BOOK REVIEW

Gil E. Clary and Jean E. Rhodes (Eds), Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development: Strategies for Closing the Gap between Beliefs and Behaviors

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The edited volume, *Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development: Strategies for Closing the Gap between Beliefs and Behaviors* by Clary and Rhodes (2006), is a collection of applied essays that attempt to draw volunteer recruitment strategies from the research literature in a range of fields. The book is divided into ecological strata that reveal potential sources of volunteers for youth development programs. The book begins with a picture of adult volunteers today. Then a section examines research from social psychology about key characteristics of successful and enduring volunteers. The final two sections describe recruitment efforts and strategies for specific types of organizations (e.g., religious, neighborhood) and suggest social policies that may facilitate a culture of volunteering in society at large.

This book is rich in examples, and it steers readers towards key research literatures and the strategies they reveal. The book is as much about *who volunteers are* as it is about *how and where to find them*. Its strength is its heavy reliance on theory coupled with its realistic and empirically supported examples of recruitment strategies. Consistent across chapters is the theme that volunteers for youth development programs are scarce and it can be a real challenge to recruit and sustain volunteers. Yet, after readers have combed through the chapters and pulled from them what is currently known about volunteers in youth development programs, readers might find themselves asking the question, "Are our efforts to recruit volunteers for youth development programs all that they *should* be?" That is, can't programs become both more strategic *and* more selective when recruiting volunteers?

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It is commonly known in the practice world of mentoring professionals, for example, that the most pressing question for the staff of mentoring programs is, "where to find new and better mentors?" Realistically, it may not be possible to capture ample mentors sufficient to satisfy the need, which has been estimated as five times the number of adult mentors who are currently serving as program-based youth mentors in the U.S. today (MENTOR 2006). How to tap into and retain this essential and scarce resource seems, so often, a question with very few, clear answers.

Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development (Clary and Rhodes 2006) addresses this question. It is a fourteen chapter, 260 page collection of research from several fields about what motivates adults to work with youth, who are the typical volunteers, and how best to recruit these adults. This book is not without limitations. It surely is not the final statement on the very pressing problems of how and who to recruit as volunteers. *Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development* may nevertheless be the most research-based collection of essays available that focus solely on the topic of how to mobilize adults for participation in youth development programs. If it is not the best, most timely, and comprehensive volume available on the topic, then I don't know its superior.

The chapters in the book draw upon high quality research from peer-reviewed, top-tier journals. This is just what practitioners want to know about but rarely receive in an accessible, summarized, and translated-for-application format. More commonly positive youth development (PYD) program practitioners have to dig deep into complex research articles to find the few kernels of wisdom that have been squirreled away in the discussion sections of published research, which frequently don't reveal strategies directly applicable to mobilizing adults for PYD programs like theirs. Much like the series of research summaries on

different topics in the field of youth mentoring called the *Research Corner* that Jean Rhodes has penned (e.g., Rhodes 2005), this book provides applications and illustrations of research that apply directly to adult volunteerism in youth development programs. For example, the chapter by Stukas, Daly and Clary (2006) provides a comprehensive review of their long line of research on the motivations of volunteers in different volunteer situations with specific applications to PYD programs.

In this book, research-based strategies for professionals in youth development programs that often seem out of reach—they are either hard to access, hard to understand, or hard to translate—are presented as low-hanging fruit, both timely and very accessible. Readers will find the kinds of useful suggestions and "under review" findings that practitioners are quite happy to digest before the academic community has provided its stamp of approval. Written by experts on their topics, the chapters provide some of the newest findings as well as creative ideas about the implications of the authors' research for PYD settings that the authors may have not been able or taken the liberty to include in the discussions sections of their research articles. Fortunately, true to their training and discipline, the authors rarely stray too far from the research when making such suggestions.

