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About *Youth & Policy*

Youth & Policy Journal was founded in 1982 to offer a critical space for the discussion of youth policy and youth work theory and practice.

The editorial group have subsequently expanded activities to include the organisation of related conferences, research and book publication. Regular activities include the bi-annual 'History of Community and Youth Work' and the 'Thinking Seriously' conferences.

The *Youth & Policy* editorial group works in partnership with a range of local and national voluntary and statutory organisations who have complementary purposes. These have included UK Youth, YMCA, Muslim Youth Council and Durham University.

All members of the *Youth & Policy* editorial group are involved in education, professional practice and research in the field of informal education, community work and youth work.

The journal is run on a not-for-profit basis. Editors and Associate Editors all work in a voluntary and unpaid capacity.

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'Youth club is made to get children off the streets': Some young people's thoughts about opportunities to be political in youth clubs

Humaira Garasia, Shazia Begum-Ali and Rys Farthing

Abstract

This article presents a 'bottom-up' view of a theoretical debate that is currently occurring about the nature of youth work practice. It is located in contemporary discussions about the individualisation and depoliticisation of youth work, and claims around the political apathy of young people. However, it explores these debates from a unique perspective; that of some young people themselves. From this perspective it becomes apparent that far from being a politically progressive practice, youth work is sometimes seen as a space where young people are actively discouraged from being political. It develops this argument by presenting findings from original research, conducted by young people. A small scale peer-to-peer research project was undertaken in London over 2014, and involved young people setting a research agenda, moderating focus groups, administering surveys, analysing data and, finally, co-authoring these findings. This research explored young people's sense of political efficacy, and where they felt they were able to be political. Sadly, youth work was not described as a space where young people could be political agents: in fact, it was often quite the opposite.

Key words: politics, youth work, progressive practice, critical pedagogy, democracy

PRACTICES THAT fall under the 'youth work' banner are complex and diverse, emerging from different backgrounds and value systems, and often oriented towards unique goals (Williamson, 1997; Furlong, 2013). Acknowledging this diversity, Furlong (2013: 245) suggests that four distinct pedagogies underpin the array of practices we currently call 'youth work'; pedagogies that centre around controlling young people, work that aims to socialise young people appropriately, practices that aspire to deliver informal education, and finally professional endeavours that aim to realise and reinforce youthful citizenships. But there is a long history of thinkers attempting to categorise and understand the myriad of practices that came to be called 'youth work'. Over two decades ago, Banks (1994) identified four distinct, but not discrete, praxes: personal and social development, preventative work, leisure based work, and youth social work. Way back in 1978, Butters and Newell (in Smith, 1988: 48) proposed three competing models of youth work: character building youth work, social education, and emancipatory youth work. Suffice it to say, youth work practice is and always has been a broad pursuit.

However, despite this immense diversity, a number of contemporary arguments suggest that current practice, through one means or another, is converging around a singular pursuit. Current day 'youth work', it is argued, is becoming a practice that orients solely towards controlling and regulating individual young people. Gone are the emancipatory, social/community developmental and citizenship pedagogies identified in the past, says these arguments; they have been superseded by practices that see individual young people as problems to fix. That is, some arguments suggest that where 'youth work' used to address social issues and identify collective solutions, contemporary practice has narrowed its focus down to atomised young people. These arguments have been presented in a number of different forms, by different authors, but below we synthesize six to outline the broad trend in thinking.

Firstly, as an example, there are arguments that suggest the dominant policy framework that guides much contemporary youth work practice – neoliberalism – undermines notions of community and community development. Under neoliberalism 'youth work' becomes stripped down to providing individual services to individual young people (Nicholls, 2012: 52). In response, the role of young people, as citizens, is reshaped and reformed into simple consumers of services provided by (or increasingly commissioned by) a minimal state (MacDonald, 2006: 74-76). For example, the failed attempt to introduce Connexions *Opportunity Cards* in the UK was an attempt to reduce youth work to the provision of individualised, personal services (Nicholls, 2012: 52; Bunyan and Ord, 2012: 22).

Secondly, it has been argued likewise, that the role of youth workers is transformed by this neoliberal turn. Their role becomes to promote self-reliance and enable responsibility among individuals; to undertake youth work 'projects of the self' (Jordan, 2004:9; Kelly, 1999) rather than projects of the social. For example, it has been suggested that one of the symptoms of a neoliberalising practice – the rise of managerialism – runs 'counter' to some of youth work's core values (Fuller and Ord, 2012: 54), including the notions of youth workers as 'activists and campaigners' for social change (Miller, 2010 in Fuller and Ord, 2012:133). Undermining youth work's capacity for campaigning, via the introduction of managerial techniques such as targets, reduces the ability of youth workers to act as political change agents. It instead forces them, for example, to focus on delivering a set schedule of personal developmental services to individual young people.

Thirdly, it has been suggested that some policies and guidelines are veering towards 'authoritarian' models and methods of practice. For example, in evaluating children's well being, workers in the UK are required to ask deeply normative questions, such as if a 'parent teaches [their children] respect for the law', reflecting an emergent 'fixation' with the personal behaviours of families and service users (Garret, 2003:445). Likewise, on the first page of *Youth Matters*, a British governmental youth policy document, was a claim that positive opportunities for young people should be denied to those who behave anti-socially (DfES, 2005:1), twinning access to youth services and youth workers to the behavior of young people themselves. This, we suggest, also

reflects an emergent focus on the behaviours of individuals, rather than social concerns like inequality or discrimination.

Practices that are now called 'youth participation' often replicate this authoritarian focus on individual young people's behaviours. It has been argued that 'participation' too often aims to ensure that individual young people comply with agendas set by decision makers, rather than giving them their own independent voice to air their own ideas and concerns (Bessant, 2003; 2004). Many youth policies blur the intentions of 'participation' with the desire to make individual young people 'fit in to' government policy agendas (Farthing, 2012), conflating 'youth participation' with the concept of 'social inclusion'.

Fourthly, the language and discourse of youth work, it has been suggested, has been shifting more towards words that describe youth work as individualised service delivery, and young people as problems. For example, the language of 'youth justice', which linguistically implied a focus on fairness and reasonableness, has moved towards the language of 'youth offending' (Sharland, 2006) which foregrounds the actions of already criminalised young people. Likewise, the word 'empowerment' within youth work has been increasingly co-opted to describe a personal form of empowerment, where individual young people are 'empowered' to achieve positive outcomes already defined by adult decision makers (see, for example, Bessant, 2003), rather than a focus on empowering young people to challenge their own marginality.

There are also arguments that imply that youth work is increasingly moving towards targeted interventions, rather than generalist service provision. This is our fifth example, and suggests that if the practice is 'inextricably tied up with the construction of social problems it is supposed to solve' (Bradt and Bouverne-De Bie, 2009), youth work, then, becomes a tool to 'fix' the problem of 'excluded' or 'vulnerable' young people. It orients itself towards seeing young people themselves as 'problems' waiting to be cured (see, for example, Bunyan and Ord, 2012).

Finally, it has been suggested that youth workers, and workers with young people are becoming inherently 'moralised' (Garrett,2003:448; Deacon, 2000:11). Their practice relies increasingly on enforcing social moral codes on young people. As 'moralised' agents, youth workers must implicitly focus on the moral ills of individual young people, rather than generating social change.

While these are six quite disparate examples, they are unified in suggesting that youth work is shifting focus away from working with young people as unproblematic members of a problematic society – which may require a focus on progressive social change – to working with young people in order to fix their own, individual problems – an inherently conservative pursuit. While emancipatory and socially focussed youth work may have never been a dominant focus of the profession, these arguments all point to a further shift away from these sorts of practices. Youth work, these arguments contend, is becoming less about helping young people to realise their

rights, less about empowerment and tackling social development, and more about controlling and regulating young people so they 'fit in' (Coussée et al, 2009) to an established social order.

Nowhere was this claim more powerfully articulated than in an open letter penned by a group of British youth workers in 2009:

> *Thirty years ago Youth Work aspired to a special relationship with young people. It wanted to meet young women and men on their terms. It claimed to be 'on their side'. Three decades later Youth Work is close to abandoning this distinctive commitment. Today it accepts the State's terms. It sides with the State's agenda* (IDYW 2009).

Youth workers are not alone in these broader debates. For example, social work, often affected by the same policy and funding forces, has been having similar debates about the co-option of its practices and the move towards becoming the 'tutelary bureaucracy' (Pease and Fook, 1999; Sharland, 2006) and replacing the 'social' with 'individualism' (Wallace and Pease, 2011). As Jordan (2004:6) cuttingly put it, social work has shifted from:

> *… being at the cutting edge of policy innovation in the post-war welfare state, to identification with many of the themes of personal liberation and anti-discriminatory collective action in the 1960s and 1970s, to the implementation of government policies for risk assessment, rationing and enforcement in the past decade.*

Likewise, it has been argued that community development work has changed to emphasise depoliticised versions of development, over adversarial forms of change (Bunyan, 2010).

This change arguably represents a deeply conservative tendency emerging within a profession that previously saw itself as having a progressive focus. Focussing on the individual in youth work is an inherently political act. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001: 40) put it, focusing on the individual:

> *… takes sides in political debate in two ways: first, it elaborates a frame of reference which allows the subject area – the conflicts between individuals and society – to be analysed from the stand-point of individuals. Secondly, the theory shows how, as modern society develops further, it is becoming questionable to assume that collective units of meaning and action exist.*

An individually focused youth work, it could be argued, is part of the ongoing process of the relentless individualisation of policy and practice. This sees governments shift responsibility for social ills on to individuals themselves, so that individual young people become compelled to find 'biographic solutions to systematic contradictions' (Beck, 2007:685, see also Brodie, 2007; Bauman, 2001). For example, young people become compelled to find individual solutions to 'sell'

themselves in the midst of a historically collapsed youth labour market. As such, the progressive potential of youth work becomes muted; it becomes a practice oriented towards ensuring that young people fix themselves so they fit in to the established social order.

This is potentially significant for the profession because 'no professional practice can be apolitical' (Lewis, 2003:143). By focussing on individual young people as problems, and seeking to ensure compliance with the established social order, it is argued that youth work practice has the potential to at best overlook, and at worst deny, the impact of social problems on individual young people (Coussée et al, 2009:434).[1]

Rather than confronting the social dimensions of their practice, youth work comes to support the status quo, it becomes *depoliticised*. As Freire (1985:122) put it, ignoring potential conflicts does not make professionals neutral, rather it sides them with the already powerful (see also Becker, 1967). This shifting focus, then, represents a political choice; it is a depolitical decision, not an apolitical decision. Youth work is actively stripping itself of its progressive political capacity and adopting an inherently conservative depoliticised approach. On a macro level, for example, it means that youth workers, for example, would need to rationalise and work within existing social hierarchies, such as social structures that discriminate against the young, ethnic or working class, rather than challenging them (Reisch and Jani, 2012:1132). On a micro level, it means that hierarchies between young people and staff, for example, would likewise need to be accepted as just 'the world we operate in' and set the stage for their practice (Reisch and Jani, 2012:1132). This means youth work passively aligns itself with whatever political discourses and practices already dominate, from neoliberalism to patriarchy and disabilism, rather than challenging them. Through this process of becoming depoliticised, youth work paradoxically becomes an inherently political and deeply conservative pursuit.

The above, however, are all contentions emerging from experts' critical gaze. While there may be some overlapping consensus emergent around these arguments, from multiple 'human service' professions, such as social work (Jordan, 2004), youth work (Coussée et al, 2009) and community development (Bunyan, 2010), and from social theory (Beck, 2007; Bauman, 2001) and empirical research (Hopman, et al, 2012), this article instead aims to unpack this contention – that youth work has become depoliticised – using a small dataset generated by young people themselves.

During 2014, a group of young BME women from areas with high levels of deprivation in and around East London, worked alongside academics to explore political efficacy, and the 'spaces' in which young people felt they could exercise political agency. One of the 'spaces' interrogated in this peer-to-peer research project was youth clubs and other places with youth workers. Our findings, we argue, triangulate with the contentions raised above by critical youth work scholars, that contemporary youth work practice is inherently depoliticised in orientation, and therefore an agent of the status quo and conservation. We do not postulate, as others have, however, that

this represents a shift from earlier foci, or any other dynamic exploration, as our aim was to explore 'spaces' for political efficacy at one moment in time, in our lifetimes right now. Instead, we aim to present one on-the-ground view of the depoliticised nature of the youth work practice we experienced. While we appreciate its limited methodological scope, both geographically and temporarily, we suggest that this glimpse into young people's lives provides a meaningful insight in to the experience of some young people and some youth work practice. Moreover, we suggest that this perspective, the perspective of the 'youth workees' and their experiences, perhaps enriches the current contestations being offered around 'youth workers' and their practice.

Below, we outline our methodology, which was peer-to-peer and involved focus groups and surveys, and our findings. We present our broader findings around youth work and youth clubs as spaces to exercise political agency, and include a case study that emerged as part of our research as an illustrative example. We then turn to reflect on what these small-scale findings might mean, and how they might connect with literature around the depoliticisation of youth work and of young people.

Methods

This research was conducted by 12 young women from East London, who used peer–to-peer research to explore how young people utilised political 'spaces'. We explored what spaces were available to young people to be political within, and if and how these 'spaces' were used. We developed our research aims independently, and subsequently co-developed our research questions with academics from Oxford University. We had a very exciting day in Oxford University, where the academics were able to advise and provide feedback, without dictating what should be done, therefore allowing us, young people, to lead the research. The academics were able to answer all our questions and guided us with practice on how to ask questions without being biased or leading in different situations.

We began by identifying potential 'spaces' for young people's politics which we could explore, established from previous literature and inductive 'hunches' based on our own life experiences. The spaces we decided to interrogate were:

- traditional political spaces, specifically national politics,
- a further traditional space, in local politics,
- schools,
- family,
- social media, and
- youth clubs and with youth workers.

Establishing these spaces as specific sites to explore aided our research as it allowed us to narrow down our questions and investigations, which added clarity to our data as our research became

focused. Previous literature suggested this could be a very broad topic, so focussing on six potential spaces helped focus our work.

Having identified these specific spaces, we then turned to co-develop our methodology. We decided to use focus groups and survey as our methods, as we felt these matched our research questions. We developed a focus group schedule that began with asking some more open questions, in order to introduce the political theme in general, and then lead on to specific questions about each space. These allowed us to explore what young people define as politics and how they express their political views, if any, as well as if and how they were using each space.

We ran five, two hour focus groups with 27 participants, who were recruited at schools, youth clubs and within our families. Participants ranged from 12 to 18-years-old, although the majority were 15 to 17. They were of mixed genders, and extremely ethnically diverse. Only two of our participants identified as 'white', with one of them recently migrating to the UK. Our sample included many young people who identified as Bengali, Pakistani, Turkish and Iranian. They were also all from three inner London boroughs with extremely high levels of deprivation (see table one). Our findings then, come from young people who we could imagine are doubly disaffected from politics, firstly by ethnicity and secondly by deprivation.

Table one: The relative child poverty and multiple deprivation rates across the areas we worked in (End Child Poverty 2014, DCLG 2011).

	Child poverty rate in 2014[2]	Index of multiple deprivation, 2010 – number of 'small areas' that rated in the top 10% most deprived across England[3]
Hackney	41%	42%
Tower Hamlets	49%	40%
Haringey	36%	29%
England average	25%	10%

We ran our focus groups in a location we felt was suitable for young people – Nandos. We felt Nandos was a relaxing environment, it was well known among participants and in east London, serves Halal food. Also, for some of the young people, Nandos was a motivating factor that encouraged them to participate in our focus groups! The young researchers moderated each focus group, as we felt that focus groups of exclusively young people created a more safe and conducive place for participants to speak freely. An academic and a youth worker were present at Nandos, but after collecting consent forms and checking recording equipment, returned to their own tables. Focus groups were recorded and later transcribed, a task we handed over to supporting academics. We found the transcripts invaluable; we were able to go back to the answers of the participants, which added reliability to our findings as we did not have to extract conversations

through memory that is not always accurate, whereas the recording is the actual voice of the participant.

After the transcripts were collected, we undertook training on data analysis, and coded our transcripts thematically. We used what we have called the 'kitchen table' method, involving multiple coloured pens, scissors and blue tack rather than computer assisted packages. This was a pragmatic choice; we did not have access to enough laptops or software packages and it allowed us to work together as a group, and using the 'kitchen table' method, we could physically see what we were all doing and deciding. Coding data consisted of reading the transcripts together, which took many hours, and then deriving key themes from the data. We then applied these key themes to all the transcripts, colour coding each transcript, in order to understand what we had been told by participants thematically.

Once we had finished our focus groups, we used our initial findings, and the coding schema we had developed, to produce surveys that further explored some of our emergent findings. Surveys were handed out in a school and two youth clubs, both undertaking the National Citizen Service at the time. This allowed us to get a wider insight, as the school group and the young people from the youth club could have different perspectives; they were either studying politics or trying to be more active citizens. In total we had 42 young people taking part, again from the same inner London boroughs and, albeit unexpectedly, from a similar ethnic make-up to the focus groups. This two-stage process ensured we had a wide range of thoughts and ideas from young people who declared that they did not know much about politics (many of our peers in the focus groups), to young people who were studying or doing politics.

In total, our findings consisted of six key themes, two of which are developed below. We co-developed a dissemination strategy for these findings, which included presenting at three academic conferences, writing a report and launching it in parliament, and co-writing this article. We have handed over writing the introduction section of this article to supporting academics, as the task of summarising existing academic literature is immense (and academics love obscure words), but we felt these connections were necessary to highlight to add weight to our small-scale findings. However, writing that was not our current priority while we finish our A-levels and BTECS or work (and academics are paid to do this). Regardless, the arguments underpinning the introduction, and the words in the methods, findings and conclusions, and importantly, the research conducted, reflects a year's worth of work together. The findings elaborated in this article are the findings around young people's ideas about youth clubs and youth work as 'spaces' for youthful politics, and we believe, provide an alternative vision of the discussions academics and youth workers are currently having about their own practice. We have used as many quotes from participants as possible, in order to let you hear from young people themselves as much as we can.

Findings

Our research uncovered six key findings that we could discern, two of which relate directly to youth work practice. Firstly, we discovered quite quickly that for the young people we spoke to, speaking about issues that were important to them, or 'talking' politics, was seen as a very different concept and process to being heard about important issues so we could try to make a change, or 'doing' politics.

This distinction was important, as it gave us a greater insight into what 'politics' young people felt they were able to engage in across each of the six sites we looked at, with some spaces allowing young people ample opportunity to 'talk' about politics, but few listening to and, therefore, providing much scope to 'do' politics.

This became our second key finding; that most of the spaces we explored did not, for our participants, provide the opportunity for them to be heard about issues that were important to them (see table two).

Table two: Our findings and indicative quotes about young people's sense of being able to speak about issues, and being listened to about issues, in various spaces.

Space	Can we talk about issues that are important to us?	Are we listened to when we talk about issues?
National politics	No *'No, this is coming from experience. Normally, us the public have the chance to meet our MPs in charge, yet when (our MP) was in charge, she was rarely ever in her office or they would say they would call you back, but never did.'* 16-year-old	No *'No because again I do not have enough power to do so or importance.'* 15-year-old
Local politics	No *'There are chances to volunteer, but that's it.'* 16-year-old	No *'I think I'm a bit alienated, but I don't know what to say.'* 17-year-old
Social media	Yes *'It's very easy to speak out on social media because everyone*	No *'I think we're like a bunch of children screaming in a loud*

	has their own account, that they control.' 17-year-old	*room, and they're giving us free speech but they're not really taking anything in to account. So basically, we're just expressing ourselves, but none of it is getting taken in.'* 16-year-old
Schools	Yes *'Yes at school in classroom discussions.'* 15-year-old Debating groups were mentioned multiple times as well as places to talk about important issues, but tellingly, we couldn't say what we believed, rather had to argue for the side we were told to.	Mixed, mostly yes *'I think that prefects, some of the prefects or some of the head boys or head girls they actually do make an impact on our school. For example, we've got lockers in our school now, and chips are back on the menu, finally, which is another good thing.'* 14-year-old But many nos as well *'I don't think schools give students much of a voice. While there is a student council, I think it merely window dresses the issues. Teachers are unwilling to compromise.'* 16-year-old
Families	Mixed, mostly yes *'My family and I discuss issues regularly' 16-year-old and 'I argue with my little sister all the time! (about issues)'* 15-year-old But many nos as well *Yeah, it (talking to my family about issues) would be like 'Shut up. Why are you trying to be smart?"* 16-year-old	Yes *'If I gave good enough reasons, yeah (my family would listen to my views).'* 14-year-old
Youth work	Mixed, generally no (discussed below)	No (discussed below)

What was notable was the limited number of spaces where young people felt like they were actively listened to when they talked about issues that were important to them. These were the spaces where young people felt like they were able to engage with decision-makers and those with power, where they could make changes and be effective political agents. Where people listened to them, young people felt able to be political agents and 'do' politics. The two spaces where young people felt they could 'do' politics were, perhaps happily, both institutions that, generally, young people engage with frequently – families and schools.

Being able to be heard, and make changes in these spaces, was often talked about as empowering and encouraging, in spite of the lack of political agency we have in other, traditional political domains. As one young woman put it:

> *I've been political in school when I wrote a letter to my head teacher and I said 'you should make this teacher permanent and give him a permanent job' and they did it. Boris Johnson wasn't there! Alright. David Cameron weren't there. But it was just me, taking the power to, the rights I have and using them.* 17-year-old

What was disturbing and surprising, however, was these young people's responses when we asked them if they felt they could talk about issues that were important to them, and be heard, in youth clubs or other places with youth workers. All of the focus group respondents, and troublingly the majority of the survey respondents, said no. Youth clubs felt like disempowering spaces for our research participants.

As one of our focus groups outlined it:

Amira, 16:	*But youth clubs, I don't think they do (make things happen). They will take your opinions, they will tell you to just gather around.*
Salina, 16:	*They are just having fun.*
Uma, 16:	*They will write loads. They will show you the way to do it, but then that's it. 'That was fun, now you learned'.*
Amira:	*It's like we have it up for discussion but…*
Uma:	*It's for show.*
Salina:	*Yeah, nothing takes action.*
Amira:	*They just try to make you practise. They try making you excited. They will be like 'One day you should become a politician.' No, I don't want to be a politician. You can get my opinion through … you don't have to be a politician to get your opinion through, I don't think.*

Sometimes, this was contested by participants who had been involved in youth councils or youth forums, but the general perception was that youth clubs the participants attended, and other places

of youth work, were more to have fun than 'do' politics. They were seen as places where you may be encouraged to 'do' politics when you get older, but not as spaces to get active now:

Aaila, 17:	*It's not even that, you know youth clubs don't even support you. I swear they don't even support you.*
Naaz, 17:	*It's just letting off some steam, just to socialise.*
Aaila:	*It's not even that. Youth club is made to get children off the streets.*
Naaz:	*Yeah, that's what it is.*
Aaila:	*That's what it is. It is what it is. They are making us do things. They are just trying to get us excited saying 'You are going to make change, you are going to make change' but where is the change at? Like how are we going to make change? They are like 'You will make a change'…*
Tahani,18:	*What about youth forums because…*
Aaila:	*No, I have never used one in my life.*
Tahani:	*…for example like me, I have been involved in one. In Hackney there are like loads of youth forums and usually in youth forums…*
Naaz:	*What's that?*
Tahani:	*They are just like clubs but you do more of the campaigns and things that you care about. You just do campaigns and events.*
Aaila:	*We do that in school but we didn't see a change for the last five years. I was in my (schools council). We didn't see no change.*
Tahani:	*I saw a change.*
Aaila:	*Yeah, they put blazers on us, but that's the change.*
Naaz:	*The uniform changed.*
Tahani:	*If you are proactive you can. Like I…*
Naaz:	*Trust me, you can't.*

While Tahani did see a change through engagement with her youth forum, she had a difficult time convincing her peers of this, who all appear to have had very different experiences.

These perceptions were perhaps reinforced by a number of negative stories that had been circulating among young people about youth work not being a site of contemporary youthful political action. From discussions about young mayors who 'do nothing', to youth clubs that told young people not to ask this question or that question in a community event, the peers we spoke to were, to a large extent, all aware of stories that made them think of youth clubs as spaces where they weren't able to be political agents, excluding a few who believed they were able to politically aware and active.

A telling case study

Below, two focus group attendees describe their experience of 'doing' politics with a youth club

they previously attended. They described how an external research student had facilitated a few sessions, where they worked to develop a list of ideas to improve young people's lives in their area. They were proud of their list, so had subsequently planned to write a letter to their mayor to share their ideas. However, for undiscussed reasons, their youth club did not want them communicating with their mayor:

Zerina, 16: *Our youth club didn't want us to do it.*

Meela, 16 *(moderator): Oh yeah?*

Zerina: *They told us to like… if you want to do it, go do it in your time. So we got on time and we did it.*

Tasnim, 17: *And then we boycotted the youth clubs.*

Zerina: *Yeah, rebels!*

Tasnim: *They told us not to do it, but we wanted to do it so we just went and did it and then we left the youth club.*

Zerina: *Our own youth club didn't support us. They took us to separate rooms and they told us if you want to carry on (and write to your mayor) the youth club can't support you because we don't support you, but if you want to do it… they just said you guys can't do it. Then one of our other youth workers, she was really supportive in secret. She was telling us you should arrange your own. You should arrange your own time with (the researcher). That's when we contacted (the researcher) again and (they) contacted us telling us that if we want to do it we should do it in our own time. That's when we got the support from (the researcher) or else if we weren't given the opportunity then we would not be participating in anything to do with politics.*

The young women went on to describe how, instead, they were offered cooking sessions at the youth club, but 'boycotted' out of principle.

Here, young people were actively discouraged from exercising their political agency within a youth club. While it was a youth worker who secretly encouraged the young women to remain engaged, it was done so outside of a youth work setting so their 'own' time was politically activated, while youth club time was placated with food.

However, these negative stories did not appear to be known by all the young people we spoke to or surveyed. Among many of our survey respondents, for example, there was an optimism about the potential of youth work, albeit among those who declared that they did not attend youth clubs; 'I'm not sure if any changes happen in youth clubs. I suppose youth clubs listen to the youth's issues'. Confusingly, while most of the young people who did not attend youth clubs were from our school survey, a number of young people who said they did not attend a youth club were surveyed within a National Citizen Service programme, which was being run by youth workers in a community

centre. This does raise questions about what participants thought youth work and youth clubs were, when they completed the survey.

While more respondents in our survey than in our focus groups felt that youth work was a site where they could talk about issues that were important to them (perhaps reflecting the optimism of non-attenders or a positive effect of the National Citizen Service), very few suggested they would be listened to. For example, one respondent replied to the question 'Can you talk about issues that are important to you in youth clubs or with youth workers?' with 'with friends and youth workers, yes', but followed up immediately by answering 'are you listened to when you talk about issues important to you in youth clubs or with youth workers?' with 'nope'. This was a familiar pattern in the data among those who indicated that they had been to a youth club.

Conclusions

Above we have presented the on the ground experience of some young people's experience of youth work in deprived inner London areas. Largely, they spoke about youth clubs as not being places where they felt they could be political agents, or occasionally, as spaces where they had been politically silenced.

However, there were some young people who felt they had been able to be political agents within youth work settings, such as youth forums, and not all of these young people's experiences were negative. For example, in the case study we presented above, it was a youth worker who in secret encouraged these young women to push on with their letter to the mayor. What was troubling, however, was that this needed to happen in secret, and that the majority of our research participants told us they did not feel they were able to be political agents in youth clubs. This might suggest that, despite the best intentions of individual youth workers, the narratives outlined in the introduction, which suggest that youth work practice is becoming depoliticised, are being played out in some inner London youth clubs.

We are not suggesting that this research is generalisable, and there may be some youth clubs in inner city London and elsewhere that encourage young people to take part in political discussion and action, making the young people more aware. However, we hope this encourages pause for thought. If youth work is meant to be underpinned partly by empowering pedagogies, that encourage youthful citizenship, emancipation and socially focussed development, this small study suggests that it can potentially be depoliticised to a point where it becomes a politically conservative practice. It can be seen as a service just to 'get children off the streets' rather than a progressive practice.

Given that young people are so often criticised as the politically disinterested generation that will cause a crisis of democracy (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Farthing, 2010; Henn et al, 2002:167),

the potential depoliticisation of youth work is especially worrying. There has been much concern about young people's increasing political disengagement, amplified by research documenting declining voter turn-out, declining party memberships, and young people's increasing cynicism about the value of mainstream politics (Marsh et al, 2007; Harris et al, 2010; Henn and Weinstein, 2006). While we do not necessarily agree that young people are politically disinterested, and an alternate vision of young people as politically engaged is amplified in other research (Bessant, 2014; Dahlgren, 2005; Coleman, 2006; Bendicto, 2012) and indeed by many of the participants we spoke to, it is still troubling that youth work could be depoliticising. Where questions remain about the political aspirations of a generation, it might be a safer approach to ensure that a practice that works with young people encourages political efficacy.

Nicholls (2012:62) suggested that for young people, a retreat from politics might be a logical reaction to not being heard and not being able to make change: 'if nothing you can do within the projected political system will make any difference, it can be a logical decision to do nothing within it'. If it is depoliticised, youth work might become a practice that (among many others practices) actively turns young people off politics, and inadvertently contributes to declining democracy. While youth work may have multiple underpinning praxes and pedagogies, we're not too sure that decreasing the democratic potential of youth should be one of its outcomes.

