About Promoting Youth Development in Schools

Problem-free isn't fully prepared.
Karen Pittman

S chools increasingly are focusing on enhancing how they promote youth development and address factors that interfere with such development. The emphasis is underscored by national organizations pursuing total and whole child initiatives (American Association of School Administrators, http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=118 ; ASCD, http://www.wholechildeducation.org/take-action/national-res/house/). Youth development also has robust research support (see reference list).

Despite the widespread interest, youth development principles remain a marginal concern in school improvement policy and practice. The following information is meant to provide another informative for decision makers and planners about the fundamental importance of promoting youth development through enhancing student assets *and* improving settings *and* pairing it with an agenda to address factors interfering with such development.

What is a positive youth development approach?

Most definitions of youth development emphasize that it is a process which lays the foundation for how a child or adolescent copes with the next set of circumstances encountered. Efforts to promote youth development involve intentional practices designed to positively enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes (often referred to as assets) in one or more domains (e.g., cognitive, physical, language/communication, social, emotional, moral, spiritual).

For example, the federal Administration for Children and Families (2001) states:

> Positive youth development is an approach toward all youth that builds on their assets and their potential and helps counter the problems that may affect them....
> Key elements of positive youth development are:
>
> - Providing youth with safe and supportive environments.
> - Fostering relationships between young people and caring adults....
> - Providing youth with opportunities to pursue their interests and focus on their strengths.
> - Supporting the development of youth's knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, including study, tutoring, sports, the arts, vocational education, and service-learning.
> - Engaging youth as active partners and leaders who can help move communities forward.
> - Providing opportunities for youth to show that they care about others and about society.
> - Promoting healthy lifestyles and teaching positive patterns of social interaction.
> - Providing a safety net in times of need....

Some Statements from the Field About Promoting Positive Youth Development

Framed by developmental systems theories, the positive youth development perspective emphasizes that every young person has strengths and a potential for successful, healthy development. ... When the strengths of youth are aligned with contextual resources over time, healthy development will be promoted (Zimmerman, Phelps, & Lerner, 2008).

...the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (1) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (2) to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives (Pitman, 1993).

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 (Damon, 2004).

The key to ensuring the positive development of youth rests on developing research-based policies that strengthen in diverse communities the capacities...to raise healthy, thriving children. Such policies must take a strength-based approach to youth; they should be developmental in nature; and they should focus on enhancing the fit between the capacities of young people and the assets for positive development that exist in their community (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005).

About Individual Assets and Settings

An asset is usually defined as a useful or valuable quality, an advantage, a resource. With respect to individuals, assets can be defined as strengths that can be used for sustainable positive development.

Because of the widespread influence of the *Search Institute's* work, developmental assets are often defined as the "internal and external building blocks of healthy development." The institute describes these as representing "the relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to avoid risks and to thrive." Based on the institute's review of youth development, resiliency, and prevention research, a synthesis generated "40 common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, successful adults." (For the Search Institute's list of assets, see http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets/lists).

Similarly, a partnership between the National 4-H Council and the University of Arizona (designated as Building Partnerships for Youth) also has developed an assets list. The list is described as a framework including "21 essential elements of youth development." (See http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/content.cfm?content=elementsDefined)

Our Center has stressed *intrinsic* motivation as a critical asset. Psychological research over the last fifty years has brought renewed attention to this concept as critical for understanding development. This work is just beginning to find its way into professional development programs. One line of investigation emphasizes the relationship of intrinsic motivation to both positive and negative development/learning (e.g., see the cited references to the work of Deci and Ryan and their colleagues). Implications of this work include understanding intrinsic motivation in terms of

> • feelings of self-determination
> • feelings of competence and expectations of success
> • feelings of interpersonal relatedness
> • the range of an individual's interests and satisfactions

It is from this psychological perspective that we suggest such feelings are critical assets.

As noted in the introduction, research stresses the importance of accounting for both individual *and* setting factors in promoting positive youth development and addressing factors that interfere with such development. As Shinn and Yoshikawa (2008) stress:

> A focus on how to improve social settings to promote positive youth development shifts the debate away from simply improving youth outcomes at the individual level to transforming settings where youth live, learn, work, and play.

