

*STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR
THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
PROFESSIONAL
A Critical Framework for
Understanding the Work*

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Despite escalating interest in positive youth development, there is little agreement on what comprises the actual “work” of youth development and even less on the role of staff development for youth workers. To strengthen professional practice and hence the quality of youth development programs, an understanding must be developed of the distinguishing features or the essential elements of positive youth development work and the ways in which these elements can best be communicated to the field through staff development. This article suggests a framework for critical reflection on practices that encourage community-based youth workers to explore and apply the lessons of positive youth development in their programs. The article discusses the experience of facilitating adult learning within this curriculum, the responses of participants, and the implications for the youth development field.

Keywords: *youth development; staff development*

It is important to understand the philosophy and essential elements of positive youth development work precisely because so many people do it. Over 17,000 youth-serving organizations exist in this country. It is estimated that at least 300,000 individuals work in a full- or part-time capacity for youth-serving organizations (Carnegie Corpo-

ration of New York, 1992; National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations, 1996). This does not include the hundreds of thousands of volunteers working with young people within these organizations every year. Despite this large number, little systematic attention has been given to the training and education of youth workers.

Youth-serving agencies, religious youth groups, sports programs, parks and recreation services, and libraries all report that the adults who work with young people in their systems, whether serving on a paid or voluntary basis, are the most critical factor in whether a program succeeds, but *do not receive adequate training, ongoing support and supervision, or public recognition*. (Carnegie Corporation, 1992, p. 87, emphasis added)

Although each youth-serving organization may have a different programmatic structure, at their cores, increasing numbers embrace the concept of positive youth development, which has been steadily gaining acceptance in the field of youth work. In common parlance, the term *youth development* is used in three different but related ways (Hamilton, 1999). First, youth development describes something young people do—the natural process of learning, growing, and changing. Second, youth development describes the philosophy of understanding young people characterized by a strength-based approach to the experience of childhood and adolescence. Third, youth development describes a way of working with young people, one that values their participation, contribution, and unique personal characteristics. Youth development programs are usually considered those that provide the opportunities and supports needed for youth to attain the goals of positive development (Kahne et al., 2001; Pittman & Cahill, 1991; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). In this article, we are concerned about the essential role of staff development in ensuring youth development work that reflects the strength-based philosophy.

Although there now is rather general acceptance about the idea of positive youth development, there is as yet no clarity about how to implement a youth development strategy in an organization. It is easy to confuse a general philosophy of youth development and a positive ap-

proach to working with young people with a concrete vision and plan to implement an actual program. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002) report makes it clear that whereas we have knowledge about the basic conditions that promote positive adolescent health and development, we know far less about how to actually put these ideas into practice in the context of community-based youth programs. Connell, Gambone, and Smith (2000) stated that currently there are no agreed-upon standards or "nonnegotiables" for the field of youth development. Pittman, Irby, and Ferber (2000) suggested that the youth development approach had not become more mainstream in part because its messages were "too fuzzy." Robertson (1997) suggested that, to effectively implement youth development practices, better organizational support for staff development must be established.

THE ROLE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development is a likely and logical point from which to begin to infuse the work of youth development with focus and change. With the absence of common educational prerequisites and preservice training for practice, youth workers often appear to be an eclectic group of savvy, street-smart, youth-loving adults committed to the success of young people more than to the agenda of an agency or program. They are the front line of the program and the front door to the agency. The task of defining the work of youth development and the processes for getting it done begins with the staff; thus staff development planning sessions are likely places to explore the real meaning of the work.

Unfortunately, many youth-serving organizations and agencies have not seriously invested in ongoing, quality staff development and training. The unspoken assumption is that anyone can work with young people. Until recently, organizations have emphasized their differences (their unique features or market niches) rather than their shared commitment to positive youth development. Typically, staff training is viewed as instruction to implement organizationally specific programs and activities. Staff development has rarely been designed to promote a common understanding of youth development

work that transcends any particular youth organization's mission. Perhaps there has not been a perceived incentive or advantage to doing this; perhaps it has not been clear how a larger vision of the work would look or how it would benefit youth, families, and communities. Such a common vision can provide the bridge between youth workers regardless of whether they are the head of a Boys & Girls Club program in Washington, D.C., or a volunteer leading a 4-H Club in rural Nebraska.