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Notes

1 It is worth noting here that a professional focus on individual young people's problems may also reduce a practitioners ability to work on an individual level. As Rixon and Turney (2007) highlight, focusing on individual young people's risky behaviours draws attention away from the ways poverty and social exclusion can contribute to abuse and neglect (Furlong, 2013:254).

2 According to the UK's child poverty measure, 60 per cent of median household incomes, after housing costs.

3 A composite measure of deprivation that accounts for income as well as social and housing measures, for 'small areas' (Super Lower Output Areas).

Uncovering Youth Ministry's Professional Narrative

Allan R. Clyne

Abstract

In the current UK youth work climate, Christian work with young people is a growing discipline. The number of professional practitioners who operate under its banner, the volume of young people with whom it works and the body of literature which informs its practice all suggest it is developing both practically and theoretically. In this piece, I will analyse Christian work with young people through its literature. A close analysis of its writings suggests that, despite its complexity, this work operates within two distinct professional narratives; youth ministry and youth work. Having made this distinction I will focus on youth ministry, analysing aspects of its self-articulation and underpinning theories to reveal a distinctive professional narrative. These observations are not intended as pejorative judgements regarding its validity. Rather, the purpose in writing is to add a perspective to the youth ministry / youth work debate and create a platform for further discussion.

Key words: youth work, youth ministry, Christianity, churches, young people

THE SUBSTANTIAL growth of professionalised Christian work with young people is highlighted by Collins-Mayo et al (2010:23), who suggest there are 8000 'youth workers' employed through churches in England alone. Indeed some have made the claim that there are now more practitioners employed within this Christian environment than are practising within statutory provision (Brierley, 2000:8), although others have suggested a lower figure for Christian faith-based workers, around 5,500 full time equivalence, to that of 8,410 in the local authority (Barrett, 2006). It is worth noting, however, that these figures were calculated before the ongoing substantial cuts to statutory provision since 2010.

Similarly, there are likely to be organisations which self-articulate as 'Christian' but appear to share many of the values and outcomes of the wider youth work community. Indeed some are specifically funded by government to provide a predetermined service. In such an environment it is likely that professional paths will cross, with practitioners who have trained in one discourse practising in another – and in a world of short-term, part-time contracts some, perhaps, practising in both. Understanding youth ministry's relationship to youth work is important here, as many Christian training institutions are professionally accredited as youth work training institutions (Hayter, 2003). Recognising youth work as a professional discourse in its own right suggests that any discussion regarding Christianity's relationship to 'youth work' and the use of the term 'youth work' as a descriptor of a particular form of practice, requires dialogue which includes those from across the youth work profession.

Considering this growth in numbers and concurrent professionalisation, it is no surprise that there has been a burgeoning of specifically Christian literature (Doyle and Smith, 2002). This piece will focus on some of the more significant Christian writings, recognising that while this is illuminating, it is also limiting. However, it does have the advantage of revealing the thinking of leading practitioners and academics and their dominant ideas. Literature is also important as it plays a role in shaping a discourse, providing what Foucault called its 'internal rules' (1972: 220). Consequently, if we are to fully understand Christian work with young people, an analysis of its literature is essential. By publishing within *Youth & Policy* my aim is to promote wider understanding and encourage debate. To that end this piece should be considered as part of the renewed interest of Christian faith-based practice within the wider youth work field (Smith, 2003; Smith et al, 2015).

As previously mentioned, Christian work with young people in the UK can be interpreted as an endeavour functioning in two distinctive professional narratives, youth ministry and youth work. While this may be challenged by some within the field, I believe there is sufficient evidence to advance this perspective. After evidencing this interpretation, the remainder of this piece will focus on developing our understanding of youth ministry, starting with a review of one of its most significant models of practice, Relational Youth Ministry. This will give us a window through which to access other aspects of youth ministry's self-understanding; its internationalist construction, its underpinning theories and suggested philosophies. Finally, by gathering these observations together we can present an informed perspective on youth ministry's practice and demonstrate there is sufficient evidence to confirm youth ministry as a unique professional narrative. Our first step towards this is to understand how Christian work with young people self-narrates its practice within the UK.

Interpreting Christian Work with Young People within the UK

In setting out to uncover the nature of Christian work with young people, we are faced by an array of models and descriptions. Doyle and Smith (2002) suggest five different models, whereas Pugh (1999) suggests four. My own research discovered twenty-six differing job titles from a group of 110 practitioners (Clyne, 2008: 27). These, along with a multiplicity of distinctive descriptions of practice, present the external observer with a confusing repertoire of images.

The internalised nature of the discussion around Christian work with young people has resulted in a number of unique descriptions of practice. For example, Doyle and Smith (2002) suggest that the term 'youthwork' (as one word without spaces) is an exclusively Christian term, as in *Youthwork Magazine*, a Christian publication. This is also used in conjunction with other descriptive terms; Relational Youthwork (Griffiths, 2013; Ward, 1995b), Incarnational Youthwork (Hickford, 2003; Nash, 2008; Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008; Ward, 1996; Ward 1997). Alongside this are other titles; *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Yaconelli, 2006), *Post modern Youth Ministry* (Jones, 2001), *Youth*

Work and Ministry (Brierley, 2003), *Sacralised Youth Work* (Nash, 2011b), *Christlike Ministry* (Griffiths, 2008), *Pioneer Youth Ministry* (Dolby and Passmore, 2012) and *Symbiotic Youth Work* (Passmore et al, 2013). While this variety of models, the list of job titles and the popularity of adjectives is worthy of a paper in its own right, here it serves to highlight the internal debate around Christian work with young people. Often these varying titles are used to create distinction from other forms of Christian practices and from what is sometimes referred to as 'secular youth work' (Bardy et al, 2015: 99; Davies, 2004: 17; Free Church College, 2014; Gregory, 2006: 11; Hayter, 2003: 11; Langdon, 2004: 105).

This multiplicity of definitions might lead the external observer to conclude that it is not a unified profession, but a field of practice operating within a Christian discourse. In addition, this internalised language presents a further challenge, that while expressions look the same, they might mean something completely different. For example the description of Christian Youth Work as it is presented in a book of that title, *Christian Youth Work* (Ashton et al, 2007) gives a definition of practice at odds with how youth work is generally interpreted in the UK:

> *Christ does not teach us to support the personal development of young people so that they may realise their full potential… The first aim of Christian Youth Work must be to present a young person with the claims of Jesus Christ* (Ashton et al, 2007: 20).

Griffiths also presents a distinctive image of practice when he writes regarding youth ministry, discussing it interchangeably as Christian youth work:

> *Youth ministry is, first and foremost, a spiritual ministry. It is out of a rich personal spirituality that we are able to form relationships which make a difference… the primary calling of a Christian youth worker is not to understand theories or management styles or even current legislation. The primary calling of a Christian youth worker is to know the will of the Father and to model his or her ministry on that of Jesus Christ… everything we teach youth workers—the theories, the theology, the good practice, the professional values—must support this primary goal* (Griffiths, 2013: 11).

From these quotations it is clear that a non-Christian youth worker who engages with a 'Christian youth work' project built on Ashton et al's interpretation of 'Christian Youth Work' is likely to encounter an alien endeavour that has little commonality with their understanding of youth work. If they were to encounter a model of practice in-tune with Griffiths' understanding of youth ministry (and, interchangeably, Christian youth work) as laid out below, which includes a commitment to addressing social injustices, they might encounter a form of practice that shares many ideals with Belton's *Radical Youth Work* (2010):

> *The challenge, then, is to recognize that Jesus is interested in the circumstances of those to*

> *whom we minister who may be oppressed because of their age or the colour of their skin or the earning potential of their parents... What we need to do is bring Christ to bear on their life circumstances. Injustice is evil. Oppression is evil. Christ will confront sin, evil, poverty, injustice and oppression and a credible salvation ministry is based on a Christology that emphasises this* (Griffiths, 2013: 66).

Griffiths' writing is also indicative of a growing commitment to holistic work within the Christian discourse (Nash, 2011a; Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008: 90). However, he takes time to warn of inadvertently losing its conversionist aspect and becoming a solely 'social work' ministry (2013: 63). It also reveals another prevailing trend, the tendency within Christian writing to use the terms 'youth work' and 'youth ministry' interchangeably (Nash, 2011b; Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008; Saunders, 2013; Ward, 1997). This further complicates any attempt by those in the wider youth work community to understand what is being written about, and limits any attempt to interpret these practices through titles alone. It also makes it difficult to write about without having to continually qualify the terms used. In this article, for reasons presented below, I will paraphrase the subject matter of these writers as 'youth ministry' and reserve the term 'youth work' to express a professional discourse as it is generally understood in the wider sector.

While all the titles used in Christian practice set out above may differ in a number of aspects, they are all broadly in tune with Ward's perspective that youth work has become secular and lost its spiritual direction (Ward, 1996: 2; Ward, 1997: 73).[1] They set out to define a peculiarly Christian practice and are largely confined to practitioners within the Christian youth ministry discourse. For example, Ward suggests that youth ministry is better understood as being in line with the role of church clergy (Ward, 1997: 3), a perspective echoed in the calls for the ordination of youth ministers (Berry, 2006; Hoskins, 2006). This chimes with Griffiths' (2013) view, which anchors good youth ministry in the spiritual veracity of the worker. In contrast, a number of practitioners have suggested an alternative locus, setting out to implant Christian work with young people within the youth work discourse (Brierley, 2003; Ellis, 1990; Green, 2010; Passmore, 2004; Pugh, 1999; Richards, 1999). For example, Passmore writes ' I fully endorse the fundamental principles of Youth Work: empowerment, participation, equality of opportunity and informal education' (2004:15).

He goes on: 'I want to lose the term "youth ministry" as it has too many connotations and links to the ecclesiocentric position' (2004:20). Brierley takes another approach and suggests he is bringing together the values of youth work and the practice of youth ministry. He terms this 'youth work and ministry'; youth ministry as a specialism within youth work. While he suggests he is reuniting Youth Work to youth ministry, bridging a gap (Savage et al, 2006:17), what Brierley has done is to express youth work from a theistic, rather than secular discourse, what we might term Christian faith-based (CFB) youth work. His focus on what he calls 'the practice of youth work and ministry' (2003:149) through fellowship, worship and mission could all have secular counterparts;

association, personal authenticity and service, for example. That said, his role in re-validating youth work as a Christian endeavour is significant.

By drawing out the narratives within the literature there is sufficient evidence for us to suggest the following conclusions. Firstly, regardless of the variety of descriptions, Christian work with young people engages with the aim of enabling transformation which includes (sometimes exclusively) a turning to Christianity. This focus may be problematic as it appears to be in contrast with an understanding of youth work. Green writes:

> *Solving the problems for a young person by offering a single religious or political solution, or the conditional offer of belonging in exchange for membership, is not informal education and is not youth work* (Green, 2010: 117).

In a similar vein we should also consider Sercombe's observation, when he said that youth work, 'is not about telling' (2010a: 33). He also adds that '[i]t is absolutely legitimate for a young person's spiritual life to be one of the questions we pursue in the youth work encounter' (2010a: 33).

Secondly, while we can agree with Nash (2011a: xiii) that youth ministry is a broad discipline, it is misleading to describe all Christian work with young people as ministry. The examples above suggest that there are two distinct disciplines at work, youth ministry and youth work, and while we have highlighted that recently these terms have been used interchangeably, traditionally there have been some attempts to distinguish practice. For example, the idea that youth ministry works inside the church and reaches out; youth work operates outside the church and journeys with young people into faith (Savage et al, 2006: 17; Ward 1997: 1). Including this, if we draw together other differences we can begin to see the framing of two distinctive narrations of practice.

Through the literature an observable distinction emerges, between those who find the locus of their practice in terms of Christian ministry and those who perceive it as youth work (Campbell 2006: 12), between those who articulate their practice as grounded in their own personal spirituality, intentionally shared (Griffiths, 2008: 18; Griffiths, 2013: 11; Nash, 2009; Saunders, 2013: 22), and those who primarily articulate it in accordance with professional youth work values (Brierley, 2003; Passmore, 2004). A related difference might be suggested between those whose practice is led by prioritising the need for generating a Christian commitment (Collins-Mayo et al, 2010; Griffiths, 2013; Nash, 2011b) and those who are more holistic in their interpretation of Christianity (Brierley, 2003; Passmore, 2004). These two different emphases are summed up by Savage et al (2006: 17) who state that ' youth ministry tends to focus on transformative spirituality, whereas youth and community work is primarily working with formative spirituality'. A further suggested characteristic of youth ministry is that its participants generally hold to the same 'Christian' world view (Savage et al, 2006: 17).

While it might be said that these are differences of narrative rather than practice, as with any professional discourse they cannot avoid shaping practice, and are sufficient to enable us to concur with Hall when he writes:

> *I would define youth work as work with young people that is based on a professional system of values and skills that are shared beyond Christianity and which (for Christian youth workers) faith is a central motivating factor but it may remain implicit… youth ministry I define as work for a church or Christian organisation in which faith is not just a motivating factor, but the explicit purpose and message of the work* (2007: 14).

Accepting this, it is important to stress a number of caveats. I'm not suggesting CFB youth work practitioners are any less Christian than youth ministers, or that youth ministry is inherently more Christian, than CFB youth work. Also, I am not suggesting that youth work is more 'professional' than youth ministry or that these distinctions are easily discernible in practice. Within the Christian landscape and its menagerie of terms and descriptions, practitioners' job titles are likely to be tied to roles provided by their organisations, which may or may not reflect their actual practice. Other influences such as funding sources and the perceived aims of practice might also play a role. The literature suggests, that within Christian practice, there would appear to be a freedom to adopt 'youth work' or 'youth ministry' in an interchangeable manner. While Brierley (2003) might argue that this is because practitioners are youth workers all the time and youth ministers when the occasion requires, it is equally plausible to suggest the reverse, in that the practitioner sees themselves as being youth minister all of the time and adopts a youth work approach in certain situations. It might be easier to accept that someone who considers themself to be 'called to ministry' is likely to run an open youth club without setting aside their belief that its success is dependent on their own personal spiritual integrity, rather than the informal approach they adopt. A youth minister may be able to move between providing an open youth club and leading the youth fellowship without troubling too much about their title. Alternatively because of this duality they may take considerable care and trouble over their job descriptor.

With these caveats in place, what I am setting out to do here is to challenge the use of youth ministry and youth work as interchangeable narratives of practice, something which can only lead to an environment where both become devoid of any, but the most superficial of meaning. I am also suggesting that some descriptions of 'Christian youth work', Ashton and Moon's as cited above for example, may be better understood as being youth ministry, regardless of them using the term 'youth work'. What exists at present within the Christian sector is a confusing amalgam of the two professional narratives which inhibits us from gaining a clear understanding of its breadth. In what follows, I will focus on developing an understanding of what might be broadly termed 'youth ministry' (while recognising the nuances within its literature). I have deliberately avoided distinguishing between Christian faith-based youth work and youth work as it is generally understood, acknowledging that the articulation of youth work from within a Christian discourse

is worthy of a paper on its own. Here I am content to distinguish youth work from youth ministry and to acknowledge youth work is a professional narrative with recognised values, methodologies and competences which are rooted in a number of distinctive traditions and discourses (Furlong, 2013: 244; Smith, 1988: 51; Tett, 2010: 5). Accepting this, some attempt has to be made to delineate differences. Therefore at this point it is sufficient to suggest that youth ministry rhetoric is distinctive to that of youth work, and that youth ministry's loci of good practice is the spiritual integrity of the worker. To see this more clearly I will make a more detailed investigation of one of its dominant models of practice, Relational Youth Ministry.

Relational Youth Ministry

Relational Youth Ministry has recently become synonymous with the more Christian sounding title 'incarnational' youth ministry (Griffiths, 2013: 5). Pimlott and Pimlott suggest that it 'describe[s] the ways in which we as youth workers can endeavour to "be" Jesus to young people, enabling them to see Christ in us' (2008: 75). As a methodology it is meant to mirror the way Christ engaged with his society. Ward has written extensively on this approach (1995b; 1997) suggesting it is a vocation, a calling from God (Ward, 1995a: 15). It's overarching idea is that '"being with" gives the relational base from which evangelism might develop' (1997:13).

Relational Youth Ministry has a number of steps, the first being:

- Contact: 'Contact time is first and foremost about spending time with a particular group of young people' (Ward, 1997: 49). It is low impact engagement as young people live out their daily life.
- Extended contact: This involves moving away from the initial area of contact – going on a trip, or going for a burger with the young people. It can also involve the youth minister joining with the group of young people as they take a trip into town. In this case the youth minister hasn't organised anything they just go along with the group. This extended contact is purposeful as its intention is to deepen the relationship (1997: 52).
- Proclamation: This includes appropriate ways of sharing the Christian message. This also involves a shift in power, where the youth minister claims power back. Ward writes:

> *Proclamation involves another crucial change in the dynamics of the relationship between young people and the youth minister. The youthworker needs to come to terms with a movement away from being an adult friend who occasionally organises trips and events to someone who overtly tells the gospel message* (1997: 59).

This changing relationship includes three further aspects:

- Nurture: This 'is when people start to respond to the gospel' (Ward, 1997: 62).
- Church: Attending or establishing church; a worship community is a must (1997: 65).
- Independence: The ultimate aim is for the young person to become independent from the youth

minister. This is to be sensitively judged. Too much dependency is a form of religious abuse (Ward 1997: 66). Too quick and it may lead to confusion and 'chaos'.

More recently, the idea that a good relationship is sufficient to instigate a faith conversation has been challenged (Mayo et al, 2004: 52). Griffiths has also challenged some existing models of Relational Youth Ministry, with its Laissez-faire approach to engaging with young people (2008: 15), branding them 'an excuse for theological and ministerial laziness'(2008: 15; 2013: 3). He set himself the task of refreshing it, by highlighting some positive aspects; its focus on social justice, holistic wellbeing and its commitment to the young person regardless of whether they develop a faith perspective (Griffiths, 2013: 106).

From a youth work perspective there are some aspects of Ward's Relational Youth Ministry which might require further exploration. How does the practitioner balance their professional requirements against their 'friendship'? For example, many youth ministry programmes meet in the homes of the workers, they are more likely to share private telephone numbers, befriend young people on social media and socialise out-with the arena of practice. At an engagement level the opaque nature of certain boundaries may make some youth workers uncomfortable. This ambiguity of roles is touched on by Ward, in response to a potential shop-lifting incident, he advises:

> *The youthworker is not saying that shoplifting is wrong, therefore they must stop doing it. The youthworker is saying, however, that shoplifting is wrong and for my sake please don't do it. This is an appeal to relationship*. (Ward, 1997: 55)

This raises the question, of what should happen if the young person shoplifts while the youth minister is in the group. What responsibility does the youthworker have to the shop owner or wider community to ensure appropriate action is taken?

Similarly, there is also a duality of relationship when the youth minister organises trips away; being part worker, part friend. It is far from clear how the worker who is a friend should respond to issues such as, buying alcohol, drug taking, underage sex, without compromising the practitioner as a professional or vice-versa, compromising the friendship with the young people. To rely on the strength of relationship to maintain appropriate behaviour might be thought at best to be naïve. To request an act be stopped for 'my sake' also raises some questions about the youth minister's methodology of presenting clear ethical boundaries. It is precisely this ambiguity that causes Sercombe (2010b: 79) to suggest that friendship is an inadequate professional relationship for ethical youth work.

A similar ethical question arises in developing a 'friendship' with young people and then using their issues, struggles and conversations to acquire funding (Ward 1995a: 25). Selling yourself to the young people as a friend and presenting yourself to funding bodies as a project presents a clear

ethical dubiety, especially if the young people are unaware that this is being done. Can you honestly present yourself to a group of young people as a 'friend' and simultaneously complete a funding application which requires you to categorise them or set out proposed targets and outcomes?

However, perhaps the most serious ethical concern that youth work practitioners may have, is Ward's belief that the youth minister doesn't have to be clear from the outset that they have a conversionist agenda, rather they can choose an appropriate moment (Ward 1997: 58). This would contrast with Sercombe's view where 'If I am working for a faith organisation, they [the young people] should know' (2010a: 33). Ward's approach to Relational Youth Ministry suggests that although he has adopted a holistic understanding of practice, similar to other youth ministry models, he continues to frame it within a conversionist agenda.

Ward's understanding of Relational Youth Ministry juxtaposes it against both church-based youth ministry — 'the youth worker who is locked inside a church context is evangelistically and culturally severely limited' (Ward, 1997: 4), and youth work:

> *When youth work becomes a 'profession', young people tend to become a 'client group' or 'cases'. In Christian relational care a high priority is placed on the personal in relationships. Christian youth ministry is not a job, it is a calling. The sense of vocation and personal involvement in building relationships means that young people are treated essentially as friends, not cases or clients. The youth ministers are involved in the local community and in the lives of the young people for reasons which arise from the core of who they are, that is their faith commitment. In a sense Christian relational care rests on personal rather than professional relationships* (Ward, 1995a: 23).

From within youth work this critique is likely to be challenged. The monopolisation of the term 'relational' is questionable. Most, if not all, youth workers would understand relationship to be a core component of their practice. To have that descriptor applied solely to a model of youth ministry is bemusing. As Sercombe (2010a: 12) observes, defining the relational engagement with the young person as client is not about professional distance, it is ensuring that youth workers inhabit a purposeful ethical relationship of mutual respect. Many youth workers would also understand themselves to be involved in a vocational endeavour. What distinguishes youth ministry from youth work is not its commitment to relationship, but its proposal that good practice is first and foremost reliant on the spiritual veracity of the worker, its conversionist agenda and the distinctive professional and ethical boundaries.

US theologian, Andrew Root has influenced understandings of UK youth ministry practice. His text *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Root, 2007), in particular, has played a significant role in articulating youth ministry with Root also having been a guest lecturer at the Centre for Youth Ministry , England's largest

Christian youth ministry training programme. Jonny Baker, at the time, an influential voice in youth ministry, blogged in response to Root's book: 'I have just read andrew root's revisiting relational youth ministry. it really is an excellent book. if you teach youth ministry or are doing it or both i suggest you get a copy (sic)' (2008: web). Baker recommends this book despite Root using an example, albeit from a movie, of a youth counsellor using violence against a young person when they perceived the young person to have spoken inappropriately (Root, 2007: 181). Root sees this as being a positive act and this appears to have been accepted uncritically within the UK, although Baker does acknowledge some difficult aspects of translating examples of practice into a UK setting.

However, we also find a similar situation in a text from a UK author. In Hickford's (2003) book *Essential Youth: Why the Church Needs Young People*. Described as 'an essential book' (Saunders, 2013: 19), Hickford describes his time at a Boy's Brigade camp, where, because he sensed a failure to engage with the young people in a manner which would enable him to communicate the Christian message, he organised an impromptu assault on a neighbouring Scout camp, of which he writes: 'Crucially though, it completely changed the atmosphere of the camp and the lads' interest in Christianity. No longer was the Christian gospel threatening to their culture – it was actually leading the way' (2003: 148).

Drawing together the above would lead us to conclude that there are approaches within youth ministry which, from an ethical perspective, sit uncomfortably with youth work. Relational Youth Ministry's distinctive narration leads to distinctive boundaries, ethics and models of practice. However, we can also see that while conversion is important for all youth ministry, its relationship to other aspects of human flourishing is understood in a variety of ways. Some writers ignore it (Ashton et al, 2007), others accept it as an intrinsic part (Griffiths, 2013, Nash, 2011a). So to fully appreciate why it is that youth ministry has become shaped in this way we must look more broadly at its influences, some of which come from beyond the UK.

Youth Ministry's International Context

As we move the discussion forward, it should be understood that youth ministry is not a title indigenous to the UK. It is a global brand, strongly influenced from the USA (Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008: 25; Ward, 1996: 12, 27) and is generally evangelical in flavour. Evangelicalism has always had a transatlantic facet (Bebbington, 1988: 74; Rennie, 1994: 333) and youth ministry is no different (Borgman, 1999: ix; Kett, 1977: 201). Cannister (2001: 82) suggests youth ministry came into existence at the end of the nineteenth century and its continuing transatlantic nature can be seen in the names of agencies which continue to operate internationally. Similarly, within its literature stream, this transatlantic relationship can also be found. For example Fields writes in the acknowledgements in his book, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* (1998) of the support he received from Jonny Baker, at the time a leading UK youth ministry specialist. *Agenda for Youth*

Ministry (Borgman and Cook, 1998) draws together youth ministry specialists from both the USA and Europe, and, in another important publication, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and The Church* (Senter III et al, 2001) we find practitioners from the USA and South Africa comparing models of engagement with little regard for wider geographic or sociological distinctions. Ward's dual publication, *Youthwork and the Mission of God: Frameworks for Relational Outreach* (1997) which was republished in the USA as *God at the Mall: Youth Ministry That Meets Kids Where They're At* (2001), has been described by Doyle and Smith (2002)as a 'very significant book'. The American version includes a foreword by Dean Borgman (a leading USA youth ministry specialist) where he writes:

> *Pete [Ward] has had a profound impact on youth ministry in the United Kingdom and around the world… Professors and leaders have all been very impressed with Pete's style and wisdom…[and concludes with the words] you may feel a bit uncomfortable being confronted by this bright and challenging Brit. Please, push through it Don't miss the crucial questions Pete is raising for our profession in these critical times* (Borgman in Ward, 2001: ix-xi).

This global perspective is also evidenced by the existence of the academic organisation which unites youth ministry specialists from around the world, the *International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry* (IASYM).

These observations suggest that to enhance our awareness of the UK's interpretations of youth ministry, its transatlantic nature must be borne in mind. This internationalism has a distinctive theoretical base which we can now move on to explore.

Youth Ministry's Theoretical Base

Youth ministry's strong theoretical base is reflected in its literature which is infused with a number of distinctive theories. One of its foremost being an interpretation of the 'young person' as 'adolescent' (Adams, 1995; Nash and Palmer, 2011). Borgman considers adolescence to be a 'divine creation' (1999: 9) and views adolescents as ' the largest… unreached people group in the world' (1999: 4). Clark writes of adolescence as being, 'the only real marker available to youth growing up in Western and urbanized societies' (2001a: 47). It is worth noting here that although Adolescent Development contains a breadth of theories (Muuss, 1996), youth ministry literature appears to be committed to its psychological aspects. Gerali writes that:

> *Guys are wired differently from girls from the beginning. But when adolescence sets in, it can appear as though their wiring has gone bad… these days we have a better understanding of what makes guys uniquely masculine and how to help him navigate through the storm and stress of adolescence and onto manhood* (2008: 19).

From the UK we get a warning for youth ministers: 'adolescence is a minefield of change. Those who stomp around in minefields are likely to end up maimed' (Tilley 1995:59).

Perhaps we should not be surprised at the relationship between youth ministry and adolescent development theory. Kett writes that 'adolescent psychology came into the field from the direction of religion rather than education or criminology' (1977: 204), and that it was particularly influential in Christian work (1977: 236). This negative interpretation of adolescence chimes with Doyle and Smith (2002) who suggest that it is one of a number of 'dubious concepts' adopted by youth ministry. That said, the emphasis on adolescent theories might also reveal youth ministry's continuing American influence, where American youth work; youth development, is also influenced by these theories (Lerner, 2006) and where there is a strong focus on individual psychological wellbeing (Grotevant and Cooper, 1998: 20; Rattansi and Phoenix, 1997: 125).

More significantly, adolescence has also been accused of being a tool through which to promote middle class qualities in young people (Kett, 1977: 113; Sommer, 1978: 21). Also it is a concept which is understood to contain a number of unhelpful images, e.g. 'Storm and Stress' and biological determinism (Kett, 1977: 243; Wyn and White, 1997: 53-57). Lesko writes that:

> *[It]has a legacy that includes racism, sexism and classism and works to reinstate social hierarchies. Another problem with development is that it generally refers to what occurs at the intra-individual, and it is hard to paste on context to what is essentially an individualized phenomenon* (2001: 194).

Equally significant is that it subjectivises young people: 'The use of the term "adolescence" is a signal that the young people being referred to are being objectified, categorised and judged' (Wyn and White, 1997: 57).

Reviewing the above suggests that youth ministry's emphasis on adolescence is in contrast to youth work. Sercombe writes: '[W]hile the concept of adolescence continues to shape public discourse about young people, its rejection by youth work is well founded' (2010a: 17). However, it is worth noting here that as a term it is still used in some youth work literature (Wheal, 1999; Young, 2006).

A second categorisation occurring within youth ministry is in its commitment to generationalism (Codrington and Grant-Marshall, 2004; Kinnaman, 2011; Nash, 2011a) which can also carry negative overtones. Borgman writes: 'How can a generation programmed to act out individual indulgence, violence, and sexual promiscuity move back to responsible behaviour and regard for the common good?' (1999: xxiii). Within Christian literature more generally, Lynch observes that generationalism became influential in the 1990s. It stereotyped young people as being suspicious of institutional religion but yearning after 'meaning and community' (2010: 33). Lynch concludes that, while significant, generationalism is inadequate in aiding understanding of how people engage

with religion. He writes that it tends 'to encourage broad sociological typologies that account for religious and spiritual patterns across the whole of society' (2010: 34). A perspective in tune with Wyn and White's observation:

> *The notion of a `generation X', similarly, has been used to describe a generation without any real features or definitive characteristics except lack of a real presence in the world… [Which at an] analytical level, serve[s] to trivialise and make abstract the lived practices of different categories of youth in a way which distorts the social differences and diversity of experience among young people. Put simply, they provide a picture of young people which is factually incorrect* (1997: 77).

