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Feature Articles

Reflections on a Century of Youth Development Research and Practice

[Article 110603FA001]

Walker, Joyce A.; Gambone, Michelle Alberti; Walker, Kathrin C.

This introduction to the special issue highlights the youth development research and practice base that influenced the field in the 20th century and presents some historical context for the practice and study of youth work. Next, it provides an overview of the articles which offer a retrospective account of youth development from how youth development has been studied, understood and measured to how youth development practice has evolved to support, engage and address the needs of young people. The introduction concludes with reflections stimulated by the process of reviewing the manuscripts and working with the authors on their contributions. Three themes emerged as good grist for the 21st century conversations moving forward: 1) the divergent perspectives on definition, dimensions of practice and accountability, 2) the value of translational scholarship bridging science and complex practice, and 3) the importance of leveraging systems support for field building.

Trends in Youth Development Topics: An Integrative Review of Positive Youth Development Research Published in Selected Journals Between 2001-2010

[Article 110603FA002]

Barcelona, Robert J.; Quinn, William

The body of knowledge related to positive youth development has grown in the last two decades, yet there have been few, if any, systematic investigations of the research base in the field. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to identify the trends in research topics and approaches within the field of positive youth development over the last 10 years by examining five top-tier research journals plus one research-to-practice journal. Results revealed that only 19% of the manuscripts published in all of the selected journals had a positive youth development focus, and this was reduced to 13% when just the five top-tier research journals were considered. Analyses of the positive youth development manuscripts pertaining to population characteristics, methodology, research setting, and topical areas provide a snapshot of the trends and gaps in the body of knowledge related to youth development, and have implications for future research efforts in the field.

Positive Youth Development: Processes, Programs, and Problematics

[Article 110603FA003]

Lerner, Richard M.; Lerner, Jacqueline V.; Lewin-Bizan, Selva; Bowers, Edmond P.; Boyd, Michelle J.; Mueller, Megan Kiely; Schmid, Kristina L.; Napolitano, Christopher M.

Using the tripartite conception of positive youth development (PYD) suggested by Hamilton (1999) – as a developmental process, a philosophy or approach to youth programming, and as instances of youth programs and organizations focused on fostering the healthy or positive development of youth – we review different theoretical models of the developmental process involved in PYD. In addition, we review the ideas for and the features of youth development programs aimed at promoting PYD. We discuss the need for research interrelating different, theoretically-predicated

measures of PYD and, as well, the importance of clear links between models of the PYD developmental process and of the youth development programs seeking to enhance PYD among diverse youth. We discuss several conceptual and practical problematics that must be addressed in order to integrate the three facets of PYD scholarship.

Locating, Analyzing and Making Available a Century of 4-H Research Studies, 1911-2011 [Article 110603FA004]

Scholl, Jan; Paster, Amy

For years, 4-H has emphasized the value of being a research-based youth organization in its long term association with the land-grant university system. But, it was the general consensus among state and national leaders that the program had no research base. The main objectives of this study were to: locate and document research studies conducted (between 1911-2010) in order to support or dispel notions about the lack of 4-H research and its focus on cows and cooking, to make information about the research studies available to the larger community of youth program practitioners and researchers and provide a general review of research topics by decade. Three thousand five hundred and fifty six studies were found over a thirteen year period and only one percent of these related to "cows or cooking." To make the data available to current and future youth professionals and researchers, the information about each study was transferred to an Internet web-site. Finally, a full century of research topics were summarized.

From Then to Now: Emerging Directions for Youth Program Evaluation [Article 110603FA005]

Arnold, Mary E.; Cater, Melissa

Understanding the impact of youth development programs has been an important topic since the programs first began, and the past 25 years in particular have witnessed considerable advances in the evaluation of youth development programs. This article presents a brief history of youth development program evaluation, considering how it has changed over the years. From there, three contemporary trends related to youth program evaluation are examined: 1) a new evaluation focus, which is the emphasis on evaluating program quality; 2) organizational structures related to effective program evaluation, primarily in the area of program evaluability and evaluation capacity building; and 3) an emerging evaluation approach, involving youth in evaluating the programs that affect them. The article concludes with a call for programs to attend carefully to program implementation quality.

