

# QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

## Positive Development: Realizing the Potential of Youth

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Volume 591, January 2004

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### What Is Positive Youth Development?

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#### *Background*

The field of positive youth development (PYD) focuses on each child's unique talents, strengths, interests, and future potential . . . in contrast with approaches that have focused on problems that some youth encounter while growing up, such as learning disabilities and substance abuse.

- In these latter models, youth is seen as a period fraught with hazards, and some young people are seen as potential problems that must be straightened out.
- From the perspectives of many child psychologists, it seems that the very processes of living and growing place children at risk and that children are easily wounded by these challenges.
- A problem-centered vision of youth has dominated most of the professional fields charged with raising the young.
- One of the legacies of this tradition has been the way young people have been portrayed in the mass culture and, hence, the popular mind in a consistently negative fashion.

#### *The PYD Approach*

The PYD is a new approach with a more affirmative and welcoming vision of young people.

- This approach sees young people as resources rather than problems.
- PYD emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people, including the most disadvantaged and those with the most troubled histories.
- It begins with a vision of a fully able child eager to explore the world, gain competence, and acquire the capacity to contribute to the world.

- Nature of the Child*
- The PYD approach aims at understanding, educating, and engaging children in productive activities rather than at correcting, curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies or so-called disabilities.
  - Research has shown that many children thrive in the face of adversity, developing what is called *resiliency*.
  - These studies argue that every child possesses the potential to develop resiliency.
  - Associated with resiliency are such characteristics as persistence, hardiness, achievement motivation, hopefulness, a sense of purpose, and more. Such claims and data on which they are based create the underpinnings for the PYD approach.
- Developmental Assets*
- Although resiliency research put a number of important PYD attributes on the psychological map, it did not provide a sufficient basis for a universal model of youth development.
  - A more solid basis rests on what are called *developmental assets*, which emphasize the talents, energies, strengths, and constructive interests that every young person possesses and the assets that the community brings to bear on youth development.
  - The goal, therefore, is to sustain these assets and build on them.
  - The implications of such an approach are profound.
  - Programs should seek to promote youth development and to prepare youth to contribute to society.
  - Preventing a problem from occurring does not guarantee that youth are being provided with the assets they need for developing a positive manner. Problem-free does not mean prepared.
  - Developmental theories maintain that elements of positive social behavior consist of emotional dispositions that are innate and that all youth inherit these dispositions and have the capacity for prosocial behavior.
  - Differences in how these reactions are triggered and expressed emerge later, once children have been exposed to the particular belief systems and values of their cultures.
- Communities*
- Another change brought about by the PYD approach is the way child-community interaction is understood.
- Community has not been a level of analysis that psychology has looked to frequently in its examinations of child development.
  - The PYD approach considers the whole community in relation to the whole child rather than privileging any particular interaction or capacity.
- Identity and Moral Perspective*
- Research in the PYD developmental tradition has taken seriously the role of moral and religious beliefs in shaping children's identities and perspectives on the future, and research has demonstrated a strong relationship between religious faith and at-risk children staying out of trouble.
  - When a person decides that the kind of person he or she is or wants to be is dependent upon a moral belief (as opposed to such things as being athletic or smart), he or she has formed the basis of a moral identity, which is just one component of personal identity.
  - Moral identity often takes shape in late childhood with a gradual increase in the use of moral terms to describe the self. When the young person moves from saying "people should be honest" to "I want to be an honest person," the likelihood that he or she will be committed to truth telling in everyday transactions greatly increases.

## The Role of Subjective Well-Being in Positive Youth Development

Nansook Park, University of Rhode Island

### *Background*

- Positive psychological well-being, that is, subjective well-being (SWB) or happiness, has long been considered a central component of a good and healthy life, as well as helping people cope with life's tragedies and stresses.
- The topic of well-being has been largely neglected by psychology in the last several decades. The prevailing idea of well-being is the absence of distress and disorder.
- The study of SWB among children and youth has only recently received attention. But researchers now have the tools to study the links among SWB, mental health, and Positive Youth Development (PYD).

