Tak Yan Lee
Daniel T.L. Shek
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# Student Well-Being in Chinese Adolescents in Hong Kong

## Theory, Intervention and Research

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**Editors**

# Student Well-Being in Chinese Adolescents in Hong Kong

Theory, Intervention and Research

Springer

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# Preface

A survey of the scientific literature shows that there is a paucity of research studies on the development of junior secondary school students in Hong Kong. Besides, there are several limitations of the existing studies. First, most studies focus on psychological symptoms and problems in which a narrow conception of student well-being was used. In particular, there are few studies adopting the positive youth development approach to examine the protective factors in different adolescent developmental issues. Second, the major trends of developmental issues among early adolescents in Hong Kong over time are seldom examined. With reference to these limitations in the field, this book focuses on several developmental issues faced by early adolescents in Hong Kong, including relationships with peers and family, resilience in the face of adversity, face-to-face and cyberbullying, drug use, Internet addiction, sex behaviors, and sex education, as well as money literacy and concept of success. Besides, the links between positive youth development and such developmental issues are addressed.

Third, there are few studies that combine theory and practice. This is the first work that offers a comprehensive theory-driven program for the implementation of a positive youth development program targeting common developmental issues for early adolescents in a Chinese context. After reviewing the nature of common adolescent developmental issues in Hong Kong, we then present the theoretical background, conceptual framework, and implementation of a comprehensive positive youth development project (named "P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme," with P.A.T.H.S. denoting Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social programs) in the form of in-class teaching and learning activities. Previous studies suggest that the project is able to promote the holistic development of early adolescents in Hong Kong.

Fourth, most of the existing studies are cross-sectional studies, and there are few longitudinal studies. Besides, large and representative samples are not common in Chinese research studies. As such, this book reviews the published longitudinal evaluation findings on the effectiveness of the prevention program on five common developmental issues. Furthermore, papers on the developmental trends based on longitudinal data collected within the context of the Project P.A.T.H.S. are included.

In short, being one of the titles in the series *Quality of Life in Asia*, this book offers theory, practice, and research of a large-scale preventive program with reference to the positive youth development framework to promote the quality of life of early adolescents in the Chinese context in Hong Kong.

The positive youth development program was initiated by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to promote the holistic development of adolescents in Hong Kong. In collaboration with the Government's Social Welfare Department, Education Bureau, and five universities in Hong Kong, the initial phase of this pioneer project was conducted between 2005 and 2012 with more than 210,000 adolescent participants. Its goal was to help students meet various challenges in their path to adulthood, with a focus on their psychosocial competencies, developmental assets, healthy relationships, and their well-being. We would like to acknowledge the initiation and generous financial support by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

Edited by the researchers of the project, this book reviews the theories regarding the common developmental issues among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong (Chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9), the application of positive youth development constructs to a large-scale positive youth development program in Hong Kong (Chaps. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17), and longitudinal research findings on five common developmental issues (Chaps. 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22). Using multiple perspectives, materials, and research findings, this book presents the overall constructs and framework underlying the Project P.A.T.H.S. in response to the various psychosocial needs of adolescents in Hong Kong. This book provides a clear picture on theory, practice, and evidence of success of the school-based prevention program in promoting students' well-being.

In the first part of this book, each chapter starts with an in-depth analysis of a common developmental issue among early adolescents. Specifically, each chapter of part 1 includes (a) literature review of the definitions, significance, and relevance of the issue today in different cultures and societies, (b) a critical analysis of its impact on adolescents and society, (c) a re-contextualization of the developmental issue in Hong Kong and Chinese societies, and (d) an analysis of the risk and protective factors at different levels (individual, group, society, etc.) and for the different stakeholders involved (families, teachers, peers, etc.). In the second part, each chapter presents (a) an analysis of the theoretical framework structuring the units of the P.A.T.H.S. program on each topic; (b) an analysis on how the relevant positive youth development constructs have been implemented and operationalized in the in-class activities; and (c) an analysis of major criticalities and resistance from students, teachers, families, and institutions. Detailed description and analysis of the program content are necessary for replication in other contexts. Finally, in the last part, results from the 4-year longitudinal study based on the extension phase of the program covered in this book addressed the question of how positive youth development attributes are related to measures of adolescent well-being across the junior high school years.