Thirdly, and not unconnected, is an emphasis on youth culture which, within the context of youth ministry can carry negative overtones (Hutchcraft, 2000: 5; Jones, 2001: 46; McDowell, 2000a: xi; McDowell, 2000b: 9). Here again we see youth ministry's transatlantic influence with Giroux observing that in American media youth issues begin to read more like `dispatches from a combat zone' (1996: 26).

Youth culture is also depicted as something contrasting adult culture (Borgman 1999: 73). Gerali writes: 'Being like an adolescent involves immersing oneself in their culture… A youth worker must understand that she is entering into another (foreign) community' (2001: 288). Equally strident is Gardner's observation that 'youth culture is a construct of our lifetime' which exists in conflict with wider culture, it has led to divisions in families, and 'divided whole nations in opposing political stances and differing definitions of what constitutes the moral consensus' (2008: 12). This confirms Strommen's observation that what he terms the 'fallacy' of the generation gap, has been uncritically accepted by youth ministry (2001a: 147).

In addition, a further problem with the use of 'youth culture' as a tool through which to frame practice is its generalising nature. Wyn and White write that 'the concept of youth culture takes on a descriptive and universalising character in much the same way as the notion of "generational consciousness"' (1997: 75).

Finally, within youth ministry the term post-modernism is widely used (Hickford, 2003; Jones, 2001; Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008). In terms of youth ministry it is often used as an inexact description which has created a new way of looking at the world, adopted by young people of the late twentieth, early twenty-first century (Jones, 2001). Again, within youth ministry it can be seen as negative in much the same way as youth culture (Dean, 2001: 29). However Bruce highlights a potential difficulty with these traumatic interpretations of postmodernity, claiming it to be 'too blunt an instrument,' it's distinctiveness often exaggerated (2002: 232). Kett (1977: 271) observed that 'raising postmodern youth culture to the level of a philosophy' was to place it within the universalising tradition of G. Stanley Hall.

Primarily, what we have uncovered here is that youth ministry has adopted theories to construct a theoretical base which fits a specific world view. Kett (1977: 74) also observed that some of these ideas, the world being a dangerous place, for example, have a long history in youth ministry, while others like youth being a distinct people group, are more recent concepts. This construction is in line with Noll's observation of more general evangelical practice where:

> *The distrust of inherited authorities – both ecclesiastical and educational – means that evangelicals have repeatedly attempted to invent first principles for themselves…At its best, much evangelical thought reflects savvy practical wisdom rather than thorough foundational reasoning* (Noll, 2004:244).

From a youth work perspective we can acknowledge that while all these theories contain valid and informative insights, if fused together they create a problematic lens, infused with an attitude of negativity through which to interpret the 'young person'. When used in a populist manner, these theories serve to objectify and generalise 'youth'. They encourage the 'othering' of young people and do not allow for differing social class, home environment, educational experience or regional, cultural or local social and community contexts.

These reflections on youth ministry suggest that its distinctive narration has shaped a peculiar practice, which, when combined with its internationalism, and its commitment to particular theoretical perspectives emphasises its unique nature. Moving on from these theories we now turn to a brief reflection on youth ministry philosophies.

Youth Ministry's Philosophy

Strommen summarises Field's 'philosophy of youth work', as set out below:

- Recognise God's power through personal humility …
- Submit your abilities to God and allow his power to work through who you are …
- Focus on being a person of God before doing the work of God …

suggesting that it is a 'A philosophy of youth ministry which centres in a partnership with God' (Strommen, 2001b: 121).

In the UK, Sally Nash edited a book, *Youth Ministry: A Multi-Faceted Approach*, where she suggested 'a philosophy for youth ministry' (2011a: xiii) which is framed in terms of Shalom and the desire to spread peace (2011a :xv). She provides a set of Bible verses through which she suggests that this philosophy of Shalom also concurs with the outcomes of the UK's Westminster government's Child safeguarding initiative *Every Child Matters*:

- Be healthy …
- Stay safe …
- Enjoy and achieve …

- Make a positive contribution …
- Achieve economic well-being … (HM Government 2003: 6-7)

It might be said these philosophical perspectives would benefit from more detail and that each is quite distinct from the other. However, they are similar in as much as they flow from within a Christian world view, with neither demonstrating any clear appreciation of structural inhibiters to human flourishing. In one sense, along with others (for example Shepherd, 2013) they tend to maintain our perception of youth ministry as having a distinct self-narration. They also differ from youth work whose philosophy has been suggested, by some in the 'secular' field, as phronēsis (a form of practical wisdom or praxis) (Ord, 2012; Smith, 1994: 76). At a practice level, these broadly defined philosophies are unlikely to address the universalising tendency of youth ministry theories which have assisted the development of generic product-focused, delivery-orientated approaches (Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008).

Product Focused Practice.

Within the UK, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that most youth ministry continues to operate within a generalising, product focused framework. Russell, writing from within this context, is perplexed at the '[v]ast resources have been made available for… Franchise Church…' (2007: 106). Other key voices have made similar observations (Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008: 75, Savage et al, 2006: 158).

This combined with a recognised over-abundance of ready-to-use resources (Doyle and Smith, 2002; Mallon, 2008: 63) has perhaps done more to shape youth ministry in the UK than any implicit understanding of the theories which underpin it. Both *Four Models of Youth Ministry* (Senter III et al, 2001) and Fields' (1998) *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, (PDYM) pay little heed to social or cultural variations. Programmes dominate and Clark asserts in the book's opening pages, that PDYM was to be 'the standard by which all youth ministry programmes are judged for years to come' (Clark in Fields, 1998: no pagination), with good youth ministry practice revolving around adopting the most appropriate model (Clark, 2001b: 110). The nature of this is compounded by what Oestergaard and Hall (2001: 213) suggest is a preoccupation in youth ministry: the hunt for the new, and the uncritical adoption of other models developed in different contexts. They go on to highlight the difficulty this creates: where practitioners utilise a methodology which is inappropriate for their local situation or the specific needs of young people.

According to Yaconelli (1999: 451), current American youth ministry models were created to engage with post world-war two white, middle class young people. They were built on a normative view of the young person, family and church (Borgman, 1999: 123) a situation, which according to some still persists (Senter III and Senter, 2010). The significance of this is that for UK youth ministry, sociologically speaking, many models adopted here are decades out of date (Clark, 2004:

4). The identification of youth ministry models with a specific social grouping would also appear to be true for the UK (Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008: 22; Savage et al, 2006: 17; Ward, 1996: 41). Ward (1996: 79) wrote that Christian work with young people 'on the edge of society' has generally lacked high levels of support. Simpson's (2008: 147-153)reflection on his work would confirm this. Therefore, in general it might be suggested that while it is not exclusively the case, much of youth ministry operates on a spectrum ranging from entertainment to conversion (Savage et al, 2006: 17) for middle class young people.

Before drawing these threads together I should also take time to acknowledge that there is a growing discomfort being expressed about youth ministry from specialists and researchers from the USA, where critical observations are being made. For example, it has been suggested that youth ministry, rather than supporting young people into adulthood has dumbed down the Church into an adolescent expression of the Christian faith (Bergler, 2012: 174; Senter III and Senter, 2010: 309). Equally serious, from a youth ministry perspective must be Smith and Denton's (2005: 171)suggestion that within the USA a different form of faith is developing unnoticed within religious traditions. What they term Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), what Dean called 'an imposter faith' (2010: 6). MTD is a world view which accepts the existence of a God who created the universe and watches over humanity. However, it also sees God as being generally distant from every-day life, except when he is called upon to intervene to resolve a particular troubling situation or issue. MTD is built around the belief that what God requires is for people to live a 'good' moral life and in return God will enhance their personal happiness and take them to heaven when they die (Smith and Denton, 2005: 162-171).

Further there is also a growing recognition that while youth ministry may be successful at maintaining contact with Christianised young people, it is failing to create a dynamic where these young people maintain that faith into adulthood (Dean, 2010: 11; DeVries, 2008: 31; Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007: 23). The discussion amongst researchers is not whether this is happening. The discussion is whether this is a new development (Kinnaman, 2011) or has youth ministry always been failing (Smith and Snell, 2009: 5991). Bergler suggests that 'At their best, youth ministries attract and at least temporarily retain teenagers who might otherwise leave the church' (2012: 220).

While only highlighting this in passing, it does raise questions as to youth ministry's effectivness as a proselytising endeavour, especially in a UK environment where meaningful church connection is significantly less than in the USA and where the secularising discourse creates a distinctive religious environment (Bruce, 2002: 227). For example, in the USA around two thirds of young people have a significant church commitment (Dean, 2010: 10; DeVries, 2008: 32; Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007: 142) (although recently what this means from a faith perspective has been questioned (Smith and Denton, 2005: 21; Smith and Snell, 2009: Loc. 5623). Within the UK those who have a meaningful connection with the church is around ten percent (Ashworth and Farthing, 2007: 9; Brierley, 1993: 90) and only eight percent say they would speak to a youth worker if they wanted

to discuss their worries (Chamberlain and Black, 2008: 20). While I am not in a position to address these criticisms, it should be an important area for youth ministry's own research.

Now drawing all these strands together, I can acknowledge that much of what I've discussed here is not new. It chimes with Ward's (1996) appraisal and with the views of others (Greene, 2010; Pimlott and Pimlott, 2008), who suggest that in general youth ministry tends to other young people. Its methodology turns young people into consumers, creates a Christianized sub-culture, keeps young people childlike and isolates them from the perceived dangers of a forbidding outside culture as well as appearing to exclude 'undesirable' young people from its groups.

All this would lead us to suggest that the influences which shape youth ministry and create its product-based practice are not superficial, they run deep. There is equilibrium between youth ministry's self-narration, its internationalism and the theories and practice which shape and direct it. Taken together the predominant result is a product-focused, delivery-orientated pedagogy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we ought to remind ourselves that defining Christian work with young people is a complex issue due to the varieties of titles, names and descriptions used. The sheer volume of publications along with a lack of academic rigour in much of the literature (Doyle and Smith, 2002) can lead to an inevitable element of subjectivity. However, some clear conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, there is sufficient evidence within the current literature to suggest a distinction between youth ministry and youth work within the Christian discourse. The former understands its practitioners to be ministers, closely related to the clergy, while the latter is a discipline embedded in the professional narrative of youth work. Similarly, youth ministry narrates its practice through the Christian spirituality of the worker, whereas youth work is primarily narrated as a commitment to a set of professional values.

Secondly, youth ministry's self-narration, approaches, theories and practices create a distinctive professional narrative which has constructed stereotypical, negative images of young people and society and culture. As a consequence it generally operates in a distinctive programme based, delivery focused educational pedagogy. Youth work practitioners are likely to struggle with this othering hermeneutic as it conflicts with a commitment to informal education and experiential learning. Youth work may also consider youth ministry to exhibit a controlling agenda with an emphasis towards Christian conversion and the use of ministry models which effectively exclude certain 'types' of young people. There are also aspects of youth ministry's uniqueness that are likely to prove unhelpful, in terms of its self-description, these have included the deliberately juxtaposing of itself to youth work .This may have resulted in isolating a significant proportion of

youth ministry from culturally relevant youth work ideas, theories and educational perspectives.

However, this is not universally so, we have seen that youth ministry is a broader field than this. Despite possible reservations regarding the nature of its boundaries and ethical duality, Relational Youth Ministry with its commitment to holistic wellbeing and stress on social justice clearly shares some ideals familiar to youth work. That it operates in a distinctive Christian discourse may not be inherently problematic. Ultimately, how youth ministry's narrative is viewed will also depend on our perspective on the acceptability of Christianity having a voice within our secularising paradigm.[2]

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Notes

1 Ward acknowledges the complexity of this as Christian practitioners working within youth work may also have a Christian understanding of their practice.

2 Williams, R. 2012. *Faith in the Public Square*, London, Bloomsbury. suggests two theories of secularisation; 'programmatic secularism' which aims to exclude certain voices from the public square and 'procedural secularism' which creates a social environment which ensures that all voices can engage in discussion and dialogue. Youth workers may hold with either of these views.

Attitudes towards working 'Out-of-hours' with Young People: Christian and Secular Perspectives

Peter Hart

Abstract

Based on empirical research, this article considers the different attitudes towards working 'out-of-hours' (ie. outside of a typical youth work session) with young people. Using a survey of 55 youth workers in a small post-industrial town, it finds that there is a clear split between workers from Christian and secular organisations, with Christian organisations fostering a significantly more positive attitude towards engaging out-of-hours with young people. This is understood through a framework that compares the 'new professionalising' agenda faced by many workers funded through public moneys, with the vocational and incarnational theological underpinnings of much Christian youth work. It concludes by arguing that this difference in theoretical concepts influences an observable difference in practice, and that greater dialogue between the sectors would be beneficial to well informed, safe, and appropriate use of 'out-of-hours' work.

Key words: youth work, professional boundaries, out-of-hours, professionalising, vocation, comparison, Christian, secular.

THE PURPOSE OF this survey-based research was to discern attitudes towards out-of-hours contact with young people by youth workers from Christian and secular sectors, and apply it to a theoretical framework. This research focuses upon the opinions and experiences of youth workers (paid and volunteer, full and part time) from a post-industrial north-eastern town. The questionnaire defined 'out-of-hours' as 'using free time' or, for volunteers, 'those times outside of a typical, regular, organised session'.

This article considers the contemporary theoretical foundations of both secular and Christian youth work as found in their respective literature for the purpose of comparison when exploring a theoretical rationale to the differences observed in the results. Ultimately this article concludes that workers in a secular setting may be required to adopt a more bureaucratic deficit model of youth work which is based on an acute perception of risk and anxiety surrounding 'youth'. In this atmosphere decisions about professional boundaries become duty-based, where universal rules are applied, thus providing a rationale for a more stringent set of responses against working out-of-hours with young people. By contrast the Christian sector has significantly more literature regarding 'vocation' and working 'incarnationally'. Though there is little in the Christian literature on ethics, it would be consistent to see professional boundaries as being situational and character-

based, relying on the sound judgement of the worker as to where the limits of their 'calling' lie.

Ultimately, the aim of this article is not to pass judgement on either secular or Christian perspectives on working out-of-hours with young people. Rather, it is to show that this difference exists, to offer a theoretical rationale as to why it exists, and to argue for an increase in dialogue between the sectors for the sake of improving practice, uncovering assumptions, and becoming more aware of workers' own 'theories in use' (Schön, 1983).

Youth work: contexts and cultures

Youth work as a Profession

Though many authors are happy to consider youth work a 'profession' this term is rarely defined (Belton, 2009: vii; Sapin, 2009: 1; Roberts, 2009: 3-4; Bradford, 2012: 34). If it is being used as an antonym for 'amateur' (and amateur is taken to mean 'incompetent' or 'unskilled' opposed to 'unpaid') then there is a strong case for a youth work 'profession' (Nicholls, 2012: 103-104). Banks (2004) suggests that 'profession' is an essentially contested concept. There are, however, common themes amongst the definitions, such as the distancing of the professionals from their clients (Banks, 2004: 20-21; 1999: 5; Austin et al, 2006: 81; Kelly, 1990: 167; Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 555; Powell, 1990: 178; Popple, 1995: 55), maintaining status and power (Banks, 2004: 20-21, 118; Kelly, 1990: 167; Powell, 1990: 179), and having a monopoly on certain knowledge or skills (Banks, 2004: 22-23). Despite Nicholl's protestation (2012: 109) the term may refer to 'quality' and 'skill' in the minds of the practitioner, but perhaps not in the mind of the manager or policy maker, nor even the young people who value 'non-professional spaces' (Sharkey and Shields, 2008). This is perhaps why Banks (2004: 32) recognised an 'identifiable strand of reluctance' towards the professionalisation of youth work.

The 1980s saw the rise of a form of professionalism based on a managerial bureaucracy. It was an externally imposed, controlling, homogenising system that focussed on targets and outcomes (Banks, 2004: 38; Gilchrist, 2004: 76, 18). This increased under New Labour, where the managerial agenda prized innovative increases in efficiency, performance, and participation. Working to procedures and predefined targets undermined the autonomy of youth workers (Banks, 2004: 152-153; Davies and Wood, 2010) and risked putting external requirements above the young people's needs. In this context youth workers could seek to uphold the dominant interests and legitimise the structures that gave them a privileged position (McCulloch and Tett, 2010: 39).

With regard to government policy in general, and its specific effects on youth work, this increase in bureaucratisation is seen through the marketisation of services for young people that seeks 'efficiency' and 'results'. The government policy 'Positive for Youth' (Department for Education 2011), for example, promotes the holistic wellbeing of young people in rhetoric, whilst in practice it appears that the priority is preventing 'risky' behaviours (Davies, 2013: 16; Department for

Education, 2011: 9-10). This difference between rhetoric and practice is possibly best seen in the 2013 progress report (Department for Education, 2013) which concentrates on easy-to-measure targets, such as accredited outcomes, alcohol intake, numbers of young people involved in social action projects, and the numbers of young people engaged in local decision making.

'Positive for Youth' holds a strong neo-liberal agenda where the development of young people's character is equated with adopting a disposition attuned to the values of the market (entrepreneurship, enterprise and a competitive attitude) and where a good citizen is 'dutiful' but uncritical (Brooks, 2013). The document also appeals to the biological sciences to create an essentialist approach to 'youth' that appears to simplify the myriad cultures and stages young people inhabit, shaped by gender, sexuality, class, religion and ethnicity – despite having alluded to some of these differences a few pages earlier (Department for Education, 2011: 7-9).

According to Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) this bureaucratic, neoliberal approach to youth services promotes discourses of risk and problematizes the young people through a hegemonic 'narrative of delinquency'. It belittles discourses of marginalisation that would challenge social inequalities and the structural forces that maintain them (see also Nicholls, 2012). There is no evidence of an awareness of such structural forces throughout 'Positive for Youth'; rather the appeal to neuropsychology affirms the individualist nature of these 'issues'. One assumes, when contracts for providing services to young people are placed on the open market the successful bidders will have shown their commitment to the individualised 'youth as risk' discourse, attacking individuals while ignoring underlying structural causes, and replacing long term ideals of human flourishing and social good with short term goals based on indicators of risk and assumptions of deficiencies amongst young people (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013: 1699). Indeed, the laudable commitment to information sharing between organisations for the sake of safeguarding, prevalent in policy discourses since 'Every Child Matters' (HMSO, 2003), is one also imbued with practitioners maintaining the hegemonic 'narrative of delinquency' (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

The main facet of a deficit based bureaucratic 'new professionalism' investigated here is the use of externally applied 'professional boundaries' that inform and regulate the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. Austin et al (2006: 81) describe boundaries as 'the edge of appropriate helping behaviours and allow for clarification of what is permitted in professional... relationships'. Over recent years there has been a steady increase in the professional boundaries which distance the worker from the young person (Banks, 2004: 21-22; 1999: 5; Austin et al, 2006: 81; Kelly, 1990: 167; Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 555; Popple, 1995: 75; Powell, 1990: 178).

These boundaries have proven benefits to youth work and young people. They prevent well-meaning workers becoming heavy handed and patronising (Banks, 2004: 54). They prevent anxiety over role confusion by young people and protect them from manipulation by workers (Austin et

al, 2006: 81). An increased sense of professionalism can also increase the media attention an occupation receives, increasing its influence over policy (Gabor, 1990: 84). Ineffectual boundaries can actually reduce or inhibit the ability for a young person to make a free choice and, at the extreme, this relationship can then become exploitative (Knapp and Slattery, 2004: 553-554).

However, youth work is fraught with dilemmas between maintaining boundaries and facilitating young people's development. Blacker (2010) suggests relationships are key to negotiating positive change within a young person, but they offer difficult ethical issues (see also Adams, 1998). He argues boundaries can become a list of what we 'should not be doing' as youth workers without acknowledging the nature and purpose of the relationship. Collander-Brown (2010: 41) agrees about the role of relationships, saying 'in the midst of all the new technical-sounding verbiage concerning targets and outcomes it is easy to lose sight of the truth that it is the relationship between the young person and youth workers that is central to the work', and here he explicitly explains out-of-hours contact as beneficial to this relationship if we are to understand life from the young person's perspective and move from being 'target orientated youth workers'.

'Dual relationships' (when a worker is also a family member, neighbour or family friend) is perhaps the best example of 'professional boundaries' and working out-of-hours in the literature. Sercombe (2010) argues dual relationships produce conflicting expectations that can hamper the educative nature of youth work. He says 'the general consensus is that dual relationships should be avoided where possible because it is difficult to avoid conflicts of interest' (p.80). By comparison Pugh's (2007) article on dual relationships in social work is significantly more positive. She suggests relationships can become more complicated than assumed when talking of 'professional boundaries', particularly in small rural communities where the worker and the user will meet, and even socialise, outside the professional relationship. Though she acknowledges several 'tensions' in maintaining a dual role, she recognises some advantages to a dual relationship. It can have a humanizing effect on the worker/user relationship, local knowledge can be of great value, as can acceptance by the community. Although during the discussion on vocations, incarnational youth ministry and character-based ethics (below), 'dual relationship' may be better understood as one singular relationship the worker performs in many situations (ie. a youth worker maintains that identity outside of the youth centre).

Youth work as a Vocation

So far it has been argued that in some forms of 'secular' youth work the 'new profession' has become an increasingly common paradigm on which to base the occupation. However, there is at least one alternative paradigm on which youth work is based, one that is common – but not exclusive to – Christian youth work: vocation. For example, Ahmed et al (2007) found youth workers in faith communities regularly spoke of 'calling' and vocation, and their youth work was often inseparable from their faith and life. It's a theological term originally used to refer to those

believed to be called by God to a particular ministry. This could be further extended into a secular understanding of vocation: there are certain social roles deemed as being particularly important for the functioning of society or having a humanitarian telos (Hansen, 1994: 259-260). In this section it will be argued that 'youth work as a vocation' helps to provide a framework for understanding the differences between secular and Christian approaches to out-of-hours youth work.

A vocation – secular or religious – has three ingredients. Firstly there is some form of 'calling' during which time a person is made aware they would be particularly suited to a role, which has been described as coming from God, from society or the community around the person, or from inside the individual. Astley and Francis (2009) researched people training for ordained ministry who referred to this as a 'passion', 'desire', 'instinct', 'itch', or refer to it in the past-tense in terms of 'fulfilment'. This 'calling' provides a profound motivation and deep personal commitment, through which other values and concerns are understood. There may be, for example, a dilemma between this belief in a calling to care for young people, and a policy that seeks to prevent a worker from certain actions or behaviours (such as, offering a lift to a young person on a cold, dark night).

Secondly, it requires integrity from the individual, which could either be an internal sense of values leading to the choice of a vocation that fits those values, or an external expectation that upon taking up a vocation those complementary personal values will follow. Ultimately it is a whole-life project, not able to be compartmentalised into private/public versions of self, but the vocation becomes part of an individual's identity where there is expected to be 'a significant continuity between the occupational role and the private values and concerns' (Carr, 2000: 10).

Thirdly, there is the expectation that when fulfilling a vocation others will be prioritised either through putting other people's needs first or through a sacrifice of time or pay (Haughey, 2004: x; Radcliffe, 1999: 199). Wingren (1958) produced a seminal text interpreting reformation theologian Martin Luther's understanding of 'vocation' for a modern audience. He summarises that a social role can be a vocation if a person's 'life station' is 'serv[ing] the well-being of others' (p.4). Carr (2000: 13) agrees, saying those engaged in a vocation will be 'utterly and selflessly [committed] to the personal flourishing of their charges'. This commitment to a positive outcome for others adds an ethical imperative to an occupation (Weber, 1958; Collins, 1991: 41-44; Hansen, 1994: 260; Badcock, 1998: 105-107).

When compared to a vocation a 'new profession' makes a distinct separation between the private and public self that can be seen as impersonal and externally regulated. Often these are assumed to be in the interests of the client, but can lead to the depersonalisation of practice that serves the 'professional' most (Carr, 2000: 11). Cooling (2010: 17-18) argues that the assumption of professional neutrality has led to ethical difficulties as professional standards supersede personal values that may offer a more reliable ethical framework (see also Prichard, 2007: 72).

Models of youth work

The way in which youth work is conceptualised, either as a 'new profession', a vocation, or some other occupational paradigm, is both influenced by and influences the predominant model of youth work in an organisation. Three broad models will be considered in brief here: deficit-based, asset-based, and incarnational approach to youth work.

Asset based approach

Within this model youth workers see young people as full of potential to be realised, and informal education may be the single most important tool for this. Rosseter (1987:2) says 'first and foremost youth workers are educators. All other roles they may fulfil at certain times are secondary. The essential nature of their work is concerned with bringing about change'. Based on the work of liberal educators such as Freire (1985) to combat potentially oppressive power structures, it is a means to growth and development using conversation with a commitment to democracy, fairness and equality (Brierley, 2003: 83-86; Jeffs and Smith, 2005).

Deficit-based youth work

When approached from a deficit model, young people are assumed to be problematic and in need of fixing. Current thinkers argue that youth work is changing in emphasis from voluntary and dialogue-based to coerced and prescribed (Jeffs and Smith, 2010b: 4-5; Batsleer and Davies, 2010; Jeffs, 1997: 164; Weil and Percy-Smith, 2002), with 'workers [being] denied the capacity to create long term relationships and build projects with an aura of permanence' (Jeffs, 1997: 163; see also Dean, 2004: 78). Funding requirements can cause youth workers to vilify young people by exaggerating negative traits and assuming they are deficient and require 'fixing', potentially forcing them away from the organisation's original aims and values (Gilchrist et al, 2003: 8; Jeffs and Smith, 2010a) – indeed, as seen above, this is implicit in both 'Positive for Youth' and its later progress report (DfE, 2011; 2013), and the commissioning process and system for measuring the effectiveness of third party programmes which suppose workers will solve the problems associated with the 'risky' stage of 'youth'.

Incarnation

Asset and deficit based youth work could be seen as a meta-theory underpinning the common daily practices and assumptions of workers. The incarnational model works at a more practice orientated level and as such isn't directly comparable to asset and deficit based youth work. In fact, it is entirely possible to have both an asset-based and deficit-based incarnational model of youth work. It is discussed here, however, because it offers a rationale for the opinions on out-of-hours contact with young people within the Christian sector.

The term incarnation refers to the belief that divinity and humanity coexisted in the person of Jesus (McGrath, 2001: 368). It is the assumption that the itinerant preacher who travelled around Palestine 2000 years ago was simultaneously Yahweh, the God of the Jewish people. The purpose of the incarnation is believed to be God's self-revelation: in Jesus, 'God is communicating God, not ideas about God' (McGrath, 2001: 371). As such it enabled God, living in heaven, to experience suffering and death and therefore to understand human experience through his own experience (Grudem, 1994: 563).

Though there are multiple variations of incarnational youth ministry, as a crude summary it is essentially prioritising the relational element of youth work, with an emphasis on the vocation and integrity of the worker, and in which the young people are expected to have an awareness of the wider context in which the youth worker lives. Jesus is often used as an exemplar where the worker attempts to live a 'Christ-like' life to act as a role model for others. This could work in a secular setting when many workers already see themselves as role models, which may or may not include specifically modelling the values Jesus portrayed (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 95; Russell, 2007; Brierley, 2003: 137-143). This relational incarnational ministry can also include ensuring humility through recognising the self-limiting nature of God's descent into humanity (O'Collins, 2002: 60-64), living amongst those being worked with (Michael, 2007; Forrest, 2000; Exley and Dennick, 2004: 276-281), showing a lasting commitment to young people and being willing to go beyond the remit of the role (Russell, 2007; Veerman, 1997; Fenton, 1998; Hunter, 1999), being a compassionate presence (Barden, 2011; Fenton, 1998), and being genuine – allowing young people to observe the worker's vulnerabilities (Fields, 2002: 91-94). Root (2007) sums up all these elements of an incarnational model as 'place-sharing'. Referring to theologian Bonhoeffer he believes in a God that 'stands in our stead', he says that 'place-sharing demands that I stand so close to the other [i.e. young people] that his or her reality becomes my own, his or her suffering becomes mine' (p.110; see also Nash and Palmer, 2011). However Root (2007) also warns this incarnational-relational model can be used as a 'strategy of influence', and the relationship can be used with a particular predefined aim – typically conversion.

Therefore, although in the youth work literature an asset-based model is either assumed or encouraged, in reality the 'new profession' of youth work that some organisations are based upon assumes a deficit model. In Christian youth work, though, both the asset and deficit models exist as meta-theories, a third incarnational model is often used which provides a rationale for a more positive approach to out-of-hours work.

Risk and Youth Work

If a deficit approach and the rise of the 'new professions' is based in part on an increase of anxiety and the requirement of control – be that managers' control over workers or workers' control over young people – one may ask where this has come from.

Beck (1992; Beck et al; 2000) views contemporary culture as a 'risk society'. He believes deindustrialisation brought identities based upon choice (see also Bauman, 1992; 1995), producing two facets of the 'risk society' – uncertainty (or detraditionalisation) and responsibility (or individualisation). Uncertainty is required to adapt to the pace of contemporary life, but also means many of society's institutions (such as marriage and childhood) have changed rapidly and no longer offer the promise of stability they once did. The increase of the responsibility of the individual which would once have lain with the community or the 'expert' has increased the level of stress and pressure to ensure citizens of the risk society make the 'right' choices at the 'right' times, thus becoming 'motivated by anxiety' (Beck, 1992: 49).

