Handbook of Moral and Character Education

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Positive Youth Development in the United States

Publication details
Richard F. Catalano, John W. Toumbourou, J. David Hawkins
Published online on: 31 Mar 2014

Accessed on: 27 Oct 2023

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Part V
Moral and Character Education Beyond the Classroom
INTRODUCTION

Positive youth development (PYD) refers in broad scope to childhood and adolescent development experiences that provide optimal life preparation for the attainment of adult potential and well-being. This paper reviews specific conceptual frameworks and focuses on the evidence from evaluations of program applications delivered prior to age 21 that have the common aim of encouraging PYD.

The study of optimal development is relatively new and emerges from research into human growth through the life course. In the twentieth century, childhood and adolescence came to be increasingly regarded as special periods of development in which children were provided extra support to learn and develop. Early in the century, American society assumed an increased sense of responsibility for the care of its young people, including increasing the reach of education, delaying entry into the workforce, and providing supports for families who, historically, had nurtured the development of children. As the century progressed, changes in family socialization created changes in conceptualization of school and community practices to support families to raise successful children (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1997).

Prevention of youth problems in the twentieth century has evolved from earlier treatment and intervention models. Many early prevention efforts were not based on child development theory or research, and most approaches failed to show positive impact on youth problems (Kirby, Harvey, Claussenius, & Novar, 1989; Malvin, Moskowitz, Schaeffer, & Schaps, 1984; Snow, Gilchrist, & Schinke, 1985).

Faced with early failures, prevention program developers became increasingly aligned with the science of behavior development and change, and began designing program elements to address predictors of specific problem behaviors identified in longitudinal and intervention studies of youth. These prevention efforts were often guided by theories about how people make decisions, such as the Theory of Reasoned
Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and the Health Belief Model (Janz & Becker, 1984; Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988). In the 1980s these prevention efforts focused on predictors of a single problem behavior and came under increasing criticism for having such a narrow focus. Concerns expressed by prevention practitioners, policymakers, and prevention scientists helped expand the design of prevention programs to include components aimed at promoting positive youth development (Catalano & Hawkins, 2002).

In the 1990s, practitioners, policymakers, and prevention scientists adopted a broader focus for addressing youth issues (Pittman, O’Brien, & Kimball, 1993). In the late 1990s, youth development practitioners, the policy community, and prevention scientists reached similar conclusions about promoting better outcomes for youth. They all called for expanding programs beyond a single problem behavior focus and considering program effects on a range of positive and problem behaviors (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Kirby, Barth, Leland, & Fetro, 1991; National Research Council Institute of Medicine, Chalk, & Phillips, 1996; Pittman, 1991). This convergence in thinking has been recognized in forums on youth development including practitioners, policymakers (Pittman, 1991; Pittman & Fleming, 1991), and prevention scientists (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2002; National Research Council Institute of Medicine et al., 1996; O’Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009) who have advocated that models of healthy development hold the key to both health promotion and prevention of problem behaviors.

### POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CONSTRUCTS

In the late 1990s, a review of the literature was conducted to discover the multiple ways PYD constructs appeared in the literature. This review was followed by a consensus building meeting of leading scientists (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999) to create an operational definition of positive youth development constructs. This definition was further developed by a meeting of scientists organized by the Annenberg Sunnylands Trust (Seligman et al., 2005). The following section provides a listing followed by a brief description of constructs addressed by youth development programs.

1. Promotes social competence
2. Promotes emotional competence
3. Promotes cognitive competence
4. Promotes behavioral competence
5. Promotes moral competence
6. Fosters self-efficacy
7. Provides opportunities for prosocial involvement
8. Provides recognition for positive behavior
9. Promotes bonding
10. Promotes strength of character
11. Fosters self-determination
12. Fosters clear and positive identity
13. Fosters belief in the future
14. Fosters prosocial norms
15. Fosters spirituality
16. Promotes life satisfaction
17. Fosters positive emotions
18. Fosters resilience

Promotes Competencies

Competence covers five areas of youth functioning: social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral competencies.

