POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Processes, Philosophies, Programs, and Prospects

Richard M. Lerner

Tufts University
A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PYD PERSPECTIVE

1989/1990: Rick Little, Founding President of the International Youth Foundation
  • Introduces the concept of PYD
  • Defines PYD as composed of 4 Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, and Character

1995: Conference in Aspen, CO organized by Peter Benson: The “C” of Caring is added
  • There are now 5 Cs!

1996: SRA (Boston): Rick Little suggests that when the 5Cs develop, a “6th C”, Contribution, emerges in youth
The concept of PYD has been understood in at least three interrelated but nevertheless different ways:

• As a developmental process;
• As a philosophy or approach to youth programming; and
• As instances of youth programs and organizations focused on fostering the healthy or positive development of youth.
APPROACHES TO PYD AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS
RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL SYSTEMS THEORIES

- The integration of levels of organization, from biology/physiology through culture, the physical ecology, and history

- Developmental regulation across life involves mutually influential individual $\xleftarrow{} \xrightarrow{}$ context relations

- Integrated actions, individual $\xleftarrow{} \xrightarrow{}$ context relations, are the basic unit of analysis within human development

- Temporality and relative plasticity in human development

- Optimism, the application of developmental science, and the promotion of positive human development: The potential for furthering social justice
WILLIAM DAMON and the Study of Purpose

• Indicator of PYD and thriving is engagement in common welfare and community contributions

• Criteria of purpose as ultimate concern
  • A youth has all elements of the definition:
    • Something to accomplish; beyond the self rationale; plans for future action; meaningfulness to self; incorporation into one’s identity
  • Organizes the person’s decisions and activities
  • Visible activities related to the concern
PETER BENSON and the Study of Developmental Assets

Search Institute

- Individual “developmental assets”
  - Commitment to learning
  - Positive values
  - Social competencies
  - Positive identity

- Align with ecological assets:
  - Support
  - Empowerment
  - Boundaries and expectations
  - Constructive use of time
JACQUELYNNE ECCLES and the Study of Stage-Environment Fit and Motivation

Expectancy-value model of achievement-related choices:

• Activity choice, persistence, and performance are related to expectations for success and value for the activity

• Expectations and value also influence other personal and contextual factors linked together within the developmental system
REED LARSON and the Study of Motivation, Active Engagement, and Real-Life Changes

Initiative is a key component of PYD, and can be developed through:

• Out-of-School-Time (OST) activity contexts in which youth can act as producers of their own positive development, and

• Personal connections with adults and peers within these OST programs

Emphasis on approaches to community-based programs that promote PYD
MARGARET BEALE SPENCER and the PVEST Model

• Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)
• Accounts for structural factors, cultural influences, individual experiences, individual perceptions
• Focuses on self evaluation of minority American youth based on stereotypes and biases of others and subsequent coping
• Considers structural inequalities in PYD
Positive Adolescent-to-Adult Transitions

- Positive adolescent to adult transitions: school to work transition
- Adolescents must consider two key facets of education and career:
  - Transparency, seeing through intricacies of stated and unstated rules of the education system and labor market
  - Permeability, amount of effort needed to move from one career plan to another
ANN MASTEN and the Study of Resilience

- Studies resilience and the quality of adaptation
- Resilience is a dynamic construct
- Resilience is result of individual ↔ context relations
RICHARD M. AND JACQUELINE V. LERNER: Study of Individual ↔ Context Relational Processes and PYD

- PYD is optimized when youth strengths are aligned with ecological resources (developmental assets)
- Intentional Self Regulation and Hope are key strengths of youth
- Individuals, institutions, collective activity, and access are key ecological developmental assets
- “Five C’s” of PYD are the outcomes of youth ↔ context relations
- Thriving youth contribute to their context
  - Contribution is the 6th C of PYD
PYD AS PHILOSOPHY OR APPROACH TO YOUTH PROGRAMMING
JACQUELINE ECCLES
AND JENNIFER A. GOOTMAN

National Academy of Sciences’ Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth:
Features of Positive Developmental Settings:

• Physical and psychological safety
• Appropriate structure
• Positive social norms
• Opportunities to enjoy supportive relationships
• Opportunities to belong
• Opportunities to build skills
• Opportunities to feel empowered by experiencing efficacy and a sense of mattering
• Synergistic with the family and the broader community
Effective programs promote five of fifteen outcomes in youth including:

