

Introduction by the Editors

In this *Handbook* – one of the Blackwell’s Handbook series, with companion volumes in other areas such as infant development, cognitive development, adolescent development – we have endeavored to bring together the scope and excitement of recent research in children’s social development, with an accessibility and precision which will make the book not only a library resource, but also a real “handbook” – a volume for the individual student and researcher to have, consult, and be inspired by.

As editors, we feel very fortunate in the authors we were able to obtain. Of course, it is customary for editors to say this; but we feel we can say it “hand on heart.” We really do have a collection of authors who are actively researching in their content areas and who have brought a truly high level of knowledge and expertise to their chapters.

When we, as editors, started planning this book, we had several specific aims in mind. First, we wished the book to have a wide scope within broad parameters consistent with the Blackwell series. This determined the relevant age range: We asked authors to concentrate on the post-infancy period, from about 3 years, through preadolescence; *not* material on infancy and adolescence, except in so far as it might be necessary for understanding or contextualizing the theories, methods, and findings of the research in childhood. Of course, a wide age range remains: the preschool (3 to 4 or 5 years), early school (5 to 7 years), and later elementary or middle school (8 to 11 years) periods.

Second, we asked for chapters at a certain level. This *Handbook* is not meant for beginners. Those persons who have not studied psychology or child development previously, will probably be better first reading a more introductory text (of which there are many, e.g., from Blackwell Publishers alone there are R. Schaffer, *Social Development*, 1996; K. Durkin, *Developmental Social Psychology*, 1995; or P. K. Smith, H. Cowie, & M. Blades, *Understanding Children’s Development*, 3rd ed. 1998). The brief we gave authors was to give a clear and succinct account of work in their area, which would be suitable for anyone wishing to go beyond basic textbook coverage. This would include advanced undergradu-

ates in psychology and behavioral sciences, postgraduates taking taught master's degrees or pursuing independent research, and teaching staff and researchers wishing for an authoritative update outside their immediate teaching/research area. The book should also be useful for those professionals now outside academic life – for example, educators, social workers, counselors, probation officers – who have had training in the behavioral sciences and retain an active interest in the implications of research for their professional practice.

Another aim we had was to get a geographical coverage of contributors. Much of the work in our domain comes from North America, especially the United States, but there are also very important contributions from the European countries, Australasia, Japan, and increasingly other countries in Asia, Africa, and South America. The child development field is truly developing into an international community. For example, both of us have been associated with the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD) for many years, and have seen how it has grown and helped create an international research community. Part of the planning for this book took place at the meeting of the ISSBD in Beijing, China, in summer 2000, where many Chinese colleagues were able to participate. With one editor based in Europe and one in the United States, some spread of contributors was natural. Although the majority of our contributors do come from the United States, we also have authors from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Italy, Belgium, and (at least for initial education) the Netherlands and Turkey. We would guess that in another decade, an equivalent *Handbook* could well have an even wider distribution of authorship.

Above all, we wanted chapters to be clear, succinct, but also interesting and challenging. In our letters of invitation we asked authors to “provide authoritative reviews of focused areas in social development, which both summarize existing knowledge, and highlight areas of debate and growing points in the discipline.” We worked with authors, sometimes through several drafts, to try and ensure this was achieved. The reader will surely find these in the chapters that follow, and we highlight particular areas of debate and growing points in our short introductions to each section of the book.

The *Handbook* has 30 chapters, and 10 sections. The first section (one chapter) is an historical overview of psychological research in social development. This is followed by a section (four chapters) on major other disciplinary views – from genetics, evolution, anthropology, and sociology. The third section (four chapters) focuses on specific causal influences important for social development – temperament, sex, childcare, families, and peers. The next two sections are on major contexts for social development; first a section on the family (four chapters) and then a section on the peer group (four chapters). Four sections follow which cover particular areas of social development: social skills and social cognition (three chapters); play (two chapters); helping and moral reasoning (three chapters); and cooperation, competition, aggression, and bullying (three chapters). The final section is on children with special needs (two chapters).

We have enjoyed working with the authors, and Blackwell Publishers, in producing this *Handbook*. We hope that you will also enjoy reading it, and find it a useful and challenging resource whether for study, teaching, research, or professional practice.

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