SOCIAL COMPETENCE
Social competence is a range of interpersonal skills that help youth integrate feelings, thinking, and actions in order to achieve specific social and interpersonal goals (Caplan et al., 1992; Weissberg, Caplan, & Sivo, 1989; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE
Emotional competence is the ability to identify and respond to feelings and emotional reactions in oneself and others. The W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (W. T. Grant Consortium 1992, p. 136) list of emotional skills includes: “Identifying and labeling feelings, expressing feelings, assessing the intensity of feelings, managing feelings, delaying gratification, controlling impulses, and reducing stress.” Goleman (1995) proposed empathy and hope as components of emotional intelligence.

COGNITIVE COMPETENCE
Cognitive competence includes two overlapping but distinct subconstructs. The first relates to personal skills such as problem solving (W. T. Grant Consortium, 1992, p. 136). The second aspect is related to academic and intellectual achievement.

BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCE
Behavioral competence refers to effective action in three dimensions: nonverbal communication, verbal communication, and taking action (W. T. Grant Consortium 1992, pp. 136–137).

MORAL COMPETENCE
Moral competence is a youth’s ability to assess and respond to the ethical, affective, or social justice dimensions of a situation. Nucci and Turiel (Nucci, 1997, 2001; Turiel, 1983) considered fairness and welfare as central concerns for moral judgments.

Fosters Self-Efficacy
Self-efficacy is the perception that one can achieve desired goals within specific domains (e.g., educational attainment) through one’s own action (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). Given that differences in self-efficacy are commonly observed across domains (e.g., school, sport, relationships), to offer PYD benefits, high self-efficacy may need to be maintained across domains that align with valued opportunities.

Provides Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement
Opportunity for prosocial involvement is the presentation of events and activities across different social environments that encourage youths to participate in prosocial actions.
There are links between the emphasis on opportunities in PYD and the United Nations Millennium Development goals that have established a strategy to reduce severe poverty by ensuring basic opportunities (nutrition, education, and rights) for youth internationally (United Nations, 2000, 2005).

**Provides Recognition for Positive Behavior**
Recognition for positive involvement is the positive response of those in the social environment to desired behaviors by youths. Both external and intrinsic reinforcers are generally agreed to have important influences on behavior (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Bandura, 1973).

**Promotes Bonding**
Bonding is the emotional attachment and commitment a child makes to social relationships in the family, peer group, school, community, or culture. The importance of bonding reaches far beyond the family. How a child establishes early bonds to caregivers (Bowlby, 1982) will directly affect the manner in which the child later bonds to peers, school, the community, and culture(s) (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004).

**Promotes Strength of Character**
Positive traits like curiosity, kindness, gratitude, hope, and humor are components of strength of character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

**Fosters Self-Determination**
Self-determination is the ability to think for oneself and to take instrumental action consistent with that thought (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996).

**Fosters Clear and Positive Identity**
Clear and positive identity is the internal organization of a coherent sense of self. The construct is associated with the theory of identity development emerging from studies of how children establish their identities (Erikson, 1968), including gender and ethnic identity (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992; Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990).

**Fosters Belief in the Future**
Belief in the future is the internalization of hope and optimism about possible outcomes (Wyman, Cowen, Work, & Kerley, 1993).

**Fosters Prosocial Norms**
Prosocial norms are healthy beliefs and clear standards for a variety of positive behaviors and prohibitions against involvement in unhealthy or risky behaviors (J. D. Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; J. D. Hawkins et al., 1992).

**Fosters Spirituality**
To incorporate religiosity and nontraditional forms of applied spiritual practice, spirituality is defined here to include affiliation, belief in a transcendent hierarchy of values, and practice relevant to both formal religion (which considers God-given values to be at the top of the hierarchy of values) and also less formal conceptions of spirituality such
as internal reflection and considering a transcendental hierarchy of solely humanistic values (Berube, Jost, Severynse, & Ellis, 1995).