Findings indicate that features of positive developmental settings include: physical and psychological safety; appropriate structure; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong; positive social norms; support for efficacy and mattering; opportunities for skill building; integration of family, school, and community efforts (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Research on facilitating holistic development stresses interventions to enhance settings to better provide for (1) basic needs – nutrition, shelter, health, and safety, (2) effective parenting and schooling using appropriate structure and expectations, and (3) more opportunities for recreation, enrichment, and creativity and for community, civic and religious involvement.

About Desired Outcomes

While there are many ways to group positive developmental outcomes, there is broad agreement about what society wants for its young people. The following synthesis reflects outcomes advocated by a wide-variety of individuals and groups, including those stemming from research on youth development, resiliency, protective factors, and developmental assets (see references at end of article).

Essentially, the aims are to enhance youngsters' opportunities, motivation, and capability to develop appropriately and function effectively. Prominent among the domains discussed are:

> (1) *Academics* (including such outcomes as school engagement; motivation and ability to work and relate at school; motivation for self-learning and enhancement of literacy; feelings of academic competence; critical thinking, judgment, and decision making; breaking set and thinking outside the box)
>
> (2) *Healthy and safe behavior* (including the ability to make good decisions about diet, hygiene, health care, involvement in activities; ability to solve interpersonal

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problems and resolve conflicts; ability to delay gratification and resist impulses and inappropriate social pressures)

(3) *Social-emotional functioning* (including such outcomes as the ability to relate socially and in working relationships with others encompassing cultural competencies and understanding behavioral norms; interpersonal cooperation and problem solving; ability to handle and reduce stress; ability to express and manage feelings; positive feelings about self and others; feelings of social-emotional competence and connection with significant others; a stable, resilient, and empathic temperament)

(4) *Communication* -- verbal and nonverbal (including basic language skills and the ability to read and interpret social cues and understand the perspectives of others)

(5) *Character/Values* (e.g., understanding and valuing personal, social, and civic expectations and responsibilities and moral courses of action; integrity; respect; self-regulation; sense of purpose; feelings of hope for the future)

(6) *Self-evaluation, self-direction, and* self-regaulation (e.g., understanding of self and impact on others; ability to formulate personal goals and decisions and follow through; initiative; feelings of autonomy/self-determination)

(7) *Vocational and other life roles* (including knowledge, skills and attitudes for ongoing learning, acquiring and maintaining employment, initiating and maintaining intimate adult relationships, providing effective parenting)

(8) *Recreational and Enrichment Pursuits* (including the ability to engage in venues for enhancing quality of life and creativity and for reducing stress).

After evaluating programs designed to promote youth development, Catalano and his colleagues (1998) concluded:

Effective programs addressed a range of positive youth development objectives yet shared common themes. All sought to strengthen social, emotional, cognitive and/or behavioral competencies, self-efficacy, and family and community standards for heathy social and person behavior.... The youth competency strategies varied among programs from targeting youth directly with skills training sessions, to peer tutoring conducted by at-risk youth, to teacher training that resulted in better classroom management and instruction. The evidence showed an associated list of important outcomes including better school attendance, higher academic performance, healthier peer and adult interactions, improved decision-making abilities, and less substance use and risky sexual behavior.

In Focusing on the Positive, Don't Ignore Addressing Interfering Setting Factors

Many years ago, William Ryan wrote an important book entitled *Blaming the Victim.* His point was that many problems manifested by individuals are caused by failures of the society, but most intervention activity places the onus for overcoming problems on individuals affected. For example, problem oriented interventions assess and treat individuals rather than addressing external factors causing the problems. The need is for a stronger

commitment to improving those environments and systems that affect how well youngsters flourish. This involves setting interventions that directly (a) facilitate positive growth, development, and learning and (b) minimize factors that interfere with such growth, development, and learning. And, it often means adopting a sequential approach where the first focus is on improving settings and systems, then if necessary, adding interventions directed at specific persons.

