Youth Work in South Africa: Why we don’t know enough

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Commonwealth Conference on Education and Training of Youth Workers
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Outline: Youth work education and training?

1. What do we [think we] know?

2. What are the problems?

3. What is needed?
What we do know?

Breakdown of youth workers by:

1. Gender
2. South African ‘population group’ of youth workers
3. Age
4. Years of experience
5. Institutional throughput up to 2008
Youth workers by ‘population group’

- Black African: 85.17%
- White: 10.57%
- Coloured: 3.79%
- Indian: 0.46%
Youth workers by gender

52% male, 48% female (from DSD 2008 survey of 920 Child and youth care workers)
- More females in Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga
- More males in Northern Cape and North West
Youthworkers by years of experience

- <1 year: 9%
- 1-3 years: 36%
- 4-7 years: 26%
- 8-10 years: 15%
- 11-15 years: 7%
- 16-20 years: 3%
- >20 years: 4%
Average age of youth workers

![Bar chart showing age distribution of youth workers.
- 20-24: 19%
- 25-29: 26%
- 30-34: 23%
- 35-39: 12%
- 40-44: 8%
- 45-49: 7%
- 50 and over: 5%]
Why is this not enough?

1. Source of these statistics – a survey conducted in 2008 by the Department of Social Development
   - State of youth work in South Africa

2. Based on 960 children and youth care workers from a database of 5000
   - Registered with the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers (NACYCW)
Why is this not enough?

1. ¼ of these youth workers are full-time employed youth workers

2. We need to know these figures nationally
   • Where employed
   • Levels of experience and training
   • Needs analysis
   • Career trajectories
   • Effectiveness of work
Institutions offering training

1. Huguenot College in Wellington
   • Trained social and community development workers.

2. UNISA
   • National Diploma in Child and Youth Development from 1999-2010
   • BTech degree in Child and Youth Care – ending

3. University of Venda

4. University of Port Elizabeth.

5. University of Stellenbosch and Pretoria
   • As a series of modules in Practical Theology or Community Development

6. What about NGO-run youth worker training?
Enrolment over past 10 yrs Huguenot College and Stellenbosch University

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What are the problems?

1. Definitional incoherence
2. Roles ill-defined – too wide
3. Absence of critical (self)-reflection as a field of practice
4. The need for data, evidence, corpus - published research findings; evidence-based practice
5. Lack of institutional memory – the history of youth work in South Africa
6. Professionalising problems - Contentious issues from invested parties
7. Placement opportunities too few
Youth work definition

‘Youth work is the professional practice that focuses on the **holistic development** of the adolescent and young person. Youth work offers learning opportunities that support and promote the **personal, social and economic** development of young people. Central to that is the **quality of the youth worker's relationship with young people** and the consequent influence on their learning and development. Learning can occur in **planned and focused programmes**, or it may be spontaneous, through **informal encounters** with individuals or with groups’ (SAYWA 2001, p. 9-10).
Youth workers definitions

• ‘Any person who is involved in work that primarily aims at addressing the needs of the youth and society that seeks active participation, liberation and empowerment of young people’ (DSD 2008, p. 8)

• ‘Practitioners and volunteers who work either at the cutting edge of society with young people... [or are] managers of youth-based organisations... [developing young people’s personal, social and economic livelihoods]’ (SAYWA 2001, p. 1; 9) .
Youth workers’ roles

- Trainer
- Educator
- Counsellor
- Social worker
- Community development
- ……

How are they the same as or distinguished from:
- Teachers
- Corrective services’ personnel
- Health personnel e.g., psychologists
- Pastors
Definitional incoherence

1. Agreed on “holistic development”
   - SAYWA (2001)
   - DSD (2008)

2. Personal, social, economic – which most important?

3. What age are youth? (SA political definition of 14-35)
Absence of critical (self)-reflection as a field of practice

1. Evidenced by lack of published literature
2. Debates about definitions, vested interests and even youth age
3. Where are our (at least) 18 youth work doctorates graduated between 1999 and 2008?
Lack of institutional memory

1. Pre-democracy – ‘veld schools’ and indoctrination; youth militarisation
2. Transition – Provincial Youth Structures
3. Post democracy – Umsombomvu, NYC, NYDA
4. Role of NGOs
5. ‘People know more than publications’ – but how do we preserve (and use) this knowledge?
Professionalising challenges

National Youth Policy Consultative Conference 2009

1. Fear of being disqualified from the profession – credentials valued over experience

2. Fear of stringent (excluding) standards with accreditation e.g. Level 7 - Bachelors degree

3. Activist v. institutional; Informal and unorthodox v. formal and orthodox

4. Multiple settings require flexibility

5. Relationship-centred – antithesis to professionalisation?
Placement opportunities

1. Outreach programmes
2. Social work authorities
3. Educational authorities and youth employing bodies
4. Information centres
5. Community centres
6. Schools, advice centres and clinics
7. Advocacy and lobbying agencies
8. Corporate sector
9. Specialist programmes such as HIV/AIDS prevention programmes
The need for data, evidence, corpus

1. Absence of published research findings
2. Reliance on secondary data problematic
3. Absence of evidence-based practice
4. Research important to create body (corpus) of knowledge
5. Specialist literature to assist the process of professionalization
Examples of studies needed

1. Youth worker trajectories and current status
2. Navigational capacities for youth development in contexts of adversity
3. History of youth work in South Africa
4. Understanding the varied work that youth workers undertake at the different youth development centres and how that work links with the overall goals of the youth development agenda.
What do we need?

1. “Institutional memory” – a history of youth work evaluating processes, successes, failures and opportunities
2. Surveying career trajectories of youth work graduates
3. Researching the skills required of youth work practitioners, and youth development in adversity
4. Monitoring youth work training opportunities and measuring through-puts
5. Setting up credible flexible accreditation courses including continuing professional development
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