**Promotes Life Satisfaction**
Life satisfaction is the overall judgment that one’s life is a good one (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

**Fosters Positive Emotions**
Emotions like joy, contentment, and love have been linked by research to the broadening and building of psychological skills and abilities (Fredrickson, 2000, 2002).

**Fosters Resilience**
Resilience is an individual’s capacity for adapting to change and stressful events in healthy and flexible ways (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1985).

**INTERVENTION IMPLICATIONS**
Identification of youth development constructs has proven useful in defining targets for intervention, as well as understanding how youth development program components might be structured. For example, the youth development construct of bonding suggests that bonding to family, peers, school, and positive community members is an important process of youth development that could be targeted by youth development interventions.

However, the field must progress beyond a listing of positive youth development constructs. To be most useful as a program development or structuring tool, the ability of the youth development constructs to predict positive and problem behaviors should be examined. Establishing predictive validity of youth development constructs provides a stronger rationale for addressing them through intervention. Consistent, longitudinal evidence across positive and problem behavior has not been generated for the youth development constructs. However, recently a series of reviews has examined the longitudinal evidence for whether youth development constructs predict sexual and reproductive health (Gloppen, David-Ferdon, & Bates, 2010; House, Bates, Markham, & Lesesne, 2010; House, Müller, Reininger, Brown, & Markham, 2010; Markham et al., 2010). This series of reviews found consistent longitudinal evidence for seven (cognitive and social competence, self-efficacy, belief in the future, self-determination, prosocial norms, and spirituality) of the 13 PYD constructs examined (positive emotions, life satisfaction, resilient temperament, strength of character, and behavioral competence were not examined). This suggests that these seven PYD constructs have evidence for being promising targets of PYD interventions to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Further reviews of the ability of the youth development constructs to predict other problem and positive behaviors will assist PYD interventions to target malleable and predictive youth development constructs and provide a firmer basis for PYD program development.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THEORY**
In addition to establishing whether PYD constructs predict positive and problem behavior, there is a need to tie this long list of youth developmental constructs together through
theories of positive youth development (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Cichetti & Cohen, 1995; Lerner, 2000; Lopez & McKnight, 2002; Seligman, 2001).

While the field of PYD is characterized by several theories of PYD, no theory predominates. Rather than review theories, we briefly present our theory as an example guide to mechanisms that produce youth development. The social development model (SDM) (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996, 2002) is a theory of human behavior that attempts to provide an explanation of the development of positive and problem behavior. It recognizes that development is a product of an individual’s behavior in multiple social environments across development. The SDM is explicitly developmental. Four developmental submodels of the SDM have been specified. The same constructs are included in each submodel, although their specific content is defined differently by individual development and changes in social environments. These developmental periods include preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school, corresponding to major transitions in socializing environments (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The developmentally specific submodels have been constructed as recursive models; however, the SDM hypothesizes reciprocal relationships between constructs across developmental periods.

The model builds on social control theory (Hirschi, 1969), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Cressey, 1953), and differential association theory (Cressey, 1953; Matsueda, 1988). Control theory is used to identify causal elements in the etiology of problem and positive behavior. Social learning theory is used to identify processes by which patterns of positive and problem behavior are learned, extinguished, or maintained. Differential association theory is used to identify parallel but separate causal paths for prosocial and antisocial processes. This synthetic theory pays particular attention to resolving competing theoretical assumptions of these different theories (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The SDM hypothesizes that children and youth must learn patterns of behavior, whether prosocial or antisocial. These patterns are learned in families, schools, peer groups, and the community. It is hypothesized that socialization follows the same processes of social learning whether it produces positive or problem behavior. Children are socialized through processes involving four constructs: 1) perceived opportunities for involvement in activities and interactions with others, 2) the degree of involvement and interaction, 3) the skills to participate in these involvements and interactions, and 4) the reinforcement they perceive from these involvements and interactions (see Figure 24.1).