### *Research Findings*

- Studies of children and adolescents consistently find that demographic variables such as age, grade, gender, intelligence, and parental occupation have at most a weak relationship with measures of youth life satisfaction.
- Research also suggests, however, that life satisfaction among children and adolescents is related to a wide range of other characteristics.
  - Lower life satisfaction is
    - correlated with depression, anxiety, neuroticism, loneliness, symptoms of psychological disorders, and teacher ratings of discipline problems.
  - Higher life satisfaction is
    - positively correlated with physical health and healthy behaviors such as exercise and sensible eating;
    - negatively linked to violent problem behaviors such as fighting, weapon carrying, and dating violence; and
    - positively correlated with a variety of desirable psychological characteristics. Youth with internal locus of control, high self-esteem, extraversion, and intrinsic motivation report higher life satisfaction.
- The importance of SWB on the overall quality of social and personal life has been well documented.
  - Happy individuals tend to be good problem solvers, show better work performance, have meaningful relationships, display virtues such as forgiveness and generosity, are more resistant to stress, and experience better physical and mental health.
  - These positive attributes may buffer people against psychological disorder.
  - Adolescents with high life satisfaction tend to be socially well adjusted despite the presence of ongoing peer stressors or the lack of resources in their immediate environments.
  - Life satisfaction also acts as a buffer in stressful events in that
    - stressful life events are seen in more positive light,
    - hassles for someone with low satisfaction may be seen as adventures for one with high satisfaction, and
    - individuals with positive emotions are more flexible.

*Life Satisfaction's Development and the Implications for Policy and Program Design*

Given the importance of life satisfaction for PYD, one must ask about its origins and development. Recent studies shed some light on this matter and have implications for the design of youth development programs.

- Studies of temperament suggest a biological basis of SWB, although environmental factors also clearly contribute to individual differences in SWB.
- Satisfaction with family has a consistent and strong association with global life satisfaction through childhood and adolescence, but satisfaction with friends and self take on increasing importance as children mature.
  - These findings suggest that developmental age should be considered in the design of intervention and prevention programs.
- There is a strong link between authoritative parenting and life satisfaction among youth.
  - This finding suggests that fostering positive families, encouraging authoritative parenting and effective family communication, and focusing on emotional and instrumental support are all ways to promote psychological well-being among youth.
- Participating in extracurricular activities and engaging in meaningful and challenging activities such as helping others are associated with higher life satisfaction among youth.
  - Highest levels of satisfaction occur in structured activities such as team sports and time with friends as opposed to being alone for studying and watching TV.
  - Quality of programs is more important than quantity.
- Positive daily life events such as enjoying a hobby, helping others, and talking with friends are among the strongest predictors of satisfaction.
  - These data suggest that helping youth to maximize the opportunities to experience positive events each day in family, peer, school, and community environments will have the cumulative effect on building life satisfaction and positive development.
- The range of life satisfaction's correlates is so broad that the question arises as to which are primary and which are secondary; the need for multivariate longitudinal studies is obvious.
- It is also important to note there are cultural differences to account for in designing programs.
- Intervention research suggests that the elimination of symptoms alone does not ensure high levels of SWB.
- Given the link between low satisfaction and various psychological and social problems, measuring individuals' life satisfaction can provide a ready means of identifying individuals at risk for psychological disorders or more generic maladjustment.

*Conclusion*

Life satisfaction can be reliably measured to index PYD.

- SWB deserves special attention for its role in PYD as an indicator, as a predictor, as a moderator/mediator, and ultimately, as a positive outcome.
- Making youth happy is not just about making them feel good.
  - It is about making them feel satisfied that their lives are good ones.
  - It is about building resources for wellness for the present and the future.
- Research is needed
  - in determining primary and secondary correlates,
  - in discovering the essential aspects or components of life experiences for life satisfaction, and
  - to find how higher levels of life satisfaction protect youth from developing psychological and behavioral problems even in the face of environmental stress.

## Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development

Nansook Park, University of Rhode Island

### *Research Findings*

- Research shows that hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and perspective can
  - buffer the negative effects of stress and trauma,
  - provide a foundation on which to base therapeutic interventions,
  - decrease or prevent symptoms of depression and anxiety,
  - promote and maintain adaptation and positive development, and
  - prevent or reduce aggression and antisocial behavior.
- Service learning programs in high schools build and promote kindness and altruism, which have long-term positive effects on attitudes, self-concepts, and well-being.
- Despite many obstacles, most youth develop most of the components of good character.
- There is a strong association between various strengths of character such as zest, hope, love, wisdom, social intelligence, self-regulation, and perseverance and life satisfaction.

### *Developing Character*

- A variety of influences contribute to the development of good character:
  - biological factors may set the stage, for example, empathetic behavior and prosocial patterns are heritable;
  - parents play a critical role in children's character development, that is, authoritative parenting produces positive behaviors; and
  - positive role models are important, as are close relationships with family members and friends and with positive institutions such as schools.
- Society as a whole can contribute significantly to character development by setting a moral atmosphere where moral behaviors are rewarded and stories of morally good deeds are shared.
- Good character is neither unitary nor discrete; rather, character comprises a family of positive traits.
- What counts to someone as good character can be influenced by contextual factors such as culture, religion, or political persuasion, although some components are universal.
- Good character is not outside the realm of self-commentary and certainly not a mystery to those in one's immediate social circle.
- Many of the core components of good character are already present as individual differences among children and certainly among adolescents.
- The manifestations of character change across the life span.

