

# Inclusion of Marginalized Boys: A Survey of a Summer School Using Positive Psychology Interventions

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## Abstract

Marginalized boys at risk of dropping out of high school have for a long time been a problem in the Western world. 100 such Danish 14-16 year old boys were in the summers of 2013, 2014 and 2015 exposed to a new school program, *The Boys Academy*, inspired by Seligman and the American KIPP schools suggesting seven character strengths to be put into action along with academic education: *self-control, commitment, perseverance, social intelligence, curiosity, gratitude, and optimism*. During these three-week summer school periods a study has been conducted by the authors, looking closer at the effects of the program. Academic performance, well-being, motivation and personal development within the seven character strengths were measured. Data consists of interviews, learning scales and different test scores. The results of the study show that all the boys improved substantially in reading, spelling, math, well-being and school motivation during the three week summer school.

**Keywords:** Positive psychology-based educational program, School motivation, Learning acceleration, School engagement, Marginalized boys

## **1. Introduction**

Not only Denmark, but the Western world in general, has seen an increase in problems with boys in the educational sector. Too many boys are left out of their local community and do not measure up to the standards of the traditional educational system. Many years of research indicate that such boys do not thrive and they perform poorly in school compared to most girls (Nordahl, Sunnevåg, Aasen & Kostøl, 2010; Danmarks Statistik [Statistics Denmark], 2015; Andersen, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Jørgensen & Preisler, 2015). Only 18 percent of the boys in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the Danish public school express that they really like the school compared to 24 percent of the girls (Rasmussen & Due, 2011). We do see great variation within the group of boys, however: the parents' socio-economic status plays an important role as sons of parents with an education, a job, and "books on the shelves at home" (Egelund, 2010, 2013) generally have no problems. Yet, in the case of parents of lower socio-economic status - for example low income, little education, social isolation, and single dependent household - the boys are very disadvantaged. The Danish Public School System is not good at including this group of students, as has been documented in, among others, the PISA studies (ibid.).

As a means to address the above-mentioned problem Løkkefonden (Note 1) initiated a pilot project in 2012, called The Boys Academy, with 23 boys from different public schools across Denmark (Andersen, 2014). The boys were disadvantaged students: they were in different ways "on the edge of the community" (ibid.) and had difficulties in school. After many years of schooling the boys had not learnt much academically, they did not thrive, and were often in conflict with teachers and/or other students, or rather almost the other way around: they were overlooked and isolated. They were all fighting low self-esteem and lack of faith in own abilities. Going to school had not made a positive difference to them, and with that loss in confidence, any constructive expectation of the educational system and their future role herein had disappeared. Yet, in three weeks the pilot program managed to boost the boys quite significantly both academically and personally. The main thought behind the pilot program is that boys on the edge of the school system can learn if they are taught with other methods and materials. This should allow every one of them to learn on their own terms and in their own pace, though in interaction with others (Løkkefonden, 2012). The positive effects of summer learning programs in general have been pinpointed in a literature review by McCombs et al. (2011) as well as in a recent Danish report (Jørgensen & Preisler, 2015).

## **2. Strength-Based Intervention**

The Boys Academy educational intervention program is based on the idea of combining intensive academic tuition with a development of social competences, strengthening of positive personal character strengths, and improvement of daily habits. The work with social competences and the boys' personalities involves seven selected "educational character strengths". Seligman argues that pupils become more successful with learning and education if they know their personal character strengths and learn to use them as much as possible at

school (Seligman, 2011).

In the American network *KIPP Charter Schools* (Note 2), Seligman, Peterson, and Duckworth have chosen these seven educational character strengths that are deemed especially important in relation to attending and completing education (Andersen, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). The seven character strengths to be put into action are: *self-control, commitment, perseverance, social intelligence, curiosity, gratitude, and optimism*. A central point about these seven character strengths is that they all, to a certain degree can be learned and developed throughout life (Andersen, 2014; Seligman, 2011).