To conclude, the P.A.T.H.S. program is designed by professionals (psychologists, educators, and social workers) for the professionals (school teachers and

school social workers); it provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for students to develop their quality of life. This program is designed to help young adolescents in developing and managing positive knowledge, values, and skills for social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual wellness through the acquisition of knowledge and experiences, clarifying conflicting values and sharing in a safe and enjoyable manner. These knowledge, values, and skills are especially geared for finding direction and purpose in life. It is a program that allows students to make positive choices in creating and maintaining a healthy lifestyle and well-being. It advocates a positive approach to life and health that helps maximize the students' potential and their quality of life. As our work is pioneer with evidence of success, it can contribute to the Chinese and global database, and it can be used for research and teaching purposes.

We believe this book will be of keen interest to a wide range of professionals who need to design preventive or positive youth development programs to reduce risk factors for adolescents. Professionals such as social workers, psychologists, policy makers, education administrators, teachers, as well as mental health practitioners will find this book valuable in their work. The positive youth development program, in particular the curriculum units based on the positive youth development constructs, can be adopted and used in the formal school curriculum, after school programs, mental health services, and youth programs. We hope that this book will also serve as a resource for researchers and practitioners who are involved in the development and evaluation of preventive programs using positive youth development concepts for adolescents in an attempt to promote student well-being.

Hong Kong, China                                                                                    Tak Yan Lee
Hong Kong, China                                                                                    Daniel T.L. Shek

# Contents

# Contributors

**Diego Busiol, Ph.D.** is Italian and currently working in the Department of Applied Social Sciences, City University of Hong Kong. After graduating in clinical psychology (Italy and Germany), he specialized in psychotherapy (Italy). He worked for several years in different psychiatric community residences as a social worker and a psychologist. Later, he came to Hong Kong to do research on the relations between psychoanalysis and Chinese culture. His research and publications cover psychoanalytic theory and practice, cross-cultural studies, psychoanalysis in Chinese contexts, counseling, and mental health.

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**Rachel C.F. Sun, Ph.D.** got her B.Soc.Sc. and Ph.D. at the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. She is assistant professor of the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong. She is a principal investigator of school misbehavior research studies and coprincipal investigator of positive youth development programs and a service leadership program in Hong Kong. Her research areas include academic achievement motivation, school satisfaction, life satisfaction, positive youth development, problem behavior, school misbehavior, adolescent suicidal ideation, and psychological health. She is a member of the editorial boards of *Research on Social Work Practice* and *Frontiers in Child Health and Human Development*.

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# Introduction

**Tak Yan Lee and Daniel T.L. Shek**

**Abstract**  The organization of various chapters covered in this book is outlined. In the first part of the book, several adolescent developmental issues (including substance abuse, sexual behavior, exposure to pornographic materials, self-harm, and Internet addiction) are discussed with respect to different theoretical explanations, related phenomena in Hong Kong and other countries, and protective factors as well as related effective prevention programs. In the second part of the book, the teaching units developed in the Project P.A.T.H.S. with reference to these developmental issues are presented and the evaluation findings in the previous studies are discussed. In the third part of the book, several chapters based on four waves of longitudinal data collected for the Project P.A.T.H.S. are presented. Throughout the book, it is argued that positive youth development attributes can promote student well-being, and it is important to nurture positive youth development attributes in young people to protect them from engaging in risk behavior.

This book offers the theory, intervention program materials, and related research findings within the context of a positive youth development program to tackle common adolescent developmental issues in Hong Kong. Specifically, five key issues – substance abuse, sexual behavior, exposure to pornographic materials, self-harm, and Internet addiction – were selected for discussion. To give the readers a roadmap for the chapters included in this book, this chapter offers a brief description of the organization of the content in this book.