Given the endangered status of so many young people, it seems clear that promoting youth development and addressing interfering factors represent an inseparable, essential agenda. As Scales and Leffert's (1999) discussion of developmental assets makes clear:

> The developmental assets do not include everything youth need. Young people also need adequate food, shelter, clothing, caregivers who at the minimum are not abusive or neglectful, families with adequate incomes, schools where both children and teachers feel safe, and economically and culturally vibrant neighborhoods -- not ones beset with drugs, violent crime, and infrastructural decay. For example, young people who are disadvantaged by living in poor neighborhoods are consistently more likely to engage in risky behavior at higher rates than their affluent peers, and they show consistently lower rates of positive outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Moreover, young people who live in abusive homes or in neighborhoods with high levels of violence are more likely to become both victims and perpetrators of violence (Garbarino, 1995).

Schools and Youth Development: Often Not a Good Fit

What happens at schools is best understood in transactional terms. Thus, a school's impact is a function of the fit between what the staff and other stakeholders bring to the situation and the situational factors that must be addressed. For example, a school's stakeholders bring a set of assimilated knowledge, skills, and attitudes, a current state of being (demographic status; immediate physiological, cognitive, and emotional states), and available institutional resources. The situation presents a host of demands and stressors which differ in terms of contextual factors such as locale, level of schooling, and student readiness. There are considerable variations among schools and in classrooms with respect to the number of students who show up motivationally ready and able to cope with what happens. There also are wide resource disparities among schools due to school budgets and differences in family income and support for school learning. At any given juncture, the situational demands and stressors may or may not be a good fit with what the school, home, and community can mobilize effectively.

Research has underscored the negative impact schools often have by not incorporating a strong emphasis on positive youth development. Focusing on student dropouts, the Forum for Youth Investment (2004) stresses:

> Both individual risk factors and the institutional context influence the problem.... Most studies ignore how schools influence students to drop out and instead focus more narrowly on personal risk factors such as social background, academic performance, and academic behaviors. The individual model ... keeps educators from working on causal factors that are under their control.

Pianta and Hamre (2009) describe the problem in more detail:

> Students spend at least one-quarter of their waking hours in schools, most of it in classrooms, one of the most proximal and potentially powerful setting for influencing youth. Students' interactions with teachers either produce or inhibit developmental change to the extent that they engage, meaningfully challenge, and provide social and relational supports for youth....
>
> Youth routinely describe experiences in classrooms that fail to capitalize on their interests, goals, and motivation and instead promote disengagement and alienation. One cannot read these accounts and escape the sense that school and classroom settings and the adults responsible for their quality are too often disconnected from youths' developmental needs....
>
> Despite rhetoric that paints a picture of middle and high school as challenging and interesting, the actual experiences youth have in classroom settings (observed or reported) are lacking in terms of meaningful challenges, supportive relationships, and competence-building opportunities. Not surprisingly, given the developmental salience of active engagement and intrinsic motivation in adolescence, middle and high school youth not only withdraw energy from school but also drop out in increasing numbers....

Because so many students exhibit learning, behavior, and emotional problems, the need to address problems often is pursued at the expense of promoting youth development. As Karen Pittman and her colleagues lament, it is the case that current policy and practice focuses too heavily on services to solve problems and too little on strengthening supports and opportunities to increase potential.

Clearly, a focus solely on fixing problems is too limited. Moreover, it is counterproductive. Overemphasis on problems works against identifying positive attributes and can work against developing successful intervention and prevention programs (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). The overemphasis diverts resources needed for promoting holistic development and thus limits future opportunities. The overall result can be motivationally debilitating to all involved. And undermining motivation works against resiliency in responding to adversity and profoundly affects school climate.

All this highlights the importance of avoiding (a) the type of stereotypical thinking and self-fulfilling prophecies that result from a mindless deficit-view of youngsters who exhibit problems and (b) a boot-strap orientation that comes from not directly addressing barriers that can be removed or minimized so that many youngsters are not confronted everyday with experiences that generate frustration and failure.

