Introduction and Conceptual Framework

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Mike, an artistic, somewhat withdrawn African American ninth-grader, was having academic difficulties. His mother and I were permitted to watch from a one-way observation studio while Mike was evaluated by a school psychologist. During the reporting session, the psychologist indicated that Mike was quite limited and very concrete in his thinking. Yet, in response to the question, "How are a poem and a statue alike?" Mike replied, "They both make you wonder." When I said I thought his answer was not only abstract but also very moving, the psychologist thumbed through the protocol before saying, "That answer isn't scorable."

—Ruth Zweifler, student advocate

We, the editors of this volume, have been wondering for some time about questions of childhood and the nature of social work. With the colleague who told us Mike's story, we are eager to restore a place for "wondering" in the process of social work education. Like Mike, we hope to identify profound connections between apparently disparate things. In particular, in this text we hope to spur social workers to wonder about their work with children and youth and to connect this work with larger patterns of global transformation. We want to invoke wonder in both of its meanings: first, in its sense of experiencing amazed admiration and awe; and second, in its sense of speculating and being curious to know about something. We hope that the contributions to this edited volume reawaken a sense of admiration and awe for the present-day insights as well as the future possibilities of young people whom we meet as we practice social work. We wish to make the gifts of people like Mike more available, challenging

the processes that so often make the talents and skills of such young people invisible to so many. We also intend to stimulate curiosity about how social policy and practice with American young people has come to be as it is, in this particular historical moment of global transformation. We particularly want to provoke critical questions about trends in contemporary social policy and practice that exclude, stigmatize, and leave behind large segments of the nation's youth. Finally, we wish to inspire speculation about how things might be otherwise.

Childhood, Youth, and Social Work in Transformation is the product of the conversations and concerns of social workers, anthropologists, lawyers, and youth workers who have wondered about the transformation of childhood, youth, and social work over the last decade. Each contributor explores a particular aspect of contemporary policy or practice. Each spent months or even years in a specific local context or studying a specific aspect of social policy with the aim of getting some purchase on larger questions of how childhood, youth, and social work are being transformed. Contributors seek to understand young people's experiences in school classrooms, detention centers, Head Start preschools, "teen mom" groups, youth centers, and community meetings. Some authors carefully document changing legal standards toward children in particular arenas of law; others follow and analyze specific media stories focused on youth. One author learns to play hockey in a mental health program for youth; another serves as "an ethnographic babysitter" to an upper-middle-class family; yet others devise programs in which young people resolve community conflicts, deliver "guerilla poetry," study their legal rights, or instruct their social workers. Few of the profound lessons that our authors have gained from these experiences are "scorable." But they all make you wonder.

One of the themes that unite these diverse contributions is the premise that in the context of a transforming global order, there is a profound shift under way in our assumptions about children and youth—about who they are, what they need, and how they can be helped. The authors are attempting to evoke our intense curiosity and speculation about the nature of this shift. Many of the contributors were prompted to undertake their studies or experiment with new practices because of a realization that we were witnessing the abandonment of a powerful set of modern ideas about the nature of childhood and youth and the possible emergence of something new (Fass 2007; Ruddick 2006; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995). We believe that recent trends in social welfare policymaking demonstrate that our nation is in retreat from public commitments to protecting, educating, sheltering, and nurturing its young people. As many historians of social welfare have shown, the public institutions that the nation created to carry out these functions have often failed, as the intention

to care for and uplift was transformed into an impulse to condemn or control (Abramovitz 1996; Finn, this volume; Lindsey 2004; Specht and Courtney 1994). Still, in contemporary times, a shared commitment to the ideal of a protected, nurtured childhood has been an important starting place, a moral ground from which to advocate for young people and their families.

Erosion of a commitment to these ideals regarding childhood and youth has particular significance for the social work profession and for each of us as social workers. Unlike scholars of childhood, who mostly observe such transformations, we, as social workers, take active part in them—dismantling, carrying forth, and reinventing policies, programs, and practices that affect the daily lives of young people. We are deeply implicated in the ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing childhood and youth for young people. At the same time, we are uniquely positioned both to witness the efforts that young people make to shape their own lives and to advocate on their behalf. The contributors explore ways in which social workers are both implicated in the construction of childhood and engaged with young people. They question the certainties that inform policies and practices, and they offer alternative possibilities for imagining and engaging with children and youth.

The central aims of this text are to help social workers to connect their understandings of childhood and youth to changing political and economic conditions; to critically examine the dynamic interplay among policies, institutions, and practices addressing the care and control of children and youth; and to imagine new possibilities for social work practice. The contributors provide conceptual tools, practical examples, and provocative stories that prompt readers to reexamine their own assumptions about and contributions to the institutions, policies, and practices that shape the experience of childhood and youth for young people.

In their writings, contributors draw on new paradigms of child research that are investigating the "cultural politics of childhood" (for example, Corsaro 1997; Hutchison and Charlesworth 2000; James and James 2004; James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; Jenks 1996; Qvortrup 2005; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995b). It is to the elements of this paradigm of "the cultural politics" of childhood and youth that we first turn. After introducing this paradigm, we take up our argument that specific modern Western ideas about childhood that have been taken as natural and universal understandings are eroding in the context of a globalizing world. Finally, we introduce the contributions to this text and preview the questions that they raise and the conceptual tools and strategies that they offer us as we seek to study the transformation of childhood, youth, and social work.

THE "CULTURAL POLITICS" OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

A fundamental premise of this text is that notions of "childhood" and "youth" are socially and culturally constructed. Within social work, this is an unsettling proposition, as our profession's understandings of childhood have been drawn primarily from developmental psychology. Traditionally, developmental psychological approaches have represented child development as a natural, largely biological process that unfolds in chronological and linear stages (Burman 1994; Kessen 1990; Morss 1996; Walkerdine 1984). This approach roots the answer to questions such as "what is a child?" in biology, rather than in the social and cultural reality of a specific historical moment.

In contrast, this text is located in a burgeoning new scholarship of childhood in anthropology, sociology, history, and legal studies. The social historian Phillipe Ariès is credited with launching this new vein of scholarship of childhood with the publication of his striking assertion that in medieval society in western Europe, "men . . . did not dwell on the image of childhood, and that that image had neither interest nor even reality for them" (Ariès 1962:34). Ariès used depictions of children and data on children's clothing and games to argue that, prior to the fifteenth century, children were portrayed, dressed, entertained, and, in fact, conceptualized as "miniature adults."