According to Seligman, well-being is viewed as a crucial condition for learning; a viewpoint shared by The Boys Academy (Løkkefonden, 2012). Seligman describes well-being with the so-called PERMA-concept, which contains five measurable elements (Seligman, 2011). Each element contributes to well-being, but none of them define only well-being. If working with these elements is given priority, it can enhance the well-being of the involved. The measurable elements in PERMA are:

- 1) Positive emotion seen in relation to a comfortable life wherein well-being is a significant aspect (the P in PERMA)
- 2) Engagement (the E in PERMA)
- 3) Relationships, good and meaningful relations with family, friends and colleagues are crucial for well-being. Other people are viewed as the best antidote against hardship in life and the best medicine to experience successes in life (the R in PERMA)
- 4) Meaning in life, which is about participating, belonging, and serving something that you see as bigger and more meaningful than yourself. Central to meaning are social networks and participation in communities, because it gives meaning and purpose in life (the M in PERMA)
- 5) Achievement where you seek learning, performance, and mastering for your own sake (the A in PERMA) (ibid.).

The five elements of well-being mentioned above are connected to the seven character strengths in a form of ‘pedagogical package’ in which they are integrated in the work with the boys’ learning and well-being at The Boys Academy.

Several similar interventions have been implemented worldwide over the last decade. Around 70 peer reviewed articles on that can be identified through an academic review (Linder & Ledertoug, 2014). Of these 16% of the interventions deal with the mentioned youth group but none of these are entirely for boys. Waters (2011) have found that using strength-based interventions in education has a positive effect.

An important goal for The Boys Academy is to increase boys’ school motivation, not only in the short term (i.e. during the three-week summer course) but also in the long term of high school attendance and graduation and completing further vocational or academic education. Besides Seligman’s (2011) theory, The Boys Academy therefore also involves some of the

newest motivational theory (Sheldon, 2013). Sheldon's theory of positive motivation is partly based on the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000). According to this, all human beings have three basic needs: the needs for *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness*. These needs are seen as essential for facilitating and internalizing human motivation, social development and personal well-being, for which reason they have been taken into account during the summer course. Among other things, motivation affects people's interest, excitement and confidence and, consequent, their performance, persistence and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and is thus crucial for learning. This is also supported by Hattie's meta studies which claim that motivation is an important factor for student learning with an effect size of 0.48 (Hattie, 2009).

### 3. A Mixed Methods Study

All the boys who have participated in The Boys Academy summer schools of 2013, 2014 and 2015, i.e. around a total of 300, had a family background characterized by low SES (i.e. socio-economic status). All 300 boys were included in the quantitative studies, but only 12 have been interviewed each summer. In this article we deal with the study of the 100 boys from summer camp 2013, with a few references though to studies of the 2014 and 2015 groups as well.

The proportion of the participating boys from a single provider household has been higher all three years compared to Danish boys in general. The group of boys has comprised students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade from all over the country, appointed by parents, schools and municipalities. A larger part has had a different ethnic origin than Danish compared to the nationwide average. When applying, the boys and their parents have had to state that the boy had significant difficulties in reading and mathematics, had no diagnosis, and was mentally able to participate in The Boys Academy for 20 days.

#### 3.1 Data Collecting Instruments in the 2013 Study

1) Qualitative interviews with 12 of the 100 boys. The boys were selected according to a diversity principle, i.e. they each represent a segment of the overall group with regard to geography, ethnicity, interests, personalities, etc. Furthermore all six teachers from The Boys Academy summer school of 2013 were interviewed.

2) Academic tests in reading, spelling, and math were conducted at the beginning, during, and after the three-week summer course. The size of the effect was measured using Hattie's algorithm in comparison to all the tests (Hattie, 2013). All 100 boys participated. The academic testing was conducted by the teachers themselves, using standard Danish academic test materials from e.g. Dansk Psykologisk Forlag [Danish Psychologist Association Publishers] and they have also themselves made the statistical analysis of these in cooperation with a university statistician.