Schools Provide Natural Opportunities to Promote Youth Development

The agenda for promoting youth development may be embedded in a special curriculum (e.g., social skills training, character education, assets development), incorporated into the regular curricula, or pursued in community service, after school programs, and mentoring efforts. However, some of the best opportunities in classrooms and schoolwide (a) capitalize on *natural* opportunities to promote development and (b) minimize transactions that interfere with positive growth. Natural opportunities are one of the most authentic examples of "teachable moments."

Take the promotion of social and emotional development as a prime example.

An appreciation of some of the natural situations that need attention with respect to promoting social and emotional development at a school can be garnered by looking at the school day and school year through the lens of goals for personal and social functioning. Is instruction carried out in ways that strengthen or hinder development of interpersonal skills and connections and student understanding of self and others? Is cooperative learning and sharing promoted? Is counterproductive competition minimized? Are interpersonal conflicts mainly suppressed or are they used as learning opportunities? Are roles provided for all students to be positive helpers throughout the school and community?

Particular attention needs to be paid to:

- *Daily opportunities.* Schools are social milieus. Each day in the classroom and around the school students interact with their peers and various adults in formal and informal ways. Every encounter, positive and negative, represents a potential learning experience. All school staff, and especially teachers, can be taught ways to capitalize on these to enhance social-emotional learning and minimize transactions that work against positive growth.

- Yearly patterns. The culture of most schools yields fairly predictable patterns over the course of the year. The beginning of the school year, for example, typically is a period of hope. As the year progresses, a variety of stressors are encountered. Examples include homework assignments that are experienced as increasingly difficult, interpersonal conflicts, and testing and grading pressures. There also are special circumstances associated with holidays, social events, sports, grade promotions, and graduation.
  Each month strategies can be implemented that encourage school staff to enhance coping and minimize stressors through social-emotional learning and shared problem solving. The point is to establish a focus each month and build the capacity of school staff to evolve the school culture in ways that reduce unnecessary stressors and naturally promote social and emotional development. (Monthly themes are readily generated; a few examples are listed in part II of the following Exhibit.)

- *Transitions.* As is evident, students are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions – changing schools, changing grades, and encountering a range of other minor and major transitory demands. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be used to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation. However, institutionalized efforts to support students through such transitions often are neglected. Examples of school-wide and classroom-specific opportunities to address transitions proactively include a focus on welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff); providing ongoing social supports as students adjust to new grades, new schools, new programs; and using before and after-school and inter-session activities as times for ensuring generalization and enrichment of such learning.

- *Early after a problem arises.* Stated simply, every student problem represents a need and an opportunity for learning – and often what needs to be learned falls into the social-emotional arena. A theme throughout this volume has been that, whatever the first response, the second response to such problems should be a focus on promoting personal and social growth.

Exhibit: **Examples of *Natural* Opportunities at School
to Promote Social-Emotional Development**

I. *Using Natural Daily Opportunities*

    A. In the classroom (e.g., as students relate to each other and to staff during class and group instruction; as essential aspects of cooperative learning and peer sharing and tutoring; as one facet of addressing interpersonal and learning problems)

    B. School-wide (e.g., providing roles for all students to be positive helpers and leaders throughout the school and community; engaging students in strategies to enhance a caring, supportive, and safe school climate; as essential aspects of conflict resolution and crisis prevention)

II. *In Response to Yearly Patterns* – Schools have a yearly rhythm, changing with the cycle and demands of the school calendar. The following are examples of monthly themes the Center has developed for schools to draw upon and go beyond. The idea is to establish focal points for minimizing potential problems and pursuing natural opportunities to promote social-emotional learning.

        September – *Getting off to a Good Start*
        October – *Enabling School Adjustment*
        November – *Responding to Referrals in Ways That Can "Stem the Tide"*
        December – *Re-engaging Students: Using a student's time off in ways that pay off!*
        January – *New Year's Resolutions — A Time for Renewal; A New Start for Everyone*
        February – *The Mid-Point of a School Year - Report Cards & Conferences: Another Barrier or a Challenging Opportunity*
        March – *Reducing Stress; Preventing Burnout*
        April – *Spring Can Be a High Risk Time for Students*
        May – *Time to Help Students and Families Plan Successful Transitions to a New Grade or School*
        June – *Summer and the Living Aint Easy*
        July – *Using "Down Time" to Plan Better Ways to Work Together in Providing Learning Supports*
        August – *Now is the Time to Develop Ways to Avoid Burnout*

