Research Supporting Positive Discipline
in Homes, Schools and Communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Current research demonstrates that quality relationships with adults and peers make a tremendous difference for young people. A sense of connection or belonging is an important protective factor. Students who perceive a sense of connectedness or community at school and/or home are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (smoking, using drugs, engaging in violence). They are also more likely to be successful academically. Young people who grow up in families that they perceive as both kind and firm are more likely to thrive. Positive Discipline teaches parents and teachers how to be kind and firm at the same time and how to invite a sense of connection from the youngsters they are involved with. The approach is neither permissive nor punitive. Positive Discipline is an effective way for parents, teachers and students to learn life skills and build a sense of community and connectedness based on mutually respectful relationships.

This review of the existing literature was supported by Empowering People and Jane Nelsen, Ed.D. The review is made from an Adlerian perspective and makes no attempt to evaluate any statistical analysis.

II. OVERVIEW

The Problem

Some basic statistics create a picture of the problem.

- More than 30% of middle school students report being victimized three or more times by peers over the course of one year (Haynie et. al.).
- In a survey of high school students nationwide, the Center for Disease Control found that 17.4% of students had carried a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, or club) on one or more days in the month preceding the survey. Male students (29.3%) were significantly more likely than female students (6.2%) to have carried a weapon. CDC 2001 data.[1]
- The same survey showed that 6.6% of high school students had missed one or more days of school during the 30 days preceding the survey because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. (CDC)
- During the 12 months preceding the survey, 19% of high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide (14.8% had a specific plan). Female students (23.6%) were significantly more likely than male students (14.2%) to have considered attempting suicide.(CDC)
- Nearly one half (47.1%) of students nationwide had consumed one or more drinks of alcohol on one or more of the 30 days preceding the survey (i.e., current alcohol use). And 30% reported episodic heavy drinking in the month prior to the survey (5 or more drinks on one or more occasions). (CDC)

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[1]CDC Youth Surveillance data available at CDC website http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5104a1.htm

- In its survey of "current drug use" (one or more uses in the last month) of high school students the CDC found that 24% currently used marijuana, 4% currently used cocaine, and 5% currently used inhalants. (CDC)
- One third of high school students reported being currently sexually active. (CDC)
- The annual dropout rate for students in high school is 5%. Five percent of students attending high school in October 1999 had dropped out by October 2000. The cumulative effect of this annual dropout rate is that 3.8 million Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not currently attending high school have not completed a high school education. Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000, National Center for Education Statistics.[2]
- Between 1993 and 2001 an annual survey was conducted on school violence. The percentage of students in grades 9-12 who were threatened or injured with a weapon (such as a gun or knife) on school property in the 12 months before the survey varied each year but was always between 7 and 9 percent. Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2002, National Center for Education Statistics.[3]

Although there is significant variation from community to community, these national numbers cannot be ignored. Together these "problems" create obstacles that prevent our youth from achieving their potential and delay their valuable contribution to the community at large.

Instead of approaching each problem directly, in isolation, the research community is now asking, "Is it the problems that prevent our youth from thriving or *have we failed to create a healthy environment in which it is more likely that young people can thrive*?" Research now examines the sources of the problems with an eye to prevention instead of examining each of the risky behaviors out of context. The research indicates that problems are a natural result of the social environment of our families, our schools, and our communities. There is ample evidence that some children are at much lower risk than others. Why is this? *Some young people are at lower risk largely because of the nature and quality of the relationships they have with the adults and peers who are part of their lives.*

Brief Summary of the Research Literature

The current research supports the Positive Discipline model. This model is based on mutually respectful relationships at home, at school and in the community. Positive Discipline teaches parents, educators, students and community members the skills necessary to create healthy interpersonal connections in an environment where each person's contribution has meaning, is valued, and expected.

The research clearly shows that young people do better when they perceive both firmness and kindness from their parents. Children who rate their parents as authoritative (both responsive and demanding) engage significantly less in socially risky behaviors. (Aquilino, 2001; Baumrind, 1991; Jackson et al., 1998; Radziszewska et al 1996; Simons-Morton et al, 2001) Other studies have correlated the teen's perception of parenting that is both kind and firm with improved academic performance. (Cohen, 1997; Deslandes, 1997; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Lam, 1997) A young person's sense of community (connection or "belongingness") at home and at school also increases academic success and

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[2]http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/

[3]http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/schoolcrime/4.asp?nav=1

decreases socially risky behavior. (Resnick et al., 1997; Battistich, 1999; Goodenow, 1993) Interventions at school and at home can decrease the "socially risky" behaviors and increase a young person's likelihood of succeeding at school and in their social environment. (Battistich, 1999; Nelsen, 1979.) Interventions that teach skills for social belonging in elementary school have lasting positive effects. (Kellam et al. 1998, Battistich, 1999