Although the empirical link between staff development and quality programs has clearly been established by the literature on early childcare and school-age care (e.g., Ghazvini & Mullis, 2002; Norris, 2001; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2001; Weaver, 2002), little empirical evidence to date links staff development directly to improved, quality programs for adolescents. We believe this deficiency is due in part to the relatively new focus on adolescents in out-of-school programs and to the fact that there are as yet no accepted standards or accreditation for quality programs for adolescents as there are for school-age and young children such as those by the National School-Age Care Alliance and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Olgetree & Stevens, 1997). If, however, out-of-school time programming for adolescents follows the same evolution as that for younger children, the link between staff development and quality programs can be assumed.

To date, we have been able to identify only two published studies linking program quality and staff development in programs serving adolescents. The first, an evaluation of a large scale staff development effort targeting staff working with adolescents, reported a statistically significant link between staff training and more effective service for young people; however, it also pointed out the need to examine whether youth worker knowledge translates into practice change as perceived by youth themselves (Center for School and Community Services, 2002). These findings also revealed that many participants believed that training about youth development gave them more credibility as professionals. The second study of program quality included middle school-age youth. Grossman et al. (2002) found that the key to having high quality activities was the ability of the staff leading those activities.

Despite such individual project efforts, based on her comprehensive review of staff development training for youth development professionals as a whole, Borden (2002) concluded that

the lack of comprehensive educational opportunities leaves the field without professionals and volunteers who are soundly grounded in its theory, research, and best practices. The fragmentation of educational opportunities prevents youth development professionals from acquiring the necessary educational foundations and the skills to create quality youth development programs that promote the positive development of young people. We can no longer afford to have youth development professionals who are forced to use only their best instincts and guesswork at what makes a difference in the lives of young people. (p. 7)

What is clearer in the literature is that most of the calls for staff development for those working with adolescents have come from researchers or from staff, themselves. In a study of low-income neighborhood programs, Halpern, Barker, and Mollard (2000) found that youth workers typically rely on their own experiences rather than on any formal training to determine the day-to-day activities and programming priorities. In a survey of 659 family support workers (Scales, 1997), the majority of respondents reported feeling unprepared to work with early adolescents and their families. Roth et al. (1998) stated that staff development programs are important to ensure that adults with high quality skills and motivation are involved in youth development programs, especially because one of the known keys to successful youth development programs is the relationship between the youth and the staff.

Other researchers have suggested ways to improve the quality of existing staff development programs. Robertson (1997) suggested that effective staff development programs should allow participants to express their opinions, challenge management assumptions, and develop a shared language and understanding of development. Ashcroft (2000) recommended that staff members' perspectives and experiences be honored in determining program content and outcome. In a study specifically examining youth worker training needs and professional development interests, respondents agreed that having a common language of positive youth development and ongoing options for

education, training, and professional development were critical to promote greater understanding among community-based youth workers, improve programs, and strengthen the youth development field (Madzey-Akale & Walker, 2000).

Given the current state of the field, we contend that two things are needed to improve current staff development initiatives. The first is development of a framework incorporating the fundamental understanding and articulation of the substance or content of youth development work. What are the common elements, assumptions and definitions of positive youth development? What does research tell about useful frameworks and theories to guide success? How does this manifest itself in practice? The second is attention to the methodology (the effective processes and proven strategies) for delivering staff development programs. As Krueger (1998) pointed out, youth development is an interactive process, and it is reasonable to expect that youth development work be as well. Adults need to be able to think on their feet and to integrate their practical experiences within youth development frameworks and definitions. Youth workers come to the field with a variety of personal and work experiences. They are adults who are typically smart, talented, creative and dedicated, but they do not share a common educational preparation. It is not surprising that traditional, didactic classroom methods of teaching are judged by youth workers to be less effective than experiential, discussion-based approaches (Madzey-Akale & Walker, 2000). For this reason, it is important to reassess the role of the staff development teacher and the methods used to engage staff in new learning.

