

Listening to and Learning From Disconnected Youth: March 2012 Update

The Latest WSOHP News: The *Washington Student Oral Histories Project (WSOHP)* is pleased to announce that we have recently received seed funding from the *Washington State Partnership on Juvenile Justice* (Office of Juvenile Justice, DSHS). The Partnership grant supports an initial study aimed at helping us to better understand and address the problems of student disengagement and dropping out. The study, which is already in progress, entails gathering individual oral histories from youth who have dropped out about their school experiences. We chose the oral history method because it allows us to capture detailed portraits of struggling students' lives. At the same time, this approach taps a largely neglected perspective—that of the disconnected youth. We are currently recruiting volunteer participants for the study at two youth-serving sites. Over the next couple of months we will be conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with 25- 30 youth at these partnering sites. Using sophisticated data analysis software, we plan to compile and analyze the transcribed interviews during the summer.

Research Products: In order to reach broad and diverse interest groups, we anticipate producing two different kinds of information products. First, we'll publish key study findings in a non-technical report format geared towards educators, policy-makers, parents and youth providers. In addition, we will use interview material to create, publish and disseminate representative profiles of the youth we've interviewed. Along with study results, these high interest "stories" will be an additional vehicle for engaging multiple audiences around the topic of student disengagement and dropout prevention. Project partners have offered to disseminate these products through their regional and national networks. If you received this current update via email, you are already on the WSOHP mailing list and will be notified of availability of report findings and the youth profiles.

Later Project Phases: In placing youth at the center of the investigation, we expect this initial study to provide a unique and nuanced perspective that moves us beyond generalizations and stereotypes about who drops out and why. This first study phase also lays the foundation for additional project activities that bring youth voice into the conversation about student disengagement and dropping out. After completing this initial research, we plan to replicate it, collecting a larger, more diverse sample of youth from around the state. This expanded statewide sample will permit a finer-grained analysis, including by geography, gender and race/ethnicity. Initial study results will also inform the planning of an innovative curriculum that brings our oral history approach into classrooms and communities.

About the Project: WSOHP is a university-community collaborative started in late 2010, which blends academic inquiry with a pragmatic research orientation. The project benefits from the combined institutional support of its three sponsors listed below:

- *Paragon Education Network (PEN)*, a non-profit education change organization dedicated to improving teaching and learning. Co-founder Barbara Waxman, PhD, will co-manage the project with senior associate Deborah Feldman. <http://paragoneducationnetwork.org/>
- *The Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal*, which is affiliated with UW Bothell. www.uwb.edu/research/centers/goodladinstitute
- *UW Bothell Education Program*. WSOHP's lead researcher is Antony Smith, PhD, who is Assistant Professor of Education at UW, Bothell, where he teaches and conducts research related to literacy and effective professional development models. www.bothell.washington.edu/education/about/faculty/smith

Community Partners: The project involves many community, as well as institutional partners. It has received commitments from multiple youth-serving agencies willing to assist with identification of study sites, recruitment of youth participants, dissemination of project results and other forms of in-kind support.

Contact Information: Please feel free to contact one of us with your questions or thoughts.

Deborah Feldman
Research
(206) 356-9096
dfeld@seanet.com

Barbara Waxman
Curriculum
(206) 356-1865
barbara@penconsulting.org

Antony Smith
Principal Investigator
(425) 352-5416
ansmith@uwb.edu