3) In order to measure the learning process during the hundred boys' stay at The Boys' Academy the LRS (Learning Rating Scale) was administered to the boys twice (Nissen, Lemire & Andersen, 2014). LRS (see Figure 1) is an analog rating-scale measuring learning, and is a research-based scale that shows how processes of learning are generally dependent on

whether (1) the student is met with positive expectations, (2) the teacher's way of teaching fits the student, (3) the learning method triggers the student's learning process, and (4) alliances between the teacher and the students, and among the students, are positive (Nissen, Lemire & Andersen, 2014). These theoretical ideas are transformed in the LRS into a four-item visual analog instrument, consisting of four 10 cm visual analog scales with instructions to place a hash mark on a line with negative responses depicted on the left and positive responses indicated on the right (see Figure 2). First, a *learning gain scale* gauges the experienced learning gain in the lesson on a continuum from "I don't learn a lot in school" to "I learn a lot in school". Second is a *social scale*, which rates the lesson on a continuum from "I don't get along well in school" to "I get along well in school". Third is a *method match scale*, which requires the student to rate the lesson on a continuum from "I don't like the way teacher teaches" to "I like the way teacher teaches". Finally, a fourth *expectation scale* gauges the student experience of expectations on a continuum from "Not much is expected of me in school" to "Much is expected of me in school". The LRS was subsequently scored by simply summing the marks made by the student, measured to one decimal place on each of the four lines. Each of the four lines was scored from 0-10 points, awarding one point per centimeter. As a result, the overall *learning alliance score* ranges from 0-40 points. There is a cut-off-score of 32 indicating that learning takes place at 32 and above (Nissen et al, 2014) 100 boys participated.

## LRS Learning Rating Scale

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

*How do you think you are doing in school at the moment? Please put a mark on the lines to let us know.*

**In class**

I don't learn much in school 😞 |-----| 😊 I learn a lot in school

**Socially**

I don't get along well in school 😞 |-----| 😊 I get along well in school

**Method**

I don't like the way teacher teaches 😞 |-----| 😊 I like the way teacher teaches

**Expectation**

Not much is expected of me in school 😞 |-----| 😊 Much is expected of me in school

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Figure 1. The learning rating scale (Nissen et al., 2014)

4) Ongoing measurements (using an Outcome Rating Scale based on the same methodology as the LRS mentioned above) of the work with the seven character strengths (Linder & Ledertoug, 2014). All 100 boys from summer camp 2013 participated in these measurements.

#### 4. Ethics

Conducting qualitative research, like the interviews in this particular study, is a value-laden activity concerning the personal lives and experiences of human beings, for which reason different ethical challenges have to be considered. At the same time, the qualitative approach contains potentials, which allow marginalized groups to be heard in the public domain (Brinkmann, 2010). In this case, hopefully the study will contribute to an increased focus on the potentials of socially and academically marginalized boys, and the results of the study can hopefully inspire others to implement similar initiatives.

The ethical considerations should begin already when preparing the interview and continue through all phases of the study. Kvale & Brinkmann outline four guidelines to be taken into account when doing qualitative research. These are *informed approval*, *confidentiality*,

*consequences for the participants, and the role of the researcher* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). All four guidelines have been considered during this study.

When applying for The Boys Academy, the boys and their parents have to sign a statement of consent that they can participate in documentation regarding The Boys Academy, and that their results can be published in relevant contexts. Furthermore, the interviewees were informed about the objective of this specific study before the interviews were conducted. In qualitative research, you are ethically obliged to protect the private lives of the respondents, since they are not hidden behind numbers and statistics like in quantitative research (Brinkmann, 2010). All names and other personal data that may identify the participants are anonymised in this paper.

Upon return to their home and home schools after the summer camps the boys are attached to a local mentor, who will for a year assist the boys in following-up on the camp intervention program.

## 5. Results

- 1) Three reading tests were conducted during the three weeks.
- 2) Three math tests were conducted in the same period as well.
- 3) Three spelling tests were also conducted in the same period. For all three academic areas the size of the effect was calculated using Hattie’s algorithm (Hattie, 2013) (see Figure 2).
- 4) It should be repeated that these tests were conducted by the teachers themselves – but a statistician assisted in the statistical analysis and in the construction of this figure:

Change in standard deviation			
	MATH	SPELLING	READING
MIDDLE	0.58	0.34	0.32
END	0.65	0.27	0.89
TOTAL	1.23	0.61	1.21
Years of Learning	3.06	1.51	3.02

Figure 2. Table for measurement of years of learning according to Hattie’s algorithm of learning effect (Hattie, 2013)

The academic tests show that significant improvements are present for almost all 100 participating students within reading, spelling, and math. The post tests at the end of the three-week course showed an improvement of 45% in math, 70% in spelling and 53 % in reading.