### *Concerns*

- Concerns have been voiced about the effectiveness of character-education programs in schools and the lack of consensual rationale for choosing which virtues and values to foster.
- There needs to be an underlying theoretical framework for character development, informed by developmental theory and research to guide the design of programs with a consensus on the main components of character and virtue.

- Results of much research are based on cross-sectional (“snap shot”) studies, which means we know little about the causal links between character strengths and life satisfaction.
- Many of the ongoing efforts by youth programs have shown success with some components, but these lines of research have been conducted in isolation from one another.
- There is a tendency in the youth development field to regard competencies (including character) as outcomes of interventions coequal with the reduction of problems, rather than as mediators.

*Implications*

- Character strengths that have a sustained association with life satisfaction should be among the first targeted in deliberately designed programs for Positive Youth Development (PYD).
- PYD may be facilitated when institutions, traits, and subjective experiences are in alignment. Positive institutions enable positive traits, which in turn enable positive subjective experiences. Indeed, the good life probably represents a coming together of these three domains.
- Life is full of challenges, stresses, and risks—both major and minor. Facing such challenges is part of growing up.

*Conclusions*

There is consistent evidence that character strengths play important roles in PYD not only as broad, protective factors preventing or mitigating psychopathology but also as enabling conditions that facilitate thriving.

- The goal of PYD should be not merely surviving in the face of adversity but actually growing throughout life.
- Programs that promote wellness and build strengths may pay much greater dividends by developing moral, healthy, and happy people in the long run who can overcome challenges and enjoy the good life.
- Future research needs to include positive outcome measures and to map the effects of early interventions and multiple ecological systems that build good character and promote well-being.

## Youth as People: The Protective Aspects of Youth Development in After-School Settings

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*Background*

As caregivers and educators, our inclination is to do things “to” and “for” youth rather than “with” them.

- The insight of positive youth development (PYD) is that young people thrive when we listen to them, respect them, and engage with them in meaningful investments in the community.
- Working with young people, we can dismantle barriers to their healthy development, appreciate our similarities and differences, and build a more just and supportive society.

*Criteria for Success*

- Recent studies help to distinguish after-school programs that meet the criteria of youth development from those that do not and, in turn, to identify the critical aspects of youth development programming that support the healthy development of young people:
  - *Competence*: choosing healthy options
  - *Confidence*: developing a positive identity
  - *Connections*: providing a primary or secondary support system
  - *Character*: requiring a sense of responsibility
  - *Caring*: offering a sense of belonging
  - *Contribution*: giving back to the community
- Excellent youth development programs create an atmosphere where the participants feel physically and emotionally safe in approaching the program setting and participating there. Adults listen, young people are respectful, and the program is youth-centered and youth-directed.
- The messages in the best youth development settings affirm each young person, both individually and culturally.
- The best of a host of programs to encourage young people to stay in science and technology have as a goal making young people feel as if they are scientific and technical insiders who could choose a science-technology-engineering-mathematics career.
- Many youth development programs increase participants' sense of entitlement to higher education by offering college visits, programs on college campuses, preparation for standardized tests, help with college applications, college scholarships, and other direct supports for students who might otherwise fall or be pushed out of the pathway to higher education.
- Young people stand to benefit from programs that engage them in their own experiments to see if a balance of healthy diet, sleep, and exercise makes them feel better, participate more enthusiastically, and win more often at their favorite competitive activities.
- Community service is a key to positive outcomes for high school students.

*Varied Program Supports*

Developing a positive identity is especially challenging for young people who are marginalized in U.S. society. Thus, the youth development program may be more important for some groups of youth than for others.

- Some argue, for example, that it is essential for black young people to learn positive cultural images outside the usual black-white paradigm, to critique and reject negative stereotypes, and to find adults who acknowledge, rather than brush off, the pernicious emotional impact of racist encounters.
- As a group, girls entering adolescence seek affirmation from adults and peers who know enough not to trivialize the girls' concerns, to equate them with the way the girls look, or to treat them as all alike.
- Boys entering adolescence can use the support of adults who understand the social costs and risk of death from backing down, the pressure to be aggressively masculine, and the need to find the way to combine academics and fitting in with peers.
- At minimum, the program can be an oasis from racial slurs, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality and sexual identity, home language, body size and shape, and other common forms of discrimination.
- At best, the program provides a safe and supportive space within which to develop an identity.

- Conclusion* Overall, the evidence is mounting that well-designed, well-implemented, youth-centered programs that consciously use a youth development model have positive outcomes for both the young participants and their communities.
- The best programs help young people become competent, confident, caring, and connected citizens who contribute to the community and demonstrate responsibility and strong character.
  - These programs take into account the particular challenges young people face and engage with them as change agents, designing and implementing solutions for themselves and their communities.

