
Making the Shoe Fit: Creating a Work Preparation System for a Large and Diverse Welfare Population

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Introduction. Welfare-to-work from a human development perspective

The purpose of this paper is to present a vision of a welfare-to-work system derived from Project Match's 11 years of direct-service experience and research. Project Match is a voluntary program that offers retention, re-employment, and advancement assistance as part of its direct-service activities in the Cabrini-Green community in Chicago. Our vision grows out of a fundamental reconceptualization of work preparation that begins by asking two questions: What are the pathways that people take naturally when they leave welfare outside of welfare-to-work programs? And how can programs be structured to reflect what we learn from these pathways?

We believe that the issues we address in this paper will continue to be relevant under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. In fact, given that there are now strict work requirements and time limits, the issues are more relevant than ever. States *must* find ways to prepare a large and diverse welfare population for work.

This briefing paper is excerpted from a longer paper with the permission of the authors. The complete paper consists of an introduction, three content sections, and a concluding "how to" section. The introduction asks the reader to view the welfare-to-work process from a human development perspective—one that is grounded in an understanding of how people learn and change. Section One critiques previous welfare-to-work approaches to discover reasons for their limited effectiveness. Section Two describes an approach to moving welfare recipients into the workforce that relies on work itself as work preparation rather than job readiness classes or subsidized jobs. Section Three describes activities Project Match designed specifically for the "hard to serve." The conclusion outlines a tool developed from Project Match's experience for guiding people along the "natural pathways" to self-sufficiency. This tool, the Pathways System, is being piloted in welfare programs in Chicago and Des Moines, Iowa. It has three components: a monthly activity diary, a computerized tracking system, and basic rules and procedures for line workers and welfare recipients.

This briefing paper summarizes the Introduction and Sections Two and Three.

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If welfare-to-work programs are to be successful, the welfare-to-work process must be viewed from a human development perspective. If welfare recipients are to develop into steady workers, we have to create a welfare-to-work system that reflects what we know about how people learn and grow. We have to wrestle with such questions as these: Why don't many welfare recipients successfully complete basic education programs? Why do they have trouble keeping jobs? How can they learn the most basic requirements for employment, like adhering to a work schedule and getting along with coworkers and supervisors? Work requirements and time limits alone will not be enough to turn a large and diverse welfare population into steady workers. If this is to happen, we will have to begin to think differently about the nature and substance of work preparation.

Section Two. A different approach to work preparation: Project Match's experience as a high-flexibility program

Our review of the research from the JOBS program and other programs across the country revealed that flexibility is the key to an effective program. Project Match identified five characteristics of a high flexibility system as most important:

- ~ Flexibility around the number of hours per week an activity lasts
- ~ Flexibility around duration of an activity
- ~ Flexibility around sequencing of an activity
- ~ Flexibility around combining an activity with others
- ~ Attention to transitions

Using work as work preparation

One of the first things Project Match discovered was that education was often not the first step in a natural pathway out of welfare. When people entered the program, most wanted to find a job. They did not want to go to GED classes or other education programs. Project Match staff did encourage many to go, believing that education credentials would improve their job prospects, but we quickly saw that most people simply dropped out of the classes or failed to make progress. So staff decided to help participants get what they wanted—a job.

Unfortunately, almost as many people were unsuccessful at their first jobs as had been unsuccessful in basic education. Fifty-seven percent lost or quit their first job within 6 months. Seventy percent left within 12 months (Herr & Halpern, 1991). To counter this trend, Project Match began to offer re-employment assistance to people who lost or quit jobs, retention assistance for people who were working, and advancement assistance to help people move up in the labor market.

At Project Match we think working is the best way to learn about work. You can lecture participants in a job-readiness class about potential problems with supervisors, for instance, but it is likely to be so abstract as to be meaningless to most

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people there. But when a person is on the job and experiencing a real problem with a supervisor—that's when guidance and advice will mean something and that's where retention services come in.

Of course, using real jobs as a training ground means that the program must be more interested in serving participants than local employers. Using jobs as a training ground also means that the program must view movement from job to job as natural. It must be prepared to support this movement with re-employment and advancement assistance. Further, the program must be ready to help people go back to school if they decide that is the best next step. We have found that many people, after working in low-paying entry-level jobs, begin to see that further education is probably the only way to get a better job.

