and classroom observation that indicate the presence of community education (WH 1c)

Features of Community Education	Positive Response Rate*	N	Response Above 50%	Assessed Value
Students develop habits of cooperation and service to the community.	SS: 42%	84	No	Excellent
	TS: 94%	17	Yes	
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
	CS: 89%	10	Yes	
School incorporates cultural and educational institutions in the community to enrich the curriculum.	TS: 76%	17	Yes	Excellent
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
There is a close relationship with a university.	TS: 18%	17	No	Poor
	CD: minimal	3	No	
School is organized as a social community.	Downtown	1		Good

*TS= teacher survey; SS= student survey; CO= class observation; CS= counselor survey; CD= curriculum developer survey

WH 1d: *The American Youth Works offers practical education.*

Table 10 describes student and staff perception of practical education. The table indicates agreement among participants that AYW offers practical education. All positive responses were above 50% and were assessed as “good” or “excellent.” A number of students reported that teachers were attentive, but teachers believed listening and speaking skills needed more emphasis. Many agreed that AYW is different than traditional public high schools, although counselors felt less so. There is strong indication that AYW considers students’ developmental needs; incorporating social significance in the lesson plans by involving students in real-world activities.

One observation made while conducting classroom observation was the use of a notebook for compiling student productivity.⁴⁰ Teachers opted not to use published notebooks with prescribed exercises, and instead had students work on contemporary topics and collect their work in a notebook. The journalism class used computers to help students learn how to write articles and prepare them for publication in the student newsletter.

Table 10 Assessing the evidence from surveys and classroom observation that indicate the presence of practical education (WH 1d)

Features of Practical Education	Positive Response Rate	N	Response Above 50%	Assessed Value
Speaking and listening skills are encouraged.	TS: 59%	17	Yes	Good
	CD: 67%	3	Yes	
	SS: 81%	85	Yes	
	CO: yes	4	Yes	
AYW is perceived by students and staff as different from other schools.	TS: 100%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 80%	74	Yes	
	CS: 67%	10	Yes	
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
Curriculum considers developmental needs of students.	TS: 71%	17	Yes	Excellent
	CS: 89%	10	Yes	
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
School has a test-and-see (experimental) attitude.	TS: 76%	17	Yes	Excellent
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
Curriculum is continually being developed and modified to serve students' changing needs.	TS: 88%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 91%	75	Yes	
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
Curriculum engages students in solving real world problems. (Project-based)	TS: 83%	17	Yes	Excellent
	SS: 89%	85	Yes	
	CD: 100%	3	Yes	
	CS: 100%	10	Yes	
Social significance of subject matter is brought out in instruction.	CD: yes	3	Yes	Excellent
	CO: yes	4	Yes	

*TS= teacher survey; SS= student survey; CO= class observation; CS= counselor survey; CD= curriculum developer survey

Second Working Hypothesis: *Students at American Youth Works express external and internal assets that indicate school satisfaction and a desire to succeed.*

WH 2a: *Students express external assets that support student success.*

Table 11 describes the range of response to the first twenty developmental assets that reflect external areas of support. Only seven of the first twenty assets received a “good” to “excellent” assessment (35%). Generally, students had more negative responses with regard to caring neighborhoods and other adult relationships than they did for family and school support. This finding is consistent with the Search Institute’s research that points to the lack of support and empowerment youth experience from their community. Even though there were more positive responses in the areas of school and family support, parent involvement in school had mixed input.⁴¹ Generally, students felt safe but expressed a strong deficiency in the area of empowerment, boundaries, and expectations. The evidence indicated that students received positive messages of boundaries and expectations from family and school, but not so much from their community. The school fared well in the area of boundaries and expectation (66% agrees that school provided positive boundaries and expectation) with many students (83%) believing that their negative actions

carried consequences at school. Although constructive use of time had the lowest range of scores, indicating a lack of participation in constructive activities, it seems that many students spend little time watching TV (35% say they saw less than 1 hour of T.V. a day).

