

Chapter 6: What Are Participants Expected to Learn?

Overview

The depth of participant learning on the construction site depends greatly on the philosophy and attitude of the construction manager and on the level of attention paid to participant learning.

On the construction site, participants have the opportunity to learn four different types of skills, all of which are critical to their ability to succeed after they leave the YouthBuild program. In order to teach these skills on the construction site, the construction staff and other program staff should identify what participants are expected to learn before the construction process starts. The staff should then plan how those skills will be taught on the construction site and how they will be implemented in the classroom. The four different types of skills are:



1

Work readiness skills

2

Leadership skills

3

Construction skills
(competencies)

4

Applied academic
skills

1. Work Readiness Skills

Many YouthBuild participants have never had a job or have not been able to keep a job for very long. The construction site provides an opportunity for participants to learn the skills it takes to keep a job and to be successful in a work environment. A key part of the construction staff's role is to teach participants positive work habits including:

- Attendance and punctuality
- Preparedness (coming to work in proper dress, with tools, awake, sober, and ready to work)
- Understanding of and respect for safety requirements and work rules
- Accepting supervision and following directions
- Taking initiative and asking questions when necessary
- Learning to complete assigned tasks
- Cooperating with co-workers and treating co-workers with respect
- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Using the proper trade vocabulary

The construction department's role is to help participants change their habits so that they are able to keep a job and perform successfully. Three keys to teaching work readiness skills include:

- Running the work site professionally
- Setting clear expectations for participant behavior and basic work performance
- Being prepared for behavior problems and planning strategies to address them



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

On Preparing Participants for a Job

"Have your main emphasis on basic work skills, not just on carpentry. This enables the graduates to have a better chance at succeeding on a job."

"It is important to understand that not all participants will want to or will go into the construction trades. We need to deal with those who will and those who won't."

"Bad language, poor work habits and being unprepared on the site are all likely to be problems that you have to deal with."

"Be fair but firm. You have to be consistent and stick with the rules you've made—no exceptions. If you say that we start at 7:30 a.m. and someone shows up at 7:45 a.m., they have to know that it is not acceptable."

"We had each participant sign a participant contract and terminated a lot of participants at the beginning, based on that signed contract."

Running the Work Site Professionally

In order to effectively teach work readiness skills, the construction site must be run in a professional manner. Staff should set the tone by setting an example - showing up early, being organized, and having all the needed materials ready in advance. Keeping a consistent schedule is important to student success.

Setting Expectations Consistent with Expectations on a "Real Job"

The program should set clear and consistent standards. Comprehensive policies and procedures let participants know what an employer would expect on a job in terms of attendance, promptness, and motivation. It must be made clear that the staff will hold participants to those standards.

Being Prepared for Behavior Problems and Planning Strategies to Address Them

If participants could all perform appropriately on a job from the start, some of them might not need to be in YouthBuild. Excuses are to be expected, and the staff should be ready to teach, coach, and discipline participants so that they learn work readiness skills. It is important to establish a strong working relationship with the counseling department and a plan for dealing with work performance problems. The construction and counseling staff should agree on expected participant behavior and communicate a consistent message clearly to the participants about work site standards. Often this is done in the form of a participant contract. It must be decided how the construction staff will communicate problems to the counseling staff (in writing, at weekly meetings about participants, or in other ways) and how the counseling staff will communicate to the construction staff about any actions taken to address the problem.

If the program has a participant contract with consequences for absences, lateness and other behavior, this contract should be given out to the construction staff. Along with the contract, many programs have an infraction sheet that construction staff can fill out to document contract violations on the work site. A copy of this infraction sheet should be turned in to the program manager or counselor, as designated, for appropriate action. The YouthBuild Infraction Sheet is located in Appendix B.

2. Leadership Development on the Work Site

One important part of the YouthBuild program is teaching young people to develop their leadership skills and take responsibility for themselves and their community. In fact, at YouthBuild, leadership is defined as “taking responsibility to make sure things go right for your life, for your family, for the program and for the community.” Through leadership development, participants begin to see how they can affect the world around them. Instead of seeing themselves as victims, they begin to see themselves as people who can shape society. They begin to take themselves more seriously.



Leadership development should take place in every part of the program, including on the construction site. The construction site provides tremendous opportunities to teach participants to take responsibility for themselves, those around them, and the project as a whole. This means giving participants opportunities to take responsibility and not just directions.

Part of the construction manager's role is to see that participants have opportunities to develop their leadership skills on the construction site. A leadership development plan for all components of the YouthBuild program should be developed by the entire staff at the very beginning of the program. This will identify leadership development opportunities for the construction site.

Examples of leadership development activities for the construction site can be found in Chapter 10: Site Activities.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

On Leadership Development

"Giving real roles and responsibilities gives the participants ownership over the project."

