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Transforming Schools through Positive Youth Development

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Abstract

Many of our schools in the United States are struggling to produce high school graduates due to many challenges such as poverty, lack of community support, drug and crime stricken areas, disengagement of youth, and the list goes on. Educational reform is necessary and crucial at this time in order to lessen the achievement gap. Although some policies, such as No Child Left Behind, have made some headway into reform, greater change is needed. I propose that educational policy needs to implement a positive youth development approach. Research has shown that PYD practices have the power to transform some of the worst schools into vibrant, successful schools. My thesis is based on a case study that analyzes how five schools transformed themselves with PYD methods and will determine if they can serve as models to other schools. The goal of this paper is to uncover the challenges of reform and policymaking while measuring the effectiveness of positive youth development strategies.

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Introduction

The United States invests billions of dollars into public education every year but the system still struggles to produce a strong backbone of educated adolescents. It is estimated that one million students drop out of high school annually, which is about 7,000 drop-outs every school day (Inglee). The main reasons why students fail to complete high school are due to: "lack of parental support or encouragement, teen pregnancy, missing too many school days, failing class, suffering from depression, a lack of interest, and being bullied" (Inglee). These factors are major obstacles for educators, school administrators, policy makers, and communities. High dropout rates are also detrimental to the economy and have cumulatively astounding costs. Students who don't graduate earn far less income than those who do, are more likely to use government assistance programs, and have a greater chance of being involved in the criminal justice system. The Alliance for Excellent Education states that, "Unless high schools are able to graduate their students at higher rates, nearly 12 million students will likely drop out over the next decade, resulting in a loss to the nation of $1.5 trillion." Henry Levin, a professor of economics and education at Columbia University, also reported that,

> "When the costs of investment to produce a new graduate are taken into account, there is a return of $1.45 to $3.55 for every dollar of investment…this is a benefit to the public of nearly $90 billion for each year of success in reducing the number of high school dropouts by 700,000 — or something close to $1 trillion after 11 years."

The United States is now ranked No. 21 in high school completion compared to other countries, whereas the nation had the highest rate of graduation in 1970 (Levin). Although the federal government has attempted to address these issues through funding initiatives and policies, such as No Child Left Behind, there lacks clear guidelines and directions on how to produce optimal results. However, a positive youth development framework may be able to provide the template

for building successful schools that will produce resilient, educated, and fully capable adolescents. Positive youth development is a relatively new field that focuses on fulfilling adolescents' potential by building on individual strengths and interests. This paper seeks to explore the ways in which positive youth development principles and practices can be implemented throughout schools and into educational policy. My research will address the following questions: 1) What are the most effective practices of PYD to produce successful schools? 2) How would these practices be implemented in schools; what would the model look like? 3) What are the main challenges and implications of incorporating PYD into schools that face major educational obstacles? In order to answer these questions my research will focus around comparative case studies. I will examine five public schools that have implemented positive youth development and evaluate their practices according to multiple variables. These schools are: the New Fratney School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Denali School in Fairbanks, Alaska, the Alternative Community School in Ithaca, New York, the High School Redirection in Denver, Colorado, and the Oakland Academies in Oakland, California. My research evaluations will be based upon the Developmental Assets Model, the Community-Classroom model, and several other variables in order to determine the most effective methods of implementing PYD principles and practices. My goal is to then categorize these methods and explore which practices will work best in different kinds of communities that are enduring numerous educational obstacles.

Chapter 1: Defining Positive Youth Development; The Four "P"s

Process

Before defining positive youth development, lets first discuss the term *youth development*. Although youth sometimes refers to childhood and adolescence, the term in this field is mostly applied to adolescents developing during the second decade life. Hamilton describes youth development through three different aspects which are, "a natural *process* of development, *principles*, and *practices*" (3). The natural process refers to the biological development of human beings physically, cognitively, and socially; "Optimal development in youth enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life…because they gain competence to earn a living, to engage in civic activities, to nurture others, and to participate in social relations and cultural activities" (Hamilton,3). Educators should be knowledgeable and supportive of this natural process because when adolescents develop optimally in all areas of life, they are more likely to be engaged and successful students. Schools can nurture this natural process by taking a more holistic approach that promotes optimal development in all aspects of life, as opposed to only emphasizing intellectual development and defining success solely by grades and test scores.

Principles

Youth development in terms of principles is a "philosophy or approach emphasizing active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals, organizations, and institutions, especially at the community level (4). This approach is founded on two pillars which is the inclusiveness of all youth and a positive direction embedded in building strengths. The inclusiveness of all youth means that the goal is to help *all* youth thrive, no matter their economic status, ethnicity, race, disabilities, risk factors, etc. It is important to recognize though that youth also have different needs that need to be attended to in order to thrive. The challenges

are in deciding which principles are most prevalent and which methods are best to apply when working with certain youth. For example, as we will see in the case study, schools that have distinct youth populations implement PYD principles and practices in a way that works specific to their structures.

The second pillar is based on building on strengths by fostering resiliency and confidence in youth, which is usually the best way to solve problems. "This approach has been validated by research on resilient children, that is, children who grew up under conditions that usually lead to serious problems but somehow managed to thrive"(Hamilton, 11). Research also shows that building on strengths helps to avoid the implications of the *self-fulfilling prophecy.* This is when a person's expectations of a behavior or event influences or causes it to be true. For example, "when youth are selected to participate in a program because they are at risk or enmeshed in problem behavior, selection confirms their identity as troubled. Furthermore, being thrown together with others who are also stigmatized may unintentionally reinforce undesirable behavior" (Hamilton, 11). One common feature of schools that have successfully incorporated PYD is that teachers hold high expectations of all students and avoid labeling them. The staff will encourage students and believe in their potential to be high achieving, capable adolescents even if they possess risk factors. If a teacher reinforces negative expectations of students and doesn't encourage their potentials, then the student will remain at a stagnant or declining state.

These principles differ from the perspective of past, traditional models which focused on the prevention and treatment of youth's weaknesses and deficits. As we explore this topic more, it becomes apparent that a blend of both models is necessary to achieve optimal development. However, achieving a successful balance between the two approaches can be challenging and needs to be further analyzed. My case study will explore the ways in which certain schools have a blended model of prevention and strength focus.