In addition to the academic tests, learning rating scales (LRS) were conducted (Nissen et al., 2014) during (mid) and at the end (post) of the three-week period of The Boys Academy. Researcher Poul Nissen (co-author of this article) participated in this data collection and these tests clearly indicate that substantial learning took place during that period, confirming the results of the mentioned academic tests.

An equivalent measurement instrument has been used to measure the boys' personal development in relation to the mentioned seven character strengths. Here, too, a similar positive development was documented (Nissen et al, 2014).

All surveys done as part of the study point uniquely to positive effects on academic learning, experienced learning, and personal development (the seven character strengths). But what has caused this positive effect? What makes all the efforts of The Boys Academy so effective? Qualitative studies (the conducted interviews) can produce some possible answers to these questions, which is what we will look into in the following paragraphs.

## 6. Analysis of Interviews

The interviews include, as previously mentioned, interviews with twelve boys as well as with all six participating teachers. All interviews were conducted at the end of The Boys Academy's three-week summer course in July 2013. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in terms of Kvale and Brinkmann's (2008) inspired method, where the main phases are coding, condensing, and theory informed interpretation. Furthermore, following Kvale and Brinkmann (ibid.) a quality rating was done of each interview. These methodological elements are described in more detail in the Danish publication *Drengeskademiets. Trivsel, læring og personlig udvikling for drenge på kanten* [The Boys Academy. Well-being, Learning, and Personal Development for Marginalized Boys] (Andersen, 2014).

In this article the following examples of quotes from the boys participating at The Boys Academy and teachers are analyzed using the PERMA-concept by Seligman (2011) and also with the help of the STD-theory (see model 1 attached).

*Thematic Analysis of the Boys' Interviews: Highlighting Themes of Great Conformity in the Interview Persons' Statements*

### 6.1 Exercise, Nutrition, and Sleep

All the boys in the interviews report clearly improved habits. Bad habits related to e.g. exercise, nutrition, and sleep have been a big problem for many of the boys. Research shows that insufficient sleep induces an increased risk of e.g. concentration difficulties, reduced academic performance, and stress development, whereas a good quality of sleep has positive effects on general physical and mental well-being (Rasmussen, Pedersen & Due, 2015). The Boys Academy has meant a positive turn around for all of the boys:

➤ "A good start of the day. Good to have so many breaks, and good to get fresh fruit and water during the breaks."



➤ “Stopped playing soccer at home when I was not allowed on the best team anymore. Then I turned to computer games. Turned day and night around. Never really tired. Play on the computer all the time at home. Eat candy. Nap at school. Luckily it all ended here.”

These examples show the boys’ change of habits toward a healthier lifestyle is equivalent to fulfilling the P in the PERMA-concept (P for positive emotion and well-being).

### *6.2 Relationship to Teachers*

A very significant difference is apparent in the way the boys describe their relationship to the teachers at their home school and The Boys Academy. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), students’ relationship to their teachers is of great significance when it comes to motivation. A student is more inclined to perform given behaviors if people to whom they feel connected value these behaviors. Hattie’s meta studies further underlines that the teacher-student relationship is highly important for the student’s learning with an effect size of 0.72 (Hattie, 2009). The boys’ relationship at home is bad, marked by apparently unengaged teachers, who make the boys feel overseen and disconnected. This is contrary to The Boys Academy where they experienced engaged, present, and attentive teachers in a good mood:

When the boys are asked about the differences between the The Boys Academy and their own public school:

- “Here the teachers respect us: They listen, they are in a good mood, they are friendly, they make you believe in it.”
- “Too much turmoil in the classes at public school. The teachers just keep going, they don’t stop the trouble; they don’t care.”
- “I don’t know what the goals are at home. It’s never explained. Don’t get the material. We never talk about how you learn. Didn’t have any plans and no goals at home.”

