NEW DECADES, new centuries, and new millennia bring forth great anticipation, hope, anxiety, and searches for new perspectives. The entrance to the twenty-first century presents the United States with numerous challenges such as remaining competitive in an increasingly global economy, reversing the growth of undervalued groups, and creating a workforce with the requisite competencies for employment in the information age (Bouvier and Grant 1994; Edelman 2000; Haveman and Wolfe 1994; Linn 1998; McCabe 1999; Murdock 1995). Those three arenas, as well as others not mentioned, are highly interrelated, and youth are critical to each if this country is to make strides toward achieving significant social and economic goals.

Today’s youth will have a significant role in bringing about changes in technology, demography, economy, and politics (Boyle 2000d). Whether they will be prepared for the task is another question—one based on the society’s views and actions toward youth. Major investment of time, capital, and commitment must be made in youth in order to answer this question in the affirmative (Haveman and Wolfe 1994). There is a realization that a “benign neglect” approach is simply not good enough to ensure that this country can continue to prosper as the new millennium develops.

The Committee for Economic Development (1997: 1) well summed up why the United States cannot afford to neglect segments of its youth population if it hopes to make significant economic and social progress:

A skilled, productive work force is essential to the economic growth and international competitiveness of the United States. Failure to utilize our nation’s diverse work force means lost national output. At the same time, it leaves workers struggling to earn wages that enable them to support themselves and a family. The nation can ill afford the consequences, from costly welfare dependency to skyrocketing prison populations, when the job market fails to absorb all segments of the population effectively. To ensure both
prosperity and social progress, the United States must extend opportunities to develop produce careers to all young persons entering its labor market.

Discussion about the status of today's youth elicits a wide range of responses, most of it being a negative assessment of youth's “at-risk” status (National Research Council 1993; McWhirter et al. 1993). Educational scores and attainment (or lack of it), drugs, juvenile crime, and lack of respect for authority are topics that frequently—even usually—come up in any assessment of youth (Besharov 1999; Morley and Rossman 1997). In academic, community, government, and policy arenas, there is little disagreement: youth-related issues and needs must be seriously understood and addressed (Furstenberg et al. 1999; Rollin 2000). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989: 11) stated this clearly: “We call upon all those deeply concerned about young adolescents' future, and the future of this nation, to begin now to create the nationwide constituency required to give American young adolescents the preparation they need for life in the 21st century.”

Setting a context is about setting a foundation. This chapter provides a map for this book: why the book is needed, its potential for practice and professional education, and definitions of key concepts and terms. In addition, this chapter orients the reader to the importance of youth development in the arenas of education, recreation, and human service. Youth development, however, cannot be separated out from the society in which it occurs. There is little question that youth development as a form of practice is here to stay for the immediate future. While the length of that stay will depend on how the practice is operationalized, supported, and evaluated, and how many adherents it can count upon, its potential for transformation is already well recognized.

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH

Much can be said about how society views youth. Society's views play an instrumental role in how youth is perceived by adults and how youths, both male and female, see themselves. As might be expected, there is no unified view of youth in this society. Youths are usually referred to as perpetrators (criminals), hedonists (drug users, addicts, promiscuous), victims (unemployed, abused, neglected, etc.), or prodigies (Griffin 1997; Males 1996, 1998; Rook 1998) (the view of youth as a consumer group I will deal with separately).

These perspectives either categorize youth as a drain on national resources, a group to be feared, or as having qualities that "ordinary people"
cannot emulate (that is, prodigies are seen as “outstanding,” having near perfect grades and test scores, as “volunteers,” or as incredible athletes). A historical reliance upon a deficit perspective has resulted, not surprisingly, in a dearth of programs and services that contribute to healthy development of youth (Hahn 2000; Nixon 1997).

Adults, however, have not escaped the consequences associated with a deficit perspective. The pervasiveness of this perspective makes a shift in viewing youth from a positive viewpoint that much more challenging for the field of youth development. Although there is an increasing body of scholarly knowledge on youth from an asset perspective, it pales in comparison with the literature focused on a problem perspective.