Practices

Lastly, youth development is also used to describe *practices* which are the application of principles to foster optimal development (4). These practices are implemented through programs, organizations, and initiatives which Hamilton distinguishes;

> "A program may be short-term or long-term. It may involve large or small numbers of youth. It is usually embedded in or sponsored by an organization. An organization is more enduring and has multiple components. Organizations typically engage youth in a range of different programs…By *initiative*, we mean a multifaceted collaborative effort to enlist the broadest possible set of people and organizations in making communities more conductive to youth development" (4-5).

M research will evaluate the effectiveness of PYD practices that can be utilized in schools, organizations, and initiatives. An analysis of successful practices in the case study communities can serve as a model to transform schools within other demographics. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on development influences the types of practices that would be implemented to support PYD. "Brofenbrenner's conception of human development suggests that development is generally promoted by engagement in activities that are regular and enduring and that are challenging in the sense of increasing in complexity as people gain competence"(Hamilton, 10-11). Schools should create classroom environments and programs that continuously give students opportunities for engagement and autonomy; there needs to be reciprocal processes. "Human beings develop through active engagement with their environment; by making choices and shaping that environment, they also direct their own development. They are more than passive recipients of external influences" (Hamilton, 15). In the case study, my research will explore the different ways that schools and programs can provide opportunities for students to be agents of their own development.

Policy

So far, the three "P"s of process, principle, and practices have been defined. However, there is a fourth "P" which is policy. The youth development movement has aimed to shape policy by influencing organizations and the government to take actions that will incorporate the principles and practices of youth development. Analyzing policy development and implementation in organizations will also help create models for policy implementation in schools. *In what ways are policies influential on the outcomes of success or failure of a program, organization, etc.?*

> "Policies tell employees, volunteers, and youth what behaviors are and are not acceptable within the setting and can set the tone for the organization's climate. Policies provide guidance on what kind of place the organization desires to be for its members by specifying rules of conduct, member rights, and the basis for rewards and sanctions. Policies are also essential to protect the organization and its staff and youth's safety and confidentiality" (Shinn, 185).

Past educational policies lacked to produce the outcomes that many schools need and PYD strategies may be part of the solution to boost effective results. For example, let's review the 2002 federal policy, Under No Child Left Behind. Although this act mandated higher educational standards and higher levels of accountability for improved performance, its' real world application methods were limited. One of the main problems that Weinstein identified is that the NLCB policy and research literature differed on their views of expectancy effects and the theory for setting change (81). The NCLB "targeted low academic expectations in schooling as the root for cause of the achievement gap—a gap that disadvantages poor, ethnic, and linguistic minority and special needs children…in sharp contrast to the policy world, contested research literature…has concluded that educational expectancy effects are typically small and

teacher expectations for students are largely accurate"(Weinstein,81). This means that the policy fails to address the multiple pathways and layers of expectancy effects. The way that NCLB policy measures academic success of students fails to consider the complex state of conditions for student learning. In order to change conditions for learning, "setting members need to understand these dynamics of self-fulfilling prophecies and to work collaboratively as well as continuously to strengthen policies, institutional practices, and services so that positive expectations are *fully* actualized in their setting" (82). In the case study, I will examine different expectancy interventions that are not a "one-size-fits all" interventions, like the NCLB, but rather context specific classroom/school setting interventions that actualize positive expectations. A more ecological perspective needs to be incorporated into policy that is "sensitive to the local conditions, systemic features, and capacity building" (Shinn, 97).

The Policy Attributes Theory is useful for helping scholars and practitioners understand and study the success and failures of comprehensive school-wide reforms. This theory will be utilized in the case study to analyze the central features that are necessary for successful policy implementation. These six necessary features are: (a) consistency, (b) specificity, (c) authority, (d) power, (e) stability, and (f) comprehensiveness (Shinn, 152). My research will explore how these features relate to the effectiveness of implementing PYD strategies within schools.

Chapter 2: PYD Theories and Concepts

In order to better understand positive youth development it is important to gain a psychological perspective. This next part will be a discussion on the history and progression of the field and how the principles of PYD developed. In the past, the problem-centered model was the dominant approach that focused only on the deficits and problems of youth. This type of approach originated from a criminal justice model, which emphasized punishment over prevention, and from a mental-health model created by child psychoanalysts which solely focused on remedying the incapacities of youth (Damon, 3). These types of approaches have had negative impacts on the way that youth is viewed in society; "youth is seen as a period fraught with hazards, and many young people are seen as potential problems that must be straightened out before they can do serious harm to themselves or to others (3). The media has especially adopted this perspective and youth are too commonly portrayed in a negative fashion which influences the way society view s adolescents. Stereotypes and stigmas are reinforced such as youth being lazy, unconcerned with the well-being of their communities, deviant, etc.

> "Since the media plays an important role in creating public opinion and in turn in *creating policy* and laws, negative media hype about young people can have serious consequences. Negative media stereotypes can alienate young people from the rest of society and lead to unfair discrimination" (Mason, 1).

The negative impacts of biased media portrayal and a problem-centered youth approach presents a major challenge to producing an effective education system. If society and local communities view youth negatively, they are less likely to be supportive of school and youth programs. One of the main contributing factors to successful schools is supportive communities created through positive community-youth interactions; this will be further discussed in later chapters.

As a reaction to these types of distorted perspectives, the positive youth development approach developed during the past decade to promote a more positive vision of young adolescents (Damon, 15). The PYD approach views youth as important resources and focuses on

potential over incapacities; “it 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” (15).

In the mid-1990’s, a universal model of youth development was created at the Search Institute in Minnesota by Benson and his colleagues. The “Developmental Assets Model” includes internal and external attributes that focus on strengthening youth by maximizing their potentials and resiliency. Damon states, “The agenda is to maximize this potential, not only as an essential and in itself but also as a means of preempting any self-destructive or antisocial tendencies that can rise when there is a vacuum of positive activity” (17). This model focuses on building skills and creating resources that youth need to become productive members of society and make positive contributions. This is an important aspect of positive youth development that needs to be emphasized and distinguished from prevention approaches. Prevention methods to reduce risky behavior do not fully encompass the aims of PYD because these practices don’t exactly promote or build upon youths’ potentials. Benson states,

> “Preventing a problem from occurring does not guarantee that youth are being provided with the assets they need for developing in a positive manner. Even if prevention efforts were completely successful, it is not the case that ‘problem-free means prepared’; that is, preventing problems among youth people does not mean that they are capable of making positive, healthy contributions to family, community, and civil society”(Damon,18).