Boholm and Corvellec (2011) attempt to uncover why some aspects of contemporary life are considered a risk, and others not. They separate the 'object of risk' (which may not be a material item, but an ideology or pastime) from the 'object at risk' – which is usually a person or people group, but could also be an ideology. The relationship between the object of risk and the object at risk are often hypothetical and exaggerated, and start with a series of 'what if' questions that become 'imaginary accounts of dramas that might occur if certain conditions are met' (Boholm and Corvellec, 2011: 181). As such the modern way to deal with risk is to increase the number of steps between the object of risk and object at risk until the 'causal chain' becomes perceived as an implausible series of events. Another common way to reduce the risk is to increase the chain of responsibility above the object of risk. In youth work, for example, an error in judgement on behalf of a worker also becomes the responsibility of management to ensure their staff are well trained and following policy, thus creating an atmosphere of control as the object of risk moves up various levels of an organisational hierarchy (Boholm and Corvellec, 2011: 182).

The perception of risk increases the requirement for control, and the acknowledgement of the need for close control provides a fertile plain for bureaucracies to develop. Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) argue that the narrative of risk and delinquency in public discourses around young people become a 'barrier' for good youth work because the 'main function of youth work [becomes to] control, monitor and restrain the problems of youth' (p.1702), and it legitimises the institutions' increase in controlling and medicalising the behaviours of young people (Finn et al, 2013).

Ethics

So far an argument has been forming along two lines that offer a framework for understanding the forthcoming differences in opinions on out-of-hours work between workers in Christian and secular organisations. The 'new professionalism' becoming inherent in much youth work is based on a deficit model, which appears to have been influenced by the 'risk society'. In contrast, literature and empirical research already conducted into a Christian context has considered youth work as a vocation and using an incarnational model (which can in turn be influenced by deficit

and asset based approaches to young people). Considering the ethical framework organisations may base their practice on can also help to understand these differences of opinions towards out-of-hours practice.

Banks (2010: 13-17) presents three metatheories of ethics that can underpin practice. Moral philosophers during the Enlightenment believed ethical rules could be discovered and understood in a similar fashion to the work of the scientists around them. Kant, working at this time, developed a set of principles that valued the individual's autonomy and rights above all else, and where an ethical decision is one which follows a universal principle (Banks, 2004: 115). The increase of the 'risk society' and the increased control of the 'new professions' has led to ethical judgements being made by management and presented in policy documents as universalised rules to follow. Though rule-following may not be strictly Kantian, this borrows the idea that right action is following a prescribed principle. Utilitarianism – conceived of at a similar time – places moral worth on the outcome of an action. The 'right' action is that which produces the most 'good' for the greatest number of people and is often invoked when budgets are stringent and efficiency or 'value for money' is praised. Kantian and utilitarian approaches are 'principle based' and they do not include other important factors for ethical decision making, such as the motivation or character of those making ethical decisions.

Alternatively, Banks says, character based ethics are contextualised and based upon internal 'virtues' with an ultimate aim (or telos) in the flourishing of self and others. A youth worker must live up to these 'virtues' in order to act ethically, it is a matter of integrity. It fits well with a vocational and incarnational model of youth work, which requires a holistic ethical framework on which to base a consistent set of decisions and practices in personal and 'professional' life. Banks concludes that in reality all these ethical frameworks are required to cover the plethora of issues youth workers face.

Summary

The argument developed from the literature is that the narratives of risk surrounding popular discourses of youth have legitimised the increasing attempts to control young people and youth workers, and promoted a definition of youth based around their deficiencies. This has been enacted through the increase in the bureaucratic 'new professionalising' of youth work in secular settings, which has encouraged a duty-based and utilitarian ethical commitment. By contrast, youth workers from Christian traditions are seen to embody a 'vocation' and, potentially, an understanding of an incarnational model of youth work that seems to promote a character based approach to ethics, with greater flexibility and a different approach to risk. These frameworks shall be used below to offer an explanation for stark differences between 'secular' and 'Christian' responses to working out-of-hours with young people.

Methodology

The questionnaire design was essentially descriptive, seeking to count how many youth workers in different contexts hold certain opinions and attitudes towards the implementation and rigidity of boundaries (Oppenheim, 2000: 112). The hypothesis was to test whether workers in secular and Christian organisations have different perspectives on 'professional boundaries' and working out-of-hours with young people. Most questions were closed and based on brief scenarios that asked youth workers to what extent, on a scale from one to five, they agreed to a particular out-of-hours issue. For example: 'youth work and your personal life should be completely separate', and 'it is acceptable to add young people as "friends" on social networking sites'.

All youth workers practising within the same unitary authority were invited to participate in the study. The sample frame was developed with the help of the local Voluntary Development Agency (VDA) and the Local Authority who both had online databases of organisations known to and/or funded through them. Local uniformed organisations and church based youth workers were also contacted, as these organisations were often not represented in the databases. All organisations in the frame were asked to take part either in person at meetings, or via email.

To comply with the ethical norms of research, all participants were assured of anonymity and any precise information that may identify an organisation or an individual has been generalised (De Vaus, 2002: 63). The nature of the questionnaire had a very low risk of causing harm and all of the university guidelines were followed. Participants were also offered the results.

Due to the possible scope of this research and the resources available, one unitary authority was chosen as the population. Although there may be interesting results that can be shared with other areas, the scope of this research does not allow any firm conclusions outside of this town. Rather, to increase its generalisability, future research may test the results in other areas. The lack of qualitative data to aid in understanding why these opinions were held, or the nuances and level of judgement the workers would make, proved frustrating. However, an ongoing ethnography-based PhD by the author in this field is helping to increase this understanding.

In total 55 surveys were completed. These were gathered partly through paper questionnaires and a web based survey hosted by Bristol Online Surveys. The data was then analysed using SPSS.

Findings

14 of the 55 respondents (26%) worked in the statutory sector, 17 (31%) within a faith based organisation, and 24 (44%) were other third sector organisations (this included uniformed organisations, a charity working with young fathers, local community organisations with youth groups, and participants from at least one large national charity with a local project). Based on

an estimated number of youth workers in the town provided by the head of the youth service, this equates to around 20-25% of the town's youth workers. Of the respondents a quarter (25.5%) reported no formal training in youth work (six respondents from the faith-based sector and seven from the third sector). Only one respondent from the statutory sector had no formal training – however, as the statutory and secular third-sector organisations are considered together due to the similarities in results, the proportion of respondents without education in youth work is similar between the faith and non-faith groups.

There is, however, no way of knowing whether some specific organisations are over-represented as many participants declined to say the name of their organisation, which was an optional question to ensure anonymity. Originally it had been hoped there would be a fourth group used for comparison, 'uniformed organisations'. This would have been valuable in understanding more about the 'uniqueness' of the framework underpinning Christian youth work argued for above – it may be possible, for example, that uniformed organisation leaders have a sense of calling or vocation in the work they do, and equally they are typically self-sustaining, requiring little external financial support from large grant giving organisations.

25% of respondents have deliberately met young people out-of-hours, and 76% have met a young person either on purpose or coincidentally. Of these, 11% say they see young people they work with out-of-hours daily and 15% weekly. 51% of those who see young people out-of-hours do so monthly, or less frequently. This leaves 24% of youth workers who say they have never met a young person they work with outside of usual sessions or working hours. About half of the respondents are sure young people do not know where they live, and 73% do not make an out-of-hours phone number available to young people.

Respondents in the statutory and third sector are far more likely to have never met young people out-of-hours (86% and 92% respectively), while 59% of youth workers in the faith sector have deliberately met a young person. Although only 38% of youth workers are aware young people know where they live, a far greater percentage of faith based workers (71%) know young people are aware of their home address compared to the statutory sector (21%) and third sector (25%). Potentially this is due to 71% of faith based workers living amongst the young people they work with (28% statutory, 29% third sector), thus demonstrating that the unique problems and benefits of dual relationships identified in the literature review are more prevalent amongst faith based workers. An even more extreme association is seen with the availability of a personal phone number, with 59% of faith based workers making one known to young people and 40% claiming to receive a phone call or text from a young person at least weekly, compared to no statutory workers and 23% of third sector workers who have made numbers available.

We can therefore be confident that there is an association between the sector a youth worker works in and what they report about out-of-hours contact with young people, with those in the faith sector

being far more likely to say they meet young people out-of-hours, live amongst them, and make out-of-hours contact possible through personal phone numbers.

Youth workers were asked to provide their opinions on the severity of breach of boundaries (if at all) across 16 scenarios on Likert-type scales from 1-5 (1 being no breach, and 5 the most severe breach). The strength of association was measured using appropriate statistical tests, and only those with a statistically strong association are included in the analysis below. Some scenarios show extremely strong levels of association in the answers given from different sectors. 31% of faith based youth workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'it is good to seek opportunities to be with young people outside of the typical youth work setting'. Although this figure may not be as high as imagined following the discussion on the influence of the incarnational model in Church based youth work, it is significantly stronger that the statutory sector (0%), and third sector (8%). 94% of statutory workers disagree or strongly disagree with that statement, showing very few in that sector see any benefits outweighing the risks.

Another strong relationship is the belief that youth work and personal lives should be completely separate, with 93% of statutory and 79% of third sector workers agreeing, while just 18% of faith based youth workers agree. A similar difference is observed when asking about social networking sites, with 41% of faith based youth workers agreeing it is acceptable to be 'friends' with young people online, while 100% of statutory based youth workers would 'strongly disagree'.

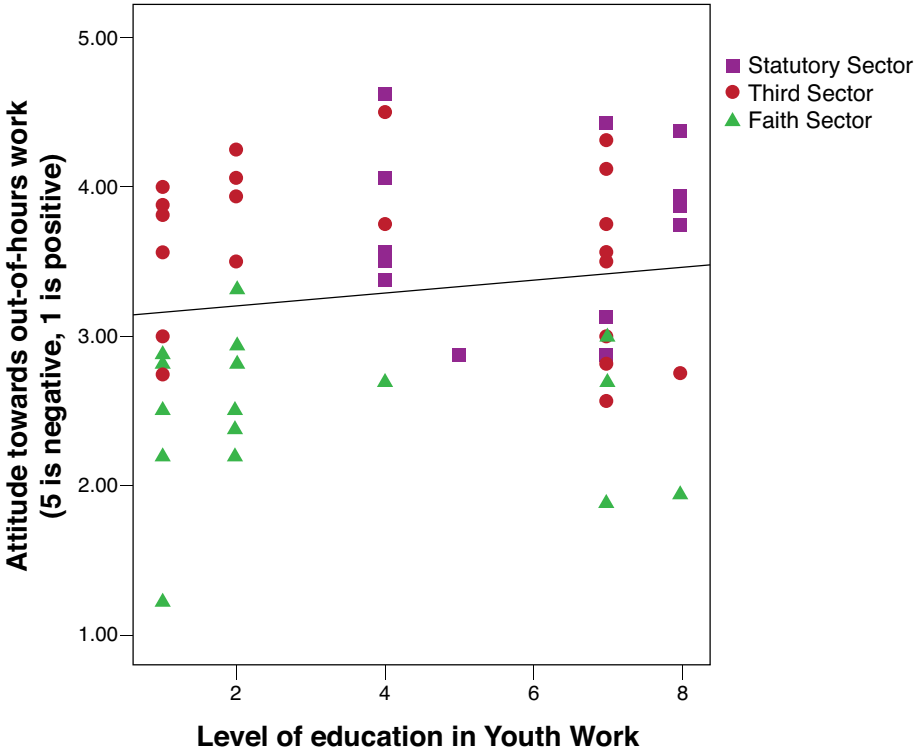
So far we can conclude that, out of those who returned the survey, statutory and third sector organisations have little difference in terms of their workers' perspectives on boundaries with those in the faith sector being more likely to have a lenient approach to out-of-hours contact, and are more willing to engage in it, possibly because of the increased dual-role nature of faith-based youth workers who live in the same area as their young people and the prevalence of the incarnational model.

Index

The indexed score is a simple mean of the 16 scenarios presented to youth workers. These figures provide an overall indication of how an individual feels about boundary issues. Altogether the index shows an average of 3.3, with a minimum score of 1.2 and a maximum of 4.6. A respondent with an index towards 1 has been more positive about out-of-hours contact in its various forms, and more likely to consider it acceptable to share aspects of their personal life with the young person, and to share in their personal lives too. The mean result for each category are 3.7 for the statutory organisation (showing a relatively strict and negative view of out-of-hours contact with young people), 3.6 for the third sector, and 2.5 for the faith based sector.

So far the analysis has focussed on the differences between sectors. Level of education and age do

Figure 1: The relationship between attitude towards out-of-hours work and level of education, labelled by sector worked in.



not show any significant levels of association with any of our variables designed to test the attitudes and opinions of youth workers on out-of-hours contact with young people. For example, the level of education and the index were put into a scatter diagram to illustrate how the cases look when sector worked in is being controlled for. The scatter of the plots (see figure 1) demonstrates that there was no correlation between the index and level of education, but the faith sector inhabits the bottom half of the graph below the line of best fit, showing a much more positive set of opinions on out-of-hours work, while the statutory and third sectors are much more prevalent in the top half. The relatively horizontal nature of the line of best fit shows decisively that education does not affect attitudes towards out-of-hours work, but the placement of the cases on the graph show that the sector worked in does.

We cannot be so confident, however, with the question of personal faith. This is for two reasons. Firstly, there were not enough respondents who worked for the statutory or third sector replying who had an occasional or regular commitment to a faith community, and there were no respondents

who worked in the faith sector that claimed to have 'no faith' or 'personal faith, but does not attend a place of worship'. There is a small amount of evidence using the faith based and third sector, that those who 'occasionally attend a place of worship' have a slightly stricter attitude towards out-of-hours contact (2.6 on the index) than those who 'regularly attend a place of worship' (2.1 on the index) – therefore potentially it is the level of personal faith rather than the sector of the organisation worked for that is the main cause for differences in opinion on out-of-hours work.

Cluster Analysis

Finally the results were subject to a cluster analysis. The 16 questions on attitudes were too many variables for a cluster analysis, and the one indexed score was not sufficiently helpful to group responses, other than by sector which has already been explored. Therefore SPSS created four sub-indexes based on the area being examined by individual questions. The first was for questions relating to physical space, including seeking to be with young people outside of the youth work setting, inviting a young person to your home, and meeting for coffee. The second related to the content of conversations relating to the youth workers' personal life, including religious and political affiliations, and sex life. The third was interacting with young people out-of-hours using the internet and phones, and the fourth was questions relating to the community, including watching young people perform in a play or sport, and living in the community a worker works in.

Table 1: Cluster analysis using the four sub-indices

Name of sub-indices		**Sub-index score**
Physical space	Group 1	2.95
(e.g. meeting out-of-hours)	Group 2	4.4
Personal sharing	Group 1	2.49
(e.g. talking about personal life)	Group 2	3.5
Interacting via media	Group 1	2.84
(e.g. use of Facebook)	Group 2	4.53
Community	Group 1	2.04
(e.g. living and working in same place)	Group 2	3.1

The cluster analysis takes individual respondents and puts them into groups based on statistical similarities. Here, there was an obvious split at two groups. Group 1 has the least strict views on out-of-hours contact, and group 2 the stricter opinions. Group 1 had 26 respondents in it. Their results were between 2 and 3 for all four sections (see table 1), while group 2 had 29 respondents and the results for each section were between 3.1 and 4.5. Perhaps unsurprisingly, group 1 is the home to almost every faith-based youth worker, but also includes 6 from the third sector and 4 from the statutory sector. Group 2 is a mix of third and statutory sectors, with one from the faith

sector (this person provided their employer as a catholic secondary school and used the optional 'any other comments' question to explain they were the chaplain in the school, and therefore bound by their policies). In each of the two groups, meeting young people physically and using the internet/phone to communicate out-of-hours were higher scores than sharing aspects of a youth worker's personal life and engaging in the community of the young people.

Table 2: Sub-index scores for each set of four questions

Sub-index (four questions on a common scheme averaged into one score)	Score
Use of media (internet/phones) to contact young people	3.7
Physical meeting	3.7
Personal sharing	3
Community	2.6

The average score (see table 2) of these sub-indices show that interacting in the community was the least contentious, at a score of 2.6, with sharing aspects of the youth worker's personal life being next at 3. Engaging in the same physical space as young people out-of-hours and interacting using the internet and phones were both the highest at 3.7. Split by sector the pattern is the same as already discussed with the full index score above, with the pattern following for each sub-index (that is, engaging in the community and sharing personal details are the two lowest scores for every sector, and meeting young people physically and interacting online are the two highest for each sector). Third and statutory sectors generally follow each other with no notable exceptions, and the faith based sector has a score between 1 and 1.2 lower than the statutory sector in each sub-index.

Therefore, although there are differences between sectors in their opinions of out-of-hours work, those aspects of work that are potentially more controversial in one sector, are also seen as less desirable in other sectors. This analysis has shown there is a difference in the attitudes and opinions of youth workers from the faith based sector and those from the statutory and third sector across respondents. Level of personal faith cannot be ruled out as another causal factor in this, but others such as age and level of education have been considered and eliminated as contributing factors. This has been shown by using linear regression models while controlling for sector worked in, and in using a cluster analysis which displayed two groups – one predominantly for the faith-based workers and one predominantly statutory and third sector workers.

Conclusions

The findings from the research show two distinct groups of youth workers who completed this questionnaire. One group, predominantly working in Christian organisations, had a more positive attitude towards working out-of-hours with young people. The second, almost entirely made from workers in a secular setting, had a more stringent set of opinions on working out-of-hours. The

sector the organisation operates in was shown to be the main factor in the approach to out-of-hours work, with possible explanations of level of education, length of time as a youth worker, and age all statistically insignificant (though due to a lack of data, level of personal faith could not be accounted for).

Workers from 'secular' organisations were significantly less likely to meet young people out-of-hours than those in Christian organisations. Most youth workers in Christian organisations believe young people know their home address and make a personal phone number available – compared to a small minority in secular organisations. This could be because far more workers for Christian organisations live in the community where their organisation is based (unfortunately there weren't enough respondents from other sectors who lived where they worked to compare). Moving from reported activity to the attitudes of workers, and the pattern continues. Significantly more youth workers from Christian organisations believe it is good to seek opportunities to work with young people out-of-hours, and there's an even larger gap between secular and Christian workers on the separation of personal and professional life and the acceptability of using personal Facebook accounts to engage with young people.

I have argued these findings are best understood through considering the whole context in which the youth worker is based. Though I haven't yet been able to draw from the actual experiences of the organisations these respondents work in, I have used the literature and available theory around models of youth work, occupational paradigms, and ethical philosophy to provide a framework with which to understand these results. I have argued that youth work has a set of values designed to facilitate positive change based on the assumption young people are capable of being competent social actors, with a recognition there are some unique social and developmental tasks associated with adolescence.

Youth workers – particularly in secular organisations – increasingly find themselves taking the role of a 'new professional', where the increase in anxiety and demand for control from external partners has created a culture of close and careful management. 'Professional boundaries' cannot be separated from this narrative of risk and control, and provide the perfect foundation on which a set of duty-based ethics can be built in which 'right' and 'wrong' are predefined through policy. By comparison, those workers in Christian organisations may find themselves in a 'vocation' that requires, amongst other aspects, a sense of integrity and 'calling'. This can work alongside the incarnational model of youth work, where relationships are used to break down barriers between the worker and young person so the worker can be both an example to, and 'place sharer' with, those individuals.

It is not my intention to caricature workers from secular and Christian organisations into a set of ethical and occupational pigeon holes. It is highly likely, for example, there are some workers in the midst of a bureaucratic new-profession with a profound sense of calling to youth work.

However, I would argue that as a general framework in which to understand the differences in approach to out-of-hours work with young people between secular and Christian organisations is through their occupational paradigm, model of youth work and assumptions about young people, approach to risk, and dominant philosophy of ethics.

Recommendations for practice

This difference in attitudes provides the basis for further discussion and study. Dialogue over good practice between organisations would strengthen the process of discerning where professional boundaries lie and could also help to create a better understanding of the risks and benefits out-of-hours work poses for young people. Workers from neighbouring youth projects sharing ideas of good practice regarding out-of-hours work may strengthen all organisations involved and bring to light some tacit theoretical assumptions on which their practices are based. There are, for example, questions over whose interests are really being served in increasing the distance between the youth worker and the young people, but equally a question mark over how youth workers remain accountable and young people remain safe if they were to either engage in out-of-hours work, or bring more of their private lives with them into the relationship. And to what extent does the difference in attitudes towards out-of-hours work affect the young people? It is through dialogue and the sharing of practice I believe that these questions can be answered.

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Youth Work and the Power of 'Giving Voice': a reframing of mental health services for young people

Ellie Wright and Jon Ord

Abstract

This article focuses on the benefits of taking a youth work approach with young people experiencing mental health difficulties. The research took place within a small voluntary youth work organisation with young people who are experiencing a variety of mental health issues from entrenched 'problems' to the early onset of conditions. The article documents how the processes of youth work, involving one to one, developmental group work and participative practices, which start from strengths, and work from a social rather than medicalised model, and which emphasise 'the voice of young people' can effectively strengthen mental health and promote wellbeing and resilience. The article also documents how the participation of young people in mental health services helps reconstruct views of participants as active in their own transformation.

Key words: Mental health, youth work, youth, participation.

There is no such thing as the voiceless, there are only the silenced and the deliberately misheard.
(Arundhati Roy, 2004)

THIS ARTICLE draws on research undertaken within a rural youth work project in the south west of England which supports young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health. The project is part of a larger voluntary sector youth work organisation and adopts a youth work approach to engage young people in one-to-one and small group work support, with youth workers who are 'non-medical' professional staff. In particular the project offers informal peer support groups, and more formal youth participation activities in the form of a Young People's CAMHS Board (CYPB), as well as individual support. The Young People's CAMHS board is commissioned by the local clinical commissioning group (CCG) to work alongside the Children and Young People's Emotional Well-being and Mental Health Partnership Board. It represents the voice of young people in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in the county. The project works with young people who have enduring mental health problems and extensive contact with health and social care services, as well as those experiencing early symptoms of mental distress. Young people are referred by schools, CAMHS staff, GPs, youth workers, parents or can self-refer.

This article examines the potential role of youth work in reformulating mental health support in ways which might better meet the needs of young people (MHF, 2007; 2004; Fraser and Blishen,

2007). It suggests that youth work approaches can effectively strengthen mental health and promote well-being and resilience. It also explores ways in which a values-based, anti-oppressive practice, working out of 'a vision of social justice' (Batsleer, 2010: 164), might work to counteract some of the exclusion and discrimination encountered by young people experiencing mental distress within a society and political climate increasingly seeking to problematise, scapegoat, control, and contain young people (Batsleer, 2010; Davies, 2011; de St Croix, 2010; Giroux, 2003). It frames mental illness within a 'social model' (Tew, 2005; Tregaskis, 2002) and argues that giving young people a voice and position of influence can have an empowering and rejuvenating effect on the lives of those experiencing mental ill health. It also suggests that youth work can provide opportunities to develop shared understanding and work towards collective well-being, thereby opening up possibilities for development and change.

Context: young people and mental health

> *We're expected to be good daughters/sons, good siblings, very good students, thin and beautiful, talented, and good friends. Constantly these expectations are far too high for teenagers to meet, and so we come to think it's our own fault, and gradually begin to hate ourselves for not being able to meet society's expectations* (Young person, cited in Brophy, 2006).

Research data suggests that in the UK one in ten children and young people has a clinically recognisable mental health disorder, while as many as 20-30 percent experience lower level symptoms of mental distress (Green et al, 2005; MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008; DH, 2011). Self-harming is now thought to affect at least one in 12 children and young people and over the past ten years in-patient admissions for young people who self-harm have risen by 68% (Young Minds and Cello, 2013). Adolescence and young adulthood is described as a time of particularly high risk for developing problems with mental health (MHF, 2007a; MHF, 2007b; Joy et al, 2008), '... possibly the highest at any stage in the life course' (Maughan et al, 2004 cited in Joy et al, 2008). One report suggests that as many as one in five young people aged 16-24 has a mental health disorder (Joy et al, 2008, citing Clutton and Thomas 2008).

Reported rates of mental health problems and conduct disorders among young people have risen significantly in recent years. The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) describes a 70% increase in rates of anxiety and depression (MHF, 2007a; MHF, 2005) while research cited in a report for New Philanthropy Capital (Joy et al, 2008) notes a steady increase in rates of a range of emotional problems among adolescents, with a doubling since the early 1990s. This includes a dramatic increase in reported incidences of self-harm between the 1950s and 1980s and although these figures have now stabilised the rates remain very high (ibid).This growth in poor mental health and well-being is not matched in other developed countries (Joy et al, 2008; Margo et al, 2006). A recent UNICEF inquiry found that out of 21 developed countries involved in the study 'the UK

received the lowest score for child well-being' (UNICEF, 2007). Of the six measures of well-being examined, the UK was ranked bottom on 'young people's behaviour and risks' and on 'subjective well-being' and 'family and peer relationships' (ibid). In addition, the 2006 'Truth Hurts' inquiry suggested that rates of self-harm in young people are higher than anywhere else in Europe (Brophy, 2006).

A range of individual and environmental factors have been shown to increase the risk of mental health problems and perhaps go some way to accounting for the UK's figures. These include learning disabilities, poor physical health, social isolation, lack of family support, poverty, parental ill health, being in care or being in a young offenders institution (MHF, 1999; Newman, 2004; WHO, 2005 and 2007, cited in MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008; Coulston, 2010; Nuffield Foundation, 2012). Joy et al assert that 'there is strong evidence associating mental health problems with almost every form of persistent disadvantage in society' (2008: 18). Studies from the MHF (2004) and Young Minds (2006), confirm that certain socio-economic factors increase young people's risk of experiencing mental health problems, but also note that causal and risk factors are likely to involve a 'subtle and complex interplay of many different factors' (Young Minds, 2006) which might include 'academic pressure, alcohol and drug misuse, junk food, sedentary lifestyles and media influences' (MHF, 2007a: 10).

In addition, several more recent publications link current increases in mental ill health, particularly among young people, to increasing economic inequality and materialism and changing social values in many developed and developing countries, in particular the US and the UK (Layard and Dunn, 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Dorling, 2011). Both Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), and Dorling (2011), find direct correlation between the prevalence of mental health problems – particularly anxiety, 'diseases of despair' (Dorling, 2011: 269), conduct disorders and substance abuse/addiction and levels of inequality. Dorling notes: 'The injustices and inequalities which underlie most rich countries are having a "dose-response" effect on the mental wellbeing of populations; the greater the dose of inequality, the higher the response in terms of poor mental health' (2011: 269). Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), link this, in turn, to chronic problems and inequalities in physical health, noting that our psychological well-being has a direct impact on our health, as do our relationships and social networks while Dorling also sees the drive to individualisation in developed countries as a significant factor, suggesting that being deprived of social connection and value 'makes us mentally ill' (2011: 270). Evans and Prilleltensky (2007) confirm this, noting that personal, relational, and collective or community well-being are highly interdependent and that in recent years a focus on promoting personal well-being has paradoxically undermined this by not acknowledging or supporting the environmental and social infrastructure that enhances well-being.

The 'Good Childhood' report, an inquiry commissioned by the Children's Society (Layard and Dunn, 2009), finds that modern society's values and lifestyle choices, especially the promotion of consumerism, aggression and unhealthy living, together with pressure to grow up too quickly and

the stresses of the modern education system are contributing significantly to the difficulties faced by young people in the UK (2009). This is also supported by findings from Girl Guiding UK (2008), Young Minds (2013, 2006) and the Nuffield Foundation (2012). There is also a considerable body of evidence to suggest that poor mental health may have a significant and lasting impact on young people, with mental health problems associated with educational failure, family disruption, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, physical disability and ill health, homelessness, and unemployment (DH, 2004; MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008; Coulston, 2010). There is also growing evidence showing a strong correlation between childhood mental health issues and long term mental health problems in adults (MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008; MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008; Layard, 2012). Studies in the US and New Zealand reveal that half of all long term problems start by the mid-teens and three quarters by early adulthood (DH, 2011; Kessler et al, 2005 and Kim-Cohen et al, 2003, both cited in MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008). Joy et al note that far from being the 'normal growing pains of childhood and adolescence' (2008: 11), 'the emotional well-being of a young person age 16 is a strong predictor of his/her mental health and life chances age 30' (2008:20).

Left unresolved, this increasingly widespread mental distress in young people is likely to result in huge economic, social and emotional cost (MHF, 2007b; Layard, 2012). Purcell et al confirm this, suggesting that mental ill health in early adulthood that prevents young people reaching their potential is 'a social and economic calamity' (Purcell et al, 2011: 74). A significant increase in youth mental ill health since the 1970s is likely to be compounded by the impact of UK youth unemployment and cuts to youth services (Coulston, 2010, CYP Now, 2012) as well as to CAMHS services (Young Minds, 2012b; Layard, 2012), resulting from current austerity policies. The need therefore to address these problems and strengthen positive mental health in young people has never been more pressing. However, there is also evidence to suggest that effective interventions, particularly at early and low level stages of mental distress can prevent escalation into long term problems (Kim-Cohen et al, 2003, cited in MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008).

