

TREKKERS YOUTH PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW BY DON CARPENTER

Background

Driven by the devastating loss of my best friend Orlando in 1986, I was propelled into youth development with a fierce resolve to make a difference for those at society's margins. Throughout my early journey of spearheading numerous youth development initiatives, I faced both victories and challenges, each one shaping my approach and refining my methods. These experiences gave birth to the Trekkers Youth Programming Principles: a definitive guide rooted in real-world challenges and solutions. More than just guidelines, these Principles form a dynamic synergy, with each enhancing the other to create a powerful framework for youth development. Dedicated to Orlando's memory and to the future of countless young lives, the Trekkers Principles challenge and guide me, and all of us, to leave an indelible, positive impact on every youth we serve.

This summary encapsulates what I termed my "Field Lessons," distilled learnings from my hands-on experiences in youth development and the Youth Programming Principles they inspired.

Field Lessons and Associated Principles

- 1. Focus on Depth Over Breadth**
 - **Lesson:** Authentic change requires deep, prolonged engagement with youth rather than broad, fleeting interactions.
 - **Youth Programming Principle:** Design Intentional Program Delivery Systems for Long-Term Engagement
- 2. Foster Inclusive Family Engagement**
 - **Lesson:** The family system is integral to holistic youth development and should be actively incorporated.
 - **Principle:** Foster Mutual Trust Between Families and Program Staff
- 3. Prioritize Local Mentorship**
 - **Lesson:** The foundation for enduring positive relationships lies in prioritizing local leadership and mentors who have the same lived experience as the students being served
 - **Principle:** Develop a Skilled Network of Caring Adults and Peer Mentors
- 4. Design Personalized Supports**
 - **Lesson:** Recognize and respect each student's developmental stages and strengths.
 - **Principle:** Apply a Comprehensive Approach to Youth Development Strategies

5. **Encourage Community Collaboration**

- **Lesson:** Avoid working in isolation; instead, collaborate with local leadership and engage **community resources, ensuring that every child served benefits from a united effort.**
- **Principle:** Create a Caring Support Network

6. **Meet Young People Where They Thrive**

- **Lesson:** Emphasize engaging students in their community settings over waiting for them to come to the program's location
- **Principle:** Prioritize Informal Relationship Building

7. **Venture Beyond Boundaries**

- **Lesson:** Broaden students' horizons through varied and contrasting experiences.
- **Principle:** Expand Worldviews

8. **Turn the Educational Process Over to Youth**

- **Lesson:** Entrust students with shared control of their learning journey.
- **Principle:** Embrace Youth Voice and Choice

9. **Ignite Personal Insight Through Societal Awareness**

- **Lesson:** Guide youth in understanding societal impacts on their identities.
- **Principle:** Encourage Community Engagement to Foster Personal and Societal Awareness.

10. **Empower Potential: Name it, Know it, Nurture it**

- **Lesson:** Recognize and nurture each student's unique strengths, sparks, and passions.
- **Principle:** Raise Optimism and Post-Secondary Aspirations

11. **Implement Proactive Systems**

- **Lesson:** Implement proactive, preventive systems over reactive, crisis-driven ones.
- **Principle:** Use Validated Assessment Tools to Promote Social-Emotional Development in Youth

In recognition of Orlando and the countless young lives who've inspired me, the Trekkers Youth Programming Principles highlight my dedication to outstanding youth development. These guiding tenets are not just a blueprint; they're a call to action, urging that all of us consistently elevate the way we serve our youth.