

Developments on a Study of Positive Youth Development Among High School Students

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Youth-Nex Work-in-Progress Meeting
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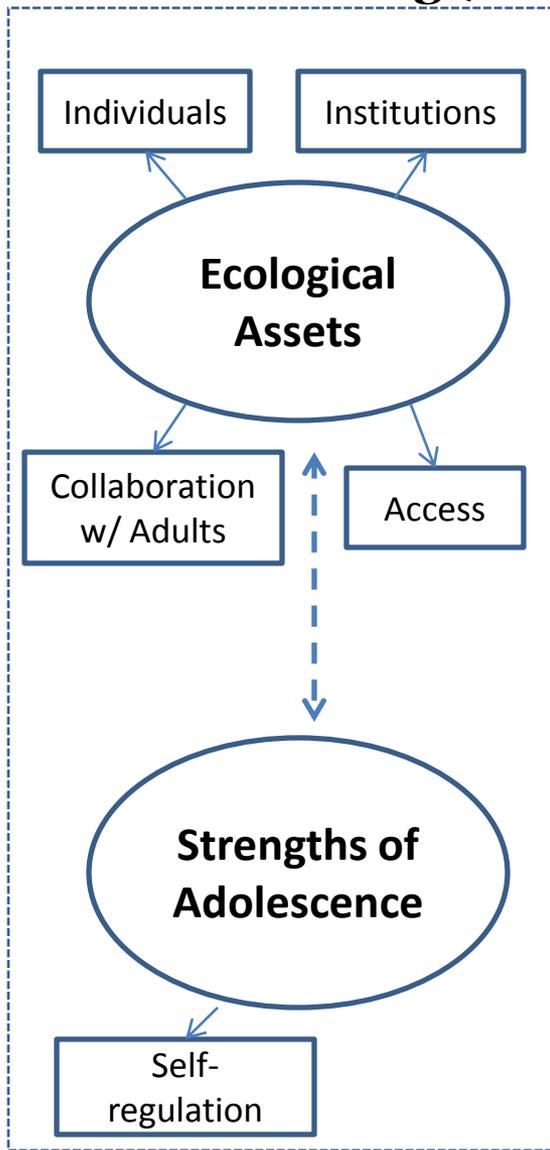