A perspective on youth as consumer takes a narrow view of the group and identifies them as a $105 billion-a-year market (Youth Markets Alert 1999) that can be influenced in what products it purchases (DNR 1999; Find/SVP Market Reports 1998; Hill 2000; Market Europe 1998). Youth as consumers of business on the Internet are expected to account for $1.3 billion in revenues from on-line sales by the year 2002 (Howe and Strauss 2000). Adolescents have, on average, $84 a week in disposable income ($56 of their own money and $28 of family money), and the average pre-teen spends $13 per week (Cable World 1999). These figures add up to $9.4 billion a year of youths’ own money and $26 billion of their families’ money (Cable World 1999). The adolescent sports market, to cite one recipient of youth dollars, takes in more than $2.46 billion a year (Footwear News 1999).

Youth comprise a significant, growing, and distinct U.S. market (Howe and Strauss 2000; Zabel 1999). The introduction of “strategic philanthropy,” whereby companies give away items to schools in exchange for opportunities to display their corporate names, is a new dimension to marketing to youth, complementing the usual approaches through mass media. It graphically illustrates the importance of this market group.

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of books deals with the marketing of products to youth (Acuff and Reiher 1997; Lopiano-Misdom and Luca 1997; McNeal 1992, 1999; Vecchio 1997; Zollo 1999). Youth-targeted marketing has been approached from many perspectives; it is, for example, estimated that girls aged thirteen to nineteen spend $9 billion annually—on fragrances, cosmetics, and other beauty products (European Cosmetic Markets 1994; Women’s Wear Daily 2000), food (Littman 1998), movies (Youth Markets Alert 1999), cameras (Discount Store News 1999), sporting events (Urresta 1996), beverages (Barboza 1997; Russo 1998), theaters (Betley 1995; Miller 1996), cars (Konrad 1999), music (Minority Markets Alert 1999), and
libraries (Dimick 1995), to name but a few. The role of media in creating markets among youth, particularly adolescents, has not been overlooked (Currie 1994).

Another perspective takes a dramatically different viewpoint, seeing youth as an asset—a group that can be embraced for current and potential contribution to society (Barton, Watkins, and Jarjoura 1997; Garbarino et al. 1992; Heath and McLaughlin 1993b; Hein 2000; Kyle 1996; Lerner 1995; Males 1998; Rook 1998; Way 1998). This view sees youth in a position to help rather than to receive assistance (Checkoway 1999). It empowers youth, and this focus—away from problems such as drug abuse, crime, and pregnancy to one of enhancing potential—is much more than a change in semantics (Family Youth Services Bureau 1998; Hein 1999): it represents a dramatic potential shift in paradigms. A switch to such a perspective would offer tremendous rewards for society, not to mention youth and their families (Drake, Ling, and Hughes 2000; Finn and Checkoway 1998; Pittman 2000a, 2000b). However, such a shift is not possible unless we embrace the paradigm that specifically sets out to achieve this goal. The founder and director of the Youth Development and Research Fund (2000: 1) stated it eloquently: “Basically, what decision makers are telling us is that there is little value placed on the potential contributions of . . . young adults. In-risk young adults have become undervalued by society and overlooked in policy.” A tremendous amount of resources and careers, unfortunately, have been invested in portraying youth as “problems” for society (McKnight 1995).

Bell (1996) argues that the prevalence of adultism (“disrespect for the young based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement”) must be recognized if society is to make effective progress in having youth as equal partners. The fundamental belief that adults know what is “best” for youth often interferes with the development of a genuine dialogue about youth participation and direction of youth programs. When adults subscribe to this belief, the true potential of youth development cannot be achieved.

A shift in paradigm from deficit to asset would result in an equally prominent change in the social norms pertaining to the role of caring in social relations and interactions (Rauner 2000: 10):

Advocating community responsibility for the care of the next generation implies an ethic of care that crosses the realms of morality, culture, and reason, and represents no division between the private and the
A worldview organized around care argues for an ethic that stands beside, and reinforces, the work ethic of individual responsibility that is dominant in our culture. It is the vision of a life organized around commitments and shared responsibilities in which interdependence, mutuality, and nurturance are seen as public, as well as private, virtues. This is caring as a social norm.

