

Book Reviews

Youth Work: Emerging Perspectives in Youth Development. By Edginton, C., Kowalski, C., & Randall, S. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing. 306 pp., \$49.95, ISBN: 1-57167-569-8.

Reviewed by

Corliss Outley
University of Minnesota

This book provides youth work practitioners and policy-makers with a tool in understanding the new political and social challenges surrounding youth work in the United States. As the authors state, youth work is “a part of national consciousness and woven into our social fabric” (pg. xiii). Not only does this book provide basic information regarding the status of youth in America today, it also engages youth workers from a diversity of settings and programmatic offerings. Edginton and his colleagues produce a well-structured and practice-focused book that is clearly written to serve as a conceptual foundation of the diverse influences on youth development, to facilitate positive and caring relationships, and provide a basic understanding of positive youth frameworks and how they can lead to a more productive youth driven society. *Youth Work: Emerging Perspective in Youth Development* comprises thirteen chapters with emphasis on three areas: (a) theoretical and empirical foundation of youth development beyond the traditional preventive strategies (chapters 1-5), (b) youth work practice for planning programs and developing relationships in diverse settings (chapters 6-9), and (c) quality of practice in professional development (chapters 10-13).

The Foundation of Youth Work

Edginton, Kowalski and Randall introduce the reader to youth work in chapters one and two. It is here where the reader is first introduced to the field of youth work and gets a contemporary overview of the lives of American youth. The authors provide not only conceptual definitions for various terms (e.g., youth and adolescence) but also present demographics for the United States and various contextual factors that influence the lives of youth. In addition, the principles for promoting youth development as adapted from Karen Pittman are presented. The presentation of this basic information provides an initial context to guide the reader’s comprehension of the field. The authors further explore the foundation of youth development by pre-

senting a comprehensive historical overview in chapter 3. With the inclusion of key pioneers in the field and a chronology of youth services the authors provide a great resource for the readers. However, the authors fail to include information regarding leaders of color in the field and the impact governmental and non-governmental programs had on the minority and low income populations in the United States.

One example of such an important omission is that of Mary McLeod Bethune, who in 1936 was appointed director of African American affairs in the National Youth Administration and a special adviser on minority affairs by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. She served in this position for eight years and supervised the expansion of employment opportunities and recreational facilities for African American youth throughout the United States.

In chapter 4 the authors discuss the language of youth development and include the continued development of five areas of competencies that assist youth in becoming successful adults. These competencies include: health/physical, personal/social, cognitive/creative, vocational, and citizenship. Along with the discussion of which competencies are most important, and their contrast with risks, assets and resiliency, the authors include a brief section discussing the refinement of these concepts over time and how they stand in contrast to other frameworks. The purpose of youth work and its values that provide a foundation for individual youth workers and agencies are also presented.

They further explore the field of youth work by discussing the various roles and position that those involved in youth works can acquire, as well as the various types of public, private and non-profit agencies that carry out youth work. The last chapter in this section provides a philosophical and theoretical foundation of the various approaches to the field. Though the authors provide this chapter to present philosophical ideas and models for the professional practice of youth work, it is extensive and compacted. Given the wide-ranging foundational discussions in chapters one through four, a more appropriate focus would be to divide this chapter into two and/or merge with previous chapters to truly provide a clearer focus.

Youth Work Practice

The chapters in this area provide strategies, models and frameworks that can be utilized by individuals and organizations that practice youth work. To lay the foundation for this area the authors present the principles of youth development programming in chapter six. These principles along with the basic building blocks of youth programming are essential for any individual that wishes to assist youth on their path to adulthood. A six-component model for programming is suggested as well. This model includes: pre-program design elements, program planning phase, goals and objectives, program design elements, program implementation elements, and program evaluation. I also applaud the authors for providing an extensive overview of

the various types of programs and programming formats that could be provided by youth serving organizations. These wide range of programs are presented in a new framework that combines the National Collaboration for Youth (2001) (15 distinctions) and Edginton and de Oliveira (1995) (nine distinctions) into a comprehensive framework that incorporates thirteen distinct program areas. Each of these program areas are discussed in detail in the chapter.

The key to success in any youth serving agency is leadership. Not only do youth workers need to be provided with leadership opportunities but youth themselves must feel empowered as well. Chapter 7 provides an overview of leadership strategies that can be utilized by youth workers which include empowerment, the art of conversation, reflection and presence. Moreover, the authors assert that "what the field of youth work lacks is a model of leadership that informs youth agencies and programs providers about what ought to be done in youth programs and how it ought to be done" (p. 179). This new model of leadership is the relational leadership model that views relationships as the key role in which members of an organization or community interact. The relationship further emphasizes the leadership components of being – *inclusive, empowering and purposeful* as an ideal that all youth leaders must attain. This chapter provides a nice segue into Chapter 8 which reviews the role of mentoring as an element of youth development. The final chapter in this area addresses multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is presented in the context of diversity and its importance to the field. The authors present a general review of the issues of diversity, racism, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and barriers to multicultural communication. Despite the authors assertion that the area of multiculturalism will be a paramount challenge in the future the chapter is accompanied by only a few personal and program examples for each of these concepts and the strategies for improving multicultural education and communication are limited. A more thorough and stronger chapter is needed to provide youth workers with strategies and insights to overcome the tremendous obstacles that are before them.

The most insightful and thought provoking chapter of *Youth Work: Emerging Perspectives in youth Development* is chapter 10 on ethics. The authors present a well written overview of ethics and its influence not only on our personal lives but also our interactions with others. Given the role that youth workers play in the lives of youth and their importance in establishing caring, positive relationships this chapter are greatly needed.

Quality of Practice

This final area introduces the reader to the professionalism of youth work through the development of youth policy and career development. In addition the book is closed by reviewing challenges and issues in the field. Social policies assist in the development of programs and services as well as providing a legal documentation for youth. The issue of defining policies, discussing their basic functions and

design is investigated in chapter 11. Continued professional development for youth workers and the influence it can have on the youth worker and the youth themselves are offered. Currently the “field” is uncertain. The authors offer the question and attempt to answer the fundamental question, “Is there a youth development field?” The authors provide Hahn and Raley (1998) and American Humanics, Inc. (1996) core competencies for professionals as promising strategies for the promotion of youth work as a professional entity. However, the authors fall short in providing the pros and cons of professionalization of the field and in providing adequate steps to managing a career in youth development. The final chapter provides an array of issues in the area of youth work that the authors felt needed to be addressed. These issues are numerous and to their credit they state the discussions will not be comprehensive but very brief. Yet one has to wonder does this chapter truly add value to the book or could these issues have been dealt with in other chapters.

In presenting this book the authors have set out to provide a comprehensive overview for a field that is very readable and particularly effective at the practitioner level. This comprehensive overview is intricately interwoven between research, theory and practice in youth development and presents practical applications for youth work. The imperfections that I found may be trivial to some but are only an indication of the often complicated issue of youth work and youth development. Overall, Edginton, Kowalksi and Randall make the youth work arena more understandable and reinforces the importance of youth philosophy, leadership, mentoring and ethics for the many youth workers in practice. In addition, this book may begin to pave the way for more exhaustive discussions on the professionalization of youth work. For this reason alone this is a timely book that warrants our attention. By presenting the book in a framework of relational based leadership, the authors have produced a book offering action strategies, models and principles for adults who care about youth and who work with them.