III. *During Transitions*

    A. Daily (e.g., capturing opportunities before school, during breaks, lunch, afterschool)

    B. Newcomers (e.g., as part of welcoming and social support processes; in addressing school adjustment difficulties)

    C. Grade-to-grade (e.g., preparing students for the next year; addressing adjustment difficulties as the year begins)

IV. *At the First Indication that a Student is Experiencing Problems* – Enhancing social and emotional functioning is a natural focus of early-after-onset interventions for learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

  *Resources related to all the above are online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Enhancing Positive Youth Development is a Natural Focus for Schools, Homes, and Communities to Work Together

As Damon (2004) states:

> In education, ...it is now widely recognized that children require multiple opportunities to learn, spread throughout the entire spectrum of their lives, if they are to become highly motivated students. ... For children to bring themselves to the academic task of acquiring intellectual competencies, children need encouragement from parent, from other adults, from peers, indeed from all the important people in their lives. Multiple positive social influences are required for an optimal learning environment. Good teaching is essential, but the teachers' agenda must find support from the community if it is to take.

Those concerned with bettering the lot of youngsters share common purpose – development of strategies focused on benefitting youngsters, families, and neighborhoods. Across the country a dialogue has begun about how schools, home, and communities can collaborate to enhance efforts to both promote youth development and address barriers to development and learning (see Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011).

The need is for a strong commitment for improving those environments and systems that affect how well youngsters flourish. This involves ensuring availability and access to essential resources. And it requires interventions that directly (a) facilitate positive growth, development, and learning and (b) minimize factors that interfere with such growth, development, and learning.

From a psychological perspective, a specific focus is on

- enhancing caring and supportive environments at home, in school, and in the community in ways that promote positive feelings of competence, connectedness, and self-determination and minimize threats to such feelings;

- clarifying and communicating norms about appropriate and inappropriate behavior (including clarity about rules, appropriate rule enforcement, positive supports and feedback for appropriate behavior; campaigns against inappropriate behavior).

More generally, schools, homes, and communities need to collaborate to deal with four central policy concerns:
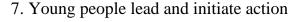
(1) **Coalescing resources** in the best interests of youngsters, families, schools, neighborhoods, and society. This requires (a) restructuring what schools allocate to address extrinsic and intrinsic barriers, (b) weaving these resources together with whatever the community can bring to the table, and (c) using the total package to strengthen families and neighborhoods. Paralleling this is the need to ensure cohesive use of youth development resources, and when appropriate, these should be combined with what exists to address barriers.

(2) **Decreasing marginalization**. Efforts to promote healthy development and address barriers are marginalized in policy and practice. This is true at schools and in communities. Such marginalization contributes to scarcity and fragmentation. It will take the united effort of all advocates for youth to alter this state of affairs.

(**3**) **Countering a squeaky wheel bias.** Policy makers continue to respond to what the most powerful advocates delineate as the most pressing needs. The result is policy that is reactive and often piecemeal. Budget cuts exacerbate this tendency. A comprehensive and balanced approach to promoting youth development and addressing barriers to learning requires countering this trend.

(4) Deploying enough resources to build capacity for effective school, home, and community collaboration. Too often, stakeholders are expected to collaborate effectively without essential preparation, clearly delineated functions, well-designed infrastructure, and resources. Based on how often collaborative efforts bear too little fruit, it should be evident that *effective* school, home, and community collaboration requires dedicated capacity building.