Beyond the requirements of organizational mission and program setting, there is a need for a basic understanding of how the philosophy and fundamental characteristics of youth development work can be integrated into an effective youth program. The array of activities, practices, mandates, and aspirations that gathers under the banner of positive youth development is both initially confusing and potentially promising. For the field to move forward with status and credibility, we as youth development workers must come to a consensus of what the work means, so when we say we are doing it, people will know what we are doing. Such a common understanding is necessary before specific program strategies can be implemented. This baseline knowledge can unite youth workers across organizations and begin to bring

legitimacy to a burgeoning field. Additionally, we should rely on methods of facilitation and critical reflection that legitimize and build on youth workers' experiences with the intent of informing future practice.

The purpose of this article is to clarify definitions of the "work" of positive youth development and to suggest specific methodological strategies for helping youth development workers critically reflect on their practice, regardless of their particular programmatic affiliation. Both will be illustrated via the evaluation of a specific model of staff development for youth development workers. It is important to note that the authors of this study were involved in all phases of the project. That is, we were members of the initial design team, facilitators of the training, and conductors of the training evaluations. This insider perspective was advantageous because it ensured that the training adhered closely to the original philosophical intent and that it maintained consistency over time.

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE FOR THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL

The particular staff development curriculum and pedagogy presented in this article is entitled "Moving Ahead: Preparing the Youth Development Professional" (Moving Ahead). This staff development training program is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it represents the first joint effort of two federal agencies (U.S. Department of Army and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service) to address the issue of staff development for youth development professionals. Second, an interdisciplinary team of seven researchers developed the framework to integrate youth development theory and the realities of practice with a critical, experiential approach to learning. Third, researchers and educators at land grant universities developed much of the curriculum content and activities. Fourth, we paid a great deal of attention to the methods used to facilitate the learning, incorporating and building on participants' existing knowledge and expertise. This section will provide more detail about the development of the framework and the methods used to facilitate the critical reflection of practicing adult youth workers.

We must note that this is not the first effort to define components of youth development work that should be related to staff training (e.g., Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, 1996; Dewitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund, 1996; Professional Research and Knowledge Taxonomy Model). It is however, the first time such an endeavor has resulted in a specific curriculum program that has been disseminated nationally.

DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK

To design *Moving Ahead*, a seven-member design team was convened. The design team was comprised of faculty from five land grant universities and the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center. Team members had expertise in adolescent development, adult learning and staff development, at-risk youth and families, youth program planning and practice, evaluation, and life span perspectives. Prior to developing specific curricula materials, the design team reviewed selected literature on positive youth development and existing staff development program models. This review included the work of Bogenschneider, Small, and Riley (1990); Dryfoos (1990); Lerner (1995); McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994); Ogletree and Stevens (1997); the National Assembly (1994); Pittman (1992); Pittman and Zeldin (1995); Scales and Leffert (1999); Zeldin (1993); and others. Existing staff development materials and frameworks from the Academy of Educational Development, the National 4-H Council, and the USDA Experiential Learning Design juried curriculum collection were also examined.

Based on this review, the team generated a framework of guiding assumptions about the work of positive youth development. Although not identical to those found in existing curricula, these assumptions represent the main ideas found in the reviewed materials. The framework assumptions include the following:

- All children and youth need support and productive experiences to grow to their fullest capacity. Vulnerable, isolated, and troubled young people may need extra support and attention. Solid youth development programs meet the needs of both groups.

- Youth development programs exist to promote the positive, healthy development of young people. Their mission is to provide the challenges, experiences, supports, and help young people need to develop to their fullest potential.
- Youth development programs are based on the idea that youth learn practical life skills through structured programs emphasizing fun, play, action, and group and individual challenge. Clubs, teams, camps, workshops, classes, social events, training sessions, volunteer work, and youth exchanges are all vehicles to get youth involved in positive activity and learning.
- Caring adults play an essential role in the healthy development of youth. These adults can be called leaders, guides, mentors, advocates, helpers, friends, and teachers; they are adults who care.
- Each youth and family (whatever its configuration) have strengths and assets that can be mobilized to serve as a source of power and support. Youth development workers must learn to reframe what at first glance appear to be negative, deficit behaviors into positive, protective forces for the child and family.
- Young people are an essential resource; they must be active in the planning, execution, and evaluation of any program. In this way, they learn from adults and adults learn from them.

