Qualitative Research Summary

SOS Year 3 –Qualitative Study Report
Strengths & Opportunities

During Summer of Service 2012, a small research team from UC Davis School of Education continued to gather qualitative data for the third year. This year’s data collection focused more specifically on how the program staff and youth were developing shared knowledge and practices that could lead to meaningful contributions to a selected community. Data included field notes gathered through observations at 2 middle school sites (though participation was mixed to include some high school sites as well), artifacts of student work, interviews and focus groups with program staff. Data analysis is ongoing, and additional results will be made available to the SOS team as analyses are completed.

Program-driven practices

A key distinction emerged in the data between practices that were program driven and those that were relationship driven. First, let’s attend to program-driven practices – that is, practices organized to specifically address the structure and expected outcomes of the Summer of Service program.

For staff (including site managers, teachers, and team leaders), when program-driven practices were the primary focus attention went to logistics, activities shared by all youth participants (not specific to particular projects), managing enrollment or participation, and pushing toward an outcome that could be documented. Tasks were addressed methodically with a focus on program frameworks and meeting externally set expectations.

Key Focus Areas

- Program-driven practices
- Relationship-driven practices
- Jointly-produced work
- Personally-relevant contributions

For youth participants, program-driven practices involved following a predetermined and guided plan and producing a record of their completed work.

Generally, the style that emerged when program-driven practices were primary was one that defined expectations for youth participants and encouraged staff to focus more directly on their job responsibilities. For youth, the style of engagement was obligatory and characterized by external validation.

Relationship-driven practices

By contrast, relationship-driven practices were those driven by interest in learning about and contributing to each other’s knowledge, interests, ideas, and projects. When relationship-driven practices were the primary focus, attention went to connecting youth with resources to pursue their
ideas (typically project specific), cultivating opportunities for youth to participate based on their interests, known talents, or works in progress, and organizing daily activities to be fun, relaxed, active, inclusive, and responsive to current circumstances. Tasks were established internally within project groups, and were closely related to what a team of youth and adults had agreed to do. In addition, staff and youth were more likely to express a sense the their expectations had been exceeded. The style of interaction when practices were driven by relationships was responsive, open-ended, and it emerged from a place of anticipation about what might be accomplished more so than certainty about an outcome. For youth, the style of engagement was collaborative and oriented toward what they could contribute to each other or to an anticipated audience.

**Jointly-produced work**

Both program-driven and relationship-driven practices occur, at times, in any given program. When practices could be primarily characterized as relationship-driven, youth and program staff were more likely to produce work together. Work was considered jointly produced when both youth and staff took personal pride and enjoyment out of the result and when they both made contributions to the outcome. In some cases, the work was in the form of a project outcome (e.g. a media project, a set of resources to be shared). At other times the work was in the form of the learning environment itself (e.g. the style of interaction, the networks and resources that were activated in order to move forward on a project).

It appears that jointly produced work led to increased learning for both youth and staff. This was evident when participants described what they had learned in detail and included discussion about what future opportunities seemed to be available out of that learning.

**Personally-relevant contributions**

As with jointly-produced work, when relationship-driven practices were primary, youth were able to develop projects that were personally-relevant and provided opportunities to contribute to others. Also promising was an increase in activation of youth and adult personal networks in service of the work.