Though Ariès's provocative thesis has been sharply debated, the body of scholarship it generated underscores the point that childhood has varied across both cultures and decades. Ariès's work provided a platform for rethinking the idea of childhood as "a particular cultural phrasing of the early part of the life course, historically contingent and subject to change" (James and James 2004). It provided impetus to explore the diversity that exists among children and their childhoods at any single historical moment. And it required acknowledgment of the ways that the ideas we hold about childhood shape how we behave toward young people and structure children's daily experiences.

Building on Ariès's insight, a new paradigm of child research took root in the late 1970s, pitched against the assumptions about children and childhood so firmly embedded in developmental psychology and uncritically embraced within social work and many other disciplines. Scholars studying the social and cultural construction of childhood rejected the degree of emphasis on children's biological makeup and the lack of attention to children's engagement with their social and cultural worlds (for a review of this work, see Boocock and Scott 2005). An important five-year project, *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon*, began in 1987 under the auspices of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, organizing meetings of international scholars and publishing land-

mark reports and books (Qvortrup et al. 1994). Another landmark occurred in 1990, when Alan Prout and Allison James published a collection of studies on *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood.* In the introduction to this volume, James and Prout defined the parameters of the new paradigm for child research, and by so doing shaped a great deal of subsequent research and theoretical debate. Here we summarize three key premises of a paradigm of research on the "cultural politics of childhood": that childhood is socially and culturally constructed; that children are and must be seen as active agents in the construction of their own lives; and that particular notions of "childhood" and "youth" must be understood in the specific political and economic contexts in which they emerge.

Childhood as Socially and Culturally Constructed

The first premise is that childhood, "as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of a human group" but a specific social and cultural institution instead (Prout and James 1990:9). Scholars working within this paradigm pay critical attention to "*discourses*" of childhood and youth, by which we mean the structures of knowledge and systematic ways of carving up reality that provide parameters for what can be said, thought, and known about young people (Chambon, Irving, and Epstein 1999; James and James 2004). Scholars researching the "cultural politics of childhood" also demonstrate that the study of childhood cannot be divorced from other social variables, such as class, gender, and race, stressing that research reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single, universal one.

In part, social work's lack of engagement with this new paradigm of child research may reflect the degree to which these studies disturb ideas and assumptions that are deeply embedded within our profession. In particular, understanding childhood as socially and culturally constructed represents a challenge to powerful ideas imported into social work from developmental psychology. Assumptions rooted in developmental psychology underlie many social work interventions. For example, researchers within the new paradigm of child research have challenged John Bowlby's highly influential theories of the impact of maternal separation and attachment on children's needs, questioning to what extent the needs he postulates are universal and innate (James and James 2004; Woodhead 1990).

Within social work, a developmental psychological perspective on child development has competed with and been combined with "family" and "ecological" perspectives. These more sociological theories emphasize the ways

that individuals and their environments exist in reciprocal relationships, each changing over time and mutually adapting to each other (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Garbarino 1992; Hartman 1979). Such approaches place much stronger emphasis on the family, community, and social context in which the child develops. However, these approaches have also been challenged by the new generation of child researchers. For example, child researchers such as Qvortrup have argued that these models frequently submerge the specific needs and interests of children with those of the family. As Qvortrup contends:

> All too often—in both research and policy—it is taken for granted that children and child families are more or less the same unit. . . . This problem arises not because of ill will, but is rather a problem of the sociology of knowledge in the sense that adults are often intoxicated with the view of children as dependents and themselves as fair representatives of children. Adults simply "forget" to raise other perspectives. It is more or less taken for granted that "what is good for the family is good for the child." (1990:87)

Challenging our theoretical perspectives means asking hard questions, reawakening us to wonder about what we have forgotten, what we have taken for granted, and what views might have "intoxicated" us and blurred our vision of children's needs and perspectives.

Children as Agents in Their Own Lives

Secondly, and very significantly, scholars examining the "cultural politics of childhood" have emphasized that children are and must be seen as active in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and the societies in which they live. If childhood is not a strictly biological phenomenon but a largely social one, they argue, then the part that young people play in shaping their own and others' social worlds must be taken into account (James 2004). Prout and James urge researchers to understand children as active agents and not just passive subjects in the construction and reconstruction of social structures and processes (1990:8). Unified by a view of children as active and constructive members of society and childhood as an integral part of the social fabric, scholars stimulated by this new paradigm focused on the empirical circumstance of children's real, everyday lives and invited children themselves to explain how they are experiencing their lives (Boocock and Scott 2005).

Scholars working in this vein argue that their work will be as important to

twenty-first-century scholarship as women's and racial and ethnic studies were to twentieth-century scholarship. One of the potentially most transformative characteristics of this scholarship is its attention to children's *voice* and *agency* (Boocock and Scott 2005, Prout and James 1990; Pufall and Unsworth 2004; Qvortrup 2005). By voice, scholars refer to "the cluster of intentions, hopes, grievances and expectations that children guard as their own" (Pufall and Unsworth 2004). By agency, they reference the fact that children are more self-determining than we have generally acknowledged. Children act as agents in their own lives, though they often act from positions of limited power. Nevertheless, children's actions affect their worlds, and they voice their views in efforts to affect or persuade others (Pufall and Unsworth 2004).

Thus, in addition to running against the grain of traditional theoretical ideas and assumptions, this emerging paradigm of child study challenges the way that the profession has engaged with young people. Recognizing that children and youth are fully human beings (rather than simply immature adults, or human *becomings*) alters the parameters of practice. For example, granting children voice and agency raises new questions about how they are (or are not) involved in choices that affect their lives—such as decisions about out-of-home placement, consent to medical treatment, meaningful participation in school governance, or voice in the management of programs designed to enhance their welfare. The paradigm also raises questions about how to undertake research efforts that recognize young people's experiences and take their perspectives into account.

Social workers in many other countries have been grappling with these concerns, propelled at least in part by their engagement with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC articulates an international response to questions about what a child is and what she needs. The convention describes rights that children have for special protection, but it also specifies children's rights to identity, to form and express views, to association, and to privacy. In the United States, one of the two countries that has not ratified the CRC, there has been a remarkable absence of debate or discussion about the convention. In our experience, most social workers in the United States have never heard of the CRC, a shocking situation in light of its influence abroad. Despite this lack of engagement with the CRC, some U.S. scholars and practitioners are beginning to raise important questions regarding children's voice and agency as citizens (see, for example, Checkoway and Guttierez 2006). Still, questions regarding children's voice and agency remain largely unexamined despite profound implications for social work practice with young people in the United States.

