

# “Making it **happen...**”

*Strengthening youth development in schools*



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# “Making it happen...”

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*Strengthening youth development in schools*

Ministry of Youth Development  
May 2005



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Ministry of Youth Development acknowledges the work of all staff members who contributed to the production of this resource.

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**MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

*Administered by the Ministry of Social Development*



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## *Introduction*

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We can all contribute to the positive development of young people by understanding the things that are important to them, providing a wide range of role models, encouraging them to meet challenges, showing them we care and by creating opportunities for them to contribute.

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The years from age 12 to 24 are critical for the development of young people as they move from childhood to adulthood and test society's values and norms along the way. Learning by doing and being involved is part of young people's contribution to changes in society. Education plays a large part in the lives of these young people; the way they view themselves and approach new challenges is shaped by the way schools assist their growth.

Youth development is not static and we as adults are still learning how best to enhance the process. By recording and evaluating how and why youth development processes work best in New Zealand we can all promote better practices.

This resource outlines some ideas about how the concepts of youth development might be used, but the list is by no means conclusive. It is hoped the examples might stimulate further thinking about how you might implement the principles

differently. You are encouraged to try these ideas or something new, evaluate them, and refine them to best suit the needs, desires and realities of your young people.



The thinking and ideas outlined in this resource may be challenging when considered alongside the myriad of other activities in which teachers and schools are involved. On the other hand, you might find them useful affirmations of things you already do.



## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

### THROUGH EDUCATIONAL

# opportunities

Youth development is 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 their 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.

The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (YDSA) [Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002] is a powerful document that describes youth development with respect to six key principles. Each of these principles is a component of good youth development practice.

The principles of the YDSA provide a useful vehicle to implement a number of concepts recognised in major educational strategic documents. These strategic publications (see below) endorse the youth development approach as one that is consistent with the future of education.



Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa	Education Priorities for New Zealand	Schooling Strategy/ Making a bigger difference	Best Evidence Synthesis	Health Promoting and Mentally Healthy Schools
<b>Principle 1.</b> Youth development is shaped by the “big picture”	Developing a collaborative and responsive education network		The complexity of community and family influences on children’s achievement in NZ	
<b>Principle 2.</b> Youth development is about young people being connected	Strengthening family and community involvement	Strengthen the involvement and engagement of family/ whānau and communities	The complexity of community and family influences on children’s achievement in NZ	Enhance the links between schools and their communities
<b>Principle 3.</b> Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach	We need to recognise and build on our strengths, while acknowledging and working on the areas where we can do better			Positive effort and achievement is acknowledged
<b>Principle 4.</b> Youth development happens through quality relationships	Focusing on quality teaching	Build teacher quality	Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling	Communication is respectful. Attitudes are caring and nurturing
<b>Principle 5.</b> Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate		Enhance student engagement and motivation		
<b>Principle 6.</b> Youth development needs good information	Promoting the knowledge base of the sector	A strengthened knowledge and evidence base that is applied to all our planning, practice and evaluation	The best evidence synthesis reports are part of the ongoing investment to strengthen the evidence base that informs education policy and practice	Help schools evaluate the range of health related activities they are currently involved in, identifying areas of need and setting goals for future action



## Using this resource



The resource explores each of the principles of the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (YDSA) in a similar format.

Each of the six principles are titled and introduced with respect to how they work and the contribution they make to the development of young people. The principles themselves are at a conceptual level and therefore it is important to link them with real life.

A plain English description of the principle is included in bold in the middle of the page. This provides an easy reference for readers to quickly understand the intention of the principle.

Each section is completed by providing a range of examples where the principle can be used within an educational context. These examples also seek to demonstrate a range of different levels on which the principle can be applied.

The examples provided in this resource document should be considered illustrative rather than official. Neither the activity nor the level it is introduced at should be considered prohibitive of other approaches.