## Research-Based Character Education

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- Background*
- Character education is not new, but scientific study of its effectiveness has been only sporadically conducted over the past thirty-five years.
  - There are seven psychological aspects of character: moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics.
- What Works?*
- *Quality of implementation* is important.
    - The programs must be fully and adequately delivered.
    - The program must be monitored for level and quality of implementation.
    - Safeguards must be in place to ensure full implementation.
    - The implementers need to ensure quality.
  - *Comprehensive initiatives* seem to be particularly effective, especially when character is broadly defined and diverse outcome goals are targeted.
  - The emotional attachment of a student to his classroom and school—that is, *bonding*—is a critical mediating factor in the effectiveness of character education.
    - It is important to convince students that their schools are caring communities and to target their bonding to the school and classroom as both a measured outcome and a mediating variable.
  - *Leadership* is also an important element of program success. The school's principal should
    - understand what quality character education entails,
    - commit to this vision and endeavor to make it happen, and
    - have the skills to enact quality education and then to “walk the walk” both personally and programmatically.
  - One of the vastly underused components of quality character education is *staff development*.
    - If staff does not understand the initiative, they will likely implement it ineffectively or reject it for the wrong reasons.
    - If they do not value it, they will not implement it effectively or at all.
  - Many of the initiatives and models that incorporate *direct skill training* are quite effective. One example is teaching listening skills so that cooperative learning can be effective.
  - Schools must recruit *parents and community members as full partners* in the character-building effort.

- There is burgeoning literature that demonstrates the power of parental involvement in children's academic achievement and character development.
- There are specific activities that parent and child can do at home that are then followed up in school.
- Pedagogical processes that rely on structured, respectful peer discussion of issues are effective.

*Conclusions*

- In the current climate of high-stakes standardized testing, quality education is taking a beating, even though
- quality character education results in academic gains for students, and
- character education has been systematically demonstrated to be an effective form of risky-behavior prevention, reducing violence and substance abuse. More research is needed to understand better how and when character education is most effective. Nevertheless, enough is known today to help educators design initiatives that will foster the development of character in students.

## What Works in School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Positive Youth Development

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*Background*

- Educators and parents want children to attend safe, supportive schools that use sound methods to enhance student's academic, social, emotional, and ethical growth.
- In addition, they want students who are intellectually reflective and committed to lifelong learning, and quality educational systems that result in students who relate in socially skilled, respectful, and constructive ways with other young people and adults.
- In response to concerns about the well-being of children and youth, public-health, mental-health, and juvenile-justice initiatives have inundated schools with well-intentioned prevention and promotion programs that address diverse areas such as AIDS, alcohol, careers, character, civics, conflict resolution, delinquency, dropout, family life, health, morals, sex, truancy, and violence.
- These efforts are sometimes more problematic than beneficial.
  - They often represent the priorities of outside professionals rather than those of educators.
  - They may not be linked to the central mission of the school.
  - Leadership and support from school administrators may be lacking.
  - Because of limited time and resources, they tend to be implemented in short-term, fragmented ways.
  - They are not sufficiently coordinated, monitored, evaluated, and continuously improved over time.

*Social and  
Emotional  
Learning  
(SEL)*

- Principles of SEL can provide a framework for coordinating all of a school's academic, prevention, health, and youth development activities.
- SEL programming is based on the understanding that:
  - Diverse problem behaviors are caused by the same risk factors.
  - Optimal learning emerges from supportive and challenging relationships.
  - Enhancing student strengths and preventing problems such as violence and drug use is most effective when multiyear, integrated efforts develop children's social and emotional skills.
  - These skills are best developed through effective instruction, student engagement in positive activities in and out of school, and broad parent and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation.
  - Programming to foster social and emotional competencies should begin in preschool and continue through high school.
- Five teachable competencies provide a foundation for effective development:
  - *self-awareness*: knowing what we are feeling and thinking;
  - *social awareness*: understanding what others are feeling and thinking;
  - *self-management*: handling our emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with task achievement; setting and accomplishing goals; persevering in the face of setbacks and frustrations;
  - *relationship skills*: establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on clear communication, cooperation, resistance to inappropriate social pressure, negotiated solutions to conflict, and seeking help when needed; and
  - *responsible decision making*: making choices based on an accurate consideration of relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, respecting others, and taking responsibility for one's decisions.