- Bonding
- Resilience
- Social competence
- Emotional competence
- Cognitive competence
- Behavioral competence
- Moral competence
- Self-determination
- Spirituality
- Self efficacy
- Clear and positive identity
- Belief in the future
- Recognition for positive behavior
- Opportunities for prosocial involvement
- Prosocial norms
JEANNE BROOKS-GUNN and Colleagues

Three characteristics of youth development programs:

1. Program **activities** providing opportunities for active involvement and for meeting new challenges

2. **Atmosphere** of hope, caring, safety, cultural appropriateness, and respect for youth abilities to make choices and to take responsibility for actions

3. **Goals** extend beyond prevention to include PYD promotion
ROBERT W. BLUM

Four elements critical to successful youth interventions

1. **People:** Strong adult-youth relationships
2. **Contributions:** Youth actively give back to family, school, and community
3. **Activities:** Productive and recreational opportunities
4. **Place:** A safe environment that is free from drugs and violence and that includes adult supervision
MICHELLE GAMBONE and the Community Action Framework for Youth Development

• Systematic approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and resources for youth, to create communities in which all young people can optimize their potential.

• Five hierarchical organized strategies for use by practitioners and scientists:
  – Building community capacity and conditions for change;
  – Implementing community strategies to enhance supports and opportunities for youth;
  – Increasing supports and opportunities for youth;
  – Improving youth development outcomes; and
  – Improving long-term outcomes in adulthood
Targeting Life Skills

- 4-H’s Heart, Hands, Head, and Health model
- Each of the four components is composed of two general categories of skills, with which are themselves composed of more specific life skills

For example, “Hands” is divided into:

**Working**
- Marketable skills
- Teamwork
- Self motivation

**Giving**
- Community service
- Leadership
- Responsible citizenship
- Contributions to group effort
Four Essential Elements

• Originally proposed as the “Circle of Courage”

• Four subdivided elements:

**Belonging**
- Relationships with caring adults
- Inclusive environment
- Safe environment

**Mastery**
- Opportunities for mastery
- Engagement in learning

**Generosity**
- Opportunity to value and practice service for others

**Independence**
- Opportunities to see oneself as an active participant in the future
- Opportunity for self-determination
RICHARD M. LERNER and the “Big Three”

Effective Youth Development programs are marked by:

• Positive and sustained adult-youth relations
• Life-skill building activities
• Opportunities for youth participation in and leadership of valued family, school, and community activities
STEP-IT-UP-2-THRIVE

• Identify and develop “sparks”
• Adopt a growth mindset
• Reflect on indicators of thriving: For example, the Five Cs and Contribution
• Build goal management skills through: Goal selection (G); Pursuit of strategies (P); and Shifting approaches in the face of challenges (S) [GPS]
PYD AS INSTANCES OF YOUTH PROGRAMS AIMED AT FOSTERING THE HEALTHY OR POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH
Catalano and Hawkins and the Social Development Research Group

- **Community Youth Development Study**
  - Communities that Care (CTC) prevention system
  - Five stages: Get Started, Get Organized, Develop a Profile, Create a Plan, Implement and Evaluate
  - Results indicate decreased drug and alcohol use and prevented delinquent behavior within four years of implementation

- **Raising Healthy Children (RHC)**
  - Provides research-based parenting workshops, home visits offering additional resources, and teacher training
  - Impacts on childhood bullying, self control, attention problems, and risk factors in early adolescence
WILLIAM KURTINES and the Miami Youth Development Project

Changing Lives Program (CLP) is a Collaborative university-community outreach research project

- Creates context in which youth with multiple problems can take responsibility for their lives and communities
- Seeks to promote positive identity development by building skills and services that allow youth to change themselves and their contexts
- CLP directly related to gains in positive identity development
  - Positive change in identity resolution among Hispanic youth
  - African American youth reported decrease in identity resolution
  - Females exhibited reduction in internalizing behaviors
  - Increases in personal expressiveness
BRIAN FLAY and CAROL G. ALLRED and the *Positive Action* Program