Therefore, schools need to incorporate programs and create classroom environments that focus on fulfilling youths’ potential, as opposed to solely directing attention to risk factors and prevention. Successful schools have found ways to implement the Development Assets Model into their practices, which will be analyzed in the case study. The assets are divided into eight categories which serve as the foundation of PYD goals. The four internal categories are: 1)

Support, 2) Empowerment, 3) Boundaries and Expectations, 4) Constructive Use of Time and the external categories are 5) Commitment to Learning, 6) Positive Values, 7) Social Competencies, and 8) Positive Identity (Hamilton, 18). Table 2.1 lists the forty assets in further detail and shows how the community, family, and school are multifaceted systems that interact with youth and have immense influential power over their development.

Another formula that is used to guide the process and goals of PYD is the "Five Cs": competence, character, connections, confidence, and contribution (Hamilton, 6).

> "*Competence* includes knowledge and skills that enable a person to function more effectively to understand and act on the environment…*Character* is what makes a person intend to do what is just, right, and good. *Connections* refer to social relations, especially with adults, but also with peers and children. *Confidence* is the assuredness a person needs to act effectively…*Contribution* means that a person uses these other attributes not only for self-centered purposes but also to give to others" (Hamilton, 6).

As my research looks at schools that have implemented PYD, it will examine how these attributes enhance the growth of students. The "Five Cs" formula is a brief description of PYD goals and a more comprehensive list, labeled as *personal and social assets*, was created by the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Table 2.2, designed by the National Research Council, summarizes the importance of these assets in adolescents lives. These types of models researched by the National Research Council have found that "the more of these assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risky behavior…and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors" (Hamilton, 9).

Table 2. 1 (Hamilton,18)

External Assets	Support	1. **Family support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. **Positive family communication**—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. 3. **Other adult relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. 4. **Caring neighborhood**—Young person experiences caring neighbors. 5. **Caring school climate**—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. **Parent involvement in schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	Empowerment	7. **Community values youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. 8. **Youth as resources**—Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. **Service to others**—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. **Safety**—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
	Boundaries & Expectations	11. **Family boundaries**—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. 12. **School Boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. **Neighborhood boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. 14. **Adult role models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. 15. **Positive peer influence**—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. 16. **High expectations**—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
	Constructive Use of Time	17. **Creative activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. 18. **Youth programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. 19. **Religious community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. 20. **Time at home**—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
Internal Assets	Commitment to Learning	21. **Achievement Motivation**—Young person is motivated to do well in school. 22. **School Engagement**—Young person is actively engaged in learning. 23. **Homework**—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. 24. **Bonding to school**—Young person cares about her or his school. 25. **Reading for Pleasure**—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	Positive Values	26. **Caring**—Young person places high value on helping other people. 27. **Equality and social justice**—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. 28. **Integrity**—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. 29. **Honesty**—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." 30. **Responsibility**—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. 31. **Restraint**—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	Social Competencies	32. **Planning and decision making**—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. 33. **Interpersonal Competence**—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. 34. **Cultural Competence**—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. 35. **Resistance skills**—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. 36. **Peaceful conflict resolution**—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
	Positive Identity	37. **Personal power**—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." 38. **Self-esteem**—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. 39. **Sense of purpose**—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." 40. **Positive view of personal future**—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Table 2.2 (National Research Council)

Personal and Social Assets That Facilitate Positive Youth Development

Possessing a set of personal and social assets increases the healthy development and well-being of adolescents and facilitates a successful transition from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood.

Physical development

- Good health habits
- Good health risk management skills

Intellectual development

- Knowledge of essential life skills
- Knowledge of essential vocational skills
- School success
- Rational habits of mind – critical thinking and reasoning skills
- In-depth knowledge of more than one culture
- Good decision-making skills
- Knowledge of skills needed to navigate through multiple cultural contexts

Psychological and emotional development

- Good mental health including positive self-regard
- Good emotional self-regulation skills
- Good coping skills
- Good conflict resolution skills
- Mastery motivation and positive achievement motivation
- Confidence in one's personal efficacy
- "Planfulness" – planning for the future and future life events
- Sense of personal autonomy/responsibility for self
- Optimism coupled with realism
- Coherent and positive personal and social identity
- Prosocial and culturally sensitive values
- Spirituality or a sense of a "larger" purpose in life
- Strong moral character
- A commitment to good use of time

Social development

- Connectedness – perceived good relationships and trust with parents, peers, and some other adults
- Sense of social place/integration – being connected and valued by larger social networks
- Attachment to prosocial/conventional institutions, such as school, church, nonschool youth programs
- Ability to navigate in multiple cultural contexts
- Commitment to civic engagement

Conclusions from examining the literature

- Individuals do not necessarily need the entire range of assets to thrive; in fact, various combinations of assets across domains reflect equally positive adolescent development.
- Having more assets is better than having a few. Although strong assets in one category can offset weak assets in another category, life is easier to manage if one has assets in all four domains.
- Continued exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people, as well as opportunities to gain and refine life skills, supports young people in the acquisition and growth of these assets.

From: National Research Council, 2002. Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. www.nap.edu. The report is based on an examination of theory, practical experience, and qualitative and quantitative research and data to gain as broad a perspective as possible on positive youth development. Programs that were examined targeted young people ages 10 to 18; adolescence is defined as the pivotal period between childhood and adulthood.

Patricia Thonney, Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University. March 2004.

Another aspect of PYD is *community youth development*. This concept emphasizes the importance of community in a broader context and aims to create a system that is "inclusive, internally coherent, connected to other systems, and enduring" (Hamilton, 17). One of the main factors that prevents current schools from succeeding is the lack of a communal climate or culture. *But why are schools in the current state they are in?* Smith addresses this question in *Public Schools that Work* and states that "one of the consequences of the growth of the middle class and the independence associated with it has been the deterioration of smaller human groupings and voluntary associations encountered in well-functioning communities" (7). There has been a growth of a competitive market economy that infuses norms of individualism, dependence, an achievement orientation, universalism, and specificity (8). These norms go against the principles of a community and schools have adopted a culture that coincides with our contemporary economic and political institutions. On the other hand though, these norms are not completely negative and can actually help adolescents acquire the necessary skills to thrive-such as confidence, resilience, and determination. However, there needs to be a balance of community and individualism within schools and education should be placed within a broader communal context, as Dewey hoped for. This lack of balance has detrimental effects on the quality of our education. Smith describes the current condition that many of our schools are in:

> "Children in school must furthermore learn to submit to a continuous process of evaluation by their teachers that has little to do with their relationships with others. Many come to believe that their value lies not so much in who they are as in what they can do…In healthy families, care and support derive from membership; in school this kind of concern is often denied children whose level of achievement does not meet the school's expectations or whose behavior challenges the school's authority" (9).