### *6.3 Community and Togetherness*

At home many of the boys have felt isolated, bullied (or are the ones bullying), and in conflict with the teachers and students at their school. A feeling of insecurity, and a fear of being made fun of if they said something wrong characterized the relationship to several of their classmates. The boys’ participation in social communities, for example sports activities outside of school, has stopped. The feeling of being rejected by their peers and feeling lonely and isolated can have tremendous consequences for the boys’ academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). On the contrary, students’ academic goals and engagement are affected positively, if they feel socially and emotionally supported by their peers (ibid.). At The Boys Academy, however, the boys have rediscovered the joy of real community and friendships, and they feel they have received new social competences during the summer course:

- “Here we have gotten to know everybody. We have gotten a great community here.”
- “Here are better opportunities to talk about our problems. There is always an adult to talk to.”

➤ “We are in this together working towards the same goals. All of us continually think about the common slogans: Be passionate, perseverance, optimism, social intelligence, best together.”

A closer relationship both within the boys’ group but also with respect for the teachers and from the teachers show the R (good and meaningful relationships) in the PERMA-concept and thus give the boys experiences of success and teach them resilience in life.

#### *6.4 Consequence and Punishment*

The boys like the kind of ‘consequence education’ (authors’ own expression) they have met at The Boys Academy. They experience that community and being together work well because both rely on clear, logical consequences to violations of rules. A consequence of not complying with the community’s rules is, for example, that their cell phones are taken away in the few hours a day they are allowed to use them. Another consequence of violating the rules can be to participate in extra cleaning and kitchen duties.

➤ “Here you learn to think positively about the punishments you get. You can see the purpose of them.”

➤ “The system is explained to us, and we respect it. We can also laugh a little about getting punished, and even though it can be tiresome, it’s okay.”

The very clear rules and regulations at The Boys Academy are working within teaching the boys the value of the M (to see your participation in a community as something bigger and more meaningful than yourself) in the PERMA-concept.

#### *6.5 Problems and Conflicts*

At home the boys lacked tools to process the many problems and conflicts they had. They felt trapped and in need of somebody to talk to, and as we have seen they didn’t feel safe and secure with either classmates or teachers. At The Boys Academy they got both: tools and somebody to talk to.

➤ “We use the seven character strengths a lot when we have problems: best together, never give up, fight for it and so on. It has helped us a lot.”

➤ “It has been good with all the many talks throughout the course about how we are doing and how it is going.”

➤ “The problems are not put away here. We address the problems as they arise. At home I have had a lot of problems with the teachers. They don’t like me and I don’t like them.”

➤ “Here we work a lot on identifying the problems and do something about that. At home nothing ever happens.”

By learning to identify and dealing with problems the boys have gotten the M (meaning in life by participating in communities) from the PERMA-concept.

#### *6.6 Academics*

At public schools too many boys have big problems of not being able to keep up academically and in most cases they have fallen years behind the expected academic level. The boys in The Boys Academy program felt lost and had very little faith in them being able to get something out of going to school when they started the program. According to Hattie, one of the greatest influences on students' learning is their own expectations with an effect size on 1.44 (Hattie, 2013). Furthermore, Deci and Ryan understand the feeling of competence as a basic psychological need with big motivational and academic consequences when thwarted (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which has been the case for these boys. The Boys Academy has turned this notion upside down; all of them have experienced significant academic progress, and suddenly they see themselves as students who know how to learn and with a future in the educational system. In terms of Bandura (1997), the boys' self-efficacy is enhanced as a result of their personal mastery experiences at The Boys Academy:

- “It helps a lot that you learn at your own pace. My teachers at my public school never taught me anything – I don't understand what they are saying.”
- “Here I learn something. I don't at home. You want to do it right when somebody is looking at what we get out of it.”

The boys had never dreamed about reading books. At the beginning of the three-week course most of them had very low reading competences. Their experience was that books were too difficult and uninteresting. Now, however, they have experienced something very different. A concrete example of how it has changed for them is that many have become aware of books that interest them. The salient point here seems to be that the boys are challenged at an appropriate level, that they always know where they are going, and they feel that they can get the appropriate help and support to get there. Furthermore by experiencing success and an ability of believing in their own learning the boys experience the A (achievement of learning for their own sake) in the PERMA-concept.