**WHAT IS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?**

There is confusion concerning what is meant by the term *youth development*. The federal government, through its Family and Youth Services Bureau (the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families) summed up the confusion quite well (The Exchange 1998: 1):

> The youth development concept often is described as amorphous or cloudlike. The vision is pretty, but hard to grasp. There is no place to call for the handbook that says, “Just complete the following ten easy steps to implement youth development in your community.” And so people struggle: youth service professionals, policymakers, and funding sources. They know what they want to accomplish; they just wish someone would tell them. Unfortunately, there are no easy methods for converting the youth development concept from words to action.

Roth et al. (1999: 272), summing up the state of the search for a definition of youth development, wrote, “A parsimonious definition of youth development programs has been elusive . . . most simply, youth development programs can be understood as age-appropriate programs designed to prepare adolescents for productive adulthood by providing opportunities and supports to help them gain the competencies and knowledge needed to meet the challenges they will face as they mature.” Thus we can see that one of the biggest challenges facing the field of youth development is deriving a consensus definition. One that, incidentally, can draw together various constituencies.

The barriers present in preventing a unified and comprehensive approach to youth development are far greater than agreeing to a “simple” conceptualization of the concept (Linetzky 2000). The primary challenges associated with operationalizing youth development are social, economic, and political.
in nature (The Exchange 1998): (1) Proclivity for political expediency—lack of willingness to devote considerable financial resources toward achieving change; (2) Competition for resources—youth are not a powerful voting block and are therefore relatively easy to ignore; (3) Low public value placed on youth services—youth staff, for example, often bear the brunt of this low priority, minimal efforts being made to provide them with training and competitive salaries; and (4) Immediate vs. long-term results—priority being given to short-term results and profits, with a focus on problem-reduction rather than enhancement.

These barriers interfere with obtaining a consensus definition. However, it does not mean that a general definition is not possible—one that is both broad and sufficiently flexible to allow local circumstances to decide how it is used in practice.

There is a misconception in the field that youth development can only effectively transpire within a “formal” youth-development program. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Youth development is not confined to any one setting. It can happen in families, communities, and among peers (Murphy 1995b). It is not restricted to place or to adults being the “developers.”

The field of youth development is still in its infancy—which speaks well for its potential to grow and transform itself. “Growing pains” are natural to development (we expect youth to meet and surmount challenges; why can we not expect the same from the field?). Challenges are inherent in any form of practice that has yet to achieve maturity, and feelings of excitement and dread can coexist in the field (adrenaline can result from both excitement and anxiety). There are so many questions: Who can be legitimized to practice? Who decides what the requisite competencies are to practice effectively? It will be noted throughout this book that there is confusion about what is meant by the term *youth development*. Nevertheless, with debate, commitment, and no doubt some hurt feelings, confusion can be clarified.

I will introduce an analogy. For me the term *youth development* conjures up images of “focus groups” (it seems everyone in human services has either led or been a part of a focus group), and the use of focus groups represents a very distinctive methodology and qualitative analysis. People questioned about their focus-group experience report a dramatically wide range of group characteristics: number of participants, number of questions asked, composition of the group, time allotted to meetings—all these vary. If we stick to a definition of what “experts” identify as necessary for a group to qualify as a “true” focus group, then very few participants or leaders have ever
been part of one (Krueger 1988). Youth development, I believe, is similar to my focus-group analogy.

The youth-development field of practice has become a catchall for any and all forms of youth-related services. It is almost as if there is a total absence of theory and scholarship on the subject, which is certainly not the case. On the one hand, the broad nature of the concept—youth development—has its appeal, since it allows many staff and organizations to say they practice youth development. When, on the other hand, a narrow definition is used, the practice is restricted to a chosen few—those fortunate enough to have the competencies and resources to qualify. The answer to the question of what is in the best interests of the field will vary according to who is “authorized” to make the reply.

As youth-development principles and practice are addressed in chapters 3 through 7, they are distinctive: they capture a process, philosophy, and approach. The American Youth Policy Forum (1995: 1) identified two premises that, they said, need to act as a foundation and guide for youth-development practice:

Youth development is an ongoing process in which young people are engaged and invested. Throughout this process, young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the competencies and connections they need for survival and success. All youth are engaged in the process of development. Youth development is marked by the acquisition of a broad range of competencies and the demonstration of a full complement of connections to self, others, and the larger community. Confidence, compassion, commitment and character are terms commonly used to express the attitudes and behaviors that determine whether and how learned competencies will be used.