When socializing processes are consistent, a social bond develops between the individual and the socializing unit. Once strongly established, the social bond has power to effect behavior independently of the above four social learning processes. The social bond inhibits deviant behaviors through the establishment of an individual’s “stake” in conforming to the norms and values of the socializing unit. It is hypothesized that the behavior of the individual will be prosocial or antisocial depending on the relative influence of norms and values held by those to whom the individual is bonded. Social and emotional bonds are only expected to inhibit antisocial behavior if those to whom a child is bonded hold norms clearly opposed to the antisocial behavior. Individuals who develop bonds to antisocial family, peers, or school personnel are expected to be encouraged to engage in antisocial behavior. Thus, two paths are hypothesized with similar socialization processes operating, one a prosocial (protective) path, and one an antisocial (risk) path. Both paths influence positive and antisocial behavior.

This theory weaves together several PYD concepts, including opportunities; social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive competencies; recognition for involvement;
bonding; belief in the future; and positive norms. It brings them together in a way that provides mechanistic links among the concepts and provides explanations for both promotive and risk paths among these constructs. The latter is particularly important since it provides caution that the PYD concepts might actually promote problem behavior depending on whether the activities, interactions, and beliefs are prosocial or antisocial. This theory thus takes the concepts beyond a list and provides dynamics among the concepts and explanations for how they might work together. This type of theoretical development is needed in the field.

**CONSENSUS ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR OUTCOMES IN ADULTHOOD IS NEEDED**

While there has been consensus on problem behaviors and PYD constructs, there is less consensus on positive behavior outcomes in adulthood. Defining a limited number of PYD outcomes would assist the field in both theory and intervention development.

Some work has been completed in defining PYD outcomes. For example, Benson, Hawkins and colleagues (2004), defined eight outcomes in young adulthood, including physical health, psychological and emotional well-being, life skills, ethical behavior, healthy family and social relationships, educational attainment, constructive engagement, and civic engagement. However, one of these outcomes, life skills, overlaps with the PYD competency constructs, thus providing seven unique youth development outcomes.

Another example of work to define positive young adult outcomes has occurred in Australia (M. T. Hawkins, Letcher, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2009). In addition to the outcomes identified by Benson et al. (2004), Hawkins and colleagues also include social trust, defined as respect for diversity and key societal institutions. Trust is conceptualized as an important developmental outcome that emerges from the PYD construct of bonding. M. T. Hawkins and colleagues’ (2009, 2011) integrative model was found to offer a good fit to data from a young adult Australian cohort. Similar
to the work of Benson et al. (2004), their model integrated constructs measuring general life satisfaction and competence (conceived as universal individual indicators of positive development) with constructs from social capital theories that included civic engagement and social trust. Social trust and civic engagement have been conceptualized in social capital theories to be important young adult outcomes that indicate both healthy development at an individual level, but also as collective resources contributing to the success of democratic societies. Their model of positive youth development appeared longitudinally valid in being predicted appropriately by child socialization and PYD indicators (O'Connor et al., 2011) and in predicting subsequent reductions in common young adult problems in areas including mental health and alcohol misuse, while also enhancing intimate peer relationships, physical well-being, and positive development (M. T. Hawkins et al., 2012).

These varied efforts to better define and measure PYD outcomes are important for improving conceptualization of the relation between PYD constructs and positive and problem outcomes in adults. Establishing consensus on positive outcomes can provide a firmer basis for examining the predictive validity of PYD constructs, and assist in designing measures that could be added as outcomes for PYD interventions, in addition to reducing problem behaviors. Further conceptual work needs to be completed to define and gain consensus on PYD young adult outcomes.

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND MORAL AND CHARACTER EDUCATION**