Positive youth development practices attempt to create a community environment that will create meaningful interactions and relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. The schools that are analyzed in the case study share common features that promote a sense of belonging among the students. The National Research Council produced a list of these features that promote the progression towards developmental goals or assets. They correspond to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and each one serves as the foundation of the next in succession. The features are: (a) Physical and Psychological Safety, (b) Appropriate Structure, (c) Supportive Relationship, (d) Opportunities to Belong, (e) Positive Social Norms, (f) Support for Efficacy and Mattering,(g) Opportunities for Skill Building, (h) Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts (Hamilton, 16). Table 2.3 describes each of these features in detail.

Notice that many of the features overlap with the developmental assets and the personal and social attributes. These lists provide a comprehensive description of positive youth development goals. Schools, organizations, and communities that want to support the optimal development of adolescents strive to create policies and programs that enhance these assets. However, as we explore different demographics in the case study, research shows that youth have different needs and interests. Therefore, feature settings will be established in different ways depending on the community and this will influence the kinds of practices and policies that are implemented.

Table 2.3 (Hamilton, 19)

Features of Positive Developmental Settings	*Descriptors*	*Opposite Poles*
Physical and Psychological Safety	Safe and health-promoting facilities; and practices that increase safe peer group interaction and decrease unsafe or confrontational peer interactions.	Physical and health, dangers; fear; feeling of insecurity; sexual and physical harassment; and verbal abuse
Appropriate Structure	Limit setting; clear and consistent rules and expectations; firm-enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries; and age-appropriate monitoring.	Chaotic; disorganized; laissez-faire; rigid; over controlled; and autocratic.
Supportive Relationships	Warmth; closeness; connectedness; good communication; caring; support; guidance; secure attachment; and responsiveness.	Cold; distant; over controlling; ambiguous support; untrustworthy; focused on winning; inattentive; unresponsive; and rejecting.
Opportunities to Belong	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement, and integration; opportunities for sociocultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence.	Exclusion; marginalization; and intergroup conflict.
Positive Social Norms	Rules of behavior; expectations; injunctions; ways of doing things; values and morals; and obligations for service.	Normlessness; anomie; laissez-faire practices; antisocial and amoral norms; norms that encourage violence; reckless behavior; consumerism; poor health practices; and conformity.
Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Youth based; empowerment practices that support autonomy; making a real difference in one's community; and being taken seriously. Practice that includes enabling, responsibility granting, and meaningful challenge. Practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels.	Unchallenging; over controlling; disempowering; and disabling. Practices that undermine motivation and desire to learn, such as excessive focus on current relative performance level rather than improvement.
Opportunities for Skill Building	Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural illiteracies, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital.	Practices that promote bad physical habits and habits of mind; and practices that undermine school and learning.
Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts	Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community.	Discordance; lack of communications; and conflict.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Previous Research

The charts provided previously will be used to guide my analysis on schools that have implemented positive youth development practices. The schools that my research will revolve around are: the New Fratney School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Denali School in Fairbanks, Alaska, the Alternative Community School in Ithaca, New York, the High School Redirection in Denver, Colorado, and the Oakland Academies in Oakland, California. My analysis will be drawn from descriptions of these schools provided by Smith in *Public Schools that Work*. I will also use examples of PYD practices that have been implemented in other schools and organizations to demonstrate their effectiveness of supporting the growth of adolescents. Then my research will look at struggling high schools in the United States and determine which positive youth development strategies are best suited to help those communities and their youth.

In order to evaluate these schools, I will be utilizing a variety of evaluation standards and measurements. My qualitative analysis on the schools will explore how their programs and practices promote the development assets, encourage the five "C"s, and establish positive developmental settings. I will also look at the contexts of school engagements such as the level of student engagement, the levels of school satisfaction, quality of student-teacher relationships, the fulfillment of community qualities, and the overall quality of school climate. The types of PYD practices implemented are dependent on the demographics of the school and community so therefore we can identify the practices as the dependent variable and the demographics as the independent variable. The diverse needs of youth will determine which practices should be utilized which will then affect the quality and levels of the analysis factors. My thesis predicts and will attempt to prove that the kinds of PYD methods implemented in the control group of schools can effectively be implemented in other schools, as long as the specific needs of youth are incorporated. This analysis should also uncover the implications and obstacles of developing and

implementing PYD practices and policy. Before performing these evaluations, I will review some past research experiments and case studies that show the significance of the relationship between the developmental assets, positive settings, and successful schools.

In Mayberry's book, *Effective Educational Environments*, she writes about the four major environmental influences that affect student learning. These areas are the groupings of students, learning climates, school facilities and size, and community environments (Mayberry, x). Studies on each of these categories provide data and enable us to measure the contexts of school in an objective manner in order to target areas of improvement.

The research on school and classroom climates has produced relatively consistent results and demonstrates that, "schools and classrooms that enhance achievement appear to be categorized by high academic expectations, effective leadership, an orderly atmosphere, and warmth, concern, and respect for others (Mayberry, 19). In *School Climate*, researchers developed eighteen climate instruments which are a collection of surveys, questionnaires, and checklists that measure climate from multiple viewpoints of student, teachers, administrators, family, and community (Freiberg, 4). In order to transform struggling schools their current conditions need to be recognized and understood. These climate instruments allow researchers to determine the level of health of a school which helps to guide a process of change and put a plan into action. Freiberg identified five questions for improving school climate:

> "(1) Start with your senses and ask yourself: How does the school look, smell, feel, and yes, taste—would I eat in the student cafeteria?
>
> (2) What direct and indirect climate measures can be used to help document and create a base-line for change?
>
> (3) What initial climate changes can we make that would have the highest visibility and be accomplished in the shortest period of time?

(4) What groups or individuals should be involved to encourage and create an environment for sustainable school climate improvements?

(5) What long term changes are needed to create a healthy environment for all members of the learning community?" (25).

These are the types of questions that positive youth development encourages us to ask. As we will see in the case study, the successful schools have asked questions like this in order to transform their climates. However, one of the major implications is deciding which climate instrument is the best to utilize in a certain school. What other questions should be asked to best gain an understanding of all parties' perspectives? When performing my case study analysis I will be making suggestions on deciding what questions to ask depending on the demographics of the school.