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In Part I of the book, the selected adolescent developmental issues are examined in terms of different theoretical perspectives with reference to the most up-to-date scientific literature. Basically, the first five chapters follow a somewhat similar structure: (a) presentation of the theoretical conceptions of the issue and why it matters, (b) presentation of findings from Hong Kong as well as the recent trends and differences with reference to other geographic areas, and (c) discussion of protective factors and guidelines for effective prevention programs. In Chap. 1, we discuss why the youth drug problem in Hong Kong is escalating, what drugs are most used in Hong Kong, and what theories may explain the drug use and abuse. Chapter 2 addresses the question of why young people today have an earlier onset of puberty than the previous generations. Following this, a review of the main sex education approaches in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands is conducted and how this can be relevant for Hong Kong is discussed. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the problem of bullying and cyberbullying in different parts of the world and in Hong Kong, with a particular focus on the role of bystanders; some of the major anti-bullying intervention approaches are also presented. Chapter 5 presents the different types of Internet addiction, how Internet addiction is increasing among youths in recent years, and what consequences on socialization it can have. Chapter 6 presents the issue of money literacy, which is particularly relevant in the context of the pragmatic and materialistic culture of Hong Kong, and what conflicting values are involved. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the concept of bonding among youths, particularly when they are with their peers or with their family members. Besides psychological theories, related cultural issues and values that may affect interpersonal bonding are discussed. Finally, Chap. 9 presents the key concept of resilience, what it is, why it is essential to a positive youth development, and what its relationships with other positive youth development constructs are.

The Project P.A.T.H.S. covers a total of 15 constructs (including cognitive, social, moral, emotional, and behavioral competencies, bonding, resilience, self-efficacy, self-determination, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, spirituality, prosocial norms, prosocial involvement, and recognition of positive behavior) that have been identified as crucial and effective elements of successful positive youth development programs (Catalano et al. 1998). While the first six chapters focus on developmental issues, the next three chapters provide a discussion on two major sources of protective factors, i.e., coping and adaptation, resilience, and human social capital (Gullotta 2015) which have been found as crucial to promoting health and psychosocial wellness among adolescents. According to Gullotta (2015), prevention means "taking actions that encourage resiliency, coping, adaption, and developing human social capital" (p. 4). We therefore review the literature on resilience and bonding with peers and family in the context of positive youth development.

In Part II of the book, each of the previous chapter is expanded (except the chapter on prevention of bullying and cyberbullying) so as to present the development and implementation of the P.A.T.H.S. program in Hong Kong. For each construct, the related conceptual framework is presented. The operationalization of the constructs, the linkage between related curriculum units, the overall structure of the curriculum in Grade 7 to Grade 9, and the implementation of the protective factors

in the curriculum are also presented. Concept maps and tables are used to illuminate the positive youth development program.

In Part III of the book, the focus is put on five common developmental issues, namely, substance abuse, sexual behavior, self-harm, Internet addiction, and consumption of pornographic materials. Findings based on the first four waves of a 6-year longitudinal study among adolescents in Hong Kong in the extension phase of the project are presented. Basically, a total of 3,328 Secondary 1 (Grade 7) students were recruited from 28 schools in Hong Kong in the 2009/2010 academic year. Students were then assessed at intervals of 1 year. Finally, 2,682 students completed the questionnaires in all 4 years and were then included in the longitudinal data analysis.

Chapter 18 investigates some of the risk and protective factors related to the increasing substance abuse among youths. Results showed that gender, age, and family intactness were significantly related to initial status of substance abuse, while economic disadvantage and family intactness were significantly related to the growth trajectory of substance abuse, with adolescents from poor and non-intact families at higher risk of substance abuse. Chapter 19 examines sexual behavior and intention to engage in sexual behavior among adolescents. Results showed that adolescents from economically disadvantaged and non-intact families engaged in sexual behavior at a faster rate than their counterparts. Furthermore, family functioning and positive youth development influenced adolescent sexual behavior and intention. Chapter 20 examines the prevalence and psychosocial correlates of consumption of pornographic materials. Results showed that older male adolescents from non-intact families consumed more pornography than others. Results also indicated that positive youth development and family functioning are protective factors against consumption of pornographic material. Chapter 21 examines Internet addiction and its related psychosocial correlates. Results showed that economic disadvantage and family non-intactness are risk factors, whereas family functioning and positive youth development are protective factors. Finally, Chap. 22 examines the influence of family attributes, family functioning, and positive youth development on self-harm and suicidal behaviors. Analyses revealed that family intactness but not economic disadvantage was related to initial deliberate self-harm and suicidal behavior. By contrast, positive youth development and adaptive family functioning are protective antecedents of decreased adolescent deliberate self-harm and suicidal signs, respectively.

