
This is the **accepted version** of the review:

Úcar, Xavier. Book Reviews. Taylor and Francis Ltd, 2020. 2 pàg. DOI
10.1080/13691457.2020.1857019

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/251191>

under the terms of the  license

Allred, P., Cullen, F., Edwards, K. & Fusco, D. (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Youth work practice*. Sage Reference.

The book I present here awards value and recognition to a professional field as disparate as it is heterogeneous and poorly structured, on both a national and global level. It represents a commitment to believing in the abilities of young people to be able to imagine, seek out and manage their own destinies. The book provides a panoramic view of the very different ways we have of working with young people, who live and experience a wide range of situations and problems around the world, comprising a very wide and diverse “box of tools and resources” for working with them.

In modern times, young people hold an ambiguous status in most societies on our planet from the perspective of adults. The fact that they are no longer children but not yet adults means that they are dealt with in an ambivalent way that oscillates between these two poles. And this despite the fact that in 2000 the United Nations identified youth participation in social and economic life as one of the priority areas for action for the coming years and that it is already possible to document almost half a century of experience working with young people.

Most governments clearly perceive youth work as a priority need today. However, in general terms, few have established decisive, credible and clear policies that really help young people to assume citizenship in a responsible and full manner. That said, and as this book clearly demonstrates, experiences of working with young people and training programmes for youth work professionals have grown considerably in recent years. And not only more and more authors, but also people in general, are choosing to give young people the necessary confidence to make them protagonists of their own destinies.

Despite enormous disparity in the works that comprise this volume, the editors highlight one underlying idea that unite all of the chapters, namely, a criticism of the way in which young people are conceptualized and treated in their respective societies. And this not only in relation to the serious problems that may be associated with them (exploitation, infantilization, marginalization, etc.), but also the conditions or requirements that may be demanded of them when acquiring full citizenship.

In terms of both its planning and content, the Handbook I present here has a reach that is at the same time global and local. Global because it aims to provide a list of the approaches, problems, policies, theories, methodologies and practices that are being developed in the field of youth work around the planet. And local because, in the dialogue that has brought this book to fruition over four years, the editors gave the authors very precise instructions to present experiences of youth work in a local context (historically, politically and geographically). Thus, throughout the 44 chapters that comprise the book, the reader will find the presented theoretical-practical perspectives differentiated territorially. This includes, for example, “Positive Youth Development” (USA), “the Albermarle tradition” (UK) and “Social Pedagogy” (Europe), as well as professional or voluntary work experiences that involve very different types of young people from the five continents living in very diverse socio-cultural situations.

The editors point out that the Handbook offers some maps of *Youth work practice* as a discipline, albeit through multiple voices. One might say that overall, the different voices that comprise this Handbook reveal the variety, diversity and richness of the experiences of work with young people in the very different ways in which it occurs in different social and cultural contexts: *community work*, *community development*, *youth programmes*, *social pedagogical work*, *informal education*, *popular education*, *youth care work*, and a very long etcetera.

The Handbook is divided into four large blocks of chapters. The first is “*Approaches to youth work across time and place*”. The chapters that comprise it address a whole series of issues and problems that affect young people in today’s societies, as well as approaches to and practices in youth work. The effects of the prevailing globalization, capitalism and neoliberalism, together with the vulnerabilities, risks and challenges that these pose for young people in different societies and the way in which neoliberal policies affect the limits and possibilities of youth work are dissected and analysed throughout the 13 chapters that make up this block.

The second block is entitled *“Professional work with young people: projects and practices to inspire”* and consists of 10 chapters presenting different approaches and methods to youth work in contemporary societies. Various topics are covered in this block: professional space, young people’s rights, questions of colonialism, street-based youth work, youth arts work, youth justice practice and youth practice related to trans, non-binary and gender-diverse young people. The editors point out that this block does not aim to present “good practices”, but rather to stimulate dialogue in relation to the complexity of political and professional changes that affect young people and the professionals who work with them.

“Values and ethics in work with Young people” is the title of the third block, which is made up of 12 chapters. The axis around which the different chapters are built is a reflection on the ethics, values and skills involved in working with young people, mainly focusing on those in situations of marginalization or vulnerability (with regard to mental health, prevention of child sexual exploitation, prevention of terrorism, violence, etc.). The reflections made in the chapters of this block provide for an analysis of the policies and different professionals and agencies involved in working with vulnerable or minority groups of young people, bringing visibility to the dilemmas that emerge from these practices. The possibility of developing an international code of ethics for youth workers that goes beyond Eurocentrism and colonialism is also addressed.

The final block is entitled *“Current challenges, future possibilities”* and is divided into 9 chapters that address these issues from different perspectives, both in relation to young people themselves and to the work of professionals. Some of the topics covered are youth work practices in conflict societies, popular education, Roma youth, community development, youth work curriculum, youth empowerment and evaluation.

The Handbook ends with a conclusion that is based on four elements the editors consider to underlie all of the chapters. The first refers to the different contextual levels that interact in youth work practices: the micro, the meso and the macro contexts that surround each practice. That is, the particular situation in which it occurs, the organizations involved with its specific circumstances and, at the broadest level, the political, cultural, economic and social factors that surround and condition said practice.

The second underlying element refers to what they characterize as *“lamenting of loss”*. The last 20 years or so of youth work have involved numerous losses of what could have been (*loss of a practice tradition, loss of impact in the lives of young people, loss of impact in terms of community outcomes, and loss of opportunity for democracy*, p. 623). However, this element highlights the tenacity among youth workers to continue working in contexts that are difficult to manage.

The third refers to a constant theme repeated throughout all of the chapters, that is, a firm commitment to a whole series of values typical of youth work: the values of relationship, democracy, inclusion, rights, social justice and ethics. Finally, the fourth element is the hope, inspiration and confidence expressed in the different articles that the future will bring more just societies. A future in which training, research and work with young people will create new practices that allow social problems and inequalities to be addressed in an appropriate manner.

Finally, I would like to add that I think this Handbook may prove very useful for youth work researchers, trainers and practitioners.

Xavier Úcar
Dpt. Teorías de la Educación y Pedagogía Social
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. (Spain)