A Note About Youth Involvement in School, Home, Community Collaboration

Special mention is warranted about viewing youth as motivated, capable, and constructive agents in their own development (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2009). Youth participation in planning and policy may take the form of (1) bringing youth to the table of an established "adult" organization (e.g., providing input as consumers and clients, representing the voice of youth as a group participant, assuming a leadership role at the table), (2) youth establishing and operating their own organization, or (3) creating a new organization where youth and adults collaborate as equals. Hart (1997) conceptualizes types of participation as a ladder with the bottom three rungs (1-3) described as not true participation. Briefly, these are the rungs of Hart's ladder – from the top rung (#8) down:

8. Young people and adults share decision making

7. Young people lead and initiate action

6. Adult initiated, shared decision with youth

5. Young people are consulted and informed

4. Young people are assigned and informed

3. Young people are tokenized

2. Young people are decoration

1. Young people are manipulated

It should be noted that there is debate over which of the top rungs actually is the most meaningful form of participation. Some argue that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without adult influence (e.g., although adults may be involved in a supportive role). Others argue that shared decision making is the most beneficial form for both youth and adults as long as there is a generational power balance.

In general, as Larson (2006) stresses:

The challenge ... is to support and enable youth to control and motivate themselves. ... Numerous studies have found that under the right conditions,

people become intrinsically motivated by challenging tasks; they become personally engaged. Evidence also shows that they learn more effectively when they are intrinsically motivated, or when they have internalized a learning goal. ... People are most motivated to take on challenges when they experience ownership of what they are doing.... Young people have a built-in motivational system that has enormous potential to engage youth in positive development. But daily life presents an obstacle course of situations and conditions that can keep that system turned off, or only partly engaged. ... A focus of positive development is to determine how to provide more opportunities for this motivational system to be activated. ... Adults who are over-controlling undermine motivation and learning; adults are most effective when they support youths' experience of ownership and agency.... Within the day to day practice of working with youth, adults can experience tension in many forms:

>When to set firm boundaries and when to be flexible
>When to support a youth's goals and when to challenge them
>How to grant youth choice and autonomy without putting them at risk
>When to listen and be empathic and when to give one's own point of view
>When to let youth learn from mistakes...

Current thinking provides a variety of working models for youth-adult interactions that can achieve this balancing youth agency with adult input. ... In the model of instrumental scaffolding, someone with expertise furnishes a novice with suggestions, cues, modeling, or clarifications that help the novice direct his or her attention to key elements in a learning problem. The expert does not directly teach or impose structure, but rather provides these aids, as needed, adjusting them to the ability level of the novice and supporting the novice in going the next step.

About Principles for Positive Youth Development

Various groups have advanced sets of principles of positive youth development. One example of the many offered on the internet can be accessed from *Find Youth Info*. (See http://findyouthinfo.gov/topic_pyd_principles.shtml .)

What follows here is an exceptional list enumerated by Bronfenbrenner and White (1993) that is less often referenced. By way of introduction, Bronfenbrenner and White note:

Where we can make a difference is through influencing child development at the most fundamental level through nurturing the strength of families, schools, neighborhoods, religions and community organizations that come into closest contact with young people. A substantial and growing body of research both in developed and developing countries has identified those elements in a child's environment which can positively influence his or her development. These elements can be summarized in the series of principles below.

I. *"Being There"* – First and foremost, to make possible their intellectual, emotional, social and moral development, children, adolescents and youth need to have adults in their lives.   – but *being there* is not enough

II: *Affection* – Development is enhanced through the formation of enduring affectional relationships between young people and the adults in their lives.   – but *love* is not enough, nor can it be produced to order. For love to develop requires other principles.

III: *Activity* – There must be some form of continuing action that both parties engage in together.   – but *doing things* together is not enough

IV: *Reciprocity* – To a significant extent, the activity must be reciprocal, with the actions of each party being responsive to the actions of the other. Purely one-way processes do little to foster development.   – but *reciprocity* is not enough

V: *Challenge* – In order to foster development, the reciprocal activity must provide the possibility, over time, of becoming progressively more complex. Purely repetitive activities may help sustain development (and that's important) but they can do little to advance it.   – but *challenge* is not enough

VI: *Stability and Continuity* – In order for development to occur, activities must take place on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Activities which occur only occasionally, or are conducted in settings where they are frequently interrupted or soon discontinued, do not permit human development to occur. It takes time for relationships and activities to work their magic.   – but *stability and continuity* is not enough.