## Why Do Positive Youth Development Programs Work?

We would like to approach this question from two levels. First, adoption of evidenced-based principles can promote success in program implementation. As a positive youth development program, the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. followed closely the 15 principles identified by Borkowski et al. (2006). Second, we also used appropriate technologies in the design and implementation of the program to maximize the program effectiveness.

In their summary of the major principles associated with effective preventive research, Borkowski et al. (2006) identified three groups of principles: treatment, procedural, and design and evaluation. Treatment principles relate to the specific curriculum and related components of an intervention. They include theory-driven, comprehensive, varied teaching methods, positive relationships, and sociocultural relevance principles. Procedural principles correspond to how that intervention program is implemented. They cover sufficient dosage, appropriate timing, well-trained staff, programmed generalization, and treatment fidelity. Design and evaluation principles refer to an appropriate and convincing evaluation of program effectiveness. They cover interpretative standards, outcome evaluation, internal validation, adequate effect size, and clinical and social significance. Based on the works of Ramey and Ramey (1992) and Nation and colleagues (2003), Borkowski et al. (2006) identified these 15 principles and demonstrated that they have been shown to lead to important scientific and clinical outcomes.

## *Adoption of Principles of Effective Preventive Research*

Since 2005, a huge number of publications on the Project P.A.T.H.S. have been published. These include more than 600 titles in English and Chinese, including books, book chapters, manuals, journal papers, conference papers, and special issues.

About half of the publications cover curriculum development and implementation. First, some adolescent developmental issues in Hong Kong are presented and discussed (Shek 2006a), with an extensive literature review and analysis dedicated to the understanding of the possible causes, consequences, and potential risk and protective factors for such issues among youths. Consequently, a number of articles focus on each single positive youth development (PYD) construct, such as prosocial involvement (Cheng et al. 2006a), recognition for positive behavior (Cheng et al. 2006b), self-determination (Hui and Tsang 2006), emotional competence (Lau 2006a), spirituality (Lau 2006b), bonding (Lee 2006a), resilience (Lee 2006b), behavioral competence (Ma 2006a), moral competence (Ma 2006b), social competence (Ma 2006c), prosocial norms (Siu et al. 2006), beliefs in the future (Sun and Lau 2006), cognitive competence (Sun and Hui 2006), self-efficacy (Tsang and Hui 2006), and positive identity (Tsang and Yip 2006). Finally, papers on the conceptual framework and program design were also published (Shek 2006b, c; Shek and Ma 2006; Shek et al. 2006).

More than 50 publications are specifically dedicated to the training of the program, which include mainly manuals and journal papers. Among these, the most substantial one is the series edited by Shek and Ma (2013a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n) titled *P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme*, which includes 12 activity handbooks and one project learning handbook. These handbooks are practical and detailed manuals designed for teachers and/or instructors with clearly defined activities for each teaching unit during the 3 years of junior secondary school. These tools are particularly flexible because they can operationalize

complex theoretical concepts into easy activities using simple and straightforward language. Furthermore, the structure of the handbooks enables teachers to adapt the program to their needs and schedules, as they can decide the number of modules to deliver (as well as the in-class activities, discussions, games, etc.). These training manuals have some undeniable advantages. For example, they allow teachers and instructors in the 237 secondary schools to have a reference manual for all. This not only implies the delivery of a more effective training to teachers, but as a consequence this also means that the same program will be delivered to all participating students.

