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International Youth Development: A Review of Youth – Realities and Challenges for Achieving Development with Equality

Abstract

Youth: Realities and Challenges for Achieving Development with Equality” edited by Daniela Trucco and Heidi Ullmann contributes to the call for stronger multidisciplinary approaches to policymaking related to youth in the Latin American and Caribbean region. The publishers, The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, recognize equality as the ultimate aim of development and young people as essential change agents. Engaging youth in the development process is an essential step for creating an egalitarian society, respecting the rights and needs of youth, and creating comprehensive inclusive policies. Data over 13 years are presented from multiple reputable sources and examined by the editors through socioeconomic quintiles and living areas. The region of Latin American and the Caribbean is defined as inclusive of all Central and South American countries, Mexico, and all island nations and U.S. territories in the Caribbean. The editors defined youth as representing those aged between 15 and 29. The editors addressed the main challenges of development and inclusion faced by youth within Latin America. Six spheres are presented encompassing the social inclusion of youth: education, employment, health, violence, culture, and participation. Throughout the book the editors highlighted gaps in various sectors that lead to the social exclusion of youth. A disconnect was found between advances in education and the lack of available opportunities in the labor market. The region overall is reaching higher levels of education, however there are fewer work opportunities available. “Employment is the most pivotal link in the chain of social inclusion for young people” (Trucco & Ullmann, 2016, pp. 45-46). The disconnect between education advancements and employment opportunities continues to be an issue in the region.

Keywords

Latin America, social inclusion, Extension, youth programming, policy recommendations

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Trucco, D., & Ullmann, H. (Eds.). (2016). Youth: Realities and challenges for achieving development with equality. Santiago, Chile: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 262 pages. \$30.00 paperback, \$5.99 electronic book or free PDF download.

Content Overview

“Youth: Realities and Challenges for Achieving Development with Equality” edited by Daniela Trucco and Heidi Ullmann contributes to the call for stronger multidisciplinary approaches to policymaking related to youth in the Latin American and Caribbean region. The publishers, The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, recognize equality as the ultimate aim of development and young people as essential change agents. Engaging youth in the development process is an essential step for creating an egalitarian society, respecting the rights and needs of youth, and creating comprehensive inclusive policies. Data over 13 years are presented from multiple reputable sources and examined by the editors through socioeconomic quintiles and living areas. The region of Latin American and the Caribbean is defined as inclusive of all Central and South American countries, Mexico, and all island nations and U.S. territories in the Caribbean. The editors

defined youth as representing those aged between 15 and 29. The editors addressed the main challenges of development and inclusion faced by youth within Latin America. Six spheres are presented encompassing the social inclusion of youth: education, employment, health, violence, culture, and participation.

Throughout the book the editors highlighted gaps in various sectors that lead to the social exclusion of youth. A disconnect was found between advances in education and the lack of available opportunities in the labor market. The region overall is reaching higher levels of education, however there are fewer work opportunities available. “Employment is the most pivotal link in the chain of social inclusion for young people” (Trucco & Ullmann, 2016, pp. 45-46). The disconnect between education advancements and employment opportunities continues to be an issue in the region.

A disconnect was also highlighted by the editors in the sphere of health and youth.

Many health-related programs for youth are linked to schools which excludes youth outside of the education system. Program implementation is often limited in scope and fails to properly address mental health issues and secondary prevention. The editors emphasized a fundamental flaw in regards to the rights of youth concerning their health. Many countries in the region have a gap between the age of consent for sexual relations and the age requirements to access health services without a parent's consent. This lack of youth rights leads to youth feeling disempowered and ultimately socially excluded.

Violence was presented as the fourth sphere of social inclusion of youth. Countries in Latin America are at peace with each other, but extreme levels of violence exist within these countries. The region currently has the highest homicide rate in the world. The need to address violence as a phenomenon challenging the youth inclusion processes in development was heavily stressed by the editors. The media reinforce the image of violence as a means for conflict resolution and at times reward violent behavior by presenting it as youthful and manly behavior. The editors recommended the need for policies to integrate peaceful resolution and negotiation strategies into formal and non-formal education settings.

The sphere of culture was centered on social media and its cultural significance. Access to media and digital media were presented as a necessary factor to youth inclusion. The lack of access to media excludes youth from involvement in the culture. The media in general was noted with concern as the media tend to intensify youth in advertisements while at the same time isolate and stigmatize them. This creates an environment where youth socialize among themselves with little outside guidance or presence from adults.

Political participation was stressed by the editors to influence the social inclusion of youth. The age requirement to vote in most of the countries in the region is much younger than the age requirements to run for various offices. The editors connected this to the low levels of political participation and engagement among youth. Lack of trust in institutions and low levels of support for democracy exacerbate this issue.

Evaluation of the Book

This book stands apart from other leading works in the field of youth development in a number of ways. Witt and Caldwell's (2018) text on youth development blends theory and practice-based information for out-of-school time settings while Hamilton and Hamilton's (2004) text aims to stimulate and inspire youth development. Trucco and Ullmann (2016) focus specifically on the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. This book presents recommendations for effective youth development policy changes in the region while recognizing that success of youth development programs differ by region. This book also focuses on youth development within specific contexts of health, violence, and political participation. The breadth of data alongside well-presented graphs and figures offered in this book gives the reader a strong understanding of the current views and conditions in the region. The six spheres of social inclusion of youth are explained in depth with the recurring theme of the need for more comprehensive policies. The editors argue the success of policies depend on their breadth of scope and inclusiveness. Policies that fail to broaden the scope could end up doing more harm than good. The need for multidisciplinary policy is well supported, however there are few tangible suggestions on how best to formulate and implement these policies.

The editors stress the importance of employment of youth and the need for inclusive policies. Fifty-five percent of youth not in school or employed were found to have roles as caregivers or unpaid domestic workers. The editors fail to mention how the social inclusion of this large percentage of the youth population could be improved by policies. Availability of work opportunities for youth can only be part of the focus in policy reform when a large percentage of youth are working in economically unrecognized areas.

The culture sphere in relation to social media presents access and participation in social media as culturally significant. The negative impacts and consequences of social media however are not addressed. The potential of social media to exacerbate youth exclusion must be included in the conversation about youth and social media.

The political participation sphere was well supported by data and addressed the policy reform needed to increase youth participation. Various categories related to voting activities are presented by the editors; however, the current presence of voting requirement laws in the region are not discussed. Voting requirement or suppression laws impact the social inclusion of youth and their feelings towards the democratic process. The editors clearly present the need to include youth in the process for a representative democracy.

The editors recognize the way youth are understood is a social construct and there is a great need to treat young people with respect. Treatment of youth characterized by transgression and risk which is present in media and current approaches to policies does not contribute to their social inclusion. More attention is needed on treating youth as the social stakeholders they are.

Recommendation of the Book

This book and its wealth of data on youth in the Latin American and Caribbean region and would assist in the creation of multidisciplinary and effective policies on youth development issues. The need for inclusive policies and the potential negative impacts of policies that are not broad in scope are clearly presented throughout the book. This book can be used as a valuable resource when planning youth development programs or recommending policies related to youth development to local governments and policy makers. Extension education administrators throughout the world can use this book as a resource when promoting inclusive and multidisciplinary policies for youth development.

References

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- Witt, P. A., & Caldwell, L. L. (Eds.). (2018). *Youth development: Principles and practices in out-of-school time settings* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Sagamore-Venture.