Positive Youth Development

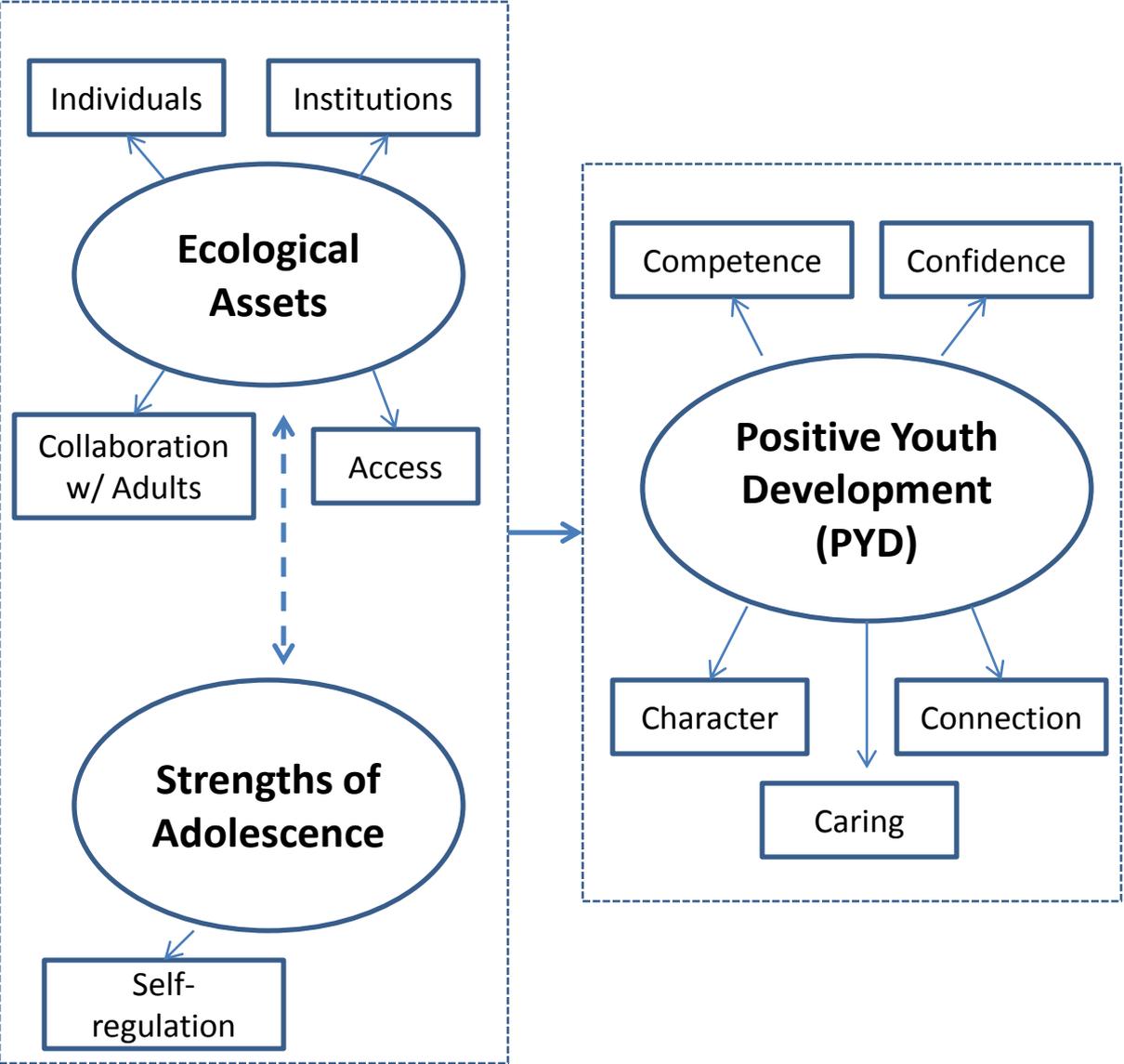
- Strengths-based approach
- Emphasis on individual $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ context relations that promote *thriving*
 - Emergence of strengths; trajectory towards contribution to society
- Shifts away from prevention-only focus
 - i.e., “thriving” is not simply the absence of problems

• Lerner, et al., 2010; Lerner, et al., 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003