The constructs included under the umbrella of positive youth development have emerged through consensus meetings involving scientists, practitioners, and policymakers synthesizing findings across the developmental, evaluation, and behavioral sciences. These efforts have married diverse science and practice across a range of disciplines and achieved an encompassing scope in the characterization of positive youth development such that domains that form the focus in the moral and character education movement have been included. The moral and character education movement shares historical similarities with many areas of positive youth development in the youth domains that have been addressed, the interventions that have been developed and tested, and in the challenges faced in attempting to integrate research and practice (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Leming, 1993). A common starting point evident in the writing of supporters of moral and character education has been the concern that modern socializing institutions have failed to reinforce the moral development of children and young people (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999; Leming, 1993). Although there are efforts to realign with evidence-based approaches (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006), the moral and character education programs that are most commonly used in American schools do not appear to reflect the diversity of underpinning theory and practice evident in the history of this movement. Many programs utilize school curricula with the aim of encouraging a common code of values, and, in this sense, resemble the ineffective programs developed in the earliest period of the character education movement (Bebeau et al., 1999; Leming, 1993); systematic reviews and evaluations of programs have shown mixed effects, with some programs demonstrating no effects (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006). Bebeau et al. (1999) comment that the implicit theory underpinning a number of
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curriculum-based programs is that didactic teaching of traditional values, reinforced with a behavioral code reflecting these curriculum values, will be effective in changing both values and behavior.

The review of character education programs conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences (2006) identified four programs that had been submitted to evaluations that at least partly met quality evidence standards. None of the programs evaluated was found to have impacted prosocial behavior and only one program (Building Decision Skills combined with service learning) was found to have had potentially positive effects on attitudes and values (Leming, 2001), while one other program (The Lessons in Character curricula) was found to have potentially positive effects for academic achievement (Devargas, 1999; Dietsch & Bayha, 2005; Dietsch, Bayha, & Zheng, 2005).

The growing emphasis on the evaluation of character and moral education programs reflects the broader emphasis on evidence-based practice. Interest in character education has seeded innovative programming and scientific investigation that has influenced positive youth development programs. The failure of a number of evaluations to find effects for character education programs (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006) has led to calls to better integrate the practice of character education with the lessons from the evaluation of programs that have successfully promoted positive youth development (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). One indicator of the need for more research in this area is that the evidence available for inclusion of this approach on the Institute of Education What Works Clearinghouse website remained effectively unchanged between July 2006 and July 2012.

EVALUATIONS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Two systematic reviews of the unpublished and published PYD program evaluations were conducted, one published in 2002 (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002) and the second in 2010 (Gavin, Catalano, David-Ferdon, Gloppen, & Markham, 2010). To be included, both reviews required that program evaluations met the following criteria:

- Address one or more of the positive youth development constructs.
- Involve a universal sample of youth (not a sample selected because of their need for treatment).
- Address at least one youth development construct in multiple socialization domains, or address multiple youth development constructs in a single socialization domain, or address multiple youth development constructs in multiple domains. Programs that addressed a single youth development construct in a single socialization domain were excluded from these reviews.

The 2002 review included studies that:

- Involved youth between the ages of six and 20 years.

The 2010 review included studies that:

- Involved youth between 0–20 years of age.
In addition to these program criteria, the program’s evaluation had to meet the criteria described below. Complete description and operationalization of these inclusion criteria can be found in the two reviews.

- Experimental or quasi-experimental designs without design flaws that affect conclusion validity;
- Adequate description of the research methodologies;
- Description of the population served;
- Description of the intervention;
- Description of implementation.

The 2002 study accepted studies with:

- Effects demonstrated on positive or negative behavioral outcomes.

The 2010 study accepted only studies with:

- Effects demonstrated on an adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcome.

A diverse range of programs met these selection criteria, some of which may be described as positive youth development programs, some as health promotion programs, and others as primary prevention programs. In the 2002 review, 30 positive youth development programs met the inclusion criteria and 25 had positive effects on behavioral outcomes with an acceptable standard of statistical proof. In the 2010 review, 30 PYD programs met the inclusion criteria. Fifteen of the 30 programs had evidence of improving at least one adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcome. The two reviews included a number of the same programs.

**SUMMARY OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

Program results are briefly summarized in this section, organized by effects on positive and negative outcomes. Illustrative references to articles describing outcomes of these programs are provided when the program is first mentioned. More complete descriptions of the programs, research designs, behavioral outcomes, and complete references for the programs named below are available in the 2002 and 2010 reviews (Catalano, Berglund et al., 2002; Gavin et al., 2010).