Childhood, Youth, and Politics

Finally, the third premise of this paradigm entails the notion that concepts of childhood and youth—like all other social and cultural ideas—emerge in the context of relations of political and economic power (Katz 2004; Qvortrup 2005; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995). The discourses and practices of childhood and youth that shape our thinking and behavior toward them are inseparable from these political and economic relationships. When we say that childhood and youth are political and economic ideas, we reference the ways that governments, political parties, national and international organizations, media outlets, and marketers make use of notions of childhood and youth. In addition to being social and cultural institutions that structure the lives of young people, notions of childhood and adolescence have been invested with enormous symbolic power. To give just one example, several scholars have noted waves of popular hysteria over child abduction seemingly out of proportion to the rarity of these tragic instances (Fass 2007; Ivey 1995; Mintz 2004). These scholars argue that panics about missing children express a much more general sense of vulnerability and loss of innocence, functioning as powerful ways to express a less clearly focused sense of grievance and anxiety about other shifts in the economy, changes in the family, new sexual practices, and changing gender roles (Comaroff 1997; Fass 2007; Katz 2005). Yet, as adults respond to these panics by restricting children's freedoms and increasing surveillance of their activities, the symbolic uses of childhood by adults generate material effects on the minds and bodies of young people (Cross 2004).

When we say that childhood and youth are political and economic ideas, we also draw attention to the ways in which political and economic change affects the lived experiences of young people. Robert Coles, in his groundbreaking book *The Political Life of Children* (1986), argued vigorously that though children do not vote or hold office, they are not secluded or shielded from the effects of political and economic processes. Indeed, political processes produce changes in welfare laws, health provision, lunch programs, recreational centers, school outcomes measures, juvenile justice statutes, and public housing—all of which have direct and immediate effects on the everyday lives of young people. In fact, as Coles notes, it is possible to understand the ways that the nation's politics make up the individual child's psychology. Katz illustrates this point when she describes the ways that poor and working-class children in New York City in the 1990s "could see their declining 'values' in the dilapidated conditions of the city's public schools, in the city's litter, which was strewn in poorly maintained

neighborhood parks and playgrounds, and in the unsafe and decaying public spaces of the residential city" (2004:160).

As social workers, we have opportunities to witness the ways in which laws, social policies, and social work practices are based on particular conceptions of who children are, what rights they do or do not have, and what they need. Within the profession, specific notions of childhood and youth are embedded in the ways that young people are talked about, the network of practices in which they are immersed everyday, and the laws and policies that frame these practices. While we may prefer to think of our work as rooted only in the objective basis of empirical evidence, this paradigm suggests that social workers are embroiled in the messier, value-based struggle over the meaning of childhood instead. We must make diligent efforts to expand our knowledge of children and youth and to assess the effectiveness of children's programs through means that are rigorous, ethical, and methodologically sound. However, acknowledging the cultural politics of childhood challenges us to recognize that beneath technical and methodological concerns lay important political and moral questions about the place of children in the broader society, the nature of their troubles, and our responsibilities in these matters.

This means that our daily practice as social workers is bound up with the cultural politics of childhood. It also means that the social work agencies, schools, community groups, and policymaking bodies that employ social workers can be understood as sites of struggle over understandings and practices of childhood and youth. These struggles have profound consequences for children, youth, and society. Acknowledging the existence of childhood as a cultural category, we argue, will aid social workers in these struggles by providing the tools to contest prevailing assumptions regarding the nature and needs of young people, and to develop new strategies of thought and action.

In summary then, we acknowledge that there is nothing new about studying children—the profession of social work has always rested on an abundance of research on young people. However, thinking through the "cultural politics of childhood" shifts the way that scholars engage with children and opens up new terrain for further research. It requires that we critically examine the discourses that structure our understandings of children and youth. It proposes that we consider young people as agents in their own lives and as participants in constructing our shared social worlds. Research in this paradigm also takes a new perspective on social work and social policy. It demands that we understand social policy and social work practice not as simple responses to the self-evident and natural needs of young people. Instead, the policies and practices of social

work are considered as means by which childhood and youth are constructed for young people (James and James 2004). Finally, this paradigm prompts us to ask whether the specific, modern, Western notions about childhood so central to the emergence of U.S. social work in the twentieth century are "at risk" in the context of a globalizing world (Fass 2007; Katz 2004; Ruddick 2006; Schepher-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995).

THE RISE OF MODERN CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, AND SOCIAL WORK

Working within a paradigm of the "cultural politics of childhood" reorients social work's search for foundational knowledge toward questions of history, culture, and power. It challenges us to explore the relationship between a transforming global order and the evolving expectations and understandings of young people. Engagement with this literature offers us ways to understand how deeply the history of the profession of social work is entwined with the emergence of particular modern Western ideas about childhood and youth—a relationship that has been both taken for granted and left largely unexamined.

In concise and insightful recent essays on childhood in America, Paula Fass draws attention to three issues that have redefined the experience of childhood and youth for young people: the issues of children's work, the role of play in child development, and the problems of sexuality (2007:204). Beginning in the late nineteenth century, and gaining momentum in the twentieth century, the "century of the child," Americans defined a "proper childhood" to be one that was free of labor; devoted in substantial measure to education, play, and recreation; and free of abuse and exploitation. These protections of childhood originated as middle-class conceptions that were gradually extended to all, and sometimes imposed on families who had differing expectations of and relationships with their children.

The effort to extend this ideal of childhood and its protections to all young people was at the center of much of the social work profession's earliest campaigns. Fass enumerates a long list of the institutions and practices that "spilled out" from this vision of childhood, including Children's Aid Societies, a host of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, orphanages, adoption and foster care, juvenile courts and detention centers, sports clubs and playgrounds, settlements and social centers, and the Children's Bureau (207). As Fass notes, while in Germany and Britain it was the needs of the worker that served as the foundation of the welfare state, in the United States it was the figure of the mother and the child that prompted the development of Mother's Pensions and

served as the entering wedge in the development of welfare provision (249; see also Gordon 1994; Skocpol 1992). In addition, it was the idea of the child and the extension of childhood to adolescents that necessitated the creation of universal public schools as symbols of democracy and community pride and important sites for the extension of social work to young people (Fass 2007; Tyack 2003).