VII: *The Developmental Power of Parents* – Especially during childhood and adolescence, the activities and relationships that are most powerful in fostering, sustaining or undermining development are those that occur with parents. This special power of parents derives from their usually strong emotional ties with their children, and with each other. In addition, family members have come to know each other well as a result of having typically lived together over an extended period of time. As a result of both of these circumstances, they are likely to be more motivated and effective than other adults in responding to the needs of their children.   – but *parents* are not the only important agents of children's development.

VIII: *The Developmental Power of Adults Outside the Family* – Adults outside the family play a key role in the development of the young by supplementing, enhancing, or substituting for primary contribution made by parents. For this reason, their involvement is especially important in programs designed for children or youth with special problems.
   – but *adults* are not the only important agents in children's development.

IX: *The Developmental Power of Peers* – The development of competence and character during the formative years also requires engagement in joint activities with age-mates and with children who are younger and older. However, a constructive outcome of such experiences depends on a delicate balance between freedom from, and involvement and monitoring by, adults.   – but *activities* with peers are not the only ones that matter; there must also be activities for people.

X: *The Developmental Importance of Altruistic Activities* – In order to function effectively in adult roles, it is essential for the young to develop both the sensitivity and the motivation to be responsive to the needs of others. Although the development of such qualities is furthered by examples provided by parents and other persons in the child's life, having good role models is not enough. There must be actual experience in doing things for others in response to recognized needs.   – but *doing things with others is not*

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enough; some other kinds of activities are also necessary

XI: *Activities with Objects, Symbols and Ideas* – In order to function effectively in adult roles, it is essential for the young to develop knowledge and skill in working with symbols, objects and ideas. Such experience cannot wait for, or be confined to, school learning but must occur from early on in the home and other settings, and involve a wide variety of activities, both formal and informal (i.e., play, hobbies, music, sports).

XII: *The Importance of Linkages Between Settings* – For developmental processes to function effectively, there must be communication and cooperation between the various settings in which children and their families live their lives. The most important of these settings are the home, health care services, child care and preschool programs, schools, child and adolescent peer groups, neighborhoods and, especially, the world of work.

Concluding Comments

Clearly, considerable attention is being paid to enhancing efforts to promote youth development. Equally evident, there is a great deal to be done to improve what is taking place.

The current norm related to efforts to improve policy and practice is for a vast sea of advocates to compete for the same dwindling resources. This includes advocates representing different professional practitioner groups within schools and from the community. Naturally, all such advocates want to advance their agenda. And, to do so, the temptation usually is to keep the agenda rather specific and narrow. Politically, this makes some sense. But in the long-run, it tends to be counterproductive in that it fosters piecemeal, fragmented, redundant policies and practices, inappropriate competition, and inadequate results.

In moving forward, it is essential to remember that, for public education, a youth development agenda by itself is too narrow to fit into the broad mission of schools in our society and is inadequate for enabling equity of opportunity for all to succeed at school. Furthermore, in working with schools, the trend has been to fund projects and pilots. This results in a few islands of excellence (demonstrations, pilots) and "Cadillac models," but with over 90,000 schools in the U.S.A., the scale of need demands moving quickly in fundamentally new directions.

Most people understand the value of strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. Now is the time to move forward together to make it happen equitably. The opportunity currently is to weave school-owned resources and community resources (including home and youth) together to develop comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive systems that fully encompass a continuum of interventions for (a) promoting youth development *and* (b) addressing factors that interfere with such development.

> *The call is for a significant shift in policies associated with public education and public health.*

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For additional references on Positive Youth Development, go to:

>*FindYouthInfo.gov* – a U.S. government website – http://findyouthinfo.gov/topic_pyd_references.shtml

>the UCLA Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on Youth Development -- http://smhp.psych.ucla.smhp/qf/youthdev.htm

Other UCLA online clearinghouse Quick Finds contain ready access to resources relevant to the topics discussed – see menu of topics at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm

Note: For more information on the national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA and its many resources, go to the website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu . The center at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 Phone: (310) 825-3634. Email: smhp@ucla.edu .

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(Online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/yd.pdf)

If this was forwarded to you, you can receive future resources from the Center at UCLA directly by sending an email to smhp@ucla.edu to provide us with your contact information.

Late again! Don't you know what time we begin school?

Nope: it's always started by the time I get here.