Table 11 Assessing the evidence from student surveys that indicate positive external support (WH 2a)

External Asset Category	Asset Definition	Positive Response Range	N	Range Falls Above 50%	Assessed Value
Support	1. Family support	78% - 81%	85	Yes	Excellent
	2. Positive family communication	70%	83	Yes	Excellent
	3. Other adult relationships	28% - 35%	75	No	Poor
	4. Caring neighborhood	24% - 63%	82	No	Fair - Poor
	5. Caring school climate	77% - 89%	74	Yes	Excellent
	6. Parent involvement in school	38% - 74%	84	No	Fair
Empowerment	7. Community values youth	35%	83	No	Poor
	8. Youth as resources	56% - 71%	74	No	Fair - Good
	9. Service to others	20% - 42%	84	No	Fair
	10. Safety	65% - 96%	79	Yes	Good-Excellent
Boundaries and Expectations	11. Family boundaries	31% - 73%	76	No	Fair - Good
	12. School boundaries	66% - 83%	76	Yes	Good - Excellent
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	28%	83	No	Poor
	14. Adult role models	40%	74	No	Poor
	15. Positive peer influence	32%-79%	80	No	Fair - Good
	16. High expectations	81% - 85%	85	Yes	Excellent
Constructive use of time	17. Creative activities	15% participate in activities 3-11 hrs/wk	83	No	Poor
	18. Youth programs	23% - 30%	85	No	Poor
	19. Religious community	19% - 53%	84	No	Poor - Fair
	20. Time at home	35% see 1 hr or less	74		Good

WH 2b: *Students at the American Youth Works express internal assets that indicate feelings of bonding to the school and a desire to succeed.*

Table 12 describes student self-perceptions and internal assets. Twelve of the twenty assets (60%) have a positive-response range above 50%. Commitment to learning indicated a high motivation to learn and engagement in school, but some learning behavior was low (e.g., reading for pleasure). The category assigned to homework is not relevant to AYW because the school does not require homework from their students, therefore results are skewed in this area. It is curious to note, however, that alumni follow up research revealed a handful of students who had actually completed both the GED *and* diploma; this may be a small gain from a statistical point of view, but it also indicates a genuine interest in learning on the part of the students.

In the area of positive values, students reported a high level of positive responses with regard to caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, and responsibility, but reported low positive responses in the area of restraint.⁴² The social competencies category is vague because there was a wide range of responses, however, some areas like resistance skills and interpersonal competence was clearly low. The response rate for positive identity varied in that results indicated that students generally had a fairly good sense of personal power and positive view of their personal future, even though many reported low self-esteem (33%).

Table 12 Assessing the evidence from student surveys that indicate positive internal motivation

Internal Asset Category	Type of Asset	Positive Response Range	N	Range Falls Above 50%	Assessed Value
Commitment to learning	21. Achievement motivation	79% - 91%	76	Yes	Excellent
	22. School engagement	64% - 89%	77	Yes	Good -Excellent
	23. Homework	93% do less than 1hr./wk	84	No	Poor
	24. Bonding to school	81% - 86%	79	Yes	Excellent
	25. Reading for pleasure	7% read more than 11 hrs./wk	84	No	Poor
Positive values	26. Caring	65% - 79%	84	Yes	Good -Excellent
	27. Equality and social justice	68% - 84%	85	Yes	Good -Excellent
	28. Integrity	88% - 92%	85	Yes	Excellent
	29. Honesty	74%	84	Yes	Excellent
	30. Responsibility	90%	85	Yes	Excellent
Social Competencies	31. Restraint	13% - 79%	81	No	Poor - Good
	32. Planning and decision making	17% - 65%	82	No	Poor - Good
	33. Interpersonal competence	17% -30%	83	No	Poor
	34. Cultural competence	67%	85	Yes	Good
	35. Resistance skills	45% - 55%	81	No	Poor - Fair
Positive Identity	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	48% -65%	78	No	Poor - Fair
	37. Personal power	69% - 77%	74	Yes	Good- Excellent
	38. Self-esteem	33% - 86%	82	No	Poor - Good
	39. Sense of purpose	56% - 72%	83	Yes	Fair - Good
	40. Positive view of personal future	70% - 76%	74	Yes	Excellent

WH 2c. *Alumni of the American Youth Works feel that school made a difference in their lives.*

Most alumni had a pleasant experience at AYW; only 2% did not enjoy it (see Appendix C). The most common compliment of the school was the supportive attitude found in teachers and staff. (47%). Most alumni felt no changes were needed or did not have recommendations for change. Some students were affected by the numerous changes taking place at the school (10%) and some felt the school should make a greater effort to control disruptive students (10%).

