A fourth-grade student at Discovery Bay Elementary School in Byron, California, could teach us all a lesson about what it means to be positive. Tyler Page participates in lessons every day at school where he learns that you feel good about yourself when you think and do positive actions, and there is always a positive way to do everything. His teachers, other school staff, fellow students, and parents provide positive reinforcement and support for him and his fellow students in the classroom, on the school grounds, and elsewhere.

One day while watching TV, Tyler found a way to take positive action. Inspired and moved by an Oprah show that exposed parents selling their children into slavery in Ghana, Africa, he devised a plan to raise money to assist those children. Tyler knew that $240 could support one rescued child for an entire year. Along with twenty-five other kids and the help of parents and local businesses, he organized a car wash fundraiser and raised $1,705—enough to support seven children. The kids worked all day, only stopping to eat. Some who had scheduled sports or other activities did not want to leave, and everyone asked Tyler when the next fundraiser would be. Within seventeen months, Tyler had led the charge in raising $50,000—enough to support two hundred children. Tyler’s positive assets and actions united an entire community behind a common cause. Two hundred children’s lives were positively changed because one group of children across the world applied the concepts and skills they were learning to civic action in real life.

What would you prefer? To be praised for your positive assets, or to be told that you are merely problem free? Should you support a safe-school initiative or fight in the war on drugs? Would you rather attend a peace rally or an antiwar protest? A positive perspective is often semantically best, and a positive perspective toward youth development helps movement away from the negative paradigm that has been predominant in scientific thinking for decades (J. V. Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). A positive youth development (PYD) perspective views youth as people to be nurtured, not problems to be managed (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a). While this perspective acknowledges the risk and difficulties youth face (Damon, 2004), its key components include (1) a focus on youth strengths or assets and
potential for positive individual development; (2) the value of supportive (asset-rich) contexts; and (3) the bidirectional interactions between person and context (Benson, 1997; R. M. Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005).

PYD is grounded in the premise that every child has the potential to succeed and the capacity for positive development (R. M. Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Of course, this development is influenced by a myriad of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural-environmental factors (Flay, Snyder, & Petraitis, 2009). Youth tend to manifest positive development when their environment is rich with assets that mesh with their strengths (Benson, 2003; R. M. Lerner, 2005). In addition to social-emotional skills, optimal youth development requires clear parental boundaries, supportive teachers, and caring communities that provide a venue for youth to contribute to society. However, only in recent decades have more researchers, practitioners, and policy makers taken a PYD approach that acknowledges these concepts. For most of the twentieth century, adolescence and young adulthood were seen as times of turbulence and stress (Hall, 1904, as cited in R. M. Lerner, 2005). Many researchers and the public cast a suspicious eye on youth, seeing them as susceptible to hazards and prone to risk behaviors that endanger themselves and disrupt society.

More recently, studies and advancements in knowledge have begun to shift the established views of youth. Now there is greater recognition of positive youth–adult interactions and motivated youth (Larson, 2006) thriving in their development (R. M. Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002; R. M. Lerner et al., 2003; Settersten & Ray, 2010). In fact, while youth do face challenges, most youth do not have a turbulent second decade of life (adolescence; R. M. Lerner, 2005) or third decade (young adulthood; Settersten & Ray, 2010). Actually, they often value good relationships with their parents, frequently develop altruistic values, and select friends with similar core values.

A variety of work has bolstered support for the PYD perspective. Toward the end of the twentieth century, researchers began to accrue empirical evidence of neural plasticity, or experience-induced changes in the brain. This breakthrough was instrumental in understanding human development (Nelson, 1999). Further, theoretical understanding, along with a discussion among practitioners and policy makers, helped form a foundation upon which the PYD approach was built. Research and practice expanded the comprehensive and evolving set of constructs that PYD subsumes. Additionally, integrative theories have been developed that unify multiple influences into a more cogent view of human development and behavior (Flay & Petraitis, 1994; Ford & Lerner, 1992). Integrative theory has informed the PYD perspective and can help bring order to the confusion that may accompany a complex system of behavioral influences.

Current researchers have learned that behaviors, both positive and negative, are correlated and have the same distal influences and ultimate or fundamental roots and causes (Flay, 2002). Similarly, program developers and evaluators have found that many school-based programs have had limited results because most have been problem specific and have not addressed the distal and ultimate influences that have far-reaching influences on numerous behaviors (Flay, 2002; Flay et al., 2009; Romer, 2003). These distal factors, such as prosocial norms, are key in creating nurturing environments (Komro, Flay, Biglan, & Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium,
Several programs have evolved from problem-specific approaches to more comprehensive (i.e., including youth, school personnel, families, and communities) and integrative (i.e., addressing multiple risk and protective factors for co-occurring behaviors) approaches (e.g., Bierman et al., 2004; Flay & Allred, 2010; Flay, Graumlich, Segawa, Burns, & Holliday, 2004; Pentz et al., 1989). This new understanding that behaviors are linked and recent recognition that programs can address multiple influences have the potential to unite many disciplines.

Indeed, PYD is a multidisciplinary field, with many individuals involved who have found common ground after inquiry and experience. In this chapter, we provide a thematic review of the field rather than an exhaustive one; we are unable to be inclusive of all the researchers and practitioners who use the term PYD and conduct related work. To date, this relatively new and multidisciplinary field involves considerable overlap with multiple approaches to prosocial education, such as character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, 2007); social and emotional learning (SEL; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Payton et al., 2000; Weissberg & O’Brien, 2004); social and character development (SACD; Flay, Berkowitz, & Bier, 2009; Haegerich & Metz, 2009); and social-emotional and character development (SECD; Elias, 2009). We use the term PYD related to denote this overlap among various areas of prosocial education and to express that some approaches, such as public policy, are related to PYD. Prosocial education, in its principles and goals given in chapter 1, is an umbrella concept that is informed by PYD and the other approaches provided in this book.

Disparate inclusion criteria determine which programs were included in reviews on different areas of prosocial education, thus generating program overlap across the reviews. Readers who compare recent reviews of character education programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007); PYD programs (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004); and SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011) will find multiple programs that are included in two or all three of these reviews. Further, there are substantial overlaps in terminologies and strategies across disciplines; however, the best programs incorporate most, if not all, of the strategies described in the reviews. Listed in this chapter’s first paragraph, three key components of PYD (a focus on youth strengths or assets, the value of supportive environments, and acknowledgment of bidirectional person–context interactions) help clarify what comprehensive PYD programs include and how they differ from other programs. A PYD program that includes these components can, as we will discuss herein, promote positive youth development and, simultaneously, prevent unhealthy behaviors without ever addressing an unhealthy behavior specifically.

Overall, PYD is a rather new perspective with a complex history. Although PYD may be a common “buzzword” in present-day scientific and colloquial dialogue, there is mounting empirical evidence that supports its concepts, characteristics, and strategies. Accordingly, this chapter provides a discussion of PYD in historical context; a detailed overview of what PYD is and its constructs; theories that informed the conception of PYD and unifying, integrative theories that facilitate understanding of PYD; empirical research on characteristics, strategies, and outcomes of effective programs; examples of effective research and programming; PYD-related policy; implications for prosocial education; and paths for future research.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The PYD perspective originated in biological and psychological research related to ontogenesis (i.e., the study of an organism’s life span) and the plasticity of development, and it grew out of work related to child and human development (J. V. Lerner et al., 2009; R. M. Lerner, 2005; R. M. Lerner, Abo-Zena, et al., 2009) and juvenile delinquency (Benson et al., 2006). Further, it propagated from a discussion among practitioners and policy makers as well as funding initiatives that aimed to enhance the development of youth (Benson, 2003; Benson et al., 2006). Overall, PYD has many historical roots, and several scholars have blazed a path of research that emerged in the 1990s.

Integral in advancing the PYD movement during the last two decades are the contributions of groups led by Peter Benson (Benson, 1997; Benson & Pittman, 2001; Benson et al., 2006) and Richard Lerner (R. M. Lerner, 2005; R. M. Lerner et al., 2003; R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005; R. M. Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, & Lewin-Bizan, 2009). Their efforts have provided vocabulary and insight about the strengths of youth, the importance of context, and approaches to enhance youth development. This chapter highlights many of their contributions toward and vision of PYD. These include Benson’s forty developmental assets (Benson, 1997) and Lerner’s theoretical and empirical work (Ford & Lerner, 1992; R. M. Lerner, 2006), including the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005).

Other key scholars interested in youth development and enhancement, including health promotion, have contributed toward a PYD approach (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Damon, 2004; Flay, 2002; Larson, 2000). Moreover, although the PYD perspective did not originate from work related to positive psychology (R. M. Lerner, 2005; R. M. Lerner, Abo-Zena, et al., 2009), research conducted by such scholars as Seligman (2000) had similarities to and application toward PYD. Lastly, PYD is an aspect of another field, applied developmental psychology, which emphasizes the study of bidirectional and changing relationships of human development and contexts throughout the life span in ways that simultaneously add to both foundational knowledge and the development of new or adapted practices.

Also related to PYD, as mentioned briefly earlier, is the understanding that most, if not all, behaviors have common developmental determinants (Flay, 2002). Behaviors do not develop or exist in isolation from one another (Biglan, Brennan, Foster, & Holder, 2004; Botvin, Schinke, & Orlandi, 1995; Flay, 2002; O’Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). Research offers clear support that both positive and negative youth outcomes are influenced by similar protective and risk factors (Catalano, Hawkins, et al., 2002; Donovan, Jessor, & Costa, 1993; Flay, 2002). For instance, a clear relationship was established between academic achievement and violence, substance use, and other unhealthy behaviors (Fleming et al., 2005; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Wentzel, 1993).

With this research showing that behaviors are linked and in an effort to tackle the narrow reach of many programs, there has been a movement in recent years toward more comprehensive, integrative PYD-related programs that address co-occurring behaviors and that involve families and communities. These programs generally appear to be more effective (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, Solomon, & Lewis, 2000; Bierman et al., 2004;
That is, a comprehensive, integrated, promotive-preventive approach that addresses multiple determinants of behavior, not a narrow problem-specific approach, is likely to improve such diverse behavioral outcomes as academic skills and achievement, prosocial behaviors, truancy, substance use, risky sexual activity, and violence (Battistich et al., 2000; Botvin et al., 1995; Catalano, Hawkins, et al., 2002; Flay, 2002).

Scholars have suggested a need to focus on risk reduction (i.e., a prevention science perspective) and asset development (i.e., the PYD perspective) because they acknowledge that positively developing youth are involved in some number of risk behaviors (Catalano, Hawkins, et al., 2002; J. V. Lerner et al., 2009). Empirical evidence suggests that it is possible to promote PYD and simultaneously reduce multiple risk behaviors with a PYD approach (Beets et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2011; Li et al., 2011; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006; Snyder, Vuchinich, Acock, Washburn, & Flay, in press; Snyder et al., 2010, 2011; Washburn et al., in press). Therefore, prosocial education can enhance youth development and, at the same time, prevent unhealthy behaviors. In fact, equipped with an understanding of PYD and more detailed knowledge of health behaviors and the components of effective programs, researchers have evaluated more comprehensive, integrative programs, such as the Positive Action program described herein. These types of programs have a greater likelihood of affecting multiple co-occurring behaviors, partly through positively influencing context; they promote positive behaviors while reducing risk concomitantly.

Before we discuss effective strategies and exemplary programs, it is useful to explore PYD constructs and related theory. Taken together, the aforementioned research has led to a better understanding of what PYD is and what constructs it includes.

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTS, AND CONSTRUCTS**

PYD is broad and encompasses many descriptions and constructs. To date, no universally accepted definition of PYD exists (Benson et al., 2006; J. V. Lerner et al., 2009), perhaps because of its relative newness and cross-disciplinary nature or its complexity. As table 13.1 demonstrates, PYD can be thought of as (1) a perspective; (2) a construct (at minimum a second-order latent construct; Phelps et al., 2009); and (3) a program or policy approach. That is, PYD is a point of view (focusing on youth assets and their context), it is multidimensional and thus requires multiple measures to capture, and it is a comprehensive approach to intervention, aligned with program or policy activities, atmosphere, and goals. With such an inclusive term, definitions and constructs comprising PYD are many and varied. Paralleling the three concepts above, we describe PYD with three definitions:

1. **As a perspective**, PYD emphasizes youths' strengths and supportive contexts, along with acknowledging bidirectional youth-context interactions (e.g., when youth engage in civic activities, they are reinforced, and the community learns to place greater value on such activities and to encourage more of them).

2. **As a construct**, PYD is multidimensional and is assessed by multiple measures related to the strengths of youth and the assets in their social environments.
3. PYD programs support youth by focusing on developing their strengths, providing supportive and reinforcing contexts, and presenting opportunities for bidirectional youth–context interactions (e.g., school efforts affect youth and youth, in turn, affect their contexts).