First jobs—and probably second and third ones—are steps along the way toward self-sufficiency. Once this fact has been accepted, it changes the nature of job search in welfare-to-work programs.

The key to the re-employment process is immediate access to job search assistance.

Job search in a high-flexibility system

Re-employment and advancement assistance are really the same process as a first job search. When it comes to re-employment, the key is *immediate* access to job search assistance, particularly to prevent people from reapplying for welfare or going back to a full grant. That's why group job searches, a common practice in many places, is unlikely to meet the needs of people who lose jobs or who want to find better ones.

When people need re-employment assistance, they should not have to go through any bureaucratic process to get access to job leads, word processors, telephones, and advice and guidance from staff. They should have immediate one-on-one help to determine what went wrong at the job and to address specific problems. Does the person need advice about how to interact with a supervisor? Does the person need help arranging child care? Or does the person simply need to find a job that is more convenient to home? Every problem that leads to job loss may not be difficult to solve or require tons of staff time. We have found that quite often people mostly need access to job leads.

When it comes to advancement assistance, group job search would be inappropriate. It would not be an effective use of time or resources for welfare recipients or for anyone looking to become re-employed. And it usually is offered during the day when people who are working cannot attend. Job search staff and resources need to be available during the evening and on weekends. People shouldn't have to quit a job in order to get help to find another.

In Oregon, a resource room is located at some branch offices of the welfare department and at all sites for the state welfare-to-work program. Job developers for Oregon's welfare-to-work program send leads to the resource rooms. Job openings from the Oregon Employment Division are posted. The resource rooms subscribe to newspapers and periodicals that list employment opportunities. Telephones, typewriters, word processors, fax machines, copiers, bond paper, and

other materials necessary for applying for a job are available. Staff members are there to assist people individually. Resource room staff and job developers offer group workshops such as weekly sessions on job openings in various labor market sectors.

Such a resource room is the foundation upon which every program should build. A resource room can be used for either group or individual job search. It can be used for guided or independent job search. It can be used for first-time job search, for re-employment job search, and for advancement job search. It is the key to being able to offer job search assistance in a high-flexibility system.

Project Match's results from operating a high flexibility system

How much more effective is the Project Match approach than the typical welfare-to-work approach?

In Riverside, California, considered to have the most successful government program, a decreasing number of experimental group members worked each year during the 3-year follow-up period: 52% were employed at some point in Year 1, 49% in Year 2, 45% in Year 3, and 31% by the last quarter of Year 3 (Riccio, Friedlander, & Freedman, 1994). The pattern at Project Match looks quite different. Data on a sample for which we have 5 years of follow-up showed in Year 1 that 87% of the participants worked at some point. Over the next 4 years, this percentage stayed steady, climbing slightly to 93% by Year 5. Project Match participants do have a high rate of job loss, but we address job loss quickly through re-employment services and we get many people back into the workforce. An even more encouraging pattern that emerged from our data is that during the follow-up period an increasing number of sample members were working full-year with each passing year. In Year 1, 26% worked all 12 months of the year. The number climbed to 36% in Year 2, 38% in Year 3, 45% in Year 4, and 54% by Year 5.

The Riverside data and our data are not directly comparable. Project Match is a voluntary program, whereas Riverside is a mandatory one. Project Match has never been evaluated using a random assignment research design, so we do not know what would have happened to people in the absence of Project Match. Nevertheless, we believe that if Riverside offered retention and re-employment assistance similar to Project Match's, it would not have seen such a decrease in the number of people working over the years. A fair number of people probably would have been helped to find their way back into the workforce.

Despite our successes, some participants have been left behind. Some people cannot find jobs at all. Some find jobs but cannot keep them long. They keep cycling from one low-wage job to another, often with long periods of unemployment in between. Most of these people have failed in education programs as well. Given their limitations, we believe that this group would not succeed in other kinds of work preparation either. Some people in this group would be exempt in a

A resource room is the key to being able to offer job search assistance in a high-flexibility system.

government program. Others would simply hit the wall in a time-limited system. We have found that we cannot predict who will fall into this group. Some of them have substance abuse problems, but some of our participants who are now steady workers also once had such problems. But no matter why they end up in the “no progress” group, they can range from 20% to 50% of Project Match participants (Herr & Halpern, 1991).