The techniques used in Positive Discipline have been shown to have a positive impact on schools. A study of a school-wide implementation of classroom meetings in a lower income Sacramento elementary school over a four-year period showed that suspensions decreased (from 64 annually to 4 annually), vandalism decreased (from 24 episodes to 2) and the teachers reported great improvement in classroom atmosphere, behavior, attitudes and academic performance. (Platt, 1979) A study of a parent and teacher education program directed at parents and teachers of students with "maladaptive" behavior using the tools used in Positive Discipline, showed a statistically significant improvement in the behavior of the students in the program schools when compared to the control schools. (Nelsen, 1979). Smaller studies examining the impacts of specific Positive Discipline tools have also shown positive results. (Browning 2000, Potter 1999, Esquivel). Still other studies identifying risk and protective factors demonstrate that the behaviors and concepts promoted by Positive Discipline are completely in line with what we now know *works* for the young people of our communities. (Click here to view abstracts of those studies.)

> "Democracy in the classroom is not just a frill or an isolated social studies unit, but an educational necessity." Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels and Arthur Hyde in Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools 2nd Ed. 1998

This paper reviews the current literature with the following questions in mind:
* What do we know about conditions that help young people thrive?
* What specific evidence is there for positive interventions?
* What evidence supports Positive Discipline in schools and homes?
* What is the specific evidence for Positive Discipline and other Adlerian-based intervention programs in homes and schools?

III. GENERAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

CONDITIONS THAT HELP YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE

1. The Impact of How Adults Relate to Youth (Parenting and Teaching Style).
a) At home.
Parenting style as it is perceived by the young people in the family is clearly associated with their academic success and with their chance of engaging in socially "risky" behaviors. There is overwhelming evidence that young people who see their parents as both kind (supportive/responsive) and firm (demanding) have more success socially and academically. Though children who are living with only one parent or who are poor do not succeed to the same degree as their counterparts with two parents or higher incomes, they still are positively impacted by an authoritative/democratic parenting style. (Lam, 1997) Different studies have examined the association between parenting "style" and behavior from different perspectives. The general conclusion is that when young people perceive that their parents are warm and responsive (kindness) and have high expectations (demandingness/firmness),

they are at significantly lower risk for drug and alcohol use, less likely to smoke and less violent. (Baumrind, 1991; Jackson et al., 1998; Radziszewska et al 1996; Simons-Morton et al, 2001) They are also more likely to succeed academically. (Cohen, 1997; Deslandes, 1997; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Lam, 1997) Studies also show that parenting styles that are authoritarian/ directive (high on demandingness, generally in an intrusive way and low on responsiveness), permissive (high on warmth but little or no directiveness) and/or unengaged/inconsistent are clearly associated with worse outcomes. (Aquilino, 2001; Baumrind, 1991; Ginsberg and Bronstein, 1993) In a study over time, Steinberg et al. (1994) found that "the benefits of authoritative parenting are largely in the maintenance of previous levels of high adjustment, the deleterious consequences of neglectful parenting continue to accumulate."

b) At School.
    Teaching style also makes a difference. Students whose teachers used a controlling style reported significantly lower intrinsic motivation to learn. (Deci et al, 1981)

2. The Impacts of a Sense of Connectedness (Belonging)
a) At Home
    The young person's sense of connectedness with his or her family is associated with positive outcomes. A national study of 12,000 adolescents showed that a sense of connectedness with their family was protective against every health risk behavior except history of pregnancy. (Resnick et. al. 1997) The questions asked of the teens in this large study included whether or not the teen felt wanted or loved by family members, whether they perceived caring by their mother or father, how many activities they engaged in with either parent in the previous week, and parental presence during different times of the day.

b) At School.
    A young person's sense of connectedness with school or "sense of community" in school is associated with positive social and academic outcomes. As above, there is a strong correlation with a student's perception of being "connected" and the sense of "community" with academic and social well being. This has been examined by numerous researchers. Resnick, et. al. (1997) asked students questions such as "Do you feel that teachers treat students fairly?" "Are you close to people at your school?" "Do you feel part of your school?" He found that a sense of connectedness to school was protective against health risk behaviors. These findings are consistent with those of Goodenow (1993) who found a relationship between the students' sense of belonging and their academic achievement and motivation.
    The Child Development Project has been involved in a large study examining the impact of interventions designed to increase sense of connectedness and community (Battistich,1999; Roberts et al, 1995; Solomon et al, 1996). The interventions included using class meetings, a constructivist curriculum, a focus on meaningful work and team building. In schools that successfully implemented the program the sense of community increased. More interesting perhaps was that examined individually, students with a higher sense of community were found to accept the established norms of the school, whatever those were. In longitudinal studies the researchers found that students coming from schools that had implemented the program to increase a sense of community and work for higher-level thinking, did better than their classmates from comparison schools when they arrived at middle

school. (Battistich,1999) Children from schools with a higher sense of community had lower drug use and delinquency. (Battistich, 1997)