Scales' (2006) chapter provides a good example of how the chapters in this book integrate findings from several separate fields and studies to reveal ways to motivate and maintain adult volunteers. Scales provides a fairly detailed profile of who in the US tends to engage non-related youth in development-enhancing ways. Then he suggests some of the reasons why the rate of adults engaging youth in PYD is declining. But quite likely to the pleasure of many applied youth development professionals who crave this, he also provides ample suggestions for how to use research to effect changes in the size of the catch from mentor and volunteer recruitment efforts. Particularly interesting is his suggestion to engage the potential volunteer (e.g., mentor) with the parent(s) of the youth before matching the adult with the youth. This way the adults can make clear to the youth what role the volunteer will play, and the volunteer can be clear about how much the parent(s) values the volunteer's role. The sophistication and rationale behind this and other suggestions is explained clearly and compellingly in Scales' review of the research. A careful read of this chapter will certainly provide practitioners food for thought and useful tools to leverage change.

Addressing a Pressing Need for Program Staff

The relevance of this book was recently illustrated by many of the issues raised in discussions between

researchers and practitioners during the weeklong *Summer Institute for Youth Mentoring* (SIYM) at Portland State University. There, at the conclusion of the week, a group of youth mentoring professionals focused on the task of taking all of the research that they had been exposed to during the week and generating new practices to improve their programs (Keller 2007). The Summer Institute assembled several experts on school-based mentoring to share the latest research findings during the first part of the week with experienced professionals, Executive Directors of mentoring agencies and advocacy organizations from locations as diverse as Alaska, Texas, and Canada. For example, participants were presented with findings from two recently completed impact studies of school-based youth mentoring (Herrera et al. 2007; Karcher 2007a), information about the "insides" of thriving and failing matches (Spencer 2007), and about variations in effective formats for school-based mentoring (e.g., Lunch Buddies; see Hughes et al. 2005). They learned which kids appear to benefit most from school-based mentoring (SBM) relative to community based mentoring (CBM), and were exposed to cultural, gender and age variations in what works in SBM and for whom. All of these lessons about program effectiveness and the practices that facilitate successful matches were then reflected upon by program professionals toward the end of the week and discussed in order to develop new goals and strategies. Certainly this information would be useful in their efforts to train mentors.

However, reflecting the general lack of research attention to the recruitment and selection of volunteers, the *SIYM* participants received very little information about how they could attract and retain new and hard-to-reach mentors, such as ethnic minority volunteers and men, who are in short supply. It is for this reason I can only imagine how valuable it would be if future Institutes shared with participants the type of wisdom contained in *Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development*.

The Importance of Bringing Professionals and Researchers into Dialogue

Other consistent themes across chapters in the book are the interrelationship between research and practice, the need for collaborative relationships, and that the legitimization of both research and PYD programs depends on bi-directional dialogue—both ground up (from experiences in community agency or school programs) and top down (from applied and basic research). Taken together, and as exemplified by the Camino and Zeldin chapter, the book chapters elevate the role of collaboration and argue for the importance of such collaborations.

Camino and Zeldin's (2006) chapter on university-community collaborations defines the principles of "outreach scholarship" (p. 178) and illustrates it with descriptions of three programs created through the application of these principles. The *Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring* (SIYM) could serve as a fourth example of the university-community collaboration they propose (pp. 180–182). The SIYM provides a lived example of the "learning community" described by Camino and Zeldin. "First, adult learning is best fostered by facilitation. Facilitators strive to set up the conditions that will enable adults to be self-directed and experiential learners. Second, there is a need to engage adults in networks of co-learners, who can challenge as well as support one another, and so move the learning process along in a collegial manner" (p. 179). The SIYM brought researchers and practitioners into an extended dialogue in which each was an expert, but where both sets of experts were encourage to challenge and learn from each other. Just as this is not easy, it also is not common. To explain why it may be so uncommon, the authors provide a compelling explanation for the potential and common divide between researchers and practitioners that often interferes with the transfer of research to practice:

> Academics and community staff reside in different cultures and frequently hold conflicting goals.…. While university researchers view the research as a cumulative body of knowledge that takes time and patience to build, practitioners often require immediate answers and solutions (Myers-Walls 2000). Researchers are also socialized to identify empirical support in order to make cautious conclusions; practitioners can rely on tacit knowledge, intuition, and direct experience (Zeldin and Camino 1999). Finally, university-trained faculty are often intrigued by questions; policy makers and practitioners want answers. (Camino and Zeldin, p. 182)

One tool proposed repeatedly throughout the book for bridging research and practice worlds in PYD is participatory research. Participatory research is gently but consistently described in multiple chapters as an important tool for creating a fertile environment for engaging adults in PYD. It is presented as one arm of any effective and evolving PYD program. Several authors suggest that involving youth, agency staff, and community stakeholders in action research is germane, sensible, and viable but also essential to thriving programs.

