

**The location of schools:  
Community connections, social capital & the reduction of risks**

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**What does neuropsychology have to do with school locations?  
Or  
How I became interested in the school location issue**

- ❖ Hx in education
- ❖ Consultant to schools
- ❖ Hardwired to connect
- ❖ Kearsarge experience

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**In the beginning:  
What to Do About Kids?**

- ❖ bemoaning the situation
  - ✓ Sending kids back into the same environments
  - ✓ Our tx. effects were worthless
  - ✓ Why keep doing this?

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***Our waiting lists are too long....***



one of every four adolescents in the U.S. is currently at serious risk of *not* achieving productive adulthood

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***Our waiting lists are too long....***



21 percent of U.S. children ages 9 to 17 have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder associated with at least minimum impairment

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***Our waiting lists are too long....***



The current generation of young people is more likely to be depressed and anxious than was its parent's generation

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**Our waiting lists are too long....**

twenty percent of students report having seriously considered suicide in the year 2003




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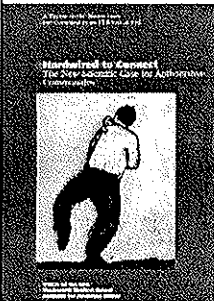
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**“Hardwired to Connect”**



The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities

National Commission on Children At Risk

<http://www.americanvalues.org/html/hardwired.html>

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**Funding to study risks**

- ❖ IAV & YMCA funded us to look into this
  - ✓ The risk model
  - ✓ The common factors underlying psychosocial dysfunction in children
- ❖ Completed a major lit review
- ❖ Held conference at Dartmouth

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## The Crisis In American Childhood

- ✓ In the midst of unprecedented material affluence, the mental and behavioral health of U.S. children is deteriorating.
- ✓ How are we, as a society thinking about this deterioration?
- ✓ It is our failure to recognize these broad environmental conditions that is contributing to growing numbers of suffering children.

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## The “New Scientific Case”

The mechanisms by which we become and stay attached to others are biologically primed and increasingly discernible in the basic structure of the brain

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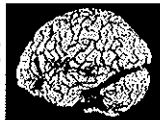
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## Brain Development



- ❖ self-organization of developing brain occurs in the context of a relationship with another self, another brain
  - ✓ this relational context can be growth-facilitating or growth-inhibiting,
  - ✓ it imprints into the developing brain either a resilience against or a vulnerability to later forming psychiatric disorders.

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### Nurturing environments

or the lack of them, affect gene transcription and the development of brain circuitry

- ✓ Example from rat studies
- ✓ the parenting of pups influences their basic health, including their capacity to respond successfully to stress
- ✓ such environmentally-engineered traits, in part because they also become expressed genetically, can then be passed from generation to generation



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### Social contexts can alter genetic expression

A social environment can change the relationship between a specific gene and the behavior associated with that gene

- ✓ Changes in social environment can thus change the transcription of our genetic material at the most basic cellular level

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### Adolescent brains

- ❖ Frontal lobe changes
  - ✓ Frontal lobes important for memory, voluntary motor behavior, impulse control, decision making, planning, other higher order processing

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### Frontal matter actually decreases during adolescence

- ❖ After period of increase
  - ✓ pruning
  - ✓ More myelin to improve transmission
  - ✓ Increased reliance on frontal lobes for behavior control
  - ✓ Adolescents often "think too much"

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### Increased need for stimulation

- ❖ The shaping of these cell changes requires environmental input
- ❖ Some evidence that adolescents do not respond to stimulation the same way as adults
  - ✓ Need more stimulation for same effect



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### The adolescent brain seeks "extreme" stimuli



- ❖ Pushing the envelope is a need, not an attitude
- ❖ The trick is to provide opportunities for "safe" stimulation
- ❖ Many cultures provide these opportunities through ritualized and proactive activities

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**Adolescent differentiation**

- ❖ Happens at the brain and social levels
- ❖ Thus, parents become less of a "direct" or immediate influence
  - ✓ Several studies that parental behavior exerts significant distal influence
- ❖ Teens seek others out to increase the probability of stimulation

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**Taking this together:**

- ❖ Humans are hardwired to have relationships
- ❖ That parental relationships are key
- ❖ But parental relationships take place in the context of larger social organizations – communities
- ❖ Adolescent development requires social interactions AND supervision that is not necessarily by the parent

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***HTC concluded that the cause of this crisis of American childhood is....*** a lack of connectedness:

- ✓ a lack of close connections to other people;
- ✓ a lack of connections to moral and spiritual meaning



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**"In large measure,**

what's causing this crisis of American childhood is a lack of connectedness.

We mean (in part) close connections to other people."

