

## Research Shows Youth University to Promote a Sense of Community in the Classroom

A sense of community in school has been identified as a pivotal condition for children's ethical, social and emotional development, and also for their academic motivation.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, it has been shown to be fundamental to students' emotional health, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, happiness, liking for school, and academic achievement.<sup>2</sup> Youth University programs are designed to create sense of community by recognizing the unique contribution of each child, while fostering supportive, caring, and inclusive relationships.

In the spring of 2007 we undertook a research project to explore young people's feelings of community with their classmates after attending our spring residential field trips. Approximately 278 students from 17 grades Grade 5 to 8 classes participated in the study. Surveys were completed by students before the program, and immediately after the Youth University program.

We used the *Classroom Supportiveness Scale* (with an internal consistency reliability of .85) designed by the Developmental Studies Center for use with grades 6-8. We used this scale as it measures the degree to which students feel their classmates are supportive, helpful, and mutually concerned. The following questions make up the Classroom Supportiveness Scale:

- Students in my class are willing to go out of their way to help someone.
- My classmates care about my work just as much as their own.
- My class is like a family.
- The students in my class really care about each other.
- Students in my class don't like to put others down.
- Students in my class help each other learn.
- Students in my class help each other, even if they are not friends.
- Students in my class get along together very well.
- Students in my class don't just look out for themselves.
- Students in my class are not mean to each other.
- When I'm having trouble with something (my schoolwork), at least one of my classmates will try to help.
- Students in my class treat each other with respect.
- Students in my class work together to solve problems.
- When someone in my class does well, everyone in the class feels good.

It was found that students who attended the Youth University Residential Program in Science and Leadership reported significantly higher levels of classroom supportiveness after attending the program (with a significance of .000)

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<sup>1</sup> Schaps, E. (1998). *Risks & rewards of community building. Thrust for Educational Leadership*, 28 (1), 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Kim, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1995). *Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and students' attitudes, motives, and performance: A multilevel analysis. American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 627-658.  
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## **Other Findings from our Spring Research**

### **Students Come Together as a Community at Youth University**

It was found that students who attended the Youth University Residential Program in Science and Leadership reported significantly higher levels of classroom supportiveness after attending the program (with a significance of .000)

### **Students Have FUN at Youth University Spring Camp!**

When asked if they had fun at YU, more than half of the students gave us a 5 out of 5 rating!

### **Learning is part of the fun**

We found that students level of program enjoyment correlated with their level of ratings on what they learned about themselves as well as what they learned about their group. This tells us that they not only liked the trip because they had fun, but because they learned new things as well!

### **The value is transferred back to the classroom**

Students not only enjoyed their trip, on average they thought that their whole class would really benefit from what they learned. They also thought that they would feel better about themselves from what they had learned.

### **What they learned**

When asked what they learned at Youth University, both students who attended the Leadership Program and the Science Program indicate that they learned about leadership. Students in the Leadership Program also reported that they learned about working as a team.

Students who attended the Science Program reported significantly higher ratings on the question "science can be fun" than the control group (using leadership program students as control) (with a significance of .000)

### **Having fun at YU associated with planning to attend University in the future!**

We found that having fun at Youth University was positively correlated with students who planned to attend university in the future and thought that they would enjoy university.

**Brock University**

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