Editorial

“Youth studies” is defined by those who over many years established and fostered international academic interest in all facets of the youth experience. My friend and colleague Andy Furlong played a foundational role in its development as Editor of the Journal of Youth Studies. Andy is now gone, but his legacy remains in the form of vibrant multidisciplinary research and scholarship on every aspect of young people’s lives, from every part of the globe.

“Applied youth studies” likewise covers a wide range of youth-relevant issues, but from the perspective of the intersections of research–policy–practice. It is oriented toward practitioner experiences, and the ways in which workers with young people do what they do and why. The “applied” refers to grounded intervention, again across many spheres of youth experience and institutional interaction.

As we view it at JAYS, applied youth studies also needs to embody certain core values. Foremost among these is the notion of social justice. See, judge, act – like many others, this is our informal motto. This only makes sense, however, in the context of an ethical framework that liberates and empowers young people.

For us, social justice reflects a series of interconnected principles and ideals. These include:

- a commitment to dignity and respect for the person and protection of human rights;
- economic egalitarianism and social equality, such that each person enjoys the same rights, opportunities and services as all other citizens and residents; and
- active engagement in social institutions and in decision-making that affects individuals and the groups or collectives of which they are a part.

Social inequality is viewed as a major hurdle in the attainment of social justice.

An applied youth studies that matters recognises that social justice matters. In practical terms, these principles translate into a participatory ethos involving the state, community, family and individuals. Social justice is oriented toward problem-solving approaches to social problems, rather than person-blaming or group scapegoating. It seeks remedies that will bring about social peace rather than sow community discord. It sees responsibility as lying in both the person and the society. It is militant in its defence of the vulnerable and the less powerful.
The personal is indeed political (who we are and how we act, counts), but it is the political that sets the context for the personal (who we are and how we act is shaped by forces beyond our personal control). The continuum of research–policy–practice is important since each contributes to the whole. Bad policy produces bad outcomes. Good practices lead to enhanced opportunities. Our role and our commitment is to assess and make judgement as to “what works”, why and under what circumstances. This, too, is the essence of applied youth studies.

The point of applied youth studies, as always, is not only to understand the world – but also to make a difference in the world. The conscious intention, therefore, is to change the world, for the better.

Rob White
Academic Editor