
Introduction

THE ADOLESCENT POPULATION in the United States is over twenty million, and internationally it is over five hundred million. We are so accustomed to viewing these statistics with trepidation: to some, they signal violence and drug use, or increased risks of depression and suicide. Right-wing extremists in Europe attack foreigners; youth worldwide serve as soldiers for all kinds of causes. The media have picked up on these risks and report far more frequently on the dramatic dangers of youth than on the positive potential of young people, covering behaviors from bullying to drug dealing to school shootings. Danger, threat, and anxiety sell far better than prosocial behavior.

But the reality of young people's lives is far more complex than the news stories or some of these statistics seem to indicate. The majority of youth are a great resource to our society—they are creative and provide time, energy, and insight into the development of new ideas, community innovation, and volunteerism.

When we think about the lives of our youth, then, the goal is not to choose between recognizing positive youth development or risk. Both perspectives have to go hand-in-hand. But we have far too long viewed adolescence as a time of crisis and danger, and we need to understand the positive and productive aspects of this important time in life.

This journal is dedicated to this shift of thinking. It is unique, created for an amazingly innovative time and an emerging field. *New Directions for Youth Development: Theory, Practice, and Research*

I would like to thank a number of friends and colleagues who have been extremely helpful in making *New Directions in Youth Development* possible. Their support, intelligence, and passion of the past year will benefit the journal for a long time: Cindy and Ron Hann, Kurt Fischer, Douglas Darling, Donald Lamm, Alan Rinzler, Paul Sidel, and as always Maryanne Wolf. The project first evolved during my stay at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California.

is committed to youth: their potential, their futures, and their everyday lives. All of us—policymakers, researchers, practitioners, educators, clinicians, and parents—must relearn to build schools that really work for kids, to train a new generation of mental health professionals who learn how to assess not only disorders but also strengths, and to provide training and funding so that the best and brightest practitioners will enter the field and stay in it. Cities have to change to become open places for children and families; out-of-school time has to be organized so that youth learn and have fun while parents work. As we move toward these goals, the challenges we face are huge. But we are in the middle of a transformation! Those dedicated to the healthy growth of youth are creating innovations and inroads, and youth themselves are natural innovators.

What has been missing is a journal that reflects these trends, one that serves as a place of exchange, discussion, and debate, where ideas and research live alongside practical recommendations and policy debates. We also need a journal in which researchers, thinkers, policymakers, and practitioners can come together to forge a strong intellectual underpinning to this emergent field of youth development. There are, of course, excellent books, magazines, and journals dealing with adolescents and positive youth development. We view those who work through those venues as our partners. The field needs all of us to help create a strong foundation. Our focus will be, in the *New Directions* series tradition, to tackle controversial, interesting, and difficult topics and to devote a whole volume to in-depth discussion of a specific topic, explored from many sides.

We will be provocative and informative, favoring essays that provide research evidence and practical case examples. Taken together, the topics will keep the diverse readership concerned with the well-being of youth, families, and communities involved in an intellectual discourse with practical implications. And as youth culture is becoming almost universal, the scope of the journal will include local, national, and international efforts.

The journal will reflect the creativity of the field. Rather than force issue editors and authors to comply with a set format, we will

experiment with many different ways of presenting material. Some volumes will present five or six essays of equal length. Others will have many short position papers. Still others will consist of a few lead papers and many responses. What matters to me as the editor-in-chief is that we address timely issues in a way that fosters dialogue in the field. If a big event occurs, such as that of September 11, 2001, the journal will make room to create a public forum for discussion.

An impressive group of advisers will be guiding me as we produce this journal, providing me with ideas and added expertise. Their fields span psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, community development, adolescent development, education, risk analysis, sociology, and the practice and policy of youth development. But it is not only this board of experts that will serve as consultants. We will also ask you, the readership, to provide us with ideas. I hope that you will let me know of topics that are important in your work, wherever it might be.

This journal serves as a bridge at a time when many fields are converging around a common focus. Everyone contributes to building this bridge and should actively suggest ways in which we can work more closely together: practitioners, researchers, program innovators, funders, librarians, educators, therapists, and policy-makers. The more you can see this journal as your own, the more relevant it will become. Please send me correspondence regarding your reactions to volumes and essays; whenever possible, we will publish your responses either in a future issue or on a Web site dedicated to the journal.

In this first communication with you, I do not want to hide behind the ideas and concepts but give you a sense of what I bring to the task of editor-in-chief and why I decided to take on this job.

My work has been that of a child and adolescent clinician and researcher, trained both in clinical and developmental psychology in Europe and the United States. With a joint appointment between a medical school and an education school, I became interested in adolescent research and childhood problems from a developmental point of view. I also focused on creating prevention programs in schools. What I did not expect was that the work in

schools bridging education and mental health would soon lead me to become involved in research and training in after-school time. The work alongside my team clearly indicated that any prevention efforts need to include families and communities and, significantly, after-school time. My developmental thinking shifted increasingly to studying the topic of resilience and finding the strengths in youth to overcome obstacles.

In some ways, I continue to do today what I began two decades ago; my passions are those of the many of us who want to see youth make their best contributions to our society. Youth inherit from us a fragile world. What we thought were peaceful times, ideal when compared to earlier epochs, have shifted. More than ever, we need to make our youth true partners, for they have to take part in solving the significant issues that face our times.

This journal is dedicated to helping this process through providing knowledge, experimentation in practice, and large-scale efforts to change our thinking and our policies. I hope you will join me in making this *our* journal, using it as a forum to inspire and inform all of us who are shaping the lives of young people.

Gil G. Noam
Editor-in-Chief