The thoroughness of PYD can be grasped by examining a representative sample of several key literatures. Benson and colleagues, for example, have hypothesized that forty developmental assets are essential for all youth (Benson, 1997, 2007; Benson et al., 2006; Scales, 1999). The list includes both external, environmental, contextual asset types (e.g., support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time) as well as internal, intrapersonal, individual asset types (e.g., commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, positive identity). Further, these categories encompass several distinct assets. For instance, among the external asset types, “support” includes family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, a caring neighborhood, a caring school climate, and parent involvement in schooling. Among the internal asset types, “commitment to learning” incorporates achievement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 13.1. Descriptions of Positive Youth Development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
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<td>Four defining features of this field: comprehensive (a host of inputs in a variety of contexts); promotion (increase access to strength-building inputs and building personal strengths); developmental (recognizes the growth process and stages, and the role youth play navigating through those stages); and symbiotic (drawing ideas, strategies, and practices from many disciplines).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core ideas: community (i.e., family, school, neighborhoods, programs, congregations, peers, workplace); view of the child; developmental strengths; reduction in high-risk behaviors; promotion of health; well-being; and thriving.</td>
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<td>Approaches that seek to achieve one or more of the following objectives: promotes bonding, fosters resilience, promotes social competence, promotes emotional competence, promotes cognitive competence, promotes behavioral competence, promotes moral competence, fosters self-determination, fosters spirituality, fosters self-efficacy, fosters clear and positive identity, fosters belief in the future, provides recognition for positive behavior, provides opportunities for prosocial involvement, fosters prosocial norms.</td>
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<td>The positive youth development 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.</td>
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<td>This approach is not viewed as replacing the focus on preventing problems, but rather as creating a larger framework that promotes positive outcomes for all young people.</td>
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<td>Initiative (i.e., related to the capacity for agency or for autonomous action) is a core quality of positive youth development.</td>
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<td>The five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. A possible sixth C, contribution.</td>
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<td>All concepts are predicated on the ideas that every young person has the potential for successful, healthy development and that all youth possess the capacity for positive development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three distinguishing features of youth development approaches: program goals, atmosphere, and activities.</td>
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motivation, school engagement, completing homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure. These forty assets have been found to affect seven thriving-related outcomes: school success, leadership, valuing diversity, physical health, helping others, delay of gratification, and overcoming adversity (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). More recently, Benson has taken these concepts and written about ways for parents to help youth succeed by igniting their potential, called “sparks” (Benson, 2008).

Benson and colleagues’ efforts coincide with work by the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Their work has considered personal assets (knowledge of essential life skills, good self-regulation skills) and social assets (connectedness, sense of social place and integration, ability to navigate in different cultural contexts) that facilitate positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Community partnerships, such as Children First, have used these concepts, and R. M. Lerner and others (J. V. Lerner et al., 2009; R. M. Lerner, 2005) have discussed the forty assets in their own work.

Richard Lerner and colleagues have sought to examine constructs related to indicators of PYD. They have hypothesized that indicators of PYD are comprised of the five Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring), and possibly a sixth C, contribution (R. M. Lerner, Almerigi, et al., 2005). The five Cs are derived from work by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003b) and are defined as follows (Phelps et al., 2009, p. 573):

1. Competence: Positive view of one’s actions in domain-specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational. Social competence pertains to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence pertains to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision making). School grades, attendance, and test scores are part of academic competence. Vocational competence involves work habits and career choice explorations.
2. Confidence: An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one’s global self-regard, as opposed to domain-specific beliefs.
3. Connection: Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
4. Character: Respect for social and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
5. Caring and compassion: A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

The sixth C, contribution, recognizes that PYD occurs over time (Larson, 2000) and that adult life should ideally include contributions to one’s own health and well-being and to various realms of society (e.g., family, school, neighborhood; R. M. Lerner, 2004).

Other scholars, such as Damon, have echoed related components of PYD and have highlighted constructs such as noble purpose and morality (Damon, 2004, 2010). Noble purpose involves youth moving beyond self-interest (assuming that their basic needs are met) to pursue a purposeful life and engage in actions that strengthen the world around them. Morality involves children’s natural moral sense and the guidance required of caregivers in a supportive context to promote youth to act in a caring and ethical manner as they mature into honorable adults.

These descriptions and constructs, along with work from other like-minded researchers and practitioners (Keyes, 2005; Larson, 2000; Seligman, 2000), have created a
vocabulary that shares a common focus on enhancing youth development. The varying terminology reflects the heterogeneity of theory that has contributed to PYD. As research and theory progress, integrative theories may help generate greater consistency across this field.

UNDERLYING AND UNIFYING THEORIES OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

By the term underlying, we refer to theories that helped inform the process leading to the conception of PYD. This process includes a myriad of child and human development theories that, along with the study of plasticity and the nature-nurture synthesis, led to the development of systems theories of development (R. M. Lerner, 2006). "Unifying" theories make reference to these systems theories and other metatheories (such as the theory of triadic influence described herein) that are integrative and acknowledge the importance of nature- and nurture-based factors and their interaction. Unifying metatheories, such as developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992; J. V. Lerner et al., 2009; R. M. Lerner, 2005), helped inform PYD and were at least part of the impetus for PYD by serving as the basis for the articulation of developmental assets. As Benson stated, "the concept of developmental assets, first posited in 1990 (Benson, 1990), is grounded in the large metatheory known as developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Gottlieb, 1997)" (Benson, 2007, p. 36). Developmental systems theories include features noting the importance of both biological and environmental factors and the interactions or relationships between them (R. M. Lerner, 2006).

Certain developmental theories, such as attachment theory and social learning theories, have long been influential in developmental research (Cairns & Cairns, 2006). Developmental theory components are included as core concepts in dynamic systems theories that describe the behavior of complex biological and physical systems (Thelen & Smith, 1998). Dynamic systems theories overlap with developmental systems models that acknowledge concepts such as individual and contextual relations and the temporality and relative plasticity of human development (J. V. Lerner et al. 2009; R. M. Lerner, 2005; R. M. Lerner et al., 2009). These theories are similar to bioecological models in that they are evolving theoretical frameworks for the study of human development over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). They generally propose that by promoting intra- and interpersonal processes and environments, human developmental potential is enhanced (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Simply put, these theories highlight that personal, human relationship, and environmental factors all interact in myriad ways to influence development and outcomes.

As much as we admire well-thought-out theory and recognize its importance, we agree with Baltes and colleagues who explained, "It is important to recognize that present theoretical preferences are in part the direct result of historical contexts of science and cultural scenarios rather than of carefully elaborated theoretical arguments" (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Studinger, 2006, p. 571). Understanding of PYD is also informed by research and program advancement, such as the movement from problem-specific interventions to those that address more distal factors that influence multiple behaviors (Flay, 2000, 2002; Flay et al., 2009; Romer, 2003). Further, practitioners provide additional knowledge through experience on the "front lines" of PYD work. Benson noted that "the articulation of a developmental theory of positive youth
development is itself an ongoing and dynamic process emerging several decades after
the birthing of positive youth development as a field of practice” (Benson et al., 2006,
p. 902). He described in detail a broad and comprehensive theory of PYD that includes
theories of human development, context and community influence, and context and
community change (Benson et al., 2006).

The Theory of Triadic Influence
Recently, researchers have recommended the theory of triadic influence (TTI; Flay &
Petraitis, 1994; Flay et al., 2009) as an integrative, comprehensive theoretical frame­
work with applicability to PYD (Catalano, Gavin, & Markham, 2010). Consistent with
the holistic nature of PYD (i.e., considering environments in relation to the whole
child; Damon & Gregory, 2003) and the reciprocity between person and context (Ben­
son, 2007), the TTI has the potential to unify and clarify the many concepts of PYD.

Due to the “newness” of the PYD field and related theory, and the multidisciplinary
and often comprehensive nature of PYD, there is sometimes inconsistency in what it
encompasses across related disciplines. Moreover, an unclear picture arises from the
complex puzzle of influences that affect PYD and result in behavior. Therefore, we be­
lieve that some new ideas regarding PYD can be derived from the TTI and have impli­
cations for prosocial education in general and PYD in particular. The comprehensive,
integrative metatheory was developed to organize the scores of factors that influence
behavior and to clearly focus one’s view of (1) what causes behaviors and (2) how to
effectively promote positive behavior, a key goal of prosocial education and PYD.

The theory was introduced during the time that PYD efforts began to expand in the
1990s. Faced with a complex mass of theories and variables, particularly in the field of
substance use, Petraitis, Flay, and Miller (1995) examined the literature and concluded
that variables can be organized along two dimensions: the social-ecological streams of
influence (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural-environmental influences)
and levels of causation (i.e., ultimate causes, distal influences, and proximal predictors).
From these findings, Flay and Petraitis (1994) proposed the TTI (see figure 13.1 for
more detail) to acknowledge that a complex “web of causation” (Krieger, 1994) affects
behaviors and that these causes can be organized into a cogent framework to provide a
structured and testable integrated theory.

The TTI provides a detailed ecological approach and suggests that distal and ulti­
mate influences on behavior produce larger and sustained effects on PYD. Further, the
theory can provide PYD researchers with a detailed theoretical framework to guide
research, program design, and evaluation. In fact, the Positive Action program that we
discuss herein maps well onto the TTI.

The TTI arranges variables that affect behavior into three levels of causation: ulti­
mate, distal, and proximal. Ultimate-level causes are factors that individuals possess
little control over such as cultural practices, mass media, politics, socioeconomic sta­
tus, school availability, parental values, and their own personality and neurocognitive
skills. However, these factors affect multiple behaviors, are the most mediated, and if
changed are likely to have the greatest and longest-lasting impact on PYD. Distal-level
influences are factors reflecting the relation between individuals and context (social­
personal nexus; e.g., general self-concept and self-control, bonding to parents and/or
peers, after-school program participation) that persons are likely to have some control over. Another step closer to behavior are evaluations and expectancies, which are general values, behavior-specific evaluations, general knowledge, and specific expectations and beliefs that result from bidirectional individual–contextual influences. Proximal-level predictors are more specific to and more immediate precursors of behavior. Youth wield control over these variables, such as their will and skill (i.e., self-efficacy) to do well in school, although proximal predictors are clearly influenced by the distal and ultimate factors described above. Decisions, intentions, and experiences are thought to directly affect a particular behavior.

Three streams of influence flow through these levels of causation as they affect PYD and influence behavior (see figure 13.1). The *intrapersonal stream* begins at the ultimate level with relatively stable biological/personality characteristics that in turn influence sense of self and competence (both general and social). These affect self-determination and general skills and converge on self-efficacy regarding a particular behavior, such as completing homework. The *interpersonal stream* follows a similar flow and begins with ultimate-level variables of the immediate social situation that in turn influence interpersonal bonding and the behaviors of role models such as parents, teachers, neighbors, and peers. The flow then continues through variables that include motivation to comply with or please various role models and perceptions of what behaviors those role models are encouraging. These influences then converge on social normative beliefs, or the perceptions of social pressures to engage in a particular behavior. Lastly, the third stream, the *cultural-environmental stream*, begins with characteristics
of one's broader culture and environment and flows into variables including the nature of relationships with societal institutions (e.g., governmental, religious), along with the information extracted from the culture, such as knowledge gained from mass media (e.g., that adolescents are typically "troubled," as they are portrayed in movies). Next, the stream affects variables related to the expected consequences (expectancies) of a behavior (e.g., whether attending class is useful) and values and evaluations of those consequences. Finally, these influences converge on attitudes toward a specific behavior, such as caring for and helping an older neighbor.

In addition to the three main streams, each stream contains two substreams. One substream is more cognitive and rational in nature, and the other is more affective or emotional, controlling in nature and less rational. Therefore, decisions may encompass an affective or emotional component (i.e., hot cognition) as well as a cognitive or rational component (Ariely, 2009). Within the TTI, every stream ends in affective or cognitive factors (self-efficacy, social normative beliefs, and attitudes) that influence the most proximal affective or cognitive predictor of behavior, intentions. The theory recognizes that variables in one path are often mediated by or interact with variables in another path, and engaging in a behavior may have influences that feed back and alter the original causes of the behavior.

Figure 13.2 illustrates that the TTI includes ecological rings and levels of causation. The three streams of influence in the TTI are similar to the rings of influence in Bronfenbrenner's ecological-systems theory (1979, 1986, 2005); however, the TTI provides explicit detail about levels/tiers of causation within its rings. Figure 13.2 shows that time and development also influence levels of causation, and lower levels of causation often include faster processes. Time and development also influence program results; for example, PYD programs that are effective but not followed up by ongoing supportive contexts will likely have less impact over time. Much like math, reading, and science, youth should not be expected to improve developmentally and permanently gain PYD assets if prosocial skills are only briefly targeted in, for example, a one-month or one-year program.

The TTI helps explain PYD because it is integrative and recognizes interactions (i.e., moderation) and intervening variables (i.e., mediation) in a developmental, ecological framework. The appropriateness of the TTI for PYD-related work becomes even clearer after reviewing PYD-related strategies, characteristics, and outcomes of effective programs, as described in the next section. The theory also helps in understanding why some programs are more effective than others. A more detailed discussion of the TTI and its various applications can be found elsewhere (Flay & Petraitis, 1994; Flay et al., 2009).

