



CONTINUITIES

Lessons for the Future of Education from
the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

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In Appreciation

As IDRA celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and all that valuing youth implies for the future of education, we wish to express our deepest appreciation to all those who made this milestone possible.

To IDRA founder Dr. José Angel Cárdenas. His vision continues to inspire IDRA's work in creating schools that work for all children. As superintendent of the Edgewood Independent School District, Dr. Cárdenas envisioned public education as a system to serve all students and fought for its realization. In Edgewood, Mr. Juventino Guerra, then-director of federal programs and Ms. Rebeca María Barrera, then-director of the youth tutoring youth program, tested the concept that became the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

To Ms. Ingrid Saunders Jones, Chair of The Coca-Cola Foundation, and the Coca-Cola family for their vision and unwavering partnership on behalf of young people.

To the many partners, public officials and NGOs in the United States, Brazil and other countries who have invested their time, energy and resources to assuring that the program succeeds and is sustained in diverse contexts and communities.

To all of the educators and family members who bring the program to life in classrooms and communities every day. In particular, to South San Antonio Independent School District and Escola Municipal Ruy Barbosa, for their longstanding commitment to pioneering the program and being part of the valued youth network in each country, from the start.

To the IDRA staff who, for twenty-five years, have provided the commitment, knowledge base and persistence to create a consistently successful, empirically valid program that yields tangible results for young people in many countries.

To the Coca-Cola Valued Youth tutors for their invaluable contributions. You are an inspiration to us all.

Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel
President and CEO
Intercultural Development Research Association

Changing Perceptions. Changing Outcomes. Since 1984.



1984

Program founded, funded
by Coca-Cola USA.



1987 - 1992

Program validated,
refined and expanded
to four states.



1990

Program expanded to
reach 28 schools in the
United States and other
countries with support
from The Coca-Cola
Foundation that
continues today.

29,231 tutors engaged
87,693 tutees served
541,000 children, families and
educators positively impacted
98% of participants kept in school



1996 - 1997

Multi-media conferences and online evaluation launched to facilitate trans-national implementation.



1998 - 2007

Program established in Brazil, proven effective and expanded in partnership with The Coca-Cola Institute-Brazil and CIMA.



2009

25th anniversary celebrated in the United States; 10th anniversary in Brazil.

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally recognized cross-age tutoring program in which secondary school students, who are considered at risk of dropping out of school, serve as tutors to elementary school students. Since 1984, the program has been implemented in 550 schools in the continental United States and Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom, and Brazil, benefiting almost 117,000 secondary and elementary students. When students are placed in responsible roles and supported in their efforts, powerful changes occur. Valued youth tutors stay in school, improve their literacy and thinking skills, develop self-esteem, feel they belong in school, and attend class more regularly. And schools shift to a practice of valuing youth considered at risk.

Context and Foundations

What is at Stake?

Around the world, a high quality education is more important than ever before. For millions of children, the future depends on getting education right. But vast numbers of students are denied that promise. In the United States, for example, despite slight gains in graduation rates in recent years, the nation still loses one in every three students to attrition. And only half of Latino, African American and Native American ninth-graders can expect to graduate with a diploma by the time they reach 12th grade. Traditional “have/have not” divides have hardened as graduation and college-readiness rates remain relatively stagnant, while the value of a high quality education rises. But just as youth, families, and societies at large bear a collective cost of under-educating our children, we also share the benefits when we set the stage for each and every child to thrive. Through serious, sustained commitments and in small, everyday ways we can and must act now to make this happen.

Why Continuities?

When a new flight officer begins training, she is instructed to use a continuities folder. Here, the trainee learns to record anything that has happened during her shift that must

be communicated to the next officer on duty. With continuity, an officer anchors a thread from the past to the present that can guide future decisions and actions.

Drawing on a history of experience in implementing the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program in the continental United States, Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom, and Brazil, this publication seeks to catch hold of such a thread. It aims to bring forward important lessons from a 25-year history in ways that can not only inform the future of education but also promote a far brighter future.

