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## Issue Editors' Notes

- How do young people come to terms with issues of meaning, purpose, and identity beyond themselves?
- How do they connect with others and the world around them?
- How do they find their place in their family, community, world, and universe?
- How do they develop their deepest, most fundamental commitments?

These are, at their core, spiritual development questions. They are also critical issues in adolescent development, particularly within frameworks of positive youth development. They are the wellspring of some of the best within young people and humanity—and the source of some of the greatest atrocities in society when the answers lead young people to alienation, hatred, or violence.

Yet these are difficult, even uncomfortable, questions in both science and practice. Fewer than 2 percent of scientific publications on adolescents address spiritual development. And when they are asked about the dimensions of development they address, youth development professionals put spiritual development at the bottom of the list—below social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

Part of the challenge is that leaders struggle to frame the agenda in a way that is appropriate in the public arena in a pluralistic society. Too often spiritual development is presumed to be synonymous with religious development and is thus optional or even taboo. Furthermore, the rise of “faith-based initiatives” in federal funding in the United States has led to skepticism that efforts to

address spiritual development are masks for religious or political agendas. As a result, we lack appropriate language, frameworks, research base, or practices that enable us to examine, understand, and strengthen this dimension of life.

Despite these challenges, the past decade has seen an explosion of interest in spirituality within youth development and related fields. National and international studies and reports have suggested that spiritual development must be addressed as part of youth development. National youth-serving systems are beginning to ask how they can more effectively address these questions in a society that has become increasingly diverse and pluralistic. The growth of positive, community-based youth development provides a platform for examining these issues within the context of an overall commitment to understanding and nurturing healthy, holistic development among all young people.

Drawing on the research and field-building efforts of Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, this volume of *New Directions for Youth Development* frames a new dialogue about the intersections between youth development and spiritual development. It draws together leading researchers and practitioners who are exploring ways to integrate spiritual development and youth development in order to strengthen theory, research, and practice.

After discussion of current theory and research, a promising practices section highlights emerging promising practices for addressing spiritual development in youth development programs and practices. The first article offers the thoughts of a long-time youth work practitioner on spiritual development and its place in practice, followed by a case study of engaging young people in finding their voices on the topic of their own spiritual development. Then seven brief articles explore promising practices. In some cases (such as mentoring and service-learning), the authors integrate an understanding of spiritual development into traditional youth development programs. In other cases (such as contemplation), the authors propose how these traditional spiritual practices may be appropriately integrated into youth development settings. Together,

these articles illustrate the range of possible directions for attending to this dimension of life in work with young people.

The volume closes with a discussion of the important questions raised in the volume and an annotated bibliography.

Spiritual development is a critical priority for the future of youth development in order to nurture young people holistically within a global, pluralistic context. The field of youth development must engage in ongoing dialogue and learning across theory and fields of practice, beginning here.

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