3. The Relationship Between Teachers Has an Impact on Students.
There is some evidence that a sense of community among staff members may be an "important precursor to the development of a sense of community among students." (Royal and Rossi, 1997) Not surprisingly, modeling appropriate relationships among the adults seems to support students in developing appropriate interpersonal relationships. Teachers' sense of community is also related to their job satisfaction and effectiveness.

4. The Congruency Between Parenting Style and Teaching Style Makes a Difference.
Children do best when parenting style matches the teaching style. They did the very best when both styles were "authoritative." The children who did the worst were those who came from a disengaged family and perceived their teacher as controlling (authoritarian). (Paulson, 1998)

5. Parent Involvement at School Makes a Difference.
There are many, many studies (not individually cited here) that show that parental involvement is related to school success. Interestingly, when more closely examined, authoritative parenting is strongly related to parental school involvement and "academic encouragement," both of which are associated with school success. The positive impact of "school involvement" is significantly less if the parent does not also have a "kind and firm" parenting style. (Steinberg et al, 1992)

INTERVENTIONS

There is strong evidence that changing the home and school environment can have strong positive impacts on young people and that the positive changes continue over time. Interventions that teach parents skills to be kind and firm at the same time (authoritative) and interventions that create a sense of community at school have been shown to be effective. Even well-designed programs, however, have some trouble with consistency of implementation. It is clear that how material is taught and how groups of participants implement the programs does make a difference. Discovering the "keys" to effective implementation is an area for current and future research. This section reviews some of what is known about intervention.

1. Sense of Community at School Can Be Enhanced.
a) Changing the Sense of Community.
The Child Development Project carefully studied implementation of their community building practices (which included class meetings) in elementary schools across the country. "Comparisons of student outcomes at the five 'high change' program schools versus at their matched comparison school revealed a large number of positive program effects including increases in students' sense of the school as a community, school related attitudes and academic motivation, and social attitudes, values and behavior." There were "reductions in their involvement in drug use and other problem behaviors.." When the students from the intervention programs were followed into middle school, the "former program students had higher course grades and achievement test scores than comparison students;

scored higher in both educational aspirations and educational expectations; had more positive perceptions of the supportiveness of the school environment for students and of the quality of student teacher relationships; scored higher than comparison students in trust in and respect for teachers and liking for schools and scored lower than comparison students in loneliness at school. Former program students from the high change elementary schools also scored higher than comparison students in self esteem and sense of efficacy." The former program students were also involved in more positive activities and less involved in negative behaviors. They reported the same for their friends. (Battistich, 1999)

b). The Role of Class Meetings
Several different programs (including Positive Discipline) use class meetings successfully to increase the sense of community, teach problem solving and give students a meaningful voice in the decisions of their classroom. The studies available all show positive effects from class meetings (though the specific formats of the class meetings vary to some degree.)

In a four-year study of the implementation of class meetings in a Sacramento elementary school, Platt (1979) documented dramatic changes. (The other change made during that time was a zero tolerance policy for fighting. Any fighting resulted in automatic suspension.) The school population was 80% Afro-American, 11% Hispanic and 9% White. Fifty percent of the families received AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children). Vandalism reduced from 24 episodes in the first year to 2 in the final year of the study (though that was not a complete year). Suspensions were reduced from 61 students in year one, to 54 students in year 2 to 5 in year three and 4 through February of year 4. Teachers also reported increase in academic motivation and job satisfaction.

In a small controlled study of 4th graders using class meetings, Sorsdahl and Sanche (1985) found that "classroom meetings were effective in improving children's behavior in meetings. The results also indicated that improvement in behavior was carried over from classroom meetings to the larger classroom setting."

Emmet et al. (1996) studied "Open Classroom Meetings." The authors note that the "impetus for the study on open meetings came in part from an assertion by a local elementary school principal that schoolwide use of the open classroom meetings had done more to improve the climate of the school and decrease referrals for behavior problems than any single innovation in her administrative career." In describing the results of their study the authors note: "Students indicated that the class meetings allowed them to ... trust each other, learn how to be safe, get to know teachers, learn about each other, feel better about themselves, share common problems, understand and share feelings, learn appropriate behaviors, be able to contribute, [and] solve problems."

