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PROGRAM QUALITY

homework help



SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT





DAVID P. WEIKART

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The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality,

a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is dedicated to empowering education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. The Weikart Center encourages managers to prioritize program quality. We offer training, technical assistance, and research services that all come together in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs.

Bringing together over fifty years of experience and the latest research,

the Youth Work Methods are proven strategies for working with youth. Whether you believe that the purpose of an out-of-school time program is to improve academics, to build life skills, or just to provide a place where kids can hang out and be kids, the approach presented in the Youth Work Methods series provides a foundation for building safe and productive places for youth.

To learn more, please visit www.cypq.org.



homework help

Tom Akiva & Gina McGovern



Revised edition, Fall 2011

Produced by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of The Forum for Youth Investment.

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Acknowledgments

The youth development approach described in these pages was originally developed and tested at the HighScope Summer Workshop for Teens (founded in 1963), later called the Institute for IDEAS. In the late 1990s, HighScope's Youth Development Group took the learning approach developed at the Institute for IDEAS and delivered training for youth workers. These workshops, grounded in HighScope's direct experience, were extended by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality through research in positive youth development and evolved into what is currently our Youth Work Methods series.

The current training framework rests on a foundation developed by many, including David P. Weikart, Nicole Yohalem, John Weiss, Becky Prior, Kiku Johnson, Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom, Laenne Thompson, Tom Akiva, Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, David Martineau, Linda Horne, Mary Hohmann, Charles Hohmann, Charles Smith, Monica Jones, and many others.

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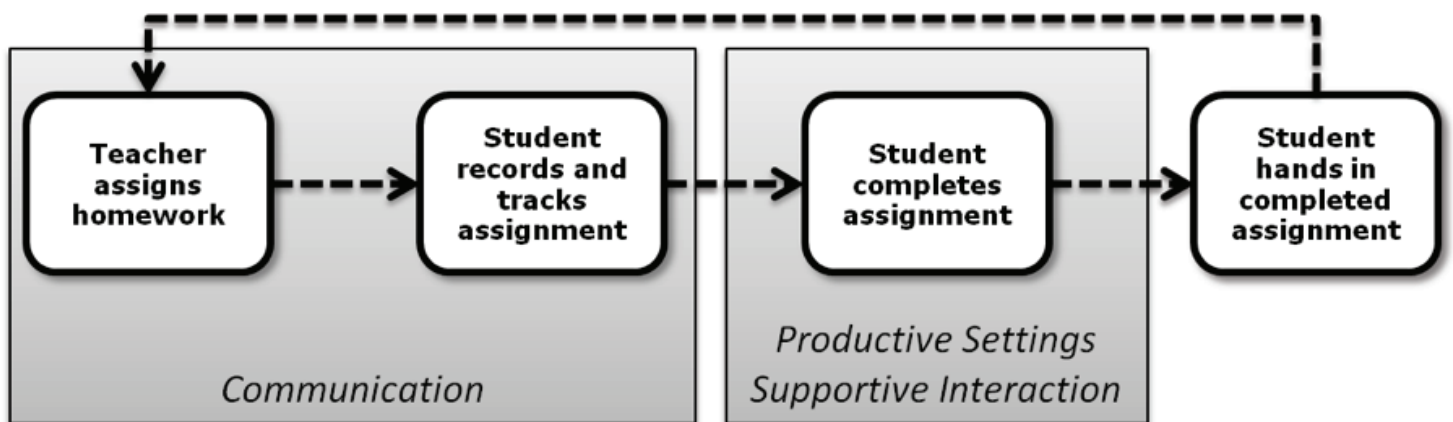
overview

What is Homework Help?

Homework Help is an important feature of many youth programs. Providing time and support for young people to complete their homework can help with academic success.

Why is effective Homework Help Important?

Effective homework support may also help some young people develop study skills and habits for successfully organizing their time. In order to consider effective strategies, let's first think more broadly about homework...