As Viviana Zelizer (1985) has pointed out, at the core of this proliferating set of policies, practices, and programs was a cultural shift from the economic to the emotional valuing of children. American young people, valued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for their economic contributions, were transformed into "priceless" children, beings whose worth could not be evaluated in monetary terms. Children's value was understood in sentimental terms that then obligated their parents, communities, and society to a commitment to protect their well-being. As Fass summarizes, "In shifting the child from a ledger where he or she could participate in economic calculations and to which even his or her small contribution had weight, to a ledger in which the only legitimate calculation was how well he could be sheltered and provided for, the society experienced a paradigm shift" ((2007:206). Social work was intimately involved in bringing about this paradigm shift and in elaborating institutions and practices that sheltered, provided for, controlled, and contained young people outside of the marketplace. As we enter the twenty-first century, we seem to be experiencing another paradigm shift in conceptions of and directions for childhood, youth, and social work as a powerful new logic of the market penetrates all aspects of social life.

NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

In this section we explore the concept of globalization and the relationship to the logic and practices of neoliberalism, which we contend are key to understanding not only the contemporary context of practice with children and youth but also the very ways in which childhood and youth are being constructed. Globalization—new arrangements and alignments of nations and regions, enabling new flows and conjunctures of people, ideas, culture, and politics—has impacted children beyond making McDonald's hamburgers, Levis, and rap music internationally available, though those are not insignificant developments. Globalization has entailed the international circulation of images of children's plights and the development of global networks of concern for children's welfare that produced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Fass 2007). Even more profoundly, however, in the context of a globalizing world, we

believe that modern ideas about who children are and what they need are being displaced. We follow Stephens in proposing that "we should take very seriously the possibility that we are now witnessing a profound restructuring of the child within the context of a movement from state to global capitalism, modernity to postmodernity" (1995:19).

Critical theorists of late-twentieth-century global capitalism have drawn attention to globalization as both an *ideology,* or set of beliefs, regarding the "inevitability" of the new world order and a *political strategy,* a systematic effort to consolidate power, create "flexible" workers, and open borders to the movement of corporate interests (Korten 2001; Piven and Cloward 1997). They recognize the transnational penetration of "neoliberal" economic politics and practices as a driving force in the production of new forms of social exclusion and political conflict (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Lowe and Lloyd 1997). We see evidence of this profound restructuring in our observations of the policy revolution that has reshaped young people's access to food, shelter, health care, education, and social services over the last decade (Giroux 2003; Grossberg 2001; Ruddick 2006). Critical understanding of and attention to these broader political and economic processes are essential to contemporary social work with children and youth, even in its most "local" and "personal" forms. (For further discussion, see Clarke [2003], Finn and Jacobson [2008], and Ferguson, Lavalette, and Whitmore [2005].)

The discussion of globalization cannot be divorced from that of neoliberalism. The central, powerful neoliberal idea is that human well-being is best advanced when individuals are free to apply their entrepreneurial skills and freedoms in a market economy. This philosophy holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions and so seeks to extend the market into all arenas of social life (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal political and economic ideas are premised on the belief that private enterprise and individual initiative are the keys to the creation of wealth, the elimination of poverty, and the improvement in human welfare. Competition—among individuals, businesses, cities, or nations—is held to be a primary virtue. According to neoliberal theory, freedom of individuals, businesses, and corporations to act in unrestricted ways within the market will deliver a higher living standard to everyone, as the "rising tide" of productivity will "lift all boats."

From a neoliberal perspective, many of the social institutions that have been central to our profession—social insurance, welfare benefits, and social services—have become positioned as economically and socially costly obstacles to maximizing economic performance and productivity (Burchell 1996). Indi-

vidual success in this context is held to be a product of each person's enterprise and ability to "entrepreneur" for himself or herself within the free market. Conversely, lack of success is attributed to individual failings and deficiencies, not to the effects of broader structural inequalities. Thus, from a perspective that celebrates engagement with the market, welfare provision is conceived as a barrier to initiative, trapping recipients in patterns of dependency and need.

Neoliberal ideas became widely accepted as "common sense" at the end of the millennium. Under the influence of neoliberal ideas, nearly all governments, either voluntarily or under coercive pressure, embraced aspects of neoliberalism and changed policies to roll back taxes, reduce welfare spending, and deregulate labor markets (Harvey 2005). Of course, the variation and unevenness among governments is substantial, and no state or government clung to neoliberal theory all the time (Clarke 2003). Nevertheless, it is possible to trace an emphatic global turn in political and economic practices and thinking that resulted in the withdrawal from many areas of social welfare, and the deregulation and privatization of other arenas.

Neoliberal strategies of government have a profound impact on contemporary social work. Fisher and Karger argue in their text *Social Work and Community in a Private World* (1997) that the neoliberal approach is to transfer government roles to business and to reorient social, cultural, and political institutions to corporate values. To that end, numerous public social welfare agencies (as well as prisons, schools, universities, and other social institutions) have been replaced by private profit-making businesses or at least placed under increasing pressure to view their efforts in "quasi-business terms," considering their efforts to provide care for the nation's neediest and most vulnerable members in terms of markets, margins, competitors, and bottom lines (Burchell 1996; Harvey 2005; Rose 1996). Sometimes moves to transfer public responsibilities and resources to the private sector were direct and obvious, as in the privatization of school districts, welfare programs, or prisons; other times, perhaps less so. For example, Karger draws attention to the dramatic recent expansion of the "fringe economy" in the context of a diminishing welfare state:

> While TANF work requirements force former recipients into low-wage work, they also allow fringe economy businesses to assume some welfare-state functions, such as providing emergency cash assistance through payday loans, pawns, and other short-term credit. Hence, the fringe economy has taken on the functions of a privatized—and expensive—welfare state by offering former recipients emergency financial services no longer provided by government. It's also one of the only economic sectors that primarily serve the poor. (2005:24)

Neoliberal approaches to government have transformed the structure of social welfare institutions, encouraged the expansion of privatized alternatives, and raised new and challenging questions for social work practice. For example, Fisher and Karger question how we will practice *social* work in a world that is increasingly antagonistic to the social sphere. They ask, "how do we create empowered citizens in a context that values independent and self sufficient family members, workers, and consumers?" (1997:4). Epstein argues that in this context, social work has broadly and much too uncritically disseminated the idea of individual initiative and personal autonomy as the solutions to problems of living in ways that make these strategies appear "believable." She notes, "The view holds that *you can do it, you can have it, it is up to you to pull yourself together to get the skills to learn the stuff, get on with your life, do it*" (1999:10).