Many alumni (82%) had not sought additional education after completing their education at AYW although 12% indicated a desire to do so, and 6% had done so and completed their education. Over 70% found the school helped them make the transition from school to work, 23% found it somewhat helpful, and

6% did not find it helpful at all. A large number of alumni were unemployed (37%), two of which were pregnant, and two who were in jail. Three alumni were attending school at the time of the survey.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the AYW service-learning model does reflect most of the pragmatic principles of education assigned in this study. All four sub-hypothesis received positive remarks assessing the characteristic as “good” or “excellent.” With regard to collaborative learning activities (WH1a.), five of the eight descriptive characteristics were assessed as “good” or “excellent.” In the area of collaborative teaching (WH 1b), 2 out of 3 were assessed as “good” or “excellent.” Community education (WH 1c) is strong at the school with all categories assessed as “good” or “excellent.” The school’s curriculum is practical (WH 1d) in that 3 out of 4 descriptive categories were assessed as “good” or “excellent.”

Areas of improvement revealed by the research include: participation of students in school responsibilities, self-evaluation of students’ process, and students’ evaluation of school. Although the school does work with area universities in some capacities, such as helping to train counseling interns, teachers were not inclined or able to work with universities in developing curriculum.

The school was very strong in the kind of support teachers and staff provided students and was consistent in introducing topics of social value in its curriculum. Students and alumni indicated a high level of school satisfaction, although self-motivated learning was low. Most of the participants (teachers, students, counselors, and curriculum developers) believed that AYW helped to foster cooperation and community involvement, yet actual participation in community events among students surveyed was low.

Unlike the first working hypothesis, the evidence for the second working hypothesis was mixed. Many students expressed high levels of family and school support, although community and other social relationships were low.⁴³ The evidence clearly identified that most students did not feel that their abilities were being tapped and utilized by their communities (35%). Nor did many students believe that their natural talents were being explored in extra curricular activities. At the time of this research, the school was in the process of making extra curricular clubs available to students.

In general, with the exception of family and school support, students expressed low external assets. The lack of social cohesion and support expressed by the students was consistent with the Search Institute findings. Although evidence of “learning and bonding” (WH 2b) indicated that students were committed to learning with regard to school and personal goals, they were less inclined to participate in self-motivated learning. Students greatly appreciated positive values like honesty, caring, responsibility, and equality and social justice, but wavered in areas of self-restraint and peaceful conflict resolution. Social competencies were mixed, with cultural competence fairing better than personal responsibility and interpersonal competence. Students generally expressed a positive sense of identity although low marks in self-esteem contradicted some of the findings. Given the stereotype associated with “at-risk” youth (i.e., irresponsible,

dangerous, drop-outs), the students surveyed at AYW indicated positive internal assets, reflected by their dedication to success and learning.⁴⁴ Many have a positive view of their future and feel bonded to their school (81%-86%).

One drawback of the student survey was that it contained questions not necessarily appropriate to some students who did not live at home. Although, questions were modified to accommodate these students, no age bracket was allowed for students over 19 years. Even though these conditions were an oversight in this study's design, the study provides a good overview of the school's service learning efforts.

One pragmatic principle that was discussed in the literature but omitted from the study's design was the practice of self-reflection. The fact that this study incorporated participant surveys *and* classroom observation, however, allowed for the observation of this attribute. In an attempt to stimulate self-reflection, one team of teachers used the concept of a labyrinth as a metaphor for life and combined this exercise with literature, painting, and group discussion. It should also be noted that students who participate in the Casa Verde and E-corp project-based programs participated in "rap" sessions that allowed them to discuss issues relevant in their lives. This anecdotal evidence offers support that AYW incorporates the practice of self-reflection in their model of service learning.

Another advantage of classroom observation was that the relationship between students and teachers was readily apparent. Positive observations include: student's timely arrival and participation in classes that start at 8:00 a.m., courteous and analytical discussions with teachers, and completion of classroom assignments. Even though disruptive behavior was observed, none of the behavior was disrespectful of the teachers.⁴⁵ Direct observation and alumni interviews revealed that some students were serious about attending the school and were bothered by students who were disruptive.

The evidence analyzed in this research suggests that the model of service learning practiced by the AYW closely resembles the principles of pragmatic. Similar to the Search Institute's findings, the students at AYW have limited external, social assets that promote healthy maturation. Still, students do report a high level of support from their school and families (school was slightly higher) and are generally optimistic about their future. In addition to bonding to the school, students surveyed expressed a desire to learn and succeed.