**Characteristics, Strategies, and Outcomes of Effective Programs**

We are beginning to amass a body of literature that demonstrates that PYD-related approaches work. Also, research explicitly describes characteristics of effective PYD-related programs and the successful strategies they employ. However, investigation is still needed to understand why some PYD-related efforts are more effective than others, and we encourage readers to examine whether programs meet criteria for effectiveness (Flay et al., 2005). We caution that evidence-based is not a standardized term and
is often used broadly to suggest that a program has some evidence of effectiveness without regard to the quality of the research that produced the results. Further, although more work can be done to guide choices for policy and practice (Granger, 2002), we have gained a better understanding of the beneficial outcomes evinced by PYD-related programming. During the last two decades, various empirical studies and reviews have clarified effective practices and continue to advance the PYD movement (Catalano, Berglund, et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2007; Gavin, Catalano, David-Ferdon, Glooppen, & Markham, 2010). A broad range of characteristics and strategies exist that overlap PYD and other prosocial areas of research and programming (e.g., SEL, SECD). Moreover, common themes emerge among these areas that lead to successful youth outcomes. These overlaps and common themes exemplify the usefulness of the prosocial education concept to further practice and educational theory building.

**UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF PYO PROGRAMMING**

Some program characteristics are included in table 13.1. According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a), who surveyed U.S. youth development organizations, there are three distinguishing characteristics of youth development programs: program goals, atmosphere, and activities. Most, if not all, prosocial education interventions likely meet Roth and Brooks-Gunn's defining characteristics. While their sample is
not representative of U.S. PYD organizations, and more research is needed regarding PYD organizations, the study does provide insight regarding PYD-related efforts. The researchers identified program goals that included the promotion of development (e.g., social and life skill building, academic improvement, personality development) and the prevention of unhealthy behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, violence, school dropout, gang activity). Programs offered youth-centered approaches that “create and nourish an atmosphere of hope” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, p. 97). Program atmospheres were supportive (e.g., relationship-focused activities); empowering (e.g., leadership training, community service); and included expectations for positive behavior (e.g., incentives or rewards). Further, program activities included opportunities for youth to pursue talents and beneficial interests, build skills, and gain a sense of achievement.

Characteristics of PYD efforts coincide with strategies of effective programs explained in recent reviews. For instance, as Catalano and colleagues noted,

themes common to success involved methods to strengthen social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies; build self-efficacy; 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; provide structure and consistency in program delivery; and intervene with youth for at least nine months or longer. (Catalano, Berglund, et al., 2004, p. 114)

The authors explain further that effective programs focused on several PYD constructs, had structured curriculum and activities, and attended to fidelity of implementation. These recommendations are similar to those suggested by other scholars. For example, some have suggested four practices of effective programs (Bond & Hauf, 2004; Dusbury & Falco, 1995; Gresham, 1995, as cited in Durlak et al. 2011). These include a sequenced step-by-step training approach, incorporating active forms of learning, a focus (and sufficient time) on social and personal skill development, and explicit learning goals, or SAFE practices (for “sequenced, active, focused, and explicit”). Effective strategies have been reiterated in the health behavior literature, and Flay (2002) has noted that programs must ideally (1) address both positive and negative behaviors; (2) be developmentally appropriate; (3) span several years, with carefully designed review, reinforcement, and extension; (4) be culturally sensitive; (5) be school- and classroom-focused, but extend beyond the school; (6) when appropriate, use peers to demonstrate skills and alter norms; (7) include proper training of personnel; (8) actively involve parents; (9) be designed with input from all stakeholders, including students; (10) include school improvement and reorganization components; and (11) incorporate ongoing evaluation at all programming stages.

Not surprisingly, these recommendations echo researchers examining other areas of prosocial education, such as character and moral education. For example, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) concluded that effective programs tend to include professional development for implementation, interactive teaching strategies, direct teaching strategies, family and community involvement, and modeling and mentoring. Many of these strategies are echoed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

These characteristics and strategies clearly relate to program expectations referenced by our integrative theory, the TTI. For example, the comprehensiveness of the TTI
explains the limited impact of information-only approaches that only focus on didactic education (i.e., knowledge, in the TTI’s cultural-environmental stream), value-based approaches that frequently focus only on the lower half of the cultural-environmental stream, and even more recent approaches that address the need for social skills and self-efficacy (Botvin, 1990; Botvin, Schinke, & Orlandi, 1995; Flay, 2000; Flay et al., 2009). The TTI clarifies that the most successful PYD-related programs must address all of the streams of influence. For example, programs that incorporate skill-, social-normative-, knowledge-, and value-based components are more likely to enhance social and emotional skills, attitudes, prosocial behaviors, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Program effects can also be enhanced if programs and supports exist that address the proximal, distal, and ultimate levels of causation.

Consistent with theory, and as several key research articles have concluded, appropriately designed and implemented programs have demonstrated effects on a variety of outcomes. For instance, Catalano and colleagues (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins 2002) found that effective PYD programs significantly enhanced multiple youth outcomes, including interpersonal skills, quality of adult and peer relationships, self-control, problem-solving abilities, cognitive competencies, self-efficacy, commitment to schooling, and academic performance. Again, not surprisingly, the results of other prosocial programs are similar, such as SEL programs, which have components overlapping with PYD. Results show that programs significantly improved social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic achievement, with fewer conduct problems, less aggressive behavior, and less emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011). Another recent review described beneficial effects of PYD-related programs (e.g., Aban Aya, Abecedarian, the Seattle Social Development Project, the Teen Incentives Program, the Teen Outreach Program) on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (Gavin, Catalano, & Markham, 2010; Gavin et al., 2010).

As demonstrated above and expressed elsewhere (Bernat & Resnick, 2006; Durlak et al., 2007), research as a whole has shown that PYD-related programs can promote development and prevent risk behaviors. Moreover, there is considerable conceptual overlap between youth development and prevention (Benson et al., 2006; Catalano, Hawkins, et al., 2002). As we will explain in the next section, programs can prevent health-compromising behaviors, promote development, and create contextual change by building abilities and competencies.

EXEMPLAR RESEARCH AND PROGRAMMING
Growing empirical evidence describes state-of-the-art research on PYD etiology and an array of PYD-related exemplar programs. These numerous programs are discussed in empirical reviews and meta-analyses (e.g., Catalano, Berglund, et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2007; Gavin et al., 2010). In one PYD review, Catalano, Berglund, and colleagues (2004) described programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Life Skills Training, the PATHS Project, the Child Development Project, Fast Track, the Seattle Social Development Project, Across Ages, the Midwestern Prevention Project, and Project Northland. Other resources summarize effective PYD-related programs such as those produced by Child Trends.
As mentioned previously, PYD reviews include programs that were also included in reviews of other areas of prosocial education, such as SEL. There is sometimes no differentiation made between PYD programs and substance use prevention programs (J. V. Lerner et al., 2009). Thus, in this chapter we discuss a program that we have evaluated, Positive Action, and believe is a good example of what a PYD program encompasses and its potential impact. Positive Action serves as an example to highlight best practices and beneficial outcomes, which include an improvement in positive and prosocial behaviors, a simultaneous reduction in unhealthy behaviors, and an improvement in whole-school quality. Additionally, we discuss 4-H and an example of state-of-the-art etiology research, the 4-H Positive Youth Development Study. This etiology research supports the inclusion of both preventive and PYD approaches in programmatic efforts, such as Positive Action. The 4-H PYD study also reports evidence that suggests 4-H participants demonstrate better outcomes as compared to those participating in other out-of-school-time activities.

4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

Through land-grant university extension systems across the United States, 4-H is a PYD organization that involves nearly six million youth and adults in a variety of programs with various curricula and activities related to citizenship, science, and health. For example, 4-H citizenship programs include Citizenship Washington Focus, held in Washington, D.C., and designed to provide youth with skills to engage in civic action through field trips and leadership opportunities. 4-H science programs include curricula on renewable energy and technology; its health-related curricula include activities and training that seek to engage youth in behaviors such as preparing healthy food and participating in physical activity. Overall, 4-H offers programs and hands-on activities intended to enhance the health of youth and society.

As part of the 4-H Study on Positive Youth Development, a cross-sectional (i.e., at one point in time) analysis suggested that tenth-grade youth participating in 4-H programs demonstrated greater academic achievement and engagement in school compared to youth involved in other out-of-school-time activities (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, & colleagues, 2011). In addition, 4-H youth evinced less alcohol and cigarette use, along with lower use of other drugs. The overall goal of the 4-H PYD study and its strength, however, is to understand the processes involved in PYD (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005), not the effects of any one particular program.

The 4-H Study of PYD was an ambitious endeavor to gain a greater understanding of what PYD is and what fosters a healthy developmental trajectory toward an adulthood full of contributions to self, family, community, and civil society. Participant recruitment for the study began in 2002 and included 1,700 diverse adolescents and their parents located in thirteen states (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 2010). The study used a longitudinal sequential design (i.e., new groups of participants were added over time), and through wave 6 (grades 5 to 10) data were collected from 6,450 adolescents from forty-five states (R. M. Lerner et al., 2011). Adolescents in the study sample took part in numerous after-school activities, not only 4-H (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005). A list of publications with detailed information regarding the
4-H study is available from the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development website (see “For More Information” section at the end of this chapter). Although the study is largely observational, its longitudinal perspective provides a good example of cutting-edge research related to PYD etiology. A brief highlight from a few of the many studies related to this project illustrates our point.

Findings from the first wave of the 4-H study demonstrated that PYD was comprised of components representing the five Cs (R. M. Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005). The results provided support for the relationship between PYD and the five Cs as well as the sixth C, contribution. More recently, Bowers and colleagues (2010), using longitudinal data from students in grades 8 through 10, concluded that the five-C model demonstrated measurement invariance and thus suggested that PYD can be measured similarly across these age groups. In a study examining the trajectories of positive (e.g., PYD, contribution) and negative outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms, risk behaviors), Lewin-Bizan and colleagues (2010) found that, from fifth through tenth grade, youth fit into groups that demonstrated several trajectories (i.e., patterns of intrapersonal change; for example, PYD scores across grade levels) and most often followed a high trajectory of positive outcomes and a low trajectory of negative ones. Youth in the high-trajectory group were most likely to be in a decreasing risk behavior group and low depressive symptoms group. Another study (Schwartz et al., 2010) found evidence that PYD acts as a protective mechanism against alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use, along with unsafe sexual behavior. The researchers concluded that the results support the integration of prevention science and PYD perspectives. Overall, the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development has provided, and continues to provide, a greater understanding of PYD etiology and how PYD relates to risk reduction.

Positive Action

The Positive Action (PA) program is a comprehensive, schoolwide PYD program designed to affect youth development in multiple affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains and create whole-school contextual change in order to reduce such problem behaviors as substance use and improve school performance. The student-focused component of the program is grounded in a broad theory of self-concept (DuBois, Flay, & Fagen, 2009; Purkey, 1970; Purkey & Novak, 1970), and the whole program is consistent with integrative, ecological theories such as the TTI (Flay & Allred, 2010).

The full PA program includes K–12 classroom curricula (consisting of almost daily fifteen- to twenty-minute lessons), a schoolwide climate development component, and family- and community-involvement components. The sequenced curricula contain teacher-friendly, scripted lessons that use a range of teaching methodologies to address different learning styles. For example, interaction between student and teacher is enhanced through structured discussions, and interaction between students is encouraged through small-group activities including games, role-plays, and practice of skills. Each grade-specific curriculum consists of 140 lessons covering six major units on topics related to self-concept (the relationship of thoughts, feelings, and actions); physical and intellectual actions (nutrition, physical activity, learning skills, decision-making skills, creative thinking); social-emotional actions for managing oneself responsibly (self-control, time management); getting along with others (empathy, altruism, re-
spect, conflict resolution); being honest with yourself and others (self-honesty, integrity, self-appraisal); and continuous self-improvement (goal setting, problem solving, persistence). The total time students are exposed to the fully implemented program during a thirty-five-week academic year is around thirty-five hours.

The schoolwide climate development kit includes materials and activities (such as posters and school assemblies) to encourage and reinforce the six units of PA. School leaders and other personnel are involved in coordinating schoolwide implementation of the program. The family and community involvement components provide additional support and reinforcement of the PA units. For example, when the PA program is fully implemented, parents receive PA materials to guide activities in the home and a PA committee is formed to involve community stakeholders.

Both quasi-experimental and experimental trials demonstrate that PA can improve a variety of student- and school-level outcomes and that the program can prevent risk behaviors and enhance positive behaviors and development, concomitantly. Additionally, the program has been shown to create whole-school contextual change and improve school quality.

Specifically, the program has been shown to increase academic performance and decrease undesirable outcomes such as suspensions (Flay & Allred, 2003; Flay, Allred, & Ordway, 2001; Snyder et al., 2010). Snyder and colleagues (2010) utilized archival school-level data collected by the Hawaii Department of Education to find that PA schools in a randomized trial demonstrated significantly improved standardized test scores in reading and math. At baseline, PA schools were below state averages in academic performance, and at posttest, they met or exceeded state averages. PA schools also reported lower absenteeism and fewer suspensions and retentions compared to control schools.

Other outcomes related to positive development have been examined. Washburn and colleagues (in press) examined the effects of PA on student-level positive behaviors associated with character. Utilizing data from three randomized trials (a Hawaii trial, a Chicago trial, and a smaller trial in a southeastern state), results demonstrated that elementary-aged students in PA program and control schools showed a general decline in the number of positive behaviors associated with character across time (4 years in Hawaii; 2.5 years in Chicago; 3 years in the southeastern state), with the PA program mitigating this decline.