The strengthening of protective factors and the building of resilience can also significantly reduce the impact of risk factors (Jenkins et al, 2002 and DfES, 2007, both cited in MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008; Coulston, 2010). Identified protective factors for mental well-being in young people include empowerment, positive interpersonal interactions and social cohesion (WHO, 2007, cited in MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008), as well as strong social support networks; participation in a range of extra-curricular activities; the opportunity to 'make a difference' by helping others; a sense of mastery; exposure to situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills; a committed mentor from outside the family and the ability and willingness to seek help (Newman, 2004).

The 'problem' of young people's mental health services

Despite the recognition that adolescence and early adulthood are a period of unparalleled vulnerability (Joy et al, 2008), it has been suggested that statutory mental health services are

'arguably at their weakest' in supporting those aged 16-25 (ibid: 16; Purcell et al, 2011). The MHF's 'Youth Crisis Project' (2004), concluded that 'current mental health services for 16-25 year olds are failing to meet their needs' (ibid: 4) arguing that oversubscribed services, long waiting lists, medical professionals who are unsympathetic or insensitive to their needs, and variable – often unsuccessful – transitions from CAMHS to adult mental health services, are letting young people down, deterring them from accessing services or allowing them to slip through the net altogether. This has been confirmed by subsequent research and further consultations (MHF, 2007a; MHF, 2007b; DH, 2008; Joy et al, 2008; Purcell et al, 2011, Young Minds, 2012a).

Purcell et al note that 'the number of young people accessing care services declines substantially between 18 and 24, precisely when it is needed most' (2011: 75). The MHF finds that between 2003 and 2006 only 25% of children with a diagnosed mental health disorder were accessing specialist services (MHF, 2007b); Lord Layard's very recent report reveals no change in this, stating that of the 700,000 children and young people experiencing mental health problems in the UK today three quarters are receiving no treatment at all, and noting that children's services are being disproportionately affected by current NHS budget cuts (2012). Despite the rhetoric of early intervention, those with low level problems are least likely to receive support, although there is widespread agreement that problems are 'best tackled in their initial stages' (Joy et al, 2008: 25; Coulston 2010; Purcell et al, 2011). Young people are left feeling 'extremely isolated' (MHF, 2004: 5) and this has prompted calls for a 'radical rethink of … services for 16 – 25 year olds' (ibid: 3; Purcell et al, 2011; Young Minds, 2006).The MHF argues that any new forms of support 'need to be provided through universal services and located in the settings young people will access' (MHF, 2007b: 6). Their 'Listen Up!' report identifies an explicit role for youth work in this delivery, arguing that what young people want is informal support 'staffed by skilled youth workers with knowledge of mental health issues' (MHF, 2007a: 11), someone to talk to who will listen to them, give advice and support, and be non-judgemental (Brophy, 2006; MHF, 2007a). This is borne out within the project we researched, where the trusting relationships youth workers form with young people mean they are often in the front line and are the first adult some young people turn to when seeking support . This highlights the need for workers to have confidence and understanding when faced with mental health issues. Supporting this, Coulston's (2010) report highlights the ways in which youth work processes can promote positive mental health and well-being, as well as suggesting a move towards addressing this in future youth work training and development. Coulston notes that:

> *Poor mental health is likely to have a significant impact on the life of a young person; including adverse effects on their educational achievement and relationships with family and friends, and an increased risk of them becoming unemployed, developing physical health problems and mental health problems during adulthood* (p.7).

He suggests that youth work is well placed to promote the aforementioned protective factors

and build the emotional and social capabilities associated with increased resilience by focusing on relationship building and providing support that is accessible, community based, and de-stigmatising.

Young people's experiences of mental health services

Research into mental health and primary care services for young people presents a complex picture of frequently negative and alienating encounters with health care services and welfare professionals, and widespread experiences of stigma and exclusion that impede recovery and prevent help-seeking (Brophy, 2006; MHF, 2007a). The Listen Up! consultation (MHF, 2007a) found that 'young people frequently felt they were not respected or treated as individuals by professionals within statutory services' (ibid: 24); reporting that they felt devalued, unable to build relationships with staff, and intimidated by the formal arrangements and time pressured services. The Truth Hurts inquiry also noted that 'over and over again, the young people we heard from told us that their experience of asking for help made their situation worse. Many have been met with ridicule and hostility from the professionals they have turned to' (Brophy, 2006: 3):

> *I had to see a children's psychiatrist, who every week I saw him would tell me I had cut myself for the attention, and asked me why I had wanted the attention. And every week I would tell him why I had really done it and he would never listen. This lack of understanding was so frustrating and patronising, it was supposed to help me stop wanting to cut* (Young Person, cited in Brophy, 2006, p. 27).

Our research revealed similar negative experiences. Discussions with both workers and young people gave specific insights into the ways in which poor mental health impacts on the lives of young people, resulting in experiences of isolation and discrimination, as well as revealing the nature of their interactions with specialist mental health services, particularly post-18, mainstream health, education, criminal justice and other welfare systems. While some have found specialist services helpful and supportive, the majority described feeling 'patronised and treated like we're idiots' and 'misunderstood'. Many also reported feeling anxious and afraid of what may happen to them if they disclosed feelings of distress to professionals. Those that did felt that they were treated as 'an illness rather than a person' and were uninvolved and without control in decisions affecting their care. One young person stated, 'it's horrible in there … you're just there and they drug you and you wait for them to let you out' (Young Person, 2012).

These problems are particularly acute after transition to adult services at 18 (Young Minds, 2012a) and also for those who self-harm or have eating disorders. These young people describe a lack of compassion and understanding of their needs within adult services, and professionals so stretched they don't have time to listen or to build trusting relationships. This results in a fear of professionals and a reluctance to engage with services or ask for support when they need it:

> *I feel like they are judging me or think I am lying, I hate the language they use about me, I always get really scared when I see their letters come … I just want someone to talk to, but they're always in a rush, it just feels like they don't care …* (Young Person, 2012).

In addition, many young people reported they are frequently driven to crisis and serious self-harm before they are taken seriously or receive the support they need, potentially impacting on their recovery. Perhaps most concerning have been the stories recounted of young people being met with outright hostility, coercion or discrimination at the hands of other health and welfare services, particularly A and E staff and police officers, as well as their families or local communities. This includes being handcuffed and physically restrained, made to feel like a criminal, humiliated, or told they were wasting valuable time and resources. For example one young person reported that:

> *Some of the nurses are really understanding … but some of them are really rude to you and like 'we've got better things to do than treat people like you' … they've got no right to speak to anyone like that, let alone when you're in a bad way, cos then you're just going to feel worse and struggle more* (Young Person, 2011).

Again these experiences are echoed in the findings of the *Truth Hurts* inquiry:

> *A and E isn't usually a positive experience. The last time I had a blood transfusion the consultant said that I was wasting blood that was meant for patients after they'd had operations or accident victims. He asked whether I was proud of what I'd done … The consultants I do see there act as if to say 'Not you again'… when I go to A and E I just want appropriate medical care …* (Young Person, cited in Brophy, 2006).

> *My doctor looked at me differently once I told her why I was there. It was as if I were being annoying and wasting her time* (Young Person, cited in Brophy, 2006).

It is evident that in many cases young people's experiences of services designed to give help and support are actually exacerbating feelings of emotional distress and compounding the exclusion experienced by those with mental ill health. It is argued that if services are to be genuinely supportive and beneficial, issues of power and powerlessness must be addressed. There is considerable merit therefore in considering a critique of services from an anti-oppressive perspective.

Anti-oppressive practice and mental health

Dalrymple and Burke (2006) note that anti-oppressive practice is founded within a commitment to social justice, a belief that practice should make a difference and focuses primarily on working towards transformational change. This will mean working alongside young people to develop shared understanding of the ways that power, oppression and inequality determine personal and

structural relations and impact on their lives (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006); rather than seeing individuals from a perspective of deficit – as either entirely responsible for their problems, or as passive victims. As a result we might begin to transform and challenge the common sense assumptions, stigma and fear that surround mental ill-health, which contribute to exclusion and negatively impact on well-being.

Our research revealed that as a result of prejudice and stigma young people regularly encounter negative experiences of power and powerlessness at the hands of health and welfare professionals. As one young woman described her experience of being admitted to A and E:

> *I didn't want to go, but I had overdosed and cut myself, so the police were called and I ended up being handcuffed, and they took me in, in a police van, so everybody looked at me and just automatically thinks 'oh you've broken the law, you've done something wrong' … and I was handcuffed to the bed and that made me struggle and cause myself more injuries … and when the police went I had security guards by my bed …* (Young Person, 2012).

For some these repeated experiences and resultant battles have come to shape their daily lives, and have become an integral part of their identities. Internalising the constant negative experiences results in a loss of self-esteem and self-worth, and can manifest in disruptive and exaggerated behaviours. Tew (2005) notes that experiences of, and responses to mental distress are often bound up with and shaped by such issues of power and powerlessness. These incidences and the attitudes described by the young people reflect what Newman and Yeates (2008, cited in Lister, 2010) describe as 'entanglements' between social welfare and crime control policies, in which 'welfare' contains a shifting balance of both 'care' and 'control',. This is enacted through coercive practices legitimised through a narrative of 'protection', framed in the best interests of that young person and the wider community but which does little to positively impact on the young person.

The *Truth Hurts* inquiry reminds us that to work effectively with distressed young people in ways that do not perpetuate harm or compound exclusion, professionals must 're-connect to their core professional skills and values: empathy, understanding, non-judgemental listening, and respect for individuals … young people [in distress] are entitled to a response based on practice of the core skills and values of the caring professions' (Brophy, 2006: 16). Only then can we, 'pave the way for forms of intervention that are more humane, less stigmatising and divisive, and above all work better' (Weare, 2006: 124). Youth Work with its commitment to developing anti-oppressive practice which seeks to ensure that interventions are empowering and young person centred (Ord, 2007), could explicitly counteract the agenda of control and containment of these young people, and begin to provide the support necessary to overcome and challenge discrimination.

Keeping in mind Thompson's (2006) suggestion that to work anti-oppressively it is necessary to 'move beyond the personal' in terms of understanding and tackling discrimination (2006: 30), it is

argued that in order to begin this process we must first understand these young people's experiences within a wider structural and cultural context, in which young people are increasingly represented in terms of 'risk' and 'deficit', as 'youth in crisis' and 'youth at risk' (Cullen and Bradford, 2012). As a result of this they are subject both to problematisation, surveillance and containment within a rhetoric of protection from harm, and to prevention of harm (Batsleer, 2010; de St Croix, 2010). This scenario is also played out in the context of the dominant bio/medical model of mental health, which is 'incongruent' with anti-oppressive approaches to practice (Larson, 2008).

From this perspective mental health problems can be separated from their social and political context, to individualise and pathologise mental distress as symptoms of illness, disorder or deficiency, 'without social causation' (Tew, 2005: 84). On this basis expertise, and therefore power is assigned to medical and social care professionals, legitimating controlling responses to 'deviance' and 'non-conformity' through a narrative of 'risk management'. This ultimately serves to maintain a dominant power structure in which such behaviours are seen as a threat to social order (Tew, 2005; Szasz, 1962).

Our research suggests that in order for youth work interventions to effectively address mental health needs and promote emotional well-being, our practice must seek to challenge these dominant discourses. Only then might we begin to mitigate the exclusion, stigma and harm that young people experience as a result.

A social justice orientated, anti-oppressive approach to practice seeks to re-politicise mental health, acknowledging the social and structural circumstances in which young people live their lives, linking their personal experiences to wider political contexts (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006: Thompson, 2006). It is premised on a recognition of young people as individuals in their own right and values them as such. It engages them in activities that promote experiential learning which help them to challenge negative assumptions, rather than focussing on correcting, containing or 'treating' them and their 'symptoms'

Defining how this anti-oppressive practice might look 'in practice', necessitates a consideration of the 'social models' developed in resistance to the dominant medical construction of mental health and disability (Tew, 2005: Tregaskis, 2002). It also requires further exploration of the nature of power, particularly in terms of Foucault's concepts of bio-power and disciplinary power. From this perspective young people's experiences are seen within a context in which power is diffuse, pervasive, ordinary, 'devolved to an army of professionals' (Tew, 2005: 84), and not seen as a monolithic 'thing' 'to be possessed', but rather 'exercised' as a 'social relation between people' (ibid: 73). Power is therefore seen as fluid and shifting, and crucially this acknowledges the possibility of counter agency, and of the possibility of contesting oppressive uses of power with the production of counter narrative and the telling of a different story...

As Foucault notes, 'there are no relations of power without resistances … like power resistance is multiple' (1980, cited in Dalrymple and Burke, 2006). It is important then that we do not view young people simply as victims 'lacking any possibility of exercising power for themselves' (Tew, 2005: 73). Tew suggests conversely that people experiencing oppression very often do 'develop strategies for survival and influence that involve the creative deployment of a variety of forms of power' (2005: 73), becoming 'adept at resisting or subverting the expectations that may be made of them' (ibid). Moreover, while these 'manoeuvres' are sometimes construed as being 'difficult' or 'manipulative', they 'may represent some people's most realistic strategies for having any influence over their lives' (Tew, 2005: 74). Anti-oppressive practice requires us to seek to understand young people's situations from their perspective and to see their possibilities for resistance from within this context (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006).

From this perspective, our research suggests that what might initially (and perhaps most often) be perceived as young people's 'difficult', withdrawn or disruptive behaviour, can begin to be seen as strategies of resistance, of complex and legitimate expressions of their anger and disappointment, attempts to regain some control, or even as counter-narratives to challenge those imposed upon them. Baker Miller (1983, cited in Tew, 2005) notes that, 'people in subordinated power positions … may be denied any opportunity to express their hurt and anger' (2005: 81). If practice is to be anti-oppressive and 'take account of the experiences and views of oppressed people …' (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006: 19) it is therefore important to provide young people with opportunities to articulate their stories as they see them.

This prompts a reframing and re-evaluation of assumptions around mental health and illness, and the ways in which these are influenced by discourses of risk, deficiency and deviance that serve to maintain the status quo so that (within this context) a youth worker's role might not be to 'challenge' or 'manage' young people, but rather to connect with core values and to build relationships based on 'regard' and 'recognition' (Nzira and Williams, 2009; Belton, 2010), as a result of developing a genuine understanding of what is really going on for these young people. Importantly our research indicates that what is of value to the young people is for someone to hear what they say, to acknowledge and accept their feelings. They want someone to take their concerns seriously and to find ways to respond that do not invalidate feelings or see actions as 'symptomatic' of mental health problems rather than as legitimate expressions of pain, resentment, fear or anger. This was experienced by young people to be of benefit and in itself can promote positive well-being:

> *Being able to connect with people who understand is really helpful, instead of people who talk out of a text book at us* (Young person, 2013).

This does not mean that youth workers within the project had stopped 'managing' behaviour, or that they absolved young people of responsibility for their actions and did not offer appropriate

challenges or introduce opportunities for learning, but rather in becoming more aware of the origins of feelings and behaviours, from within the wider context of power relations, they emphasised listening and dialogue, opening up space to ensure everyone had opportunities to speak and be heard. They focused on channelling rather than challenging feelings of anger and injustice, naming these and recognising them as legitimate and as potential sources of creativity, protest and as an impetus for change, for example through the making of short films which highlight young people's experiences of stigma and bullying, or through the development of training activities for professionals, which communicate their negative experiences of services.

Batsleer reminds us that 'dissatisfaction and discontent are invaluable allies of the practitioner' (2008: 72). Newman suggests that educators 'can help people develop, articulate and explore their anger', a process through which they 'seek to release and at the same time focus the passion and creativity of a potentially wayward emotion' (2006: 55-56). Anti-oppressive youth work practice can find ways of enabling young people to exercise power productively and 'speak back' constructively, opening up possibilities for change.

Re-framing of mental health services and the youth work response

The aforementioned consultations (MHF, 2004; MHF, 2007a) highlight young people's desire for a change to systems of mental health support. They reveal an awareness of the limitations of current approaches, implicitly critiquing or even rejecting the medical model. This is reinforced by young people's continued reluctance to access services (Brophy, 2006). It also suggests that they have a very clear sense of the models of support that will work for them. This research echoes these earlier consultations and young people stressed that they want person centred services that are commissioned across the age range – ie. 16 – 24yrs, and importantly see them as 'individuals and not a collection of symptoms' (MHF, 2007a: 26). In instances where young people do want access to psychological therapies and emotional support, they prefer this to be delivered through community based services that are informal, flexible, accessible, confidential and non-stigmatising. They talk about opportunities to build friendships and gain support from peers who have had similar experiences and they stress the importance of fun and creative group activities. They also emphasise the value of building trusting long term relationships with non-judgemental and accepting workers who support them with care and empathy (Brophy, 2006; MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008):

> *I want workers to be more concerned about me, genuinely, than to be only thinking about risks* (Young Person, cited in Brophy, 2006).

They state that they want choice over both who they work with and how the work develops, expressing a desire to be involved in professional training and recruitment, and argue the case for a holistic or multi-disciplinary approach that addresses other factors which impact on their mental

health such as housing, employment, relationships, drugs and alcohol (MHF, 2004; MHF, 2007a, Joy et al, 2008). This is reaffirmed by workers who were also consulted and identified that:

> *It is important that young people are able to have a part of their life that focuses on them as a person rather than just what is wrong with them* (Youth Mental Health Worker, cited in MHF, 2007a).

> *They want … a service that isn't just about mental unwellness … they don't want to sit in an office and talk about what's gone wrong and come away with an appointment for three weeks time* (Youth Mental Health Worker, cited in Joy et al, 2008).

Coulston's report confirms that 'young people have said that specialist mental health support is not always what they need, and what they have found helpful is support from informal, community services' (2010: 13) and that 'naturally occurring opportunities in daily living may ultimately prove more therapeutic than ones which are specially contrived or engineered' (Gilligan 2000, cited in Coulston, 2010: 13).

As noted, any shift in approach to meet the needs of young people and 'rethink' services, as part of a positive re-framing of mental health, will entail greater emphasis on support provided in non-mental health settings (MHF, 2007b). It is argued that youth work in many ways is uniquely placed to support a re-framing of mental health in line with social models (Tregaskis, 2002; Thompson, 2006) and with young people's expressed needs and desires, and can work alongside therapy – based approaches if necessary. It is a practice which is not only characterised by flexible approaches and accessible settings, but equally importantly by commitments to respect and mutuality in the relationships between adults and young people (Ord, 2007), an emphasis on conversation and dialogue (Smith, 2001; Jeffs and Smith, 2005), that aims to tip the balance of power in young people's favour and to start where young people are at (Davies, 2005), and to foster participative and associative processes that work from a strengths-based rather than a deficit model of young people (Davies, 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Cooper, 2011).

As a practice youth work has potential to genuinely empower young people (Cooper, 2011), supporting those experiencing poor mental health to develop coping strategies, improve emotional well-being and find ways to challenge the exclusion they have experienced. In addition, as Coulston (2010) notes, youth workers and youth projects are able to provide many of the factors identified as important for strengthening resilience (see Newman, 2004; MHF, 2004, 2007a and Paul Hamlyn, 2008). Our research suggests that such youth work practices, when delivered as part of a project for young people experiencing mental ill health, can considerably promote young people's emotional well-being. It is argued that the most significant factors in this transformational work are the potential of 'developmental group work' and 'giving voice' through innovative approaches to genuine youth participation.

Group Work

Drawing on evidence from the aforementioned studies, and through ongoing discussion, and consultation with young people, this project aimed to develop a service that is accessible, relevant, non-stigmatising and attempts to meet their needs through a positive approach to mental health. It was based on core youth work principles outlined above and was in sharp contrast to the deficit perspectives associated with the 'medical model' and much of the dominant policy discourse and the popular representation of young people with mental health issues. As such, the group work offered through the project does not offer traditional forms of 'talking therapy' but is activity and conversation based, and focused on experiential learning, inclusion, association and developing positive, trusting and supportive relationships.

Group activities are varied and range from music, arts and film making, preparing healthy food or learning yoga and relaxation, to more structured learning around mental health. All the activities are used as tools to build resilience, promote well-being and reduce isolation. They offer young people a 'safe space' in which they can share stories and experiences and build friendships, as well as challenge themselves and try out new activities. The young people are given the opportunity to increase their understanding of mental health and emotional well-being and learn about 'self-care' and are, as a result, enabled to develop strategies for positive mental health. This is often achieved through the articulation and expression of their feelings through creative and/or physical activities. In addition young people have opportunities to take part in consultations, formal discussion events and campaigns that help them to understand the 'bigger picture' – the social context of mental health – and the resulting impact of stigma and discrimination on young people with mental health difficulties. These provide empowering opportunities for them to 'have their say'.

The groups are run by two JNC professionally qualified and experienced youth workers, who have undertaken some additional (non-medical) training to enhance their understanding of youth mental health, such as suicide prevention, self-harm, resilience, adolescent brain development and mental health stigma.

Groups are small, up to 10 young people, and accessed only via referral to ensure they feel safe. They are attended by young people experiencing low to moderate mental health difficulties, and by those who have more enduring and significant problems, as well as by some who have additional learning difficulties or autism/Asperger syndrome. Some who attend are in mainstream education, while others are educated through 'cyber-school', short stay schools, or are out of education/employment. Young people are referred in to the project by schools, parents, GPs, CAMHS workers, social workers and other youth professionals. They can also refer themselves. Often the young people do not meet the eligibility thresholds for specialist CAMHS (Tier 3/4) services, although for some who do, they often choose to attend the groups alongside their individual treatment from CAMHS or adult community mental health teams (CMHTs), or as part of their

transition out of specialist (Tier 3) or sometimes inpatient (Tier 4) services.

Some who attend a group also receive one to one support from the project workers. This consists of ongoing sessions based on listening, emotional support, developing understanding of mental health and positive coping strategies and also involves making and supporting referrals into specialist CAMHS or CMHTs or other local services such as drug/alcohol services, family support, housing or employment support. Workers also work as part of multi-agency teams to support young people through local Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child (CAF/TAC) processes or Care Programme Approaches (CPAs). This individual work is important in supporting young people to access the groups and to encourage them into specialist services if necessary.

Systematic analysis of project outcomes data was not available at the time of writing, although the project has now improved its evaluation and monitoring processes, including introducing the 'Youth Star' outcomes tool (Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Limited 2009-2012). Further research is planned which can both identify significant outcomes of the projects as well as identifying some of the causal factors in their production. However, our initial findings based on observations and feedback from young people, indicate that involvement in the groups has a positive impact on their well-being, promoting understanding and normalising of mental health. Involvement also promoted feelings of acceptance, belonging and being part of something, building confidence, forming positive relationships and sharing experiences. These can all begin to counter experiences of exclusion, bullying, stigma and isolation that many of these young people have encountered.

What's best about the groups is being able to share your experiences with other people who have been through something similar, so you don't feel you're alone with it anymore (Young person, 2013).

> *I don't really go out with other young people, so [the project] gets me socialising and doing things and meeting people which makes me feel better* (Young person, 2013).

Fuller et al note that 'young people with mental illnesses largely remain on society's fringe' (1998 in Dadich, 2010: 106), the very nature of mental distress isolating them from school, employment, family and friendship groups. This is compounded by popular rhetoric and policy, as well as by health care approaches that largely construct them as vulnerable and dependent recipients, often excluding them from decisions and processes affecting their lives. This unfortunately often leads to 'cynicism, fatalistic attitudes and a sense of hopelessness' (ibid). Our research demonstrated the value of developmental group work processes and the potential of group membership to counter this exclusion by including and empowering these young people, bringing them back in from the periphery. Tew notes that, 'for many, everyday survival may depend on networks of mutual support and co-operation … offering mutual forms of understanding and emotional support' (2005: 73).

Attending groups alongside others who have shared or similar experiences can offer young people opportunities to construct productive, 'co-operative' experiences of 'power together' (Dominelli, 2002) enabling them to see their personal experiences as part of wider shared experiences, linked to social, political and economic processes (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006; Thompson, 2006). For the young people involved, simply realising they are 'not the only one' is very powerful. Dominelli emphasises the empowering potential of group work, stating, 'oppression individualises people in ways that isolate them and fragments their experience … coming together in groups is a major way of reversing this fragmentation' (2002: 109).

> *I've got a lot more confident since coming here. When I first came I wouldn't even say hello … I think it's because I felt welcome here, I didn't feel pushed out or I didn't feel weird here. I knew other people were going through the same thing and I wasn't the only one … I found it helpful knowing I wasn't the only one. I didn't feel on my own or like an outsider* (Young Person, 2012).

In addition, Dadich finds that 'opportunities to both give and receive assistance were helpful' (ibid: 107). This is confirmed by Coulston who suggests that 'one of the most important coping strategies that young people can use is to seek support from others' (2010: 14). Similarly the *Truth Hurts* enquiry found that young people generally prefer to seek help from peers who have had similar experiences when they have a problem with mental health (Brophy, 2006).

Our research indicated that young people who regularly attend the groups benefit as much from the relationships they develop with one another as from the support they receive from workers, with some going on to take mentoring roles with younger members. In this way, through peer support and reciprocal learning, group membership changes power dynamics, enabling young people to become providers of support to others, allowing them to experience 'an altered understanding of their abilities and of their valuable role within the group' (Dadich, 2010: 107). This paves the way for a 'strengthened self-perception' (ibid), and helps build positive mental health and resilience (Joy et al, 2008), as well as self-confidence and emotional development (Brophy, 2006).

Importantly, as these groups are facilitated by experienced workers, peer support is delivered in a safe and supportive manner, with clear boundaries and supervision, ensuring young people are not overwhelmed by taking on responsibility for another's distress.

> *We do support each other, especially when we know each other quite well … it's really good to have people to talk to who understand and know what you're going through* (Young Person, 2012).

> *Coming to the group is the first time I have actually felt 'normal' in a really long time* (Young Person, 2013).

These groups can be seen as powerful examples of the anti-oppressive perspective in practice. Dadich describes such groups as an 'environmental antidote to social isolation and exclusion which offer possibilities for counter narratives to social constructions [whereby young people] challenge and change constructions they had of themselves and reframe their self-identity, giving rise to different self-understanding' (2010: 106-108).

These insights reinforce the value of youth work's historic commitment to association and informal social education through developmental group work, working with the 'collectivities' and networks to which young people are attached (Smith, 2001; Davies, 2005; Ord, 2007). It also highlights the opportunities for empowerment and recovery that can be missed through the individualistic focus of many mental health services and psychological therapies. Our research also counters the increasing emphasis on individualised one to one interventions and formalised case work approaches in current youth policies, which are in danger of undermining such successes (Davies, 2010; Jeffs and Smith, 2002; Smith, 2003). As Dorling notes 'learning to live better with each other is beginning to be seen as the key to learning to live better within our own minds' (2011: 270).

Participation and empowerment

Central to anti-oppressive youth work practice is the process of youth participation (Davies, 2005; Ord, 2007). This is seen as a 'transformative' process, and is 'the antithesis of isolation, marginalisation, exclusion, powerlessness and alienation' (Ledwith and Springett, 2010: 57). It is premised on inclusion, trust and a belief that young people have a valuable contribution to make; it is also an important factor in enhancing well-being (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007; Cooper, 2011).

Since the 1980s there has been increasing recognition of the rights of children and young people to have their 'voice' heard within institutions, as well as be more involved in the decision making processes that affect their lives (Young Minds, 2005; MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008). This is reflected in a range of legislation and policy documents that attempt to ensure that young people's active participation is no longer an optional add on but is a central principle underpinning the delivery of services: for example, the Children Act, 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, ratifed 1991), and *Every Child Matters*, (2003). More recently, the updated NHS Constitution, 2013, and Coalition Government policy (DH, 2013a; DH, 2010) have emphasised clear commitments to the involvement of children and young people in health services, including the planning, commissioning, development, and evaluation of services. The participation of young people in service development is important as it helps to ensure that provision is relevant, accessible, and is meeting their needs. Importantly these participatory processes also potentially build many of the protective factors described earlier (MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008; Newman, 2004) and thereby promote positive mental health and resilience.

Participation and youth voice therefore form a central thread running throughout the project and

the trajectory towards genuinely enhanced participation is an important part of the pathway the project seeks to open up for young people. Much of this activity is led by or carried out through the CAMHS Young People's Board (CYBP) described earlier, although those involved in social groups also take part in consultations and creative participation activities, and many go on to become members of the CYPB as they build confidence.

Members of the CYPB come from a variety of backgrounds, some are project participants and/or CAMHS service users, others are carers for parents or friends and some simply have an interest in young people's mental health. The board is commissioned by the local clinical commissioning group (CCG) and members regularly attend meetings with health professionals, including commissioners and senior service managers. The board is involved in a wide range of activity; they are regularly consulted and have recently contributed to a local CAMHS needs assessment and the development of a new mental health strategy for young people. They also carry out consultations and 'peer research' with other young people locally, in order to represent their views. They have worked alongside CAMHS staff to organise and facilitate conferences and training for local professionals working with young people, have been involved in the recruitment and induction of CAMHS staff, and receive their own small commissioning budget through which they are able to develop resources to meet identified 'gaps'. This has included film-making, organising events, developing a local youth mental health website, and designing leaflets and information resources for young people. More recently they have been invited to support the national CYP IAPT (Children and Young People Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) programme which aims to transform delivery of specialist CAMHS across many parts of England. They have also been working with the newly established local Healthwatch. Members receive training and are informed and supported by the project workers to ensure they are able to participate fully.