In the context of a neoliberal ethic that celebrates self-sufficiency, pathologizes dependency, and advocates market solutions to personal and social problems, how do we think about young people? The modern notions of "the child" that were built into twentieth-century welfare programs assumed that children's dependency made it incumbent upon adults to make arrangements for their protection, education, guidance, and nurture. Meanwhile, children were extracted from the streets, the labor market, and other locations where they might be "self sufficient." Do we expect children and youth to "pull themselves together" and "get on with their lives"? Dependent by social, cultural, and legal definition, where do children and youth fit in contemporary social, cultural, and political worlds? What are the effects of reform on the life experiences of diverse young people across the nation? So far, scholars who have productively explored the implications of neoliberal globalization for the profession have paid surprisingly scant attention to shifts and changes in social work's relationship to children and youth. These transformations are central concerns for the authors who contribute to this book.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

The complicated constellation of neoliberal reforms affects children in local settings in complex ways. The contributors to this volume are involved in the process of tracing the impacts of these reforms on discourses of childhood and on practice with children in particular contexts. However, as an introduction to these very specific explorations, we want to highlight some general trends here. We draw attention in particular to a growing indifference to the material plight of segments of the nation's youthful population; an increasing reliance on strate-

gies of exclusion, punishment, and stigma; and an escalating sense of panic and anxiety over "children at risk" who are also understood to be "risky children" (Stephens 1995).

Children, Youth, and Intensifying Inequality

First, implementation of neoliberal political and economic theory has had material impact on children's lives. Neoliberal interventions have not delivered on promises to "lift all boats" or to generate productivity that would "trickle down" and eliminate poverty. In fact, a neoliberal reform has produced intensifying levels of inequality, particularly for young people. Analysts offer a variety of ways to illustrate these patterns of inequality. For example, by 2004 the richest 5% of all U.S. households received more than 20% of total income. What is more, the average after tax income of the richest 1% of households was 50 times that of the bottom 20% of households. Neoliberal policies resulted in the redistribution of wealth upward: these wealthy households saw their after-tax income increase by 140% since 1979—65 times more than the gains seen by the typical household and 370 times the average income gain for the 22.2 million American households with the lowest incomes (Children's Defense Fund 2005:4).

The effects of this intensifying inequality have been particularly harsh on children. Despite the heralded "success" of welfare reforms, for example, in 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 13.3 % of all persons lived in poverty, which was pegged at an income level of $15,577 for a family of three persons. Rates of child poverty were substantially higher than the average for all persons: 18.5 % of all those under 18 were poor. Conditions were worse for the youngest children: more than a fifth (21.3%) of all of the nation's children under 5 years of age were poor (Child Welfare League of America 2007). The number of children in extreme poverty—defined as living at less than half of the poverty level, with an annual income below $7,610 for a family of three—increased to its highest level in more than 30 years, affecting almost 5.6 million children (Darling-Hammond 2007; Children's Defense Fund 2005). Though children's poverty is often attributed to lack of parental enterprise and work effort, more than 7 out 10 poor children lived with at least one employed relative (Children's Defense Fund 2005).

The impact of deep inequalities on poor children was made harsher by increasing barriers to quality education, decent housing, and adequate health care for many of the nation's young people. Under the dramatically altered welfare rules, only one-quarter of poor children receive benefits under the provisions of Temporary Assistance for Needy Children (TANF), though the number of chil-

dren living in poverty has increased nearly 13% since 2000 (Children's Defense Fund 2005; National Center for Children in Poverty 2006). As public budgets tightened, states aggressively retrenched public health care to poor families and children. As states reduced Medicaid rolls and tightened benefits, infant mortality, a key index of child health, which had declined for four decades, showed significant and sometimes dramatic increases in 2005 in regions with poor populations and particularly minority populations (Eckholm 2007). Patterns of public disinvestment in children's welfare in poor and working-class neighborhoods produced deteriorating public schools, playgrounds, recreation centers, and public spaces (Katz 2005; Kozol 2005; McLaren and Farahmandpur 2006). Amid a crisis in affordable housing, 40% of homeless persons were members of families with children. Another 5% of the homeless population were unaccompanied youth, age 18 or younger. Higher education became significantly less accessible to working- and middle-class families, and young people who succeeded in higher education emerged with escalating levels of personal debt (Toppo 2005). Because of this debt load, many young people are increasingly reliant on their family members into their mid-to-late twenties or early thirties as they work at low-paying, entry-level jobs or assume unpaid internships (Jennings 2007). Young people without this family support struggle to find a foothold in society.

One central and profoundly troubling effect of neoliberal policy, then, is a deepening inequality in the material circumstances of the nation's young people. This dismal result has occurred in the world's richest nation, during a period that has been heralded for its prosperity. What is very striking is not only that this injustice has occurred, but that it has produced so little comment. As Grossberg notes, "this intolerable situation is tolerated, not only by politicians but also by the general population" (2001:113). He suggests that this indifference to the plight of young people indexes a shift in our conception of children, and an abandonment of our belief in and commitment to our collective future. He proposes that throughout most of the twentieth century, our faith in our collective future was embodied in children and youth. Our national investment in their welfare was a sign of hope for that future. In the contemporary context of neoliberal globalization, the attack on programs for youth is also an assault against our commitment to that collective modern social vision (135).

We agree with Grossberg that public indifference to the material plight of so many of the nation's young people indexes a profound change in our shared notions of childhood and youth. Shared commitments to the well-being of all the nation's children have eroded in the context of neoliberalism, altering our view of who children are, and what we owe them. Evidence of this displacement

of concern for the welfare of "the child" is evident in the tendency to "change the subject" of policy once aimed at children. As "Aid to Dependent Children" is replaced by the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act" (PRWORA), for example, children and youth are displaced as the explicit subjects of reform discourse as the spotlight focuses on the "work effort" of their parents. In contemporary welfare provision, benefits to children are conditioned on the willingness and ability of their parents to become "self-sufficient" by complying with stringent demands for "work effort" and other punitive requirements. Members of families whose adult members cannot or do not comply with these demands and requirements are "sanctioned" as benefits are reduced or terminated.