The effect of the PA program on unhealthy behaviors has also been investigated. Utilizing data from the PA randomized trial in Hawaii, Beets and colleagues (2009) found that 10 percent of fifth-grade PA students and 19 percent of control-school students had ever consumed alcohol. Less than 11 percent of fifth-grade students reported having ever engaged in behaviors related to extreme violence or voluntary sexual activity, but results showed significantly lower rates of substance use, violent behaviors, and voluntary sexual activity among students receiving the PA program compared to control school students. With data from the PA randomized trial in Chicago, Li and colleagues (2011) found that nearly one-third of fifth-grade students reported using at least one substance and engaging in at least one violent behavior, but students attending PA program schools had significantly less substance use and violent behavior compared to control school students. Overall, the studies found that
the PA program reduced unhealthy behaviors even though limited or no instructional
time was devoted to negative behaviors. Although substance use and violence-related
behaviors (harassment, bullying, fighting, etc.) are mentioned, they are not the main
focus anywhere in the curricula and are used only as example behaviors (sexual activity
is never mentioned).

More recently, studies have examined mediational models whereby positive behav­
iors mediated the effects of the PA program on unhealthy behaviors. That is, positive
development was promoted, and in the same model, risky behaviors were reduced.
Snyder and colleagues (2011), using data from the Hawai‘i trial, found that program
effects on positive academic behavior (e.g., work hard in school, set goals, manage
time wisely, try to be one’s best, solve problems well) mediated the effects of PA on
reducing substance use, violent behaviors, and sexual activity. In another study using
longitudinal data from the Chicago study, Lewis and colleagues (2011) demonstrated
that program effects on youths’ general character (defined as prosocial interaction,
honesty, self-development, self-control, respect for teacher, respect for parent; DuBois,
Ji, Flay, Day, & Silverthorn, 2010; Ji, DuBois, & Flay, 2011) mediated the program ef­
teffects on substance use. That is, students attending PA schools showed significantly
better change in general character than students attending control schools, and general
character, in turn, mediated the program’s effects on reducing substance use. These
results, in total, confirm the model underlying the PYD approach.

Regarding whole-school contextual change, a recent study (Snyder et al., in press),
using school-level data collected by the Hawai‘i Department of Education as part
of its School Quality Survey (and independently of the evaluation of PA), showed
that PA schools demonstrated improved overall school quality compared to control
schools. Program schools, compared to controls, also evinced improvement on indi­
vidual indicators of school quality such as school safety and well-being and student,
teacher, and parent involvement. Notably, by one year posttrial, PA schools outper­
formed control schools and state averages on school quality. Emerging evidence con­
tinues to support the concepts that PYD-related programming can indeed improve
youths’ contexts and have both promotive (of positive development) and preventive
(of problem behaviors) effects.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT POLICY
We agree with others who have suggested that “promoting healthy youth development
through programmatic means must be coupled with policy-based approaches that ad­
dress the broader social determinants of health” (Bernat & Resnick, 2006, p. S14). This
is evident by a quick glance at the TTI in figure 13.1. Most, if not all, policy is related to
health, and policy in general is linked to PYD in some way. PYD-related policy extends
beyond the educational landscape. Schools and the educational system play a role, but
youth also spend time in homes and neighborhoods interacting with family, peers, and
neighbors, and they are exposed to mass media. Although an in-depth discussion of
many PYD-related policies is beyond the scope of this chapter, here we briefly focus
on examples of U.S. federal policy and federally funded programs related to PYD and
socioeconomic status. Similar to a PYD perspective, policy and program strengths and
beneficial outcomes are highlighted.
Policies related to increasing the economic well-being of families play a vital role in PYD. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), for instance, is one strategy responsible for lifting over four million families above the federal poverty line and increasing employment (Holtz, Mullin, & Scholz, 2001). Family-directed, in-kind support is another strategy used to increase resources for families. Strategies that are classified in this category include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; formally known as the Food Stamp Program); the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the National School Lunch Program; the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); and housing assistance programs. Many of these strategies have repeatedly been associated with improved development and health outcomes in youth. For example, WIC has been associated with a range of positive health outcomes, including improved cognitive abilities among youth (Gershoff, Aber, & Raver, 2003).

Other programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, include an assortment of health services for young children. In a review of Head Start research, Barnett and Hustedt (2005) reported generally positive evidence supporting the long-term benefits of Head Start. Relatedly, the Early Head Start program (Robinson & Fitzgerald, 2002) has been implemented and is designed to influence four related outcomes: child development (e.g., cognitive and social development), family development (e.g., parenting practices), staff development (e.g., training), and community development (e.g., family support services). Although there is a need for more rigorous research and evaluation of these strategies, evidence has indicated that Early Head Start has a positive influence on parents and their children, with mothers found to be more supportive and children demonstrating greater cognitive development as compared to children not enrolled (Gershoff et al., 2003).

Not only are these aforementioned policies and strategies good for the families and youth directly involved, but research demonstrates that greater equality makes societies stronger and is better for the health and well-being of everyone (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Actualizing positive health and developmental outcomes largely depends upon policy, and although investing in youth can have a positive financial return (Newman, Smith, & Murphy, 2001), U.S. society in general has yet to make PYD a high priority. The PYD perspective and research clearly show the need to move away from an approach that attempts to fix problems (i.e., depression, substance abuse, school dropout), to one that focuses on youth development and primary prevention, a key point of the prosocial approach of this handbook. Overall, it is also important to note that programming efforts will be maximized across the life span if policy supports PYD, another point of this handbook’s focus.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROSOCIAL EDUCATION

Educators, researchers, policy makers, and the public can benefit by acknowledging the components of PYD and supporting effective PYD strategies and programs. In particular, PYD research has generated, and continues to generate, knowledge about specific youth and context strengths/assets. In this chapter we have sought to provide clarity by highlighting three key components of PYD programs: (1) a focus on youth strengths/assets and potential for positive individual development, (2) the
value of supportive (asset-rich) contexts, and (3) bidirectional interactions between person and context. The implication of this is that a comprehensive PYD program by our definition includes three characteristics: (1) curricula to teach students prosocial and emotional skills and develop their intrapersonal strengths/assets; (2) activities to enrich environments (schools, families, and community) to support and reinforce the use of skills and positive behaviors by youth; and (3) activities to encourage the bidirectional influence of intrapersonal and environmental assets. Because of the relative newness of PYD, its efforts go beyond the origins of some other types of prosocial education; for example, character education, because of its far-reaching roots, was historically didactic (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2009), although this is now changing. Areas of prosocial education overlap with PYD if they include a focus on youth strengths, comprehensive and integrative components, or acknowledgment of bidirectional interactions. Similar to other successful prosocial education and health promotion efforts, it is likely that the most effective approaches to PYD will include behavioral and contextual change strategies from the multiple causal levels and six substreams included in the TTI (Flay, Snyder, et al., 2009).

Although it is often difficult and frustrating to sift through the PYD-related programs without evaluation data, rigorously evaluated PYD-related programs exist and have demonstrated encouraging results on a wide array of outcomes (Catalano, Berglund, et al., 2004). Program evaluations (using randomized trials) and PYD etiology research have suggested the integration of promotive and preventive approaches. Our research with the Positive Action program suggests that focusing mainly on PYD (increasing strengths/assets/positive behaviors) can also reduce unhealthy behaviors among youth (Flay et al., 2003).

Even with the promising results of evidence-based programs, “one program, even an extraordinarily good program, cannot do it all” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, p. 97). Each effective programming effort plays a role, and a variety of evidence-based strategies should be implemented that meet the demands of diverse youth (Komro et al., 2011). Further, strategies need to be broader (i.e., address sociocultural influences), with sustained efforts and policy supports for long-lasting effects. Regarding sociocultural influences, more can be done by, for instance, increasing positive portrayals of youth in film media, highlighting positive youth outcomes in the news, training students to be peer advocates, creating more opportunities for community service and service abroad, offering only healthy foods at schools, changing food policy to make fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable as compared to processed and fast food, and providing youth with access to clean, safe outdoor spaces (e.g., community gardens, parks, natural areas).

Limitations

Positive youth development is comprehensive, and comprehensiveness often entails complexity. Researchers are beginning to understand the multidimensionality of PYD; however, more work is needed. Not only is PYD challenging to measure, but PYD indicators may also change across childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Further, although multidisciplinary work has the potential for innovation, this relatively new and multidisciplinary field is rife with overlap with other areas of prosocial education,
which can make uniquely defining and understanding PYD a challenge. In many ways it appears everyone has their own unique insight regarding what PYD is and what strategies it includes. However, after a careful review of the empirical literature, several lucid themes emerge, including a focus on youth strengths/assets, the importance of supportive environments, and bidirectional youth–context interactions.

**CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Progress has been made in the last couple of decades toward expressing a positive view of youth development, and more research and practice will occur in the future. There will likely be growth in some PYD-related areas, such as positive psychology, while other related areas will perhaps merge together, such as SEL and SECD. Recognizing the challenges of research extending across numerous disciplines and many programs, an increased effort toward generating consistency should be made. Ideally, over time, with persistent effort, research and practice will form a more uniform terminology and approach. Consistency in theoretical understanding is one way of achieving this. Theory, when empirically tested and validated, can bring together various fields by building a common foundation on which to understand phenomena. Interconnected with a need for theory, there is a need for advancing PYD-specific measurement models to help define and delineate constructs included in PYD.

Prosocial education has much to gain by embracing a PYD perspective, which acknowledges that youth have strengths and that context matters. Indeed, public-health research shows the importance of contextual and social determinants of health (Marmot & Bell, 2009; Woolf, 2009). Overall, there is vast potential for the prosocial education focus of PYD to help answer some of the vexing questions surrounding education. For instance, PYD-related work has answered questions related to how youth are motivated and challenged to succeed and move toward a healthy adulthood: youth can be engaged in positive, meaningful activities and relationships (Larson, 2000, 2006). There is, however, more work that is needed to gain a better understanding of PYD and its influences.

To help advise and advance theory, and to understand why some PYD-related efforts are more effective than others, further research is needed related to mediation and moderation analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009). This will help add to the limited PYD literature consistent with theory and, further, will help in the development of PYD-specific theory (Benson et al., 2006). Methodological and statistical advances (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon, 2008; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010) have potential to improve youth development by helping to identify how to prevent risky behaviors and promote healthy behaviors. Moreover, a better understanding of program effects can be gained. Ideally, to reduce Type I error, analysis should include comprehensive models that examine many components of a program in one theoretically justified model.

Relatedly, more research is needed to examine how positive behaviors can lead to a reduction in negative ones under differing circumstances. Evidence herein shows that a program can promote positive development and, at the same time, reduce risky behaviors; however, more work is required to better understand the complexity of this effect. For instance, does this effect occur differently for varying ages and cultures, and how
can PYD be optimally integrated with risk prevention in, for example, unsafe sex prevention? Are there certain situations and contexts where increasing positive behaviors will lead to a more sustained reduction in negative behaviors? On a related note, more research is required to better understand the bidirectional nature of PYD (Benson et al., 2006; J. V. Lerner et al., 2009). For example, how do school/community efforts affect youth, and how do youth in turn affect their contexts? This calls for more longitudinal research and rigorous quasi-experimental and experimental designs.

Increased efforts could also be made examining the effect of PYD on additional behavioral outcomes, such as dietary behaviors and physical activity. Given the promising results of PYD-related programs described herein, it is likely these programs (perhaps modified) can affect behavioral outcomes that have not been examined to date. To help predict and understand the potential of a program's impact, prosocial education practitioners can refer to theory. Theory can help understand if, for example, a program will likely be behavior specific or influence multiple behaviors (Flay, Snyder, et al., 2009). Theory also helps in understanding the limits of program impacts if there are not auxiliary supports (interpersonal, environmental, or cultural, for example) in place to enhance outcomes across time.

Additionally, although some work has been done specifically with PYD among diverse youth (Lerner, Taylor, & von Eye, 2002), more cross-cultural work is needed. Further, more can be uncovered about PYD programming and etiology across ages. This includes examining the importance of PYD before a child is conceived, across gestation, through young adulthood, and into adulthood and old age.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it is essential to determine which programs are effective and ready for broad dissemination (Flay et al., 2005). Many evidence-based programs exist, yet ineffective (even iatrogenic) programs continue to be implemented. Both PYD programs and other related efforts should be backed by objective data that demonstrate their positive impact; otherwise, limited resources are wasted.

To reiterate, a PYD approach seeks to instill in youth and adults the belief that humans are born with vast potential, and youth are not problems to be managed. Unhealthy development and behaviors are not inexorable, but instead, with healthy personal strengths in a supportive, asset-rich context, youth can develop positively and be more likely to have bright futures full of satisfaction, health, happiness, and contribution. This is the PYD perspective.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Child Trends: http://www.childtrends.org
Children First: http://www.children-first.org
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): http://casel.org
4-H: http://www.4-h.org
Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University: http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/default.htm
Positive Action (PA) program: http://www.positiveaction.net

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Chapter 13: Positive Youth Development


Case Study 13A

Integrating Six Developmental Pathways in the Classroom: The Synergy between Teacher and Students

James P. Comer, Larissa Giordano, and Fay E. Brown

Development and learning are inextricably linked. By integrating development with academics in the classroom, teachers can open up a world of opportunity for building relationships between and among students, parents, and teachers. *When these relationships thrive, so does the learning.* When in the process students are helped to better understand their own resultant development, they can also begin to understand that of their peers. With a better understanding of behavior, they can be held accountable for their actions and are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning. As this capacity grows, students tend to worry less about "why" certain things are happening or about what decisions they need to make or should have made. Greater awareness about their development and acceptance of responsibility remove a major roadblock to learning, which then allows them to focus more on what is being taught.