Positive outcomes for youth in these programs included a variety of improvements in emotional competence, including greater self-control (PATHS—Greenberg & Kusche, 1997; Bicultural Competence Skills—Schinke, Orlandi, Botvin, Gilchrist, & Locklear, 1988); frustration tolerance (Children of Divorce—Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985); increased empathy (PATHS); and expression of feelings (PATHS; Fast Track—Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002). Improvements in social competence included interpersonal skills (Children of Divorce; Fast Track; Child Development Project—Battistich, Schaps, Watson, & Solomon, 1996; Life Skills Training—Botvin et al., 2000; Social Competence Promotion Program—Weissberg & Caplan, 1998); greater assertiveness (Bicultural Competence Skills; Children of Divorce); greater self-efficacy with respect to substance use refusal (Project Northland—Perry et al., 1996); healthy and adaptive coping in peer-pressure situations.
(Bicultural Competence Skills); improvements in acceptance of authority (Fast Track); and improvements in race relations and perceptions of others from different cultural or ethnic groups (Woodrock Youth Development Project—LoSciuto, Freeman, Harrington, Altman, & Lanphear, 1997). Increases in cognitive competence included decision making (Life Skills Training) and better problem solving (Children of Divorce; PATHS; Social Competence Promotion Program). Increases in behavioral competence included better health practices (Growing Healthy—Smith, Redican, & Olsen, 1992; Know Your Body—Walter, Vaughan, & Wynder, 1989) and greater self-efficacy around contraceptive practices (Reducing the Risk—Kirby et al., 1991). Positive youth development programs were associated with improvements in parental bonding and communication (Reducing the Risk; Seattle Social Development Project—Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005, 2008; High Scope Perry Preschool—Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Big Brothers/Big Sisters—Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). Positive outcomes also included increased acceptance of pro-social norms regarding substance use (Life Skills Training; Project ALERT—Ellickson & Bell, 1990). A variety of positive school outcomes were also achieved by some youth development programs, including higher achievement (Big Brothers/Big Sisters; High/Scope Perry Preschool; Seattle Social Development Project; Teen Outreach—Allen, Philliber, Herring, & Kuperminc, 1997; Abecedarian Project—Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Valued Youth Partnerships—Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992; Adult Identity Mentoring—Clark et al., 2005; Success for All—Slavin, 1996); higher school attachment (Seattle Social Development Project); increased high school attendance (Big Brothers/Big Sisters; Quantum Opportunities—Hahn, Leavitt, & Aaron, 1994); increased high school graduation (Across Ages—LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996, Quantum Opportunities Program; Seattle Social Development Project; Valued Youth Partnerships); increased postsecondary school and college attendance (Quantum Opportunities Program; Seattle Social Development Project); and employment in adulthood (Abecedarian Project; High/Scope Perry Preschool). Other positive youth outcomes included higher levels of voluntary community service (Across Ages) and use of community services when needed (Creating Lasting Connections—Johnson et al., 1996).

