Strength-Based Positive Youth Development and Juvenile Justice Practice

Accentuate the Positive

William H. Barton, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
Indiana University School of Social Work

Preview

I. The Traditional JJ System Does Harm
II. Risk, Resilience, and Delinquent Behavior
III. Adolescent Biological Development
IV. Positive Youth Development
V. Positive Youth Justice Framework
VI. Strength-Based Practice for Case Planning and Interventions
VII. Transforming Agency Culture
Traditional Juvenile Justice System – Ineffective & Harmful

- Many youths in the JJ system have current or prior child welfare system involvement – “dual status youth” – and/or mental health issues
- Many incarcerated youths are not serious and/or chronic offenders
- Poor conditions of confinement are common
- JJ system involvement may foster further delinquency rather than suppress it
- Punishment vs. treatment dialectic – historically cyclical, disempowering, and ineffective
### Risk and Protective Factors

Adapted from: Kirby & Fraser (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>biomedical problems</td>
<td>“easy” temperament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gender (male)</td>
<td>self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aggression</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>risk taking</td>
<td>high intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezzo</td>
<td>child maltreatment</td>
<td>social support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inter-parental conflict</td>
<td>caring adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parental psychopathology</td>
<td>+ parent-child relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poor parenting</td>
<td>effective parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anti-social peers</td>
<td>prosocial peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>limited educational or employment opportunities; racial discrimination;</td>
<td>opportunities for education, employment, growth and achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poverty; exposure to violence</td>
<td>low crime rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Risk, Resilience, and Juvenile Justice – Better but Still Problematic

- Attention to criminogenic risks and needs
- Proliferation of risk assessment instruments
- Case plans based on reducing criminogenic risks and addressing criminogenic needs
- Dominance of “evidence-based” programs
- Practice still emphasizes “doing to” rather than “doing with”
- When things go wrong, failure attributed to the youth rather than to the plan
In other words ...

- The juvenile justice system is **iatrogenic** – i.e., makes things worse
- Involvement in the system is itself a risk factor for further delinquency and adult crime
- **WHY?**
- Because the system works against the principles of adolescent development!
What is Adolescence?

“that awkward period between sexual maturation and the attainment of adult roles and responsibilities” (Dahl, 2004, p. 9)

- Begins with biological markers – around age 13
- Ends with social roles – varies; age 22-26
- Note varying ages of eligibility: driving, marriage, voting, military service, alcohol, car rental, etc.
- Duration of adolescence has lengthened
Brain Development in Adolescence

- Incomplete in adolescence (up to age 25)
- Frontal lobe: pre-frontal cortex controls “executive functions”
  - Gray matter increases, then decreases
  - Unused synapses “pruned”; frequently used synapses become stronger
- Myelin coats circuits as they mature, speeding up communication among them
- Levels of dopamine production change producing increases in risk-taking behaviors
- Limbic system still maturing – stands in for still-developing prefrontal cortex – decisions based on emotions
- Testosterone, associated with aggression, increases tenfold in adolescent boys
The Adolescent Brain & Behavior

- Emotional context affects behavior and decision making
- Peer acceptance becomes more important
- Decisions driven by emotion
- Less control of impulses
- Tendency to make risky choices
- Traumatic victimization slows brain maturation
- In the presence of other risk factors, immature brain sets the stage for delinquency and violence
- Adolescents’ personalities not yet fixed – therefore they are highly amenable to positive interventions
The Paradox of Adolescence

- Period of physical strength, rapid cognitive learning, and social resilience ...

  But...

- Period of great risk
  - High morbidity and mortality rates (suicide, homicide)
  - High incidence of risky behaviors

- Long-term patterns developing – for better or worse – great opportunity/great challenge
What is Positive Youth Development (PYD)

- **Goals**
  - all youth gain competence and character

- **Practices**
  - youth participation in decisions
  - healthy relationships with adults, peers and younger children
  - relationships changing and enduring as developmentally appropriate

- **System characteristics**
  - community-wide partnerships
Youth Development Models

- Benson & Pittman (2001) – 5 Cs: competence, confidence, character, connections, and contributions
- Connell, Gambone, & Smith (2001) – Learning to be productive; learning to connect; learning to navigate
- CUBI Model (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2000) – Competency; Usefulness; Belonging; Involvement
- Search Institute (Scales & Leffert, 1999) – 40 Developmental Assets
Traditional Juvenile Justice: Not Congruent with PYD

