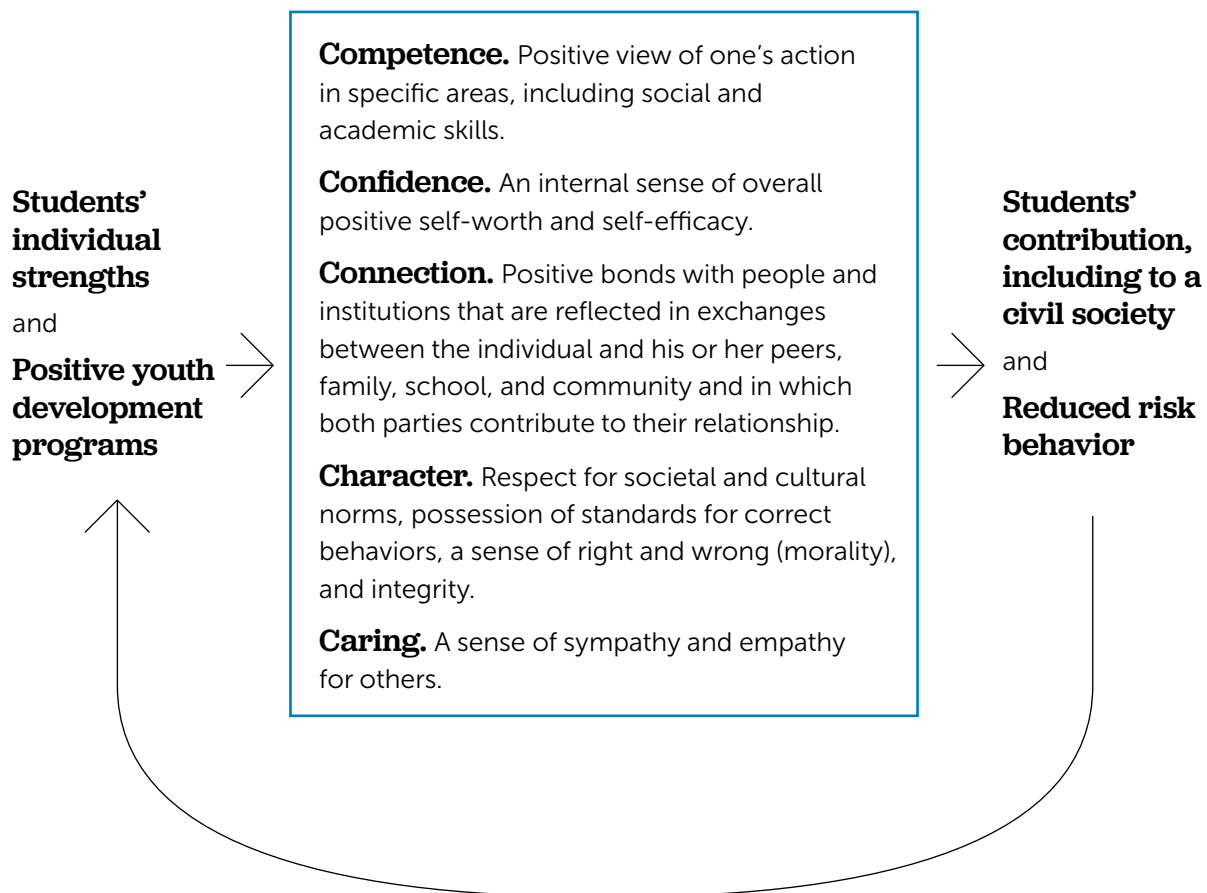


Because PYD revolves around the specific needs and abilities of participating youth, programs based on a PYD model may seem vastly different from each other. But the most successful PYD programs share these foundational building blocks:

- **Youth voices are valued and respected:** Young people participate alongside adults in every phase of the program, from inception, through development and implementation, to evaluation.
- **Trust is key:** Adults—the teachers, educators, instructors, and counselors who serve as mentors—build trust by outwardly demonstrating that they care about the youth with whom they work. Mentors provide emotional support and help young people build skills, set goals, and explore workplace and career opportunities. Adults earn students’ trust by demonstrating consistency, respect, and commitment to students’ success.⁴
- **Diversity is honored:** Different learning styles, abilities, and familial and cultural backgrounds are recognized and respected.
- **Civic engagement is encouraged and supported:** Young people are given opportunities to gain and apply real-world skills and contribute to their communities through service-learning projects.

While there is no one right way to design and implement a PYD program, certain theoretical perspectives can help educators develop activities that are grounded in PYD. The Five Cs perspective⁵ is one such approach. It describes PYD as a self-reinforcing process focused on competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring—the Five Cs. Programs developed around these characteristics have been shown to reduce risk behavior and help students become productive, contributing members of society. By experiencing success in school, growing through collaborative relationships, and participating in civic initiatives, youth are more likely to continue to participate in a program, and their reinvestment then feeds back into and strengthens their 5Cs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The 5Cs model of positive youth development.⁶



Other frameworks offer techniques and tools to measure the outcomes of PYD programs. The PYD Measurement Framework,⁷ for example, examines these elements:

- **Assets:** Skills, competencies, and other similar strengths,
- **Agency:** Empowerment, as well as an ability to identify, set, and attain realistic goals,
- **Contributions:** Engagement in personal and community matters, and
- **Supportive environments:** The social, normative, structural, and physical environments that characterize PYD programs.

Although PYD programs are based on a range of educational approaches, they all aim to incorporate common elements—the assurances of a physical and psychological safe space, trusting relationships between young people and adults, opportunities for personal growth, and civic engagement that allows students to make meaningful contributions to society.⁸



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PYD and environmental education as complementary approaches

Environmental education often focuses on real-life issues through project-based learning, civic engagement, and citizen science initiatives. These approaches promote PYD by enabling young people to acquire and hone important assets, including problem-solving, cooperative learning, agency, creative thinking, and communication skills.⁹ PYD is a fundamental component of strong environmental education programs involving young people.

Many effective environmental education programs already incorporate tested approaches that foster PYD. As youth learn to trust the adults they collaborate with in educational settings, they can extend that trust into their families and communities.¹⁰ Case studies in this book show how PYD, both as a teaching approach and a learning outcome, creates stronger bonds between youth and their communities and enables them to contribute to environmental and social change.

The safe and respect-filled spaces that are integral to PYD programs provide structure that encourages experimentation, integrates novel experiences, and supports youth as they gain confidence and learn to bridge differences.¹¹ In addition, environmental educators can create opportunities—chances to improve community gardens, clean up beaches, and plant trees—for youth to work alongside adults, experience stewardship, and bring environmental benefits to their communities.¹²

Rocking the Boat, in the Bronx, New York, is an example of a robust PYD program that incorporates environmental learning. We will explore Rocking the Boat as a case study of PYD in practice ([click here](#)). Discussion questions and activities are included below to help educators and learners alike reflect and think critically about this case study and the PYD theories and practices incorporated in Rocking the Boat's approach.

Endnotes

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