



Meeting the Transitional Needs of Young Adult Learners (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, Number 143)

Davis, C. Amelia; and Olson, Joann S., eds.
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Book Review

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Part of the series “New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education,” *Meeting the Transitional Needs of Young Adult Learners* is the first entry to address young adult learners in thirty years. As such, it is a welcome contribution to the series, as well as a valuable resource in its own right. Faculty teaching traditional undergraduates, as well as those in continuing and adult education roles, will find much of value here.

The terms “young adult” and “youth” are used across the essays in the volume, though without a single common definition. Generally, “young adult” refers to individuals from ages eighteen to twenty-five, though with some flexibility on both sides; adult education may begin at sixteen, as Davis notes (chapter 6). Chapter 1, by Joanna Wyn, introduces several key concepts that recur in subsequent chapters. Wyn offers a nice overview of the scholarship of youth transitions, new adulthood, and age. She argues that the “metaphor of transition” — a frequent feature in discussions of young adulthood — should be replaced with a “metaphor of belonging” that emphasizes relationships and connections (9).

Indeed, many of the following chapters take up this call for an emphasis on relationships and belonging. Chapters 2 through 8 follow a basic model of identifying a specific community, reviewing the literature, data, or relevant theoretical work relating to that community, and concluding with suggestions for instructors. Thus Brendaly Drayton (chapter 2) introduces and theorizes cultural difference, with special attention to ethnic difference and the experience of young adults positioned in multiple cultures. Drayton encourages instructors to use texts from a range of cultures as well as collaborative learning practices. Rongbing Xie, Bisakha (Pia) Sen,

and E. Michael Foster (chapter 3) offer a similar introduction to “vulnerable youth,” a broad category that encompasses socio-economic disparities, mental health, welfare, and involvement with the justice system. Noting the problem of youth who “age out” of social services, they call on educators to be informed and competent allies for vulnerable youth and to provide social support. Jessica Nina Lester (chapter 4) makes a similar argument with respect to “youth with dis/ability labels.” The pedagogical emphasis in these chapters is on the affective and relational, encouraging instructors to engage beyond course material. Steven B. Frye’s contribution addresses young adults in faith communities (chapter 5). Instructors in confessional contexts may find his insights helpful; in other contexts, less so.

The final three chapters are the work of the editors, C. Amelia Davis and Joann S. Olson. Davis (chapter 6) discusses adult education programs as they serve young adult learners, and offers some helpful suggestions for strengthening these programs. Olson (chapter 7) takes up the transition from school to workplace, arguing that educators can intentionally create classroom and school experiences that prepare students for, and ease the transition to, the workplace. She also offers a number of useful examples, including discussing class assignments. A final chapter by Olson and Davis (chapter 8) offers a concise overview of key themes from the preceding chapters. This is a valuable collection of essays, which much to offer all educators working with young adults.

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