"The more the youth feel a part of it, the more they get out of it. Have them involved in planning, in taking leadership roles in the different phases. Give them practical opportunities to use what they are learning."

"What works well for us is having specific youth leadership roles such as:

- Crew chiefs (who do daily recordkeeping)*
- A steward (who sets break times, calls clean-up times, maintains the cooler and does store runs)*
- A safety coordinator (who maintains the first aid kit, prepares for safety meetings and sometimes runs the safety meetings)*
- A photographer (who documents the work in progress), and a tool manager."*

3. Construction Skills

The construction site provides an opportunity to teach real construction skills that will be valuable on a construction job. Part of the construction manager's role is to decide which skills are important to teach the participants and to make sure that the participants are actually learning the skills rather than just going through the motions.

The YouthBuild program should develop a list of construction skills (also known as competencies) that participants are expected to learn. This may include certain vocabulary, proper tool use, and construction methods. These competencies should be included in all of the curricula supported by DOL and YouthBuild USA as well as in other industry-recognized curricula. Many programs develop a construction competency checklist for each participant, so that the construction trainers or the vocational education teacher can check off when a participant can demonstrate a certain skill. A Construction Skills Competency Checklist is included in Appendix B. The Biweekly Participant Performance Evaluation and Biweekly Performance Self-Evaluation, to be completed by instructors and a self-evaluation to be completed by participants, is included in Appendix B.

In general, the construction competencies should include skills in each of the following areas:

- Work site safety and first aid
- Safe and skilled use of hand and power tools
- Specific trade skills, knowledge and abilities within at least two modules and skill areas (e.g. green building, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, masonry, landscaping, painting & finishing, facilities maintenance, weatherization)
- Material and tool identification
- Construction terminology and vocabulary
- Construction math
- Blueprint reading
- Cost estimating

Broader construction trade sensibilities include:

- Logical sequencing of work
- Acceptable standards of work quality
- Understanding of basic structural and mechanical systems
- Employability and career pathways

Transferable competencies can include:

- Leadership
- Attitude
- Effort
- Work ethic (hard work)
- Punctuality
- Communication skills
- Teamwork



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

On Teaching Construction Skills

“On site, participants are really learning how to do things and are gaining marketable skills.”

“Hands-on learning in the field is the most exciting for the youth. When we first began the program, I went out and bought 20 copies of Modern Carpentry and the corresponding workbooks, attempting to do a lot of teaching classroom style. This was not successful. Participants were bored within a week and it turned out to be much more productive to do the majority of teaching on site.”

“Be sure to include specific training for trades and jobs that are going to be available; for those trades, the training must include the math involved, the terminology, and the methods.”

“Youth must receive training in plan reading. If you are not teaching how to read plans, you’re not giving a solid foundation and a potential for upward mobility in the construction trades.”

4. Applied Academic Skills and the Construction Site

Participants gain the most out of YouthBuild if their experience on the construction work site is linked to their experience in the classroom. The closer the coordination between the construction staff and the teaching staff, the stronger the overall program will be.

Many YouthBuild participants learn best in a hands-on situation. When participants use math or reading or writing skills on the construction site, they usually learn more and learn faster. When a participant measures a board or uses fractions to cut a 2'x 4', he or she is applying classroom (academic) skills in the work world.

Construction trainers and classroom teachers need to communicate and work together towards intentional integration of classroom and construction site skills so that the participants get the most out of both the work site and the classroom. Math that participants learn in the classroom can be taught in a way that helps them on the construction site, especially as math is an ongoing challenge for participants to learn. The construction staff can then reinforce the math skills through activities on the site. This coordination requires planning among members of the staff.

In some YouthBuild programs, even the reading and writing activities in the classroom are coordinated with the construction site. Writing and construction skills can be linked by having participants keep daily journals of their activities and the skills they are learning on the work site. Reading skills can be reinforced by asking participants to read and follow directions for mixing cement, installation instructions or looking up information in supply catalogs or other activities. For more ideas on linking construction site activity with academic learning, see Chapter Seven: Vocational Education.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

On Linking Construction and Academics

"Everything you teach needs to be relevant."

"Wherever possible, integrate the work experience with the classroom experience. When it works, they feed off each other."

"The need for teaching basic math was much heavier than expected. We had to backtrack—even for those who were supposedly at high school level—to teach basic math skills."

"Constantly relate the math to actual construction."

Chapter 6 Resources in Appendix



APPENDIX B

- [Biweekly Participant Performance Evaluation and Biweekly Performance Self-Evaluation](#)
- [Construction Skills Competency Checklist](#)
- [YouthBuild Infraction Sheet](#)