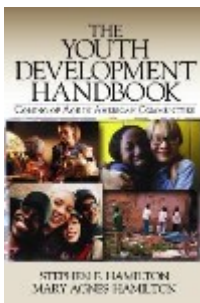


Building Resilient Youth

A review of



The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities

by Stephen F. Hamilton and Mary Agnes Hamilton (Eds.)

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004. 408 pp. ISBN 0-7619-8872-6. \$49.95, paperback

Reviewed by

[Stephanie L. Brooke](#)

In community agencies, work with youth focuses on building resiliency. Building on youth's strengths increases resiliency so that youth have some positive protection against the risks they face on a daily basis, risks such as violence, crime, drug use, and pregnancy. Community agencies call this promoting developmental assets, and this is the focus of Stephen F. Hamilton and Mary Agnes Hamilton's work. *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities* is a comprehensive, well-researched volume that outlines the principles of youth development. Using a case approach, it discusses different types of youth organizations that promote the principles of child development. Of particular interest is the last section of the book, which focuses on implementation of youth development programs, evaluative measures, and funding concerns.

Opening the first section of the book is a thorough discussion of youth development principles. "The term youth development is used in at least three different ways, referring to a natural process of development, principles, and practices" (p. 3). In line with this logical description of youth development, the book covers all three aspects in detail. Having had

experience in several youth organizations, from settlement houses to homeless shelters for teens, I thought the book adequately describes the personal and social assets that promote positive youth development. Benson's conceptualization of developmental assets, in particular, was used as a guide to developing the programs for the settlement house for which I worked. Hamilton and Hamilton's work supports the importance of the development assets and internal sense of control—individually and in combination—as being key to effectively dealing with life adversity and promoting the principles that guide youth development. Further, the text takes an ecosystemic approach to understanding and promoting youth development principles and practices.

In the middle section of the book, the editors use a case approach and detail different types of organizations, from grass-roots agencies such as settlement houses to national organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. “As a clearer picture emerges of what youth need to aim for and attain a productive, healthy adulthood, we also understand more about the organizational structures, program features, functions, and context that support these youth development goals” (p. 26). Using three cases, the editors illustrate the principles of youth development in practice, institutional challenges, and community connections. Featuring the East Oakland Youth Development Center, HOME, and Jamestown Community Center, the editors provide a history of each organization as well as discuss the important features of youth development goals, including youth centeredness, clear focus, embedded curriculum, cycles of planning, practice, and performance.

I found the last section of the book particularly valuable, as it focuses on action steps. For those people responsible for maintaining an agency's funding for youth programs, this is an important resource. The editors provide ideas for designing work and service learning for youth. Further, they provide suggestions for building family strengths. One of the most frustrating parts of my work with youth was the lack of involvement of family members. The message of our program and that of the school system were similar, but when the child returned to his or her home, the message was different, if not diametrically opposed to the community message. This particular chapter discusses in detail the different types of family systems and provides strategies for strengthening the family's assets so that families and communities can work together to support youth.

Similar to the approaches used in primary education, the editors provide information on incorporating peers as a tool to promote positive youth development, a microsystemic view. Different types of peer programs, such as peer counselors, mediations, tutors, and mentors, are described in detail. This chapter follows nicely from the chapter on how high schools can promote positive school development. Continuing with the ecosystemic overview presented in the first chapter, the editors discuss exosystemic influences providing suggestions on how to promote and strengthen a community's ties to create a comprehensive context that fosters positive youth development. Further, another chapter covers macrosystem influences, specifically focusing on the media's impact on youth development.

Absent from this text is a view of the chronosystem, Bronfenbrenner's (1990) view of how time impacts a child's environment and development.

The last section of the book outlines critical factors for the successful implementation of communitywide initiatives for youth development. Particularly valuable is the section on evaluating the implementation of youth development initiatives. Critical approaches to evaluation are key to showing outcomes to the program's indicators. The text ends with implications for youth development practices.

This book is a highly valuable resource for college and high school educators, community agency representatives, social workers, and counselors working with young children and teens. *The Youth Development Handbook* draws on the key themes presented in the previously mentioned chapters: the ecological perspective, mentoring, race and ethnicity issues, problem solving, building communitywide systems, outcomes and indicators, and youth participation. In summary, the book is extensively researched, well written, and well organized. It is a must-read for any individual working to promote positive youth development.

Reference

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1990). Discovering what families do. In *Rebuilding the nest: A new commitment to the American family*. Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America.

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