Based on the framework of assumptions, the team identified a set of five specific knowledge and skill outcomes. These outcomes represent the team's attempt to identify appropriate baseline knowledge about the work of positive youth development. The team also developed specific learning objectives related to these outcomes. Both are presented in Table 1.

Taken together, the framework of assumptions and the learning objectives led the team to define a youth development professional as one who works in informal educational settings and uses the techniques of experiential education to provide supports and opportunities for young people to meet their basic needs and to develop the competencies and skills they will need to become successful contributing members of communities.

Once the framework was complete, the team looked for existing curriculum materials that were consistent with the guiding framework. Because of the team's commitment to including high-quality, research-based information, they examined curricula developed by

TABLE 1
Outcome Goals and Associated Lesson Content for Moving Ahead Framework

	<i>Articulate the historical significance and current benefits of nonformal educational programs (typically available in the nonschool hours).</i>	<i>Demonstrate improved skills in communicating effectively with children, youth and families.</i>	<i>Minimize the risk behaviors of young people with whom participants work.</i>	<i>Engage children and youth in programs that build strengths and reinforce principles of positive youth development.</i>	<i>Become advocates for young people and resources for youth, families and community members.</i>
The needs and competencies necessary for healthy growth and development				X	X
The role of the youth development professional in nonformal settings	X				X
The importance of developmentally appropriate program practices				X	X
Understanding one's personal preferred style of working with others		X			X
Applying the experiential learning model in practical situations				X	X
Understanding the ecological model and the mapping of risk and protective factors			X		X
Valuing diversity		X			X
Communication skills with youth and adults		X			X
Peer group support and peer pressure			X		X
Programming to support healthy risk taking			X		X
Understanding negative and self-destructive behaviors					X
Helping youth and adults develop a working partnership				X	

state extension specialists and colleagues throughout the land grant university system. The intent was not to develop new materials (although this was unavoidable in some cases) but to identify high-quality, relevant materials that could be worked into a progression of applied activities. Our goal was to weave together the best of existing research-based topics with our understanding of what the field required in the everyday practice of good youth development work.

When the materials were in place, the team gave serious consideration to the method of teaching. Many of the first students were used to the “sit in your seat, stay awake, and appear interested” school of learning. This is not what they needed, and it certainly was not a model for the active, engaged learning environments we expected them to create for young people. Based on the team’s experiences in training youth workers and on work by Madzey-Akale and Walker (2000), we realized that traditional methods of teaching by “experts” were not appropriate for youth workers who are themselves experts in the applied side of the equation. Heeding advice not to discount participant expertise gained by experience on the job, the team adopted a model of shared learning with trainer as facilitator (not expert) and youth workers as experienced practitioners. The goal was a cocreated, mutually respectful model that blended research and theory with critical reflection on practice in the real world.

As a result, the topical subject matter in *Moving Ahead* is strikingly similar to other youth-worker training curricula reviewed but the training strategies and identified outcomes are quite different. The original plan to simply identify key topics; find engaging, research-based lessons in existing training programs; and fashion a composite 40-hour program for practicing youth workers proved naïve. Most of the reviewed instructional formats relied heavily on lectures, overheads, and knowledge acquisition spiced up with participatory activities only weakly related to practical applications. Some materials reviewed were designed to advance a particular organizational philosophy or way of working with youth. Overall, there was little attention to application in community and site-based settings and minimal acknowledgment of the variety of leadership roles youth workers play in groups and agencies and with young people and volunteers.

After significant reflection, consultation, and trial and error, the *Moving Ahead* model evolved with an emphasis on the benefits, chal-

lenges and issues youth workers face when they embrace the key principles of positive youth development work in their daily practice. Lessons were built around the question, "Here is a principle supported by research and practice. If you accept this principle as valuable, what does this mean for the way you do your work?" Discussions, mini-lectures, reading materials, and short research presentations were interspersed with intentional learning activities and problem-solving games that emphasized the reality of active youth participation, cocreation of program planning, negotiated curriculum activities and lessons, and responsiveness to youth needs.