No participative process is guaranteed; young people and workers will be faced with challenges (Baker, 1996; Ord, 2007) and the tension between empowerment and control at the heart of the participative process needs to be navigated (Barber, 2007). For example young people may express initial resistance and need to be encouraged, or be anxious in dealing with other professionals and need to be supported. They may also be wary of tokenism. Similarly the participative process within this project was not always smooth. For example at times young people needed to cope with their anxiety in dealing with other professionals who lacked understanding and at times workers met with resistance. However the participative opportunities developed within the project provided genuine involvement, which allowed young people to 'speak back' and have their voices heard, to use personal narrative to offer powerful insights into their experiences. It also enabled young people to describe the discrimination and stigma they have been subject to, to highlight the impact of cuts to services, to question or challenge professionals and to ensure young people's concerns are on the agenda. As such, they enable invaluable experiences of empowerment and provoke a 'shift' in relationships with professionals. Even if this was momentary, young people are still able to speak as 'experts' in their own lives, through what Tew describes as 'dialogue across

difference' (2005: 79). Such difference is viewed 'as an opportunity rather than a threat' (ibid: 78), and may provide the impetus for learning and change. Such opportunities allow the young people to feel that they have some control and are able to make a difference and influence change, as is powerfully expressed by one young person on the project:

> *Going to the conferences and meetings is quite hard, because it's hard not to be angry with the professionals, because of your experiences, but then they have made the effort to come and learn more and try to understand it a bit more … and having a chance to speak to them makes me feel better because I know I can be the better person … we just want to make things better for people who come after us* (Young Person, 2012).

Participation is essential to an anti-oppressive youth work that seeks to promote well-being and positive mental health because it attempts to change the narrative – challenging discourses and policy making based on assumptions of risk and deficit – by empowering young people. It supports them to achieve change and become actors rather than recipients of care, transforming their individual experiences into collective concerns, giving them responsibility and valuing their input.

Several reports (Oliver et al, 2006; MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008; MHF and Paul Hamlyn, 2008; Coulston, 2010; Cooper, 2011) similarly conclude that being involved in such participatory processes supports young people to understand the socio-economic and cultural factors that impact on their lives and their mental well-being, enabling them to feel in control and connected to their community. It also helps young people to develop trust and important decision making, communication and relationship building skills. Such processes are essential to building resilience and promoting positive mental health, as well as enabling young people to develop a sense of optimism, purpose and hope, and to challenge stigma, (MHF, 2007a; Joy et al, 2008). Young people's participation must be seen as more than 'making individual decisions about health care' or 'identifying areas for service improvement and developing wish lists', but rather as an empowering, anti-oppressive and emancipatory model of practice (Cooper, 2011).

Conclusion

It is argued that youth work is well placed to meet a number of the challenges facing mental health services for young people. The work developed within this project promotes protective factors which are important to recovery and resilience. The groupwork and participation practices employed by this project provide a vehicle for including and engaging the voices of excluded or marginalised young people with mental health difficulites and: 'reconstruct views of participants as active … in improving their own situations … able to actively engage in reflecting on and transforming their own marginalisation' (Dadich, 2010: 108) thereby 'challenging the status quo by contesting and transforming self-identity and the dependency implicit in prevailing models of mental health care responses' (ibid: 109). Whilst there is evidence of a slight shift in focus among some mental health researchers and practitioners,

in some parts of UK government policy (Brophy, 2006; DH, 2009; DH, 2011), whereby 'child and adolescent mental health work is starting to take a more holistic and preventive approach' (Weare, 2006: 119) moving from a 'pathogenic' or medical model to a 'salutogenic' or wellness model (ibid), there is clearly still much more work to be done. This paper proposes that youth work is well placed to deliver projects involving developmental group work and participative practices, underpinned by anti-oppressive principles which enable the voice of young people experiencing mental health problems to be genuinely heard, enabling young people to develop agency in helping to shape the services they receive which in turn significantly enhances their own and others' mental health.

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Note

1. This is an online alternative provision for young people with health problems and whose mental health stops them attending school.

Informal Education, Youth Work and Youth Development: Responding to the Brathay Trust Case Study

Bernard Davies, Tony Taylor and Naomi Thompson

YOUTH WORK as a distinctive process-led, young person-centred educational practice has been on the wane for at least two decades (Davies, 2008; Jeffs and Smith, 2008; IDYW, 2009). Its open, improvisatory and unpredictable character has not fitted well with an increasingly instrumental and behavioural neo-liberal agenda. As youth work has declined, other forms of work with young people have risen in prominence, particularly those favouring structured and targeted approaches based on prescribed outcomes. By and large these behavioural modification schemes have hesitated to give themselves an identity, preferring the pretence of still defining themselves as youth work. In the emergence of this array of interventions intent on regulating young people's lives (Taylor and Taylor, 2010), relatively few writers have drawn attention to the significance of the technocratic 'youth development' model.

Given this silence we welcomed the appearance earlier this year of an article, *'Non-formal youth development and its impact on young people's lives: Case study – Brathay Trust, UK'*, written by Karen Stuart and Lucy Maynard (2015) and published in the *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*. However, we found ourselves so perplexed by its argument that we have produced a trio of critical articles as a collective response. These are prompted by their account of 'how the [Brathay] Trust has developed a robust theoretical framework to underpin a non-formal youth development approach' (Stuart and Maynard, 2015: 231) which reignites what are, for us, important debates on three contested areas of practice with young people: informal education; youth work; and youth development.

Obviously, we would urge you to read Stuart and Maynard's piece in full, but our interpretations of its main assertions are as follows:

- Rooted in non-formal learning and education, youth development is a structured and planned intervention into young people's lives with identified and intended measurable outcomes. It can be shown to be robust and rigorous in both theory and practice.
- Rooted in informal learning and education, youth work is no more than unintentional learning, having little need for an educator or for preparation. Given a failure to evidence achievement, youth work is less than robust and less than rigorous.
- Against this backdrop, it is clear that in the present climate youth development richly deserves further research and development as the way forward for work with young people.

In the following articles we take up these assertions critically, but with a desire to open up dialogue

rather than shut it down. Firstly, Tony Taylor offers some overall context on the youth development versus youth work debate and questions Stuart and Maynard's claim that youth development is robust and rigorous, suggesting it is as much riddled with contradiction as the youth work it seeks to surpass. Secondly, from a theoretical perspective, Naomi Thompson explores Stuart and Maynard's misunderstanding of what constitutes informal learning, informal education and youth work. Finally, through a detailed interrogation of an example from practice, Bernard Davies offers evidence on the centrality and impact of the purposeful, reflective youth worker – in direct contrast to Stuart and Maynard's dismissal of the youth work role and process.

In line with Stuart and Maynard's openness about their commitment to Brathay and its programmes, we need to make clear that each of us brings to these articles an equally strong commitment to and long experience of youth work and specifically to the open access facilities and approaches advocated by *In Defence of Youth Work*. (IDYW, 2014; see also Davies, 2015). We also start from the premise that any analysis of the practices considered in Stuart and Maynard's paper need to be located in explicit theoretical, practice and political perspectives, including how those practices are defined, contextualised, analysed and evaluated.

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Youth Development: Youth Work's Friend or Foe?

Tony Taylor

IN THIS RIPOSTE to Stuart and Maynard's article, I will concentrate on unravelling their explanation of what constitutes youth development. Given the promiscuous desire nowadays to use and abuse the term youth work if and when it suits, their attempted clarity is enormously valuable. Placing itself in the camp of non-formal learning, youth development is described as a structured and planned intervention into young people's lives with identified and intended outcomes, which, Stuart and Maynard claim, is robust and rigorous. I offer the following doubts in a critical rather than antagonistic spirit, arguing that, at the very least, youth development is as riven with contradiction as the youth work which, in these three articles, we seek to defend and nurture.

The Political Context

Whilst Stuart and Maynard sketch an assault on both youth service provision and its philosophy over the last decade, document young people's dilemmas 'in these challenging times', and outline the pressures upon projects to respond, they tell only part of the story. The pressures to justify the survival of youth work are hardly new. Speaking personally, as a Chief Youth Officer in the mid-1990s, I almost crumbled under 66% cuts to a nationally regarded Youth Service in Wigan. The only way to procure further funding back then was to submit programmes based on specious outcomes. A few years later I was admonished by several of my peers for not believing that accredited outcomes would be the saviour of youth work.

Thinking more broadly, the last four decades have witnessed the triumph of neo-liberal economics and ideology. It is revealed as the common-sense of our age, 'the individualisation of everyone, the privatisation of public troubles and the requirement to make competitive choices at every turn' (Hall and O'Shea, 2014: 6). If we are to be rigorous the question of what has happened to youth work and to young people ought to be grounded in these political and social circumstances, in the hegemony of neo-liberalism. This is the ABC of any social or political analysis.

The fixation on outcomes-based approaches is born of the 1990s. Its raison d'être is to measure supposedly the effective and efficient use of funding in achieving targets. In terms of the impact on youth work this is best caught in the advice contained in the National Youth Agency/Local Government Association documents, *The Future for Outcomes* (2013) and *The Calculator in Practice* (2013). Before a young person is even 'a twinkle in the eye' of the youth worker, a project is instructed to define its audience, to agree the evidence needed and in accord to select from its portfolio of outcomes. In this scenario prioritising the collection of the right data is seen as crucial

to competing in a world of commissioning and increasingly payment-by-results. At a stroke the market is thrust into the very heart of our work, whilst young men and women are commodified, reduced to being no more than the bearers of 'data for exchange'.

Stuart and Maynard's account of the pressures on young people today is well made. Indeed commentators such as Henry Giroux (2013) talk of a 'war on youth'. However Giroux, along with others such as In Defence of Youth Work (2009), is at pains to stress, in contrast to Stuart and Maynard, that young people are not a homogeneous category. Rather than being seen as generally vulnerable or disadvantaged, young people are better understood as being particularly oppressed by and alienated in differing and similar ways according to the interplay of their class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and faith. They are caught up inexorably in this matrix of power relations.

Stuart and Maynard's silence on the character of the political regime we live under and the austerity it has consciously imposed, together with their embrace of a generalised category of young person, raises important questions about what sort of practice with young people might contribute to their vision of 'autonomous young people flourishing in a just and sustainable world' (2015: 234).

Youth Development as Programme

Stuart and Maynard might well shake their heads at our doubts. For they argue confidently that youth development as an approach can deliver in four broad areas: improving learning, attainment and employability; reducing offending and anti-social behaviour; improved well-being (groups with discrete needs); and Social Action. However, these categories are not of their making. Across the last two decades they have been imposed by successive governments in an ideologically driven mission to instrumentalise work with young people, to bring order to an unruly practice. They constitute the reference points for funding. Of course they make the sort of common-sense that suggests anyone doubting their appropriateness is a trifle disturbed. And yet, for us, it raises some important critical questions:

- Is improving learning, attainment and employability such a straightforward objective when youth unemployment is high, when so many young people face being part of a precariat rather than a proletariat?
- Isn't reducing offending and particularly anti-social behaviour related intimately to how we define pro-social behaviour? This is not a question to be restricted to young people. It is a question to be asked across society, most obviously of the financial institutions, whose greed precipitated the post-2008 crisis. It is a question to be posed of a Tory government's profoundly anti-social policies.
- Isn't improving well-being fundamentally a collective project? Thus, alongside the important work with individuals or groups with discrete needs with its inevitable psychological focus, isn't it necessary to encourage the politicisation of what it means to be well or even happy? Isn't it the case that any young person has good reason to feel ill at

ease with the values and norms of contemporary neo-liberal society?

- Whilst welcoming Stuart and Maynard's emphasis on 'criticality', hasn't the radical meaning of Social Action been undermined via its appropriation by schemes such as 'Step Up to Serve' and the National Citizen Service? Whilst workers are under pressure to encourage volunteering, as if clearing an overgrown path is novel, they are disciplined for accompanying young people on political demonstrations.

Of course these questions might be missing the mark in terms of the form and content of Brathay's programmes, but how are we to know? The description of youth development in Stuart and Maynard's article is conspicuously lacking in detail. We are informed that the programmes last between two days and three years, that the funding is diverse and that the young people vary in demographics, assets and needs. At a minimum we need more information. A breakdown of the range of programmes, their differing lengths, the means of recruitment, especially as groups are said to be referred, the character of these varied groups of young people and an insight into the make-up of the providing organisations themselves is basic surely to gaining a better understanding of what is meant by youth development. So too an insight into the process, through which workers and young people decide upon the specific five or six outcomes pertinent to their particular programme, would be invaluable. In terms of the integrity of youth development, knowing more about the nuts and bolts is all the more important as its programmatic character dovetails with the neo-liberal policy of providing short-term funding linked to pre-determined outcomes.

Brathay's Model of Youth Development

The youth development programme of the Brathay Trust is situated within a three part framework comprising Values, Practice and Outcomes. There is much within this structure that youth work and youth development share. There are also significant moments of difference. Both the common and uncommon ground need to be explored. Thus for now, we shall pose some areas for exploration in the hope that this collective journey might be undertaken.

Values

The historical struggle for social justice is a shared endeavour. Hence both youth work and youth development are haunted by the question of to what extent they nurture young people's social selves and encourage the growth of autonomous young people's groups. At its best youth work has contributed to the fostering of young people's groups, organised around gender, race and sexuality, but less so as neo-liberalism has sought to depoliticise practice. Whilst youth development speaks of young people as successful social agents in the pursuit of fairness, it is unclear how the mutual struggle for human rights, the forging of independent youth groups, emerges out of its practice.

Stuart and Maynard pin their colours to the mast of critical pedagogy, arguing that adherents of

youth development work with young people in ways that are anti-oppressive and empowering. This is to be applauded and obviously chimes with youth work's efforts, particularly in the 1980s and 90s to nurture through training an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. However, in reality, given that youth work is always a contested ideological arena, youth work's radical pedagogy minority was always opposed by youth work's conservative social pedagogy majority. And the latter has strengthened its influence in recent decades, embracing an outcomes-led approach geared to social conformity. Against this background, at the very least, youth development's advocacy of critical pedagogy and thus the fostering of a critical consciousness underpinned by a relentless critique of capitalist education is surely no straightforward matter.

Both youth development and youth work share a commitment to experiential learning and to a positive rather than negative view of young people. In theory, both refuse to see young people as in deficit. However, again, youth work's perspective has been seriously undermined by a shift to targeted interventions premised precisely on a view of young people as deficient in one way or another. Again it is difficult to see how youth development's programmes directed at referred groups (referred on the basis of what need?) floats above this dominant discourse without some degree of turbulence. For example, below the surface talk of assets and strengths the very way in which the discourse of 'employability' is utilised, suggests that young people lack the skills needed to gain employment. In this way the victim is blamed, the system excused.

Practice

The youth development model emphasises self-awareness, empowerment and agency. Stuart and Maynard speak of dialogue, consciousness and politicisation. Within youth work from Davies (2009) to Young (1999) and Batsleer (2008) via Jeffs and Smith (2008) the same themes emerge, if sometimes differently named.

Neither youth development nor youth work, though, can escape a number of important concerns. Upon which psychological theories do they draw in seeking to understand the personality and practices of young people? To what extent do these theories or understandings make sense in the hurly-burly of practice? In my opinion youth work has been confused on such matters. To put it crudely it has leaned principally on humanistic psychology, which offers insights essential to the building of relationships, but which fails to ground its subject in social relations. In contrast youth development seems more confident about its psychological perspective, offering 'frames' and 'models' to aid the worker's intervention into young people's lives. Its sources are eclectic, drawing on a heady mix of humanistic and behavioural sources. There is though, a fly in the explanatory ointment offered. Stuart and Maynard's references point both workers and young people to seductive, yet speculative models and categories, which claim to explain in simplistic terms who we are and why we act in the ways we do.

Amongst the sources referenced by Stuart and Maynard, Honey and Mumford propose that we are but one of four sorts of learner – Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist or Reflector; Kahler suggests that human motivation can be reduced to five drivers – Be Perfect, Be Strong, Hurry Up, Please Others and Try Hard; and Harris, best selling author of the book, 'I'm OK, You're OK' completes a trio of theorists wedded to the significance of Transactional Analysis (TA). All of which takes me back forty years to running a part-time youth worker training course with a colleague besotted with Berne (1964), the father of TA. It made for a fraught, even tetchy relationship, which certainly entertained the students. My prejudiced interpretation of those events is that my co-tutor captivated the workers in the early stages, but that as time passed they became less convinced that complex young people could be easily fitted into the functional roles on offer. In addition Stuart and Maynard invoke the controversial world of neurons and genes to explain further our behaviour, quoting favourably 'the amygdala hijack' which claims that a particular part of the brain controls emotions, and Glaser's choice theory which argues that we are driven by our genes to satisfy five basic needs – survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun.

All I can humbly say is that Stuart and Maynard's pot-pourri of explanations is extremely contentious. Given that youth work and youth development are concerned with the 'character' of young people and thus inexorably the 'character' of youth workers themselves, both have much to do in developing a coherent psychology which goes beyond fads and fancies.

In using the notion of empowerment as a signifier of individual development, Stuart and Maynard embrace the contemporary abuse and dilution of its meaning. In its original incarnation, empowerment is a collective undertaking, impelled from below on the basis of a common cause or identity. It is not an individual project. The collective cannot be empowered by those possessing power. The very idea of 'empowering' individuals masks the structural inequalities, which restrict the mass of humanity's choices. Empowerment reduced to the gaining of self confidence feeds into a neo-liberal diet of possessive individualism.

Outcomes

The uncritical, even effusive welcome given by Stuart and Maynard to the deeply problematic Catalyst Outcomes Framework (2012) is disconcerting. Together with Marilyn Taylor (2014) I have offered a thorough critique of its shortcomings, but in this context we will confine ourselves to the following points:

- The Framework is neo-liberal to its core, expressed in the fact that it accepts without question austerity and argues therefore that the young person of its attention must become 'emotionally resilient', less of a drain on the State and prepared to work for whatever crumbs are on offer in the market place.
- The outcomes themselves are treated as if the process is linear, irresistible and easily measurable. Whereas, to take confidence as an obvious example, the capacity is fragile.

Confidence waxes and wanes, is often situation-specific and indeed sometimes deeply problematic, spilling over into arrogance.

- Remarkably, too, the research supporting the Framework's seven clusters of outcomes fails conspicuously to engage with the burgeoning sexual feelings and desires of young people.
- The use of Outcomes-based approaches across the public sector has distorted practice in deeply troubling ways, leading to the fabrication of data. Work with young people is not insulated from such dilemmas. We know of situations where management monitors workers' performance on the basis of them illustrating ever increasing improvements in prescribed outcomes for young people.

Stuart and Maynard claim that the Catalyst Framework affords a shared language. If this is the case and accepted across youth development it brings with it too an ideology utterly at odds with their claim to critical pedagogy.

From Evidence-based Practice to Practice-based Evidence

The section of Stuart and Maynard's article on the process via which the Brathay Trust honed their youth development model is illuminating. There are several moments where Stuart and Maynard and ourselves share the same analysis. They recognise the range of problems besetting the Outcomes agenda, for example, noting that, 'young people are complex; with many different factors affecting their day-to-day living. Therefore, how can we truly claim that a programme has led to the outcomes they experience?'(2015: 245).

This said, though, they cannot resist a side-swipe, by way of a quote from Jean Spence (2004), at youth workers, who throw in the towel in the face of this tough question and 'reject the very notion of outcomes'. In fact Spence's point is that youth work is process-led: 'the dominant ethos in youth work is one of "process" rather than "outcome"'(2004: 262). She does not dismiss reflecting upon the consequences and effects of our engagement with young people.

But to return to points of agreement. In their scrutiny of evidence-based practice they come to a conclusion, with which we would concur, 'that simplistic pre-determined outcomes, pseudo-scientific and quantitative analysis would not show the real value of [their] work' (Stuart and Maynard, 2015: 247).

To their great credit Stuart and Maynard undertook a pilot one year project to test their conclusion across as many of their 5,000 participants as possible, utilising a classic pre-intervention, post-intervention model of self-assessment by young people. As a result they drew up an extensive range of descriptive statistics, supported by a number of observations from participants to give soul, as we would obviously argue, to the dry data. The outcomes were perplexing as there was a gulf between the apparent results of the pre and post intervention outcome wheels and the information

provided by young people through a feedback form at the end of the specific programme. The latter, completed by around 20% of young people involved, conveyed a real sense of progress and learning, whilst the former suggested that little had changed. In Stuart and Maynard's words, 'young people cannot have learnt and not changed in learning' (2015: 253).

Spurred on by this contradiction they pursued a further piece of work with 12 young people on a three year programme. To cut an interesting story short, Stuart and Maynard's explanation of the gap between the intervention self-assessments and the feedback forms is that the former are 'not methodologically fit for purpose. Young people are not "lab rats", the variables in their lives cannot be controlled, and there are psychologically more complex processes at play than in a medical trial' (2015: 257). Thus Brathay 'have implemented a post intervention measure of retrospective start scores and supported this by qualitative data to evidence the impact of our practice' (2015 :257). They argue that their approach is to be understood as a search for practice-based evidence.

Without being too sanguine about these conclusions none of them come as much of a surprise to those of us committed to informal education and youth work. As illustrated by the example analysed in Bernard Davies's piece below, across our diverse moments of action research into the significance of our practice a consistent theme haunts us – uncertainty. Our encounter with young people is thoughtful and purposeful. Its effects though can never be predicted or indeed settled with certainty, can never be guaranteed. None of which means that we don't do our utmost to reach our very best understanding of our impact on young people's lives. Indeed our own excursion into the potential of story-telling (In Defence of Youth Work, 2011) is a way of better recognising and sharing youth work's possibilities. Our heresy, deeply unfashionable in these instrumental times, is that youth work can never offer proof of its worth. It can provide evidence, but evidence that will always be open to interpretation, not least from an ideological point of view. If youth work is undoubtedly on the retreat, it is not because it lacks the manly virtues of robustness and rigour, although this might well be the case. Its present unpopularity is due to the fact that its open and improvisatory practice is explicitly at odds with the dominant neo-liberal agenda of individualised social conformity.

It is necessary to add that in practice youth work will witness moments when a structured approach comes to the fore, classically when the need for a themed residential emerges from the unfolding conversations and relationships with young people. I presume that in youth development there will be moments of informal learning as workers and young people mix outside of the structured setting. This said the two perspectives are clearly distinct. The question arises as to whether youth work and youth development are in opposition within a system that is obsessed with competition and rivalry?

Concluding Concerns

In truth the conclusion to Stuart and Maynard's exposition of their youth development model is disingenuous. In essence, they argue they have illustrated that their model of youth development

is robust and deserving of further research and development. Whilst we are less than convinced by the former claim, we have no quarrel with the latter desire and applaud their scepticism about evidence-based practice. However, in the final paragraph they seem to want 'both sides of their bread buttered':

> *[Pointing] to the need for the sector to be skilled and confident, developing its own artful ways of applying science to impact evaluation, and defending its position from its value base. We now support other UK organisations to navigate the ground that we have through a peer support group, the Youth Work Evidence Group. We highly recommend that youth workers and educators in other countries take the initiative in such a manner and tell their governments what good evidence of youth work looks like, rather than waiting to be told. And finally, above all, as critical pedagogues, we need to remain cognisant to the power structures that may shape our practice, and the oppression that may create for us as practitioners and for the young people we serve.* (Stuart and Maynard, 2015: 258/259)

Firstly, as is par for the course nowadays, Stuart and Maynard here slip into eliding notions of the youth sector, youth work and youth development. All of which is less than helpful, given that the substance of their argument clarifies the distinction between youth work and youth development, opening up the chance of a fruitful debate about differing forms of work with young people. For example, how far are youth social work, youth development and youth work complementary or antagonistic to each other? As things stand these questions are not being asked and the debate is not taking place. Secondly, having been at pains to dismiss youth work, Stuart and Maynard are now supporting a Youth Work Evidence Group to follow Brathay's youth development journey.

We can be forgiven for feeling that youth development needs no special pleading. In a range of guises, some of which we're sure Stuart and Maynard would be critical, youth development dominates the scene. With respect to their aim of influencing Government, the Cabinet Office supported Centre for Youth Impact might well be named the Centre for Youth Development. The website is awash with articles and blogs which take for granted the superiority and efficacy of structured programmes with specified and intended outcomes. Criticism is given but a token hearing.

As far as Stuart and Maynard's claim to being critical pedagogues goes, being seriously so is tough in these 'dark times' (Giroux, 2013), whether within youth work or youth development. They are absolutely right in the final sentence to underline that practitioners do not float free from the power structures of oppression and exploitation. Brathay's model of youth development though fails to remember sufficiently this stricture. In this they are not alone. Our own practice within youth work has often fallen short.

The reality is that almost four decades of neo-liberal violence have, from schools through to

universities, undermined deeply the holistic tradition of liberal education discussed below by Naomi Thompson. Teachers teach to test, lecturers answer to the market and youth workers are led by outcomes. Youth development does not stand outside of this authoritarian script. It is problematic that while youth work is in crisis, youth development prospers. Increasingly the remnants of youth work, often now youth development in all but name, propagate the values and norms of a possessive, individualistic society. Our contention is that both youth work and youth development need to be self-critical and grounded, recognising the enormous pressures to adopt what Marina Warner (2015) dubs 'a cruel optimism' via which we put the best gloss on our practice, even as it is distorted almost beyond recognition. Remaining true to a critical pedagogy or radical practice can only be a collective project. In its limited way the In Defence of Youth Work campaign tries to contribute to this endeavour. It would be good if the advocates of youth development joined with us. In this way we can be critical friends rather than hostile rivals.

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Informal Learning is NOT the same as Informal Education – addressing Stuart and Maynard's problematic theoretical confusion

Naomi Thompson

THIS PIECE responds to Stuart and Maynard's (2015) dismissal of youth work as informal learning from a theoretical perspective. In particular, it seeks to highlight that their conflation of youth work with informal learning disregards the theoretical underpinnings of youth work. They define informal learning in detail on page 236 of their article with no reference to theory at all. Their definition suggests that informal learning can take place anywhere, requires no educator or facilitator to be present and leads to no evidence of achievement. On page 237, they use the term 'informal education' interchangeably with informal learning and include a brief reference to Janet Batsleer's (2008) discussion of such. They assume, quite erroneously, that informal education is the same as informal learning and they routinely ignore some of our profession's other key theorists on the former (for example: Brew, 1946; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). In doing this, they argue for a non-formal youth development approach to work with young people, within which they place the practice of the Brathay Trust, as superior to informal learning and youth work.

Informal learning is NOT the same as informal education

The key problem in their utilising a definition of informal learning is that whilst it is the form of learning which often takes place in youth work, it is not the mode of practice that has been theorised and developed over decades to underpin youth work. Informal education is a mode of practice that has been carefully considered and articulated and that emphasises the importance of paying attention to, for example, the character of the educator, the environment or setting created for education to take place and the deliberate (as opposed to incidental) harnessing of informal learning within the youth work context.

What is informal learning?

Stuart and Maynard's definition of informal learning, though unreferenced, is not inaccurate. It fits with the distinctions made between formal, non-formal and informal learning by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC):

- ***Formal learning*** *takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications.*
- ***Non-formal learning*** *takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and*

training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations).

- ***Informal learning** is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills* (CEC, 2000: 8).

As outlined by Stuart and Maynard, informal learning can happen anywhere without educational intervention and may not lead to evidence of achievement. McGivney (1999: 6) outlines that it can be 'unplanned', 'incidental', 'unintentional' and 'surplus' to any explicit aims. She also outlines that it occurs 'through dialogue' and explains how such learning might be utilised for work with communities.

Those discussing informal learning also acknowledge that it is often ignored and its importance disregarded by policy-makers and researchers, as it is by Stuart and Maynard. Frank Coffield states that 'although informal learning is routinely ignored by government, employers and most researchers, it is often necessary, whereas formal training is often dispensable' (2002: 1). Similarly, in discussing engaging people in lifelong learning, the CEC state that:

> *[F]ormal learning has dominated policy thinking, shaping the ways in which education and training are provided and colouring people's understandings of what counts as learning… Non-formal learning, by definition, stands outside schools, colleges, training centres and universities. It is not usually seen as 'real' learning, and nor do its outcomes have much currency value on the labour market… But informal learning is likely to be missed out of the picture altogether, although it is the oldest form of learning and remains the mainstay of early childhood learning… Informal contexts provide an enormous learning reservoir and could be an important source of innovation for teaching and learning methods* (CEC, 2000: 8).

The CEC document also emphasises that in contexts where people have the choice to engage in learning that individuals' motivation is only likely to be sustained where they are:

> *… able to follow open learning pathways of their own choice, rather than being obliged to follow predetermined routes to specific destinations. This means, quite simply, that education and training systems should adapt to individual needs and demands rather than the other way round* (2000: 8).

This emphasises, again, the importance of providing learning that is not the 'outcome based' form triumphed by Stuart and Maynard.

What, then, is informal education?

It would be arrogant to assume that learning only takes place in educational contexts. However, Jeffs and Smith (2005) explain that education is the process of bringing thinking and learning into the 'conscious'. Informal learning occurs both, purposefully, in an informal education context and, incidentally, in everyday life. This distinction is grasped by anything more than a cursory glance at the informal education literature. In short, informal education is a mode of practice developed to allow an educator to create environments for informal learning:

> *Informal learning involves unplanned, incidental, even accidental, learning in everyday experience. Informal education involves an educator creating an environment to facilitate informal learning rather than leaving it to chance* (Stanton, 2004: 75).