### *6.7 Good Habits*

Most of the boys mention how happy they have become about their new healthy habits. Regular bed times are mentioned, for example. One boy describes it thus: “To have that kind of alertness I think is really nice.”

The boys want to try to stick with these good habits when they return home again, both regarding sleeping habits but also by practicing math and reading skills in the evening so their learning will continue. Some of the boys agreed on cutting down on their candy consumption when they return home. One of them explains: “Usually we eat much more candy and stuff like that, but then we got something completely different to eating here, where we didn't get sugar at all. And all we drank was water so the energy isn't always at its highest all the time, but I really think that I have grown accustomed to it, so I am not so tired anymore at all.”

The boys are well aware that the many improvements their stay at The Boys Academy has made in their life will not necessarily last into the future unless they stick to their new habits and continue the good intentions when they go home:

- "I will go away from computer games and in the future focus more on sports and skateboarding at home."
- "I ate way too much candy before. I have learned to eat healthier now. I want to stick to that."
- "I have become much more social from being here. I didn't want to talk to anyone before."

As a means of addressing the challenge of maintaining the positive development and the good habits, The Boys Academy has established a voluntary mentoring program, which provides all the participating boys a local mentor when they return to their home schools. The engagement the boys have shown at The Boys Academy and their willingness to continue this engagement at home is in line with the E (engagement) in the PERMA-concept.

## 7. Analysis of All Interviews According to Character Strengths

Character strengths not only interact with motivation orientations within the PERMA-concept but also within the STD-theory as shown in model 1 (attached). Therefore, the strategy for looking at the character strengths in this study has been operationalized within those two concepts. All the measurable elements within PERMA-concept were just shown used in the highlighted themes described in the former section.

### 7.1 Persistence

All of the slogans, but especially *Never give up*, are mentioned several times during the interviews as something that just works. The boys also talk about how, in the math lessons for example, the students are not allowed to move on to the next subject or level until they know the academic area of the curriculum they are currently working on. This principle is based on the assumption that learning takes places individually and asynchronously, which is not usually taken into account in a regular classroom (Løkkefonden, 2013). A dialogue between three students, here named Mikkel, Peter, and Ferhat (anonymized), expresses it like this:

Mikkel: "The difference here is that you continue..."

Ferhat: "You continue..."

Mikkel: "...yes, you continue."

Peter: "Until you know it."

Ferhat: "...yes, until you know it."

Martin: "You are not allowed to leave before you have actually solved your exercises."

### 7.2 Self-Control

Teacher C explains how the work towards self-control has contributed to the boys' positive development: "... a kind of inclusiveness has happened in an authentic way. I can't come any closer to explaining it, but the work [with self-control and the other character strengths] must have done something to them. Focus has been on each one of them [...] instead of [...]

measuring everybody by the same standards, and so there has been a high degree of self-responsibility and control in the learning community.” What the teacher expresses, relates to Deci and Ryan’s idea of autonomy as a basic need. When the boys feel that they are actually responsible for their own learning and development, it has positive consequences for their motivation.

Both teachers and students emphasize the ‘buddy teams’ (of three to five students) as something that has been instrumental in teaching the boys self-control, create common and individual responsibility, and, closely related to that, natural friendships.

### 7.3 Social Intelligence

The boys all mention the large and good community that was generated at The Boys Academy. It feels like one big family. Working with the characteristic *social intelligence* has, among other things, contributed to this and the agenda it has set.

One boy describes it this way: “Now we also have more people looking after at each other and asking how you are doing. And many are really good at intervening and saying ‘*you know what, you are coming with me, then I will help you talk about it*’.”

Another says: “So [...] you are in an awesome company, you get good friends out of it [...]. And when you are in awesome company that makes it all more fun.”

Yet another describes how The Boys Academy has helped him become more open towards other people: “...I have almost never hung out with anybody, just been by myself, gone outside and skateboarded by myself, but [...] after I’ve been here, I have started to trust people. [Now] I feel that I can be around some people and become friends with them even if I haven’t seen them before.”