*Evidence to  
Support the  
Model*

- Three programs demonstrate that SEL competencies can be taught through school-based programs.
- *Caring School Community* (CSC) is a K-6 program that strengthens connections among peers and between students of different ages, teachers and students, and home and school through such techniques as
    - cross-age buddies programs that pair older and younger students in academic and recreational activities, and
    - family-involvement activities that provide opportunities for students and family to share ideas and experiences related to what the children are learning at school.
  - *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies* (PATHS) is a K-6 program that fosters the development of emotional awareness, self-control, interpersonal problem-solving skills, and peer relationships through such techniques as
    - asking students to identify and describe a wide range of feelings,
    - using breathing techniques to teach students how to calm themselves through breathing techniques, and
    - learning new study skills and work habits.
  - *Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition* (SOAR) strengthens teaching practices and increases family involvement to provide K-6 students with consistent opportunities to apply prosocial skills such as regulating their emotions, listening, sharing, and respecting others.
    - Low-income boys scored higher on combined reading, language arts, and math tests and showed higher social skills and less frequent interaction with antisocial peers.

- Low-income girls reported lower cigarette use, less heavy drinking, fewer sexual partners, and fewer acts of violence and misbehavior at school.
- Effective Practice*
- Schoolwide implementation of SEL has been found to succeed when
    - children are taught to apply SEL skills and ethical values in daily life;
    - children's social, emotional, and ethical behavior is improved;
    - children learn to recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspective of others, establish goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively; and
    - children display responsible and respectful attitudes and behaviors about self, others, work, health, and citizenship.
  - Integrated SEL programming helps schools to coordinate and unify programs that are often fragmented.
  - A variety of organizational supports and policies that foster high-quality implementation and long-term success of SEL programming include
    - the support of district and school leadership, active participation by key stakeholders, adequate time and resources, and alignment with school, district, and state policies; and
    - well-planned professional development.
- Summary*
- In summary, schools are increasingly pressed to address the social and emotional needs of their students as well as to enable peak academic performance.
- SEL provides a framework for programming that effectively addresses student's needs while decreasing the fragmentation that typically results from problem-specific responses.
  - The evidence is strong that such approaches work to improve the well-being of young people and their success in school and life.
  - The challenge facing promoters of these programs and the educators who implement them is to integrate and coordinate the programs with the school's mission and activities and to create the condition for success through
    - strong leadership,
    - policy support,
    - high-quality staff development, and
    - assessments that assure accountability.

## Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of PYD Programs

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- Background*
- Increases in juvenile crime and concerns about troubled youth led in the 1950s to the beginning of major federal-funding initiatives.
  - Prevention approaches began to emerge three decades ago with an emphasis on supporting youth before problem behaviors occurred.
  - Longitudinal studies that identified predictors of problem behavior provided a key turning point in the design of these programs.

- The dominant prevention models were urged in the 1980s to examine the co-occurrence of problem behaviors within a single child and the common predictors of multiple problem behaviors.
  - In the 1990s, practitioners, policy makers, and prevention scientists adopted a broader focus and are now converging on the developmental precursors of both positive and negative youth development.
- Summary of Program Evaluations*
- *Big Brothers/Big Sisters* and *Bicultural Competence Skills* programs—both of which operated at the *community* level—sought to build bonding, competence, and positive identity in youth.
    - Evaluations of these programs showed them to increase students' self-control, assertiveness, and healthy and adaptive coping with peers. Problem behaviors were also reduced or prevented.
  - *Growing Healthy, Know Your Body, Life Skills Training, PATHS, Project Alert,* and *Children of Divorce* programs—all implemented in *schools*—produced evidence of changes in children's behavior in personal health management, attitudes and knowledge, and health practices. Also improved were assertiveness, sociability, problem solving, frustration tolerance, decision making, and managing reactions in social and emotional situations.
  - Eight other programs have been implemented in both *family* and *school* settings.
    - Evaluations of these programs produced evidence of greater social acceptance with peers, improved communication with parents, higher school achievement, higher involvement with peers in problem solving, improved cognitive competence, and greater acceptance of authority.
  - Seven other programs combined treatments across *family, school,* and *community.*
    - They produced improvements including more positive attitudes about older people, higher levels of community service, higher levels of social skills learning and school attendance, greater substance use refusal, higher reading grades, and cognitive competence and improvements in race relations and perceptions of others from different cultures and racial groups.
  - *Creating Lasting Impressions*—a program that combined treatments across *family, church,* and *community*—observed more likely use of community services when personal or family problems arose, more action based on the service contract, and beliefs that actions accomplished something helpful.
  - The *Quantum Opportunities Program*—which combined treatments across *school, workplace,* and *community*—demonstrated increases in high school graduation rates, higher college enrollment, and more honors or awards than did the control-group students.
- Effective Positive Youth Development (PYD) Programs*
- In all, twenty-five rigorously evaluated youth development programs shared certain characteristics in that they
- measured both positive and problem outcomes,
  - provided structured curriculum,
  - had frequency and lengthy contact with youth, with at least ten sessions and with some programs lasting nine months or longer,
  - took steps to insure the quality and fidelity of implementation, and
  - served diverse populations.