The next category of studies to review revolves around school satisfaction and contexts of school engagement. School satisfaction of students is one of the main markers of positive adjustment in children (Baker, 4). It is not surprising that if students are satisfied with their school climate they are more likely to be engaged and feel connected to a community. One way to increase school satisfaction is by fulfilling the three fundamental needs posited by the self-determination theory: "to be meaningfully connected to others, to have developmentally appropriate choice and self-direction, and to perceive themselves as competent in their endeavors" (4). Another way to promote school satisfaction is by having effective and positive classroom structures, goals, and practices; "tasks that provide optimal levels of challenge, feedback that is informational rather than evaluative, recognition of mastery efforts rather than relative performance, and grouping that minimizes interpersonal competition are all associated with enhanced academic motivation" (6).

One model that can be specifically implemented to increase the quality of school climate and satisfaction is the Child Development Project. The CDP is an elementary reform model based on intrinsic motivational theory (Baker, 7). This model has proven to produce tremendous effects on the changes of increased motivation and positive attitudes. Researchers found that CDP created a community atmosphere within the classroom due to the teachers' warmth and supportiveness, elicitation of critical thinking, emphasis on prosocial values, and promotion of cooperation among students. Researchers measured these factors influence on students' classroom behaviors by looking at both their academic engagement and positive interpersonal behavior (7). They noted that students develop a perception of increased connectedness with the CDP which thereby leads to "enjoyment of class, increased learning, motivation, concern for others, and conflict resolution skills" (7).

Overall, Baker has identified the types of practices that are associated with school satisfaction through existing literature. These school practices:

> "Enhance children's meaningful connections to others in the school environment (through positive student-teacher relationships, successful peer relationships, and a positive social climate), enhance children's sense of competence as learners (through educational practices that promote self-regulated learning), and promote a sense of autonomy and self-direction…" (11).

In the case study analysis, I will be able to pinpoint specific practices that enable schools to achieve these outcomes. However, it is important to keep in mind the implications of the limited research because there is an abundance of factors that influence students' learning and the school climate. It is difficult to account for every interaction and relationship of environmental and developmental influences.

Another significant area that has been researched in positive psychology is the contexts of school engagement. Research has shown that school involvement has great protective influences such as preventing youth against discipline problems, disengagement, and dropping-out (Furlong, 99). For example, the National Adolescent Longitudinal Study found that,

> "…youth reporting positive social "connections" to school have lower rates of negative developmental outcomes. The importance of this association has been reinforced among researchers, educators, and policy makers because it *recognized that many forms of community and school violence have been perpetuated by students who had a history of school alienation and detachment*" (100, emphasis mine).

Furlong also identifies the four major contexts of school engagement: students, peers, classroom, and school environment (102). It is important to measure the level of engagement in each area because all of these contexts interact and influence student outcomes. The figure below, adopted from Furlong, displays "the relationship among school engagement contexts and their relationships to student outcomes" (Furlong, 102).

School wide Context
Climate
School Size
Physical Setting
Diversity of Student Body
Discipline Practices
Zero Tolerance

Peer Group Context
Special Support
Impact on Achievement
Academic Orientation
Victimization

Student Context: Behavioral (participation), Affective (bonding, attachment), Cognitive (identification, membership

Classroom Context
Supportive Teacher Relationship
Caring Community
Mutual Respect
Supportive Cooperative Learning

Student Outcomes: Competence and Efficacy, Academic, Social, Emotional
Life-Long Learning

Research has shown that the main causes of dropping out are underachievement and learning, social, and emotional difficulties. These factors begin the gradual process of "dropping out" which is characterized by "disengagement and alienation, marked by a chronic cycle of tardiness, absenteeism, failing classes, suspensions, and transitions between schools" (Shernoff 159). The "flow theory" of positive youth development is based on preventing this "dropping out" process by engaging students. Flow is experienced when "one's skills are neither overmatched nor underutilized to meet a given challenge" (Shernoff, 160). One investigation that put flow theory to the test was Shernoff's longitudinal study that sampled 526 high school students across and asked them to report when they were most engaged. They found that

> "…participants experienced increased engagement when the perceived challenge of the task and their own skills were high and in balance, the instruction was relevant, and the learning environment was under their control. Participants were also more engaged in individual or group work versus listening to lectures, watching videos, or taking exams" (Shernoff, 158).

Increasing "flow" within schools is one of many PYD practices that can be implemented to foster engagement and connectedness. However, choosing activities that create flow can be challenging since factors such as gender, school subject, and individual interests have an impact. Teachers and administrators should take this into account and attempt to get to know their students so that they are better able to gauge their interest and enhance their motivation.

"Studies of at-risk youth have shown how their level of academic achievement often improves dramatically when they are placed with teachers who encourage the formation of personal ties" (Smith, 15). One approach that seeks to strengthen teacher-student interactions and relationships is MyTeachingPartner; "MTP utilizes a collaborative consultation process and web-based resources to provide ongoing, classroom focused in-service training across a

distance" (Shinn, 30). It is a professional development design that allows teachers to grow through reflection and feedback. Teachers are able interact with a consultant and analyze videotapes of their classroom practices, which is performed every two weeks. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is used as the basis for their consultation and feedback and an interactive website also provides teachers access to an abundance of resources and learning tools (Shinn, 30). CLASS measures classroom quality by measuring emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (33).

There are four feedback circuits in the classroom that should be targeted for improving the climate. Baker identified these four as: a) program circuits which are the schedule of class activities, b) goal circuits which connect the setting's program to the "goals, aims, and needs of the individual students", c) veto circuits that remove students whose behavior consistently threatens the setting's program, and d) deviation-countering circuits that "regulate less serious disruptive behavior through the teachers behavior management activities" (41).

All of this research is aimed at building communities within schools by establishing and maintaining positive features and characteristics. Raywid lists the six major defining qualities of a school community as: "respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment, and commitment (Smith, 40). I will be researching how schools foster these qualities through positive youth development practices in my case study analysis.

Chapter 4: Comparative Case Study Analysis

The following case study will analyze how five public schools transformed themselves from struggle to success. We will learn how different communities overcome their obstacles and the efforts it take to achieve desired outcomes. School transformation does not happen in isolation; it occurs within a broader, societal context and faces many challenges. A school reform movement does not just impact schools but communities, families, and individuals as well.