In an evaluation of the impacts of "The Responsive Classroom," which is heavily based on "morning meetings" and collaboratively setting clear guidelines for students, Elliot (1993) found that after one year, in comparison with a non-intervention school, the intervention school students had increased social skills and decreased problem behaviors. Esquivel reviewed the impact of Positive Discipline class meetings in her own classroom of 19 first grade students and found positive impacts, especially on three of the children with especially challenging needs. In a similar study, Potter (1999) examined the effects of class meetings in her 5th grade classroom over a period of only eight weeks. She observed improvements in active listening, appreciation of others, respect and the sense of community. In a study of the impact of class meetings on special needs children, Zeeman and Martucci (1976) found that nine learning disabled pupils (10-11 years old) who participated in open-ended class meetings

demonstrated increased verbal participation, decreased hyperactivity and diminished social isolation from regular class children.

2. Parent Education Can Change Parenting Practices.
There are many published studies on parent education, most involving small numbers of families. The studies support the Positive Discipline model of teaching groups of parents experientially (with role plays and games). Teaching parents in groups has been shown to be more effective than individualized instruction. There is more change in parenting behavior and the positive impacts last longer. (Cunningham et al, 1995; Goodson et al, 2001) Opportunities to practice what they are learning through role plays and other experiential activities is also cited by researchers as one of the tools that makes parenting class more effective in changing behavior. (Daro, 1994; Stone, 2000)
In a small but very interesting study, Stanley (1978) showed that when parents and teens are taught Adlerian parenting skills together, the teens continued to advance in their moral development for the year after the class (measured using a Kohlberg moral development scale). Another small study reviewed the impacts of Adlerian parent education showed it to be effective and well-received in Latino families. (Newlon et al 1986)

3. Early Intervention Makes a Difference
Students who are taught social skills early in their school career have a reduced risk for aggressive behavior as much as six years later. When first grade teachers were taught a method of teaching kids how to cooperate and work in groups, the level of classroom aggression went down. The boys from those classrooms were much less likely to demonstrate aggressive behavior in middle school. (Kellam, 1998) This finding is notable given previous findings (Campbell, 1995) that behaviors noted in preschool are likely to persist into the later years.

4. Implementation Issues.
Though the studies are clear that teachers can modify their behavior to create different classroom environments, there is often a wide range of implementation. The data shows that several different programs that work to enhance school communities and academic success are successful when they are implemented well. However, studies have also shown that different schools have varying degrees of success with new programs. What makes for successful long-term implementation is the subject of current study by several groups.

IV. STUDIES OF POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Nelsen, Jane W. *The Effectiveness of Adlerian Parent and Teacher Study Groups in Changing Child Maladaptive Behavior in a Positive Direction.* A Dissertation presented to the faculty of the school of education, Educational Psychology Program, The University of San Francisco, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education. December 1979
> A three-year study of preschool through sixth graders who were identified by parents and teachers as having "maladaptive" behavior. "Maladaptive" behavior was defined as "any behavior which interferes with either social or academic learning." Parents of referred students

were invited to join a 12-week Adlerian parenting study group. Teachers were invited to join an Adlerian teacher study group (led by the school counselor). A child was not considered for the study unless both the teacher and the parent attended the study group. A comparison group of students were identified using the same criteria at another school, but no intervention was attempted. Maladaptive behavior was evaluated at home and in the classroom before and after the intervention. Significant changes were found when compared to analysis of behaviors in the comparison group of students. This is the study on which Dr. Nelsen based her later work with project ACCEPT (Adlerian Counseling Concepts for Encouraging Parents and Teachers) and the Positive Discipline program. Study excerpts.

Platt, Ann R. *Efficacy of Class Meetings in Elementary Schools*. Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling. California State University, Sacramento. 1979

The study examined the changes that occurred within a Sacramento elementary school over a four-year time period in which class meetings were implemented. (The other change made during that time was a zero tolerance policy for fighting. Any fighting resulted in automatic suspension.) The school population was 80% Afro-American, 11% Hispanic and 9% White. 50% of the families received AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children). Vandalism reduced from 24 episodes in one year to 2 in the final year of the study (though that was not a complete year). Suspensions were reduced from 61 students in year one, to 54 students in year 2 to 5 in year three and 4 through February of year 4. Measurement of gains in other areas are subjective. Included are teacher interviews in which teachers comment on a positive change in student behavior, school atmosphere and academic performance. Also included are comments by the secretary about how her job had become much more positive and an anecdotal report of one student who transferred to the school because of its growing good reputation. As a result of the changes the school was identified and recognized as having an exemplary program in classroom and behavior management. Study excerpts.