These two premises serve not only as a foundation but also as a guide for operationalization. Within this paradigm there is, however, sufficient flexibility for it to be brought to life at the local level.

Paradigms need to be broad. Narrow paradigms invariably fail to capture the imagination of practitioners or public. True, some paradigms effectively limit themselves to select contexts and environments, but sweeping paradigms are energizing, offer hope where hope is limited, and reach out to engage as many practitioners as is possible. However, we must note that this
flexibility is not so broad as to allow any form of youth-focused service to be called youth development.

This book is about contextualizing youth development practice. It would be a serious mistake for the field of youth development to standardize practices in such a way as not to build in sufficient flexibility—enough to allow for considerations such as a variety of settings and activities and what I call the core factors—cognition, emotion, physical, moral, social, and spiritual. The paradigm must allow for issues of gender and sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and emotional and physical challenges. Such “lenses” influence how youth see their world—a world that may well be toxic and therefore detrimental to youth achieving their potential. This book is cognizant that we walk a thin line between, on the one side, capturing as many practitioners as possible with the youth-development net and, on the other, not sufficiently limiting the paradigm’s boundaries.

GOALS OF THE BOOK

This book seeks to ground the reader in current youth-development thought and tensions. At the same time, it seeks to expand the vision of what youth development can be and where it can be practiced. The field is dynamic, and to reduce it to a list of concepts, principles, and activities may seem to be an arduous task; nevertheless, such listing will be essential to my effort to “ground” the paradigm.

The book addresses five goals. It seeks (1) to provide a state-of-the-art description of youth development—its rewards and challenges; (2) to provide an expanded view of settings in which youth development can take place; (3) to consider what I have called “new frontier settings” and analyze the rewards and challenges they offer; (4) to provide an in-depth picture of day-to-day operation in new frontier settings; and (5) to provide a series of recommendations for work on this new frontier—aimed at enhancing the prospects of success and minimizing the obstacles.

Readers will be able to develop a comprehensive view of youth development at macro, mezzo, and micro levels. The macro perspective outlines the broad social forces that impact youth; the mezzo examines youth development at community and organizational level; and at micro level we look at specific cases. The latter perspective makes extensive use of interviews with youth-development staff working in new frontier settings.
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NEW FRONTIER SETTINGS

A definition of new frontier settings for youth development has to take into account the turn-of-the-century challenges facing youth in the modern world. New frontier settings can be defined as community sites that have a primary focus on education, information, and/or recreation and that lend themselves to programming for youth (there is, for example, a whole new intensity of interaction between zoos and youth). These new frontier settings do not have to serve youth exclusively; they can be accessible to all age groups, but in them youth patronage is not stigmatized. Youth-development programming will not significantly alter such a site’s mission in society but will enhance some aspect of it.

For many people, settings such as museums, libraries, zoos, and aquariums are places that we might visit once a year. They are places to pass through, not stay in—places where not too many people imagine themselves working or studying at. I, for one, knew no one who worked in a zoo. But the recent evolution of youth-development programs has thrust such sites into a prominent position in the field. Such settings can now, much more than in the past, be viewed as high-profile places for youth to visit, study in, and even work at.

All of these settings bring youth into contact with professionals who do not have a history of this type of involvement in community, unlike social workers, psychologists, recreational specialists, and educators. This exposure to a “new” type of professional has its challenges and rewards for everyone involved. Although youth development can take place in any type of setting, historically it has been limited to certain types of youth agencies and after-school settings. This book examines commonalities and differences between new frontier settings and urges the importance of accessibility for youth.