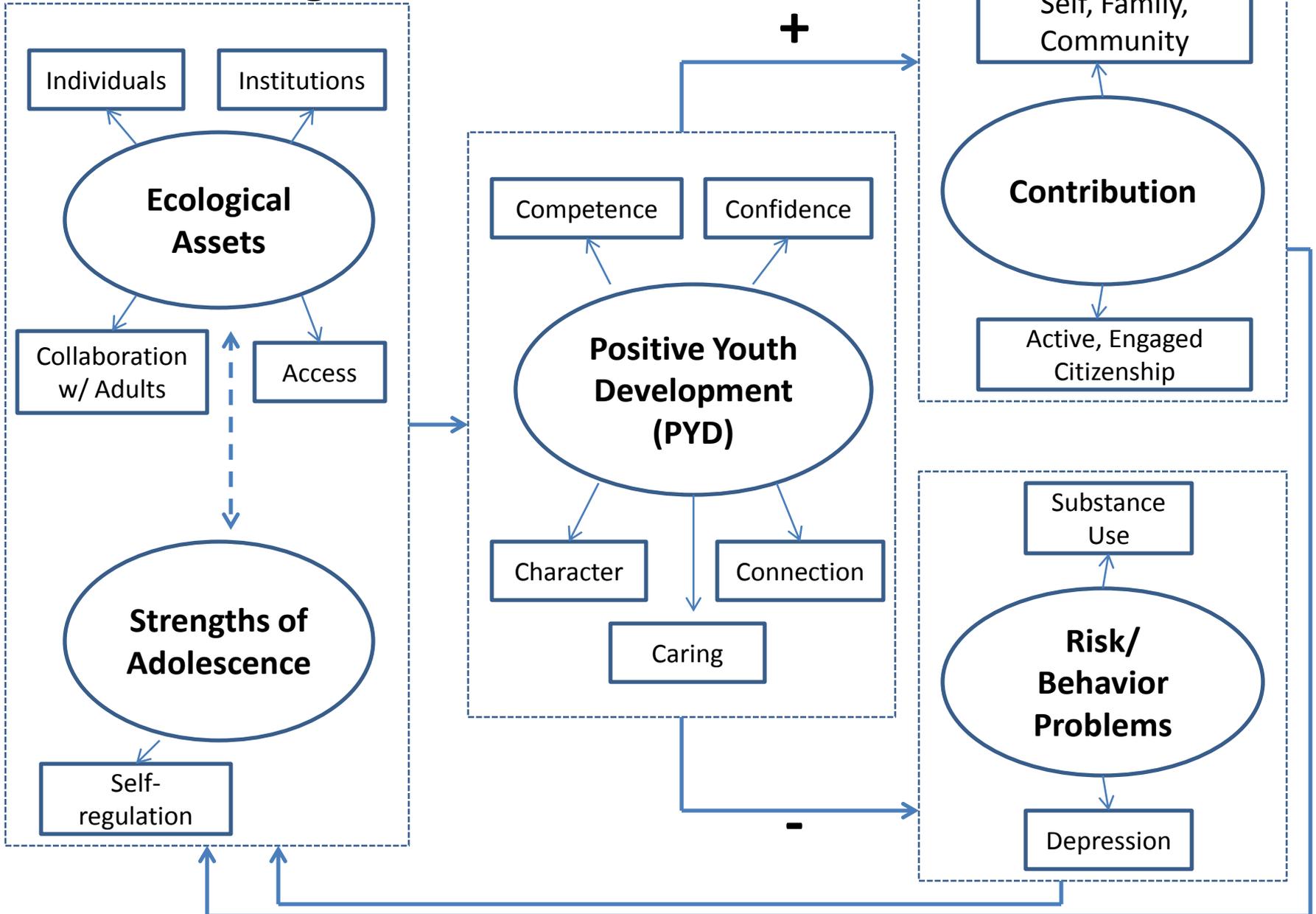
Developmental Systems theory-based model of thriving (Lerner, et al., 2010)



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Positive Youth Development

- Policy Implications:
 - Every youth has the potential for healthy, positive development
 - Emphasis is on developing programs and contexts that promote thriving rather than a strict focus on preventing problem behavior
 - Out-of-school programs as optimal sites for PYD

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- Youth Roundtables Program
 - Emphasis on **Intergroup Dialogue**: students trained to facilitate dialogues with others (peers, parents, community members)
 - Led by 3 adults from a CBO
- Program Goals
 - Train youth to facilitate intergroup dialogues
 - Develop youths' communication skills
 - Foster understanding of social justice issues
 - Provide leadership opportunities and space for youths' voices

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- Goals of current project:
 - Understand Youth Roundtables as a “PYD” program that promotes thriving
 - What ecological assets are present?
 - How are 5 C’s manifested?
 - Is there evidence of contribution?
 - Do Roundtables participants have greater increases over time in 5C’s, empathy for other groups, and communication skills compared to non-participants?

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- **Methods:**
 - Interviews with current participants (May & Nov) & adult facilitators
 - 14 interviews with 11 youth (1 int. with 2 adults)
 - Types of Questions
 - Observations during program meetings

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- Who is at the (round) table?
 - High school students (12-15 per meeting):
 - Male & Female
 - Predominantly Black & White (reflects HS population)
 - Diversity in school involvement, academic standing, SES
 - 3 Adult facilitators from CBO

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- A “typical” day at the program:
 - Physical Space
 - Energy
 - Late arrivals
 - Snack
- Check-in
- Business
 - Agenda
 - Planning