The remaining 40 % of the publications are composed of evaluative studies about the efficacy of the program, which in most cases are in the form of journal papers and book chapters. Among these, the most important evaluation studies are longitudinal research that normally analyzes students' progress over three or more waves of data on issues such as drug abuse (Shek and Ma 2011), gambling (Shek and Sun 2011), consumption of pornographic materials (Ma and Shek 2013; Shek and Ma 2012), delinquency and problem behavior (Shek et al. 2012), Internet addiction (Shek and Yu 2012a), self-harm and suicide attempts (Law and Shek 2013; Shek and Yu 2012b), compensated dating (Lee and Shek 2013), sexual behavior, and intention to engage in sexual behavior (Shek 2013). The reliability of measurements is high, because they are based on data from more than 3,000 Hong Kong adolescents from 28 secondary schools, and the same questionnaire was used every year in the study.

## *Making Use of Effective Technology*

To answer the question from a technology perspective, the Project P.A.T.H.S. made use of three out of the four essential technologies identified by Gullotta (2015). They are (a) education, (b) promotion of social competency, and (c) natural caregiving. Effective technologies for education include the provision of information and knowledge, anticipatory guidance (so as to educate a particular group prior to some expected events), and personal self-management of behavior (with methods that can vary from skills training to psychotherapeutic strategies). Social competency means a sense of belonging and a willingness to contribute to the group through a positive self-esteem, an internal locus of control, a sense of self-efficacy, and an attitude of caring for others (Catalano et al. 1998; Gullotta 2015). Finally, natural caregiving could be in the form of a mutual self-help group in which individuals serve as both caregivers and care receivers. Indigenous trained caregivers such as teachers and mentors provide advice, comfort, and support. Peers who are capable can also share knowledge, experiences, compassionate understanding, companionship, and, if needed, confrontation (Bloom 1996).

Education is the core of the Project P.A.T.H.S., although education alone is not sufficient for producing a significant change. As commented by Gullotta (2015), "the most often used of all prevention's technologies, alone it rarely, if ever, is effective.

**Table 1**  Teaching and learning activities designed for use in the Project P.A.T.H.S.

| Instructors | Individuals (students) |
|---|---|
| Experience sharing (one-way) | Individual activities |
| Short tutorial (one-way) | Individual creative activities |
| Raising questions (two-way) | Individual reflections |
| **Groups** | **The whole class** |
| Group sharing | Class discussion |
| Group discussion (including presentation) | Class sharing |
| Group games | Class games |
| Group creative activities | |
| Role-plays | |

The reason for this is that while education increases knowledge, only occasionally does it affect attitudes, and it almost never changes behavior" (p. 6). The Project P.A.T.H.S. provides basic education through (1) teaching and learning activities (increased knowledge), (2) learning activities using real-life examples (anticipatory guidance), and (3) skills development (personal self-management of behavior). Basic knowledge is provided partly by instructors in a one-way mode of teaching; these are universal information about different issues (e.g., effects of drug abuse), which are available to everyone. However, this information is always provided within a specific context (i.e., drug prevention) and serves as a basis for students to elaborate *their own* opinion about that specific issue through role-play, debate, or discussion, so that they can be prepared to face it in the future. This is anticipatory guidance. Finally, the Project P.A.T.H.S. teaches adolescents a set of practical skills that can be used in multiple settings for multiple purposes (Gullotta 2015). Youths can learn and train these skills in role-playing activities, where they can practice different roles simulating real-life cases, for example, how to say no to socially undesirable requests. Table 1 summarizes the teaching and learning activities designed for use in the preventive program. Adolescents learn new behaviors effectively in small groups where they can practice and test what they learn in small groups and natural caregiving can be developed (Gullotta 2015).