The new frontier settings covered in this book, while having many elements in common, are different from each other in significant ways. Youth development in libraries differs considerably from youth development in zoos. Libraries focus most youth-development activity indoors, with special emphasis on literacy; zoos, on the other hand, generally take youth participants outdoors, and since their programs involve animals as well as humans they require youths to develop a range of animal-oriented competencies. Libraries can be found in almost all communities and generally are one of the few settings where youth and adults coexist, whereas far fewer communities have local zoos or aquariums, which limits the
possibilities for youth-development programming. Libraries—a traditional nonstigmatizing environment—in certain circumstances employ staff who have fluency in multiple languages, which is a particularly important offering in communities where few residents have English as their primary language, and in such situations, communication skills will tend to stress verbal and nonverbal interactions. In zoos, on the other hand, communication skills rarely involve languages other than English, but youths working in zoos and aquariums must develop communication skills involving the public and in working with animals (Harmon 1999). While aquariums often show many similarities with zoos, most youth-development activities at aquariums take place indoors.

The book’s discussion of different new frontier settings addresses four key elements of accessibility: (1) geographical; (2) psychological; (3) cultural; and (4) operational. Geographical accessibility is a critical, although not the sole, element in increasing the reach of youth development. It is a rare community that has an abundance of museums, zoos, and aquariums (although few communities do not have a public library), and it is crucial that youths be able to get to such settings. In cities, this means that these facilities be on public transportation routes and in suburban and rural settings it means provision of transportation.

Psychological accessibility relates to how comfortable youths feel in attending a setting—being at ease, feeling accepted, not stigmatized, and physically safe (Gambone and Arbreton 1997; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman 1994; Pittman 1999b). For example, can youths feel comfortable at a museum, a place that usually targets adults? Cultural accessibility relates to settings providing youth with experiences that are validating in terms of ethnicity, race, social class, and gender. Does the setting seek, for example, to enhance a nonwhite youth’s self-image or does it seek to undermine and replace that image with a Eurocentric identity? Operational accessibility is to do with the times when a program is offered. Do the hours facilitate or hinder youth participation? Settings that severely limit days and hours of operation systematically screen out those who cannot be there during scheduled times. For optimal accessibility, all four forms of accessibility must be present.

THE NEED FOR THIS BOOK

The field of youth development is now facing many challenges, and it will face more in the immediate future. One of those challenges is who—what
profession—will step forth to claim this practice as their own. Hellison et al. (2000: xii) note that the lack of a home for youth development opens up a potential for university departments of physical education to fill this vacuum:

Right now, youth development is without a home in most universities. Schools (colleges, departments) of social work don’t really focus on youth development nor do schools of education. Departments of recreation and/or leisure studies as well as programs in therapeutic recreation have shown some interest, but physical education in higher education . . . could step into the breach, thereby expanding opportunities for the employment of graduates.

In this book I want to push the boundaries of where practice can “legitimately” take place. My predisposition for community to play a central role in practice necessitates that I consider places, or “settings,” that have multiple roles and functions and that they be considered “practice worthy.” My desire to find new settings is a journey without any definite destination or timetable, and it invariably results in new discoveries. This book is an unscheduled stop on this journey.

The subject matter—new frontier settings—first emerged in the process of my writing a book on the use of the arts, humanities, and sports (Delgado 2000a). In the process of researching and writing that book, I came across settings that were undertaking what I considered to be innovative approaches to youth-development practice. Since detailed description of those settings did not fit into that book, the information was gathered and stored until now.

My enthusiasm for new places that can broaden youth-development practice will be contagious, I hope, and open for readers new sites for youth development in their communities. I hope that the energy, drive, and commitment that readers bring to this effort will help them surmount any barriers encountered along the way.

The field of youth development has already received considerable attention in print. Numerous foundation reports have been issued on the subject, and books on various aspects of youth development have been published. However, the amount of writing about the ground covered in this book is very limited. Most previous publications, although of immense importance, focus on a narrow aspect of youth development or are very
broad in nature. Youniss and Yates (1997) focus on community service and social responsibility in youth; Rauner (2000) uses the construct of caring to ground youth-development practice. The broadly based works (e.g., Lakes 1995 and Lerner 1995) set the stage for the philosophical foundation for youth development.

