Chapter 11
Youth Work in Schools
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Chapter outcomes:

By the end of this chapter, readers will be able to:

- Conceptualise the possibility of youth work within formal educational settings
- Articulate youth work as an emancipatory practice which complements schooling
- Identify 'hidden knowns' in youth work and analyse how they may be important in thinking about youth work in schools as a threshold concept
- View youth work *as* education not solely as being *in* education

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This chapter will consider the inherent possibilities and problems in conceptualising youth work in schools. It will examine potential synergies between a curriculum for educational youth work and contemporary curricula in school education, drawing on the emerging Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Government, 2013) as a potentially useful means of facilitating social change. The chapter will explore some of the 'hidden knowns' that youth workers routinely apply in practice encounters including school settings. This exploration suggests that while these 'knowns' contribute to practice, they can also limit perspectives on whether youth work can be authentically conceptualised in a school setting. Current changes in policy direction of policy for formal schooling across the UK brings into focus different ideas such as free or home schooling and identifies new roles and possibilities for youth workers in schools.

The extent to which these new roles for youth work are beneficial is impacted upon by recognition of difficulties in sometimes competing methodologies, and in the starting point for work with young people. Building on the work of Morgan, Morgan and O'Kelly (2008) and Harland and McCready (2012) in Northern Ireland, we argue that youth work can be effective in classroom situations and should not be viewed in opposition to schooling, or as an alternative curriculum for 'problem' young people. Rather, youth work offers a viable educational methodology that works alongside, but is different from school education, which should be viewed as an equally useful form of education. Our argument sits uncomfortably with contemporary literature where it is suggested that the nature of school education, means that youth workers should not engage in school-based practice, and if they do, should resist calling it youth work. It is in this sense that we propose 'border pedagogy' as an important threshold concept (Land, Meyer and Baillie, 2010) that can help to bridge formal and informal education in school teaching and youth work contexts.

Perspectives on Youth Work in Schools

Youth work in schools is not a new invention. Even prior to 1870, when attendance in formal schooling was made compulsory, there were a range of educational initiatives run for those who did not attend state schools including Sunday schooling and ragged schools (Smith, 2001). While the Albemarle Report (HMSO, 1960) provided unprecedented opportunities to develop youth work in England and Wales through investment in facilities (Smith & Doyle 2002), in Scotland, the Kilbrandon Report (HMSO, 1961) established a unique Children's Hearings system and included investment in the creation of 'school wings' and increased use of schools for youth club type activity.

Thus, far from being a new philosophy, youth workers have traditionally engaged in individual case work and in organising educational classes to compliment formal schooling (Jeffs and Smith, 2002). Spence (2001) notes that change happened when formal education was opened up to a wider age group, care work grew and state investment in youth work was introduced.

Within this changing context, youth work education and formal schooling evolved as quite distinct, yet parallel pathways. Youth workers, however, are routinely introduced into schools to work with young people described as 'hard to reach' or 'vulnerable to exclusion'. There are examples of positive impacts associated with this kind of targeted youth work. For example, Finlay et al (2009) have shown how young people who have been excluded from school respond positively to youth work methods, and the Youth Work and Schools Initiative (Education Scotland, 2014) has suggested added value from involving youth workers in school-based education.

Yet, while this kind of targeted intervention brings positive benefits, it could also be regarded as contributing to negative labelling of young people. In terms of specific behaviours or characteristics; this positions youth work as a response to 'troubled young people' which is in keeping with the kinds of intervention that are aligned to social work practices.

Research has also shown that young people are able to thrive in informal youth work environments, despite previously failing in, or being excluded from, formal school settings (see Finlay et al., 2009; 2013; Deuchar and Ellis, 2013). Thinking of youth work as an educational methodology which is effective in 'engaging young people who are disengaged/disengaging from mainstream education or facing particular barriers to learning' (Harland and McCready, 2012) as distinct from social work or traditional school based pedagogies can help to clarify the added value of educational youth work, and consider why this distinction might be useful.

Over to you…

How does thinking about youth work as an educational methodology differ from thinking about youth work as an approach to working with young people?

Why is this important and what does this mean in everyday practices.

How might a specific educational focus enhance:

a) the position of youth workers, compared to other professionals

b) the experiences of young people involved in youth work, compared to, those who are engaged in, for example, social work or alternative to school learning environments

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Routinely, voluntary participation is asserted as a defining principle of youth work. This assertion means that young people must freely choose to participate, in order for practice to be called youth work. The voluntary principle is regarded as a crucial signifier of youth work in differing locations, contexts and settings and is so pervasive that it has come to be regarded as a fundamental aspect of educational youth work. Yet, recent youth work practice in schools has routinized a focus on employment and containment of young people whose 'behaviour' has been identified as troublesome. We suggest this recent shift in focus on employment and containment is not helpful and assert the need to return to the importance of negotiated relationships and liberal education as the principal drivers for youth work as education. Yet, we also assert that as an educational methodology, youth work can contribute to mainstream schooling while retaining a distinctive ethical purpose and value base.