Because we are committed to helping everyone who comes to our program, we have spent considerable time figuring how to serve this group. Our experience with this group is extremely relevant to recent federal welfare reform. States must now serve far larger numbers of people in welfare-to-work programs than ever before, including many who previously would have been exempt.

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Section Three. Adding lower rungs to the Ladder: How to help the “hard-to-serve”
In recent years, some states have moved toward universal or near-universal participation in welfare-to-work programs. They have come face to face with question of how to help the hard-to-serve.

Many public and private programs attempt to help the hard-to-serve by identifying and treating barriers such as substance abuse or mental health problems. Project Match has developed a different approach—one in which treatment is not the only activity. In fact, in Project Match, treatment is usually not even the core activity. Instead, Project Match has created a whole set of new work-preparation activities that address a broad range of psychological, social, and cognitive issues common to most welfare recipients. Many people who end up in the hard-to-serve group do have problems such as substance abuse or abusive boyfriends or spouses. Often, however, these problems alone do not keep them from getting and keeping jobs. There is usually a host of more subtle, harder-to-pinpoint problems that would hold them back even if they did overcome a drug habit or other perceived barrier.

Project Match’s Incremental Ladder to Economic Independence

Project Match has three groups of work-preparation activities—volunteer activities, activities with children, and self-improvement activities. These are part of a larger model—the Incremental Ladder to Economic Independence (see Figure 1). The Incremental Ladder also includes education or training activities and employment. With this broad array of activities, there is a place on the Ladder for every welfare recipient, from the most to the least job-ready. Underlying this welfare-to-work model is a developmental approach. Activities are arranged on the Ladder so they are progressively more demanding. On each rung there is an increase in skills, competencies, and expectations and a gradually increasing time commitment.

We use the Ladder to help participants develop natural pathways to self-sufficiency. The Ladder helps staff and participants consider their alternatives at each step by laying out a variety of options. People can move up and down the Ladder. They can move sideways or diagonally. A common natural pathway at Project

Figure 1. Incremental Ladder to Economic Independence

Unsubsidized Jobs 40 Hours/Week (Over \$6.00/Hour, Benefits) Over 5 Years 4-5 Years 1-3 Years		Unsubsidized Jobs 40 Hours/Week (\$6.00/Hour or Less) Over 1 Year 7-12 Months 4-6 Months 0-3 Months		Unsubsidized Jobs 20 Hours/Week or More 7-12 Months 4-6 Months 0-3 Months		Unsubsidized Jobs 20 Hours/Week or More College Vocational Training High School ABE/GED		5 Hours/Week or More Crafts/Sewing Exercise Class/Aerobics Substance Abuse Treatment	
Scheduled Hours 20 Hours/Week or More Outside Community (e.g., Hospitals) Inside Community (e.g., Child's School)		Scheduled Hours 11-19 Hours/Week Outside Community (e.g., National Organizations) Inside Community (e.g., Church)		Scheduled Hours 7-12 Months 4-6 Months 0-3 Months		Scheduled Hours 11-19 Hours/Week College Vocational Training ABE/GED Literacy		3-4 Hours/Week or More Crafts/Sewing Exercise Class/Aerobics Substance Abuse Treatment	
5 Hours/Week or More Other Activities (e.g. Sports) Community Activities (e.g., Scout Leader, Coach) School-based Activities (e.g., Homeroom Mother)		Scheduled Hours 1-10 Hours/Week Local School Council Tenant Management Bd. Child's School Head Start		Subsidized Work On-the-Job Training Supported Work		5-10 Hours/Week ABE/GED Literacy		3-4 Hours/Week or More Crafts/Sewing Exercise Class/Aerobics Substance Abuse Treatment	
3-4 Hours/Week Family Literacy Programs Family Support Programs (e.g., Parenting Education Class, Drop-in Center)		Unscheduled Hours Local School Council Tenant Management Bd. Child's School Head Start		Internships with Stipend Structured Activities w/Stipends (e.g. WIC Clerk, Head Start Aide) 7-12 Months 4-6 Months 0-3 Months		1-4 Hours/Week ABE/GED Literacy		1-2 Hours/Week Family Counseling Individual Counseling Parenting Class	
1-2 Hours/Week Acts on Referrals in Timely Manner Takes Child to Extracurricular Activities Regularly Gets Child to School on Time		Volunteer Work/ Advisory Boards		Employment		Education/Training		Self-Improvement Activities	



--WELFARE DEPENDENCY--

Match is for people to enter the program and start working at either part-time or full-time jobs. Many just keep moving up the Ladder. Others straddle employment and education rungs at some point. The time frame for each participant is different. The Ladder embodies the characteristics that make for a high-flexibility program. Attention to transitions is also inherent in the Ladder model.