Why Youth also Need to be Brought to the Table

There are several reasons to nod one's head when reading the chapter by Lerner et al. (2006) on youth involvement. In fact,

the points they make in their chapter were echoed by the *Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring* (*SIYM*) working group when they discussed how best to engage ethnic minority high school youth in school-based mentoring. Lerner et al. and the SIYM working group agree on the importance of giving youth a say in how to promote their development. During the *SIYM*, the participants learned that school-based mentoring may be less effective for Latino than Latina high school students (Karcher 2007a). After discussing this finding in terms of cultural, gender, and developmental theories, the group decided that a specific practice already utilized in the Norfolk Public Schools might serve to alleviate this problem. The coordinator of the Norfolk program suggested that when she found African American high school students relatively uninterested in meeting one-on-one with an adult mentor, she reconceptualized the program altogether and decided to ask the boys and girls separately what they *would* like. Through meetings with the boys who had been identified for the mentoring program, she and her staff were able to help the boys decide how they might be able to utilize adult mentors and toward what youth-selected goals these matches might work. Through this process of asking the youth to explain what they needed and how they felt they could benefit most, a distinctly different format was created in which mentors were *added to* the youth-developed program. This, then, redefined the types of mentors that were needed for the program and gave those mentors a mandate.

This approach of involving youth is exactly what Lerner et al. (2006) describe as the "youth charter." The youth-driven mentoring program for boys in the Norfolk Public Schools also reveals the veracity of Lerner et al.'s argument that PYD programs must be developmentally informed and truly derived from an approach that assumes *the presence of strengths among all young people*, including those most in need of intervention:

> The promotion of positive youth development has at its core the enhancement—through the civic engagement of young people—of the active contribution of the young person to both self and context, of the individual as an active producer of his or her own positive development. (Lerner et al. 2006, p. 30)

The first and the last chapters of the book underscore the point that achieving PYD requires reconceptualizing youth from at-risk to engaged and thriving, from receivers of interventions to creators of interventions and designers of the services they, their schools, and their communities receive. It is a movement away from viewing youth as "they" to youth as "us"—sharers in the responsibility for promoting PYD. By serving as bookends, the chapters by Lerner et al. (2006) and by Durand and Lykes (2006) seem to highlight the need to involve youth as architects of their own development and their own communities.

A Contrarian View from the Social Sciences for the Social Services

One element that was somewhat absent in the book was an examination of the role of contingencies for increasing the participation of adult volunteers. Several chapters note that helping potential volunteers become aware of the benefits they may incur through volunteering can increase volunteer rates and retention (Camino and Zeldin 2006; Flanagan et al. 2006; Stukas et al. 2006; Taylor 2006). Volunteers typically want to make a difference in the lives of youth, and some more than others need to see evidence that this is occurring. (Although, there is some qualitative evidence that volunteer mentors who *do not* expect to see change in their mentees during the course of their match persist longer than those who expect and want to see more immediate change (Karcher 2007b).) However, only a couple of chapters addressed incentives that have been provided to increase volunteerism. Stukas et al. (2006) suggest that helping volunteers be aware of the specific outcomes they may experience and the motivations they are most likely to achieve is a good program practice. In this way, they suggest the usefulness of emphasizing built-in contingencies or rewards to recruit and retain volunteers.