Another form of instruction of the Project P.A.T.H.S. is "Project Learning." "Project Learning" is an exploratory learning method for a specific topic which is related to students' daily lives. It aims to develop students' independent learning capacities and self-learning attitudes. There are five "Project Learning" in P.A.T.H.S., including romantic relationships, bullying prevention, religion and life values, success and materialistic orientation, and national/ethnic identity and acceptance. Each Project Learning can be divided into three stages: preparatory (instructors arrange activities so as to arouse students' interest), implementation (students collect data, make conclusions, and write reports), and concluding (students use different formats to present their results). Here, students are required to have some information and skills (knowledge as a base for education) for participating. However, they are then required to experience and share with others and develop

their critical thinking. Experiential learning begins with a concrete experience, is followed by a reflective observation, an abstract conceptualization, and ends with an active experimentation, which can also be the starting point for a new experience of learning. The Project P.A.T.H.S. adopts an experiential learning perspective, which means (a) knowledge is constructed and acquired through experience; (b) knowledge is constructed in an individual mind, and it can be expressed and transferred to new situations; (c) learners can choose their own goals and can learn by asking questions and doing experiments; and (d) instructors can help students reflect on their experience and reexamine their personal assumptions. New behaviors are then learned by lived experiences. Experiential learning provides chances for adolescents to control the learning experience, to change its content, and to modify its intensity and duration (Gullotta 2015).

Promotion of psychosocial skills of the youth is an essential component of the P.A.T.H.S. program. Indeed, literature review (Catalano et al. 2012) on previous prevention programs has revealed that among 25 successful programs, 24 were based on the training of social or cognitive-behavioral skills. The curriculum for junior secondary school students was designed considering that development of adolescents at this stage in life goes through different domains, including physical development, cognitive development, personality and psychological development, social development, and relationships with the family and peers. The Project P.A.T.H.S. pursues the principles of "whole person education" and "whole person development" (Shek and Ma 2006). The project adopts both an ecological and a developmental perspective. Based on ecological models, adolescent developmental outcomes are determined by personal factors and environmental factors (family, peer, school, community, and cultural context). Based on life-span developmental theories, there are different developmental assets that need to be developed by an adolescent. Hence, adolescents need to learn different skills. The Project P.A.T.H.S. aims at helping adolescents develop their own abilities and enhance their ability to bond with others. After participating in this project, students will (a) enhance connections with healthy adults and peers (connection); (b) enhance social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral competence (competence); (c) enhance self-determination, self-efficacy, resilience, and beliefs in the future (confidence); (d) develop a clear identity and enhance their spirituality (character); (e) care for others (caring); (f) be more compassionate toward others (compassion); and (g) contribute to society (contribution). Indeed, longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of P.A.T.H.S. showed an increase in all major psychosocial indicators (Shek and Ma 2011, 2012; Shek et al. 2012; Shek and Sun 2013, 2014; Shek and Yu 2012a, b).

One of the constructs used in the curriculum is behavioral competence. Students are assisted to develop the ability to use verbal and nonverbal strategies to perform socially acceptable and normative behavior in social interactions (Ma 2006a). Based on a positive or prosocial motivation, students are taught to be courteous, graceful, and fair. The behavioral curriculum units cover three types of behaviors: applause, criticism, and apology. By providing opportunities to discuss and role-play, students were able to say no to socially undesirable requests.

Finally, the curriculum of P.A.T.H.S. is designed in such a way that students can gradually become more active indigenous caregivers within their groups. Teaching methods are an important factor for achieving this goal. In the Secondary 1 curriculum, there are mainly group and class discussions, which aim to enhance students' communication skills. The Secondary 2 curriculum adds role-playing, class games, and class sharing as teaching methods to increase students' learning interest and enhance their learning experience. Finally, as Secondary 3 students are becoming more mature, individual activities are increased so that students can learn more about themselves, observe their achievement, and prepare for future positive development (Shek and Sun 2013). However, it also means that Secondary 3 students are more likely to be ready to give their contribution to their groups, as they have developed a personal opinion or knowledge that they can share with others. At this stage, they are more likely to be in the position to become not only group members but also caregivers toward others.

What role can a massive preventive program using the positive youth development approach play in addressing developmental issues of early adolescents? That is the central question addressed in this book. Previous research findings have showed that positive youth development attributes are positively related to student well-being (Sun and Shek 2010, 2012, 2013). It is hoped that the theoretical discussion, practical intervention program manuals, and research findings provided in these chapters will serve as a stepping stone on the journey to promoting the well-being of early adolescents.

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# Part I
# Student Well-Being and Developmental Issues: Theory