The integration of development and academic learning occurs best in a culture of belonging, trust, mutual respect, and collaboration, which taken together form the basis of a prosocial context for school experience. All of the stakeholders in a school, those with the greatest authority taking the lead, must intentionally create these conditions in order for the school to be a vital, dynamic place for effective teaching and learning. The Comer School Development Program (SDP) serves as a framework that, when implemented effectively in schools, helps to bring about those favorable conditions. This chapter presents a brief discussion of the model.*

THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

The implementation of the SDP framework is guided by our theory of dynamic interaction: positive interactions between children/students and their caretakers in a supportive environment lead to powerful emotional attachments that

*For detailed information about the School Development Program, visit the website at schooldevelopmentprogram.org.
enable students to positively identify with, imitate, and internalize many of
the attitudes, values, problem-solving behaviors, and expressive ways of their
caretakers, and enable the caretakers to help make the development-driven
energy of the students available for play, work, and learning.

The framework has nine elements: three mechanisms or teams (governance
and management, parents, student and staff support); three operations (com­
prehensive school plan, assessment and modification, staff development); and
three guiding principles (no-fault problem solving, consensus decision mak­
ing, and collaboration).

The governance and management team is selected by, and is representa­
tive of, the stakeholder groups—educators, parents, support staff, and com­
munity partners. It establishes the school goals and creates a comprehensive
school plan that addresses both academic and social issues. This team and
plan provide direction and drive school activities. The parent team supports
activities created in the plan. The student and staff support team provides
services that promote development, desired behavior, and learning for stu­
dents, staff, and parents.

The nine elements systematically pull all the many activities that must go
on in a school together in a coordinated way and focus them on the critical
needs of students—development and learning. Through ongoing assessment
and modification of program outcomes and consistent practice of the guid­
ing principles, representative governance helps all the stakeholders experi­
ce a sense of ownership, belonging, and responsibility for producing good
outcomes. This helps to minimize relationship and behavior problems. The
framework and processes encourage school community members to carry out
effective problem solving and promote creative expression and growth of
students, staff, and parents.

The relationship elements of the overall School Development Program
framework are used to improve classroom climate, culture, and support for
development—“Comer-in-the-Classroom.” The following case study demon­
strates how a teacher uses the Comer-in-the-Classroom elements of the School
Development Program framework to improve her classroom culture and cli­
mate and effectuate significantly positive outcomes for her students.

ONE TEACHER’S EXPERIENCE
Nathan Hale is a pre-K–8 school located in New Haven, Connecticut. It serves
approximately 550 students, 61 percent of whom are designated as students
eligible for free or reduced-cost meals, and 9 percent of whom are design­
ned as students with disabilities. The race/ethnic breakdown is as follows:
13 percent African American, 31 percent Hispanic, and 54 percent White. The
school has made improvements in different areas within the past three years
but made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the first time last academic

On the first day of school, I (the second author) was amazed by the twenty­
seven young fourth graders in front of me. Not only did they seem self-moti-
vated and very bright, but they were respectful and helpful and very willing to please. As the weeks passed, they were still very bright, but some were no longer willing to please, never mind be respectful. This bothered me immensely. As a teacher, I felt that it was my duty to teach and nurture these students and build relationships both with and among them so that they could better understand themselves as young people and one another as classmates. Some of my students began acting as if they were the center of the universe and no one else mattered. I could tell that something was bothering them and that they were taking it out on each other by teasing. They were probably hurting inside and wanted everyone else to feel the same way, including me. And I confess that their lack of respect toward me was making it difficult for me to want to help them—a feeling that made me both angry and guilty at the same time. I knew I needed to do something fast.

In October, the Yale School Development Program (Comer Process) started conducting a series of workshops at our school. The workshops introduced the concept of developmental pathways—physical, cognitive, language, social, ethical, psychological—which deepened my understanding of development and connected it to academic learning. The process also introduced the integration of the guiding principles of collaboration, consensus, and no-fault problem solving in the school and classroom. Not only did the Yale professionals provide workshops for the administration and faculty, but they also conducted workshops for the parents to help them understand how to support the development and learning of the children at home. With this new information and my administrator’s support, I embarked on executing a plan for improving the overall climate of my classroom, with a specific goal of improved prosocial behavior.

Comer-in-the-Classroom: Getting Started

October–November

I began first by examining my own strategies of teaching and management by completing the SDP’s Teacher Development and Instructional Strategies Survey (TDISS). This survey measures several variables including teachers’ perceptions of their classroom practices, professional expertise, and teacher–student relationships. After reviewing the data, it became clear to me that my classroom management was too loose and inconsistent. Based on that observation, I started keeping a daily personal reflection log of the positive happenings and shortcomings of the day. I realized that although the students were learning, they were capable of so much more if I would give them more responsibility, have more confidence in them, and take more risks in challenging them to achieve. In other words, I needed to improve my expectations for my students. Furthermore, I noticed that I spent a great deal of time planning and mapping out objectives, big questions, and activities and too little time observing what actually unfolded in the classroom, where teachable moments were sometimes overlooked because of my rigorous adherence to my plan. I concluded that without becoming rigid I needed to be more structured and
consistent with my expectations, and more observant of student needs and teaching opportunities. The structure and clarity of expectations allowed me to gradually release the responsibility for learning to the students and created a stronger, trusting relationship between us.

Given the valuable lessons I learned from completing the survey and engaging in further self-reflection, I thought the students could also benefit from doing some self-reflection. I provided an opportunity for them to complete the SDP's Student Development Survey (SDS). This survey measures students' opinions regarding various aspects of themselves as individuals, as learners, and as members of a social community. It examined not only how they felt about themselves, but how they felt others viewed them (e.g., "When I get angry, I can calm myself down," "My friends like me").

Before administering the survey, I read the questions to the students and asked them to think about what the questions were asking and to be honest with themselves. I told them that they did not have to share their answers with me if they weren't comfortable, but also that the purpose of completing the survey was not only for them to understand themselves better, but for me to better understand them in an effort to help meet their needs. Students therefore were given a choice, but they felt comfortable with me reading their answers because they wanted to reach out for help. Some of them were as unhappy with the peer relationships in the classroom as I was with my management. By completing the survey, students learned about themselves, and I learned much about them as individuals and as a class of learners. This insight led to change in how I conducted the classroom, which in turn made the management smoother because the students knew I cared, and the instruction was more closely related to them as learners. As time passed, I noticed the direct impact of my understanding and integration of the developmental pathways framework in every aspect of my teaching and overall classroom functioning. For surveys such as the SDS that do not present any psychological risks to students, we have passive parent consent; however, I also meet with parents and share with them many of the activities we do in our classroom regarding the integration of the developmental pathways, including the completion of the surveys.

Comer-in-the-Classroom: Moving Forward
After completing the survey process, which included my explaining the purpose for which they were taking the survey, I provided an overview of the three guiding principles and the six developmental pathways. Regarding collaboration, we talked about the importance of working together as members of the class to keep the room clean and tidy, restacking materials after we have used them, and being mindful of how we treat one another as a larger group and when we work in small groups. As we discussed consensus, we talked about the need for being in agreement, especially regarding how we would treat one another in the class and outside the class. We emphasized the importance of respect and integrity of self and respect for others. In terms of no-fault problem solving, we
focused on tone of voice and choice of words, discussing how they can inflame or diffuse a situation. We also discussed that as a class, when we are faced with a problem, we would do our best to not focus on blaming one another, but to try to find the best solutions to the problem.

After explaining the developmental pathways, I instituted what I called their “pathways journals.” In these journals, students could record their learning about each of the pathways and also reflect on their growth along each pathway. We inserted our completed personal surveys in the opening pages and then separated the journals into chapters based on each of the pathways. I also included a section titled “Please Help Me,” where students were encouraged to write about any issue of concern. They needed to identify the problem, explain it in terms of the pathway to which it was connected, and then propose a solution for solving that problem. Initially, I intended for it to be a chance for the students to write to me and I would respond in writing, but as I read a few of the journal entries and noticed some of the issues the students divulged, I knew they needed a more immediate response. I then decided that I would invite students to have lunch with me in the classroom to discuss their concerns and help them problem solve. This one-on-one lunchtime strategy proved to be very effective. Also, rather than simply reflecting in their journals once a week on Friday mornings, students often asked if they could write in their journals first thing in the morning before the teaching began, if there were issues they needed to “just get out of the way.”

It is important to note that with twenty-seven students in my class, it was not possible to meet with all of them in a week or in a month. Actually, not all students indicated the need for help in any given month. Also, as the students wrote in the “Please Help Me” section of the journal, I was walking around noticing some of their entries and paying attention to body language. Some issues were taken care of at the moment of need rather than waiting until lunch. For example, one student had had an argument with her mom that morning and was allowed to call home to reconcile. Another student was writing about feeling anxious about the writing prompt that he knew he needed to take that afternoon because he “hated writing.” I was able to take this child into the hallway for a pep talk. I was surprised that he hated writing because he was clearly a good writer. He thought he didn’t measure up with the other students because his style was so different; so I was able to assure him that his style was different, but that’s what made it so great.

Some issues that could not be addressed in the moment were discussed over lunch. Students were invited to have lunch with me either as individuals or in groups of twos or threes as the situation necessitated. If students expressed similar concerns or were involved in an issue with the student who wrote about the concern, I would meet with those students at the same time.

A More In-Depth Look at the Pathways

Over the next couple of months, in an effort to integrate the pathways in an in-depth manner in my instruction, I focused on each of them through children’s
books and excerpts from chapter books in which the message, theme, or characters reflected one or more of the developmental pathways. We focused on one pathway per week. Because the pathways are interconnected, in many cases all six were evident in the selected text, but we focused on one at a time until the students themselves began seeing the integration of all the pathways within the lives of the characters or message of the book. We started with a discussion about the particular pathway and connected it in terms of its relevance to our lives. Following the discussion, we read the text, stopping along points where the students noticed evidence of the pathway in a particular part of the text. After reading the text, students then shared their ideas about how a character was developing along that pathway or grappling with an issue along that pathway. The students then offered suggestions about what a character could have done to promote healthy development.

As a follow-up activity, students then had to write a reflection sheet that demonstrated their understanding of the pathway just studied and how it was relevant to their lives. They were also encouraged to include in their reflection if it was an area in which they could use more support. Throughout the week, students became increasingly verbal across the curricular areas about where they saw a pathway being developed or needing support, both within the curriculum as well as with what was happening within their own lives, in and outside of school. They were eager to share the stories with me and the class, and sometimes they added comments and suggestions in support of each other's development, such as, “I noticed that you are having difficulty with your language pathway because you don’t always listen to what I am saying, and that makes me feel bad. You are a good friend, though, so I wanted to tell you and help you, because I have also done that but am trying to be a better listener.” Or, “If you would only have more confidence in yourself, you would notice that you would make a great leader because you think so creatively.”

January

When we returned from winter break on January 3rd, we shared some of the experiences we had during our time away. It was refreshing to see how, without prompting, we all seemed to share by focusing on our development along the six pathways. I then gave students some time to reflect in their journal—to write about any experience they chose and explain how it strengthened them as an individual or created a challenge for which they might need support in handling or resolving it. After giving the students some time to reflect, we talked about resolutions and goals. We spoke not only about how each student had grown along the pathways both socially and academically, but also about how there is always room for growth. We then discussed the importance of goals and goal setting. Given that this was January, when most of us focus on our “New Year’s resolution,” we talked about resolutions or promises to promote continuous self-improvement. I encouraged the students to examine themselves, focusing on their strengths and seeing if they were able to recognize personal weaknesses along the pathways that they could
work on improving over the next few months, or areas in which they felt that I could provide support to help promote their development. I reminded them that I would be doing similar reflections, and that whatever they identified, it should be personal to them, with a goal that they could easily accomplish.

February
With February came Valentine’s Day, or how I explained it to my students, “a day to express your feelings of friendship.” I encouraged the students to not wait for this day to express their feelings, but to always use their language pathway to share feelings that boost the social, psychological, and ethical pathways, both for the person sharing and for the person receiving the compliment.

We began the day by reading the story of Amos, a mouse, and Boris, a whale, who develop a lifelong friendship. Amos, who is mesmerized by the sea, takes a boat trip on a sailing vessel which later capsizes in the rough seas. Boris comes to his rescue and brings Amos safely to land. Years later, Amos spots Boris washed up on the sand along the shore and despite his size he is able to help Boris back to his home in the sea. Despite their differences and years of separation, Amos and Boris know what it means to be a good friend. We discussed each character in terms of the developmental pathways, particularly the social, ethical, and psychological pathways. Then linking text to real life, we talked about what makes a good friend and how to be a good friend. We focused on important characteristics or qualities that ensure lasting friendships or promote healthy social relationships.

To further the conversation, each student was given a large construction paper cutout of a heart and a sheet of labels with each student’s name. I then asked them to identify two specific positive qualities for each person in the class. Students then circled the room placing their label on the person’s heart. The labels had items such as, “I like your sense of humor,” “You have a great smile,” “I like working with you in our group,” and “I’m glad we’re friends.” This activity allowed each student to receive fifty-four positive comments that they could take home and share with their loved ones and that they could have as something tangible to revisit on days when they might feel that peer relationships were challenging.