Volunteer activities

Volunteering can serve as a lower rung of a career ladder. It provides an opportunity to develop skills, build confidence, and create a social network. It also opens the door to other opportunities.

Perhaps the most frequently cited example concerns Head Start. Parents of children in Head Start are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or on policy committees. Quite a few go on to become Head Start staff. In 1993–94, for example, 31% of Head Start staff were parents of current or former Head Start children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995).

Volunteering can lead to regular employment. One Project Match participant volunteered at her child’s elementary school, where she worked in the administrative office calling the parents of children who did not come to school to verify why they were absent. She now works at Federal Express. This volunteer experience laid the foundation for her to go out and get a regular job, not just in terms of skills and work habits but also in terms of confidence and motivation. In this case, it took some prodding from Project Match to help this woman realize she had developed marketable skills and was ready for a regular job. Just because a pathway is “natural” doesn’t mean it will unfold without attention to transitions.

Volunteering is effective job preparation because it uses a work or worklike setting to help welfare recipients who are not job-ready develop skills and behaviors that will help them gain regular employment.

Activities with children

Project Match began to consider these activities when we observed that many of the people who could not get to school or work on time were the same people whose children were always late to school or never made it to appointments and extracurricular activities. We reasoned that the best place to start learning how to adhere to a schedule was with parent-child activities. First, many welfare recipients seem more willing to do things for their children than for themselves. Second, there are not a lot of expectations to overwhelm or confuse parents in these activities. The only expectation on the lowest rung of the parent-child activity category is that the parent will get the child to a certain place at a certain time. The parent is not faced with additional expectations once she gets there, like having to learn algebra or how to talk to potential employers.

The best place for many participants to start learning how to adhere to a schedule is with parent-child activities.

Counseling, treatment, and support groups should always be done in conjunction with other activities on the Ladder.

Self-improvement activities

There are two kinds of self-improvement activities on the Ladder: counseling, treatment, or support groups and hobbies or athletics.

Although we recognize the importance of counseling, treatment, and support groups, we believe that such activities should always be done in conjunction with other activities on the Ladder. In most other welfare-to-work programs, people in treatment are usually not expected to be involved in other activities. But outside of welfare-to-work programs, people with problems—even serious problems—usually have to get the help they need while continuing to function at some level as workers, parents, or spouses, or in other roles. We try to prepare people for this reality by helping them tackle their problems while continuing to work or go to school. Engaging in other activities gives participants the opportunity to meet new people, to be exposed to different environments, and to feel a sense of accomplishment. Isolation and inactivity often worsen problems like depression, substance abuse, and family violence.

Hobbies and athletics can provide an arena for positive development. We tend to think of hobbies and athletics as just “fun.” They can, however, play an important developmental function and can serve as a forum for learning specific skills and valued behaviors, like knowing how to follow instructions and being able to work with others as a member of a team. To function as legitimate lower-rung work-preparation activities, though, these classes and groups must meet regularly and have set times for starting. The activity must have a schedule that can be verified.

The characteristics of lower-rung activities

These three activities constitute the lower rung activities and share several characteristics that make them constructive work-preparation for the least job-ready:

- ~ They are flexible when it comes to scheduling, duration, sequencing, and combining.
- ~ They cannot be implemented without paying attention to transitions.
- ~ They are based on an experiential learning approach.
- ~ They provide a variety of options from which participants can choose.
- ~ They carry a low risk of failure.

Why lower-rung activities help people prepare for work: Some theoretical rationales

Participation in lower-rung activities have three beneficial effects that are directly relevant to preparing people for work. These activities help people

- ~ learn to stick to a work schedule;
- ~ learn to interact appropriately with supervisors, coworkers, and customers or clients; and

~ acquire a variety of job-related skills.

How do we “teach” people to adhere to a work schedule?