In creating this environment, the nature and role of the educator and the context in which they operate are key considerations. Jeffs and Smith (2005), in their much re-printed, seminal text on Informal Education, define informal education as follows.

> *It is the process of fostering learning in life as it is lived. A concern with community and conversation; a focus on people as persons rather than objects, a readiness to educate in different settings* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 8).

Whilst it is clear that informality is central here; within this 'fostering of learning', of making learning a conscious process, the role played by the educator is highly significant:

> *Because informal educators aim to advance learning and open it up to as many people as possible they naturally seek to build upon such incidental learning. They use it as a starting point, and try to deepen learning through encouraging conversation, reflection and further experience. In other words, informal educators both consciously set out to create environments that foster incidental learning, and encourage people to explore what may have been learnt* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 9).

As well as the role of the educator being significant in the theory of informal education, those organisations engaged in practice have also emphasised its importance. It featured, for example, in many of the curriculum documents of individual Youth Services developed in the early 2000s, such as that of City of York Council:

> *Informal education is a delivery style which runs through all these methods used and areas*

> *covered in youth work. It relies on workers engaging young people through conversations and skilfully using these as a way of raising issues and engaging with young people. Good quality youth work makes use of opportunities as they arise to support young people in exploring ideas and issues through conversation and action* (City of York Council, 2003: 2).

Whilst Stuart and Maynard suggest that no educator is required for informal learning to take place, we see here that in the more purposeful practice of informal education, an educator is indeed present and important. Brew also emphasises the role and character of the educator in what was the first substantial text on informal education. She explains, among other attributes, that 'one should adopt the language of the people and be both clear and homely' (Brew, 1946: 40). What all these examples emphasise – and what the story discussed in Bernard Davies's piece below helps illuminate – is that the presence and role of the educator is crucial to the learning that takes place within informal education.

Different settings or any setting?

Stuart and Maynard (2015) also suggest (in table 1, p.236) that informal learning can take place in any setting. Whilst this is true of definitions of the incidental nature of informal learning, in fostering environments for *informal education*, setting is a key consideration. Jeffs and Smith, in their definition of informal education quoted earlier, suggest the educator must have a 'readiness to educate in different settings'. However, a flexibility to work in different settings is not the same as being able to work in *any setting*. Indeed, as the theorists of informal education (such as both Brew and Jeffs and Smith) emphasise, in the process of fostering or creating environments, the appropriateness of the setting itself is an essential consideration. First and foremost, the key consideration is that theorists of informal education and youth work emphasise the importance of starting 'where the young people are' (Brew, 1946; Davies, 2015; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). Whilst the informal educator needs, therefore, to be flexible to work in different settings, some may not be appropriate at all due to them not being anywhere near to the young people's starting position or them having negative connotations for them. Davies (2015), in particular, explains the importance of levelling the power dynamics between young people and educator and to starting from spaces within which the young people have ownership or, at very least, a level of negotiation. Stuart and Maynard's suggestion that youth work as informal learning can take place anywhere is a gross oversimplification of the importance of considering the environment within informal education practice.

Whilst there is not space to explore them all fully here, Stuart and Maynard's simplistic comparison of the different forms of learning disregards some key features of informal education – with the importance of the facilitator and the environment being but two examples. Another is their suggestion that no 'evidence of achievement' occurs from informal learning. By contrast, impact is a much debated (though, admittedly, contested) concept in youth work and informal

education theory and practice. The fact that outcomes are achieved through youth work is not contested, how these outcomes should be measured and whether they can be pre-defined is more complex. Davies (2015), for example, emphasises that impact is significant in youth work but that this should be measured qualitatively (see, for example, In Defence of Youth Work, 2011) and not merely in reductionist and quantitative ways. Moreover, as demonstrated by the example of practice examined in Davies's piece below, the evidence may take (considerable) time to emerge – and even then may do so only by chance.

Acknowledging overlap

Stuart and Maynard are keen to emphasise their non-formal 'youth development' approach as distinctive from informal youth work, which they appear to view as chaotic and uncontrolled. However, as Tony Taylor makes clear in his article above, many of the features of their work which they go on to discuss have long been discussed as features of youth work. Empowerment, critical pedagogy, experiential learning and social justice have long been discussed by informal education and youth work theorists as defining features. This is undeniable with a knowledge of the literature (see Jeffs and Smith 2005 as a starting point). Take, for example, Stuart and Maynard's focus on experiential learning as key to their youth development approach. The theories of Kolb, Dewey and other key thinkers on experiential learning have long informed – indeed, arguably, are the most crucial underpinning of – the theory of informal education.

Why therefore are Stuart and Maynard so keen to distinguish their approach from the developed theory and practice of youth work? As already suggested, clear overlaps exist which their over-simplistic distinction appears to disregard – overlaps between formal, non-formal and informal learning and education which commentators on informal learning and education recognise. McGivney explains:

> *It is difficult to make a clear distinction between informal and non-formal learning as there is often some crossover between the two. The setting itself is not necessarily a defining element: some informal learning takes place in formal educational environments (such as schools) while some formal learning takes place in an informal local setting (such as church or village halls)* (McGivney, 1999: 1).

Similarly, Jeffs and Smith (2005) explicitly recognise and discuss this overlap between the formal, non-formal and informal modes of learning.

It is perhaps important to consider whether the approach triumphed by Stuart and Maynard, if not as distinctive as they suggest, is as superior to youth work as informal education as they appear to argue. If we consider the original definition of education (as emphasised by Dewey, 1956) as the 'drawing out' as opposed to the 'pouring in' of learning – then the process of informal education

arguably achieves this more easily than modes of non-formal learning which are manipulated to achieve certain pre-defined outcomes whilst maintaining the illusion of non-formality. Informal education arguably has the intrinsic capacity to remain guided by the theories of person-centred, reflective and experiential learning.

Conclusion

Informal learning is the process that people engage in. Informal education is the practice that has been developed to facilitate that form of learning. Whilst informal learning is unplanned, incidental and often takes place without an educator, key theorists of informal education as a form of practice emphasise the role and character of the educator as highly significant. The use of informal learning as interchangeable with informal education in Stuart and Maynard's paper, as well as the oversight of these key theorists, is a major error in their analysis. Their definition of informal learning is correct in that it is incidental, even accidental, and without the intervention of an educator. Informal education, however, is the deliberate use of informal learning as a tool by educators in which they obviously do apply some limited structure, boundaries, even goals – in order to foster an environment in which they can facilitate learning. As such, the use of a definition of informal learning rather than informal education in their article is misleading as they are relating it to a situation in which a youth worker or educator is actively present rather than simply the incidental moments of learning encountered in everyday life.

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Challenging Stuart and Maynard's Misrepresentations of Youth Work: Evidence from Practice

Bernard Davies

STUART AND MAYNARD's (2015) rejection of youth work as a conscious and disciplined form of practice is made most explicit in their assertion that 'much youth work is based on an informal learning approach'. Adopting positions which, as Naomi Stanton has shown above, do not withstand critical scrutiny or analysis, they then define this as:

> *… learning that is not organised or structured in terms of goals, time or instruction. There is no teaching or facilitation. So informal learning refers to the skills acquired unintentionally through life and work experience, and the skills are not acquired in a planned or deliberate manner* (236).

This position is then explained further in a table which characterises 'informal learning' as:

- having 'no adult role';
- in relation to the 'role of the learner', being merely 'self-directed';
- having 'no plans';
- in relation to 'who has responsibility for planning', being simply 'learner directed';
- in relation to 'evidence of achievement' – providing 'none'.

(Stuart and Maynard, 2015: 236)

In the past and perhaps still, too much practice claiming to be 'youth work' has, it is true, displayed too many of these characteristics. However to define the practice in this way is to do so simply on the basis of what its least effective practitioners do. More positively, it needs to be challenged as a grossly inaccurate characterisation both of youth workers' intentions and of their actual direct practice with young people.

Moreover, for an article whose whole purpose is to argue the case for 'evidence-based practice', Stuart and Maynard provide little evidence to support these assertions. To counter their view, rather than setting out an alternative abstract definition of youth work, I offer as evidence a critical analysis of one of the 'stories' included in the In Defence of Youth Work book *This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice*. (IDYW, 2011: 20-21). As explained when it was published, the book itself sought 'to counter New Labour's resort to the simplistic number-crunching and "tick-boxing" which dominated its monitoring and evaluation of youth work' (p 2) – a need which under subsequent governments since 2010 has become even more pressing. As do others in the book, the specific story analysed here has been chosen as a fitting practical illustration of the key features

of the youth-work-as-informal-education approach outlined by Naomi Thompson in her article above. In particular, though the young person's learning was in many ways 'unplanned, incidental, even accidental', it can be shown to have occurred only because an educator, 'rather than leaving it to chance', deliberately intervened to create an environment and processes which made it possible.

Some evidence from practice

In a slightly abbreviated form, this is the worker's 'story':

Pen and paper youth work

> *Anne was fifteen. On this particular evening she looked subdued and withdrawn, making little contact with the other young people. Something was clearly affecting her but her shrug suggested that she did not want to talk. It was a dismissal of both Grace (the youth worker) and the topic.*
>
> *During the evening Grace created an opportunity for sitting next to Anne. Rather than talking, she passed her a note asking if she was ok. Anne responded by writing a note back saying she was feeling down, things were not all well at home – that she was really struggling. She signed the note with a sad face ☹. Through a series of small points of clarification in the notes that followed Anne, bit by bit, was able to reveal her struggles. Open questions were avoided or ignored by Anne who was too sussed for that: she saw them as disrespectful, an insult to her intelligence. For Anne the problems were too big to bring out in one go.*
>
> *Though it wasn't emotionally and physically possible to do that, the small pieces of clarification that Grace asked for seemed to be respected and responded to. Grace used the clarifications to show she was interested, that she cared and – both as a youth worker but also as a parent herself – that maybe she even understood a little of what was happening to Anne. When it became clear that her relationship with her mother and father was strained, one of Grace's responses was that she was a mother as well and that as a parent she didn't always get it right.*
>
> *As the exchanges of notes continued other worries came out – about the pressure to have a boyfriend and how she felt about herself. All this took place without a spoken word between the two of them. At the end of the evening Grace wrote another note asking Anne how she was feeling. Her response was to draw a ☺ – an improvement on the ☹ where she'd started.*
>
> *No more was thought or said about this exchange. Though infrequently, Anne continued to visit the centre, then eventually stopped coming altogether and contact was lost. A couple*

of years later Anne saw Grace in the town centre. She approached her smiling, asked how she was and about the youth centre. She was studying in College and enjoying the course. Anne asked whether Grace remembered their exchange of notes, to which Grace replied that of course she did. Anne thought for a moment and then, looking directly at Grace, said that on that evening she was feeling so low that she was thinking of self harming but that their 'conversation' had stopped her. She then said thank you, and 'seeya'.

(Adapted from IDYW, 2011: 20-21)

Messages from practice

How then does this example of practice fit Stuart and Maynard's definition of 'informal learning' and their criteria of this:

- 'not (being) organised or structured in terms of goals, time or instruction';
- involving 'no teaching or facilitation';
- with 'skills acquired unintentionally (by young people) through life and work experience' – 'not acquired in a planned or deliberate manner'?

Intentionality – generating goals and structure

Underpinning this whole piece of practice is the intentionality of Grace, the worker's, behaviour throughout her contacts with Anne. When, during young people's 'private or social lives' – such as when they are 'hanging out in the park' (Stuart and Maynard, 2015: 236) – did a member of the public who just happened to be around approach a young woman she did not know that well, indicate she'd noticed she looked 'subdued and withdrawn', and ask how she was feeling?

Indeed, so against our society's norms of everyday social intercourse is such behaviour that we surely have to conclude that:

- From the moment Anne crossed Grace's path that evening, Grace was acting with what Stuart and Maynard call 'goals'.
- By deciding later to sit herself next to Anne to 'create an opportunity', Grace took a calculated decision – one which I and many other youth workers might not have taken on the grounds that Anne might find it too intrusive.
- The highly unconventional form of Grace's second approach indicated a carefully thought-out structure shaped by the 'failure' of her earlier one.

Learner – or worker – directed?

Some complicating factors to Stuart and Maynard's rather one-dimensional perspective here would seem to include the following:

- In the story, ultimately Anne was certainly in control, not least because, as in all open access youth work, she had chosen to come to the club and could have left at any point she experienced Grace's behaviour as unacceptable.
- In reality however Anne's hold on this 'leadership' was, it would seem, flexible even in the very short time gap between Grace's first approach (when clearly the outcome was 'learner-led') and her acceptance of Grace's first note to her.
- Anne's readiness to let go of some of her 'leadership' may also have been influenced by how Grace made that second approach, with the note-passing perhaps leaving Anne feeling more in control than a conversation would have done.
- Nonetheless, that Anne did respond to the first note suggests that she was willing, to let go of some of her control of the situation and even accept some 'leadership' from Grace.

Much of this is speculative and is certainly not intended to provide definitive answers to the question: so who was leading who here? On the contrary, its aim is to suggest that monolithic notions of 'self-directed learner' and 'learner directed' have little operational value within the complex human dynamics of young people – youth worker exchanges. Indeed, such notions may act as barriers to adult (worker) interventions which a young person may welcome and need. Though young people's agency will remain a paramount consideration for youth workers, this cannot reduce them to passivity. Indeed if youth workers are not prepared to take some initiatives in their encounters with young people then why are they putting themselves in these situations in the first place?

The adult role

Far from having 'no role' therefore (as Stuart and Maynard's depiction of informal learning suggests) Grace the youth worker had an – at times low key, at other times active and indeed pro-active – role to play. Moreover, not only did she go into that club session clearly assuming this, but many of her reactions to Anne can only be explained as stemming from her definition of herself as in a youth worker role. For example:

- However implicitly defined this role may have been for both Anne and Grace, and however contested it might still be generally, Grace's two attempts to draw Anne into conversation were clearly shaped by her conscious embrace of the youth worker label – ultimately her *raison d'être* for being in that place at that time.
- Anne, too, will also have had her perceptions and expectations of someone so labelled which will have fed into her exchanges with Grace – not least when she opened up to her in a way she would hardly have done to that casual passer-by in the park.

As *This is Youth Work* (IDYW, 2011) highlighted many times, not just in Anne and Grace's story; for youth workers, these complexities are amplified by the fact that the role boundaries in youth work are seen and, at times, treated as permeable. A range of ethical as well as practical

considerations will of course always limit what a youth worker can and cannot do. Nonetheless, *in situ*, judgements are constantly being made, many 'on the wing' (DES, 1987: 2), on where to draw the lines – judgements which during the evening Grace apparently made at least twice – in that:

- it was OK for her to try again to 'talk' with Anne – something, as suggested earlier, another worker might not have done; and
- because it might help Anne, it was within her role at that moment to share with Anne Grace's experience as 'a mother' and even 'as a parent (who)… didn't always get it right'. This after all was a decision containing substantial ambiguity which others might have judged:
  - negatively – as a risky extension of the youth worker role into a 'private' sphere of Grace's life;
  - positively – as Grace's attempt to express in that role some aspects of herself as 'the person' playing it.

What this 'unpicking' of Grace's behaviour reveals therefore is that Stuart and Maynard's simplistic assertions about informal learning such as 'no adult role' fail completely to engage with the 'unfinished' elements of the youth work process, as well as, in this case, the often shifting, nuanced and tentative but nonetheless – even in 'informal' situations – ascribed role which adults take on when they commit themselves to being a youth worker.

Planning – why and how?

Clearly Grace had not arrived that evening knowing Anne might be unhappy – or indeed even that Anne would be in the club. In that sense, therefore, she had done no 'planning' for what turned out to be, for Grace, a very testing piece of practice.

Nonetheless, very quickly Grace picked up – interpreted Anne's non-verbal communication – that 'she (Anne) looked subdued and withdrawn' and that 'something was clearly affecting her'. Later, again through observation alone it seemed, she added to these insights that Anne was 'making little contact with other young people'? This cumulative 'reading' of Anne's state of mind (and therefore potential needs) suggests that at the very least a prepared mind and sensibility were at work which provided the prompt for a far from straightforward but, for Anne, important youth work intervention.

Two conclusions here would therefore seem to be that:

- to reduce the notion of planning to, in effect, 'lesson planning' is to remove some of its most subtle and indeed human features; and
- to talk about planning in this simplistic way is to give it a rigidity which is incompatible with the responsive person-centred practice to which youth workers aspire. Like others in *This is Youth Work*, the 'Pen and Paper' story is an example of what Tony Taylor in

> his earlier article calls an 'open and improvisatory practice' – a practice which, 'though boundaried by commitments to consistency and reliability … enables workers to respond flexibly and creatively to young people's interests and concerns' (IDYW, 2011: 3).

Here, as in so much else in their analysis, Stuart and Maynard seem to need to gloss over and even remove the complexities of the real life demands faced by youth workers in order to make their practice amenable to the 'scientific' measurement and statistical 'outcomes' demanded by youth work's currently dominant paymasters.

Providing 'evidence of achievement'

Stuart and Maynard clearly appreciate the challenge facing youth work as it tries to meet policy-makers' currently unremitting demand for 'evidence-based practice'. They note how this 'has … overlooked key evaluations that were not evidence based' but 'chose qualitative methods' (2015: 247) and even argue that 'evidence based practice is not fit for all youth work contexts' (2015: 256).

However, they go on to suggest that 'many youth workers reject the very notion of outcomes…' (2015: 245), even, as Tony Taylor points out, unfairly referencing Jean Spence's work in support. They also seriously misrepresent the position of many other youth workers, with *This is Youth Work* for example unequivocally asserting '… the need (for youth workers) to be accountable to elected representatives, management, communities and especially young people themselves' (IDYW, 2011: 7).

However, as *This is Youth Work* also makes clear, the book was in part prompted '… to call the bluff on that feigned ignorance, which claims that youth work is a bit of a mystery and asks "how do we know it's doing any good, giving value for money?"' It also describes itself as a response to a debate within IDYW focused on 'how we might illustrate the qualitative dimension of a youth work practice which sees young people as the active and critical citizens essential to an authentic democracy' (IDYW, 2011: 7).

The challenge for youth workers in fact is decidedly *not*, as Stuart and Maynard suggest, whether to be accountable. It is *how* to provide that accountability in ways which – through sensitive human processes rather than highly instrumental tick-led procedures – are congruent with the practice's defining features.

In this context, using the 'Pen and paper' story as evidence of youth work's 'outcomes' poses a number of problems. Because of that entirely fortuitous meeting in the town centre two years later – and, for this purpose, aren't we all relieved it happened! – we can assess what Grace did over that one evening as a most striking 'success story'. What more could you ask of a youth worker than,

from body language alone, to pick up that a young woman was 'feeling low'; and then, despite an initial 'dismissal', use a highly imaginative intervention which deflected the young woman from self-harming? How warmly the funders of targeted youth work would embrace that; how eagerly managers would incorporate it into their monthly returns.

Yet – questions remain:

- *On the night,* what could Grace have put into her 'evaluation' forms? That Anne's sad face had become a straight face? And how would that have gone down with her managers and ultimately perhaps the funders? As a sufficient justification for two-and-a-half or three hours' work?
- *In the longer-term* what would Grace have known she could claim as other, even 'soft', outcomes from her efforts that night? She couldn't even have pointed to the start of an ongoing relationship with Anne who subsequently came to the centre only 'infrequently' until eventually 'contact was lost'.
- And how useful would that eventual 'successful' outcome have been in the Stuart and Maynard scheme of things? Very little, it seems, given that:
  - Anne's own very revealing (and positive) evaluation of this piece of practice was so delayed that it could never have been available for the kinds of imposed evaluations Stuart and Maynard advocate;
  - the very fortuitousness of Grace's eventual meeting with Anne demonstrates how big the odds often are against important youth work 'outcomes' ever becoming available for Stuart and Maynard's kinds of evaluative procedures.

So … where does all that leave 'youth work'?

My reason for selecting the 'Pen and paper' story was not because it was 'a success story', nor even to illustrate high quality youth work practice, but because:

Firstly, it provides some credible grounded evidence of youth work in action which contradicts Stuart and Maynard's hugely oversimplified representation of such practice and their resultant under-estimation of the informal learning, broadly conceived, which young people can derive from it. Especially in the present ideological and funding environment, such distortions offer so many hostages to fortune that they need to be challenged head-on, and in an evidence-based way.

Secondly, in making a positive case for youth work, including its honest and realistic evaluation, it is vital, too, to confront its complexities and ambiguities – something which (at best) Stuart and Maynard play down in their mission to convince us (and perhaps also themselves) that there are no serious obstacles to adopting the 'scientific' forms of 'measurement' to which they are so strongly committed.

In a further challenge to some of Stuart and Maynard's core arguments, this 'story' surely also carries another important message: that, without relying on highly structured pre-planned programmes and curricula, purposeful youth work can support and indeed prompt forms of informal learning which young people experience not only as educationally developmental in the longer term but also, at moments of uncertainty and stress, as highly supportive and motivating in their here-and-now.

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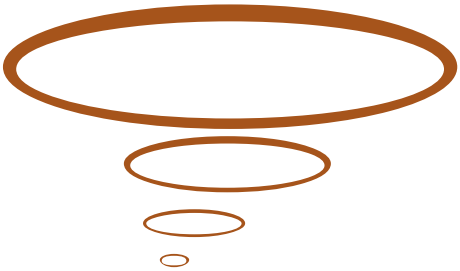
THINKING SPACE (1)



Reflections on the Scottish referendum and young people's participation

Alan Mackie

WHILST WORKING last year during the Scottish Independence referendum I helped to run a small Yes shop in the village where I live. It was busy one day and I noticed three schoolgirls standing furtively at the door, as if afraid to cross the threshold. I went out to speak to them and asked if I could help:

'We were wondering about something to do with the referendum.'
'Aye, what's that?' I asked.
'We keep hearing about TTIP or something like that and were wondering what it is?'

As someone who has worked with young people for many years and with an academic interest in the political participation of young people, I was astonished that here I had three young people who were compelled to seek out information on a topic they didn't fully understand. It was at that moment that I knew something special was happening in Scotland. Of course, anecdotal evidence like this doesn't tell us much about broader patterns of political participation. But as someone who was engaged in the referendum, I think it is indicative of the engagement and participation of young people last year.

In this short article, I will try to pull out some of the reasons I think young people did engage with the referendum process and also identify reasons why young people are choosing to disengage from the formal political process. I will make some tentative suggestions that could potentially address this situation, based on conversations I had with young people, as well as my own research where I carried out in-depth, qualitative interviews with five politically engaged (on both sides of the debate) young people during the referendum.

Young People's Formal Engagement

Having worked with young people and now researching their exclusion, it is difficult not to get frustrated with the continuous debate concerning the issue of whether or not 16 and 17 year-olds

should get the right to vote. On the one hand we hear that young people aren't interested – 'if 18 year-olds can't be bothered to vote why should 16 year-olds be given the right to vote?' On the other hand, politicians who are seeking to give young people the vote seem to imagine that the simple act of enfranchisement will act as some sort of democratic salve; young people will magically appear at polling booths and democracy will be reborn. Both positions are well off the mark in my opinion.

A post-referendum report from the Electoral Commission (2014) suggests that turnout amongst 16 and 17 year-olds (there were 109,593 young people registered to vote in this age group) was 75% compared to 54% amongst 18-24yr olds. The figures are, as expected, lower than for their older contemporaries (85% for 35-54yr olds and a whopping 92% for those 55 and over). If this is correct, that three-quarters of 16 and 17yr olds voted, it is a spectacular success and vindicates the decision to extend the vote to young people.

The recent General Election also saw a welcome increase in young people voting, with 58% of 18-24 year olds turning out to vote (BES, 2015). Prior to this, less than 50% of young people turned out to vote from 2001 onwards. The full breakdown has yet to be published, but early analysis suggests that turnout amongst young people in Scotland was much higher than other parts of the UK, pushing up the national average (this is the case for all age groups) (*Independent*, 2015). However, compared to their older contemporaries, young people are still significantly less likely to vote, to register to vote and are less committed to political parties. In short, young people are shunning 'conventional' politics.

However, we know that young people are engaging in politics – just out-with the formal sphere. Their participation appears to be 'issue-based' reflecting a growing political 'consumerism'– dipping in and out, picking issues that are of importance to them. Much research has shown that young people are looking at issues such as militarism, Third World debt, animal rights, nuclear power, environmentalism and anti-capitalist policies amongst others – and have little confidence in their elected officials to either represent them or deal with what they see as globalised issues. Young people are engaging in new ways which the traditional formal structures are unable or unwilling to accommodate – such as petitioning, boycotts, demonstrations and online activity such as blogging and internet campaigning.

Young people demand a new response and so far our old politics has not responded. Our institutions are failing to engage with the politics of youth; until they do, it will be of little surprise if young people remain outside the realm of formal politics. Young people are still largely seen as 'citizens-in-the-making' rather than citizens in the here-and-now. But the recent experience of working with young people during the Independence Referendum has firmly cemented the belief in my mind that young people are just as capable as their older contemporaries in making political decisions based on considered reasoning.

Citizenship Education and the School

Dr Jan Eichorn (2014) carried out a quantitative study with over 1000 young participants during and after the referendum, looking at their level of political interest, and compared these results with parents and adults. Some of the key findings make for interesting reading and rebut some of the common charges laid at their door:

- Young people are not uncritically mimicking parents in voting decisions – over 40% voted a different way from their parents;
- Young people who discussed the referendum with parents did not feel more confident having done so;
- Young people are not less politically engaged than adults;
- Where young people discussed the referendum at school, their confidence did increase.

Eichorn concludes by stating 'that young people who do not get the chance to discuss politics in an informed manner in the classroom miss out. There is no other institution that seems to be able to create the same positive effect on political confidence' (2014: 12). This mirrors other research which suggests that the socialising influence that school possesses can play a significant role in arming young people with the skill, knowledge, critical capacity and confidence to engage in the political sphere. Research has found that turnout in a first election is crucial in leaving a 'participative footprint' in one's voting 'career' (Plutzer, 2002). Because young people are embedded in what could be a highly productive social environment at school, it is lamentable that we are not using that space more to encourage young people to participate in politics.

In terms of my own research into this matter, the young people I interviewed over the summer were less than complementary about the 'citizenship education' they received at school. In their opinion (and this is supported by, for example, Biesta, 2011) the political education young people largely receive is not political at all. At its worst it revolves around their social responsibilities and encourages them to engage in 'pro-social' behaviour (don't drink, don't take drugs, volunteer etc). At its best it teaches young people about politics rather than how to do politics. If we are serious about engaging young people in democracy this undoubtedly needs to be addressed.

An alternative education?

Unfortunately, at the moment, many young people feel that politics is something that is done to them and not with them. Young people feel alienated from politics (I have little doubt that many adults feel this way too); they are bored by politicians and formal politics but not with political issues and ideas. So how can educators contribute to the re-engagement of young people in the political sphere? I have some tentative suggestions based on reading and my own research and experience during the Independence Referendum:

1. *Treat young people as citizens*. The young people I worked with during the referendum enthused about activities such as debates, meetings, hustings, and voting. This means a re-conception of young people, from 'citizens-in-the-making' to 'citizens-in-the-here-and-now'. These were not just mock events (although some were) but involved politicians coming to the school and truly engaging young people, looking for their votes. The young people felt that they were taken seriously. Theyfelt *involved*. They felt *engaged*. It is little surprise that these activities and events had an impact.

2. *Encourage Group Learning*. This requires the social aspect of educational practice being brought to the fore. Democracy is not learned in isolation, but in co-operation, argument and action – all of which were highlighted as important (and enjoyable) aspects of the experience of the young people over the last two years. This means not only prioritising group learning but also involves a serious step change from the current 'political' education which individualises young people and looks to address social dysfunction. Young people are not blind to this and from my discussions with them, they actively enjoy working with each other. This should be encouraged as Warren and Mira (2008:30) note, 'as young people build relationships, talk with each other about their values and the issues they face, they build some shared understandings and a sense of common interests' Only by engaging in dialogue, reflection and practice with others will young people begin to unpack the issues that limit their political participation as a collective and offer a starting point for a response. After all, isn't association, dialogue, reflection and praxis the very essence of a healthy democracy in any case?

3. *Be active in the community*. It is clear that young people place a high value on participation at the local level, that offers them the opportunity to participate directly and engage with others. This undoubtedly shapes political participation as they seek opportunities out-with schools which have failed to satisfy their motivation to become involved. Getting young people out into their local communities to be political is (and should be) a key facet of their political education. Citizenship education as it stands is detached from the lives of young people outside the school and a one-size-fits-all approach seems doomed to failure unless it takes into account the contextual factors that constitute their everyday lives. This means educators have to pay attention to the micro-politics of young people's lives. Much research has highlighted the importance of family, peers, media and the broader social networks on political participation and attention should be paid to these, if not drawn upon to boost participation.