As school reform continues to evolve in the twenty-first century, it is important to realize that both schools and our communities struggle to overcome a sense of alienation and fragmentation that evolved from political and philosophical history. This research confirms the Search Institute's findings that youth do not feel empowered by their community though this particular school, with its emphasis on service learning, does seem to captivate student's interest in learning. In general, these findings indicate that social factors, not necessarily families or schools, contribute to the problem of students at-risk of not fulfilling their educational potential. Clearly, this research indicates that students at this charter school, who are considered to be at-risk, may hold positive views of their future and their ability to learn, but must struggle with the negative messages they receive from the world around them.

Notes

¹At the time of this research, the Columbine High School was the first of twelve school shootings that took place over a period of eighteen months.

²Likewise, this Applied Research Paper (APR) joins other recent ARPs from Southwest Texas State University in their analysis of school issues. These include: Deborah Durham, "School-Based Health Centers: The Attitudes and Perceptions of Austin Independent School District Principals and Area Superintendents," (Spring, 1995); Laura Sheridan, "The Alliance Schools Project: A Case Study of Community-Based School Reform in Austin, Texas," (Spring, 1996).

³Founded by Charles Sanders Pierce in the 1860's, pragmatism emerged as a means of inquiry that was neither "absolute" in its scientific expectations, nor "relative" in its philosophical explanation (Pierce 1968 as cited in Murphy 1990, 11-12). Pierce argued that man had neither introspection or intuitive abilities to understand the "truth" and that "knowledge, truth, and reality" could only be understood through community inquiry. Pierce held that experimentalism, based on community of inquiry, offered the best opportunity for testing natural phenomenon.

⁴ During the course of this research, the charter school changed its name from the American Institute for Learning to American Youth Works.

⁵ This survey was used for an educational purpose only. It allowed me the opportunity to dissect this educational tool and determine a method for analyzing the data.

⁶ Certainly Schaps and Lewis (1998), Beane (1998), and Smith(1998), believe schools hold the potential for improving our democracy, but sadly, Kahne (1996) reports that many of his students seldom think of democracy or citizenship when defining education (4).

⁷According to Bloom (1979), Rousseau wanted to write a philosophical work that rivaled Plato's *Republic*.

⁸ In addition to Melchert's perspective, David Elkind points out that although Locke and Rousseau differed in their opinion on whether a child needed tutelage they "both talked about children in a universal sense and with little attention to the differential progress that might be observed thanks to dissimilarities in ability, race, ethnicity, or culture" (Elkind 1997, 242).

⁹ Along with the other social institutions feeling the pinch of government downsizing and decentralization, schools are forced to consider new paradigms for teaching while resources are declining. Those who favor private efforts for reforming schools maintain that government bureaucracies have been unresponsive and cumbersome and tend to over-regulate schools (Molar 1996, 9-15).

¹⁰ Shields (1998) incorporated the theory of pragmatism in education by using a "notebook method" for teaching research methods in higher education (204). This method utilizes the practice of "*Read-Write-Think-Connect to Experience*" as an organizing principle for conducting graduate-level research (205). The active note-taking process helps students connect theory and practice.

¹¹ Romeo Eldridge Phillips, "John Dewey Visits the Ghetto," *Journal of Negro Education* 47, no.4 (1978); Edward F. Potthoff, "Functionalism in General Education," *Journal of Higher Education* 14, no. 3 (March 1943): 148 -152. Both authors advocate a return to practical, as opposed to, subject driven education in order to foster more democratic values.

¹² Eric Schaps and Catherine Lewis (1998) suggest there are three qualities of citizenship that contribute to competency: 1) deep regard for self and others; 2) a commitment to core values of justice and caring; and 3) consideration and civility in their interactions with others.

¹³ One of the key principles guiding Hull House, established by Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, was the belief that relationships must be created that are "consistent and ongoing" in order to lay the foundation for democratic participation and stimulate learning (Schugurensky n.d., 18). Intergenerational learning and one-on-one interaction with students were two concepts practiced at Hull House to create a sense of community. These two concepts seem far removed from the current school reform debate, since students are segregated by age and schools remain overcrowded.

¹⁴ Although the term does carry some negative connotation for youth who are not able to complete traditional high school, the term refers to the various social and personal obstacles that threaten a young person's chances for completing school. The term does not mean that a youth is intrinsically unable to learn.

¹⁵ The Search Institute is based in Minneapolis and was founded by Dr. Merton P. Strommen in 1958. It originally focused research on youth within a religious setting but expanded to include a nonsectarian focus on the healthy development of young people.