There is a difference between being unable to adhere to a work schedule because a person never learned how to do so and being unable to adhere to a schedule because of frequent crises or chronic problems such as an ill child or an abusive spouse. Among welfare recipients, tardiness and absenteeism are common for both these reasons, yet each reason requires a different sort of intervention.

Every culture is marked by a particular temporal framework. In industrial cultures like ours, time is defined by small units that are tied to clock time and by a linear view of the relationship of these units to one another. In other words, getting somewhere on time requires developing a temporal framework in which a person thinks and acts upon an understanding of the succession of events in relation to his or her own actions and to desired goals (Norton, 1990).

So how can we teach people to gain a better sense of time?

Begin with enjoyable or personally useful activities. If we want welfare recipients to learn how to adhere to a schedule, it will help to start out by making the activities in the employability plan enjoyable or personally useful. In many cases, people might already be doing things that can be incorporated into an employability plan, as long as the activity has a regular schedule. Once a person proves that she can get to scheduled activities that are “fun,” we know that if she doesn’t get to less enjoyable activities, it is not because she doesn’t know how to adhere to a schedule. Other problems may exist.

Begin with simple tasks. On the lowest rungs of the Incremental Ladder, getting places regularly and on time is the only skill a person is working on. We try to make that one activity as easy as possible to attend. We choose an activity within walking distance of a person’s home or one that can be reached easily by public transportation. We choose an activity that does not require finding child care. As a person shows she is able to meet the expectations of a simple schedule, we add hours in the activity—or more activities. We might replace the initial activity with activities that require the participant to think about complicated bus schedules and child care arrangements or to make the time to do “homework” for an activity.

Find the “zone of proximal development.” The trick in moving from simple to more complex employability plans is knowing when a person is ready to tackle a bigger challenge and what the challenge should be. In the field of cognitive learning, this is known as finding the zone of proximal development.

To illustrate what the zone means in the context of a welfare-to-work program, let’s look at the hypothetical case of two women who have both been assessed as needing to work on time-management skills in a lower-rung context. Both

To help welfare recipients learn how to adhere to a schedule, start out by making the activities in the employability plan enjoyable or personally useful.

women have the same initial employability plan: every Tuesday they are to take their youngest children to a ceramics class that meets from 4:00 to 5:30.

At the end of the month, the caseworker finds out that one woman got her daughter to all four classes during the month on time. The woman also helped the ceramics teacher put the children's projects into the kiln, even though this type of volunteering was not part of her employability plan. The other woman brought her son to only two of the four classes and was half an hour late for both of them. Unlike the other mother, she did not stay for the class, but simply dropped off her son and picked him up at the end.

The first woman appears ready for a more challenging employability plan. The second woman, in contrast, will need more help before she can move on.

Interacting appropriately with supervisors, coworkers, and customers or clients

Not acting appropriately with supervisors, coworkers, and customers or clients is a common reason for job loss, perhaps even more common than low skills (Berg, Olson, & Conrad, 1991; Quint & Musick, 1994).

Understanding of the relational dynamics of the workplace is gradual and complex, involving cognitive, social, and emotional development. First, a person must "learn" the rules and expectations that govern how to behave at work. Second, a person must develop the psychological resources to be able to act on those rules and expectations. Lower-rung volunteer activities can help people learn these lessons.

Learning the rules and expectations of relationships at work. Many welfare recipients who fall into the hard-to-serve group need to learn the complicated and subtle set of rules and expectations about the values and customs of the workplace. They need to learn to interact with supervisors, coworkers, and customers or clients. Usually they are sent to job-readiness classes to learn this. People may come out of these classes able to recite the rules and expectations, but they are often unable to apply their lessons to real-life, on-the-job situations.

Not acting appropriately with supervisors, coworkers, and customers or clients is perhaps a more common reason for job loss than low skills.

This breakdown occurs because, as linguist James Paul Gee (1987) put it, there is a difference between "learning" and "acquisition." People who can adjust their behavior to different situations usually develop the capability through a process of acquisition, not learning. Behaving properly in a given setting is a "performance" skill and not a "talking about" skill. Thus, it is easy to see why job-readiness classes are not the best approach: they promote learning instead of acquisition. Yet, when it comes to keeping a job, it's performance that counts.

To help welfare recipients develop social competencies, we need to set up situations that will lead to acquisition. This is one of the goals of the volunteer activities we have described. In most volunteer settings there are both formal and informal policies regarding interpersonal behavior that are similar to those in normal work settings. There is also the same sort of hierarchical structure. These set-

tings also offer exposure to people who model the behaviors that many of the least job-ready need to learn.