A teacher says the following about the boys’ social successes: “...I think that one of the most interesting thing is that their problem creating behavior [...] has almost not been present. So many of these kids have demonstrated problem-creating behavior indeed [at their old school] because they were not concentrating and were unfocused, and none has known what to do with them.”

The character strengths most prevalent in the interviews were ‘persistence’, ‘self-control’, and ‘social intelligence’. These three character strengths are taught and strengthened in cooperation with the learning, relationship building, and the forming of good habits created at The Boys Academy.

## 8. Discussion

The boys’ academic development is compared to Hattie’s concept of size of effect. According to Hattie, measuring the size of the effect is a useful method to compare results from different measurements. The measurement of size of effect is done by measuring the difference between two scores, for example start and end score, which are then divided by standard deviation. An efficient coefficient of 0.4 is equivalent to one year of learning (Hattie, 2013).

The results of the analysis of the many data, from the interviews, the professional tests, LRS,

and the scaling of character strengths etc., are very positive, as shown in the earlier paragraphs. The results also confirm earlier research on resilience (Jakobsen, 2008).

The big question is, however, what will happen when the boys return to their normal everyday life? It is well-known that quick and impressive results can be achieved when people are removed from a strained environment and, for a limited period of time, exposed to optimal conditions and efforts. But can the students maintain the positive progress when they return to their home environment? Follow-up interviews with the boys after returning to their regular school and family will answer this question. Interviews will be conducted by the authors in 2015 and in that connection focus on the crucial mentoring that will take place at the regular home school. Results from the three additional interviews conducted by Line Poulsen indicate that the healthy development of the boys continue after the boys return to their home schools, but this additional study is too narrow to draw general conclusions on.

After several studies Hattie has reached the conclusion that the most significant single factor to promote school performance is feedback. The teacher should receive feedback from the student's perspective and the student gets feedback from the teacher's perspective. Using LRS makes it possible for the teacher to quickly get feedback on the learning (Hattie, 2009). It is exactly this kind of feedback process the LRS-schedule can help facilitate, and thereby establish and develop evidence in the teacher's work.

## **9. Conclusion**

Before the boys started at The Boys Academy's summer camps in 2012 and 2013, only one in eight answered that he was engaged and looked forward to going to school. By the end of The Boys Academy in the summers of 2012 and 2013, seven out of eight of the same boys answered they were engaged in their education and looked forward to it. The research results from 2012 show that 78 percent of the boys experienced higher self-confidence because of the stay, 74 percent became better at taking responsibility for themselves, and 74 percent got better at pursuing goals (Andersen, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Similar results are reported for the summer camps in 2013, 2014 and 2015 (ibid.).

The objective of this study was to measure to which degree the educational program at The Boys Academy had an impact on the boys' learning, well-being, personal development and school motivation. Based on the different data presented in this article, the general conclusion is that the work at The Boys Academy has had a positive effect on the students' learning, well-being, personal development, and motivation. The conclusion can thus be summed up as follows:

- The students have generally and significantly improved their academic level in reading, spelling, and math.
- Generally an improvement has been seen in the students' well-being and school motivation for going to school.
- The majority of the students experience a positive personal development towards a greater sense of self-esteem, self-regulation, and inner motivation.

➤ Students who, prior to the course, felt (and were described by their home school as) problematic, inadequate, hopeless, and functioning badly in school now see themselves as more resourceful, more competent, more social, and with a greater hope for the future.

The results indicate that The Boys Academy has to a large degree fulfilled its short-term project goals. As mentioned in the discussion, the question about long-term effects remains, however. What happens when the boys return to their home school in grade 9 after the summer school? New studies being conducted in 2016-2017 will look closer at that question. It is important to continue developing the mentoring program at the home schools as well as expanding this intervention into the vocational or academic training these boys continue into after high school.

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## Notes

Note 1. The *Løkkefonden* is a non-profit foundation initiated in 2012 by the Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and two business leaders. The foundation has as a goal to reach and help misfit boys and young men.

Note 2. Retrieved from <http://www.kipp.org/our-approach/character>

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