



December 2001

New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth: Use of the Arts, Humanities, and Sports.
Melvin Douglas. Reviewed by Julian Chow

Julian Chow
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chow, Julian (2001) "New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth: Use of the Arts, Humanities, and Sports. Melvin Douglas. Reviewed by Julian Chow," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 4 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol28/iss4/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts: one comes away not only with an intellectual understanding, but also with a visceral sense of the impact of these stubbornly entrenched aspects of our current form of stratification on the lives of real people.

Diane M. Johnson
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Melvin Delgado. *New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth: Use of the Arts, Humanities, and Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, \$21.50 papercover.

The recent interest in social work community practice calls for innovative service delivery arrangements. Youth services, in particular, are receiving considerable attention due to several high profile incidents of youth violence. Throughout the United States, social workers, policy makers, law enforcement officers, human service professionals, teachers, and parents alike are wondering what's gone wrong with our teenagers, and what can be done about it.

One consequence of the assumption that "something's wrong" is the trend toward tougher punishment for youth crimes—most notably trying juvenile in adult courts and imposing longer detention and jail terms. Such responses, however, can further alienate youth from society, and preclude the opportunity for rehabilitation. Trust, a fundamental requisite for developing relationships in any successful youth program, cannot be built with barricades and concrete walls.

In *New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth*, Melvin Delgado contends that social services with teenagers need to be reconceptualized. An important first step, he believes, is to stop demonizing youths and to explore how we can maximize their potential for normal growth and development. Thus, Delgado argues for a less stigmatized community development approach that emphasizes a strengths perspective. Presenting case studies from the arts, humanities, and sports, the author provides insights into successful intervention strategies,

filling a neglected area in the literature of community social work practice.

The book is divided into three parts: Background and Context, Reflections from the Fields, and Implications for Social Work Practice. The chapters in Part I provide the conceptual foundation for the rest of the book, with the author re-visiting the theme of social work practice in the community. Delgado reminds us of the importance of the community context where social work practice, in this case, youth services, occur. "Effective social work practice is only possible and relevant when the practitioner designing the intervention is firmly grounded in the reality of the life of those he/she wishes to change" (p. 4). The fact that the majority of social workers do not live where their service users reside underscores the significance of this position. Understanding the context, of course, would help practitioners become better aware of their own biases towards life in inner cities.

Part II details different types of programming in the arts, humanities, and sports fields that can be implemented for youth development in urban cities. Eight case studies, covering materials on the context setting, project information, and lessons learned, are presented. Of particular importance are the "best practice" organizational characteristics the author has identified as essential for quality programming. This is useful to anyone planning to initiate program in these new arenas. In part III, the case studies are followed by a discussion of a community social work framework, integrating the new practice arena with a generally available social work practice model of assessment, engagement, interventions, and evaluation.

While Delgado calls for developing program from the youth's perspective, his book ironically fails to do so. Although the author provides rich and detailed analysis by interviewing service providers, reviewing brochures, and observing program operation, voices from the youth themselves, which could provide a strong and powerful testimony, are notably absent.

Another limitation of this book is that very little empirical evidence is provided to demonstrate the linkage between program intervention and outcomes. It is understandable that a new arena of practice has not been fully evaluated. However, without

evidence, his ideas remain suggestive, rather than conclusive. Nevertheless, this is a useful primer for social workers interested in reconnecting our presence to the “real world” of neighborhood and community, a world where social work practitioners worked in the past, and should be engaged in the future.

Julian Chow

University of California at Berkeley