In his poem, “Continuities,” Walt Whitman wrote: “Nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost/No birth, identity, form—no object of the world.” In the field of education, this may very well be so. The act of a caring teacher and the energy of a great classroom are not lost on children. But often, ideas that truly work and are transformative, while not lost, are also not widely known. We appreciate and celebrate the dedication of all our partners who have realized the vision of valuing youth. *Continuities* is offered as a reflection on what we have learned and, it is hoped, a guide or catalyst for the much-needed work that lies ahead.



Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

The concept of youth tutoring youth is not new. It was extensively used in U.S. public schools during the teacher shortage of the 1960s. During that time, educators and researchers learned that peer and cross-age tutoring can create valuable learning experiences for both tutor and tutee. What was new was the concept of selecting youth at risk of dropping out—not only honor roll students—to serve as tutors and role models. This bold proposition—that all students have something valuable to contribute—was borne out when IDRA founder and director emeritus Dr. José Angel Cárdenas conducted early trials of the concept as superintendent of the Edgewood Independent School District. This kernel of an idea would be formalized by IDRA in the 1980s, when, with funding from Coca-Cola USA, four school districts in San Antonio became the first sites to implement a valued youth model as a Partners in Education Program. The program has since grown to benefit almost 117,000 tutors and tutees in 550 schools.

Body of Evidence

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based program. It was extensively tested in 1987 using a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design with data collected for the treatment

and comparison group students before tutoring began, during implementation, and at the end of the first and second program years. The results of this study showed that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program had a statistically significant impact on the dropout rate, reading grades, self-concept, and attitudes toward school of tutors.¹ Subsequent research, finding that half of Hispanic students in Texas drop out before entering ninth grade, led to a focus on middle school tutors.² The program also has been informed by IDRA research on school holding power and the role of family, school, and community partnerships in improving outcomes for all students.³

Rigorous Evaluation

IDRA uses a rigorous, comprehensive evaluation designed to assess every aspect of program implementation and to provide data and analysis to schools that allows for continuous improvement. The program utilizes qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate implementation and gauge student progress, including a pre-and-post-test evaluation; assessments of classroom and tutoring progress and outcomes at the elementary and secondary level; reflections by students in journals and interviews; and surveys of families. Across all sites, IDRA also collects and analyzes

demographic data, grades, standardized test scores, absences, and disciplinary referrals. The program's evaluation is among the most rigorous of any dropout prevention model in the country.

Philosophical Base: Seven Tenets of the Program

- All students can learn.
- Schools value all students.
- All students can actively contribute to their own education and to the education of others.
- All students, parents, and teachers have the right to participate fully in creating and maintaining excellent schools.
- Excellence in schools contributes to individual and collective economic growth, stability and advancement.
- Commitment to educational excellence is created by including students, parents, and teachers in setting goals, making decisions, monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes.
- Students, parents, and teachers must be provided extensive, consistent support in ways that allow students to learn, teachers to teach and parents to be involved.



Recognition and Awards

The program has been recognized for its empirical base, rigor and consistent outcomes for youth through numerous awards. It was, for example: identified as an effective program in *Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools*, by Dr. Robert E. Slavin and Dr. Olatokunbo S. Fashola; approved by the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel for inclusion in the National Diffusion Network; and selected as one of only 30 programs worldwide for initial inclusion in the International Youth Foundation data base. It has been featured by the George Lucas Educational Foundation's *Edutopia: Success Stories for Learning in the Digital Age*; in *Everybody's Business: America's Children*, a NBC television special hosted by the Today Show's Katie Couric; and in *Making Schools Better: How Parents and Teachers Across the Country are Taking Action and You Can, Too*—and profiled by the BBC, Caribbean Business, The Christian Science Monitor, Fortune Magazine, The Times of London, The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, PBS, USA Today, U.S. News and World Report, and The Washington Post.