March
The activity in February helped to decrease students’ nervousness and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that seem an inevitable part of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) done in March. In preparation for these tests, I allowed students some time to talk about their test anxiety and to offer suggestions and kind words to one another. While we continued with our structured learning routine of the day, we also integrated some test-taking skills and a review of what we had been learning that year. We integrated the six developmental pathways in our discussion and reflection sheet as we shared what we were going to do to help promote a healthy mind and body to better stay focused.
on those tests. For example, students talked about getting more exercise and fresh air to reduce stress, drinking plenty of water, and getting the appropriate amount of rest (physical pathway). They shared that they were going to think critically when reading and problem solving or perhaps reread a text for deeper understanding (cognitive pathway). Some gave “good luck” notes to friends (social pathway), and I reminded them of the confidence I had in each of them that they would do well and had them promise that they would keep positive thoughts throughout the tests, knowing that they had the confidence to do well (psychological pathway). Students felt more prepared and confident knowing that they had the knowledge about the content and the support of their teacher and their classmates while they took the tests.

The Tests Behind Us, the Year Continues

As the CMTs came to a close and nerves began to ease, I noticed that among a few students there was somewhat of a reversal of the growth made over the previous months, particularly along the social, ethical, language, and psychological pathways. A few of them seemed to be behaving as if they were taking charge of each other and of the class community without regard for anyone’s feelings. This seeming reversal was a bit surprising to me, but then I remembered a few important principles about development. For example, development is uneven and continuous; and very importantly, at this age the brain is still developing, which can account for why students from this age into their late teens seem to be inconsistent in controlling their emotions, impulses, and judgments. I also thought of the principle of no-fault problem solving.

This was early April, so we came together as a community and talked about our intolerance for teasing and for any behaviors that might feel like or sound like bullying. We talked about some of the behaviors of a bully as well as what being bullied looked like and felt like. Again, we examined ourselves along the six developmental pathways to reflect upon what happens in our language, our physical reactions, our cognitive thinking, our social behavior and interaction, our psychological mind-set, and our ability to make ethically sound decisions. I allowed students to revisit their “hearts” from February and reminded them to use their “Please Help Me” page in their journals to reach out to me so that I might know how to work with them personally to help them resolve conflicts or any other issues they were grappling with on a personal level.

May

In May, as a class we continued reflecting and, where needed, correcting past poor decisions; and although there were still two months of learning ahead, we began to focus on the positive outcomes of the year and took time to discuss how each of us had grown along all of the pathways. Each morning following math journal, a student’s name was randomly chosen from my “take-a-turn” jar, and that student received the credit he or she deserved during a brief morning meeting that focused on how the selected student had
demonstrated improvement along certain pathways and how that improvement was also reflected in his or her academic achievements. Many times that student would also take a minute to comment on how he or she still needed support or needed to improve along a particular pathway. The other students often commented on my comments or chose to mention specific positive details about the student of the day. This additional aspect of the student-to-student communication made it much more powerful than simply teacher-to-student feedback.

**June**

As the year began to come to a close, I allowed the students to again complete the survey they had completed in late October. After the self-reflection and the completion of the survey on their own, it was time for me to read the items aloud to tally the responses. In October during the first administration of the survey, I gave the students the option of putting their heads on their desk as I read the items aloud to tally their responses. They all selected to put their heads down. This time, however, the students did not feel it was necessary to put their heads down. They were proud and comfortable with how they felt about themselves, their friends, their teachers, and the school. And yes, their familiarity with having completed the questionnaire a few months earlier might also have contributed to their level of comfort sharing their responses openly. But for me as a teacher, it was enlightening to hear students stick up for one another as they raised their hands and noticed how others raised their hands to answer questions about feelings of belonging. This sharing made an enormous impact on the students and on me as their teacher to see their growth, not only in the results of the data but more importantly in the relationships that were formed and nurtured. Students were better able to understand each other because they understood themselves better. This understanding was evident in their reflection sheets about what they had learned about the pathways that year, and how this learning had helped them become better students and strengthened their confidence as individuals in and out of the classroom.

During the last week of school, I gave students the opportunity to create memory books in which they reflected on their fourth-grade school year. As I read some of their entries, I was impressed and delighted that many of them mentioned the six developmental pathways as an integral part of their learning. Following are a few examples:

My most memorable day was when my teacher gathered us on the rug to reflect on how each of us had grown and improved along our pathways. I felt so proud to be a part of such a smart class. Listening to her compliments about my specific strengths like how responsible and ethical I am in my decision making made me feel so good. The other students even chimed in and encouraged me too! I had no idea that I had such a positive effect on people around me. I realized then how important it is to always be aware of my development because it's not only about me but about my relationships with others.
My most memorable day was when the teacher was discussing feelings and how important it is to love yourself in order to love others. On my survey, I noticed I was choosing “never” a lot when it came to if I liked myself and if I found it easy to make friends. When sharing our surveys with the class, my classmates were very supportive in telling me, “That’s not true, we are your friends and we love you. You should love yourself too.” This made me feel very proud of myself and more confident in who I am inside. I will never forget that day when my friends really helped me to find myself, because I started the year feeling very lost.

My favorite thing about school this year was being able to express myself and learn how to not be afraid of who I am. I am able to concentrate on my work. I am learning so much more now because I am not preoccupied with how I look or whether I have designer boots on. I finally have confidence and know that others believe in me too, especially my mom. She has really noticed the difference and hugs me all the time.

Selected Examples of Student Success Stories*

**Allejah**

One morning, while entering the classroom, I could tell right away that something was bothering Allejah. I thought it might be a good idea to make a quick change to my lesson plan and allow for five minutes of reflection in the pathway journals. As I circled the room, I peeked at Allejah’s entry in the “Please Help Me” section and noticed her eyes welling up with tears as she wrote. She was writing about needing help with her psychological pathway. I asked her to join me outside for a quick talk. She shared with me that she had an argument with her mom that morning and was feeling upset about how she left it, as she jumped out of the car for school, slamming the door behind her. Tearfully she told me she was afraid her mom didn’t know that she was sorry and that she loved her. Feeling empathy for Allejah, and knowing how her state of mind might impact the rest of her day, I allowed her to use the phone to call her mom. I connected her with her mom and allowed her two minutes for her conversation. She returned to the classroom with a smile and whispered “thank you” to me as she passed. Having resolved that issue, I knew she was ready to start the day.

**Jordan**

It was Friday morning and Jordan was very excited, not only because it was Friday, but also because it meant that she had something positive to record in her pathways journal. Her journal was often filled with situations in which she needed support, but reflecting upon the week, this time she couldn’t wait to get started. Seeing her enthusiasm, I circled to her desk to take a quick peek at what she was writing. She was writing about her development along the cognitive pathway. Specifically, she was pleased with her growth in writing. I had individually conferenced with her earlier that week and commented on how much improvement I saw in her fluency, organization, and elaboration

*Pseudonyms are used to protect the students.
in her writing. I told her that it was proof that if she believed in herself, took
time to use the writing planner, and wrote about what she knew with feeling,
hers narratives would read more fluently and she would be proud of her work.
Thursday she shared her story with the class about the day her baby brother
was born. This was unusual for her because she often rejected any type of
sharing of her work. It was the class's responsibility to note what was positive
about the piece and what needed improvement. As she finished reading, the
class was quiet for a second before applauding her. Although there were com-
ments about grammar or sentence structure or using the words I or said too
often, the overwhelming response was that Jordan did a terrific job in help-
ing to create a picture in the listener's mind about what happened and what
she was feeling the day her brother was born. Proudly, Jordan had noted in
her journal that she was becoming a better writer—something that she had
always thought was her worst subject.

Taylor

Another Friday morning I was circling the classroom as the students wrote
in their journals. I saw that Taylor was trying to cover a bit of what she wrote
under the "Please Help Me" section. I noticed that it involved her language
pathway, but she was a bit embarrassed to let me see it at that moment. Re-
pecting her space, I continued to circle the room, stopping by students not
seeming to mind my presence. As we lined up for lunch that day, she asked if
I could write back in her journal that day.

Over lunch I opened up to that page in her journal and read her entry.
There, she indicated that she was having trouble with her language and
psychological pathways because she gets nervous when the teacher calls on
her and often doesn't want to answer in front of the class. This revelation
surprised me, given her strong academic record. Although a quiet girl, it was
something I should have picked up on earlier that week when I asked her to
explain to the class how she solved a particular open-ended response to a
math word problem. She was the only one in the class who got the correct an-
swer. In response to my asking her to share with the class, she quietly said that
she was not sure and couldn't really remember. Sadly, I had embarrassed her.
She did know the answer, but now all her other classmates probably thought
she was dumb, since she could barely speak. She wrote that when the teacher
calls on her she gets nervous and goes blank. She mentioned that she often
felt different from the other students and felt it was hard making friends be-
cause of her shyness. Rather than writing back, I asked her to bring her
lunch upstairs and eat with me. First, I apologized to her for putting her on the spot
in front of her classmates, and then we discussed some strategies to help her
build self-confidence and maintain friendships. I reminded her that although
scary, it can also be rewarding to share what you know with your peers, as
long as it's in the right context and is not condescending. Within the next
couple of weeks, Taylor was like a new student—actually a bit more talkative
than I had hoped, but she was developing into a leader.

Case Study 13A: Integrating Six Developmental Pathways in the Classroom 455
Malcolm

Struggling with issues along his cognitive pathway—math and reading—Malcolm tried to cover it up by acting as if he didn't care so that others wouldn't see him as not being smart. It didn't seem to require much in terms of triggers for him to act out in anger. He behaved as if he did not care about any of the other students or teachers because he was just "too cool." When I introduced the idea of writing in the pathways journal, he initially rebelled against it, but after a couple of weeks of noticing the acceptance and changes in the other students in the classroom because of their writing and sharing, he eventually began to write. It was also clear to me that his psychological pathway needed attention because it was affecting his social and cognitive pathways. I knew that the key was to work with him in a manner that would not allow him to feel like he was being targeted. So, through a variety of whole-class lessons on accepting oneself and activities aimed at building peer relationships such as the aforementioned Valentine Heart lesson, Malcolm began to settle down and open up. In one of his journal entries, he shared that he started to feel better about himself as he understood that others did not see him as he saw himself. He also came to understand that it was okay to ask for help. Because of his positive changes, his grades improved, as did his friendships.

I tutor students during part of my summer break, so after the close of the academic year, Malcolm’s mom asked me to tutor him in math that summer. It was wonderful to work with him one on one and see the changes that were evident in him. I saw a boy that did care and wanted to excel and one that learned that it’s not “uncool” to be smart. What touched me most was that on my first day of tutoring, as I entered his kitchen in July, I noticed the Valentine heart displayed proudly on his refrigerator.

What I Learned through This Experience

When integrated consistently throughout the curriculum, the guiding principles of collaboration, consensus, and no-fault problem solving and the six developmental pathways framework help to make significant changes in the functioning of a class and in the outcomes—for the students and the teacher. The plan I implemented in my classroom not only helped to reduce conflicts among students and helped to improve their prosocial behavior, but it also impacted their learning in ways that surprised me as I watched them take risks in their learning. Not only did their confidence increase, but so did mine as I watched my fourth-grade students develop into a community of learners.

Although this was not my first year teaching, it was my first year teaching at this school, and I felt it was my best and most productive year as a teacher. Although there is always room for growth, I felt satisfied with how I was teaching and with how the students were learning; and my “teacher passion” really came out as I reviewed my own pre- and postsurvey results and reflections and saw my growth as a teacher. I learned that trust thrives only when the students know that the teacher is on their side, and that when the students know they
are cared for, they believe in themselves and want to live up to the expectations they have for themselves as well as those set by the teacher. This has been especially evident in my classroom in math, science, reading, and writing. The students tracked their growth in their data folders, which contained their assessments based on daily instruction, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores, district assessments, and Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT). Our fourth-grade class had outstanding results on those mastery tests, especially in the area of writing.

Yearly, as August draws to a close and teachers are scurrying to get their classrooms in order, many will wonder what is going to work for the group of children that will soon be greeting them. In the past, my behavior management methods varied per different group. But, having implemented “Comer-in-the-Classroom” last year, I knew that I could think about classroom behavior and management differently. I knew that although the students change and their needs change, the developmental principles remain the same. Thus, the focus did not need to be on a particular management method, but on finding ways to support the development of each student using the Comer program guidelines.

So, I began the new school year with a newfound confidence. Welcome letters were sent out to the parents the second week in August in which I introduced myself and gave them a preview of the upcoming year. I provided an outline of the three guiding principles and the six developmental pathways as the method that would be used to foster students’ development and guide the instruction. Parents were also asked to fill out a “Getting to Know Your Child” survey and to return it on the first day of school so that I would have an insight into what the parents’ expectations of their children were for the upcoming year and an insight about each student who would be before me. It was a great way to get to know the students and build relationships with the parents, whose support would be needed throughout the year by both the students and me. I know that every group of students is different. I am not perfect, and I’m not looking for, nor expecting, perfect students; however, I feel more prepared than at any other point in my teaching career to handle the challenges I will face and to appreciate the surprises and the wonder of what makes every student a gift and a promise.