Volunteer settings usually are a safe place to practice these new skills. A key to practicing is that the consequences for failure must not be too severe. In lower-rung settings, people tend to be able to make mistakes without suffering serious consequences and they get the chance to try again.

Psychologist Margaret Donaldson (1979) says people learn better and more quickly in settings that are familiar to them. Because most volunteer settings are community agencies and institutions, the volunteers often know the people there. Moreover, in community agencies and institutions at least some of the staff members are likely to be ethnically or racially similar to the volunteers. This is important in fostering identification with and imitation of role models. People also often already know how to get to the place where they are volunteering. They are familiar with the physical layout of the building or office. They usually understand the purpose of the agency or institution and the various roles and responsibilities of the people there. Because the settings make human sense to the volunteers in terms of people, place, and purpose, the acquisition of social competencies is more likely to occur.

Developing the psychological resources to be able to interact appropriately. A person may know what the rules and expectations of workplace relationships are, but that is not the same as being able to act on them. To do this requires the ability to balance one's immediate needs and feelings against the longer-term consequences of acting on them. In an employment context, this means not walking off the job when you don't like your supervisor. Instead, you find a constructive way to address the problem on the job or continue to put up with the situation while you look for another job. For most people, self-regulation requires strong motivation because it means acting in a way that is contrary to what you are thinking or feeling, to the way you would really like to act.

For people who need more than financial incentives and disincentives to learn to regulate behavior, the lower rungs add a layer of psychological ones, which go deeper and for many people can be more powerful. The key is self-esteem, which, in the field of human development, is generally considered to have two dimensions or sources: competence and acceptance. In lower-rung activities, both the desire for competence and the need for acceptance are motivational forces.

What we mean by competence will become clearer if we use a concrete example involving a Project Match participant who has severe learning disabilities and difficulty completing simple tasks. This woman had a child at Head Start and we thought that a good activity for her would be to sign up other Head Start parents to volunteer there. At first she had difficulty working the sign-up table. Eventually she could do it with relative ease. At this point we began to push her

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toward the next incremental competency, providing a monthly summary of parents' volunteer hours. By giving the Head Start volunteer progressively more demanding tasks, we helped her feel a sense of competency.

The lower rungs also foster the second dimension of self-esteem—acceptance. This need influences our behavior, our decisions, the way we feel about ourselves. The lower-rung volunteer activities help people feel accepted because, as volunteers, they tend to be welcomed and appreciated by the agency or institution they have chosen.

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Lower-rung settings also provide the opportunity for welfare recipients to become part of a new social group. Community institutions and agencies tend to be relatively small, informal and inclusive. They encourage interaction and socializing among staff at all levels. It is easy for volunteers to meet new people and make new friends. These new “reference groups” are important from a work-preparation perspective because they are composed primarily of working people who can serve as role models. These role models often are similar to the volunteers. They may live in the same neighborhood. They may be the same gender. They may be racially or ethnically similar. They may even once have been welfare recipients.

Fostering self-esteem through the development of a sense of competence and acceptance is essential to helping people learn to self-regulate their behavior.

The issue of workplace diversity. Race and ethnicity can affect the ease and comfort with which people learn to interact appropriately on the job. In the United States, most workplaces are governed by White cultural norms. For many potential workers, these norms may be quite foreign. Even those who understand the norms may not feel comfortable with them. Employers have been more likely to recognize these issues in relation to immigrants; there has been less recognition of the tensions between African American culture and White American culture in the workplace.

In our opinion, one of the main reasons for these tensions comes down to different ways of communicating. In his book *Black and White Styles in Conflict*, Thomas Kochman, a professor of communication, describes some of the differences between Black and White modes of expression: for example, “black culture allows its members considerably greater freedom to assert and express themselves than does white culture. . . . It also values spontaneous expression of feeling. . . . White culture values the ability of individuals to rein in their impulses.” Anyone who has attended services in both Black and White churches has probably noted this difference. In most mainstream White churches, the congregation sits quietly, speaking and singing only where the liturgy indicates they should. In many Black churches, the congregation is much more spontaneous, speaking and singing when moved to do so. In and of themselves, neither mode of expression is better or worse; they are simply different. But this difference can lead to discomfort, miscommunication, and conflict when the two styles come together, as they often do in the workplace.

