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PROMOTING POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT -- A DEVELOPMENTAL INTERVENTION SCIENCE APPROACH: NEW DIRECTIONS IN DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY, METHODS, AND RESEARCH

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Reviews of the youth development literature indicate that although hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year to reduce or prevent “problem or risky” youth behaviors, far less research and fewer resources have been directed toward intervention efforts promoting “positive” development, particularly in at risk and behavior problem youth. The result has been the recognition that developmental science needs to do more than generate complex “descriptive” models of developmental systems and of relations between individuals and their real-world ecological settings. The descriptive models need to be translated into programs that can be implemented in “usual care” practice in community settings. To date, however, there has been a paucity of examples of this type of research on troubled (multi-problem) youth. Indeed, the literature on positive youth development and efforts to integrate developmental and intervention science promoting positive youth development is still in its infancy relative to the well-developed treatment and prevention research literatures targeting problem and risky youth behavior.

The May 2008 Special Issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, published by SAGE, reports the results of nearly two decades of the research efforts of the Miami Youth Development Project (YDP), a community-supported positive youth development program of outreach research that draws on a Developmental Intervention Science (DIS) perspective (i.e., a fusion of the developmental and intervention science literatures). These reports illustrate how the application of developmental intervention science outreach research contributes to knowledge of human development at all levels (practical as well as methodological, theoretical, and meta-theoretical). Consistent with a DIS outreach research approach, YDP is committed to the use of descriptive and explanatory knowledge about changes within human systems that occur across the lifespan in the development of evidence-based individual and institutional longitudinal change intervention strategies in promoting long-term developmental change. The evolution of the Miami YDP illustrates the value of developmental intervention science outreach research “in action.”

The key concepts a Developmental Intervention Science approach draws on include:

- Community supported interventions that meet youth and community needs
- Developing affordable and sustainable interventions in “real world” settings
- Targets risky and problem behaviors while promoting positive self development
- Research that aims to promote both short and long term life course changes

“The Miami Youth Development Project (YDP) represents watershed work within developmental science,” Richard Lerner and Willis Overton observe in their Commentary on the issue, “demonstrating, within one project, the key relational integrations -- between individual and context, theory and research ..., qualitative and quantitative change, university and community, and basic and applied – heretofore discussed and pursued as largely disconnected facets of the developmental systems literature. No other project to date demonstrates that it is feasible and theoretically and empirically productive to pursue simultaneously these several instances of relational developmental science. .. Kurtines, Montgomery, and their colleagues and students have given developmental scientists and the youth, families, and communities they seek to understand and serve through their scholarship a potent example of how researchers can transcend the confines of conceptual reductionism, or an exclusive reliance on a single methodology ... to address all issues of science, application, and evaluation raised in regard to enhancing the lives of the diverse young people of America.”

The special issue of *Journal of Adolescent Research*, entitled, “Promoting Positive Youth Development: New Directions in Developmental Theory, Methods, and Research” by William M. Kurtines of Florida International University and colleagues is available for download at <http://jar.sagepub.com/content/vol23/issue3/> Contact: <mailto:kurtines@fiu.edu>