- Tendency to focus on the individual level
- Physical isolation from home/school/community
- Psychological isolation via labeling
- Placing with other negatively labeled peers
- Doing “to”, not “with” young people
- “Record” restricts future opportunities
Adolescent Brain Development and Social Development: Congruent with PYD Principles

- Strength-based
- Importance of relationships with caring adults
- Empowerment-focused
- Supports and opportunities to learn healthy behaviors
- Connections to community
PYD and JJ: Contrasting Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Development</th>
<th>Juvenile Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Deficits/Deviance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets</td>
<td>Diagnoses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Treatment/Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Symptom Amelioration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Positive Youth Justice Framework

(Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010, p. 31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICE DOMAINS</th>
<th>Domain-Specific Example</th>
<th>CORE ASSETS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Job readiness</td>
<td>Job-seeker support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>Youth-to youth tutoring program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Youth-adult mentor program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Youth-led civic improvement campaign</td>
<td>Launch new advocacy program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Physical fitness</td>
<td>Team sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>Group performance, music or theater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Learning/Doing**: Resume writing workshop, 1-on-1 skill building in HTML, etc.
- **Attaching/Belonging**: Training in conflict management, Prepare and present formal testimony, Mural art program.
Strength-Based (SB) Practice to Promote PYD

- Every individual, group, family and community has strengths
- Practitioners best serve clients by collaborating with them
- Every environment is full of resources
- Assessment process seeks to discover strengths
- Engage clients in collaborative planning

Source: Saleebey (2006)
What Would a Strength-Based, PYD-Focused System Look Like?

- Emphasis on diversion; limited use of secure pre-trial detention
- Mental health screening
- Individualized assessment of risks, needs, AND strengths
- Collaborative case planning based on assessments
- Individualized intervention plans with goals based on core assets and practice domains
- Family engagement
- Community-based; limited use of residential placements
- Informal options for technical violations of probation
Individualized Assessment of Risks, Needs, and Strengths

- YLS/CMI is a good tool for assessing criminogenic risks (Hoge & Andrews, 1996)
- Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scales (BERS; Epstein & Sharma, 1998)
- CANS is a good tool for assessing needs (Lyons et al., 1999)
- Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) – a strengths assessment developed specifically for juvenile justice (Mackin et al., 2005)
- Oregon’s integrated assessment (OJCP; NPC Research, 2010)
Collaborative Case Planning & Individualized Interventions

- Involve the youth and family as partners
- Use team approaches, e.g., similar to wraparound
- Involve mentors if possible
- Fit the plan to the youth and family rather than fitting the youth to existing programs
- Use identified youth strengths and interests as “hooks” to prosocial engagement, e.g.,
  - Community service in an area of youth strengths/interests
  - Assign family fun as “homework”
  - Creative skills development with peers
- Review the plan periodically and modify as necessary
Contrasting Interventions (1)

Traditional
- Probation supervision to ensure compliance
- Individual and family counseling, group therapy
- Job counseling, community service as punishment

PYD-Oriented
- Case management to ensure youth access to range of social resources
- Peer counseling, leadership development, family living skills
- Work experience, community service as job preparation, career exploration
Contrasting Interventions (2)

Traditional
- Outdoor challenge programs
- Mentoring, Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Remedial education

PYD-Oriented
- Conservation and community development projects, engaging with community groups
- Youth/adult mentors; intergenerational projects with elderly
- Cross-age tutoring (juvenile offenders teach younger children), educational action teams, decision-making skills training
Changing the Culture: Facilitating Factors

- Hospitable, collaborative community culture
- Vision, supported by a plausible “theory of change,” with a credible “Champion” of the vision
- Effective communication & collaboration among key agencies and stakeholders
- Commitment from the top
- Training/retraining/intentional hiring
- Early adopters’ success
- Integration of SB/PYD into the “machine” of the bureaucracy (e.g., paperwork)
- Consistent reinforcement through supervision
- Abundance of and links to community resources
Changing the Culture: Challenges

- Resistance from “old-line” staff
- Additional demands on staff in terms of time and creativity
- Making meaningful links between SB assessment and individualized plans
- Staying the course
- Obtaining buy-in from other stakeholders: judges, prosecutors, police, service providers, etc.
- Some families are initially resistant – want system to “fix” their child
Bottom Line

View youth who come into contact with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system as **children** first

Develop policies and practice protocols collaboratively

Pursue PYD goals in addition to recidivism reduction

Enhance the educational level and competencies of staff who work directly with youth

Tailor interventions collaboratively and individually – be creative

Don’t give up and just blame the youth when plans don’t work – adjust the plan