TRAINERS AS ADULT FACILITATORS OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

Given the rich diversity of experiences most youth development professionals bring to their work, the trainers of the Moving Ahead curriculum decided to think of themselves as facilitators rather than didactic instructors. A facilitator assumes a level of collaboration or equality with learners, valuing the experiences and perspectives learners bring to the group (Brookfield, 1987). Here the term *facilitator* suggests a skilled, intentional leader but it does not suggest a neutral, content-free leader. In this model, one of the facilitator's primary roles is to foster critical reflection in the intentional process to provide opportunities for participants to make connections between their experiences and the material presented. They challenge participants to use new information to derive meaning from their previous experiences with the intent of informing future behavior (Mezirow, 1991). The facilitator is challenged to be attentive to the participants, develop meaningful ways for them to interact with the material, and be willing and able to depart from lesson plans if it seems the group is excited by something unexpected (Brookfield, 1989). This flexible, responsive leadership style requires the facilitator to be extremely well versed in the materials so that movement (between concepts and application, presentations and discussion, research and practice) flows smoothly without getting remote from the topic at hand. This approach assists the learners to integrate the new information into their current level of understanding. Additionally, concepts are introduced in a recursive

fashion such that they are introduced, integrated into current experiences, then revisited again and again to push the learner to think about them in different ways and in the context of other concepts.

METHOD

As part of the pilot project, the Moving Ahead course in its 40-hour format was introduced to youth workers at 10 sites over a period of 4 years. This pilot project involved nearly 600 child- and youth-services staff serving school-age youth on U.S. Army installations worldwide. Three facilitators intentionally introduced the materials using interactive teaching methods designed to appeal to adult learners with diverse learning styles. Each was a highly skilled facilitator, and each had experience working in community youth development programs as well as excellent knowledge of the course material. The three worked as a team, always present and always engaged regardless who was taking the lead at the moment. Each was committed to staying current with the most recent research related to youth development.

At the end of each training day, the youth workers were given time to reflect on a worksheet that encouraged them to think about what they had learned that day and to integrate it with their experience. Over the course of the training, these reflection worksheets (on triple carbon copies) helped participants to track their learning and set personal goals for their work. Participants' reflections also alerted the facilitators to which sessions were working well and which needed to be reworked. Based on participants' input during the 3-year pilot phase of the project, the Moving Ahead curriculum was modified and refined multiple times. The criteria for revision were always "Is this concept being translated into practice?" and "Is the important point coming through in the discussions and applications?"

The final version reflects the joint construction of both the design team and youth professionals working in the field. Throughout the process, participants were actively encouraged to share their experiences and to challenge new ideas. Concepts that were introduced early in the training we intentionally revisited and built upon multiple times during the course of the week. Every new topic was carefully nested into the previous work, not handled as a new topic. Visual and sym-

bolic representations of important concepts were graphically displayed on oversized posters with new concepts added every day. All learning experiences were processed at multiple levels. For example, a cultural sensitivity simulation was modified to include a youth focus. The traditional cultural sensitivity exercise was adapted to include adult stereotypes of adolescents, features of positive youth development, risk and protective factors, and experiential methodology. The activity was processed at each of the multiple levels.

DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

After this 3-year pilot project, we had the opportunity to launch the completed version of Moving Ahead as the centerpiece of three separate staff development programs with teams of youth workers affiliated with a national youth-serving organization. Specifically, the Moving Ahead training was implemented in January, May, and August of 2000 with a total of 170 participants representing 35 states and 2 territories.

To examine the impact of the curriculum and the facilitative teaching process, upon completion of the training, participants were given an 18-item survey assessing their perceived abilities and knowledge before they attended the training and after they attended the training. The survey questions were based on the original learning objectives presented in Table 1. This retrospective pretest design allows participants to report on both their pretraining and posttraining knowledge at the end of the training (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). This type of design is particularly useful in self-report data when a potential response shift bias is possible. According to Pratt et al. (2000), response shift bias "can be defined as a program-produced change in the participants' understanding of the construct being measured" (p. 342). Because the purpose of the training is to help youth workers understand and apply youth development concepts to their work, it is expected that their perception of the construct will change, thus making the retrospective pretest a viable method of measurement. Additionally, this posttest format limits the possibility of test-retest sensitivity and it minimizes participants' tendency to overestimate their initial knowledge base (Bernard, 2000; Pratt et al., 2000).

