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Taking a Societal Sector Perspective on Youth Learning and Development



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A Societal Sector Approach

Despite their common focus on young people, youth-serving institutions—schools, health and welfare services, juvenile justice agencies—typically are disconnected from, and uninformed about, each other's programs, policies, and approaches.

Youth's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development does not divide neatly into institutional domains. The institutional resources available to youth are generally not integrated, resulting in a set of institutional silos that each work to support different areas of development.

New cross-sector tools are necessary to support cross-institutional collaboration for youth.

DBIR and the Societal Sector

Working within a societal sector framework presents particular conceptual, political and technical challenges. Research and implementation adopting a *sector* as the relevant unit of action encounter problems of a substantively different stripe than do research or recommendations located within a single institutional space.

A societal sector framework connects with *design based implementation research* along several dimensions:

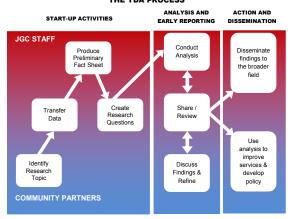
- Engagement of multiple stakeholders and active attention to their points of view, including reliance upon multiple disciplines
- 2. Iterative processes of analysis and response
- 3. An intentional focus on capacity building among partners
- A design/build model of research, implementation and deepening understanding

The Youth Data Archive

The **Youth Data Archive** (YDA) is an integrated longitudinal data system comprised of administrative records from community agencies and organizations linked together at the level of individual youth.

- Creates a virtual youth sector by linking across agencies to understand opportunities and program participation for the community's youth
- Promotes an actual youth sector by focusing on relevant questions across agencies and enabling partners to understand and act on resulting analyses

THE YDA PROCESS



Strengthening the Youth Sector

The YDA has strengthened the broader youth sector through:

- Focusing on cross-agency framing, analysis, and response
- Providing opportunities for capacity building to digest findings and promote action steps
- Working with partners to frame the next set of research questions

Focus on Actionable Research

Action is defined broadly as:

- Change in policy, practice, or programming
- Use of research to support continuation of existing efforts
- Intention to use research to discuss making changes

Research in Action

- In San Francisco, findings from analyses of math and English remediation in community college led to modification of the community college placement process to allow more students to place into courses for which they would accrue college credit.
- In Redwood City, an analysis of chronic absenteeism led partners from school districts and other city and county agencies to collaboratively consider responses to the underlying student and family barriers that affect student absences.

Lessons for Supporting a Youth-Serving Sector

Motivation matters. A problem salient to all stakeholders spurs collaboration, learning and joint action.

A situated lens focuses action. Local contexts embed practices, institutional histories and relationships, and political and economic realities that are situated in existing arrangements.

Process is product. A collaborative stance within a youth sector requires a fundamental shift in perspective from one defined by specific institutional goals to one that focuses on broad, cross-institutional goals of youth development.

Trust and credibility build over time. Through its emphasis on relationship building, iterative analysis and reporting, and sharing findings, the YDA team becomes embedded in the collaboration.

Knowledge production is interactive and collaborative.

Collaborations like the YDA see knowledge as changing, changeable, and sometimes inconsistent—the result of a locally adaptive process.

Capacity develops collectively. Collective capacity builders take the system as the unit of action, and view the processes of making and sustaining change in terms of relationships, joint action and investment.