In an ideal situation, a teacher would assign useful and challenging (yet doable) homework, each student would then record the assignment, have the support they need to complete the assignment, and then hand in the completed assignment.

But in the real world, breakdowns can occur throughout the cycle. Employing the ingredients for successful Homework Help can help you and your students get closer to the ideal of the homework cycle.

This course focuses on making homework help time effective by helping youth get organized, by providing an atmosphere that helps youth focus on their work, and by building a supportive relationship with youth. This is done through communication, productive settings, and supportive interaction. The strategies listed below are described in more detail on the pages that follow.

Communication

- Communicate with teachers
- Track individual students
- Track the group

Productive setting and routines

- Establish a setting conducive to learning
- Establish productive routines

Supportive interaction

- Be nice
- Be available
- Circulate
- Ask rather than tell
- Listen and encourage
- Explicitly teach Homework and Study Skills

Tracking

There are many ways to track students' progress on assignments. Tracking progress involves recording the assignments students have, and student completion of each assignment. In the next few pages, you'll see some examples of how to do this. These are just suggestions- the important thing is that you have a system in place to keep track of students' assignments on a daily basis.

The list below serves as an index for the tracking forms that follow.

Sign-In Sheet (Page 13)

A sign-in sheet for the Homework Help session is a great way to track what youth will be working on that day. You can even use it to gauge which assignments they find easiest and most challenging so you get a heads up on where they'll need support. As students complete their work, you (or they) can cross the assignments off the list and add your initials or a sticker to mark that it is complete.

Index-Cards (Page 14)

Rather than use a single sign-in sheet, you could have students record their assignments on index cards and store them in a card file. Students can communicate a lot in a note!

Sticky-Note Tracking (Page 15)

Sticky notes can be used in a variety of ways to keep track of assignments. Start by having students write each assignment on a sticky note and arrange them on one side of their desk or another convenient place. As students complete assignments, they can remove the sticky note for that assignment.

Charting (Page 16)

In a study of strategies to improve homework completion, a group of teachers had students record their homework in a chart.² We modified this practice for an after school setting. Each student receives a chart to track one week's assignments, and the cells are colored in each day for each subject.



Study Skills and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

This section provides insight on directly teaching students skills that can help them throughout their academic careers.

In general, it is helpful to make something explicit to students that they would otherwise have to guess at. This is the case, for example, with phonics instruction. Explicitly teaching young readers to recognize the sounds made by individual and groups of letters allows them to recognize written words that they might not have seen before. The so-called reading wars between supporters of phonics instruction and supporters of whole language instruction are over and most literacy researchers agree that children benefit from both phonics and whole language instruction. Further, evidence suggests that phonics instruction is particularly beneficial for poor readers. This makes sense: explicit reading instruction helps students who are struggling to break the code.

This general rule is also true in the case of study skills. Explicitly teaching the skills for productive study that some youth learn at home or take for granted can really boost the success of students for whom these skills aren't second nature.

Study skills can be considered a subset of a topic which researchers call self-regulated learning (SRL). Substantial research has been conducted in this area recently and SRL skills have been shown to make a big impact on student achievement and other important life outcomes.

SRL involves the cognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress. Study skills in these areas can be both practiced in homework help settings, and explicitly taught there. For example, once your assignment tracking system is functioning well, you might have a conversation with your youth about how this system reduces transition time and what their thoughts are about this. Do they recognize the value of this system? How might it apply to their academics and their lives outside of homework help?

Or in another example, you could provide a workshop for youth in effective note taking. Then youth could practice note-taking with their textbook during Homework Help to study for an upcoming test. The list below divides study skills into the three categories of organization, time management, and study effectiveness. Resources on how to conduct workshops for students in these areas abound on the Internet.