1) La Escuela Fratney: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Background: This school was started by a group of community activists called Neighbors for a New Fratney who had a vision of a multi-cultural, parent-teacher lead, and progressive school. The activists had to rally support and mobilize their community to fight to establish the school because the school administration opposed and did not have faith in their proposal. After a lengthy and challenging battle the community eventually succeeded. La Escuela Fratney was established in 1988 and was "an urban kindergaden-through-fifth grade public school with 350 students (65% Latino, 20% African-American, 13% white)" (Smith, 46). The school was located in a neighborhood that was one of the few racially integrated, working class neighborhoods in the city.

Implementation: One of the main factors that contributed to La Escuela Fratney's success was significant parent involvement. They implemented the "Parent Project" in which parents participated in workshops where they were able to discuss school issues. This helped to obtain and maintain parental involvement. Peterson describes the role that parents play at the school and states,

> "The school-based management council of parents and staff members meets monthly and makes the major decisions. We chose our principal, rewrote our report card; developed

policies around homework and multicultural education…we also have a curriculum committee, a fund-raising committee, and a building committee…" (Smith, 61)

Parental and community involvement falls under the external asset of support in the Developmental Assets Model and is also part of the integration of family, school, and community efforts listed in the Positive Developmental Settings. Youth are more apt to build relationships, be engaged with both school and community, and more likely to feel connected and secure.

Another positive program that La Fratney implemented was a thematic approach to school curricula, as well as a multicultural, antiracist curriculum. Their themes emphasize social responsibility and action by informing youth on how to live healthy, active lifestyles. For example, the students had to complete a project demonstrating how they can make a difference for the theme "We Can Make a Difference on Planet Earth" (Smith,61) Many of these projects gauge student engagement because they are able understand real-world applications of the curriculum they are learning in class. Their projects included "recycling, raising money for homeless children in El Salvador, treating each other better in the classroom, and testifying at a public hearing in favor of creating a nature preserve adjacent to the Milwaukee River" (61). When children can relate their experiences with education they "reconfirm the worthwhileness of themselves and their families and simultaneously think about the problems that they and our society as a whole must confront" (Smith, 60).

La Escuela Fratney also tries to teach students about human relations and the issues of race and power (59). Teachers display all types of work from different geopolitical groups like African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (59). Coming up with the curriculum was not an easy task and there were five drafts made before a final decision was agreed upon by parents, teachers, and other staff. The school implemented a two-way bilingual program as well. They found that the children really enjoy learning in both Spanish and English, which may

have been due to the diversity of the student body, and the program promotes a message of equality.

The practices of La Escuela Fratney greatly enhance the internal assets of youth; their messages enable students to establish positive values and identities. These students develop characteristics of integrity, honesty, self-esteem, sense of purpose, etc. The multicultural curriculum also builds social competency by allowing youth the opportunity to interact and cooperate with peers from different backgrounds. However, the school still faces several challenges such as "overcrowded classrooms, inadequate physical facilities, lack of resources, and lack of time for teacher preparation joint planning and parent and teacher in-services" (Smith,56-57). These factors correspond to physical and psychological safety and appropriate structures of positive developmental settings. The school needs to find solutions for these problems but will need the cooperation and support of administrators and policymakers.

2) Denali Elementary School: Fairbanks, Alaska

Background: "The Denali school community consists of a rich mix of ethnic groups, people from many different socioeconomic levels, and an interesting blend of longtime Alaskans and those new to the city. About twenty-five percent of the children are Alaska Native, another ten percent are African-American, and approximately fifteen percent are children from a wide variety of other minority backgrounds…the remaining fifty-percent consists of a Caucasian population…" (Smith, 70). One day two teachers, two parents, and the principal discussed how they wanted to transform the mission of the Denali School and create curricula linked to students' experiences (71). This began the process of the Denali Project.

Implementation: The Denali Project is the epitome of positive youth development principles because they decided to focus on building strengths rather than emphasizing a fix for problems; "Rather than focus on absences or problems (single parents, dysfunctional family characteristics,

etc.), the Denali Project celebrates the presence of everyone in the school community and encourages each person to do whatever is necessary to express his or her particular talent or ability. At the same time, each person shares responsibility for all the community's children" (Smith, 69). The school also recognized that reform has to come from within because those on the inside have better understanding of their needs and how the process of change should be implemented. Therefore, the small group that originally met began to expand and gathered every Tuesday morning with other parents and teachers to create their vision (71).

The principal also obtained feedback from students and asked them how they envisioned the project. Students were interested in exploring and discovering nature and the environment, they were intrigued by math and science (72). An environmental focus for the school seemed to suit perfectly, especially due to Alaska's conditions and the Valdez oil spill at the time. They therefore created the idea of The Discovery School in 1988. The staff wanted to focus on mathematics and science to satisfy the curiosity of the students. In order to establish their vision the teachers and parents had to convince the school board to adopt the mission and prove that it would be a long-term project. They were able to convince the board through visuals and phrases that expressed their mission. These included: "Total Community Effort", "Teachers and Learners", "A New Partnership with the University", "Bringing about Change from Within", "Shared Leadership", and "A Curriculum Based on the Characteristics of Our Children and the Needs of Alaska" (75). These phrases demonstrate that the Denali Project helps enhance the developmental assets of youth, such as support, empowerment, commitment to learning, and positive values, and establishes positive developmental settings.

The school's mission statement was also written in a booklet called, *The Denali Discovery School Plan* (Smith, 76). This was one of the main factors that contributed to the school's success because they clearly laid out their expectations, guidelines, structures, and overall outline. "The

little booklet also notes goals for each of the seven years and provides ways to evaluate progress being made with the project. It provides an outline, a timeline, and the incentive that children, teachers, and parents need to keep the school moving forward" (77).

Many programs implemented at Denali also meet the "Five C's" formula, competence, character, connections, confidence, and contribution. For example, the school created a community garden which enabled students to plant and learn how things grow, alongside parents and community members. The students' competence was enhanced by learning while planting and they built character and confidence by having autonomy over their learning experience, built connections with other community members, and made contributions to the environment and community.

Another contributor to Denali's success was an increase in funding from a private organization that allowed them to "embark on a number of unique projects tied to the school's overall mission" (78). For example, they created a science summer camps focused on space, chemistry, and technology, a natural history camp, and an exchange program with an Athabaskan village. The teachers, administrators, and community noticed a huge impact on the level of student achievement. However, they did not believe that the current measurement procedures accurately accounted for their growth. Therefore, Denali teachers became determined to develop a different standard of assessment and joined a statewide reform movement for that cause (79). When using Denali's observation and measurement methods, student's showed significant gains (79).This should *alert policymakers* to evaluate the effectiveness of their measurement methods.

