

WHY NOT BOTH, ALL? READING AND QUESTIONING MAGNUSON, BALDWIN, BAIZERMAN & STRINGER

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"The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in this approach" (Czech novelist, Milan Kundera, in Roth 2001, p. 100).

I read "Adolescence or Youth: Youthwork Practice and Human Development Ideology" by Doug Magnuson et al. The authors, like a good novelist, comprehend the questions. They grapple with growth, development, and life purpose, and make the argument that the way youth are understood, explained and interpreted is part of a choice between two perspectives: adolescent as a biosocial stage that is part of a sequence of stages through the life span and youth as a more sociological or anthropological idea conveying cultural influences on a generation or a cohort, a role or social status.

They are not afraid of the uncertainties or to take a position. Adolescence as a biosocial stage, they argue, is often detached from youth in the lived experience. It is also focused too much on defining and solving the problems (pathology) as opposed to the youth perspective, which is focused more on an ideological way of being with and in youth. The tendency with the adolescent perspective is to focus on the risks and associated threats to development whereas the youth perspective provides a reflexive and dynamic process for growth. The choice, as summarized in the abstract, is between youth as a problem to be solved and youth as an opportunity for exploration.

The arguments include many powerful ideas whose arrangements challenge my notions of adolescence and youth. As I read, I try to read the way Harold Bloom (2001) suggests we read, my mind free of can't.

"Do not try to improve your neighbor or your neighborhood by what or how you read. Self-improvement is a large enough project for your mind and spirit: there are no ethics of reading" (Bloom, 2001, p. 24).

I read into, from, and through the authors' work. Then back again. As I do, I read myself, see new possibilities, comprehend more questions. Why not both, all, as opposed to either or? Why these definitions, not others? Isn't youth development science, ideology, choices, art and more? Is science, in the broader sense of the definition, that separate from human development ideology, reducing risk from providing opportunity problem from solution, sociology from cognitive development? Aren't these words, ideas, interconnected in our efforts to understand adolescent/youth development? Don't both of his perspectives apply to practice?

For example, I am a youth worker. My goal is to be in adolescence/youth development with youth. I do my homework. Self is my major informant. I want to know self so I can be open and available to know other. I also want to know adolescence and the ideology of youth development. So I learn about self, and read about youth development, adolescence, philosophy, art, literature, and youth, trying to comprehend the questions.

In my studies I also try to understand how kids, young people, adolescents, and youth develop emotionally, socially, psychologically, physically, and cognitively. I learn this from reduction and expansive, historical and contemporary, linear and nonlinear, psychological and ideological, and preventive and opportunistic perspectives. I try to understand the science of adolescence/youth as a stage and phase with a beginning and an end as well as a stage, phase or something else with no clear beginning and end.

I am infinitely curious. How does and where does time go in youth/adolescence? I wonder. How do youth make choices? What roles do their brains, stories, families, social groups, cultures, and beliefs play? How do I make choices for and with youth? What roles do my brain, story, family, social group, culture, and beliefs play? How are these things similar, different? What is a life's purpose, and how does purpose fit with just being? How do youth become, what is the science, art and ideology of becoming? How are they interconnected? How does purpose detract from or enhance being a youth, in adolescence, experiencing? What is the meaning of it? Does it always have to mean something?

When I am with youth, I want to understand each youth's unique story or evolving narrative. Where does she/he come from and how does her/his narrative influence the way he/she experiences and sees the world. How is it different than the way I see things. I also want to be *in* it fully. I want to prevent and support. Nourish and languish. Wallow and dream. Be in the thick and muck of it. Reflect and just be, sometimes with purpose, and sometimes without purpose. All this and more I want to know (at the edge of my consciousness), and do (first, second, third person, present and past tense) so I can *be with* a youth when I sit down and try to give him or her my undivided attention, or when we run, or select an activity together, or sit quietly doing nothing.

References

Bloom, H. (2001). *How to read and why*. Scribner: New York.

Roth, P. (2001). *Shop talk: A writer and his colleagues and their work*. Vintage International: New York.