- The Future* Evaluators of PYD programs are encouraged to take action to expand the knowledge gained from evaluations.
- Achieving consensus on the use of standardized youth outcome measures would help determine whether existing findings are replicable.
  - While negative behavior outcomes are more standardized, measures of PYD tend to be more idiosyncratic to each study.
  - Studies should measure changes of both positive and problem behaviors.
- Conclusion* Although a broad range of strategies are used to produce program results, the themes common to success involved methods to
- shape messages from family and community about clear standards for youth behavior;
  - increase healthy bonding with adults, peers, and younger children;
  - strengthen social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive competencies;
  - build self-efficacy;
  - expand opportunities and recognition for youth;
  - provide structure and consistency in program delivery; and
  - intervene with youth for at least nine months.
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## Indicators of Child Well-Being: The Promise for Positive Youth Development

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- Background* The current system of child well-being indicators
- does not accurately inform taxpayers about the state of the nation's children;
  - lacks measures that resonate among adolescents themselves and their parents and the adults who lead programs and activities for them;
  - may exacerbate the negative opinions that the public holds about adolescents and the problems experienced by children and their families;
  - because of its negative focus, fails to serve and inspire youth development programs; and
  - does not provide "on the shelf" measures of positive emotional development, spirituality, positive social behaviors, positive interpersonal behaviors such as altruism and empathy, and measures of interpersonal relationships such as sibling relationships.
- Having positive outcomes incorporated into the national indicator system would highlight a broad array of positive goals for children and youth and provide a specific vision that includes both what we do not want and what we do want as outcomes.
- Difficulties* The task of providing positive indicators has proved to be difficult for several reasons:
- We lack as a nation a common vision of what we want for America's children beyond the prevention of problems and dependency.
  - Only a few positive measures are currently available in national databases, so new measures need to be either developed or imported from elsewhere.

- Many statisticians and policy makers are not convinced that positive outcomes can be measured as rigorously as problem outcomes, and evidence to show their importance has been slow to accumulate.
- Varied Domains of Development*
- The four domains of Positive Youth Development (PYD) are
    - *educational achievement and cognitive attainment,*
    - *health and safety,*
    - *social and emotional development,* and
    - *self-sufficiency.*
  - These multiple domains suggest that development is not simply a reflection of one outcome, but rather is broad and encompasses multiple and various types of outcomes.
  - Self-sufficiency is of obvious interest to policy makers and funders who have their eye not only on well-being in the present but also on “well-becoming” in the future.
  - Despite the challenges, recognition of the importance of positive indicators has been developing. Therefore, it makes sense to consider what the elements of a strong system of indicators would look like.
- Positive Outcome Indicators Should*
- Define the criteria by which we decide that something is a positive outcome by, for example,
  - identifying outcomes found among youth that predict an outcome that is considered desirable in adulthood, and/or
  - assessing whether an outcome is intrinsically important by the use of focus groups; polls; views of social, political, and moral leaders; and opinions of children and parents.
  - Provide age-appropriate measures.
  - Be psychometrically rigorous by
  - addressing questions that influence the quality of indicators such as social desirability and missing data, while insuring that measures meet adequate standards for internal, over-time, concurrent, and prospective validity for different age, race, gender, and cultural groups of youth.
  - Be intuitively meaningful for policy and program audiences and presented in understandable formats.
  - Use a set of measures as social indicators, as independent and dependent variables in longitudinal research studies and as outcome measures in program evaluations.
- Conclusion*
- In sum, there is a lot of work to do to develop positive indicators, particularly a system of indicators that is conceptually coherent and psychometrically rigorous.
- It is important not to reach closure prematurely and fully accept available measures to just have something.
  - When measures get included in the national system, it can be difficult to revise them.
  - The demand for positive outcomes measures and indicators has come primarily from practitioners and service providers who sought to move beyond suppressing the negative to nurturing the positive. The research community has arrived late on the scene, but researchers have much to offer and can be strong partners in the development of positive indicators.

## Cultivating Optimism in Childhood and Adolescence

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### *Benefits of Optimism*

Optimism and hope are associated with a variety of positive outcomes:

- optimists have greater success at academics, on the job, and on the playing field;
  - they report less depression and anxiety; and
  - they enjoy greater marital satisfaction, better health, and longer lives.
- Many argue that research supports the power of positive thinking, in that optimism enhances one's mood but also leads to changes in behaviors that may drive the changes in mood, productivity, performance, and health;
- optimists are more persistent, and persistence leads to solutions; and
  - optimists take better care of themselves.

Although there is some debate about whether pessimism predicts negative outcomes or simply results from them, there is some evidence that it is a risk factor and may play a causal role.