Youth Roundtable Meetings

Dialogue

Students participate in adult-led IGDs on youth-generated topics

Youth Roundtable Meetings

Dialogue

Training

Students are taught
to be facilitators in
structured trainings

Youth Roundtable Meetings

Dialogue

Training

Hybrid

Students practice
facilitating
discussions with
adult and youth
feedback

PYD in the Culture & Climate

Character

- Trust
- Respect

Connection

- Family Atmosphere
- Relationship Building

Competence

- Interpersonal Skills
- Facilitation Skills

Confidence

- Empowerment

Caring/ Contribution

- Future Involvement
- Life Direction

Youth Roundtables: A PYD Program

- Analysis of interview data
 - 1. Descriptive “start codes” from Lerner, et al., model (e.g., 5 C’s)
 - 2. Identification of common themes/patterns within each start code
 - Preliminary stages of coding
- Select results:
 - Ecological assets: Role of adults in program
 - Two of the Five C’s: Character & Competence
 - Contribution

Ecological Assets

- **Supportive Adults**

- **Respect:** “they treat us in a more equal standing”
- **Caring:** “they ask you your opinion and actually cared”
- **Family:** “they’ve treated us like family”
- **Involvement in outside lives:** “if they ever think there is a problem, they ask”
- **Scaffolding:** “they know how to let us go out on our own limb and test things with each other”
- **Modeling:** “they have the weight of all this incredible experience”

...they have been there for me outside of Youth Roundtables in a greater capacity. There was a point in time where I was going through some difficulties and they actually came to my house; they spoke with my mother, they spoke with me and they actually helped us work through that.

-African American Male, gr. 12

I never had someone put me on the spot and say, “what is your opinion on this, or your opinion on that?” ...like teachers if you’re quiet in the building they don’t say, “How do you feel about this?” They just let you sit back and be quiet. ...[The Youth Roundtables Leaders] ask you your opinion and actually cared. It wasn’t asking your opinion just because you sat there all the time.

-African American female, gr. 12

I see them as my three other mothers, you know. They're really great. At times, it's like they give us wisdom from their experiences. And it's like a parent passing down what they know to their child, and that's really great because that's the relationship really. It's a respectful relationship on both sides. They respect us; we respect them. And it's really cool because they're great people. They really are. And they come from different walks of life themselves, just like us. And they impart what they have to say to us, and it's really a beautiful thing to see, you know.

-Black/Multiethnic male, Grade 12

The Five C's

- **Competence:**
 - “Positive view of one’s actions in domain-specific areas, including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational” (Lerner, et al., 2005)

The Five C's

- **Competence:** Primarily social competence
 - **Conflict resolution:** “...much easier to make people who are having an argument look at each other and realize what is going on”
 - **Giving voice to own perspective:** “in school it helps in discussions where you’re supposed to represent your side”
 - **Discussing social issues:** “it was really fun to talk about immigration laws”
 - **Diplomacy & Open-mindedness**
 - **Group facilitation skills**

I feel like I'm open-minded, but I also make snap judgments of people and I feel Youth Roundtables has really helped me to like, I still make that snap judgment sometimes, but I'm always ready to revise it which I think is really important. White female, gr. 12

It really helped because they took time to teach us how to deal with people who do think differently than you and that there are people who do think differently than you and that doesn't make them wrong.

–White male, gr. 10

And I've learned since being in there to calmly just ask them questions, "Well, why do you feel that way?" Or you can't really say that, just respect their opinion, regardless of how much I disagree with it, and then talk about how I feel about it.

–African American male, gr. 12

...to be in control of a large group of people knowing that you have to give everybody a bit of space to kind of explore and kind of develop what it is they are thinking and feeling, but at the same time be able to keep things controlled to the point where everybody shares something and positively benefits from the experience without stifling anyone else... after you've facilitated a discussion and you realize that you're sixteen or seventeen and you've just facilitated a discussion full of twenty, thirty, sometimes and forty and upwards adults, and it feels good. You walk away with quite a bit.

-African American male, grade 12

The Five C's

- **Character:**
 - “Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.” (Lerner, et al., 2005)

The Five C's

- **Character:**

- **Respecting others:** *“...it becomes a habit that we respect each other when we talk. And it's powerful.”*
- **Being a better person:** *“Youth Roundtables has taught me to be accepting of myself and others and just be the best that I can be.”*
- **Adhering to group rules:** *“We all understand what they say in the club is what they say in the club and no where else so we take that very seriously with one another”*

In this room you don't have, necessarily, arguments; you might disagree with something, but you talk about it in a mature way and in a way that you are still respecting their opinions but just disagreeing with it, and so it's an environment in which you're actually really talking to someone, understanding where they're coming from. You might not agree with it, but you still understand it and respect it.