Esquivel, Annalisa. *Learning Through Positive Discipline and Intrinsic Motivation*, A teacher inquiry project submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. Southwest Texas State University.

Class meetings were implemented in a first grade classroom of 19 students. Three of the students were identified as special needs students. Their self concept, behavior and academic achievement were tracked. All three students had improvements in behaviors, self concept and academic achievement. There were other positive effects on the classroom as a whole. The study is not specific on the length of the intervention. It should be noted that while the teacher used class meetings and other Positive Discipline tools, she also used a discipline tracking system which is not consistent with Positive Discipline. It is unlikely, however, that the tracking system explains the enhanced student performance, as it was in place before the intervention. Study

Browning, Louisa; Davis, Barbara; Resta, Virginia; *What Do You Mean "Think Before I Act"?: Conflict Resolution with Choices.* Journal of Research in Childhood Education. Vol 14(2), Spr-Sum (2000). (pp. 232-238). This study shows that a specific, time-limited Positive Discipline intervention can have significant impact on even very young students.

Twenty 1st-grade students participated in an eight-week action research study. Students participated in class meetings where they discussed problem-solving solutions, particularly positive forms of conflict resolution. The "Wheel of Choice" provided the students with the choices for solutions that included 1) make an apology, 2) tell the other person to stop, 3) walk-away, and 4) give an "I" message. Data was collected through 1) student pre- and post-surveys, 2) student conflict resolution journals, 3) behavior tally sheets, 4) observational notes, and 5) teacher reflective journal. Pre- and post-surveys indicated that the students developed more positive strategies for solving conflicts. The student conflict-resolution journals demonstrated that students were able to write down positive forms of conflict-resolution after thinking about the problem. Analysis of the tally sheets indicated that physical and verbal aggression decreased from the first week (22 incidents) to the eighth week (4 incidents) of the study. The teacher reflection journal and observational notes also documented that students used the "Wheel of Choice" when given the opportunity and time to think about the problem.

Louisa Browing's paper *What Do You Mean "Think Before I Act"?: Conflict Resolution with Choices*, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education online.

Potter, Shannon *Positive Interaction Among Fifth Graders: Is it a Possibility? The Effects of Classroom Meetings on Fifth -Grade Student Behavior* Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas   June 1999.

This is a short, uncontrolled and small study of the use of class meetings in a fifth grade class. The teacher initially describes the class as "full of bright children who could not get along and had trouble restraining their impulses." After only eight weeks of class meetings, colleagues remark how respectful and supportive the class is.

A first-year teacher introduced classroom meetings to her class of 23 5th graders. The study period was limited to eight weeks. Her questions were: Do classroom meetings decrease the number of minor behavior infractions by the students? Do classroom meetings increase the students' ability to interact positively at school? Do classroom meetings increase the students' ability to interact positively at home. Data was collected using a teacher journal, student journals, "self correction sheets" and parent surveys.

The teacher noticed an increase in positive interaction among her students. Student journals reflected an appreciation for class meetings. The number of "self correction sheets" did not change significantly over the eight week period. Parent surveys reflected improvement in four of six skills monitored (though only a small sample of the class was used for the evaluation). The teacher was surprised to hear another teacher comment on how the class had become respectful and supportive of each other. The teacher's impression was that by using classroom meetings, students can increase their skills in attentive listening, ability to compliment and appreciate others, respect for others, and community building. Study

CURRENT STUDIES

A Measurement Tool for Class Meetings.

Suzanne Smitha, an elementary school counselor, has developed and administered a tool that can be used for teachers to self-evaluate or for outsiders to evaluate the process of a class meeting. The

instrument has been checked for internal reliability and for consistency between administrations.   It is in the process of being written up for publication.

Project R.E.S.P.E.C.T. (Responsible Educators, Students, and Parents building Educational Communities that Thrive)

Project R.E.S.P.E.C.T. is a collaboration of Positive Discipline and ParentNet (link to their website) and will be piloted in two schools. Each school will have the option of starting either of the programs at the beginning and will work toward full implementation of both programs by the end of the second year. Both programs actively engage parents, staff, and students through structures and practices that are based upon mutual respect and focus on communication and problem solving. At the same time, researchers will collect comprehensive data to document this change process so that other school communities may learn from and replicate the process. More on Project R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

Other studies:

Several smaller scale studies of the effectiveness of experiential parenting classes are planned and underway.

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