Diversity and Inclusion in Youth Development: What We Can Learn from Marginalized Young People [Article 110603FA006]

Russell, Stephen T.; Van Campen, Kali

As we commemorate 100 years of youth development programs whose origins are traced to organizations founded in the United States, we consider key insights as well as strategies relevant for diversity and inclusion. Many of the large, mainstream youth development organizations and programs that were founded over a century ago now primarily serve youth in the "mainstream": youth from the middle classes, traditional families, and dominant cultural groups. A growing body of scholarship considers the positive development of youth who are marginalized due to their social class, ability, sexuality, citizenship status, race, ethnicity, or culture. We draw insights from studies of youth and families who are immigrants, or who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). These findings provide a vantage point for considering ways that contemporary youth development organizations might stretch the margins, or adapt their practices, in order to reach and include all youth.

The Many Faces, Features and Outcomes of Youth Engagement [Article 110603FA007]

Saito, Rebecca N.; Sullivan, Theresa K.

Civic engagement, experiential education, positive youth development, youth leadership, service-learning: what is it about these programmatic models that account for their popularity and impact over decades? What's at the core, how are they similar and different, and what differential impacts and benefits might various types or forms of youth engagement affect? The lack of consensus on conceptual frameworks and definitions of youth participation and engagement has been identified as one of the issues plaguing the field and restricting progress of youth engagement research and practice (O'Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2002). The authors present a conceptual framework called the Rings of Engagement that captures the myriad ways in which people think about youth engagement. The literature on the benefits and outcomes of each ring or type of youth engagement is highlighted. The authors conclude with recommendations for further research which will guide training, stakeholder-driven communication tools created to garner support, ways to act locally while working at the intermediary level to provide the supports necessary to promote and support youth engagement.

The Evolving Role of Youth Workers [Article 110603FA008]

Borden, Lynne M.; Schlomer, Gabriel L.; Wiggs, Christine Bracamonte

In reviewing the field of youth development, of which youth workers are a part, it is clear it has had a long and complex history that is intertwined with other disciplines. More recently youth workers have experienced a transformation of sorts, with youth programs in the past being seen exclusively as a place to play and have fun, whereas today's expectations include a much broader focus on the overall positive development of young people. This evolution has been heavily influenced by a number of societal changes that have placed increasing demands on youth programs. Today's youth workers are faced with the responsibility to promote a young person's development which often includes supporting academic success and graduation from high school, reducing risk-taking behaviors, increasing positive health attitudes, and more. Youth workers have seen their role change dramatically over the past 20 years with greater demands and increased accountability.

Voluntary Youth-Serving Organizations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century [Article 110603FA009]

LeMenestrel, Suzanne M.; Lauxman, Lisa A.

As many national youth-serving organizations have either celebrated their 100th anniversaries or are approaching their centennials, we take a step back to celebrate these organizations' accomplishments, but also to examine how youth organizations have responded positively to the youth development philosophy and approach to programming. The focus of this paper is on those organizations in which participation by youth is voluntary.

New Horizons: Understanding the Processes and Practices of Youth Development [Article 110603FA010]

Larson, Reed W.; Kang, Hyeyoung; Perry, S. Cole; Walker, Kathrin C.

This article presents new horizons for research on youth development by focusing on the challenges youth face in learning teamwork and in coming to terms with diversity. These are both essential competencies for navigating the "real world" of the 21st century. We examine how youth experience these challenges within programs; also how they present second-order challenges to practitioners. The underlying message of this article is that it is essential for researchers to see programs from the point of view of the people in them. Researchers have learned quite a bit of what can be learned from arm's length: that programs can make a difference in youths' lives and that certain features of settings are associated with these changes. To go further, researchers need to work side-by-side with practitioners and youth to understand their complex worlds as they experience them.

The Future of Youth Development: Multiple Wisdoms, Alternate Pathways and Aligned Accountability [Article 110603FA011]

Blyth, Dale A.

Based on trends and events observed or experienced by the author over the last 30 years in research, evaluation and practice, this article examines three challenges facing and shaping the future of the youth programs as contexts for development. The first challenge surrounds how the field comes to understand, value and integrate different forms of knowing -- particularly quantitative data. The second challenge represents how the field shifts from proving it makes a difference to improving the ways it makes a difference by expanding the pathways to impact. The third challenge regards how the field responds to and shapes accountability pressures in ways that better align accountability rather than succumb to it. Implications of each challenge for effectively bridging research and practice are noted.