### SCHOOL WORKLOAD

It is appreciated that schools are busy places and that curriculum and assessment activities take a considerable amount of time. Youth development approaches should not be considered additional workload, but rather as strategies for more effective teaching and relationships with students.

Many teaching practices currently used within education demonstrate the YDSA principles. The YDSA provides a useful framework, however, to evaluate which principles are receiving attention and which ones are currently underused within the school. Being conscious of, and deliberately applying multiple principles can lead to better results for young people both academically and behaviourally.

Title	
intro	intro
intro	intro
Plain English	
context	context
context	context

example

example

example

example

### FLEXIBLE SCHOOLS

Schools succeed by being responsive to the desires of the community, the needs of students and the practicalities of the education environment. Each school develops its own culture and management processes. It is possible that some schools will pursue a whole school approach to youth development while other schools may utilise the principal or senior management team to drive youth development opportunities. In other schools, boards of trustees may find it useful to increase engagement.

### YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN RESOURCE DESIGN

As this document may change the way young people interact with the education environment, their views and perspectives have been used to shape this resource. The section entitled *Walking the talk* outlines how a youth development approach has been taken in the conceptualisation and design of this resource.

The partnership between young people and educationalists has enabled this resource to provide guidance, examples and stimulate thinking on how the education sector can lead the implementation of youth development approaches.

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PRINCIPLE

01

## *Big picture thinking*

The idea that youth development is shaped by the “big picture”, recognises there are a number of influences on the environment that young people live in.

The society that young people live in today is very different from the one we grew up in. Technology and media have increased the exposure to the ideas and fashions of a global community, and an increasingly diverse New Zealand population. Both ethnicity and youth-based subcultures affect the way young people choose to participate in areas that challenge them. They also affect

the levels of comfort young people experience in challenging situations.

The economic and financial circumstances facing young people may play a significant role in both the opportunities that are open to them and the energies they are likely to put into education. From time to time, behavioural and scholastic performance may be related as much to these external influences as they are to events within schools or relationships in families. *Whare Tapa Wha*, the ecological model of Māori wellbeing and development, also appreciates a big picture approach.

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**The Big Picture means there are things outside of school that affect what happens in school. By knowing the whole story, people can find help and support for young people in the areas where they really need it.**

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The Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand’s commitment to respecting diverse cultural realities are significant parts of the way young New Zealanders see themselves and others. Good youth development opportunities should incorporate perspectives that are consistent with the Treaty and foster the development of positive and strong identities within young people.

To assist youth development, young people need to be involved on a personal basis. This means providing opportunities that appreciate and respect the individual circumstances, culture and priorities of youth. This may also include directing young people and their families towards sources of help and support.



## AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

A board of trustees decides to find out more about its community before beginning the school goal setting in August/ September.

The six principles of the YDSA are used as a framework for each trustee member to gather information about the community. Trustees:

- explore the connections the school has to its community
- record the school's perceived strengths
- get feedback about the relationships with the community
- acknowledge levels of student participation
- identify potential indicators of a school environment with positive and strong relationships with its communities.

Trustees compare their findings as a background to the school goal setting.

## IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS

A teacher notices that a student does not concentrate in lessons, talks loudly and is slow to begin new tasks.

The teacher assesses that the reading ability of the student is appropriate and that their written work is consistent with other pupils. In considering the bigger picture of things that may be going on in the student's life, the teacher conducts some simple and discrete formative tests in class.

The teacher phones the student's parents to discuss this behaviour, and indicates that the student may need a hearing test.

With a hearing test and a hearing aid the student is able to better participate in school life.

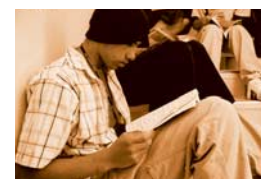
## FRAMEWORK FOR SOLUTIONS

A principal decides to use the principles of the YDSA as a way to approach extreme discipline behaviours.

In recognising the big picture, the principal asks students to think about and outline a range of perspectives on accepted behaviours and appropriate discipline methods.