Program Structure

In the United States, IDRA works directly with school districts and campuses to coordinate, implement, and evaluate the program in a way that preserves the integrity of the program and ensures that students succeed. In other countries, IDRA has partnered with local nongovernmental organizations, which work directly with participating school sites. In each case, IDRA provides implementation materials and resources, on-site and online training and support, technical assistance, and ongoing monitoring and assessment in coordination with school-based site implementation teams. IDRA promotes the exchange of best practices, nurtures student leadership and extends staff enrichment through regional, national, and international convenings.

Schools that adopt the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program recognize the alignment of the program's philosophy with their own mission, set specific goals for keeping students in school who are at risk of dropping out, commit time and resources to implementing the program, and collect data for evaluation. Each site establishes an implementation team that creates linkages between the district office and the campuses, between secondary and elementary schools, and between schools and the community. Teams include district and campus administrators, a teacher coordinator, an elementary school representative, a family liaison, and an evaluation liaison.

Corporate, Foundation and Federal Support.

When Coca-Cola USA approached then-mayor of San Antonio Henry Cisneros in 1984 about identifying a dropout prevention initiative for Hispanic youth, he contacted IDRA. Since then, The Coca-Cola Company and The Coca-Cola Foundation have committed themselves to advancing educational opportunity through valuing youth. The Valued Youth model was selected as the foundation's flagship strategy for addressing chronically high attrition rates among minority youth, and the company and foundation have partnered in this work both locally and internationally. Grants from federal and state funders and private foundations have complemented these efforts, providing the resources to research and refine the program, disseminate findings, and support local implementation.

Program Elements

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has 10 mutually reinforcing components: five instructional components and five support structures.

Instructional strategies:

- Tutoring Sessions—Tutors tutor a minimum of four hours a week for one class period a day.
- Classes for Tutors—Tutors meet with their secondary school teacher coordinator once a week.
- Educational Field Trips
—Tutors go on two to three trips to explore career, economic and cultural opportunities.

■ Mentors and Role-Models

—Adults who are considered successful in their fields and who represent students' ethnic background are invited to participate.

■ Student Recognition

—Students are acknowledged for the efforts and contributions they make as tutors.

Support Strategies:

- Curriculum—The objectives of the curricular framework are improving the students' self-concepts, tutoring skills, and literary skills.

- Coordination—Periodic meetings are held to coordinate all activities, facilitate communication among personnel, and provide first-hand information for monitoring the program.

- Staff Enrichment—Training and technical assistance are provided to implementation team administrators and teachers.

- Parent Involvement—The program demonstrates to families that the school takes their children's education seriously and values the families' contributions.

- Evaluation—IDRA analyzes data and other information for each school to inform implementation of the program.

Schools Valuing Youth

Profiles from Houston, Atlanta and São Paulo

Schools that engage youth as tutors are located in small towns, urban centers and suburban communities. Regardless of where they are located, they primarily serve economically disadvantaged students from minority backgrounds. One in ten of valued youth tutors are students with disabilities. Across sites, schools are committed to engaging, not giving up on, students at risk of dropping out.

James Madison High School serves 9th–12th grade students in the Houston Independent School District. The district and high school have made a longstanding commitment to improving student connections with school. Madison High School serves a diverse student population; just over half of its students are African American (54 percent) and 45 percent are Latino. Nine percent of students at Madison are English language learners. The majority of students (73 percent) are economically disadvantaged. The high school's mission is to "equip our students to meet the challenge of the 21st Century...through hands-on, commitment-oriented curricula that promotes skill development for gainful employment, and academic excellence for college preparation." Madison High School first engaged high school students as valued youth tutors in the 1995–96 school year and has included the program as a core component for eight school years.

Located in Atlanta, the capital and most populous city in Georgia, Kennedy Middle School serves students grades pre-K and 6–8 in the Atlanta Public School District. Ninety-nine percent of students are African American; 95 percent are economically disadvantaged. From 1998 to 2000 and 2004 to today, school leaders at Kennedy have paired their students with youngsters from Bethune Elementary School. In describing her experience with the program, a Kennedy seventh grader wrote: "The best thing about tutoring [is showing] the kids... there is a place in the world for them to shine."