4. *Consider the importance of Power*. The final lesson to draw from the experiences of young people during the referendum concerns the issue of power. It was apparent that young people embraced those political activities where they have a sense of power in the immediacy – attending demonstrations, signing petitions, taking part in debates and

> being out in their communities talking to people. In other words, they have a sense of power when they have an active role in shaping what is going on around them. Without attendance to this fact young people will inevitably be switched off from a citizenship agenda that prioritises a vision of a good citizen as someone who 'pulls their weight' and takes responsibility for themselves. Framed in this way and without any reference to political power young people will, quite rightly, seek alternate ways within which to represent themselves and their political views. But herein lies the rub – if young people continue to be misrecognised as 'citizens-in-the-making' or worse, as 'domestic extremists' when they do demonstrate against issues that impinge on their lives, then their participation will continue to be ignored.

There is great political education work going on with young people – I don't want to be seen to be being disrespectful. But it isn't embedded into the very fibre of our education system as it could be. Of course this isn't just to do with schools and education. Politicians must recognise that they have utterly failed to take into account the issues that young people feel are important. Simply giving young people the vote is not enough. Their interests and issues need to be given consideration and taken seriously.

Unfortunately, as political parties become more target-driven, policy agendas are focused on where they can get the most 'bang-for-their-buck'. This inevitably leads to the 'grey vote' – and young people's agendas are seen as peripheral. This has created a vicious circle where young people are not voting and now politicians can seemingly ignore their concerns with impunity;their entitlement to the most basic social security is looking increasingly imperilled by the major parties at Westminster. Young people have become the victims of policy as they suffer for their 'failure' to participate in elections which do not speak to their lived reality.

Our Challenge

Young people do want to learn about politics, to be involved in politics and to be able to influence politics. We have much to teach them but just as importantly, young people have much to teach us – this is democracy. The exclusion of young people from the political domain is not only negative for them – it impoverishes the overall debate if we miss out on the contribution of a potentially politically fertile section of the population.

I want to finish by posing an additional challenge in an area I think is ripe for further investigation. Much research suggests that it is of fundamental importance that young people need to feel that they are involved with and have a stake in their society. Exclusion from the economic sphere and the methods of production and consumption is undermining the level of commitment young people feel to participate. What makes this all the worse is that it is young people who have been hardest hit by the economic turbulence of recession and austerity with the unemployment rate for

young people running (at times) at three times the rate of the rest of the populace. This is further compounded with recent studies showing that their real incomes have fallen faster in comparison to other age groups. As working patterns change and we see a rise in a 'precariat' class, how is this going to influence political participation? If young people's connection to employment becomes more tenuous, how will this impact on political engagement? If young people are further excluded from the economic sphere then I fear that this is only going to add to the distance between young people and 'formal' political participation. And we'll continue to see a repeat of the recent budget where young people are punished for their non-participation – reduced entitlement to social security and the increasing shadow of full-blown workfare looms.

Schools can only do so much – they are, after all, merely a reflection of the society within which they reside. All the educational engagement in the world may be in vain if young people continue to be ignored by our political class and excluded from the world of work. The Independence referendum showed that young people can do politics – the question is does our politics want young people?

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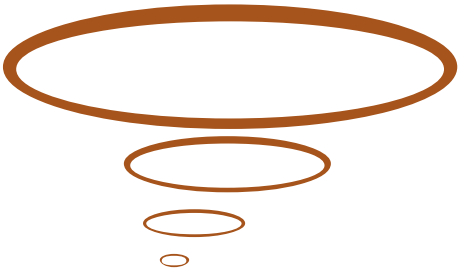
THINKING SPACE (2)



Engaging youth through restorative approaches in schools

Laura Oxley

THE CURRENT discipline system in English secondary schools is failing many of our young people. Based on punishments and sanctions, the usual procedure for lack of compliance in school is a repetition of the same sanctions again and again, often increasing in seriousness as time goes on. If this system was successful in changing behaviour, there would be no need for this cycle of repetition.

This article will consider the current issues surrounding disruptive behaviour in schools. It will explore the use of school disciplinary exclusions in England and the cost to society of the current approach. The article will conclude with a suggestion for a change in the predominant school discipline system in England, advocating a policy that introduces restorative practice as a way of more effectively meeting the needs of both students and staff involved in dealing with disruptive behaviour.

What works?

The topic of disruptive behaviour in schools is one that is rarely out of the media spotlight. A recent example is the introduction of a 'behaviour tsar', Tom Bennett, under the Conservative government in 2015 (Mason, 2015). Bennett has pledged to tackle low level disruption in classrooms and has published his 'top ten tips' for teachers to maintain classroom discipline (Bennett, 2015), which mainly seem to focus on ensuring the authority of the teacher through the imposition of sanctions.

However Greene (2008:8) suggests that, 'the reality is that well-behaved students aren't behaving themselves because of the school discipline programme. They behave themselves because they have skills to handle life's challenges in adaptive fashion'. What about those young people who don't seem willing or able to make the decision to behave in a way that their school judges to be appropriate? Anyone who has worked in a school will recognise the description of the student who, despite being punished and sanctioned numerous times, continues displaying the same challenging

behaviour day after day. If a student makes an academic mistake, they are taught how to rectify this and offered support to help them learn, even if they make the same mistake more than once. However if a student makes a behavioural mistake, rather than being offered support to change their behaviour, they are subjected to punitive sanctions. Our school discipline system is failing a core minority of young people by not addressing their underlying needs and thus denying them the opportunity to take full advantage of their educational entitlement.

As highlighted by Goshe (2015: 45), there is a perceived concern that by helping young people when they make a behavioural mistake, rather than punishing them, they will become 'coddled', soft, or encased within a 'web of useless dependency'. Goshe suggests that:

> *…punishment is profoundly respected. It is seen as useful, practical and essential to ensuring personal accountability for choices. Unlike social support services which are seen as enabling the weak to be weaker, punitive practices are seen as right, rational and necessary for personal growth and transformation. Under this mentality, if someone fails to change, it is because the punishment was not harsh enough* (ibid).

This quote illustrates the stance that is taken by many schools when a young person continues to make the same behavioural mistakes or poor choices on repeated occasions, despite the sanctions put in place, eventually leading to an exclusion from school.

School exclusions

England has a school exclusion rate that is ten times greater than any other country in Europe (Kupchik, Green and Mowen, 2015). In England in the academic year 2011/12 (Department for Education, 2013):

1. 137,070 young people (4.26 per cent of the entire secondary school population) received at least one fixed term exclusion from mainstream state funded secondary schools.
2. A significant proportion of this group (37 per cent; 51,220 young people) received more than one period of fixed term exclusion in this year.
3. The majority of these exclusions were recorded as being due to persistent disruptive behaviour.

Between 2003 and 2010, exclusions remained fairly static with an average of 4.96 per cent of the school population receiving at least one fixed term exclusion from school each year (Kupchik, Green and Mowen, 2015). These statistics show a recurrent pattern, year after year. They indicate that the same young people are being given repeated fixed-term exclusions for the same type of behaviour, mostly for being persistently disruptive during lessons. Yet, as studies by Martinez (2009) and Searle (2001) reveal, school disciplinary exclusion is not an effective way to change

student behaviour. The literature indicates that students return to school displaying the same behaviour as before or more extreme behaviour, which leads schools to repeatedly exclude the same young people (Martinez, 2009). Exclusion causes feelings of rejection and resentment, it does not resolve the underlying issues that have led to the behaviour in the first place, and it denies young people their right to access education.

There are particular groups who are far more likely to be excluded from school than others. A report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner in 2012 found that boys, children with special needs, children from specific ethnic backgrounds, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds were most likely to be excluded. One particularly stark statistic stated that 'in 2009-10, if you were a Black African-Caribbean boy with special needs and eligible for free school meals you were 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded from a state-funded school than a White girl without special needs from a middle class family' (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012:9).

Regardless of the inequality of exclusions and the research which suggests they are not an effective way of dealing with challenging behaviour, a number of schools in England now implement 'zero tolerance' policies, which cause the number of school exclusions to rise rapidly. 'Zero tolerance' policies were first developed in America by the US Customs Agency to combat the drug trade and were then introduced into schools to address the issue of gun crime and extreme violence in schools (Kupchik, Green and Mowen, 2015; Martinez, 2009). There was never any intention that these policies should be applied for trivial disciplinary offences in schools and there is very little research to support their effectiveness (Martinez, 2009). As well as significantly increasing the number of exclusions from schools, 'zero tolerance' policies also create a rigid 'one size fits all' structure where the focus is primarily on the offence, rather the student (Kupchik, Green and Mowen, 2015).

The cost to society

The cost to society of these punitive school discipline regimes is high (Parsons and Castle, 1998). Young people who are disaffected from school and are out of lessons due to disciplinary exclusion or self-exclusion (truancy) are more likely to become involved in criminal activity and to be at risk of exploitation (Parsons, 2011). This increases the cost to public services, such as the police and social services. In addition, young people who are disengaged and excluded from education are more likely to be unemployed in adulthood, resulting in a long term cost to the taxpayer.

Despite this, schools and government education policy continue to advocate and use the sanction based system (Department for Education, 2014). The punitive response, which predominates in today's schools, limits educational authorities to simplistic choices. 'To punish or not to punish. How much punishment? How many detentions or days of suspension?'(Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel, 2009: 49). There needs to be another option. As Flanagan (2014) suggests, if something

is not working to change behaviour, then it is necessary to try something else. There is little point in continuing with the same approach, ever increasing in seriousness of sanction until the point of permanent exclusion from school is met.

Proposed approach

The good news is that there are alternatives to this type of discipline regime. One of these alternatives is to introduce restorative approaches in schools. This approach is evidence-based and proven to be effective at changing behaviour (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013). A restorative approach is based on building and maintaining relationships, on repairing any harm that has been caused, and working together to develop sustainable solutions to issues. All parties are involved in resolving the situation, rather than a punishment simply being imposed by an external authority.

Restorative approaches are not necessarily more financially costly than the current dominant approach. In the UK criminal justice system, restorative approaches are being increasingly used and this has been shown to be not only effective but also to save money (Flanagan, 2014). If we are willing to use an alternative approach to resolve criminal behaviour, surely alternative approaches to resolving challenging behaviour should be tried in our schools as well, where we are dealing, not with adult criminals, but with young people who are still learning and developing. They need to be taught other ways of behaving rather than being punished for lacking the skills they need to respond adaptively (Greene, 2008).

Being excluded from school is a significant risk factor for becoming involved in criminal activities (McAra, 2009). A major variable that contributes to this is simply the amount of time available to young people excluded from school. Attending school limits the time available to become involved in criminal behaviour and lessens the likelihood of involvement with older peers who may have a negative influence. If less young people were excluded from school, they would be provided with a consistent and safe environment to attend during the day.

Reducing exclusions through the use of restorative approaches in schools would also reduce the criminalisation of young people. Exclusion is a punitive measure that does not repair the harm that has been caused. Within the criminal justice system, restorative justice for youth crime in Northern Ireland has been successful, with re-offending rates lower than for most other sanctions and high victim satisfaction with the outcome (Department of Justice Northern Ireland, 2011). Early intervention with a restorative approach can improve behaviour and reduce the risk of escalation into persistent and serious offending, both in the realm of the school and the wider community (Youth Crime Commission, 2010). In the case of Hull Youth Justice Service, their 'Challenge and Support' intervention, which always included a restorative element, achieved a 48.7 per cent reduction over 2009/10 in the number of young people entering the formal youth justice system for the first time (Smith, 2014).

Over the past decade there has been an increased emphasis on diversion from formal criminal sanctions for young people, including greater use of restorative approaches within the youth justice system (Chaney, 2015; Smith, 2014). As this has become an increasingly high profile issue in politics (Chaney, 2015), the implementation of restorative approaches as an early intervention within schools would seem appropriate in line with the current political climate in which the dominant parties are beginning to move their discourse away 'from popularism and punishment towards rights and rehabilitation' (Chaney, 2015: 37).

To implement such a policy would require senior school leaders and teachers to understand and support the philosophy behind restorative approaches. This could be achieved by promoting the value of restorative approaches and publicising the evidence showing the effectiveness of the approach. High quality training and support for school staff would be an essential part of the implementation of this policy. Whilst this would be fairly time consuming and would have an initial financial cost, in the long term it would be far more cost effective than continuing with the current ineffective system.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper recommends introducing a policy on the use of restorative approaches in schools. This would minimise the need for school exclusions and would in turn minimise the risk of young people becoming involved in offending behaviour, which would save the cost to the police and social services. Engaging all young people in education is vitally important and the introduction of restorative approaches in UK schools would move us a step further towards achieving this.

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Reviews

Julian Cohen
All about Drugs and Young People: Essential Information and Advice for Parents and Professionals
ISBN: 978-1-84905-427-0
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Fin Cullen

RECENT YEARS under austerity have seen severe cuts to drugs prevention and education and young people's drugs services. Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) remains non-statutory, with the rise of free schools and academies providing a hotchpotch of approaches to drugs education across the UK.

The past few years have also seen the demise of important UK agencies that supported good drugs education and treatment, from the Drugs Education Practitioners forum (closed in 2012) to the influential campaigning, training and research organisation, Drugscope (which also sadly closed, in March 2015). At the same time, Government Ministers heralded the Coalition's drugs strategy as successful, as drug use is at its lowest level since measurement began in 1996 (NTA, 2012) as cultural shifts impact on patterns of use (DOH, 2015). As I write in May 2015, I note another piece of curious – and potentially unworkable – legislation attempting to criminalise 'legal highs' in the draft psychoactive substances bill by outlawing anything that effects 'brain function' save for the legitimate taxable 'legal highs' of booze and cigarettes.

Into this highly politicised realm arrives Julian Cohen's new book, *All about Drugs and Young People*, which aims to provide advice and information for parents and professionals. I first came across Cohen's work some years ago – when working in the field I stumbled across a copy of a splendidly polemic and astute article on the limitations and expectations of drugs education (Cohen, 1996). Cohen works from a specific harm minimisation approach and his work as a youth and community worker – and later as an educator and trainer – provide a solid foundation for this book.

In Cohen's earlier 1996 article he notes the tensions inherent in drugs prevention and notes that education cannot stop drug use, although it might contribute to supporting harm reduction. Springing from such a viewpoint, the new book continues to frame understandings and insights within such an approach. Cohen takes some time in establishing the wider context and asks readers to reflect on their own attitudes, feelings and autobiographical experiences with drugs. In the introduction Cohen states: 'It is my belief, apart from a very few purists, we all use drugs and the

experiences we have had with our own drug use, and that of the people around us greatly influences our feelings and attitudes towards drugs, and the people who use them …' (p.15).

I appreciated that in his opening Cohen reflects on his own autobiographical experiences that framed his views from his 'first nip of Palwin' (a sherry-like wine) as part of religious family gatherings, through tobacco, alcohol, prescription medicine and his family's relationship with substances, to his own work in the drugs field. This autobiographical element provides an insightful grounding that is echoed later in section two where readers are encouraged to reflect on their own drugs career. I am reminded of my own experiences of leading and participating in drugs education sessions for professionals, and of how many of us arrive with coffees in hand with moral 'certainties' about 'drugs' – and a 'professional' refuting of our own everyday drug histories that can flatten the complexities and lived realities of substance use in 'real life' contexts.

As Cohen notes, the only permitted occasions where such a reveal is permissible are the exceptions where 'ex-addicts tell us in graphic detail about the terrible times they have endured while dependent on drugs' (p.15). Such narratives tend to take centre stage in drugs education over the more mundane everyday drugs careers of recreational and experimental use and the learning that might arise from these experiences. Indeed Cohen approaches this head on and asks the reader to reflect on their view and consider where they might place themselves on a liberal – conservative continuum, and how in or out of line their views might be in relation to the young people with whom they work.

This stepping out of the professional into the personal provides a valuable forum to think thorough with humility the ethical and cultural dimensions of practice, and the need to bring such critical insights into work with young people. I also imagine that this text would be a very helpful resource as a practice manual with its mix of quizzes and key harm reduction messages for young people and I could imagine it accompanying drug education group work and one-to-one resources.

This is an important and immensely practical book covering concrete advice for dealing with first aid emergencies, disclosures and working with young people involved in dependent use or supply. It offers a comprehensive overview of trends in use, the law, educational approaches, specific substances and a directory of further resources and organisations. For those involved in training youth practitioners on drug use and young people it would be helpful to read alongside Shane Blackman's excellent analysis, *Chilling Out*, which explores the socio-cultural and historical background to drug use and drug education in the UK. *All About Drugs and Young People* is a welcome addition to the library of any drugs educator, PSHE coordinator, youth worker, school nurse or any other youth practitioner, and hopefully will become an essential practice text on drugs and young people.

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Joel Best and Kathleen A. Bogle

Kids Gone Wild: From Rainbow Parties to Sexting, Understanding the Hype Over Teen Sex

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pp. 177

Tracy Ramsey

THROUGHOUT HISTORY the lives of young people have been used as a barometer or 'social litmus test' (Davies, 1999:14) of the morality and stability of our society. Perhaps nowhere is this witnessed with more clarity than through the pages of the press reporting the sexual exploits of youth, highlighting the state we're in.

Young people the world over explore and experiment with their sexuality, often leaving adults struggling, only to demonstrate a blend of protection and panic as both parties navigate this tumultuous journey. With the expansion of the mass media, there is somewhat of a third person in this relationship there to muddle and mystify the process, playing hermeneutic games on both sides, leaving fear and confusion in its path.

Kids Gone Wild demonstrates just how powerful and complex the business of growing up in the global limelight is for both young people and their parents. Drawing on research and responses primarily from the United States, although internationally significant, Best and Bogle set the tone by highlighting the 2013 MTV performance by Miley Cyrus as a critical point at which

performance, meaning behaviour, stepped over a line. For some youth and community workers, the 'twerking scandal' that ensued provided a worrying yet interesting and useful resource for debate with young people, promoting consciousness raising (Freire, 1972) and exploring the 'blurred lines' of exploitation of their generation.

What follows is an analysis of the power play at work using the phenomena of sex bracelets and rainbow parties as the contemporary 'myths' which are the focus throughout. Best and Bogle dig below the surface in an attempt to understand this complexity and as a result present a wildness of a different sort. Media representations of the sex lives of young people are an increasingly tangled portrayal, of the ever younger, going ever further, encouraging us to believe in a moral and social deterioration which requires immediate adult attention and action. With this the central theme, the agenda Best and Bogle seek to illuminate concerns the reality and truth behind the hype.

Set within six accessible and engaging chapters, Best and Bogle present a challenging argument. In 'These Kids Today', they position the responsibility of parental protection for young people within a backdrop of an ever changing and more dangerous world, moving on to define and discuss the rise in notoriety of sex bracelets, rainbow parties and sexting. This chapter also usefully provides a wider historical and societal context providing early examples of youth culture, which drew similar concerns, whilst also recognising the shift from the external fear of adult exploitation to the recent fears of children and young people themselves being 'out of control'. The notion of the moral panic is nothing new; Cohen (1972) enlightened us to the impact of media influences long before the birth of the internet provided additional tools for the job.

In a curious likeness to our own professional demand for improved outcomes, the media industry's drive for increasing ratings provides, in this case, the pressure necessary for the culture of sensationalism to grow. In chapter 2, 'How Legends Spread', Best and Bogle devote attention to the nature of urban legends and folklore before detailing the extent and breadth of the research undertaken to find the stories of sex bracelets and rainbow parties, proceeding to unpick how these are shared across a variety of media.

The authors use numerous examples from 'infotainment' shows, radio talk shows and newspapers to highlight the spikes of interest in sex bracelets and rainbow parties, tenuously researched and fuelled by its self-perpetuating coverage. From the authors' findings, the extent to which the tales are generated and exacerbated is evident. Leading the charge for moral recourse are trusted household names including American TV chat show hosts Oprah and Tyra Banks, displaying a sudden concern for the nation's youth, adding credibility not only to the existence but also to the epidemic proportions, precariously based on a fragile evidential foundation.

Best and Bogle's extensive research trawling online conversations, whilst creating methodological tensions, reveal a mixed picture of skeptics and believers using the same evidence to argue their

position. For some the very presence of the discussion is enough to substantiate their reality, fueling anxiety and driving the protectionist agenda for policy reform. Attitudes towards sexual health and relationship education are central to a dedicated chapter on sexting, with opposition argued for cause and effect. Sexting is another technological transformation as young people's lives become increasingly mobile; the reality, however, can include criminal records and sex offender registers. Best and Bogle again focus us on the actual rather than the alarm, deftly citing critique to the media presented frenzy. Whilst accepting that the evidence of sexting, though disported by the media, is substantially more robust than for sex bracelets and rainbow parties, attention is given to the dilemmas in legal systems and the implications for social policy, particularly for the administration and accessibility of drugs that protect against cervical cancer or prevent pregnancy.

In the concluding chapter Best and Bogle draw together the central themes of the book, locating the debate of young people's sexual behaviour in contemporary society within a framework of more reputable research data providing analysis contrary to the popular press. The authors' analysis also includes data and discussion through the lens of ethnicity and class which, whilst presented as an undertone throughout, could have been strengthened, with a more challenging critique of the ongoing social divisions. In parts the rationale for the alarm presented through the media is centralised on concerns of the sexualisation of middle class, white girls.

The final call is for education for parents, young people, teachers, faith leaders and all those working with and for young people '… to become critical consumers of claims about what the younger generation is doing' (p.144). Whilst focused on heterosexual young people, largely within an American context, and at times unnecessarily repetitive, this book is a useful and accessible read, exposing the questionable connections between fact and fiction in the media story telling. This is ideal for those beginning their critical journey.

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Nigel Pimlott
Embracing the Passion – Christian Youth Work and Politics
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Jonathan Roberts

HERE'S A BOOK that gives the sort of definitions that will help us all. Christian youth work is above all about 'the motivation of the worker and who they work for rather than who they work with' (p.6). It is marked by voluntary participation by the young people and unconditional positive regard by the adults. Youth ministry is more about transmission inside the faith community (some readers will wince). Politics is about who gets what, when and how. And now we set off.

The Christian God is presented (chapter 2) as one who gives power to people. This God is concerned about justice, and what happens to the poor. Believers are to be a blessing: acting, making a difference, trusting God and not being distracted from what they are trying to do. Jesus (chapter 3) is the model for Christian lives. Jesus was political; he spoke to power and situations. He was an irritant and dissenter; a philosopher and pundit; an activist and liberator. It is a coherent life from the 'Nazareth manifesto' of good news for the poor (Luke 4) to crucifixion.

Pimlott asks, rightly, why social action is so far down the hierarchy of importance in the profile of Christian life. In particular; the dominant neoliberalism of current politics is a very long way from these core findings about God and Jesus. Prophecy is a hard task requiring care. So, notice the values youth workers talk about and rehearse and practice what you are going to do. Here he draws in Alinsky and Freire with a strong focus on local action. But I particularly like the encouragement to deal with the trouble that comes calmly: his discussion of meekness is an outstanding application of one of Jesus' most famous statements (p.97): if you focus on God the worldly things are put in perspective and we can 'inherit the earth' without being crushed.

He highlights the barriers Christian youth work (and indeed good youth work generally) tackles (chapter 6). How can these be dealt with without political acts? He encourages readers to read their Bible carefully, see their faith as collective, above all do something for the common good (chapter 7). He sets out some good examples of opportunities (chapter 8), and practical success stories (chapter 9).

This is a great read and it should help youth workers grasp the links between what they do and what the Christian youth workers might be up to. Its first audience is undoubtedly Christian youth workers, particularly those like the author 'finding resonance in Anabaptist teachings' (p.14). It is rarely this

obscure: full of detailed examples, vivid illustration, precise Bible references covering a wide range of sources, and drawing on an interesting survey of 111 youth workers. I can imagine a group of Christian youth workers finding it stimulating and practical in a support and development group.

I have two areas where I wish there was more development. The first is Catholic social teaching which he finds (contrary to his tribal habits) is rather good (p.140). It is a great shame that this is not more sure footed. The Catholic church has undertaken some great leadership in youth work, for example in local projects, and in the great international youth meetings led regularly from the Vatican. The teachings of Vatican 2 have a literature which is available. It ought to have been possible to cite the Catechism with an accurate date. There are excellent youth work educators, for example at Newman University, and a humble conversation would yield great rewards. I am not sure why we Christians are so anxious about working together.

The second is democracy. This is written for the UK. Politics has lots of manifestations, especially at local level. To encourage reflection I devised a list of 12 alternatives to democracy by which people get things done in their community (Roberts, 2009:34). For a Christian audience I might say that this sets out how sin operates in social settings. I do believe that democracy is a godly goal: people talking together, and compromising to move towards a fairer life together where the vulnerable are safeguarded. I agree that we have to practise, but we also have to build alliances and unite to be effective. Churches know this with the extraordinary success of Jubilee 2000. This is why political parties are formed and why Christians join them.

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Sam McCready and Richard Loudon
Investing in Lives: The History of the Youth Service in Northern Ireland (1844-1973)
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Tom Wylie

THE LONG HISTORY of youth work provides an opportunity to consider how youth services emerge in different settings, evolve (or not) to meet changing needs, build an organisational infrastructure,

and relate to the state. Bernard Davies' (1999a; 1999b; 2008) magisterial three volumes provide such an account for England (*A History of the Youth Service in England 1939 – 2007*). Now McCready and Loudon, academics at the University of Ulster, have begun to tell the story for Northern Ireland in a comprehensive account which reflects much devilling in various archives and official reports.

During most of the period reviewed here, youth provision in the province followed a similar trajectory to that in England. This is not surprising; many in Ulster saw themselves linked, economically and culturally, to Britain rather than to the rest of Ireland. This was especially the case in Belfast whose industrial base of linen mills, shipbuilding and engineering ensured that the city's social structure and character had more in common with Glasgow or Newcastle than Dublin. The poet, Louis MacNeice, described his birthplace as 'devout and profane and hard'. Into this challenging setting, with an ever-present undercurrent of sectarianism, arrived in turn the YMCA and YWCA, the Boys Brigade in 1888 (reflecting the local affinity with Scots Presbyterianism), in 1907 came Scouting, a little later the Guides and, in time, boys' clubs and youth clubs. Importantly, McCready and Loudon note the early emergence of a welfaring imperative for youth work with factory girls for whom, from 1904, The Hon. Ethel McNaughton took on a role similar to Maude Stanley's in England and oversaw the creation of the extensive Belfast Girls Club Union in 1908 with much emphasis on young members' participation in decision-making. The political partition of the island, and the consequent establishment of Northern Ireland in 1922, did not alter greatly the continuing development of voluntary youth organisations modelled on the English pattern with similar approaches in their leadership and programmes, including much use of sport especially in club-based provision .

As the twentieth century unfolded, structural questions similar to those in England also became evident: would the associations of Boys' Clubs and Youth Clubs merge? (No.) What, if any, would be the relationship with schools? How were youth workers to be supported and trained? Despite pressure from a sector growing in cohesion, there was a general lack of policy, drive and finance from successive Unionist governments at Stormont, apart from a brief flurry of activity including a White Paper in 1962. Nevertheless, the jurisdictions were beginning to diverge in their approach to local youth service structures: in Northern Ireland the churches continued to play a significant role though not always a benign or positive one while, echoing the situation in the Irish republic for a change, local authorities apart from a modest effort by Belfast city council, rarely made youth provision. Thus the traditional voluntary sector reigned supreme and, for the most part, was slow to respond innovatively to changing social needs, although in the late 1950s and 60s some notable new organisations such as Voluntary Service Belfast and a few other specialist interest groups emerged and a handful of outdoor education centres opened.

From 1969, however, the skies darkened as the province descended into 30 years of mayhem and murder, euphemistically described as 'the Troubles'. At this point the book escapes from its rather dry account of organisations, over-arching committees, and thwarted policy ideas by deploying

illuminating, even inspiring, accounts by individual youth workers of the challenges they faced: club members beaten up, killed or drawn into paramilitary organisations; youth facilities occupied by the army; streets barricaded; youth workers' cars hijacked at gun point; the Scouts' Belfast headquarters bombed. While some youth projects closed, others struggled on and attempted to provide a semblance of normality or respite in young lives, often using residential or summertime experiences to engage more intensively. Some individual units made particular efforts to hold back the tide of violence and to promote cross-community understanding, seen most obviously in the reconciliation work of Corrymeela. The imaginative and entrepreneurial Northern Ireland Association of Youth Clubs, ably championed by the indefatigable May Seth, continued to promote personal and social development through their affiliated clubs and in special projects and used their newly acquired residential centre to train volunteer youth workers across the divided community.

Deeper trends also came belatedly to the surface. In 1972 the Youth Service in Northern Ireland was given a clear statutory basis – to this day the most explicit in the British Isles – with specific duties and expectations placed on local education authorities. Although, ironically, this was enacted by a Conservative government (Stormont having been suspended), the decisive roles in its creation and implementation were played by two local civil servants, Ernie Martin and the influential Inspector Paddy McDermott, both of whom were also voluntary youth workers. Training for professional youth workers was at last established by Derrick Wilson at the Ulster Polytechnic (now Ulster University): amongst his other important contributions to youth work's development in the province, Wilson would go on to write insightfully about the roles of youth workers in situations of community conflict. Learning how a Youth Service, now being re-shaped by these two vital pieces of policy architecture, responded to the long years of strife, the continuing blight of sectarianism, the growing separation between its major communities and to the consequences of endemic poverty will have to await the authors' promised second volume.

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Youth & Policy Journal was founded in 1982 to offer a critical space for the discussion of youth policy and youth work theory and practice.

The editorial group have subsequently expanded activities to include the organisation of related conferences, research and book publication. Regular activities include the bi-annual 'History of Community and Youth Work' and the 'Thinking Seriously' conferences.

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