The principal then tests these perspectives with parents and the community.

The principal and students develop a disciplinary process that reflects the views of students, parents and the community as well as the school and keeps each group actively involved in monitoring and reviewing the process.



## MAPS OF CONSEQUENCE

A teacher wishes to assist students to better appreciate each other, and to increase understanding of student lives and priorities.

The teacher maps out a "live" student issue (possibly uniform or cafeteria discussions) on the board and gets the students to help identify reasons for the issue and any consequences that might result.

As the map comes together, the teacher gains an insight into the experiences of the students, who also learn about their fellow students' lives and priorities.

The teacher helps students to find solutions and work out what steps to take to get good results. The teacher uses this exercise to develop future lessons that build on and challenge student experiences.

PRINCIPLE

02

## *Making useful and positive connections*

The second principle of the YDSA affirms that youth development is about young people being connected. This “connection” recognises the healthy and protective implications of increasing the range of environments that young people feel comfortable in.

Young people interact with four main social environments: family, community, school and peers. The first and most significant of these is the family and whānau. The relationship between young people and their families is important to the way they view themselves and the behaviours they exhibit. The interactions within families are

influential on the attitudes, perspectives, and priorities shown by young people. Families and whānau can be a source of strength when looking to change behaviours, engage young people and promote positive futures.

All four environments provide young people with a network not only of opportunities but also social and cultural obligations, and the combination can be very challenging. However, family, community, school and peers can provide strength and positive support as young people find the confidence to make their own connections.

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**Connections are having a network of friends, family, whānau, relations, coaches, mentors and other people in your life. The more connections you have the more information, opportunities and support are open to you.**

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Contact with the community helps young people position their lives within broader social and cultural settings. It also opens their experience to other possibilities, role models, opportunities and lifestyles. By being connected to more people in the community, young people have a greater understanding of different perspectives and how actions affect others. Active youth development assists young people to make these positive connections.

Schools and peers provide the final two environmental settings for young people. The way that teachers relate to students and the relationships that schools endorse between peers are pivotal in the development of young people.

Young people’s identities are explored, shaped, tested and amended within these environments, so it is crucial that they feel secure, supported and a sense of belonging within all four areas of their lives.



### PLANNING AND PROBLEM SOLVING EXERCISES

A teacher asks students to plan and promote an event that enables the school to forge stronger connections with the community.

The students identify what resources they need, where they can find them, and who will be responsible for what. In promoting the event students gain support from peers, the school, the board of trustees, their parents and the community.

Through the event, students have the chance to test their ideas and develop their social skills.

### INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

A teacher wishes to encourage family involvement in the school work conducted by students.

In class, students are asked to generate three different advertisements for the same product. Each ad uses a different approach.

Students are asked to test the market by gaining preferences and feedback from their family on which advertisements sold the product best to them.

To let families know the outcomes, the class puts together the feedback and students take this home to share with their family.

### PROMOTING A VISIBLE COMMUNITY PRESENCE

A board of trustees at a Health Promoting School wants to encourage its community to have more involvement with the school and students.

The board asks student representatives to survey students about possible speakers to speak to groups of students.

The representatives prepare a list and the board agree on a programme of community presentations throughout the year.



### COMMUNITY PLACEMENTS

A principal wishes to build links between the school, parents and community to assist in transitions to work and promote the profile of students.

The principal encourages local employers and businesses to consider what opportunities they may have for youth work experiences.

The principal then coordinates the opportunities to occur within a work experience week. Students select work opportunities and build relationships with members of the community.

Responsible and enthusiastic students raise the profile of young people and the school.

### TUTORING, MENTORING AND PEER SUPPORT

A teacher recognises that younger students are having difficulty fitting in at school and are withdrawing from school involvement.

The teacher discusses the issue with older classes and identifies potential mentors from both academic and lifestyle perspectives.

The mentors work with the younger students to make them more comfortable with the school environment, enable them to develop positive behaviours and good attitudes, and promote progress towards academic achievement.