João Amós Comenius, in the city of São Paulo, has engaged students as valued youth tutors since 2002. Though São Paulo is Brazil's financial engine, it has many poor neighborhoods. This school is located in one of them. The majority of João Amós Comenius's students are economically disadvantaged. Here, the program inspires widespread participation of students, both as tutors and volunteers. While the school has room for only 25 tutors at a time, many more students want to be associated with the program. So João Amós Comenius created a volunteer role for them to participate as well. This past year, 100 percent of valued youth tutors completed the program and advanced to their next grade level.



"A lot of people believe that once you grow up in a bad neighborhood surrounded by bad influences, you will become one yourself. It is hard to break that cycle. If it wasn't for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program maybe I would have just become another statistic and not the person you see here today. When you are that age and you are given that type of responsibility, it makes you yearn for more and it makes you want to become something in life. Now I am a police officer for the city of McAllen, Texas. The best thing about my job is helping those in need."

—Pablo López, former tutor, 2007



“Children learn best...by being active participants...It has to be powerful. That’s how the student learns, by being powerful in their own learning.”⁵

— Bertha Peña, At-Risk Coordinator,
Brownsville Independent School District, Texas, 1996

One. valuing valorização valorizando

“Since I became a tutor, life to me has endless possibilities, dreams and goals that I can accomplish when I just sit down, relax and look at the small things in life.”

“Desde que me convertí en monitora, la vida para mi tiene un sinnúmero de posibilidades, sueños y metas que puedo lograr cuando simplemente me siento y me relajo y miro a las pequeñas cosas de la vida.”

— Gabriella Marie Guajardo, tutor, South San Antonio High School and Grand Prize Winner, 25th Anniversary Essay Contest, 2009



What We Have Learned

1. Valuing Youth Works.

If you provide young people with an opportunity to contribute—to themselves, their families, their communities—they will.

Research and classroom experience make clear that student engagement—a student’s intellectual, social, and emotional connection to school—is a prerequisite to learning. Without substantive student engagement, researchers find, “there is no learning.”⁶

When students lack a sense of connection to teachers, school and what they are learning, there is little reason to remain.⁷ This is especially true at key transition points or when students are struggling to stay on track.⁸ But all too often, when students are struggling, we give up on them. Valuing youth, without exception, turns this tendency on its head.

Engagement is valuing youth made manifest. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program pairs middle and high school students who are at risk of dropping out with youngsters just starting out in school.

In selecting them as valued youth tutors, the school says to them, often for the first time, “You are needed. You belong. You have something special to contribute.” Students rise to the occasion. Since 1984, 29,231 youth tutors in Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States and Puerto Rico have gained confidence and self-esteem through serving as role models to 87,693 younger children.

“Throughout my life, I have always been taught to believe that I was no good and that I could never do anything right, and that maybe I should have never been born. I felt that my parents and former teachers were always disappointed in me because of my low grades. I too, began to believe what they believed of me and my grades went down. I became very rude and disrespectful. [My teacher] told us that this class was open to those kids that she thought would be ‘good for the program’ and that could be ‘positive role models.’ I can remember the feeling I got when she said those words because I had never been told that I could be ‘good’ at anything, much less that I could be a positive ‘role model.’”

— Jamilleth Hernandez, tutor,
Dr. Javier Saenz Middle School, La Joya, Texas, 2009

two. ownership pertencimento hacerlo propio

“Nos apaixonamos com a metodologia.”

“We fell in love with the methodology.”

— staff member, Centro de Cultura,
Informação e Meio Ambiente, Rio de Janeiro, 2009



2. Local Ownership is Key. To scale up and replicate success requires holding fast to essentials while adapting to local contexts.

There is a pervasive and urgent need to improve educational quality for students of all backgrounds. But finding responses that work in one context and can succeed and be scaled up in another is a challenge. Research suggests that a program is ready for replication only when it “identifies and outlines the essential components...that must be implemented with fidelity in order to achieve desired results... [and] illuminates the more fungible qualities that can be adapted to meet local circumstances.”⁹ Our experience bears this out.