### *Development of Optimism*

- Recent research suggests a combination of genetic and environmental factors that together predispose a person to think optimistically.
  - *Genetics:* Although findings do not necessarily imply that optimism is transmitted genetically, one study estimated that about 25 percent of the variability in optimism is due to genetic factors.
  - *Negative events:* Negative events, particularly chronic or traumatic ones, increase pessimism.
  - *Parenting:* Parenting plays a strong role in the development of hope and a basic trust in the world, which affects the ways that children react to situations and deal with events in their lives.
  - *Teachers, peers, and other influences:* Teachers affect children's attributions through the feedback they provide, and children internalize the optimism and pessimism that are conveyed through stories, movies, television, and other media. We actually know little about the role of peers in these processes.
- In part, positive outcomes result from the belief that the individual can control good outcomes.
- Positive expectations also result from a general belief that good things will befall us.
- There is an expectation that one's behavior will be effective (self-efficacy), and there is a tendency for these people to be optimistic.
- Both self-efficacy and optimism are important elements in resilience, and resilience, in turn, bolsters hope.

### *Low Hope and Depression*

Low hope is a core symptom of clinical depression. One in five adolescents may experience an episode of clinical depression by the end of high school. The high prevalence of depression is concerning for many reasons.

- Depression is associated with enormous suffering.
- Adolescents with depression are more likely to experience social rejection and isolation.

- It can lead to substance abuse and suicide.
  - Depression is a recurrent disorder, and in adulthood, these individuals are at increased risk for depression and for transmitting it to their children.
  - Therapies that build hope and promote optimism are effective. *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (CBT) attempts to change thinking patterns by teaching individuals to identify negative beliefs, to evaluate these beliefs, and then to generate alternative interpretations that are more hopeful.
- Future of Hope*
- Currently, debate focuses on the importance of optimism versus the accuracy of interpreting life events for those who are depressed. Accuracy is an important goal in CBT.
  - Some school-based interventions attempt to teach accuracy in the belief that children will encounter fewer difficulties in the future if they can analyze problems accurately, generate solutions, and feel confident in the skills they have developed to cope with adversity.
  - Goals are essential to hope therapy. Optimism increases when realistic goals are combined with strategies for reaching them.
  - Extreme optimists do not take responsibility for problems and may minimize the meaning and importance of interpersonal conflict. When bad things do happen to them, they are unprepared to cope.
- Implications*
- Research and its implications suggest that if we are to build high optimism and hope in youth, we must also help young people to focus on ways in which they are connected to others and larger group and community goals.
  - Many current programs also promote courage, interpersonal skills, insight, rationality, and perspective. Positive Youth Development (PYD) will be best achieved when families, schools, and communities promote a variety of strengths.
- Conclusion*
- Fortunately, research has begun to identify the pathways by which high hope and optimism develop.
- Optimism may also be increased through interventions that affect parenting behaviors, teaching styles, and mass-media messages.
  - Structured interventions are inadequate unless they are embedded in an environment that includes families, schools, communities, and institutions that encourage the development of hope and other psychological strengths in young people.

## What Is Wisdom and How Can We Develop It?

Robert J. Sternberg, Yale University

- Background*
- IQs have been rising at a rate of 9 points every thirty years for at least several generations. In spite of this rise, we can note that we have not improved peoples' or nations' relations with others. Wisdom-related skills are at least as important as IQ.
- Wisdom in School*
- It is important to help children develop wisdom in school for several reasons:
- to help students use knowledge wisely;
  - the judgments wisdom yields can improve our quality of life;

- wisdom represents an avenue to creating a better, more harmonious world; and
- students, who later become parents and leaders, are always part of a greater community and, hence, will benefit from learning to judge rightly, soundly, or justly on behalf of their community.

*Programs*

What would an educational program look like that fostered wisdom? There are three good examples.

- *Philosophy for Children* uses a set of novels to develop analytical thinking skills. Children read the novels and make judgments about the characters and the choices they make.
- *Paul's Program* emphasizes seeing problems from a variety of perspectives.
- *Perkins Program* emphasizes how knowledge is designed and used to solve problems.

Wisdom must be considered in the context of values that mediate how one balances interests and responses and even how one defines a common good.

*Balance Theory*

There are sixteen principles derived from the balance theory (balancing interests other than one's own) that form the core of how wisdom can be developed in the classroom. These include, for example,

- exploring with students how conventional abilities and achievements are not enough for a satisfying life;
- having students read about wise judgments so they can understand that the means for making such decisions already exist;
- helping students recognize and balance their own interests and those of other people and institutions;
- encouraging students to form, critique, and integrate their own values in their thinking; and
- teaching students to search for and then try to reach a common good where everyone wins.

*Teaching Wisdom*

There are several procedures to follow in teaching for wisdom.