Given the reality of workplace diversity, we believe that employers must do some learning about the culture of their workers—whether African American, Asian, Hispanic, or something else—just as we expect workers to learn about the culture of the workplace. Through better understanding, tensions are likely to diminish.

Acquiring job-related skills in community settings

Lower-rung activities help people acquire skills needed in many entry-level jobs—basic math and reading skills, computer skills, office skills such as filing and phoning, writing and presentation skills, teaching skills, child care skills, and cooking skills, to name a few.

Lower rung settings are often a better place for learning such skills than traditional work activities. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), in their *Situated Learning*, argue that social processes are as important to learning as cognitive processes. They examine formal and informal apprenticeship situations in different cultures and isolate the social conditions that promote the acquisition of specific skills. Among these conditions are three that are particularly evident in the community agencies and institutions where welfare recipients can volunteer:

- ~ The “community of practice” is relatively easygoing and engaging.
- ~ The volunteer can start out in a peripheral role and then move “in.”
- ~ The volunteer has the chance to perform many different tasks and to try out different roles.

The qualities of the community of practice. By “community of practice” Lave and Wenger (1991) mean the people as well as the *gestalt* of the setting—its mission, values, atmosphere, attitudes, and other characteristics. The particular qualities of a community of practice will affect the learning process of the apprentice. In particular, “conditions that place newcomers [apprentices] in deeply adversarial relations with masters, bosses, or managers; in exhausting over-involvement in work; or in involuntary servitude rather than participation distort, partially or completely, the prospects for learning in practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In contrast, in most community agencies and institutions, there is usually a feeling of mutuality among staff and volunteers, a sense of working together for a common cause. As we described earlier, in these settings there is usually frequent contact and an easy rapport between volunteers and staff at all levels and the atmosphere is more relaxed than in more traditional work settings. Further, it is significant that volunteers get to choose a community of practice. Having some control over where you are going and what you are doing can make a huge difference in attitude.

Starting in a peripheral role. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe how, in the beginning, apprentices need to be able to observe more experienced people and to play a peripheral role. In the beginning, observation may be the primary mode of learning. Then, usually gradually, the apprentice moves from the periphery toward the center, taking on more difficult and challenging tasks.

Employers must learn about the culture of their workers, just as workers must learn about the culture of the workplace.

Many volunteer activities allow for this initial peripheral involvement. Community advisory boards and local associations are a good example. Some of our most isolated participants have embarked on a career pathway through a marginal role on a local school council, a tenant management board, or other similar group. If a person stays on the periphery, however, the learning process stalls. The newcomer must have the chance to play a more active role. The value of many lower-rung volunteer settings is that they allow for this type of movement from the edges toward the center.

One Project Match participant on a Head Start policy committee was elected to the position of secretary. Now she had to take notes during each meeting and write the minutes. She could use the minutes she had already read as a model and she had watched the previous secretary during other meetings, so she knew where to start. Also, because she was both self-conscious and conscientious, she had the social worker at the Head Start site proofread her minutes and point out errors in spelling and grammar. As the secretary of the policy committee, she had a real opportunity to work on her reading and writing skills in a supportive and instructive environment.

Performing different tasks and different roles. Another way in which volunteer activities tend to be “fluid” is that people often have the chance to perform many different tasks and to try out different roles. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), this is another hallmark of a good apprenticeship situation.

At Project Match we have observed that many volunteers get to do a variety of tasks instead of being assigned to a single routine task. One Project Match participant volunteered in the library of the elementary school where her sister also had volunteered. Because the librarian was always shorthanded, the volunteer got to help in many different ways. She learned to use the computer to locate books. She cataloged and shelved books. She helped children use the library. The computer and clerical skills she learned in the library landed her a position in the school office as a clerk.

Another Project Match participant volunteered at a hospital-affiliated thrift shop in her neighborhood. As in many charity thrift shops, most of the work was done by volunteers and the manager was the only paid employee. The Project Match volunteer started out tagging merchandise, but she soon had the opportunity to learn to operate the cash register, to create window displays, and to assist customers. She proudly “complained” that on a few occasions she had to open and close the store, which involved operating the alarm system, among other things.