While the methodology showed success in selected Texas public schools from its earliest implementation, IDRA and The Coca-Cola Foundation did not expand to other regions until the program proved empirically valid. This happened in 1987, when our research, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, showed a dropout rate of 1 percent for valued youth tutors compared to 12 percent for the comparison group. Tutors also showed statistically significant improvements in reading, attitudes toward school, self-worth, attendance, and discipline.¹⁰ The

study determined which features of the model are essential and which can be adapted to meet unique local needs, ensuring that, when implemented in other countries, the program is not a U.S. transplant but rather a locally owned program integrated into local educational contexts.¹¹

By holding fast to core elements (e.g., classes for tutors, staff enrichment, and an appropriate age and grade distance between tutors and tutees) while tailoring the operational model, Programa Coca-Cola de Valorização do Jovem, for instance, has grown from a two-school pilot in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to serve students in 44 schools, 20 cities and eight states, while maintaining a less than 2 percent dropout rate. A three-way partnership among IDRA, the Coca-Cola Institute of Education, and a local non-governmental organization, Centro de Cultura, Informação e Meio Ambiente (CIMA), the Brazil model is informing U.S. operations: IDRA is now expanding the North American program by certifying selected U.S. nonprofits and trainers.

While program success has been achieved across diverse educational contexts, scale-up within a given school district has not come easily. Even when valuing youth is recognized as the key to transformation, it is much harder for this principle, and all that it implies, to be adopted campus-wide. Our experience shows that when this “second-tier” transformation occurs, it happens as the result of a clear intention, coupled with concrete action to engage students and families around a high quality curriculum.

“The large majority of our participating students has increased their grade point average, reduced their absences, and become a viable part of the school community. The program has given our students the opportunity to regain a sense of worth. It has added value to the educational curriculum at the elementary campus for young students in need of assistance. I believe that the Coca Cola Valued Youth Program has been an excellent addition to our campus curriculum.”

— Curtis W. Britt, Director, Career Center,
Ector County Independent School District, Texas, 2008

three. leadership liderança liderazgo

“Being in student council has helped the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program students because it impacts and changes their lives, and they become successful leaders...who represent the campus. Do not close the door to these students.”

— Jerry de la Garza, teacher coordinator and student council sponsor, Memorial Middle School, La Joya Independent School District, Texas, 2008



3. School Leadership Sets the Tone.

To squarely take on attrition, school leaders must inspire innovation, embody engagement, and incorporate actionable knowledge.

When you come around the sharp corner and enter the schoolyard of Ruy Barbosa in Rio de Janeiro, you are struck first by the sheer energy of the children and next by the sense of the school as a community. In the busy hallway at the school's entrance, you find a wall of leadership—photographs spread out like the branches of a tree that recognize key people who led Programa Coca-Cola de Valorização do Jovem since it began as a 1999 pilot site—and photographs of those who continue that legacy of leadership today. Between 1999 and 2007, school leaders at Ruy Barbosa

have created the opportunity for 228 tutors in grades 5–8 to serve 684 elementary school tutees.

Committed principals and superintendents—whether impressed by the program from the start or convinced by its results—are a defining force in sustaining a successful program. A shining example is Debra Duvall, superintendent of the Mesa School District in Arizona, who sees the Salt River Project/Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program as the single most successful dropout prevention program in her district.

When Mike Hughes, a Mesa school board member successfully nominated Duvall for Arizona Superintendent of the Year in 2007, he cited her outstanding “ability in the areas of instructional leadership, communication, professionalism, and community involvement.”¹² From Mesa, Arizona to Rio de Janeiro and beyond, school leaders who squarely confront the challenge of student attrition are adopting and tailoring successful strategies, creating a climate that inspires innovation and engagement, using data for continuous improvement, and securing the resources to underwrite change.