This is a contrary approach to the commonly held assumption that all volunteer opportunities meet the same basic motivations or hoped-for outcomes of volunteers. The line of research by Clary, Omoto, Snyder, and Stukas illustrates that all motivations may not be readily achievable through all forms of volunteering. Their research suggests that program staff should speak more directly and accurately with volunteers about the types of personal (adult) and intervention (youth) outcomes that volunteers *are* likely to experience themselves and observe among youth during their work. This, they argue, may help screen out inappropriate volunteers (i.e., those who might quit prematurely) and may circumvent the disappointment of those who would volunteer with expectations that are incompatible or unrealistic with their volunteer role.

A parallel process to providing contingencies to volunteers that seems somewhat absent in the book is the importance of volunteer accountability. Perhaps the authors did not write about this because holding volunteers (e.g., mentors) accountable for their commitments (e.g., to mentor a full year, or to meet with the youth weekly) might entail, potentially, terminating a volunteer's involvement with a program—of course, terminating volunteers is the opposite of mobilizing them (which is the book's primary focus).

Yet termination and mobilization may be related. Think outside the social service box for a moment. Holding mentors and other volunteers to a higher standard may, ultimately, increase the status of volunteering and increase both the number and skill level of volunteers. However, the assumption held by most program staff seems to be "If someone volunteers to help, free of charge and of their own volition with no tangible compensation from the program, then who are we to hold them accountable to their commitment to the program—as if it was a *real* binding commitment?" Yet abandoning a youth, as in the case of a mentor who fails his or her commitment, is more egregious than someone who fails to purchase a house they've made an offer on or someone who fails to deliver on the promise to take a friend to the airport by never showing up—and we hold those individuals accountable in one way or another. Perhaps there are better examples of commitments we feel we can "hold adults to" or punish them for when their commitments are not honored, but for some reason, youth development program staff often don't seem to feel entitled to hold volunteers accountable for there behavior. Yet, we know from parenting research that this is just the kind of lassie-fare approach that only creates more problems.

All agree that there is a need to actively recruit those individuals who will be the most honorable, who will follow through with their commitments, and who thereby will stay the course. In the field of youth mentoring, with the growing evidence of the harm that can come from mentors who fail their mentees by abandoning them (Grossman and Rhodes 2002; Karcher 2005), this is becoming a more and more pressing problem. Indeed, if mentoring programs continue to emphasize quantity over quality (Rhodes and DuBois 2006), this may become a bigger problem (i.e., more mentors means more mentors quitting prematurely). Yet participants at the SIYM seemed stunned to hear Cavell, an expert on mentoring as well as parenting, propose the possibility of such contingencies for mentors.

Given this predicament, in this volume or similar books on how to mobilize volunteers, it seems that there should be more discussion and ultimately more research on the issue of *which* volunteers to mobilize. While Scales' chapter provides some ideas of who to target, and Stukas, Daly and Clary's chapter also reveals which motivations make for better volunteers in which programs, it seems a chapter on the need to be more selective in how we identify, target, reward (or compensate), and hold accountable these volunteers would be important. For example, Lerner et al. make the point that not all adults will volunteer to work with youth, and not all *should* work with youth. There may be an unrealistic expectation in the population and among program staff than anyone can mentor or serve equally well in all volunteering capacities. It is more likely that some mentors are better than others, and some individuals simply posses the required interpersonal skills, insight, patience, or creativity to serve as volunteers in specific programs, whereas others simply do not. But, for example, there seems to be an assumption that either

anyone can mentor, or that anyone can be taught to mentor. This is likely just not the case, and so a "who should *and shouldn't* we mobilize" chapter is one that I hope we will see in subsequent editions of this book.

Using Research to Overhaul our Understanding of Program Goals and Structure

Critically examining our assumptions about who should volunteer and what we should be able to expect from the volunteers we mobilize for PYD is where I think current research, and by extension the content of this book, may fall short. It may be helpful to step back and consider the assumptions behind interventions involving volunteers and to think more deeply about why we choose the volunteers we do. For example, in his presentation to participants at the SIYM, Cavell provided two provocative sessions that both served to challenge commonly held assumptions about school-based mentoring. First, he reported that, much to his surprise, a one-hour, twice weekly *Lunch Buddy* mentoring program was more effective for aggressive youth, particularly in high-risk schools, than was the more structured and intensive alternative mentoring intervention called *Prime Time*, which was expected to have a greater impact. *Prime Time* included much more volunteer training on youth development, parenting, and clinical theory and techniques. It also kept the same therapeutic mentor in a continuous 3-semester relationship. In both programs college mentors received (or lost) college course credit for mentoring. But the *Lunch Buddy* mentoring condition, in which college student volunteers could only work with a youth for one semester and were given minimal training had better outcomes.