## *Finding and building strength*

The identification of strengths-based approaches arises from the recognition that both “risk” and “protective” factors are acquired throughout a young person’s development. These approaches look to increase protective factors in the lives of young people.

A focus on positive behaviours and good attitudes assists and encourages young people to work towards better results. By building on or engaging

enthusiasm in areas of strength, young people can change behaviours and improve achievement.

With any new issue, the challenge becomes resisting the initial tendency to focus on the behaviours that are negative or causing problems. Although this needs to be done to understand the issue and identify why individuals may be drawn to certain behaviours or attitudes, strengths-based approaches look to other areas for the solutions.

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**Traditionally people have focused on negative issues and blamed one group or another when things go wrong. Strengths-based approaches are now used to find positive solutions to problems. They work by identifying what is going well, and how that can be used to find positive solutions to a range of problems.**

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The YDSA has identified areas that are protective in the lives of young people. These may provide a useful framework when looking for where strengths may be found, ie

- large networks of social support from family, coaches, mentors, youth organisations and the community
- faith, optimism, aspirations and hopes for the future
- parental warmth, clear limits and firm consequences
- safe, supportive neighbourhoods
- school retention and achievement levels
- involvement in extracurricular activities, hobbies and interests
- at least one close friend
- mainly law-abiding friends with positive interests
- thinking skills, problem solving and being able to see other perspectives
- positive social interactions
- community and cultural attachment
- meaningful employment of time.



### PROGRESSIVE WORK FROM SECURE TOPICS INTO MORE CHALLENGING ONES

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A teacher is finding it difficult to teach students about the impacts of consequences.

The teacher engages the students on the topic of computer games. Most students can identify critical points within the computer game where outcomes change drastically if the character does things in the wrong order. The teacher books the school computer lab and ensures that the same role playing game is on each.

Working in pairs, the students are given one period to map as many decisions and consequences as they can. This project engages many non-traditional achievers. The teacher in the next lesson uses these multiple possibilities to illustrate how chains of actions and consequences lead towards different outcomes.

Low tech alternatives may include the choose-your-path style books that engage the reader in making critical choices in an action or fantasy world, and then relating the implications of these decisions to real circumstances.

### APPRECIATION OF TOPICS WITH YOUTH EXPERTISE

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Although a board of trustees may already have two student representatives, it is always open to consulting with a larger body when appropriate.

In considering how best to equip a new recreation centre, the board requested both a presentation from the school senior management and one from a project committee of students.

The student presentation outlined the equipment and resources that had the most youth appeal and the best indication of use.



### PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACHES THAT RESIST NEGATIVE FOCUSES

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A principal identifies bullying as a major issue within the school.

Rather than identifying individuals and focusing on negative behaviours, the principal asks teachers to nominate students involved in bullying behaviours to attend a meeting. In the meeting, the principal asks the assembled students for ideas on how the school can effectively reduce bullying behaviours.

Student suggestions include tougher penalties and offers to identify perpetrators.

The principal asks for volunteers to watch out for bullying behaviours and keep the peace. The principal thanks the students for their time and asks them to attend another meeting in two weeks time where they can brief him/her on their findings.

This empowers students, gives them responsibility in changing behaviours in the school, and reinforces that their own bullying behaviour is unacceptable, without focusing on them as individuals.

## Quality relationships

The focus on quality relationships demonstrates the need for young people to feel comfortable and to trust adults before youth development can take place. Within a setting where young people feel secure they will be able to try new things, attempt new challenges and explore new behaviours.

In all relationships with adults, young people like to be treated with respect. This can be demonstrated by acknowledging their perspective

and viewpoint, providing opportunities for their input, and recognising areas where their knowledge/experiences or circumstances can add value.

Young people appreciate adult concern and caring. Quality relationships will reflect a pastoral care approach and investment in the feelings, events and future of young people. This environment of support increases both self-confidence and trust.