¹⁶ Efforts to promote programs that target self-esteem are hampered by the fact that there is no indication that they improve academic achievement. Self-esteem is a "slippery" concept to define, according to Kahne (1996), because it is, "likely to be acknowledged, promoted, even cherished, but rarely defined, monitored, or used to guide educational policy" (18).

¹⁷ Abraham Maslow's theory of education emphasizes that people follow an intrinsic motivation to learn in order to reach the highest level of development - self-actualization. This level of development, however, could only come after individuals have their basic 'hierarchy of needs' met (as cited in Nemiroff 1992, 34). This hierarchy begins with peoples' need for biological survival, and moves up to security, belonging, dignity, love, respect, and self-esteem.

¹⁸ In 1991, the first charter school legislation was passed in Minneapolis, to allow privately managed, non-sectarian schools to receive public funds for education. Since then, charter schools have gained so much approval, Budde (1996) projects that "by the year 2003, there may be as many as 5,000 charter schools enrolling 1.5 million students and supported by a tax revenue approaching \$3 million!" (73).

¹⁹ The concept of vouchers originated with Milton Friedman, in the 1950s, as a market-driven approach to school reform that would introduce competition among schools by providing parents with vouchers to pay the tuition for the school of their choice (Latham 1998, 82-83). Those who defend vouchers believe the competition will weed out ineffective schools and forge a greater alliance between teacher, parents, and students. Vouchers, however, would not guarantee all students the same opportunity to attend any particular school since schools would be private and able to set tuition fees and entry criteria.

²⁰ Charter schools serve a larger percentage of minority (76.2% to 53.0%) and at risk students (68% to 39.0%) than do Texas public schools statewide exploding the 'white flight' and 'public money for private schools' myths. Seven of the charters are dropout recovery schools bringing over 1200 children back into public education, and doing so with an attendance rate of over 80%, while the overall attendance rate for charters exceeds 90%.

²¹ Texas charter schools must be fiscally and academically accountable to the Texas State Board of Education, and are evaluated by the Texas Education Agency.

²² Nathan (1996) notes that since start-up costs are high for charter schools, some teachers and parents have refurbished downtown buildings and warehouses donated by the city in order to lower costs. Inadvertently, this obstacle has placed some charter schools exactly where Dewey suggested - right in the center of the community.

²³ Prior to being called AYW, the school was called Creative Rapid Learning established in 1978. Currently the school is undergoing another name change from "American Institute for Learning" to "American Youth Works."

²⁴ Information provided by the AYW's information pamphlet.

²⁵ Information provided by AYW.

²⁶ Early community theorist, like Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber proposed typological approaches for examining community entities, but it was not until Robert and Helen Lynds' study of *Middletown* (1929), that researchers took the value of holistic single case studies more seriously (Lyon 1987, 9-10). The Lynds' research moved beyond the methodology of ideal types to recognize the elusive variable of community power.

²⁷ Laurel Tanner, *Dewey's Laboratory School: Lessons for Today*. Teachers College, New York, 2997.

²⁸This research does not consider the financial and administrative components of the AYW.

²⁹ Approximately 25 of the original Search Institute questions were omitted. Listing these would be difficult since some of the original questions were moved around during the formatting of the revised survey.

³⁰ Only one curriculum director was employed by the school, but since the Principal and Education and Intake manager participate in the process of curriculum develop, they filled out the same survey.

³¹ Although objective measurement of self-reported data is difficult, the Search Institute has found consistent pattern of responses with the extensive data collected over time.

³² An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was not possible because the number of participants in each group was too varied; the number of cases per category differed too much for comparison (DiLeonardi and Curtis 1992, 132).

³³ This research modified the Search Institute's survey so it was not possible to recreate their method of analysis.

³⁴ This research failed to include a "20" and "21- year" bracket which would have been useful in identifying those student who live alone or out of the home.

³⁵ Questions for this category were poorly written and did not seem to capture the relation between students and teachers.

³⁶ This response is based on an open-ended question. Teacher satisfaction was the most often sighted response.

³⁷ Teacher recognizes student idea, or refers to by name, nine times per class.

³⁸ All four of the classrooms observed were taught with two teachers.

³⁹ One problem affecting this study is that the sample of curriculum developers was too small and not necessarily relevant. Only one curriculum developer works full-time to synthesize the curriculum of the entire school. Teachers develop their own curriculum and the curriculum developer documents it for the school. The other two curriculum developers are mostly involved in administrative duties and, therefore, questions were not really appropriate to their job assignment.