- Focus on promotion of healthy positive development of children and youth in multiple domains
- “Positive Action” Program
  - School based intervention
  - Based on concept of feeling good about oneself when taking positive actions
  - Program includes six units: Self-concept, Positive actions for body and mind, Social /emotional positive actions for managing yourself responsibly , Social/emotional positive actions for getting along with others, Social/emotional positive actions for being honest with yourself and others, and social/emotional positive actions for improving continually
- Participants were less likely to engage in substance use, violence, and sexual activity than students who did not participate
PROSPECTS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE PYD PERSPECTIVE
To Better Align the Three Facets of the PYD Perspective, We Need to Build on What We Have Learned
PYD IS CONSTITUTED BY “FIVE Cs”
Key Findings

• Intentional self regulation (ISR) constitutes key cognitive and behavioral bases of PYD
  • Positively predicts PYD and Contribution and negatively predicts Risk/Problem behaviors within and across grades

• Hope for the future is a key emotional basis of PYD
  • Within and across grades, Hopeful Future Expectation scores are associated with high ISR, PYD and Contribution and low risk behaviors and depressive symptoms

• School Engagement is composed of Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive components
  • Within and across grades, school engagement is associated with better self-reported grades, higher ISR, and lower involvement in delinquency and substance use
Key Findings (cont’d)

• Key Ecological Assets Promoting PYD are:
  • Individuals
  • Institutions
  • Collective Action
  • Access

• In each family, school, and community setting, and within and across grades, **INDIVIDUALS** are always the most important asset in predicting PYD and Contribution
Key Findings (cont’d)

Important Outcomes of PYD

• **Contribution is a Key Outcome of PYD**
  • Contribution involves Active and Engaged Citizenship (AEC): Civic duty, Civic skills, Neighborhood social connection, and Civic participation
  • Within and across grades, Contribution is associated with ISR, Hope, and PYD

• **Lowered Risk/Problem Behaviors**
  • ISR, Hope, and PYD are negatively related to Risk/Problem Behaviors within and across grades
Key Findings (cont’d)

• However, there are diverse pathways youth travel across adolescence

• There are also diverse combinations of positive and problematic trajectories

• The strengths of youth and their ecological assets place youth on the most favorable trajectories
THE PYD MODEL

Individual Strengths

Ecological Assets

Competence

Connection

Caring

Character

Confidence

Contribution

Reduced Risk Behavior

Broader Ecology of Human Development

Time
We Need to Work with Key PYD-Promoting Organizations
Innovation Center
WENDY WHEELER

• President and founder of the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development

• The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development unleashes the potential of youth, adults, organizations, and communities to engage together in creating a just and equitable society

(www.theinnovationcenter.org)
Forum for Youth Investment (FYI)
KAREN PITTMAN

- Co-founder with Merita Irby in 1998
- Ready by 21 Challenge
  - Four building blocks for effective change:
    1. Build broader partnerships
    2. Set bigger goals
    3. Use better data and information
    4. Implement bolder strategies

- FYI as an “action tank”

(Forumfyi.org)
America’s Promise Alliance

MARGUERITE KONDRACKE AND JON ZAFF

• Marguerite Kondracke: President and CEO
• John Zaff: Vice President of Research for the America's Promise Alliance and a senior fellow at Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University
• APA seeks to raise awareness, encourage action, and engage in advocacy
• The Five Promises:
  1. Caring Adults
  2. Safe Places
  3. A Healthy Start
  4. An Effective Education
  5. Opportunities to Help Others

(www.americaspromise.org)
Youth-Nex: The UVA Center to Promote Effective Youth Development

PATRICK H. TOLAN

- Applies a **scientific** and **holistic** approach
- Works across the University to **engage multidisciplinary faculty**
- Emphasizes promoting effective **positive change**
- **Bridges gaps** between practice and policy; disciplines; and service sectors
- **Trains** students and other professionals in the science and practice of effective youth development
- Collaborates with **local, state, and federal partners**
- Harnesses the opportunities in **schools and communities** to realize the potential of our nation's youth

*(curry.virginia.edu/youth-nex)*
INTEGRATING OUR EFFORTS TO ANSWER THE REALLY BIG QUESTION
• What actions…
• of what duration…
• with what youth…
• in what communities…
• at what points in adolescence…
• will result in what features of positive youth development and youth contributions to self, family, community, and civil society?

Or, more simply:

• How do we use theoretically-predicated and evidence-based youth development programs to foster mutually beneficial relations between healthy youth and a nation marked by social justice, democracy, and liberty?