

Preface

Over the past decade, the positive youth development (PYD) perspective has been adopted by researchers studying adolescence, practitioners of youth development, and policy makers concerned with improving the life chances of young people and their families. This book describes research about youth development that provides evidence for policy and programs aimed at promoting positive development (thriving) among the diverse youth of the U.S. Using this evidence, the authors of each chapter in this book make specific recommendations for policy innovations and youth development programs.

Much of the evidence about youth thriving that is discussed in this book is derived from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD), a longitudinal study supported by the National 4-H Council and the Altria Corporation that spanned nearly a decade. Accordingly, the book describes the concept of PYD, the theoretical basis of the 4-H Study, and the method the 4-H Study used to study youth. In particular, we discuss the Five Cs model of PYD—involving Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring—and the links across adolescence among the Five Cs and a “sixth C” of youth Contributions to self, family, school, and community.

Each of the chapters in this book focuses on a specific facet of youth development, such as youth strengths (e.g., intentional self regulation, school engagement, and hopeful future expectations) or contextual resources that, in combination with youth strengths, provide the bases of PYD. Examples of these ecological assets are parents, peers, and, of course, out-of-school-time youth development programs. Across the chapters, authors explain how the integration of youth strengths and ecological resources promotes thriving and, in turn, is associated with such “outcomes” of PYD as academic achievement, facets of youth identity development, positive and active engaged citizenship, sexual health, and diminished engagement in bullying. A final chapter in the book, by Suzanne Le Menestrel, formerly the National Program Leader of the Division of Youth and 4-H within the National Institute for Food and Agriculture of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides a scholarly reflection on

research about PYD, as illustrated by the 4-H Study, and discusses how developmental research provides an essential means to advance evidence-based practice and policy innovations for youth development programs.

In sum, our goals in editing this work are to further research and contribute to evidence-based applications aimed at promoting PYD among diverse youth. Our hope is that the book will be a useful resource for policy makers, practitioners, applied developmental scientists, and members of the public interested in the use of theory-predicated, developmental research in community-based actions designed to enhance the lives of diverse young people.

We are grateful to numerous people and organizations for making this book possible. We are profoundly grateful to the authors of the chapters. Their singular levels of expertise and mastery of their areas of youth development scholarship are richly and compellingly conveyed in this volume. We also express particular gratitude to Suzanne Le Menestrel for writing the concluding chapter of this book and for all of her years of support and service on the Advisory Board of the 4-H Study.

We are grateful as well to the other members of our 4-H Study Advisory Board—Drs. Dale A. Blyth, University of Minnesota; Lynne M. Borden, University of Arizona; Constance A. Flanagan, The University of Wisconsin; Daniel F. Perkins, The Pennsylvania State University; Michael J. Rovine, The Pennsylvania State University; and Linda Jo Turner, University of Missouri—and in particular to Professor Alexander von Eye, of Michigan State University, for chairing the Advisory Board. His thoughtful, illuminating, and generous scientific collaboration across all the years of the study was essential to us.

Of course, we have deep and enduring gratitude to the National 4-H Council and to the Altria Corporation for the opportunity to conduct the research described in this book. In particular, we want to thank Donald T. Floyd, Jr., past President and CEO of the National 4-H Council, and his colleagues, Jennifer Sirangelo, the President and CEO of National 4-H Council, and Linda Jo Turner, retired Foundations Relations Consultant at National 4-H Council, for their unflagging faith in and support of the work involved in conducting the 4-H Study. We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support from Philip Morris USA, an Altria company, and the collegial support from our Altria colleagues, including Jennifer Hunter, Megan Witherspoon, Joel Schendel, and Ed Largo. Without Don, Jennifer, and their teams, neither the study nor the field of PYD would have existed.

We are also grateful for the contribution of the Thrive Foundation of Youth of Menlo Park, CA, and their past Executive Director, Carol Gray, and her colleagues, and Nicole Taylor, the current Executive Director, and her colleagues, for some of the research reported in this book. We thank the Thrive Foundation for the funding to develop tools and measures for youth-serving organizations that were based on findings from the 4-H Study.

The editors and authors of this book have been exceedingly fortunate to have had superb scholarly support and intellectual and editorial guidance from Professor Roger J. R. Levesque, Indiana University, the Editor of the Springer *Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development* series. We are honored and privileged to have this book appear in his series.

We are also grateful to Judy Jones, Senior Editor, Springer Publishing, for her support and wise editorial guidance. Her enthusiasm and commitment to this book enabled both editors and authors to complete their work with quality and efficiency.

Jarrett M. Lerner, the Managing Editor in the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts, was involved with this book since its inception. He has organized and advanced every facet of the editorial and production process. His professionalism, knowledge, organizational capacities, efficiency, commitment, and indefatigable, positive spirit were vital to the existence, and to any contributions, of this book.

Finally, we are grateful to the youth who participated in the 4-H Study. It was a privilege to work with them and to report about their development and achievements. The commitment of these young people and their parents to participating in a long-term longitudinal project was extraordinary. Obviously, without them, this book could not exist. Accordingly, we believe it is fitting to dedicate this book to them.

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Promoting Positive Youth Development

Lessons from the 4-H Study

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