At South San Antonio ISD in Texas, pioneering school leaders such as Gilbert Quezada have assured since 1985 that students have the chance to contribute and benefit as valued youth tutors. Then an associate superintendent for special programs, Quezada and other school leaders would establish a program that has engaged students from four secondary schools as tutors in five elementary campuses. The tone they set reverberates today: this past year, 100 percent of tutors remained in school, and a majority improved their scores in standardized reading and mathematics. And 12th grade tutor, Gabriella Guajardo, represented her district as first place winner of the 25th Anniversary Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Essay Contest.

“There’s a little exchange of knowledge going on between me and my tutees. I teach them to excel in reading, grammar, science, and occasionally math and science. In exchange, unknowingly, they teach me valuable life lessons found only in a child’s heart.”

— Crisol Ortúñoz, tutor, Ann Richards Middle School,
La Joya, Texas, 2009

four power poder poder

“Só em meio aos obstáculos e desafios posso provar o quanto eu sou capaz de vencer. Antes do programa eu não ligava para nada disso—Nem para o estudo eu ligava. Sei o que sou e até onde posso ir. Quero continuar sendo um bom exemplo na minha casa e te ruma boa profissão, porque agora sei a importância da família e do estudo na minha vida.”

“It is only through obstacles and challenges that I can prove how much I am capable of overcoming. Before the program, I didn’t care about any of this. I didn’t even care about school. I know [now] what I am and what I am capable of doing. I want to continue setting a good example at home, and I want to have a good profession, because now I know how important family and school are in my life.”

— Alanna Alves Moraes, tutor, Shopping Park Municipal Public School,
Uberlândia, Minas Gerais and Grand Prize Winner, 25th Anniversary
Essay Contest, 2009



4. Realizing the Power of One + One + One. All students must have at least one caring adult in their lives at school and a reason to care.

It is estimated that in the United States, 40–60 percent of students feel chronically disengaged from school.¹³ That's the bad news. The good news is that stronger ties with at least one caring adult not only fortify students' connections to school but also help to improve their academic achievement.¹⁴ In this way, the best dropout prevention programs "do more than increase student attendance—they help students and families who feel marginalized in their relationships with teachers and peers to be connected at school and with learning."¹⁵ In strengthening these connections, two factors seem to matter most: supportive relationships between students and their teachers

and student perceptions that school is preparing them for their future.¹⁶ The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program foregrounds these features by:

- Instituting effective cross-age tutoring sessions that set the stage for students to be seen, and to see themselves, anew;
- Promoting and supporting the leadership of path-finding teachers through the role of the teacher coordinator;
- Breaking down school silos through cross-level implementation teams;
- Creating a "home room" environment through weekly classes and field trips for tutors; and

- Providing ongoing enrichment opportunities that build on educators' existing strengths.

With these features in place, cross-age tutoring carried out under the guidance of caring and effective teachers keeps 98 percent of participating students in school. Through a further refinement—the development of a community of practice for teachers and school leaders—La Joya Independent School District in South Texas achieved a multiplier effect, raising standardized reading scores and diminishing absences and disciplinary problems.¹⁷

"John was struggling in school. He was absent a lot from his eighth grade classes and often sent to the school office for discipline. So I put John in the program to tutor young children in reading four days a week. One Friday, when I was alone in the classroom, John walked in. He handed me a small black canister, a 35mm film canister. There was a bullet inside. John said that he had planned to use it the night before. But he had stopped when he remembered that his tutees would be waiting for him on Monday. 'I want you to have the bullet,' he told me. 'I won't be needing it anymore.' "

— Eduardo Reyna, secondary teacher, South Texas, 1995

“The Coca Cola Valued Youth Program gave my daughter, Athena, a new reason for living. She has formed bonds with her tutees that will last a lifetime. She has found her youthful dreams and goals again. She has been accepted to Odessa College, and she is so excited by this new beginning for her. My educational philosophy has always been—totally due to my Hispanic culture—‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ I, as a single parent, have been fortunate enough to have such great people as part of my support system.”