A. Organization

- Writing down assignments
- Keeping track of assignments
- Keeping organized

B. Time management

- Managing time effectively (e.g., considering how much time to plan for assignments)
- Pacing studying

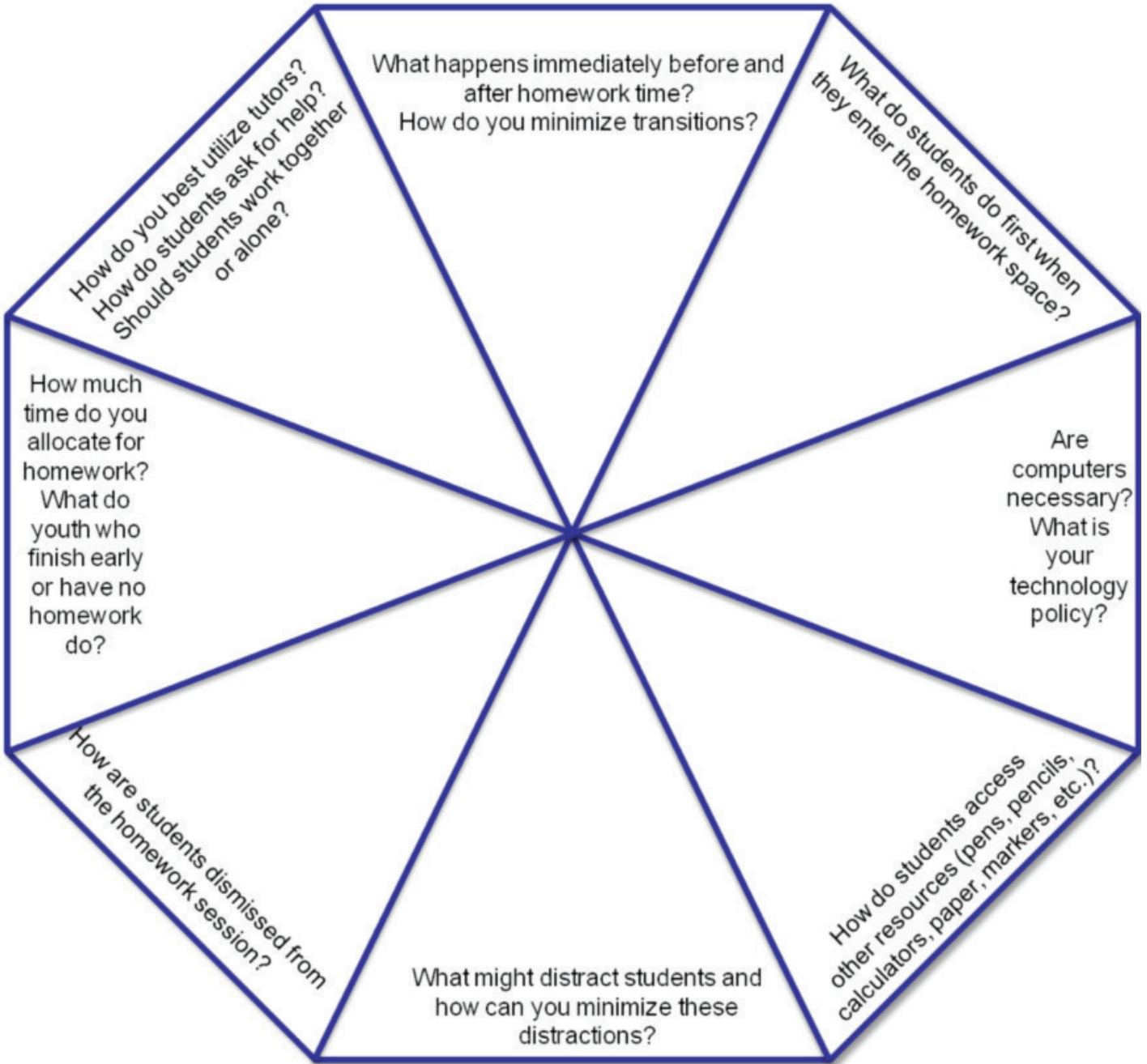
C. Studying effectively

- Focusing
- Taking good notes
- Monitoring own learning (e.g., if you get to the bottom of the page and don't know what you've read you should read it again)
- Studying for a test
- Using reference materials
- Asking for help when needed



Considering Routines

Consider the following questions to identify where your homework help session has solid routines in place and places where you might develop one. Be honest about challenges or limitations as well as assets or resources.