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**Respect and caring are key aspects of quality relationships. Young people need encouragement and support too. There will be quality people in your life that both help and challenge you.**

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The development of quality relationships with young people involves setting clear boundaries and expectations. By discussing the limits, the reasons for these limits, and the consequences of breaking them, young people are given the tools and information to self-regulate their behaviours as appropriate.

The openness to negotiate and adjust limits provides increased opportunities for young people to make their own decisions and feel appreciated, listened to and valued. With the negotiation of conditions, young people also assume responsibility for their actions.

Adolescence is a time where young people begin to explore both their own individuality and a number of new relationship types. The role modelling of good relationship behaviours by adults provides a framework for young people to emulate in their own peer relationships.

By training young people in modes of appropriate peer communication, adults can assist the development of healthy friendships and relationships.



## PRACTICE GUIDES

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A principal wishes to have a clear practice guide for student and teacher behaviour that also recognises the necessity for flexibility.

Every year, in negotiation with the principal, the school council considers the previous year's practice guide and recommends changes for both the student and teacher versions. The merits and practicalities of these are debated and a new practice guide created.

The practice guides are displayed prominently and signed by the school council, teacher representative and principal.

## DISCUSSIONS ON FAIR ASSESSMENT AND MARKING

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A teacher wishes to expand the quality relationship with senior students to an appreciation of assessment.

The teacher discusses why marking occurs, and asks students what format this could best occur in to assist development of student skills and abilities. The students suggest a number of rules to consider including supportive feedback for improvement.

The teacher takes this list down, and extends an invitation to the senior class to mark an anonymous set of junior assignments to this marking schedule.

## STUDENT IDENTIFICATION OF QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

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A board of trustees wishes to get direct information on whether the school's students think the school is "youth friendly".

The board requests that the school council coordinates a list of characteristics that all school teachers should model. This list does not identify individuals and is ranked in order of the most common attributes, down to the least common.

The board uses this list to stimulate conversations with the principal about change in the school.



## CLEAR EXPECTATIONS ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

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A teacher wishes to have an open relationship with students but needs to maintain social responsibility.

The teacher outlines what pastoral responsibilities come with being a teacher, and asks students to explain why these things are in place. Students identify what societal, parental and positional responsibilities are placed on the role.

Both the teacher and students outline the help that the teacher can provide students in each situation.

## SENIOR ROLE MODELLING TO JUNIORS

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A teacher wishes to contrast a range of historical values and behaviours with the present day to illustrate ways people have built better relationships.

The teacher outlines accepted behaviours and positional powers in historic situations and invites comparisons with perceived student rights now.

Students identify similarities and freedoms afforded to them by adults in the current day. The teacher invites the class to consider how they can extend these rights to juniors.



PRINCIPLE

05

## *Participation*

The importance of providing opportunities for young people to exercise control in their lives is recognised in this principle. Youth development occurs through young people experiencing events, giving advice, participating in decisions and being engaged in a functional way.

Young people learn most by actually doing things and by reflecting on what they have achieved. Young people also build trust and understanding

through having opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and skills.

The healthy development of young people involves the creation of opportunities for them to influence, inform, shape, design and contribute to an activity or idea, and to solve problems. Effective participation can lead to more ownership of the activity/idea and ensure that young people's thinking is included.

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**Young people need to be more actively involved in decision-making processes and be able to drive change in their surroundings. This principle encourages more opportunities for young people to have their say about things that matter to them. It also challenges young people to get involved themselves.**

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Involved young people build not only their individual capacity, but the responsiveness of those around them to change. The enthusiasm of young people participating is infectious.

The benefits of involved, engaged and motivated young people in education are two-fold. Student engagement:

- promotes a fuller learning environment and better academic outcomes
- reflects a more inclusive learning environment and can encourage students to take up challenges at appropriate ability levels. Engaged students pose fewer behavioural problems.