*Lessons Learned from Larissa’s Experiences*

Larissa’s experiences underscore the old axiom that teaching can be the most frustrating and simultaneously the most rewarding of any career. Now more than ever, our schools need great teachers, but too often many of those teachers enter the classroom without preparation that is grounded in child and adolescent development principles and practices. Without such preparation, when they are faced with the challenges that students can present, some may become overwhelmed into making decisions that are not necessarily in the best interests of their students. But all is not lost, because as explained by Larissa, her in-service professional development experiences provided her with
knowledge, strategies, materials, and on-site support that helped to awaken her passion as a teacher, increase her sense of efficacy and confidence in the classroom, and, perhaps more importantly, helped her to better understand and thereby truly teach her students.

But the lesson continues because she didn’t accomplish all the changes by herself in a vacuum. She had the support of her school community, especially her principal. Her principal explained to her that the school would be implementing the Comer Process, a different way of doing business. The process involved the practice of shared leadership and the empowerment of all staff; the use of the developmental pathways framework to plan and provide support for children’s learning and development across the curriculum; an emphasis on relationship building in the classroom, throughout the school, and between school and home; and the collective and concerted effort of every adult connected to the school to work in support of improving the life trajectory of every child that enters through the schoolhouse door. Larissa’s classroom was nested in a school in which all the stakeholders believed and practiced these aspects of the School Development Program model. As a case study, her examples provide the kind of details we hope will be beneficial to all teachers, particularly those who are just starting their journey.
Case Study 13B
Children First: It Starts with You
Karen Mariska Atkinson

Ever since I was younger, I've always felt like St. Louis Park was a place for me to flourish and grow into a great person, to get involved and make sure that other children felt the same way. I believe that the Children First initiative has everything to do with that even though as a child I wasn't aware of this community-wide asset building effort.

I became involved in Children First in seventh grade. Without this initiative, I don't think I would have found a way to get involved in my community. I have gotten to know so many new people and made so many connections. This not only made my childhood that much better, but it also has prepared me for my future.

—Leigha Sledge, Class of 2011

HISTORY OF CHILDREN FIRST
St. Louis Park is a newly urbanized community of 44,470 residents just west of the city of Minneapolis. The community has been proactive to ensure a high quality of life for all. As a first-ring suburb, St. Louis Park has instituted measures to ensure that urban blight does not impact the community. Strong housing codes and aggressive redevelopment plans have kept it a vibrant place. Likewise, the school district has continued to innovate, implementing an International Baccalaureate (IB) program in three elementary schools; the fourth is the Park Spanish immersion School. St. Louis Park High School has Advanced Placement and IB classes along with programs to encourage academic success in low-income students and students of color. The school district's 4,300 students are 63 percent Caucasian, 22 percent African American, 8 percent Hispanic or Latino, 6 percent Asian, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan. Thirty-five percent of students are on free/reduced-cost lunch. St. Louis Park has 8,300 children under the age of eighteen years.

The seed for Children First was planted on March 12, 1992, when Dr. Carl Holmstrom, superintendent of St. Louis Park Schools, made a presentation
about the plight of young people to the St. Louis Park Rotary Club. Carl's speech was so inspiring that two Rotarians who were entrepreneurs challenged the community to dream of a way to make life better for its young people. The question became, how does a city rally its citizens, schools, families, and neighborhoods to help all children and teenagers thrive? Armed with these questions, Dr. Holmstrom and two benefactors invited Search Institute to help St. Louis Park create a citywide effort. A yearlong process of community forums, focus groups, surveys, and interviews led to the creation of Children First, the nation's first community initiative organized to rally all its residents and institutions to nurture the healthy development of children and teenagers based on Search Institute's forty developmental assets research (Leffert et al., 1998). The developmental assets are forty commonsense positive experiences and qualities that help influence the choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, and successful adults (Search Institute, 2011). Search Institute's research consistently shows that the developmental assets are strongly related to positive outcomes for young people across race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, family composition, and type of community.

Children First is a partnership among the business, city, health, faith, and educational communities in St. Louis Park. An eleven-member executive committee made up of top leaders representing the founding partners provides direction with the help of a staff of one. Linked by the shared vision of raising asset-rich youth, this collaborative has mobilized a significant number of citizens and organizations to promote developmental assets. Since Children First was launched in 1993, more than six hundred communities across the United States and Canada (and, increasingly, around the world) have launched similar initiatives.

Children First is not a program. St. Louis Park has plenty of good programs for young people. Instead, it is an initiative that keeps the healthy development of young people in the forefront of the community's psyche. The initiative is designed to bring both paid professionals and residents together to determine the important role that they play in young people's lives. Children First unleashes community capacity by asking its members to be intentional about their actions and to use the common language of the forty developmental assets. The Children First initiative markets, educates, trains, connects, and facilitates asset-building efforts. This is done through the Asset Champions Network—a network of individuals from all types of St. Louis Park organizations responsible for championing asset building in whatever way makes sense in their organization. Asset champions tie into systems, ignite the asset-building capacity among others in their organization, and uncover productive partnerships. The network gives asset champions ways to connect with each other, share ideas, and link to one another when appropriate.

There are 170 trained network members. They are all ages, including youth themselves, from a broad spectrum of organizations including businesses, neighborhoods, student groups, congregations, health care, law enforcement, and schools. Asset champions meet during training and later during quarterly Champion Charge gatherings where they share their accomplish-
ments and frustrations. In March, Children First hosts an annual meeting to serve as another connecting point. In May, the Children First Ice Cream Social is a way to celebrate all that St. Louis Park offers young people during a free community celebration with entertainment, exhibits, crafts, and ice cream. Asset champions also have the opportunity to share information online through a Facebook group. All infants, children, and young people in St. Louis Park benefit from this web of asset support spanning the community.

AN INTENTIONAL FOCUS ON ASSET BUILDING
The Children First initiative serves as an instigator, encouraging community organizations and individuals to do good things for youth. Children First encourages intentional, repetitive actions that build assets in young people. The following are examples of projects that network members have developed over the past eighteen years.

Free Clinic for Youth
Park Nicollet Health System partnered with the school district to build a free clinic for infants, children, and teens. The clinic runs on a small grant offering a consistent front office and nursing staff. Medical residents work at the clinic as part of their rotation. The clinic is open two half days a week in a community center located two blocks from the high school. Once a month, dental care is offered. While a clinic is a major benefit to young people, the caring staff is what makes it an asset-rich place. An example is a doctor who while conducting a routine physical suspected that the teen was clinically depressed. After consulting with the teen’s grandmother, the boy received mental health treatment. The mental health counselor explained that the young man was very depressed and the doctor likely saved his life.

Day One Celebration
Two mothers became familiar with the asset research just about the time their daughters were starting high school. After reviewing results of Search Institute’s Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors Survey administered to St. Louis Park students in 1997, the mothers were disturbed that only 28 percent of students reported experiencing asset number 5, Caring School Climate, and 22 percent possessed asset number 7, Community Values Youth. The women sprang into action, recruiting other volunteers and raising funds for a Day One celebration to send students the message: school is important and we are happy you are here. On the first day as students travel to school, they see lawn signs dotting the landscape that say, “Kids are First in St. Louis Park, Welcome Back to School.” Dozens of community volunteers greet students as they arrive. Students enjoy a free lunch from a local restaurant, and there is a lot of talk about the importance of what they will learn in the year ahead. When the Attitudes and Behaviors Survey was administered in 2003, 36 percent of students experienced the asset Caring School Climate and 28 percent felt that the Community Values Youth.
Changing Sunday School

A congregational committee viewed all of its programs with the forty developmental assets lens. As a result, the church changed how it delivers Sunday school. The curriculum remained the same, but it was reformatted so children have interaction with multiple caring adults during Sunday school, not just a single teacher.

Embedding Assets

The principles of Children First have become a part of the fabric of the St. Louis Park community. Through the local hospital foundation’s grant process, community groups are required to name which assets they address. Children First is an integral part of the school district’s mission statement. The city’s vision statement includes a focus on young people. As the city manager explains, Children First is an economic development tool. If this is not a good community for children to live in, it’s not a good community for anyone.

DOES IT WORK?

Children First has a small staff with a limited budget. Even so, a couple of tools have been used to measure its results. Search Institute’s Attitudes and Behaviors Survey measures the number of assets that, on average, young people possess. A longitudinal study between 1997 and 2001 showed that for grades 6 through 12, students reported significantly higher average asset levels in 2001 compared to 1997. On the whole, youth in St. Louis Park reported having about two more assets in 2001 than in 1997 (Roehlkepartian, Benson, & Sesma, 2003).

Children First is interested in monitoring the community environment. Lots of work is focused on changing adult behavior so that they can be intentional asset builders. In the 2008 City of St. Louis Park Residential Study by Decision Resources Ltd., 56 percent of residents were aware of Children First. Among those, 46 percent were aware of the assets and 46 percent of them were actively engaged in activities to help the asset-building process, an increase of 11 percent since the 2006 survey.

Children First has conducted an online survey with asset champions to measure their commitment to community building around young people and their focus on developing and spreading the word about developmental assets. The responses of 70 asset champions in Children First’s 2009 report to funders shows that through the Asset Champions Network, 78 percent have gotten to know other people in the community, 68 percent found new ideas and inspiration from others, 43 percent collaborated with others on an asset-building project, 68 percent increased their commitment to asset building, 75 percent became more familiar with the developmental assets, 70 percent talked to the group they represent about assets, 61 percent used the developmental assets in their families, 38 percent talked to youth about the assets, and 30 percent referred someone to the Asset Champions Network.
Asset champions were also asked if they “often” participate in the following behaviors. Their responses indicate that 95 percent greet young people by name, 62 percent take time to learn the strengths and talents of young people, 50 percent use the asset language when talking to others, 40 percent keep assets in mind when planning or setting policy, 30 percent recognize asset builders in their midst, and 28 percent include young people in planning and decisions.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Social change efforts are often easier to start than to keep going. St. Louis Park’s commitment to building assets in its young people has spanned nearly two decades. Those involved share lessons that have been learned along the way.

**Partnership Is Key**

Researchers and reporters that have studied Children First find this out quickly. As they talk to representatives from the partners involved, with each visit they come away with the feeling that the partner they’ve just spoken to owns Children First. And in fact they do; they all do. The leadership of the initiative rotates among founding partners, who cochair the initiative with a young person. Cochairs have included the police chief, a bank CEO, and a hospital foundation president. The relationships are authentic, and partners are just as willing to come together in tough times as they are to celebrate successes.

**We’re a Philosophy**

Children First has stayed true to its philosophy of building assets in all people by garnering community action and support. While it can be tempting to move on to the latest grant-funding craze, Children First has not done that. It is steadfast in its commitment to be an initiative, not a program.

**Give It Away**

Power in a community initiative comes from giving power away, sharing information, and encouraging everyone to be involved. Everyone in the community has the power to build assets in young people. No one, or no one organization, is more important than another. That’s the strength of a community initiative.

**Ask, Don’t Tell**

When people ask what they can do, the question gets turned back to them. A frequent response is, “I don’t know; what can you do?” It’s not just a rhetorical question. Those in the community know best what should be done. They know what they can do, what they have the passion to do. The positive focus of the assets is perhaps one of the most important engagement tools. Many don’t feel equipped to address a wide range of risk behaviors. Almost everyone can think of a positive way to build assets in kids. Usually what community members decide to do far exceeds what they would have been told to do.

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Authentic Youth Leadership

Who knows better than young people what life is like at ten or thirteen or eighteen? Young people play a critical role in expanding the initiative. As our current cochairs—the school superintendent and a seventeen-year-old high school senior—the superintendent looks to her cochair for input, creativity, and leadership. At public meetings, they stand side by side as champions for young people. Young people share the message with fresh eyes, creating skits, Facebook groups, coloring books, parades, flash mobs, and even dressing the mayor as a red-caped superhero. Their mission is to inform, engage, celebrate, and have fun. The work is serious, but it can be fun, and everyone appreciates a little fun.

Even after eighteen years, the people involved in Children First would say they’re still on the journey. Those involved continue to ask the question about how to rally the community to help all of our young people thrive. Many steps have been taken, but things change. There are new residents and community leaders, changing demographics, and a whole new generation of youth that weren’t born when Children First was launched. The initiative is fluid, and those involved constantly pursue ways to include new routes to reach all young people. Children First may be a mature initiative, but community members are still on the path to making this the best community in America for every child.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Children First: www.children-first.org
Search Institute: www.search-institute.org

REFERENCES
“You are special because you are you,” said third grader Alejandra during a discussion following a Positive Action lesson, surprising the facilitator, Ms. Garcia. Alejandra came to Farmdale Elementary School at the start of the third grade. It was a new school and with it came a new family. Alejandra’s whole life had been spent moving from relative to relative. Her mother’s substance abuse problems had required others to step in. Her grandmother and uncles and aunts did their best to care for her by moving her to whoever was able to take her. The moves had left their mark on her. She was very guarded and quiet. She only wore dark clothes. In a simple project with modeling clay at the start of the year, she chose only the black clay. Classified as a high-risk student, Alejandra was not technically eligible for the school’s Amigos program for low- to moderate-risk students, but the administration decided to let her try the program. The Amigos program uses the Positive Action curriculum to accomplish positive youth development.