- Students read classic works of literature and philosophy to learn and reflect on the wisdom of the sages.
- Students engage in class discussions, projects, and essays that encourage them to discuss the lessons they have learned from these works with emphasis on dialogical and diacritical thinking.
- Students study and reflect on not only so-called truth, as we know it, but also values.
- Instruction places an increased emphasis on critical, creative, and practical thinking in the service of good ends.
- Students think about how almost everything they study might be used for better or worse ends and must realize that the ends to which knowledge is put matter.
- Teachers must make themselves role models to be used by the student in constructing learning from their own and other's points of view.

*Lesson Structure*

Lessons taught to emphasize wisdom would have a rather different character from those taught today.

- Social studies and history would consider the point of view of all sides as opposed to teaching things like Columbus discovered America without the view of those who already lived here.

- Science would no longer be facts presented as though they are the final word, knowing that things change as knowledge grows.
- Literature would reflect a balance that does not ignore the standards and context of the times that the literature reflects.
- Foreign languages would be taught in the cultural context in which they are embedded.
- The curriculum would be far more integrated than it typically is now. Literature would be integrated with history, science with history, and social values and foreign language with culture.

*Conclusions* The road to this new approach of teaching for wisdom is bound to be a rocky one.

- Entrenched structures are difficult to change, and wisdom is neither taught in schools nor, in general, even discussed.
- Many people will not see the value of teaching something that shows no promise of raising conventional test scores.
- Wisdom is much more difficult to develop than is the kind of achievement that can be developed and readily tested via multiple-choice tests.

Wisdom might bring us a world that would seek to better itself and the conditions of the people in it. What do we wish to maximize through our schooling? Is it knowledge, intelligence? Is it also wisdom? If it is also wisdom, then we need a new course of action that values wisdom.

## Positive Stigma: Examining Resilience and Empowerment in Overcoming Stigma

Margaret Shih, University of Michigan

*Background* Stigmatized individuals possess a devalued and denigrated identity in our society. As a consequence, they regularly

- receive fewer positive nonverbal clues and encounter awkward social interactions more frequently;
- experience greater difficulty in gaining access to resources such as housing, public accommodations, employment, and education;
- face glass ceilings in their careers; and
- seek treatment for health problems reluctantly and thereby prolong these problems.

However, many stigmatized individuals live successfully, and experiencing these difficulties does not always translate into poor outcomes. Stigmatized individuals often function as well as those who are not stigmatized. Thus, investigators should focus not only on identifying the factors that lead individuals to be hurt by stigma but also on factors that help them overcome stigmas.

*Resilience and Coping Skills* Stigmatized individuals have resources to handle stigma that help them develop resilience to stressors. Factors such as intelligence can lead adolescents living in adverse environments to develop competence and healthy adjustment outcomes. Stigmatized individuals can develop skills to compensate for the stigma by, for example,

- being more persistent and assertive;
- refining their social interaction skills;
- distancing themselves from the stigmatized group;
- devaluing the dimensions on which they are disadvantaged and valuing the dimensions on which their groups are not disadvantaged;
- strategically manipulating their interpretations of their social environments to protect their sense of self-worth by comparing themselves, for example, to members of their own group rather than those outside of it who may have different characteristics; and
- drawing upon alternative identities to protect themselves from stigma.
  - Individuals with greater self-complexity are more resilient to stress-related illnesses and to depression.
  - Since stigmas are social constructions, certain identities may be stigmatized in one social context and not another, and individuals can spontaneously switch their identities across situations.

*Coping and  
Empowerment*

Individuals adopt one of two protective strategies.

- The first strategy is *coping*. Individuals adopt a perspective of prevention and avoidance, which tends to be both mentally and physically draining.
- The second is *empowerment*. Here, individuals seek to understand their social world and create positive outcomes that tend to be replenishing and enriching.
- Two factors help predict whether individuals will react to stigma through empowerment or coping:
  - the perceived legitimacy of the stigma, and
  - their degree of group identification.
- Moderators for adopting strategies include individual differences in areas like IQ or the theories one adopts toward achievement.

*Conclusion*

Traditional work on stigma has focused largely on the harm that stigma brings to individuals who are its targets and on identifying the factors that lead to these negative outcomes.

- However, many individuals flourish in spite of a stigmatized identity
- by employing one of two strategies: coping and empowerment.

Efforts at improving the conditions of stigmatized individuals have focused on removing the stigma from the identity through education, protest, and contact.

- These efforts are necessary, but removing prejudices and changing social attitudes are difficult tasks.
- Investigators should focus attention on the individuals who are successful in overcoming stigma and identify factors that allow them to be successful.
- The strength gained from overcoming adversity has received too little attention but can in fact produce insights into the factors that protect and contribute to the resilience of individuals coping with stigma.