### YOUTH CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING

A board of trustees is considering changes to the school hours. There are proposals to change from five (1 hour) periods per day to six (50 minute) periods per day.

The board receive recommendations from the principal, and invite students to provide submissions and present their points of view to the board meeting. The students consider the recommendations with the board to make a decision.

### STUDENT NEEDS DESIGN

A principal has had a new classroom block added to the school over the Christmas holidays. As it is in a field of grass, the principal is aware the approach could become muddy.

The principal resists the temptation to place a linear concrete path before term one.

In the first assembly of the year the principal encourages students to define where the concrete path should go by their foot traffic. Within a month an angular path of most use has been defined by the students.

The principal thanks the students and has this path cemented.

### REPRESENTATION AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The teacher co-ordinating the school council is enthusiastic about the council participating in genuine events and contributing to real outcomes.

The teacher routinely talks with the board of trustees, the local council, the police, district health board and Ministry of Youth Development for topics that students can contribute a youth perspective to.

This involvement in genuine issues and with genuine outcomes encourages school council representatives to consult widely to gain school perspectives.

### YOUTH SUPPORT FOR LIFESTYLE DECISIONS

Students at a Health Promoting School decide to actively support fellow students to give up smoking.

Students co-ordinate a *Smoke change* programme for peers who register as smokefree, or make a commitment to become smokefree.

The *Smoke change* programme involves events and activities that are planned by the student co-ordinators for the benefit of those on the smokefree register.



### STUDENT INPUT OR CHOICES IN CLASS/PROGRAMME DESIGN

A teacher wants more student responsibility and engagement in the learning process.

The teacher opens more decisions up to student input in class. By enabling students to discuss, debate and vote on aspects of the learning environment, students become more accepting of the class work through the decisions that they have made.

### STUDENT DIRECTED AND COORDINATED EVENTS

After an accident involving a student cyclist and a car, a teacher assists students to make some changes to the road safety around the school.

The teacher contacts the police/ Land Transport Safety Authority and they work with students to measure car speeds, assess visibility and record road usage.

Through working with students, changes are made to the roading – a barrier prevents students crossing on the corner and the pedestrian crossing is moved to a better place for students.



## *Good information*

Evidence-based programmes and strategies for youth development rely on good information. Continual research and evaluation is all about learning from what we do and examining how we can do it better.

Delivering youth development opportunities to young people should be considered an evolutionary process. Both the culture of young people and the employment needs of the time will help

shape what opportunities and challenges will best prepare them for the future.

Collecting the right information and studying the trends enables the building of a knowledge base on what works well, what works and what doesn't work at all. It is important that information gathered includes aspects of bigger picture thinking so the links can be better illustrated.

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**This principle is based on the same R&D (research and development) process of any industry. It means by studying what works, we can make things better. People who work with young people constantly change programmes to make them more appealing, challenging and useful for young people.**

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There is a need for young people to be involved in collecting and analysing data. This not only extends them in academic ways but also ensures assumptions are credible and valid.

By being involved, young people can guide and shape programmes, units of work, or activities through awareness of what is working.

Good information and feedback systems allow formative assessments and summative evaluations to quantify the difference that youth development approaches have on the lives of young people.



## EVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMMES

A principal arranges for an external programme to be conducted within the school to address an issue.

As part of the programme acceptance the school requires an evaluation. The evaluation conducted by the provider measures attendance and summative student evaluations.

The principal follows this up with informal feedback from students. The school measures the performance of the programme against the persistence of the issue.

The information is recorded so it can be used as a baseline for future comparison.



## CUSTOMISED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A teacher uses a series of formative evaluations to test appropriate resources and topics that appeal to students while delivering learning outcomes.

By exposing students to a range of information sources early in the year, the teacher gains an appreciation of topics that both engage and challenge the abilities of students.

By delivering lessons that students see as relevant and current the lessons mobilise enthusiasm.

## EVALUATIONS OF IMPACT

A board of trustees is keen to know if a new anti-violence initiative is having a measurable effect on the school and its students.