My New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth: Use of the Arts, Humanities, and Sports (Delgado 2000a) is the closest to this one in subject matter; however, my earlier book is specific to certain activities (arts, humanities, and sports), is focused on urban youth that are primarily of color, and did not address new frontier settings. This book, broader in scope, does not limit itself to urban areas or youth of color, and it represents a newer vision that will appeal to a new and broader audience. It can be considered complimentary to New Arenas. As to the future, the ever-expanding arena of youth development will bring with it increased scholarly attention and an increasing number of books—a key indicator of the field’s growing prominence.

The practice of youth development has tremendous promise, yet in some cases the field has relied on activities that spark neither the interest nor the imagination of today’s youth. New frontier settings offer great potential for learning and fun when compared with traditional youth activities. Youth-development organizations, therefore, have a great deal to learn from such settings on how to plan and market programs and activities. However, people working in new settings can also benefit from the countless years of history and wisdom of their traditional counterparts.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

The broad nature of this book’s subject matter will make it useful to many different professions. Not only those traditionally involved with youth development—for example, those in social work, education, recreation, and psychology—but people working in libraries, museums, aquariums, and so on will find the book relevant. The book can be used as a supplemental text in professional education programs as well as by youth-development practitioners. In social work, the book can be used in graduate-level practice classes that provide a “positive” view of youth (e.g., human behavior and the social environment). For people in macro practice the book will show how youth-development activities are used in programming; it can also be used in planning/program development and community-practice courses.
I am a social worker, and this book naturally draws on this perspective, but the broad nature and importance of youth development makes it necessary that a wider view be taken. There is little question that the youth-development field cannot be the exclusive domain of any one profession. The field touches on so many practices and disciplines that to take a single professional focus would be to do it an an injustice. I have made great effort to draw on the literature and experiences of other professions. This encompassing approach also serves to bring together professions that, while they may all deal with youth, are not accustomed to working together.

The book draws on a wide variety of sources, scholarly as well as popular. Youth development does not belong only to scholars, and the topic’s popular appeal naturally lends itself to coverage by the popular media. To ignore this source of material would constitute a serious bias and would significantly detract from the book’s usefulness.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of three parts, divided into sixteen chapters and an epilogue. The eight chapters of part 1 set the context and present up-to-date thoughts about youth-development issues in the United States. Part 1 serves a foundation for the remaining chapters in the book. The eight chapters of part 2 are devoted to examining issues, challenges, rewards, and “New Frontier Settings” that are currently using youth development principles and approaches, with chapter 15 providing especially detailed case studies. In part 3—the epilogue—I offer some reflections on youth development practice.

I use case illustrations and case studies throughout. By tying theoretical constructs to real-life situations I hope to help readers to see how theory can be operationalized.

The twenty-first century holds much promise for the field of youth development, particularly as the concept gets broader exposure and acceptance. The number of undergraduate and graduate education programs offering degrees in this field will no doubt continue to expand, and in so doing increasing the number of “formally” trained staff. Increased scholarship and research in youth development will serve to inform programs across the United States, regardless of geographical locale. Youth development will find
itself being a subject of discussion in field agencies, academic settings, and in
government circles.

However, as advocates for this form of practice push a youth-development
agenda at local and national levels, the increased recognition of youth
development will experience greater scrutiny and criticism. This book hopes
to better prepare practitioners, academicians, and policymakers to recognize
the rewards and challenges that lie ahead. If youth development takes on a
“system change” focus, opposition to this paradigm will grow (see chap. 3).

Not that academics and practitioners must actively seek to “depoliticize” this
paradigm, but if the field is politicized, we must be prepared for a backlash.

I believe that a political approach to youth development is inevitable, so
the field must systematically and strategically prepare itself for an extreme
reaction. This reaction will manifest itself in a variety of ways, including the
types of programs and activities funders are prepared to support under the
youth-development rubric. This book hopefully will fill a variety of gaps in
the field, and do so in a way that encourages partnerships between profes-
sionals, youth, and communities. The true meaning of youth development
can be achieved only through partnerships, particularly those that have
youth play increasingly critical and decision-making roles.

Those committed to the field of youth development must walk a thin line
between being “realistic” and being “visionaries.” We must continue to dream
the impossible dream while keeping our feet firmly on the ground. We need
to inspire youth and each other to maintain a steadfast devotion for a better
world, yet understand that setbacks are a natural occurrence in this line
of work.