Importantly, these programs reduced or prevented problem behaviors. For several programs substance use was lower, including alcohol or drug use (Abecedarian Project; Bicultural Competence Skills; Big Brothers/Big Sisters; Child Development Project; High/Scope Perry Preschool; Life Skills Training; Project ALERT; Project Northland; Seattle Social Development Project; Woodrock Youth Development Project; Adolescent Sibling Pregnancy Prevention—East, Kiernan, & Chavez, 2003; Aban Aya—Flay, Graumlich, Segawa, Burns, & Holliday, 2004; Staying Connected with Your Teen—Haggerty, Skinner, MacKenzie, & Catalano, 2007; Gatehouse Project—Patton et al., 2006; Midwestern Prevention Project—Pentz et al., 1994; Familias Unidas—Prado et al., 2007; Wolchik et al., 2007; New Beginnings—Wolchik et al., 2002) and tobacco use (Child Development Project; Growing Healthy; Know Your Body; Life Skills Training; Midwestern Prevention Project; Project ALERT; Project Northland; Woodrock Youth Development Project). Several programs reduced delinquency and aggression (Aban Aya; Adolescent Transitions Program; Big Brothers/Big Sisters; Gatehouse Project; High/Scope Perry Preschool; Fast Track; PATHS; Seattle Social Development Project; Social Competence Promotion Program; Staying Connected with Your Teen; Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways—Farrell & Meyer, 1997; Metropolitan Area Child Study—Guerra, Eron, Huesmann, Tolan,
& Van Acker, 1997; Reach for Health—O’Donnell et al., 1999; O’Donnell et al., 2002). Youth contraception practices increased, and initiation and prevalence of sexual activity were reduced in multiple programs (Aban Aya; Adult Identity Mentoring; Familias Unidas; Gatehouse Project; Reach for Health; Reducing the Risk; Seattle Social Development Project; Staying Connected with Your Teen; Keepin’ it REAL—DiIorio et al., 2006; DiIorio et al., 2002; Adolescent Sibling Pregnancy Prevention—East et al., 2003; CAS-Carrera Program—Philliber, Kaye, Herrling, & West, 2002; Teen Incentives Program—Smith, 1994). Teen pregnancy was reduced by several programs (Abecedarian Project; Adolescent Sibling Pregnancy Prevention; CAS-Carrera Program; High/Scope Perry Preschool; Teen Outreach; Seattle Social Development Project). Negative school outcomes were reduced, including truancy (Adolescent Sibling Pregnancy Prevention; Big Brothers/Big Sisters) and school suspension (Adult Identity Mentoring; Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways).

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Summary of the characteristics of the effective positive youth development programs across the two reviews is instructive.

Youth Development Constructs
Both reviews showed consistency in the youth development constructs addressed by efficacious programs. At least two thirds of the efficacious youth development programs addressed some form of competence, opportunities for prosocial involvement, recognition for positive behavior, and bonding; and at least 40% of the efficacious well-evaluated programs addressed positive identity, self-efficacy, self-determination, belief in the future, and prosocial norms.

Program Frequency and Duration
Twenty (80%) efficacious programs in the 2002 review were delivered over a period of nine months or more and two-thirds of the efficacious programs in the 2010 review had this duration.

Program Implementation and Assurance of Implementation Quality
Fidelity of program implementation is one of the most important topics in the positive youth development field. The efficacious positive youth development programs reviewed here consistently attended to the quality and consistency of program implementation.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CONCLUSIONS

We found a wide range of positive youth development approaches that resulted in promoting positive youth behavior outcomes and preventing youth problem behaviors. Thirty-seven programs showed either positive changes in youth behavior, including significant improvements in interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem solving, cognitive competencies, self-efficacy, commitment to schooling, and academic achievement; or significant improvements in problem behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, school misbehavior, aggressive behavior, violence,
truancy, high-risk sexual behavior, and smoking. This is good news indeed. Promotion and prevention programs that address positive youth development constructs are definitely making a difference in well-evaluated studies.

Although a broad range of strategies produced these results, the themes common to success involved methods to strengthen social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies; shape messages from family and community about clear standards for youth behavior; increase healthy bonding with adults, peers, and younger children; expand opportunities and recognition for youth; and intervene with youth for nine months or more.

IMPLICATIONS OF EVALUATIONS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR MORAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The constructs addressed by effective positive youth development programs provide some confirmation of character and moral development program elements as well as some potential extensions. While these youth development constructs were not tested individually, their presence in effective positive youth development programs is suggestive of their importance. It appears that addressing multiple positive youth development constructs was associated with positive program impact. However, for the field to most efficiently develop now, we suggest that a relatively small set of positive outcomes in young adults be agreed upon, and call for more studies demonstrating that these PYD constructs are predictive of a range of positive and negative outcomes. Both directions would assist in progressing the research, program development, and ultimately the effectiveness of PYD programs.

In sum, there is clear evidence from well-conducted trials that positive youth development programs can be effective. Many of the elements of character and moral development have been included in the programs reviewed here. Cross-fertilization of programming and theory could lead to improvements in our understanding of youth development.

REFERENCES