In addition, PRWORA targeted benefits to full citizens, restricting benefits to legal and undocumented immigrants. As of 2001, many (about 15%) of the nation's children are native citizens with immigrant parents; another 4% are foreign-born children with at least one immigrant parent (Leiter, McDonald, and Jacobson 2006). New immigrant children are excluded from benefits. Native-born children of immigrant parents are eligible; however, scholars have documented an erosion of access to benefits by second-generation children, following their parents' loss of benefits. In other words, children of immigrants, who are among the most likely young people to need a safety net because their parents are poor and uninsured, are now less likely to access it (Leiter, McDonald, and Jacobson 2006).

In summary, children's status as children no longer protects them from the withdrawal of even minimal levels of public support. Instead, proponents of welfare reform such as William Bennett degraded the provision of aid to poor children as a product of "the nanny state," an arrangement that "has eroded self-reliance and encouraged dependency, crowding out the character-forming institutions and enfeebling us as citizens" (Bennett 1998). The disappearance of concern for the material well-being of children from such debate about welfare reform bears heavily on the minds and bodies of young people, even as the evidence of these impacts escapes the frame of reference of policy debate.

Children, Youth, and Exclusion

As the infrastructure of support for many of the nation's young people eroded in recent years, punitive responses to the problems of children and youth gained momentum, revealing erosion of protectionist ideas about shielding young people from the full, adult consequences of their actions. Juvenile justice reforms

"got tough" on young people, making it easier to try children as adults and stiffening their sentences (Sealander 2003; Shook 2005). School districts across the country enacted school discipline policies that enforced "zero tolerance" in schools. Mandatory expulsion laws, enacted to remove dangerous young people from schools, seemed to take on lives of their own. However, as these policies were implemented, evidence arrived of more and more districts removing children from school under the law on the basis of vague offenses with vague criteria for reentry, a practice that undermined the vision of universal education (Zweifler and DeBeers 2002). Practices of monitoring and surveillance of youth intensified. For example, in 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of schools to test all members of sports teams for drug use, even when individuals were not suspected of using drugs; in 2002, the Court upheld random drug testing for all students involved in extracurricular activities (Mintz 2004).

When investment in social welfare was withdrawn, prison populations soared as states invested in building new prisons and expanding their criminal and juvenile justice systems. In 2006, approximately 7 million Americans were in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole (Sarri and Shook 2006). As a result of the expansion of the justice system, increasing numbers of young people, particularly poor youth and youth of color, spend considerable portions of their adolescence and early adulthood in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The erosion of a range of public social welfare institutions and organizations focused on youth development has been accompanied by an expanding criminal justice system, so that the justice systems are becoming a primary public site for youth development for a large population of young people. These youth are often those whose families did not have the resources to access or purchase the programs and services provided in the private sector.

In these policy moves, children and youth are subject to a range of strategies that evict young people from the conceptual categories of childhood. Young people who are judged to have made "bad choices" are no longer subject to the protections we once sought to guarantee to children. Children who are disciplined under zero-tolerance policies are denied the access to the education once guaranteed to the young (Zweifler, this volume); juvenile detainees are held responsible as adults without ever having experienced the rights of adulthood (Shook, this volume). The direction of much of this reform supports the claims of some researchers that notions about the innocence and vulnerability of children are being replaced with policies that are hostile to children, and that powerful interests are "at war" with the nation's youth (Giroux 2003; Grossberg 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998) or at least with "some people's children" (Hutchison and Charlesworth 2000).

Childhood, Youth, and Panic

The tone of all policy reform is not "child hostile." For example, in the face of this harshening of children's policy in the 1990s, calls for integrating children's services at the level of "the community" soared. Advocates from across a broad political spectrum converged upon a vision of reform in which local people would provide comprehensive, collaborative, community-based care that could respond flexibly to family needs (for example, Clinton 1996; McKnight 1995; Schorr 1997). Yet, these harmonious visions of children and youth ensconced in communities are starkly at odds with the broader trends in social policy reform that leave parents in poor and working-class communities overworked and overwhelmed, as demands of the workplace increase and the public infrastructures of schools and neighborhoods deteriorate. In addition, idyllic visions of community-based commitment to the needs of individual troubled local children are regularly disturbed by panics about the welfare of young people in these settings. Alarm about teenage pregnancy, juvenile crime, and child abduction powerfully impacted local communities in spite of the declining rates of teenage pregnancy (Mintz 2004) and juvenile crime (Snyder 2006), and the relative rarity with which children are kidnapped by strangers (Sedlak et al. 2002).

Parents and children had other worries, too, as an increasing portion of the youthful population was perceived to be suffering from emotional disturbance. In an era when support for welfare provision, schools, and social services for children dwindled, alarm over the status of children's mental health flourished. In 2000, the surgeon general of the United States, David Satcher, developed a national "action agenda" to respond to "public crisis in mental health for infants, children, and adolescents" that was conveyed as afflicting all children across lines of class, race, and culture. Experts at the conference quoted studies reporting that about one of every five young people suffered with diagnosable mental disorders (Kelleher 2000; Offord 2000). Evidence of parental concern for children's mental health problems was in evidence as an increasing proportion of the youthful population was diagnosed and treated pharmacologically. In 1996, for example, it was estimated that 1.5 million of the 38 million schoolchildren (or 3–5%) took Ritalin to treat attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Kolata 1996). By 2003, the Center for Disease Control estimated that approximately 4.4 million children (or close 8% of all children in the United States) were reported to have a history of ADHD diagnosis, with 2.5 million of them taking medication for the disorder (CDC, 2005). In addition to surging increases in prescriptions for Ritalin, an increasing number of children were diagnosed and treated for what have traditionally been considered adult disorders,

particularly bipolar disorder, during this same period. Researchers reported in 2006 that a fivefold increase in the use of potent antipsychotic drugs to treat children for problems such as aggression and mood swings occurred between 1993 and 2002 (Carey 2006).

Nor was concern for young people limited to children with diagnosed disorders. Changing conditions of childhood affected the materially privileged as well as disadvantaged young people in other ways, too, as adult insecurity and fearfulness generated what observers dubbed "domestic fortressing," "household hypervigilance" (Katz 2005), or "paranoid parenting" (Lavalette 2005:154). Parents were drawn to strategies and devices that they hoped would protect their children from threat—private play corrals, highly structured and supervised activities, and home surveillance cameras (Katz 2005). Motivated by fear, parents restricted children's activities, limited their ability to play independently, and conveyed them to and from school and recreational activities (Lavalette 2005).