And finally, would YOU want to be a part of the session if you had homework to do?

Using the Guidebook

Bring Homework Help ideas into your staff meetings by using the materials in this guidebook. Below are suggested activities to accompany each set of content.

The Method (pages 2-10) 15-20 minutes

Review the homework cycle with staff, having them point out potential breakdowns at each stage. Discuss how communication, productive settings, and supportive interaction can prevent breakdowns or lessen the impact.

Tracking (pages 12-16) 20-30 minutes

Have staff share their current systems for communicating with teachers and tracking student progress. Ask them to rate their system on three criteria:

1. Does it keep students, teachers, afterschool staff, and parents in the same loop?
2. Do they track students' daily progress as well as progress over time?
3. Is the system simple to follow and easy to use?

Share the examples from this book and have staff tailor or create a system that meets these criteria (or other criteria that the staff deem important).

Interaction (page 17) 15-20 minutes

Have staff demonstrate each of the interaction strategies from pages 6–7. Then have staff write short scenarios for their peers to role play. The scenarios should be such that staff are challenged to use the supportive interaction strategies. Encourage staff members participating in the role play to stay in character as youth in your program.



Study Skills and Self Regulated Learning

(pages 18-19) 20-30 minutes

Assign one of each of the bulleted items on page 18 to a pair of staff members. Have each pair find resources or materials to share with the rest of the staff. At subsequent staff meetings, have pairs present their findings or even a sample lesson that staff could use with students.

Across Age Groups & Content Areas (page 20-21)

15-20 minutes

Write a different content area (e.g., art, math, literature, sports, etc.) at the top of large sheets of paper. Have staff rotate to each of the sheets and brainstorm homework help activities that could work for different age groups. After all the ideas are posted, have staff do a gallery walk to gather ideas from the posted sheets.

You might also partner with school-day staff to present to afterschool staff what major content topics are a focus for them, or what typical developmental patterns they see among youth of a particular age band.

Research Review (pages 36-41) 20-30 minutes

Have staff read the Research Review before coming to the meeting. Begin the session by having staff underline two sentences in the text that stand out as important or intriguing. Have staff form group of no larger than 4. Have one person in each group begin by reading the statement that they underlined, without going into why they underlined it. The person to the left then shares their thoughts on the quote the leader read aloud. The next person shares their thoughts on that same quote, and so on until it gets back to the leader. Then the leader has the “last word” to share their thoughts. Then the leadership shifts to the next person. Debrief with the large group once all of the small groups have completed the exercise.

Homework Help: The Research

This section presents a review of research related to the homework help method.

The provision of Homework Help has, in recent years, become an important component of numerous programs that serve youth in the out-of-school time (OST) hours (Halpern, 2003). While the value of homework has been contested recently and throughout history (Gill & Scholossman, 2004)—involving important considerations such as home-school friction, time taken away from other activities, and student stress (Kohn, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2001)—most research supports the notion that time spent on homework correlates with achievement, particularly for students in middle and high school (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). In addition, regardless of differing opinions about the place of homework in schools, homework assistance programs across the country help children and youth complete assignments that might not otherwise be completed. While research that moves beyond the ‘is homework good?’ question is limited, existing research does provide some direction for addressing methodologies for effective homework assistance.

This document provides the research context for the Homework Help Method, promoted by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center). The literature review contains three parts. First we present a brief history of homework in America, including attitudes about homework and research on the relationship between homework and learning. Next, we discuss the context for Homework Help in out-of-school time (OST) programs. Finally, we discuss research on specific strategies for helping youth be successful at homework.