The trustees benchmark the performance on the previous incidence. Information is gathered on the number of violence-related detentions, stand downs and expulsions occurring within the school and compared with previous years.

This information is evaluated each term and areas for improvement are discussed. The school also works with families and the community to see whether the initiative has had any impact outside of school.

## ENCOURAGE ATTEMPTS TO QUANTIFY INFORMATION

A teacher decides to demonstrate the importance of gathering good information as a study.

The teacher proposes two different cell phone pricing plans and asks students which plan is better. Some students identify that they would need more information to make an informed choice. The students recognise that they would have to better understand their usage patterns to know which to choose.

The teacher recommends that they record (and chart) their daily use and the choice of plans will be offered again in a week's time.

Students realise that their use dictates which plan is better.

## GETTING GOOD INFORMATION TO PARENTS AND FAMILIES

A principal recognises that the daily report system is not producing accurate or relevant information for parents about student attendance, behaviour, learning abilities and quality of work.

The principal suggests students design a form that enables teachers to give feedback to parents on student achievements.

The students are asked to survey their parents and family members to identify the desired information.

## *Walking the talk*

The introduction of the YDSA into the education environment is not just a matter of gaining stories and strategies that reflect best practice youth development from adults. The YDSA opens possibilities and opportunities for young people to contribute to their peers, schools and communities.



In the development of this resource, the expectations of young people were sought to ensure that the examples provided reflect positive engagement with students.

Focus groups were held with students and young people from a range of different backgrounds and educational circumstances. Opinions and perspectives were sourced from students of different age groups (13 to 19 years old), ethnicities and backgrounds. The schools consulted spanned state, private and alternative education, the decile range (2 to 10), girls, boys and co-educational situations, the North and South Island and rural and urban locations.

The young people talked to displayed a great deal of maturity and pragmatism when they discussed how they thought a youth development approach could change the school experience. The realisation was that it both offered some freedoms but also came with responsibilities. Students could generally appreciate the way that the opportunities could assist them to learn, grow and develop new skills that were not so obvious in the current school environment.



## BIG PICTURE

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The young people saw many benefits in a school that recognised the bigger picture. This was most often in terms of teachers “getting to know” students and levels of acknowledgement for accomplishments outside school.

## CONNECTIONS

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The connection that most young people felt could be better enhanced in schools was that with their parents. Students felt that a system that communicated their strengths to parents and caregivers would be as beneficial as the one that currently communicated the discipline system.

In discussing interactions between peers, the young people believed that structures that promoted communication between year levels would be useful. Many students indicated that “House” competitions promoted this opportunity.

The concept of community connections fostered by the school was an interesting proposition for students. Many young people suggested career experiences and field trips to employment environments as a valuable link between education and community. Other thoughts included support for guest speakers and visits from youth orientated services.

## STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACHES

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In discussions of the YDSA, young people consistently appreciated the value of a strengths-based approach. Young people indicated that using strengths-based approaches that acknowledged achievements wider than academic and sporting accomplishments would enhance their experience and potential performance. Many students believed that there were not many systems in place to recognise achievement or encourage good performance.

## QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

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Teacher personality and the approach of staff within the school was identified as an area where youth development currently took place. Four simple themes arose from the discussions. Students appreciated the qualities of:

- **wisdom** – a willingness to impart knowledge about their subject and equally important, life in general
- **aroha** – concern for student welfare, a willingness to support students and an openness to discuss topics
- **respect** – the ability to really listen to students and consider their views
- **talent** – an ability to present information in a creative and dynamic way that is both practical and engaging.

## PARTICIPATION

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Students agreed that although there was no perfect process for involvement in the life of the school there were some fundamentals that a good process would share. Setting aside time to consider decisions was seen as important as was help from adult expertise. Both good information and office support (photocopiers, phone etc) was desirable, and a sense of where student viewpoints were actually adding value to decision making.