— Yolanda Brown, parent and educator, Ector County Independent School District, Texas, 2008

five
engagement
engajamento
involucramiento



5. Family and Community Engagement is Essential.

The school-family-community triad is at the heart of holding on to students and ensuring their success.

When schools, families, and community members work together to support student learning, “children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”¹⁸ Family engagement in public education is associated with higher grades and test scores, enrollment in higher level programs, passing classes and earning course credits, better school attendance and social skills, graduation, and advancement to postsecondary education.¹⁹ And these findings hold true for students across diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Still, when it comes to creating meaningful school, family and community partnerships, barriers persist. Obstacles include: cultural, language, and socio-economic differences, logistical barriers, and

“deficit-based” interactions that suggest to low-income families that they either are irrelevant to school reform or are the principal cause of student failure. Although some ground has been gained in overcoming logistical and language barriers, the full social capital that families and communities offer in meaningful partnerships with schools remains largely untapped.

Twenty-five years ago, when IDRA proposed that families of all backgrounds be engaged as valued partners in their children’s schools, the idea flew in the face of prevailing views—and resistance to engagement persists today. But on countless campuses, educators are using the valued youth program as a way to turn family-school relationships around.

Teacher coordinators establish new relationships with families through visits to their homes, inviting them to serve as role models for tutors and seeking their input through program evaluation. Enrichment sessions, conducted in families’ first languages, address issues that families themselves have raised. Families are invited to celebrate their children’s successes at school, serving as honored guests at special recognition events. Many families report that the first time they had a positive communication with their children’s schools was through the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. In putting meaningful family engagement into practice, participating schools find that the respect they show families is repaid multifold.

Surveys of more than 1,000 parents in Brazil (with a 90 percent response rate) found that “parents were impressed by the power of the program to change their children,” reported that the program helped their children at school (97.8 percent) and at home (88.4 percent), and thought (94.8 percent) their children’s participation “would help them achieve their educational goals.”

— Brazil Evaluation Report, 10th Anniversary, IDRA, 2009



six partnership parceria colaboración

“Nós temos dez anos de trabalho, o programa esta ampliado para todo o país, y de maneira muito êxitosa. Tudo isso foi possível porque nós acreditamos em um sonho e nós fomos capazes de diálogar, que é a base do nosso trabalho em educação.”

“We have 10 years of work; the program has expanded to the whole country, and with so much success. All this was possible because we believed in a dream and we were able to establish a dialogue, which is the basis of our work in education.”

— Dr. Regina de Assis, former Secretary of Education, Rio de Janeiro, 2009



6. Success Demands Well-Defined Partnerships.

When roles are clear and each partner contributes from its unique strengths, a multi-sector collaboration can reap dramatic results.

IDRA's 25-year relationship with The Coca-Cola Foundation is founded on a shared vision and a mutual long-term commitment to effective education. The success of this partnership—and of the myriad collaborative efforts that make the program possible at the local level—has depended on each partner working with common purpose and well-defined roles.

Both locally and internationally, schools, families, NGOs, government agencies, corporations and philanthropic organizations have each brought their distinctive strengths to valuing youth. In Great Britain, the program was launched through

a set of education and business partnerships in collaboration with education agencies. In Brazil, the Ministry of Education has partnered with Coca-Cola in Rio de Janeiro with additional support from local bottlers to sustain the growth and expansion of the program. In the United States, funding from state education agencies, federal programs and agencies, and foundations has complemented funding from The Coca-Cola Foundation, providing critical resources for research, diffusion, and program implementation. In the state of Arizona, the Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District, a water and electric company, led implementation in

partnership with school districts and then worked cooperatively to support programs in Tempe and Phoenix.

Whether their role is to design and develop a pedagogical framework; to put the framework into practice; or to test, evaluate or underwrite innovation, each partner must both be aligned with the goals for youth and contribute from its distinctive strengths.

