Module 9: Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts - Fact Sheet

Research Overview

There are several important environments in youth's lives, and three of the most essential ones are family, school, and community (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Family, school, and community integration represents the relationships and collaborations between family members, school personnel, and staff of community-based organizations such as libraries, universities, religious groups, and social service agencies (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Due to a lack of resources, skills, or capacities, it is sometimes difficult for a single party to achieve the best results of positive youth development on its own; therefore, collaborations between different settings provide greater resources and maximize positive outcomes (Griffin & Steen, 2010; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014).

The theoretical foundations of family, school, and community integration are evident in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000). The ecological systems theory suggests that the healthy development of youth is determined not only by settings that directly impact the youth (e.g., family, school, community), but also

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by the interactions between different settings (i.e., the mesosystem). The stronger the links among settings, the better development outcomes youth can potentially achieve (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The social capital theory indicates that collaboration among family, school, and community is a great way to increase youth's social capital, which is the set of resources available to youth due to positive social relationships and strong social connections (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

Benefits of Integrating Family, School, and Community Efforts

The integration of family, school, and community efforts is associated with positive youth development outcomes (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Nitzberg, 2005; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). The more support youth have, the greater the opportunities for positive development. For example, parental involvement in youth's education can predict higher academic performance, reduce school dropout rates, and improve youth's emotional functioning (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Wilder, 2014). In addition, youth whose parents are actively involved in the community show good academic performance and healthy peer relationships because they feel connected with their parents and a sense of belonging with the community, thereby improving their social capital (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015). Finally, positive youth outcomes can also be achieved through collaborations between schools and communities. For instance, mental health practitioners who serve youth may consult with teachers and other school staff to design and implement treatment plans that are most suitable for youth (Clemens, 2007).

Youth Programs' Role in Family, School, and Community Integration

Since youth programs are usually imbedded in the context of a larger community and have close connections with various systems (families, schools, religious organizations, etc.), they can serve as

catalysts for bringing parents, teachers, community members and youth together to promote positive youth development and address issues relevant to the whole community (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001; Jeynes, 2012; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014).

Implications for Youth Programs

The following approaches should be used by youth programs in order to promote family, school, and community integration:

- Identify key stakeholders (e.g., youth, families, schools, community institutions) and gather information regarding each party's interests and needs
- Provide opportunities for important environments of youth's lives to collaborate, reach synergy on their goals, and collaborate to improve youth's well-being
- Build partnerships with key youth settings, invite all parties to engage, and create a welcoming atmosphere
- Reach out to potential partners with specific offers of assistance
- Manage challenges as they arise and change approaches when needed
- Build out from success by sharing positive outcomes with stakeholders and encouraging continued efforts

Youth workers should consider taking the following steps in order to facilitate family, school, and community integration:

- Receive training to gain skills and tools necessary to facilitate family, school, and community integration
- Learn about important environments in youth's lives as well as resources for positive youth development
- Be skilled in working with not only youth but also families, schools, and community agencies
- Stay sensitive to families' cultural values and provide opportunities for all families to be involved
- Build positive relationships with youth so that youth feel secure and supported
- Provide information on additional resources to youth, such as different kinds of programs, school clubs, summer camps, and recreational and educational community events

For a complete discussion of this topic and a full list of references, see the topic paper by the same name.

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