Homework in America

Gill and Schlossman (2004) provide a historical look at homework from 1850 to 2003. They report that public sentiment has gone in waves, varying between support and attack, and that homework has often been a hot button issue. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, homework was generally supported by the public and was typically an extension of the common school practices of drill, memorization, and

recitation. The progressive education movement of the 1930s and 40s produced strong anti-homework sentiments by educators and spokespeople. In 1957 the former Soviet Union launched Sputnik, spurring the space race, with schools feeling the pressure for science achievement, and pro-homework sentiment came back in fashion. In 1968, the Vietnam War took the national spotlight and through the 1970s homework was less of a contentious issue. In the 80s and 90s with a national focus on American academic performance in the global context, homework came back into favor.

Today, the educational establishment largely supports the provision of homework as an extension of learning; however, several high profile, book-length attacks on homework have appeared in recent years. *The End of Homework* by Buell & Kralovec (2001) argues that homework contributes to an overemphasis on competition and work, intrudes on family time, and harms economically disadvantaged youth who may have trouble completing assignments at home. In *The Homework Myth*, Kohn (2006) argues that research does not support homework and he generally calls for a shake-up such that assigning homework is more of an exception than the norm; in other words, a reduction in quantity and an increase in quality. It is likely that most homework researchers—even those who have been directly attacked by Kohn—would agree that intentionality to the type and quality of homework assigned is a good thing. And certainly some of the arguments and issues raised by the anti-homework books can benefit from further empirical research. These attacks are summarized in the context of educational research in a short piece by Marzano and Pickering (2007).

Meanwhile, educational scientists have conducted numerous studies examining homework. Cooper and his colleagues conducted two comprehensive syntheses of this research; the first reviewed studies conducted from the 1930s to the 1980s (Cooper, 1989), and the second synthesized studies from

Homework Help and the Active-Participatory Approach

Youth and adults learn best through hands-on experiences with people, materials, events, and ideas. The experiential learning model — validated by decades of research and rooted in our early work as part of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation — is the basis of our approach to teaching and learning.

Homework Help and Other Youth Work Methods

Homework Help is different from most of the other Youth Work Methods. Each of the other methods presents an instructional best practice that applies across all aspects of the program. In contrast, the Homework Help Method provides guidance for improving the specific time during the afterschool program day dedicated to supporting youth to complete their homework.

This method contains specific strategies for making Homework Help time supportive and productive for youth. It also recommends ways to take advantage of this time as an opportunity for learning. This method is fully compatible with the other Youth Work Methods and we recommend utilizing multiple methods during Homework Help and throughout all aspects of your program.

The adult-youth interaction strategies we promote in Homework Help are described more fully in the **Ask-Listen-Encourage Method**. The strategies of asking powerful questions, actively listening to youth answers, and providing encouragement for their learning and accomplishments are aimed at producing fun and productive environments for young people.

Other methods that also may relate to your Homework Help time include: **Active Learning**, **Planning and Reflection**, and **Structure and Clear Limits**. Please see these guides for more information.

Assessing Homework Help

The published Youth PQA and School Age PQA do not currently have items specific to Homework Help. However, a set of pilot items for homework help are currently being tested for inclusion in future versions of the Youth and School-Age PQA.