## GOOD INFORMATION

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Access to, and involvement in school decisions is reliant on being informed. Students felt that greater value could be gained if they had the chance to evaluate their decisions against a range of information and perspectives. This knowledge of adult imperatives and constraints would enable them to place their advice in context and help their contributions to be realistic and valuable.



## *Making it happen*

The application of the six principles of the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (YDSA) in schools is a way to improve the education environment for all young people.

Students are challenged and grow in response to their participation, problem solving skills, their experiences of decision making and their relationships with friends, family, whānau, the school and community.

Learning and benefits are not, however, limited to students under the YDSA. There are a number of benefits that youth development approaches bring to the school and to the staff that practise them. By involving students in the life of the school and the management of its processes, there is the potential for a number of beneficial offshoots.



The increased connectivity through youth development approaches promotes engagement at all levels of the school community, including students, teachers and school managers. This establishment of better relationships may encourage an environment that is more responsive to student needs.

There have been many examples<sup>1</sup> where the change in morale has increased commitment, performance and perceived “value” of the school. The attitudinal change of students may contribute to lower incidence of vandalism and an increased pride in the school environment.

There is evidence<sup>1</sup> to suggest that engaged and valued students exhibit fewer behavioural problems and lower truancy rates. There is also a strong correlation between motivated/enthusiastic students and improved academic outcomes. Both of these outcomes have significant implications at all levels of the school.

Improved school performance and a more positive community image can make a difference to schools. Retention of teachers, attraction of resources and increased enrolments are all potential outcomes of implementing a youth development approach.

As students gain a better understanding of decision making processes and the complications involved in them, they also gain a better appreciation of the attitudes and values that make people different. The resulting youth growth and maturity assists students to role model responsible behaviours within the school.

<sup>1</sup> *Building Strength: A review of research on how to achieve good outcomes for young people in their families, peer groups, schools, careers and communities* was published by the Ministry of Youth Development in 2002 and is available on [www.myd.govt.nz](http://www.myd.govt.nz)

participation

Involve

Education





## ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

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A wide range of organisations were involved in the consultation process in developing this resource.

Ministry of Youth Development:  
[www.myd.govt.nz](http://www.myd.govt.nz)

Ministry of Education:  
[www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

Ministry of Social Development:  
[www.msd.govt.nz](http://www.msd.govt.nz)

The New Zealand School Trustees Association  
[www.nzsta.org.nz](http://www.nzsta.org.nz)

Secondary Principals Association New Zealand  
[www.spanz.school.nz](http://www.spanz.school.nz)

Post Primary Teachers Association  
[www.ppta.org.nz](http://www.ppta.org.nz)

New Zealand Principals Federation  
[www.nzpf.ac.nz](http://www.nzpf.ac.nz)

Tearaway Magazine  
[www.tearaway.co.nz](http://www.tearaway.co.nz)

New Zealand Council for Educational Research  
[www.nzcer.org.nz](http://www.nzcer.org.nz)

Faculty of Education, Auckland University  
[www.ace.ac.nz](http://www.ace.ac.nz)

University of Waikato School of Education  
<http://edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz>

Massey College of Education  
<http://education.massey.ac.nz/>

Victoria University Faculty of Education  
<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/education>

Christchurch College of Education  
[www.cce.ac.nz](http://www.cce.ac.nz)

Dunedin College of Education  
[www.dce.ac.nz](http://www.dce.ac.nz)

Education Gazette  
[www.edgazette.govt.nz](http://www.edgazette.govt.nz)

Leadspace Principals Forum  
[www.leadspace.govt.nz](http://www.leadspace.govt.nz)

Student Trustees  
[www.otago.ac.nz/CIC/BOT\\_site/intro.html](http://www.otago.ac.nz/CIC/BOT_site/intro.html)

Teach NZ  
[www.teachnz.govt.nz](http://www.teachnz.govt.nz)

Ministry of Health  
[www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz)



**MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

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