⁴⁰ Three of the four classrooms used a "notebook method" of teaching similar to the one espoused by Shields (1998).

⁴¹ Approximately 20% of the students lived alone and therefore did not respond to some family-oriented questions.

⁴² Thirty two percent of students volunteer 3-11 hours per week.

⁴³ The length of the student survey was a concern in this study, however, the high completion rate (83%) indicated that students were interested in the survey questions. Debriefing sessions following the surveys found that students were interested in the topic of school reform and eager to share their ideas.

⁴⁴ AYW has been the subject of many local newspaper articles, commending the school for its efforts and curriculum, but students are quick to correct authors that misrepresent their abilities based on stereotypic biases.

⁴⁵ The presence of an observer may affect these observations.

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APPENDIX A: Search Institute Findings

Table A.1 Percentages of young people experiencing the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets. Almost 100,000 sixth through twelfth youth, from 213 towns and cities around the United States, were surveyed.

External Assets	% say Assets present	Internal Assets	% say Assets present
Support		Commitment to Learning	
Family support	64%	Achievement motivation	63%
Positive family communication	26%	School engagement	64%
Other adult relationships	41%	Homework	45%
Caring neighborhood	40%	Bonding to school	51%
Caring School Climate	24%	Reading for pleasure	24%
Parent involvement in school	29%		
Empowerment		Positive Values	
Community values youth	20%	Caring	43%
Youth serves as a resource	24%	Equality and social justice	45%
Service to others	50%	Integrity	63%
Safety	55%	Honesty	63%
		Responsibility	60%
		Restraint	42%
Expectations		Social Competencies	
Family boundaries	43%	Planning and decision making	29%
School boundaries	46%	Interpersonal competence	43%
Neighborhood boundaries	46%	Cultural competency	35%
Adult role model	27%	Resistance skills	37%
Positive peer influence	60%	Peaceful conflict resolution	44%
High expectations	41%		
Constructive Use of Time		Positive Identity	
Creative activities	19%	Personal power	45%
Youth programs	59%	Self-esteem	47%
Religious community	64%	Sense of purpose	55%
Time at home	50%	Positive view of personal future	70%

APPENDIX B: School Profile

Figure B.1 Summary of American Youth Works project-based education

<p>Casa Verde Builders: Providing youth and opportunity to learn construction skills while building energy-efficient homes</p>
<p>E-Corps: Teaching youth about conservation while preserving our precious natural heritage.</p>
<p>Cultural Warriors: Applying theater arts to highlight the challenges to at-risk youths in presentations to schools, groups, and the community.</p>
<p>PC Training: Preparing students with word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and desktop publishing for PC Windows in a hands-on learning lab.</p>
<p>Technology/Multimedia: Students will explore web page design, desktop publishing and video production.</p>
<p>Health: Preparing students for careers in health, while providing health services for the student community.</p>
<p>Career Planning: In the Career Resource Center, students develop real-world tools to aid their transition to employment.</p>

Table B.1 Demographics for the American Youth Works 1999-2000 school year

Gender	Ethnicity	Social Profile
46% Female	13% African American	76% Low-income
54% Male	57% Hispanic	15% On probation or parole
	28% White	13% Parenting Teens
	2% Other	
Total of 250 students enrolled for the year		

APPENDIX C: Alumni Response

Table C.1 Assessing the evidence from alumni telephone interviews that describe alumni status and attitudes about school

#	Survey Question	N	Response
3	Have you sought additional education or vocational training after graduating from AYW? If yes, where?	51	82% = No 12% = Plan to go 6% = attended and completed
7	On a scale of 1 to 3 (1= not helpful, 2= somewhat helpful, 3= very helpful) do you feel AYW helped you make the transition from school to work?	51	71% = very helpful 23% = somewhat helpful 6% = not helpful
8	What did you like most about AYW?	51	47% = supportive teachers, staff 14% = combination of all 12% = atmosphere 12% = flexible, self-paced 8% = curriculum, project-base 4% = student-teacher ratio, class size 2% = working with other people 2% = did not like it
9	What do you feel AYW should improve on?	51	39% = no changes needed 12% = no suggestions made 10% = sense changes taking place 10% = disruptive students 8% = other 6% = improve school aesthetics, size 4% = more staff support 4% = expand project-based curriculum 2% = improve school efficiency 2% = did not like it 2% = class size is too big 2% = provide day care