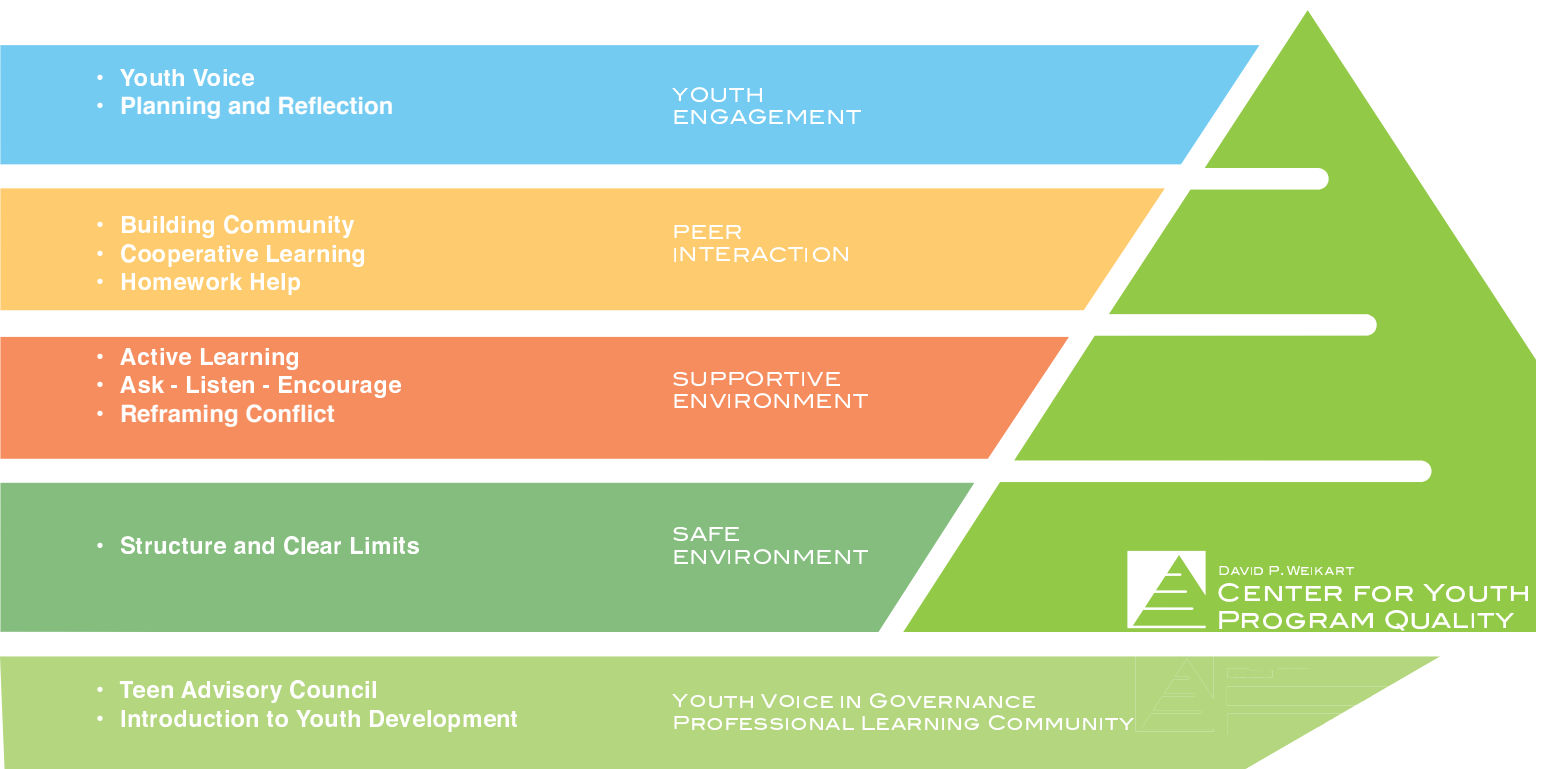


To learn more about the history of the Active Participatory Approach, visit www.highscope.org.

The Youth PQA is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. It focuses on the point-of-service—the place where the kids are. The School Age PQA is based on the validated Youth PQA instrument and is designed for children and youth in grades K - 6. For more information on either tool, visit www.cypq.org.

The Youth Work Methods Series

The Youth Work Methods are powerful strategies for working with young people, based on positive youth development. The Methods are a key part of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), a comprehensive system for integrating assessment and training. Each Method is linked to assessment items and designed to help youth workers improve the areas they choose to focus on.



To learn more about these and other Weikart Center workshops, please visit www.cypq.org.