Although there is tremendous potential for acquiring “hard” job skills in lower-rung activities, volunteering does not result in a diploma or credential that can be presented to an employer. If employers are going to recognize the value of volunteer experiences or other work-based placements, welfare-to-work programs must find a way to help welfare recipients articulate and market their newly acquired skills. A critical part of this is a good resume.

Some of our most isolated participants have embarked on a career pathway through a marginal role on a community advisory board or local association.

A volunteer placement should appear on a resume, just as a college student includes an unpaid internship on a resume. Responsibilities should be clearly detailed. Most welfare recipients will need help pulling out the elements of a volunteer experience that will make a resume shine. Unfortunately, the average welfare caseworker often does not have the time or expertise to sit with a person and do this. This is a point where a place like a resource room—with its specialized staff—can be of real value.

The community agencies and institutions where people volunteer should also be brought into the loop. Welfare recipients should ask their volunteer supervisors to provide letters of reference. As we said earlier in this paper, attention to transitions is one of the most important aspects of the welfare-to-work process. If volunteer activities are to lead to unsubsidized employment, welfare-to-work programs must build on the experience and provide immediate and substantive job search assistance.

Virtually every volunteer activity on the lower rung would fit into the federal category of community service.

The new federal welfare law: Where do the lower rungs fit under TANF?

With the passage of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant legislation, states have realized they will have to find ways to help hard-to-serve welfare recipients to prepare for work. We believe that the lower-rung activities are states' best option. These activities are developmentally sound starting points for the least job-ready and can help them build a foundation for future success at school and work. Properly implemented, these activities will maximize the number of welfare recipients who either become steady workers within a state's time limit or who at least make real progress toward that goal.

Meeting participation rates. States are concerned about TANF's progressively increasing annual participation rates. By the year 2002, 50% of single parents on welfare must be engaged in "countable" activities as defined by the federal government. For two-parent welfare families, the rate is 90% by 2002. As many of the more job-ready welfare recipients move off the rolls, those left will be the hardest-to-serve. Given this fact, states are unlikely to consider implementing lower-rung activities unless they are countable under the federal guidelines.

Luckily, many of the lower-rung activities fit into the federal category called "community service." According to legal experts, as long as an activity "serves a public purpose," it should be allowable as community service. Thus, among the lower-rung activities, virtually every volunteer activity would qualify as community service. Many of the activities with children like being a scout leader or the coach of a sports team would qualify. Probably none of the self-improvement activities would qualify. However, treatment activities might have a special place in state plans apart from TANF.

It is important to remember that TANF allows people to combine activities within categories and across categories to count toward the participation rate. Two or more activities that require fewer hours per week can be combined to meet the federal participation rate.

Meeting the two-month community-service requirement. Under TANF, states must require welfare recipients to engage in community service after 2 months on the rolls unless they are “engaged in work” or exempt from work requirements. Here is another place where volunteer activities and many activities with children would qualify as legitimate placements. States can determine the minimum hours per week for community service, so they are not tied to 20 or 30 hours a week.

Meeting the 2-year work requirement. Under TANF, welfare recipients must “engage in work” after 2 years of assistance or when a state determines the recipient is ready to engage in work, whichever is earlier. The definition of “engaged in work” has been left up to the states, and they have considerable latitude. We consider the 2-year work requirement an opportunity to broaden the definition of “engaged in work” to include all lower-rung activities. Each of the lower-rung activities can play a work-preparation function. We believe they are legitimate work-preparation placements for the 2-year work requirement. As with the 2-month community-service provision, states can set the minimum hours per week of participation.

In conclusion, lower-rung activities are meant to be a first step in the welfare-to-work process. To ensure that people do not get stuck in them and end up “hitting the wall” of the time limit, the activities must be implemented and administered properly. This means making sure that the activities chosen are developmentally appropriate for each person. The activities should be monitored, and there should be clearly stated sanctions for not participating in activities according to the terms of the employability plan without good cause. Employability plans should be reviewed monthly so that people move up to more demanding activities as soon as they are ready.

Conclusion. Getting from here to there: The Pathways System

The paper describes in detail the three elements of the Pathways System: a monthly activity diary, a computerized teaching system, and basic rules and procedures for line workers and welfare recipients. This system can help states implement and administer welfare-to-work programs that include lower-rung activities along with the standard work-preparation activities.

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