TABLE 2
Results of *t* Tests Comparing Pretraining and Posttraining Test Scores
on Youth Work Core Areas (*N* = 153)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Pretraining</i>		<i>Posttraining</i>		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Critical needs and competencies	3.13	0.76	3.76	0.43	-11.98**
Articulating PYD role	2.88	0.86	3.71	0.47	-13.47**
Understanding steps in ELM	3.51	3.31	3.80	0.41	-1.11
Apply steps in ELM	2.90	0.87	3.64	0.52	-11.77**
Understanding my preferred style	3.25	0.93	3.88	0.35	-8.74**
Understanding how to work more effectively with other styles	3.04	0.82	3.67	0.47	-10.71**
Developing age appropriate activities	3.05	0.77	3.65	0.51	-11.63**
Stages of group formation	2.78	0.94	3.47	0.57	-11.39**
Understanding risk and protective factors	3.23	2.66	3.70	0.46	-2.27*
Mapping risk and protective factors	2.63	0.91	3.52	0.56	-15.64**
Awareness of diversity issues	3.32	0.66	3.74	0.48	-7.68**
Dealing with differences	3.11	0.65	3.62	0.51	-10.23**
Communication skills	3.25	0.62	3.71	0.46	-10.11**
Dealing with conflict	3.01	0.73	3.42	0.63	-8.37**
Peer pressure	3.19	0.68	3.76	0.43	-11.13**
Programming for developmental needs	2.95	0.75	3.55	0.56	-11.99**
Understanding negative and self-destructive behavior	2.65	0.85	3.32	0.65	-12.89**
Youth and adult partnerships	3.08	0.79	3.67	0.51	-10.71**

NOTE: Means reflect rating on scale ranging from 1 (*no competence*) to 4 (*much competence*).
 PYD = positive youth development; ELM = experiential learning model.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Survey data were collected from 153 participants with a 90% response rate. Eighty percent (80%) of participants were female; 20% were male. Eighty-five percent (85%) of participants reported their ethnicity as White/Caucasian, 11% as African American, 1% as Hispanic, 1% as Asian, 1% as American Indian, and 1% as other.

Question responses ranged among 1 (*no*), 2 (*sometimes*), 3 (*usually*), and 4 (*yes*).

To examine program effects, differences in mean scores were compared between the pretraining and posttraining responses for each item. As illustrated in Table 2, with the exception of one item, paired sample *t* tests revealed significant differences among participants' scores on survey questions related to the each of the twelve content areas.

Specifically, participants increased their understanding of the need and competencies critical for healthy growth and development ($p < .001$), improved their ability to articulate their role as a youth professional working in the area of nonformal education ($p < .001$), improved their ability to apply the steps of experiential education to youth activities ($p < .001$), increased their understanding of their preferred style of work ($p < .001$) and how to work effectively with others ($p < .001$), increased their ability to develop age appropriate activities and programs ($p < .001$), increased their ability to recognize the stages of group formation ($p < .001$), increased their understanding of the concepts of risk and protective factors ($p < .001$), increased their ability to map risk and protective factors found in multiple ecological levels of a community ($p < .001$), improved their ability to develop programs that meet youths' developmental needs in exciting yet safe environments ($p < .001$), increased their ability to involve youth as partners in program planning and implementation ($p < .001$), and increased their understanding of the components necessary for establishing a comprehensive program plan ($p < .001$). The only nonsignificant finding was in the area of understanding the steps in the experiential learning model. Participants reported a high level of understanding of these steps prior to course completion. It is important to note that although participants reported previously understanding the steps in the experiential learning model they demonstrated significant gains in understanding how to apply the experiential learning model in their work settings.

Two potential limitations of the retrospective pretest design must be noted: demand characteristics and memory-related problems (Pratt et al., 2000). Demand characteristics could come into play if program participants had some motivation to make the program appear more effective than it actually was. Because Moving Ahead participants completed the evaluations anonymously and received no compensation for their feedback, it is unlikely that demand characteristics influenced our findings. The entire training occurred over a consecutive 5-day span. To prevent memory-related problems, concepts that were introduced early in the training were continuously referred back to and built upon throughout the week. Additionally, on the final day of the training, an entire session was devoted to reviewing and summa-

rizing the lessons, thus lessening the likelihood of memory recall being an issue.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE YOUTH WORKER STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Moving Ahead used adults to facilitate the critical reflection of participants about the work of youth development. According to their self-reports, program participants demonstrated significant gains in learning about the baseline concepts of youth development through participation in Moving Ahead. The curriculum and pedagogy of Moving Ahead has helped us learn from participants the realities and challenges of incorporating a youth development approach into practical work. Our experience in conducting staff development within this model has several implications for the field of youth development and for those who provide staff development training.