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK

We argue that this proliferation of policy reform, punitiveness, and panic indexes a transformation in notions of childhood and youth that has had profound, if largely unexamined, impacts on the daily practice of social workers. Reconstructions of childhood and youth also reconstruct the roles of those who care for young people—parents, teachers, social workers. In particular, we propose that the instability of these ideas presents new problems for the social work profession. Though social work practice with young people has historically been embedded with contradiction, in the transforming global order of the twenty-first century, social workers are encountering a particularly demanding set of competing claims about the needs and rights of children and youth. Workers are facing unprecedented and often excruciating dilemmas in policy and practice with young people. For example, child welfare workers are urged to serve children's best interests in the face of the realities of welfare systems that are overburdened, and economic, health care, and education systems that grow more precarious and privatized. School social workers are incited to "leave no child behind" even as they are asked to implement "zero-tolerance" policies that exclude young people from educational settings. Youth workers are asked to prevent the development of delinquency among "children at risk" while they are charged with holding juveniles accountable for their behavior and protecting communities from "risky children." In special education, social workers mobilize support for the inclusion of children with diverse needs in schools and

communities, while school systems face increasing pressures to exclude children who will jeopardize average test scores and achievement records. In local communities, practitioners struggle to make innovative community-based programs work as the income, employment, and housing infrastructure grows more precarious.

Contributors to this text explore specific ways in which our perceptions of and discourses about children and youth have shifted and changed over time, particularly in the context of neoliberal policy, and they illustrate the implications of these shifts for work in specific local contexts. In addition, they highlight a few of the many possibilities for reinventing social work with young people. Here we elaborate, in turn, the three central themes around which the book is structured: the changing discourses of childhood and youth, the various contexts and settings in which notions of childhood and youth are contested, and the prospects for reinventing social work with young people.

Exploring Changing Discourses of Childhood and Youth

Contributors to part 1 of this volume inspire us to think critically about the contemporary "common sense" of childhood and youth. They illustrate a variety of strategies for making the familiar unfamiliar and making visible what we take for granted (Chambon 1999). Their work suggests that preparation in strategies for "interrupting this message" in order to think reflectively should be part of the education of all social workers. They illustrate and analyze particular discourses of childhood and youth, examining ways of carving up reality that structure what can be said, thought, and known about young people.

One means of calling into question what we take for granted at present is the study of the "history of the present." In part 1, Janet Finn follows the philosopher Michel Foucault's observation that "recourse to history is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been: that the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history" (1983:206). Finn offers a historical perspective on the social construction of childhood in relation to notions of trouble. She examines the interplay among shifting representations of children and youth, beliefs about problems and pathology, and technologies of social work intervention. In particular, she speaks to the role of social work in both the consumption and production of images of trouble.

Several contributions to part 1 critically examine particular discourses that structure social work policy and practice with young people, illustrating how

these ways of thinking and talking about young people are both shaped and constrained by social structures. These chapters examine how particular stories that we tell about young people shape the social work practices and social policies and institutions that we create to care for or control them. For example, Lynn Nybell critically examines representations of "missing children," exploring the circulation of these images and the ways in which they map onto a host of adult anxieties. Nybell raises important questions regarding the race- and gender-based nature of these images.

Linwood Cousins takes readers inside a predominantly African American public high school and critically examines the disconnect between the discourse of "moral entrepreneurs" and the complex realities of everyday life for many young people of color in the United States. His analysis speaks to the hypocrisy of public policy and policymakers who fail to acknowledge these complexities. To illustrate ways in which young people are actively challenging and changing the discourses of childhood, youth, and trouble, Jennifer Tilton focuses on the collective action of young people to stop the building of a "super jail" for California youth. Tilton's case study offers provocative insights into emerging youth voices, organizing strategies, and forms of power. Deborah Lustig presents an ethnographic perspective on young mothers, showing how parenting teens give meaning to their experience; claim rights, responsibility, and agency; and talk back to a dominant discourse that both pathologizes and silences them. Finally, Kerrie Ghenie and Charlie Wellenstein's contribution concludes part 1 as they probe shifting discourses and practices of attachment in relationship to the welfare of children. Their historical overview sets the stage for their critical reading of contemporary child welfare policy and the contradictory messages regarding attachment therein.

Contexts and Settings

Contributors to part 2 focus on a critical examination of specific policies and practices in particular locations and settings. A primary goal of these contributors is to examine the connection between macro and micro processes, in order to show how broader economic, political, and cultural transformations have influenced policy and practice toward children and youth. At the same time, each contributor attends to the importance of geography. In doing so, they collectively demonstrate that contestations and negotiations over the cultural parameters of childhood are ongoing across multiple sites and locations, involving actors representing a diverse array of interests, values, and resources. As each

piece demonstrates, these contests and negotiations are not merely symbolic but have substantial consequences for children and youth.

Policy is often defined as a course of action directed toward a problem, issue, or group of people. However, contributors to part 2 demonstrate that policy itself often constitutes a particular problem, issue, or group. For example, policy can serve to establish who or what is considered to be a child, define the problems facing those who fall into this category, specify the rules for addressing these problems, and allocate resources to carry out these rules. Embedded within these categories, definitions, rules, and allocations are meanings regarding the nature and needs of children and youth. These meanings serve not only to shape understandings of the nature and needs of children and youth, but also to guide how social workers and other professionals practice and engage with children and youth.

In addition to acknowledging the role that policy plays in shaping understandings of the nature and needs of children and youth, contributions to part 2 explore how practitioners accept, modify, or resist these understandings. Attention to the meanings that practitioners construct and employ, as well as the organizing fields of knowledge they draw from in constructing and employing these meanings, reveals the tremendous fluidity of the cultural category of childhood and shows how its meanings vary across and within different contexts and settings.

Thus, these contributors make obvious the role of place in helping to produce meanings regarding the nature and needs of childhood and demonstrate how these meanings vary across or within different institutional settings and local contexts. Further, they demonstrate the constitutive role of practice, thereby revealing the power that social workers and other professionals hold in the production of the cultural category of childhood. Even more importantly, however, they reveal the power of social work and other professionals in reifying or altering social and structural inequalities, thereby offering the potential for a new course of action.

To begin Part 2, Jeffrey Shook explores the notion of "childhood by geography" through critical inquiry into variability within and across states regarding the decisions to treat juvenile offenders as adults. He builds from this critique to offer readers a framework for a more just and equitable balancing of the rights and responsibilities of young people. Luke Bergman continues the exploration of juvenile justice, taking readers to Detroit and into the political history of a new juvenile detention facility. Bergman demonstrates how the brick-and-mortar construction of the detention facility represents the physical embodi-

ment of a political shift in attitudes toward and treatment of young offenders. Ruth Zweifler shows the ways in which punitive disciplinary policies are impacting the lives and educational futures of children in public school. Drawing from her work as a student advocate in Michigan, Zweifler also shows how young people are talking back, asserting their agency, and contesting the punitive policies and practices that shape and constrain them.