As the months passed, Alejandra began to discover her own strengths. She was in a supportive environment where prosocial skills were taught not just in the Amigos group, but in the classroom and reinforced throughout the school. Every step forward Alejandra made was acknowledged so that her experience in the school was fully immersive and interactive. Alejandra began to wear brighter colors. She began to speak in class. She began to have friends at recess. By the end of the year, Alejandra had blossomed.

To the teachers and staff at Farmdale, Alejandra stands out as a student clearly reached by their conscious, structured approach to positive youth development using the Positive Action program.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AT FARMDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Farmdale Elementary School is a single-track school serving students in grades K to 5. The school is located in Local District 5 of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and it serves the Northeast Los Angeles community of El Sereno. There are 587 students enrolled: 95 percent Hispanic and 4 percent Asian, with a small
number of African American, Filipino, Caucasian, and Pacific Islander children. While the student attendance rate is 95 percent, there is a transiency rate of 23 percent, which indicates that about one in five students will enroll in school and leave within the year. Almost 46 percent of the students (284) are English learners (Spanish-speaking students). Eighty-five percent of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and receive free and reduced-cost lunch.

Since 2004, Farmdale Elementary has been a Program Improvement (PI)/Title I school under the No Child Left Behind Act because it has not reached adequate yearly progress (AYP). The research shows that many PI/Title I schools exist in communities where children’s academic performance is negatively affected by poverty and community stressors. Farmdale students are faced with daily environmental and familial stressors, thereby exposing them to additional risks of developing adjustment problems, especially at school (Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council, 2004). The El Sereno community is impacted by serious gang activity. Felonies, shootings, graffiti, vandalism, and arrests occur regularly around the schools and community. Unfortunately, many children witness violence acts, shootings, arrests, drug sales, and substance abuse on a regular and ongoing basis.

Students, teachers, parents, and school staff at Farmdale Elementary School look forward to the Positive Action Assembly Days held at the end of every month. Teachers at Farmdale Elementary select two students per classroom for recognition during the assembly. Parents are invited to be part of this celebration. A lot of work goes into making this assembly special.

Students clap as the school principal, Mrs. Saracho de Palma, announces their friends’ names on the microphone. One by one, students selected begin to walk to the front to receive their Positive Action certificates and pose for pictures. Proud parents begin to quickly gather to the front to take pictures of their children being recognized by the entire school. This is a great way to acknowledge and recognize students schoolwide for their positive actions at Farmdale Elementary School.

Assembly Day is just one piece of the school’s effort to implement Positive Action as part of Los Angeles Unified School District’s Discipline Foundation Policy and School Wide Positive Behavior Support Programs. The policy calls for every student to be educated in a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment. In addition, every educator has the right to teach in an atmosphere free from disruption and obstacles that impede learning. Positive Action was funded in September 2009 by a School Community Violence Prevention Grant from the California Department of Education. Implementation began in the middle of the school year of 2009/10, and full program implementation started with the 2010/11 school year. The selection of Positive Action was the culmination of a process that began when the school’s existing collaborative (composed of school and community stakeholders) identified behaviors such as bullying, fights, and vandalism as key school problems. The behaviors were also identified by students and parents via self-report surveys and focus groups. The school administration charged the collaborative and a local consultant, Ricardo Lopez,
with the task of identifying and selecting a comprehensive, evidence-based program to address these problematic behaviors. After an exhaustive review of programs, Positive Action was selected because it addressed the problem behaviors not only with students but also with school staff, administration, parents, and other community members. The group felt it was important to target multiple systems for success. (For a further description of Positive Action, see the information provided in chapter 13 of this volume.)

For Farmdale Elementary, this multiple-systems strategy is achieved through the adoption and implementation of Positive Action to develop a consistent approach to positive youth development with schoolwide positive behavior support and a discipline plan. Farmdale Elementary School's plan consists of teaching school rules and social-emotional skills, reinforcing appropriate student behavior, using effective classroom management and positive behavior support, and providing early prevention and intervention strategies. Farmdale's plan encompasses the three key components of positive youth development—a focus on youth strengths/assets, a positive and supportive environment, and acknowledgment of bidirectional person–context interactions. Students must first be supported in learning the skills necessary to enhance a positive school climate and avoid negative behavior. Positive Action is critical in helping us reach our goals.

POSITIVE ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS
Embedded in the Los Angeles Unified School District's Discipline Foundation Policy and School Wide Positive Behavior Support Program is Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²). RTI² is a student-centered, multitiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. All students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction provided by qualified personnel to ensure that their difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction. Teachers from all grade levels use the Positive Action curriculum in their classroom. All students are screened on a periodic basis to establish an academic and behavioral baseline and to identify struggling learners who need additional support. Students identified as being "at risk" through universal screenings or results on state- or districtwide tests receive supplemental instruction during the school day in the regular classroom.

Classroom Example: First Grade
“I hit her because I like her,” said Joseph, a first-grade student at Farmdale Elementary. After he made that statement, the whole class looked baffled, especially Christina, the girl he “hit.” It happened right after lunch recess, so Ms. Ohashi decided to reteach the concepts from the Positive Action lesson titled "My Code of Conduct" to address this particular incident.

This lesson reinforces the idea that students should treat their peers the way they want to be treated. They began the lesson by sitting in a circle in order to lower their affective filters and create an atmosphere that is conducive to open discussions. The students were then asked to discuss what they think
“respect” means to them by sharing their insight with a partner. This think-pair-share activity was the introduction to their open discussion. Since this was not the first time the students were exposed to this lesson, Ms. Ohashi did not want to teach the lesson in the same manner as she had earlier. Instead, she used various examples from the students’ experiences and had them engage in role-play to help her students better understand the concept that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. By doing so, the students were able to make connections to their own personal lives and were motivated to begin to engage in positive actions.

The most challenging part about teaching these important concepts to young students is that it is not something that can easily be learned and applied after just one lesson. And even if it seems that they understand the lesson, sometimes unique situations may arise that require additional improvisation in order to better meet the needs of the students, as in the case with Joseph and Christina. Hence, taking advantage of teachable moments, along with continuous reinforcement of the concepts presented in Positive Action, is necessary in order to help students become positive, productive members of this society. One of the characteristics of positive youth development is that it takes time. A single lesson is never enough for sustainable change.

Classroom Example: Fifth Grade

Positive Action works because the school community engages in developing positive habits in and out of class. This was the consensus of Mr. Zamora’s fifth-grade class, who realized that Positive Action only worked if they practiced positive behaviors outside as well as inside the school. One student said, “We all have to follow it [in order to] make it work.” In Mr. Zamora’s dual-language class, everyone has agreed that behavior is not a finished product—it’s a work in progress.

Mr. Zamora got on board with the philosophy of Positive Action after a professional development where the school’s Healthy Start coordinator, Mr. Lopez, reminded him that people come first and his relationships with his students had the power to change lives. Positive Action ensures that students are treated as people; they have both social and academic needs that need to be addressed on a daily basis. Concepts in Positive Action assist students in thinking about their actions, thoughts, and feelings and how they are really one major concept.

At Farmdale, everyone is trying to create authentic learning opportunities in a positive, supportive context for students. That has been our mission, and now with Positive Action, the mission of Healthy Start and the Farmdale community of learners initiative as well. As part of the community of learners, Farmdale has embraced the idea of working collectively to engage all students in Positive Youth Development using Positive Action.

The Amigos

To create a positive environment with effective bidirectional communication between students and the school, students’ progress across a range of
academic and behavioral metrics is monitored. Students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress. Intensity varies across group size, frequency and duration of intervention, and the level of training of the professionals providing instruction or intervention. These services and interventions are provided in small-group settings in addition to instruction in the general curriculum.

One of the most effective interventions is called the Amigos (“Friends”) program. In Amigos, small groups are formed for those students who need extra help with social skills. The Positive Action curriculum is taught in this program using the Positive Action Counselor’s Kit. Some of the students selected to be part of the schoolwide assembly are also current and former participants of the Amigos program. The group facilitator, Ms. Garcia, works with children exhibiting low to moderate school adjustment problems. A psychiatric social worker, Mrs. Aviles, and the Boys Group facilitator, Mr. Cruz, also use the Positive Action Counselor’s Kit when working with their students who are exhibiting high-risk behaviors or other needs.

Alejandra was a participant in the Amigos program. Ms. Garcia noticed an increase in self-esteem and confidence in her group of students. Mrs. Aviles collected the pre- and posttests from the program using the Walker-McConnell Scale (WMS) of Social Competence and School Adjustment (Walker & McConnell, 1995), and they noticed that 83 percent of students responded well to the services using Positive Action, while others needed more individualized interventions rather than groups. The WMS is used as a tool to evaluate the effects of the Amigos program intervention on social competence and school adjustment factors as reported by teachers. Ms. Garcia also noticed that students in her groups understood the material taught and stories read. After doing a lesson on respect with her kindergarten students from unit 4 in the Positive Action Kindergarten Instructor’s Kit, a child said, “I always do positive actions at home because I respect my mom.” Another student in the group shared, “Positive is love, friends, and respect.”

Mr. Cruz facilitated the Boys Group for fifth-grade boys displaying behavior and emotional issues. At first, group implementation was difficult because of the behavior of the boys. However, within the fourth week, the boys started understanding the Positive Action core philosophy. In one instance, after a behavioral incident during group time, without prompting, the boys used the Positive Action thoughts-actions-feelings circle to assist the boy who acted out in correcting his own behavior. “We realized that the curriculum is working!” said Mr. Cruz. Even better, the boys started referring and recruiting others boys to the group. One boy in the group said, “We do not want this group to end.” Another boy said, “I changed so much.”

The El Sereno Community

Farmdale Elementary School plays an important role in the mostly Hispanic and Latino community of El Sereno in East Los Angeles. Mr. Lopez, the Healthy
Start coordinator, organized a community learning fair to help educate families on the importance of making good choices in taking care of their bodies. There were booths for the dental clinic, medical clinic, farmer’s market, and local mental health agencies. Mr. Lopez integrated Positive Action with the community learning fair because the Positive Action curriculum incorporates three basic human needs—taking care of the body (physical needs), the mind (intellectual needs), and feelings (social and emotional needs).

The community learning fair team decided to recognize teachers for their strong support with the implementation of Positive Action as well as by recognizing some of the outstanding students who helped during the fair. This was an excellent way to involve the El Sereno community and educate them on how our school is using the Positive Action program.

**PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Positive Action lessons are monitored in the classroom by the use of an independent evaluator. The evaluator uses a fidelity checklist and monthly teacher implementation worksheets as tools. In addition, there are various evaluation tools used to measure process and outcome objectives. The findings are used to monitor Positive Action at an entire school.

Every semester, twelve to fourteen students are admitted to the Amigos program to participate in small-group lessons using the counselor’s kit from the Positive Action program. Each group consists of about three to four students. Positive Action lessons run for about twenty-five minutes. Students are selected based on how they scored on the Walker Scale Instrument, which is completed by all teachers in the targeted grade level for all their students. Those students whose scores fall within the 10th to 25th percentile (low-moderate school adjustment functioning) qualify for Amigos. The program admits few high-risk students, which is agreed upon by program staff and administration. Parents are invited to an orientation to learn more about Positive Action in the Amigos program. Once the parents provide parental consent, those students are registered Amigos. The first semester targeted students in grades 1 and 3, while the second semester targeted students in kindergarten and grade 2.

In the Amigos program, data are collected by program staff prior to children beginning the program and after completing the program using the Walker-McConnell Scale. Teachers complete the scale, which measures children’s school adjustment behaviors, such as social skills in and out of the classroom. Figure 13C.1 compares pre- and posttest results for a group of twelve children in grades 1 and 3 admitted to the program for the first semester (October 2010–January 2011), and figure 13C.2 shows the results for fourteen students in kindergarten and grade 2 who participated in the second semester (February 2011–June 2011). The same teacher who completed the pretest also completed the posttest for the students. Most children who participated in small-group intervention improved in their social skills.
Figure 13C.1. Positive action groups 2010–2011, semester 1.

Figure 13C.2. Positive action groups 2010–2011, semester 2.
Figure 13C.1 shows results from the first semester. Eighty-three percent of students \((N = 12)\) who participated in the Amigos program during the first semester did well, while 71 percent of students \((N = 14)\) in the second semester (figure 13C.2) also did well using Positive Action in small-group interventions. In the second semester, four out of fourteen students were high-risk students. All four students moved up in points!

CONCLUSION

We made a substantial commitment to positive youth development when we brought in the Positive Action program. In addition to facing all the challenges of any school in a major urban school district, we took on the challenge of making Farmdale Elementary School an International Baccalaureate (IB) school. We aligned Positive Action and the IB program using components like the Positive Action words of the week.

Positive Action helped Farmdale Elementary School create a structure to enable students to recognize their own strengths; to provide a positive, supportive environment reaching into the students' homes and into the broader community; and to establish a responsive, bidirectional context-aware system of interaction. The heart of Positive Youth Development is beating at Farmdale Elementary School.

Having Positive Action at Farmdale Elementary School has given us the opportunity to train and educate everyone, including teachers, teacher assistants, and after-school program staff, on an evidence-based program that is helping us improve our school's academics, behavior, and character. In implementing this program at Farmdale, we were able to continuously monitor its application in classrooms, specialized programs, and the entire school while measuring improvement in students' academics and behaviors. Positive Action is practiced from morning before school begins and all throughout the day, including in the afternoon during the after-school program.

REFERENCES
