OVERVIEW

Research needs to be defined—as a state of mind, as a style (and stage) of ministry, as a process, and as a measuring and evaluation tool. Research is a function of social science, with highly refined means of choosing random samples, using controls, and rules of statistics. Increasingly, social science includes not only empirical and quantitative studies, but interview, narrative, and other qualitative techniques.

Practitioners of youth work can also make valuable use of surveys and questionnaires—without knowledge of calculus. If you use ten or a hundred interviews, or pass out the same round numbers of questionnaires, you have automatic percentages in figuring out your percentages. ("One out of ten or 10% of our respondents claimed no allegiance to the church."—or no knowledge of Moses, King David, or the Twelve Disciples. "About two thirds, or 65 percent, of young people polled, said they would attend a coffee house with live music at a neighborhood church.") If you receive, for instance, 17, 22, or 56 completed surveys, you can still figure out your percentages with a calculator. Of course, you cannot give the exact reliability or validity of your survey with percentage of possible error. We are saying then, that there are at least two levels of research: scientific research and practical research.

If you are an effective youth worker, you are doing research all the time: in casual conversations with young people, observing the context of their lives, listening to their music. We recognize this informal information-gathering as important research—and ask you to see how that investigation fits into the larger picture being presented here.

Consider some of the functions and importance of community and topical research:

- Gives youth an important voice; involves young people themselves in the planning process.
- Can stimulate young people’s interest in the youth group and coming discussions.
- Provides you with deeper and more personal insights into the youth
culture and minds of youth.
• Gives you further understanding of the context of your ministry.
• Will introduce you to people you might not have met.
• Is important in planning and evaluation.
• Needs + Resources (under Purpose Statement) = Goals
• Gives you crucial and impressive information for writing proposals and fund raising
• Will help you develop better public relations...in educating adults

COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Consider why Research is Stage Two (not One) of the Nine Stages of Youth Ministry and why? (Should research be considered Stage One, who would then own this research and what might be lost?—see Kumbaya, p. 228)

• What is my target population (by age and type, subcultures, etc.), and what is my target area?
• What are the larger contexts of my target area:
  • Town or neighborhood of a city
  • Region
  • Country
  • and larger contexts
• What are the geography and history of my target area?
• What are the economics and politics of my target area?
• What is the demography of my target area and how is it changing?
• What cultures and subcultures are here—especially among my target population?
• What are the special needs of this area and my target population?
• What assets or resources exist within this area and my target population? (Examine organizations, and the assets of youthful subculture.)
• Remembering that Needs + Resources = Goals (under your Purpose Statement), what might my program look like?
• What other programs exist in or around my target area?
• How can I best network with other leaders and key people?
• How will this research affect planning and evaluation of my program? Will this program represent—not only my vision—but the vision of my mission or sending community?
TOPICAL RESEARCH

Should we know as much about our market as advertisers do? The government and UN find research critical for planning. How can we get the information our ministry needs?

- What are the special issues that affect my target population (young people)? How can I use interviews and surveys more effectively?
- How can I find out more about these issues? Where is the information?
  - Newspapers and magazines.
  - TV.
  - Bookstores.
  - Music Stores.
  - Libraries.
  - Other organizations.
  - Universities.
  - Government.
  - Internet.

How can we effectively gather and organize this information?
- Study format of research presented in this course.
- Network with other youth leaders and develop a local resource center.
- Use the Center for Youth Studies and our Encyclopedia.

MINISTERIAL RESEARCH: EVALUATING OUR MINISTRIES (This is where we can use special help from empirical researchers.)

- Evaluating the purpose, goals, and functions of a program or youth ministry.
- Evaluating our contact and relationships with young people.
- Evaluating the fund raising, management, and cost effectiveness of our program.
- Evaluating the long-term effects of the program in young people’s lives.
- Evaluating staff growth, retention, and future effectiveness.
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

• Will you make a place for research in your ministry from now on?
• What do you see as the role of the Center for Youth Studies in this?
• Can you establish a resource room or center for youth studies in your youth work?
• How can CYS and its Encyclopedia help you in your future ministry?

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