Lastly, the Denali Project created a stronger community within the school. "In the development of our own interests and talents, and in the collective search for resource assistance, *we became a family*" (81). They were able to form this bond through the practice of "talking circles and the Native elders project. The "talking circles" were discussion groups for teachers that

allowed them to express concerns, achievements, and basically was a support group (82). The Native elders project brought Alaskan natives into the school to teach students with their learning techniques and share their practices. These types of programs exemplify positive youth development strategies because they build a sense of connectedness where the students and teachers care for and respect each other (community qualities and supportive relationships), encourage engagement and empowerment of students over their learning (external assets and opportunities for skill building), and fulfill a variety of other PYD goals.

3) Alternative Community School: Ithaca, NY

Background: This alternative school is a "public, open-enrollment, self-selection school of choice for some 260 middle school and high school student…" whose members sought to build a community through strengthening programs and increasing expectations. The following description will analyze the school's implementation process and how it fits into the PYD models.

Implementation: Most recently, the construction of the "Yurt Retreat Center" has been used to strengthen bonds between staff and students while also creating something meaningful and lasting for the school. The yurt was built to be a community building for the school to utilize; students can go there to complete projects, homework, join study groups, etc. and it is also available to staff (90) The construction of the yurt was a lengthy project that all the students, staff, and even former students participated in. Students learned carpentry skills, cooperation, patience, and the importance of contribution; these learning experiences enhance their developmental assets and establish positive developmental settings. Lehman describes the outcome of the project; "Staff and students all come to know each other more fully as total human beings, with strengths and weaknesses, points of discouragement, and times of great satisfaction at our accomplishments, when sharing the experience of building something together, in community" (90). It is important to note that this project required the support of parents and the community; it required resources,

money, time, energy, and determination. The "Yurt Retreat Center" is an example of the integration of family, school, and community efforts listed under Positive Developmental Settings. The yurt also provides physical and psychological safety because it "increases safe peer group interaction" (Hamilton, 19).

The Alternative Community School created opportunities for skill building, built supportive relationships, and enhanced youth's social competences with other programs as well. These include the student orientation, annual fall retreat, daily morning meetings, and family group meetings. The student orientation is held at the beginning of each year and enables students to get to know each other, discuss issues that they believe should be addressed, and plan their goals for the year with an advisor (Smith, 90-91). This especially enhances the internal assets of youth because they learn planning and decision making, increases optimistic attitudes about their future, gives them personal power, and encourages engagement and achievement motivation. The annual fall retreat, planned by a committee, is held at a nature center where the wholes school attends. The students participate in both group and individual activities such as, "Project Adventure", sports, cooking, talent shows, etc. (91). These activities engage students in "flow" and create situations where youth have to cooperate, communicate, be sensitive to others, and form a bond with others which creates inclusiveness.

Instead of making morning announcements over a loud speaker, the whole school meets in the gym to take attendance and discuss events, accomplishments, news, etc. Also, the school holds family group meetings twice a week. Lehman describes this as,

> "Every staff member serves as a teacher/counselor/advisor for a small group of ten to fifteen family group members or advisees. These staff act as advocates for students, liaisons to their parents, as advisors with respect to the school curriculum and each

students' schedule, and as facilitators of small-group discussions regarding school and/or personal issues" (92).

This practice clearly represents community building and a great school climate. However, this school is fortunate that it is not overcrowded and has the money to go on these retreats. Many of the obstacles that struggling schools face are the lack of funding and overpopulation. These schools may need to find other ways to run democratically. For example, this alternative school also has student committees that meet regularly to plan events and make decisions on proposals submitted to them (93). Student committees create support for efficacy and mattering, a positive developmental setting, because it gives youth responsibility, challenges, and empowerment.

Overall, the Alternative Community School in Ithaca has found ways to successfully implement and maintain positive youth development practices. However, their beneficial conditions contributed much to their success such as community support, motivated teachers, a manageable student size, and even location to nearby nature centers.

4) High School Redirection: Denver, Colorado

Background: High School Redirection differs from the previous schools described because it is an "inner-city public school composed of students who are primarily people of color and often on welfare or part of the working poor" (Smith, 129). In 1988, the U.S. Department of Labor provided a grant that enabled the establishment of this alternative school. The staff had a vision to create as school climate that eliminated feelings of powerlessness, alienation, and anonymity by building relationships between staff and students based on mutual trust and respect (129). High School Redirection designed a plan to increase expectations, create a meaningful curriculum that was relatable to students' experiences, build advisory groups, and establish structures that would provide opportunities for growth to all students.

Implementation: One of the school's main challenges was disciplinary issues and the school wanted to take an approach different from past, conventional methods. Rather than focusing on punishment and zero-tolerance policies, the school wanted to treat any misbehavior, "short of causing immediate danger, as an opportunity for education" (Smith, 130). Langberg wrote, "The only discipline we were concerned with was self-discipline. Our goal was for all students to learn how to monitor and control their own behavior and, eventually, to have a positive effect on the behavior of others" (Smith, 130). High School Redirection adopted a positive youth development philosophy that built upon the interests and strengths of the students and gave them the opportunity to actively engage in shaping their own school.

Langberg describes the process of transformation in three phases. The first phase was about allowing students to move through the freedom of being told what to do into freedom to create a path that was best suited for them (Smith,131). The school had to transform the school climate and culture, which would be a process taking several years. They had to prevent staff turnover so that supportive relationships could be established and maintained and they also had to limit the number of student enrollment during the first year to better focus on reform. The school also received funding which allowed them to have effective, balanced teacher-student ratios in the classroom.

Advisory groups were created where each student was assigned an advisor that would guide them along their journey to achieve graduation. Students had to complete a list of expectations throughout the three phases of their high school career. Phase I emphasizes introspection through building character and personal power. For example, they have to "establish a relationship of mutual trust with at least one staff member…and complete at least 10 hours of community service, in our out of school, individually or as part of a group" (134).

Phase II required creating a curriculum plan that balances students' in school and out of school experiences. The school found it more effective to relate subjects to real-world applications.

Sounding boards, composed of several teachers and students, were created for conflict resolution. Students had to create a portfolio of self-evaluations according to the school's list of graduation expectations. Graduation expectations focused on the growth of the students as human beings. For example, they were required to write a resume and complete a job application correctly, demonstrate an awareness of stereotypes, and perform "calculations necessary to maintain control of personal finances" (140).

Lastly, in phase III the school required students to complete a project demonstrating three passages: global awareness, career exploration, and creative expression (145). One example of a student that completed this project was Monique who wrote a research paper on child abuse in Canada, interviewed the director of a local crisis center, did volunteer work with abused children, and shadowed a social worker.