-African American male, grade 12

Freshman year, I was almost to a point, I would say I was becoming kind of ignorant. If something would happen in the lunch line I'd just be like, "Those people," or it didn't matter who they were. I'd just be like, "Oh God, they're terrible people," no matter who they were... It was everybody... I think this group kind of reminded me that everybody's a person and that we've all had experiences. That's just something that I have to constantly remind myself of because I've had anger issues in the past for sure.

-White male, grade 12

It totally changed my thought process. I mean, like, a confession is, I mean, I was a very strong conservative because that's, I mean, my background. My dad instilled that to us, as a kid growing up. And when I came to the group, I wouldn't say that I'm not conservative anymore, but I'm a conservative with views of how the other side thinks, liberal views. I understand – I'm not so much, "Oh, they're dumb." I say now, "Oh, okay, that's different from what I'm saying, but I respect that." And a lot of what Youth Roundtables did was show – it forced you to have respect to the point where it becomes a habit.

-Black/Multiethnic male, grade 12

The Sixth C

- **Contribution:**

- “...on a life trajectory towards an ‘idealized adulthood’... marked by integrated and mutually reinforcing contributions to self... and to family, community, and the institutions of civil society” (Lerner, et al., 2010)

The Sixth C

- **Contribution**

- **Active, engaged citizens:** *“we are bound by our desire to bring forth change and help others”*
- **Contribution to community and institutions:** *“Sometimes we’ll go into classrooms, which is really cool... we get to impact the kids in our school”*
- **Future aspirations:** *“I hope to inspire. That’s definitely something that I love to do.”*

It's really important for me to feel like I'm doing something about the problems I've seen in the world and people are always are like 'well you just sit around and talk,' but like whenever I'm [at Youth Roundtables] I feel like I'm doing something concrete about the issues at this school.

-White female, grade 12

...we're teenagers and [adults] always think teenagers don't know anything or haven't learned yet. So for us to go and give a dialogue and have adults who wouldn't sit down and talk about stuff like this, it's kind of like a shocker to them...

*-African American female,
grade 12*

we've got a cause that we can actually; again, I don't know enough about [other school clubs] to say that they don't actually contribute to helping their cause. I know we have. I know that we can and we've inspired people to do so.

-White male, grade 12

Final thoughts from teens...

- *“Youth Roundtable is just **a wonderful experience in my life**. You may not be like the best at what you are, but you learn how to be the best of yourself. You don’t have to be perfect... you come as you are and that’s all that really matters. I love Youth Roundtables.”*
- *“it’s definitely been some of **my best spent hours and days and moments of my life** and there’s never been a day that I’ve come to Youth Roundtables that I regret it”*
- *“I mean, I like to think of it as **like a castle**. Once you get past those walls, the outside world, the way they conduct things and arguments and just everything that goes on is different when you step inside those walls. It's just like a **different kingdom**, in a sense, I guess. It's totally different”*

Summary

- Youth Roundtables as a context that promotes thriving:
 - Ecological assets
 - Emergence of the 5 C's
 - Evidence of contribution

Limitations

- Interviews generally reflect youth with high levels of participation who really enjoy the program
- Sample size
- Selection vs. socialization
- PYD models assumes youth-context alignment; still missing perspective of what youth are bringing to the table
- No info on risk behavior

Audience Feedback

- Ideas about additional qualitative data collection
 - What else should we be asking youth and/or adults?
 - Who else should we be talking to? (e.g., non-program participants)
 - What other sources of information should we consider? (e.g., facilitated sessions, exit essays)
- Ideas about analysis
 - Other interpretations we're not considering?

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Ecological Assets

- Group Norms
 - Supportive
 - Welcoming, Open
 - Safe, Trusting
 - Flexible
- Intergroup Interactions
 - Everyone is different; no cliques
 - Getting to hear different sides
 - Pushing back against stereotypes