Part 2 continues with explorations of practice with children in a variety of specific settings. Patricia Jessup offers readers an ethnographic journey into a rural Head Start program and the ways in which teachers, administrators, children, and parents construct and negotiate meanings of childhood and disability. Jessup illuminates not only the social construction of childhood, but also the social construction of disability and the profound consequences of practices of labeling. Ben Stride-Darnley takes readers inside two mental health programs for children and youth, offering a nuanced picture of the ways in which young people give meaning to experiences in mental health systems, engage with professional helpers, negotiate the boundaries between institutional and noninstitutional spaces, and exercise agency within the confines of these spaces**.** Lynn Nybell draws on her ethnographic study of community-based intervention with "at-risk" children to raise questions about the ways in which notions of risk and concomitant practices of intervention are constructed. She questions narrow conceptualizations of risk in terms of children's behaviors and attitudes and asks readers to examine critically the implications of such reductionist concepts in light of larger shifts toward devolution and dismantling of social welfare systems.

Finally, Rachel Heiman shifts our attention away from social work's more traditional sites of engagement by turning her gaze to middle-class family life, problematizing how children learn the habits, tastes, and styles of their class positioning in ways that go without saying. In so doing, she helps us to think more critically about the making of childhood and about the concept of risk therein. Heiman demonstrates ways in which children are learning to be particular *kinds* of consumers, students, workers, and social subjects.

Reinventing Social Work with Children and Youth

Contributors to part 3 go beyond critique to open and explore possibilities for critical and creative social work practice with children and youth. They recognize the ways in which young people assert their agency, even in the most constrained circumstances, and they point to the power of intergenerational relationships where adults engage with young people as allies, advocates, and, most importantly, colearners.

In exploring creative directions for practice with children and youth, the contributors do not offer naïve or simplistic interpretations of the problems at hand. Contributors not only resist the pressure toward context stripping, they actively probe the very specific historical, cultural, social, geographical, and political spaces of young people's experiences. Their inquiries provide readers with intimate encounters with children and youth at home and in schools, treatment centers, court rooms, and correctional facilities. They take us to public sites of youth action, resistance, and performance and to private moments of reflection and dialogue that offer a more nuanced understanding of the tensions, fears, and hopes that shape young people's lives.

Janet Finn's contribution to part 3 offers a framework for social justice–oriented social work, grounded in the key themes of meaning, context, power, history, and possibility, to illustrate the challenges and possibilities for social work practice that honors the voices, views, and rights of children. This framework provides a structure through which to view more specific examples of creative work with young people. Derrick Jackson follows by describing his own journey into social justice–oriented social work with young people, as he joined youth in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to build Project SpeakOUT. Jackson's account of the evolution of Project SpeakOUT demonstrates the unexpected and dynamic ways that youth-led initiatives can transform communities, institutions, social workers, and the young participants themselves.

In the chapters that follow, contributors describe their own ventures in pioneering new forms of collaboration with children and youth. Maryam Ahranjani outlines the development of a project that seeks to inspire young people to care about the Constitution by showing them how if affects them in schools. Ahranjani's work also demonstrates how joining the energies of young law students and youth in the nation's low-income public schools and detention centers transforms all participants. Sara Goodkind draws from her ethnographic work on "gender-specific" programs in juvenile justice settings for young women. She challenges her readers to think critically about social work practices that center on concerns for young women's "self-esteem" or "independence" while failing to challenge the structural inequities that impinge on their lives. Goodkind concludes by offering guidelines for interventions that reconnect the "personal" with the "political" in residential programs for adolescent girls. In her description of the Youth Uprising Center in Oakland, Jennifer Tilton brings the program's philosophy of "gritty youth leadership development" to life as she describes how young people led both the initial campaign and the planning process for a center that uses youth music, language, and culture — often framed as the sources of neighborhood problems — as the tools for personal and community

transformation. Charles Garvin draws from a long-term participatory research project with youth to demonstrate young people's capacities for leadership and conflict resolution. Finally, Lori Fryzel and Jamie Lee Evans describe their work in California's Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, which brings together the grassroots efforts of current and former foster youth with a successful formal social work training institution. Fryzel and Evans demonstrate ways in which a youth-led social work training movement can challenge and change child welfare practice, and they offer a powerful set of guiding principles for this work.

Questions for Discussion

Through careful attention to the social, historical, cultural, and political contexts of young people's lives and the possibilities of human agency therein, these contributors challenge the *inevitability* of contemporary policies, programs, and practices. Social work practice guided by marketization, managerialism, and the medicalization of trouble is a relatively recent phenomenon (Ferguson, Lavalette, and Whitmore 2005), and one that is open to resistance and challenge by critical practitioners and by young people themselves. Contributors challenge us to be critical consumers of policies and practices, to question received wisdom, and to probe the ways in which our "common sense" about the concerns and capacities of young people is constructed. They provide poignant illustrations of the capacities of young people as both makers of meaning and bearers of rights. They recognize children and youth as critical actors, able to reflect on their experiences, resist interventions that claim to be "in their best interests" yet deny them their voice, and respond individually and collectively in making rights claims.

As the contributors carefully examine aspects and examples of contemporary social work practice and policy with children and youth, each intends to inspire critical reflection and action. In support of that intent, we introduce discussion questions at the end of each chapter, based on a framework for critical reflection. This framework asks, first, that you consider connections between the very particular, situated accounts of work with children and youth included in this book and your own experiences. It challenges you to explore the implications of each chapter for your own social work practice. It prompts you to raise questions about what you have taken for granted in contemporary social work with young people. For example, questions push you to reconsider what you are most certain about, historicize your "here-and-nows," deconstruct your dichotomies, or "complexify" your simple answers. Furthermore, a framework for critical reflection asks you to reconsider our practice from the perspective of children and youth themselves, whose insights often challenge our perceptions

and aims. Finally, this framework invites you to consider the lessons, visions, or aspirations for the future that are inspired by each account.

We are eager to broaden the conversation about the transformation of childhood, youth, and social work currently under way and to collectively imagine new possibilities for action. We believe that the work of the contributors to this volume can inspire a dialogue that makes a difference. We invite you to wonder with us.

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