High School Redirection created a high quality school climate through the implementation of their structures, guidelines, and curriculum. They empowered students to take control over their own lives by providing them trust and support. The school's curriculum enabled students to make constructive use of their time (external asset) by encouraging them to participate in a variety of activities such as community service, journal writing, field trips, etc. Students formed positive identities (internal assets) by building character through these experiences; they gained competence and confidence in what they could achieve. Youth also formed supportive relationships in their advisory groups, sound panels, and community services.

5) The Oakland Academies: Oakland, California

Background: "The Oakland Unified School District has been besieged with problems for the past several years. In addition to high dropout rates and test scores that are among the lowest in the state, the district has contended with cronyism, incompetence, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement" (155). The two high schools that were determined to overcome these obstacles created the Health

Academy and the Media Academy. They believed that the best way to approach reform was to "link up with resources in the community to provide students with an academic curriculum focused on a career area in a school-within-a-school setting" (156). The Oakland Academies were inspired from the vocational academies established in Philadelphia. However, the Oakland high schools shifted their focus towards preparation for postsecondary education.

Implementation: Just like the other schools previously described, the academies created a curriculum based off the theory of dropout prevention through educational management and school membership (156). They wanted to make learning relatable to the real world with instruction that includes reality based activities and projects. The school also wanted to promote membership so that the students develop a sense of belonging, increase engagement, and find a purpose in education. The Health Academy was established due to its proximity to several hospitals and health care facilities. The school puts a focus on medical and health issues when possible and made the core curriculum a science sequence of biology physiology, and chemistry (158). This academy also gives their students the opportunity to take health occupation courses and obtain work experience at a local hospital.

The Media Academy's focus is on journalism where students have the opportunity to publish stories in the school paper, produce a bilingual community paper, and become skilled in electronic media (159). They also reach out and contribute to their community; for example the students produced an AIDS education video alongside the YMCA.

The academies did not achieve without challenges. Guthrie writes, "Most of the students came from disadvantaged homes and lived in the lower-income neighborhoods around the schools. Their backgrounds and experiences reflected inner-city life. They came from single-parent homes and encountered crime, drugs, and prostitution daily" (Smith, 160). However, with the help of the community and committed teachers, the schools' programs had a positive impact on student's

attitudes, behaviors, and level of achievement. “Students attributed their improved grades to the additional support they received from teachers or pointed to teamwork and cooperation arrangements in class. Some students, however, reflecting on their personal development, drew a connection between their growing self-confidence and better schoolwork” (163). They were able to build strong bonds among students and teachers by keeping classes small and implementing block scheduling to allow more time with instructors. These outcomes are evidence that positive youth development practices can be very effective, no matter the challenges or obstacles. The academies were able to create an optimal school climate through programs that foster internal and external assets, as well as establishing positive developmental settings.

Chapter 5: Results and Conclusions

Through the analysis of these school's stories, common themes and patterns were displayed in all five schools. There are several conditions that I have identified as necessary, but not always sufficient, for transformation of a school. These conditions are: a) a desire for change from within b) community, family, and staff support (especially by the Principal) for the mission or endeavor c) resources of money, time, space, etc. d) long-term expectations and persistency e) incorporation of the students' needs and interests f) clear set of expectations and guidelines, and g) maintenance of a school community

Also, these five schools implemented policy and programs that follow the guidelines of the Policy Attributes Theory: (a) consistency, (b) specificity, (c) authority, (d) power, (e) stability, and (f) comprehensiveness. Each school was consistent in their messages and goals when creating programs and structures. They were specific to what they wanted; for example, Denali wanted a Discovery School focused on math and science. There was authority and power within the people that organized for change. In La Escuela Fratney, the parents, teachers, and staff needed to fight for power from central administration to achieve their goals. The schools also sought authority over their own evaluation assessments, rather than being confined to the state's assessments. They also created stability and comprehensiveness by establishing clear guidelines and expectations, a strong curriculum, and a communal climate.

Transforming a school with positive youth development practices will, evidently, still be very challenging. The implication of this case study analysis is that it is not representative of all schools. For example, it may be much more difficult to establish a multicultural curriculum and integrate a student body from different socioeconomic backgrounds in other schools. Also, many parents and community members may not have the time or energy to attend meetings or programs that support youth. There may also be deep, embedded negative stereotypes and history of tension

between youth and their community. Poverty and lack of external funding remain huge obstacles for many schools. Shinn writes that, "Research consistently suggests that although it is possible to make schools with high concentration poverty work…it is extremely uncommon" (256). A research study also showed that middle-class schools are 22 times as likely to be consistently high performing as high-poverty schools (256). However, this does not mean there is no hope for schools in poverty because "while money matters a great deal in education, people matter more" (Shinn, 256, emphasis mine). Students, parents, and staff can have a huge impact on the level of students' achievement, as the case study analysis demonstrated.

One suggested policy to help diminish the achievement gap is "controlled public school choice" which magnetizes all schools and allows families and students to choose which school is best suited for them. Magnetizing a school means creating a specific theme or pedagogical approach in the curriculum (259). For example, one school might focus on media as we saw at the Media Academy while another school focuses on a multicultural approach, such as La Escuela Fratney. Other suggested policies to reduce the achievement gap include: creating incentives for middle-class families to engage in socioeconomic integration, involving key stakeholders, adjusting magnet offerings depending on demand, and providing free transportation and good information to parents (Shinn, 258-264).

Policymakers need to be knowledgeable of the current research on reforming schools. The problem with many policies is that they don't reach the local level; a top-down approach is not always effective. Datnow argues that a "co-construction approach" for educational reform implementation is more effective than the current "technical-rational perspective", which places planning, organization, command, coordination, and control as priorities (Shinn, 271). Co-construction reform would place the cooperation of federal, state, and local agencies as priority. However, it is important to maintain the accountability system that NCLB established so that

education is held to high standards. On the other hand, current education policies must reconsider their methods for assessing student achievement and reduce bias and ineffectiveness by giving more weight to local evaluation practices.

The implementation of a positive youth development approach in schools and policy is an effective way of producing better schools and better students. The backbone to democracy is education; we must prepare students and provide them the tools needed to be active citizens. Although intellect and knowledge is important, good character, social skills, mental and physical well-being, etc. should also be promoted in our schools. Students need to be looked at holistically, they are not just learners inside the classroom but are learners of the world.

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