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**Communities**

- ❖ The larger context is local, regional, national, world-wide
- ❖ But humans are endowed with the neurological equipment to manage social interactions
- ❖ Humans NEED to have social interactions from the very beginning

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**Societal reductions in social capital**

- ✓ Those tangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people. Namely:
- ✓ Good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up the social unit (L. J. Hanifan; Robert Putnam)
- ✓ Bowling Alone and the loss of capital as is reflected in the loss of community

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### Kids & connections



- ❖ Kids need to be connected to peers
- ❖ Kids need to be connected to *adults*
- ❖ Kids need to be connected to *institutions*
- ❖ Kids need to be connected to *communities*
- ❖ Kids need to be connected to *values & meaning*

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### Kids need to be seen

- ❖ As part of a community
- ❖ By members of the community
- ❖ They learn by watching
  - ✓ Particularly adolescents
- ❖ When left to their own devices....



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### Further,

- ❖ studies of brain function show that the adolescent brain is developing its ability to understand and process social information -
- ❖ in developmental terms: differentiating from the family.

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### Observation of the social world

- ❖ Is EXACTLY what adolescents NEED to do
- ❖ In order to help the development (brain-wise and behaviorally) kids need to observe & interact with adults in natural settings.

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### What is the default alternative?

- ❖ Peer to peer supervision?
- ❖ Video, movies?
- ❖ Teachers?
- ❖ Those adults who will tolerate them?
- ❖ Other schools' success stories?

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### Supervision

- ❖ Adolescents need to be supervised.
- ❖ Children do fewer drugs, engage in less risky sex and do less violence when under adult supervision.
- ❖ Supervision includes arranging the environment, not just keeping eyes-on.
  - ✓ But 'eyes-on' is good too.

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### **“Authoritative” Communities**

- ❖ The term comes from the parenting literature (Baumind)
- ❖ It is the type of parenting that supports development through
  - ✓ Limit setting
  - ✓ Communicating
  - ✓ Providing appropriate opportunities for autonomy
- ❖ The antithesis of Authoritarian or Permissive parenting

*Authoritative Communities are groups that live out the types of connectedness that our children increasingly lack*

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### **Authoritative Communities**

1. It is a social institution that includes children and youth.
2. It treats children as ends in themselves.
3. It is warm and nurturing.
4. It establishes clear limits and expectations.
5. The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists

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### **Authoritative Communities**

6. It is multi-generational.
7. It has a long-term focus.
8. It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
9. It encourages spiritual and religious development.
10. It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.

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### So why

- ❖ Would we isolate them?
- ❖ Kids are our responsibility
- ❖ In a sense, they are a community asset and so they "belong" to the various communities

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### Why are schools important institutions to have in our communities?

- ❖ We see the kids and their behavior
- ❖ Kids see adults and their behavior
- ❖ Kids participate in the community
  - ✓ Visiting hospitals, nursing homes, police & fire more easily
- ❖ Being in the community means
  - ✓ Less busing
  - ✓ More walking
  - ✓ Less sprawl

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### National Clearinghouse of Educational Facilities (1998).

✓ Design principles for planning schools as centers of community. Washington, D.C: National Institute of Building Sciences. <http://edfacilities.org>

- ❖ The six principles
  - (1) enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners
  - (2) serve as a center of the community;
  - (3) result from a planning and design process that involves all community interests;
  - (4) provide for health, safety, and security;
  - (5) make effective use of available resources; and
  - (6) be flexible and adaptable.

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**#2 The learning environment should serve as a center of the community**

- ❖ Strengthen the a community's sense of identity & coherence
- ❖ Serve as a town (region) hub
- ❖ Help meet community's leisure, recreation & wellness needs
- ❖ Be accessible to people of all ages
- ❖ Encourage more active parental involvement in school activities

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**A school should be a part of the community**

- ❖ Establish a school-parent resource center that is accessible
- ❖ Support pro-active relationships with local businesses
  - ✓ Community-wide positive-behavioral support programs
  - ✓ The 'best practice' for behavior education & intervention

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**Schools within communities, ii**

- ❖ Economics – local businesses
- ❖ Safer - "naturalistic observation", emergency response
- ❖ Consistent with federal and state mandates
- ❖ A centralized, accessible resource, meeting place, gymnasium, etc.
- ❖ Regional schools have been shown to be cost-*inefficient* (Mich. Chamber of Commerce Study)
- ❖ Historic preservation

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**The evidence is clear that  
from brain development to**

Federal policy, environmental  
concerns, safety issues, and  
social capital,  
schools belong in communities.

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**The question should  
NOT be**

where should we put a  
school,

But

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**Why would we put it  
any place but within  
a community?**



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