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Book Review

Raising kids in the 21st century

Sharon K. Hall (2008)

Wiley-Blackwell. UK

Reviewed by

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Raising kids in the 21st century is an oddly titled book given its content and the author's assertion that it is to provide informative guidelines for teachers, parents and students. I would presume by the title that the book was aimed at parents only. This turns out to be an unfortunate assumption because this book presents a very readable, well researched account of integral theories (both scientific and popular) associated with the development of children and as such provides a useful introduction to psychological research and its pertinence to developing optimum outcomes for children.

The author states that "healthy children are our goal" and to this end she discusses what she terms as Ph (i.e. Psychological Health) in developing children. One of the main foci of the book is the importance of functional social and familial relationships. This focus resonates with contemporary psychological and educational research, where attachment theory and values education have gained research prominence. Major theorists such as Vygotsky and Rutter are addressed in these discussions. However, a glaring omission, particularly in relation to the importance of parents as the foundation for subsequent social relationships, is the work of Bowlby and Freud. Both theorists initiated research interest into attachment theory, and Bowlby posited that subsequent social relations were guided by our early attachment patterns. Rutter later refined this research. Consequently, it is a shame not to have referred to the basic tenets of Bowlby's seminal work in the discussion on attachment.

Throughout the book, Hall provides the reader with useful lists of what to expect developmentally from children, or ways to facilitate positive outcomes, and I think this is a useful tool for parents and educators as the lists are well rationalised and consistent with the research. Hall also includes some interesting information that is not normally presented in introductory texts of similar genres, in that she includes societal changes in family structure. For instance, she discusses the current statistics for single parent families and the gender breakdown of these statistics: in the United States, one third of children come from single parent families, ninety five percent of whom are female single parents. These figures force the reader to reconsider the extant stereotype of the nuclear family. Similarly, Hall presents an interesting analysis of the impact of the media on behaviour. This is well researched and covers not only violence and television, but also lyrics and pop music's impact on first sexual experiences. The importance she accords to values and humour also is welcome.

I would recommend this book as an adjunct to introductory developmental psychology texts. It is very readable and its predominant social analysis is of contemporary relevance. It should stimulate students' interest in the area. Parents also would find this book informative and interesting.

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