**PCC 2008 Abstract Submission**

Title: Re-visioning Schools as Educational Communities for Positive Youth Development

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Schools have historically been sites of divisioning; dualistically positioned. Schools for the most part, exist in isolation from the communities they serve. Fences are a symbolic representation of this separation. The wearing of uniforms symbolises the separation of teachers from students. The term 'student' symbolises the divisioning of the young person as a whole being from the young person solely as a learner.   Schools historically have divisioned power. Teachers make decisions and students follow. Teachers are authority figures in positions of power over students. Youth development as a paradigm challenges historical dualism in schools. Youth development promotes connectivity between family, schools, communities and young people. Youth development recognises the whole person and is strengths based in orientation. Youth development promotes youth participation and shared decision making and agency.

While the field of youth development has grown significantly over recent years, Peebles-Wilkins (2004) notes that, "there has been little attention given to the school system…as a domain for youth development" (p.3).  While other authors have proposed that youth development can exist in schools (Ministry of Youth Development, 2005) I would suggest here that it would be of greater value to re-vision schools as sites *of* youth development. To apply a model of youth development over a model of traditional schooling is likely to lead to philosophical and pedagogical tensions and inconsistencies, and epistemological challenges.

So what then is youth development? There is no one, unified definition of youth development and the models of practice also vary.  This may in part be due to the fluidity and responsiveness of youth development to the rapidly

changing society in which the concepts are emergent. Delgado, (2002) in a literature review of youth development notes that while youth development is not easily, or perhaps able to be defined, it may be viewed as a paradigm with overarching, unifying themes:

1) an inherent belief in the self-worth of youth, regardless of their competencies – cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical
2) stress on the importance of cultural heritage
3) the importance of youth exercising control over their lives
4) a holistic perspective of assets (strengths) and needs – cognitive, emotional, physical, moral, social, and spiritual
5) belief in the possession by youth of innate capacities
6) an understanding that it takes a whole community to carry out youth development and that no one institution has the total responsibility or ability to do so
7) long-range commitment (p.47).

In addition to the 7 themes listed here, Delgado stresses that where youth development is present interventions will be implemented that challenge systemic level "toxic" policies and practices which seek to undermine the aforementioned themes. Such intervention may range from "advocacy to consciousness raising and political mobilisation" (p. 48).

It may be useful, at this point, to consider the extent to which traditional models of schooling genuinely implement themes of youth development. There is certainly a long-range commitment present as young people are required to attend schools for a determined length of time and it may be argued that there is within schools an understanding that youth development occurs across settings.  Upon reflection of these themes, it could be argued that perhaps the greatest challenges for schools in re-visioning to become sites of youth development are: (1) the acknowledgement that youth are to exercise control over their own lives; (2) the assurance that holistic strengths and needs are assessed and appropriate interventions implemented; and (3) the importance of cultural heritage is stressed.

When considering the re-visioning of schools, these issues may be further explored through an examination of the relevance of the New Zealand Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA) (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The YDSA (Ministry of Youth Development, 2005) describes youth development as being

> …about young people growing up and developing the skills and attitudes they need, both now and in the future, to feel positive and comfortable with their own identity, and believe they have choices about their future. It is also about young people developing ways for increasing control over what happens to them and around them. They need to feel they are contributing something of value to society and to their family friends and community. They also need to feel connected to society as a whole (p.4).

The YDSA (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002) is described through six key principles that include the notions that youth development: (1) is shaped by the big picture; (2) is about young people being connected; (3) is based on a consistent strengths-based approach; (4) happens through quality relationships; (5) is triggered when young people fully participate; and (6) needs good information.

The idea that youth development needs good information requires that practices are evidence based. When considering the synergy between youth development and schooling practices, what is required is a greater cross-disciplinary understanding of research; integrating theory to practice. Throughout this paper attempts are made to highlight such potential synergies and where present, highlight the differences also.

Shaping thinking by considering the big picture ultimately centres around core beliefs and values about macro-level phenomena.  It is of

course necessary to acknowledge that all countries now are affected by globalisation as a movement that has evolved in part out of technological increases and late capitalism and neo-liberal practices. The way in which global economic and political factors impact upon each country requires that youth development as a paradigm needs to include critical thinking and action by all involved (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). To act or not to act; to accept or challenge the status quo: both of these are political actions. As youth development is shaped by the big picture, it may also be said that youth development has the power to shape the big picture.  Accepting the status quo of macro–systems including social, cultural, economic and political practices would mean that youth development is essential chameleon; reflecting the climate in which it exists. Challenging status quo, big picture practices presents many opportunities for change. The starting point is for teachers and other youth development practitioners to have sociological understandings that shift beyond pedagogical practices.

Key principles (2) and (4) explore connections and relationships. Connection as a key principle indicates that young people benefit from connecting in several different positive environments where they feel comfortable, valued and engaged (McLaren, 2002). Understanding of the worlds in which young people may connect was most clearly articulated through the work of Bronfenbrenner (1986). Quality relationships is another key principle, essential for youth development. New Zealand students when commenting on quality relationships with their teachers outlined 4 qualities that they most appreciated: wisdom, aroha (genuine concern, supportive and open), talent (in teaching). The students also valued mostly those teachers who took the time to get to know them (Ministry of Youth Development, 2005). These findings are consistent with other research that emphasises the necessity of being able to establish quality relationships as integral to a young persons' development (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; McGee & Penlington, 2001).

Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach that seeks to increase resiliency in the lives of young people through building on and developing assets that young people have (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 1997Werner & Smith, 1989). Many teachers in schools have historically focused more on a deficit approach, particularly when students are struggling to conform and to achieve (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; Bruner, 1996; Flude, 1974). A strengths-based approach challenges deficit thinking and presents opportunities to develop pedagogical and school wide practices that seek instead to embrace "a holistic perspective of assets (strengths) and needs – cognitive, emotional, physical, moral, social, and spiritual" (Delgado, 2002, p.48). A recent document released for discussion within New Zealand proposes that all young people in schools are to have an Individual Education Plan to assist with their development (Schools Plus, 2008). Such a plan that is primarily holistic and strengths-based may contribute significantly to a young persons' development. Teachers need to have a greater understanding of strengths-based literature and be able to apply this to their own practice. I.e. what are resiliency and protective factors (both internal and external) and how might these be developed within a schooling context; within a youth development educational community?

The idea that youth development is triggered when young people fully participate and exercise control over their own lives is a key principle of the YDSA (2002) and an underlying theme identified by Delgado (2002). Historically schools have been places of power imbalances that are oppositional to the predominant youth development ideology. As a craft however, many of those working within the field of youth development have also struggled to re-vision their own thinking around this particular principle (Flowers 1998; Cargo et al. 2003). There seems to be a disparity between rhetoric and actual practice as practitioners struggle with the rationale and the implementation which requires a significant shift in power sharing. Drawing on relevant literature the YDSA provides useful explanations of what youth participation looks like in practice and concludes that "a participatory approach requires an intentional process that progressively grows young peoples' capacity to contribute" (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002, p. 23).

Examples: Te Ora Hou and Steinberg and Allen

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