Possible explanations for these unexpected findings presented real challenges to the participants' (and his fellow researchers') assumptions about what makes a mentoring program or development-promoting youth-adult relationship work. Maybe it was easier for those one-semester mentors to remain positive with their mentees and not get burnt out by their mentees' aggressive behavior. Maybe the less-trained mentors knew just enough to *not* be harmful. Maybe the matches ended before the halo of the honeymoon period of the early phase of the relationships faded. Maybe it provided a clear end-date and expectation about closure for the youth that was less clear to the youth in the longer-term *Prime Time* intervention.

Rethinking an intervention, such as school-based mentoring, in light of such surprising findings, however, actually could address some of the main problems already noted about school-based mentoring (Herrera et al. 2007; Rhodes 2005). Consider two examples: (1) for many adults, even a 1-year commitment is too long to be appealing,

seem realistic, or actually complete, and (2) there are problems presented by the gaps between semesters and especially over the summer when mentors cannot meet with their mentees (Herrera 2004). Given these problems, maybe shorter commitments (one semester) with clear contingencies (course credit) are more appealing to the mentors and thereby more effective than longer-term matches (which, it seems, tend to be held out as the gold standard because these work best in community based mentoring). This is all to suggest that sometimes, when it is hard to recruit or maintain volunteers, it may be the structure of the intervention or the built-in problems experienced by those who volunteer that are the bigger problems to address. In this case, however, programs can either provide more incentives, change the nature of the intervention, or seek out only those mentors who have the requisite commitments and skills to perform the intervention.

This is not to suggest that there is not a wealth of great ideas in the book for how to encourage volunteer participation, as there is. For example, in the Flannagan et al. (2006) chapter, they describe how it might reduce apprehension among potential volunteers if they knew about Public Law 105-19 which protects volunteers from frivolous lawsuits related to their efforts. This does not seem to be well known—either that there is this law, or that many potential volunteers are wary of inviting trouble into their lives by entering into helping relationships with individuals or families who might decide to sue them. Flannagan et al. reference the *2003 Report to the Nation* to provide other such insights as well. Rather, the point of this critique of the book is that perhaps the difficulty programs encounter in recruiting volunteers lies in the structure of the intervention itself or in our assumptions about what we can expect from volunteers.

Conclusions: Toward a Zeitgeist Wherein Beggars Can be Choosers

While the book does an excellent job of garnering the available research on how best to motivate and thereby mobilize adults to serve as volunteers in youth development programs, an underlying message seems to be that there is a drastically imbalanced supply of and demand for volunteers, which makes for an uneven playing field. This situation likely helps to foster an *open door, beggars can't be choosers, we'll take anyone* mentality among organizations seeking volunteers. Maybe this is how it will always be. But is it how it has to be or ought to be? Might there be ways to involve businesses, communities, parents, and even youth to elevate the status of volunteer opportunities? What if a balance of rewards, contingencies, and

consequences could be marshaled to reverse this pattern, making volunteering a competitive, selective, and high-status opportunity that is only provided to the most skilled and most committed in our society? Were volunteers only of the highest caliber, might it also make them more appealing to the youth they serve, and might this convey to the youth a sense of their importance that has its own positive effects on youth, beyond what occurs through the relationship or organization's program? If so, maybe more attention needs to be paid to promoting the status, rewards, and incentives for volunteers, and shouldn't this be borne in some large part by those institutions, private and federal, who have a commitment and responsibility for seeing that youth are given all they need to thrive and achieve their potential. Probably so, and, indeed, this book by Clary and Rhodes reveals a first few important steps in this direction.

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