First, as workers in the field of youth development, we must come to agreement on the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to be an effective youth development worker. Such consensus promotes youth worker intentionality with respect to the youth development outcomes they are trying to achieve and the methods they are using to achieve them. Currently most organizations develop their own personalized materials with little concern for the field as a whole. This is expensive and time consuming; in addition, this practice impedes our ability to integrate the best information from both research and practice. The strategy of focusing on individual programs limits our ability to come together as a legitimate and unified field. Issues of ownership and turf can make consensus difficult. This study showed that when we were explicit about our definition of the work and when we presented it in a way that allowed participants to integrate their own experiences, we were successful in increasing skills.

Second, we must bridge the worlds of research and practice, theory and application. Staff development provides one venue for this bridging. Successful teaching and learning is premised on a mutual respect between the direct service provider and the more removed facilitator or academic or intermediary sponsor. There is reciprocity between the teacher and the learner. Therefore, a preferred way to think of staff de-

velopment is as a critical reflection on research and practice among colleagues rather than as an expert trainer in charge of instilling knowledge or building skills of people who are doing the work every day. Certainly, knowledge and skills will grow as practice will inform and shape applied research and evaluation. The Moving Ahead staff development model is an excellent example of this partnership. The initial 3-year testing process allowed integration of many of the participants' thoughts and experiences with the research base. This resulted in a product that bridges the research and practice base making the work both accessible and applicable to participants in their everyday work.

Third, we must continually strive to improve the foundation of our staff development. This means putting the learner, not the teacher, at the center of the process. It means authentically engaging each other around the complex and thorny issues of how to best promote healthy youth development in programs, agencies, and communities where young people are not always the top priority. A learning climate characterized by engagement and mutual respect requires high levels of participation, discussion, discovery, action, and critical reflection. The staff development methods should model the active engagement and discovery characterized by effective learning methods that work with adolescents, adults, and often even younger children. We must be as intentional about the way we present information as we are about what it is we are presenting. Part of the success of the Moving Ahead process was due to the trainers being both content experts and facilitators of adult critical reflection. This combined skill allowed the trainers to help participants integrate knowledge into existing experience.

Fourth, we must invest in our youth development staff. This means dedicating resources and significant blocks of time for staff development. Good staff development requires time to integrate the demands of research, theory, and practice—a construct that often seems at irreconcilable odds to thoughtful people. Most youth workers have experienced unrelated bits and pieces of training but it is the integration of ideas that can change practice. The Moving Ahead training program required 40 hours of onsite training. This time investment allowed participants to become immersed in understanding the concepts of youth development without fear of outside distraction. It allowed us to present ideas in a recursive fashion—building from one

day to the next. This time investment also allowed participants to get a solid grasp of the big picture of youth development and how the concepts fit together before they try to implement them. Many participants stated that having the material all together increased their awareness of the interrelatedness of concepts.

Fifth, we must expand the context of staff development events. The Moving Ahead sessions showed that participants' receptivity is best when they are engaged with youth workers from beyond their own workplace or agency. The more diverse the group is in every way, the less constrained is the discussion, the wider is the arena for questions, and the more varied are the perspectives on what works. Learning in a nonagency environment reduces the fear of judgments by supervisors and coworkers and stretches thinking beyond the politically correct confines of the workplace.

Finally, we must put aside issues of proprietary ownership, develop first-rate national staff development materials for the field, and create a system for access and dissemination. Multiple organizations have an interest and capacity in this work. Nonprofit organizations like the Child Welfare League of America and the Forum for Youth Investment, government entities like the Cooperative Extension Service with its land grant university partners, and intermediaries like the Academy for Educational Development and National Collaboration for Youth all have roles in and much to contribute to this work.

The Moving Ahead training represents an initial step in thinking about the work of youth development and the methods used in staff development training. We hope it opens a dialogue for others to share their experiences. It is only through such continued dialogue that the field of youth development work will gain credibility and growth.

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