“We looked around the world, to find the very best [educational] programs. After analyzing some 20 different programs with the advice of a group of educators...we decided that this program was the one because it could result in the greatest improvement for education in our country. Then...we saw so many lives change. Until now, we have been able to directly impact the lives of 30,000 children. And we know there is a multiplier effect.”

— Marco Simões, Vice-President of Communications and Sustainability,
Coca-Cola Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, 2009

"The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped transform the lives of nearly 30,000 "at risk" students on the verge of dropping out of school. With a graduation success rate of 98 percent, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is one of the most successful intervention programs designed to transform the lives of young people. Congratulations on 25 years of helping to deliver hope to the more than 540,000 students, families, and educators who have been touched by the program."

— Ingrid Saunders Jones, Senior Vice President, The Coca-Cola Company,
Chair, The Coca-Cola Foundation, 2009

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7. Structure and Innovation Sustain Impact.

Transformative impact demands sustained structures, resources and a commitment to valuing all youth.

From curricula for tutors to cross-level school implementation teams and evaluation protocols, the formal structure of the program provides the foundation that supports implementation with integrity. But in the end, what creates transformative impact is the commitment people make to bringing structures to life on behalf of youth and sustaining them over time. Schools are achieving this as they invest in the role of the teacher coordinator, strengthen school-family and secondary-elementary campus connections, and enlist a diverse array of funding partners.

When Houston ISD in Texas began the program in 1995, it was funded by The Coca-Cola Foundation. The district expanded the program to reach substantially more students

with support from the Houston Rotarians and Houston Works. More recently, the district has secured funding to continue the program from the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the Texas Education Agency, and federal programs. With tenacity and multi-sector support, Houston ISD has re-engaged hundreds of secondary students who were at risk of dropping out.

As the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program celebrates its 25th anniversary, an enduring commitment has positively impacted over half a million youth, teachers and families in three countries. Committing to valuing youth has also made sound economic sense: every dollar invested in dropout prevention yields a nine dollar return.²⁰

In Brazil, Guardian Angels Circles are being established to diversify and sustain support for the program. The intent is to expand program support through collaboration with local Coca-Cola bottlers, and with governmental and educational institutions interested in improving the educational system.

Continuities: A Call to Action

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in history. It is a time when many are jolted into realizing how much our lives are intertwined, not just within but across nations. Wherever we live, we see that the quality of our lives will depend on the quality of education we secure for all our children. As U.S. President Barack Obama recently said to Congress, "In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite."²¹

Our collective experience with the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program suggests that making sure all children have access to a good education will depend on strong teachers, engaged families, and vital, creative partnerships that support quality schooling. At heart it will depend on a fundamental and unwavering focus on the value of young people. We offer *Continuities* with the conviction that

what we have learned can help illuminate the path. And we offer these lessons with deep commitment to young people, and gratitude to every family member, educator, and partner who, in the network of relationships that make up each school, are valuing youth each day.

The work ahead—to assure that each child graduates from high school, well prepared for the future—could not be more urgent. The well-being of our children and communities hangs in the balance. Fortunately, from the classroom to the boardroom to the capitol to the kitchen table, we have the capacity—together and as individuals—to make sure that our children succeed.

"In the network of relationships created by the program, everyone is a teacher. At first many say 'I have nothing to give' but that nothing is everything."

— Jaime Pacheco, General Project Coordinator, Centro de Cultura, Informação e Meio Ambiente, Rio de Janeiro, 2009

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About the President and CEO

María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., President & CEO of the Intercultural Development Research Association, is a recognized expert on the prevention and recovery of dropouts. Her research, public testimony and advocacy on behalf of all children informs education policy and practice. Dr. Robledo Montecel was principal investigator and project director of the Texas School Dropout Survey Project, the first statewide study of dropouts in Texas, and has led state and national research on educational outcomes and best practices. Under her leadership, IDRA’s Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was validated by the U.S. Department

of Education’s National Diffusion Network, identified as a Program of Academic Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, and recognized by the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for excellence in non-profit management.

and innovative materials and programs. Each year, IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators, community members and families. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to realizing the right of every child to a quality education. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses;

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