Inflexible methodologies are inherent in both formal schooling and, at times, in youth work services. This leaves them both open to critique. Rather than dwelling on differences, we are inclined to seek understanding of commonalities that help to explore potential for a complementary education system which fundamentally has the interests of young people at its heart. In striving for a system that values the participation, views and input of young people, and in striving for a more socially just and equitable society we see the two as parallel aspects of an education paradigm that values both formal and informal methodologies in equal measure. While routinely, and on a global scale, policy and government spending has prioritised formal school, college and university education as 'the' education paradigm, the shift towards a learning society has meant that perspectives on adult education and lifelong learning have come into focus. We regard this shift as a golden opportunity to reconsider the potential for youth work methodology as part of a wider, more inclusive educational paradigm. Our intention is to offer a means through which youth work practitioners might shift their conceptualisation of youth work beyond current practices where a series of 'hidden knowns' sometimes constrain or deny youth work practice in schools.

A recent survey on youth work within schools in England found that 90% of 550 respondents felt youth work was important in a school context. Nevertheless, the chief executive of NYA stated:

> "Whilst the findings of this survey indicate that those involved in youth work in education are strong advocates for it, there is still work to be done to help education providers understand the role of youth work and to see it as complementing formal education – in order to get the best outcomes possible for young people."
> http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1077292/youth-wins-backing-role-schools

This idea of youth work as a complimentary practice in schools led us to consider possibilities arising from shifting UK policy and practice drivers.

For example, the English educational system has seen widespread changes under the recent Coalition government. The 2010 white paper called for a change to league tables, targets for primary schools, increased assessment of teachers and an increased focus on discipline and examinations. The new grading structures, the return to traditional written examinations, the emphasis on the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) and other rapid and widespread changes, have come under substantial criticisms from academics (Alexander, 2013) and

politicians, and have resulted in a vote of no confidence from the Association of Teachers and Lecturer's Union (ATL) in former Education Secretary Michael Gove. The Welsh system is to maintain its previous GCSE structure, whilst the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence resonates with youth work practices by acknowledging a wider basis for education beyond the cognitive and subject based curriculum through its explicit concern for citizenship. This results in students across the UK having differing experiences of schooling and a divergent suite of qualifications.

The introduction and promotion of free schools exemplifies how extension of the academy programme has allowed groups of individuals to establish their own school, and brought about possibilities for religious groupings, charities, parents or youth workers, to run schools. Despite raising difficulties, Hope (2012) asserts this as in keeping with radical youth work that 'puts relationships at the heart of learning' (p. 67)

Although academies do not have to subscribe to the national curriculum they are still subject to Ofsted inspections, and academic outcomes are emphasised. Taking this focus could cause difficulties for youth workers seeking to establish a free school where:

> ... the hidden message of the Coalition government policy on free Schools is not about freedom and choice. It is about improving educational standards. And of course, measuring the effectiveness of schools is a highly contested area
>
> (Hope, 2012, p. 67).

In Northern Ireland, Morgan et al (2008) found that 'soft outcomes' generally associated with informal education were often not recognised within the traditional curriculum led education system yet suggested:

> … if schools need to expand their remit from a subject-led curriculum to a more student/learner-led curriculum youth workers are well placed as effective partners
>
> (Morgan et al, 2008, p.1).

Building on this initial work, a study of adolescent male school-life experiences (Harland and McCready, 2012) found that teachers also recognised the benefit of youth work methodologies in the classroom, as helping to connect learning to the everyday lived experiences of the young men who participated in this study. Further, the boys were able to engage with complex and difficult subject areas that were not routinely part of the school curriculum.

This kind of student/learner led curriculum also underpins Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland where the potential for more explicit social purpose and democratic education creates a critical space (Beck and Purcell, 2010, p. 13) in which the youth work sector has been recognized as making a vital contribution to the CfE which contributes to national outcomes and 'helps young people become confident individuals who are ready to succeed (YouthLink, 2014, p. 3) . This curriculum builds on the work of Dewey (1938; 1963) who believed that learning should be active and that schooling is unnecessarily long and restrictive (Coburn and Wallace, 2011, p. 42). The Curriculum for Excellence aims to transform education in Scotland for young people 'wherever they are being educated' (p. 24).

In complementing Dewey's ideas for education and citizenship, the Curriculum for Excellence features four driving and overarching capacities:

- Successful learners with the motivation for learning;
- Confident individuals with physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and self-respect;
- Responsible citizens with respect for others;
- Effective contributors who can communicate, solve problems and be enterprising and creative.

While successive policy developments have advocated close links between schools and youth work, the CfE has taken this linkage to new levels in integrating policy and practice across professional domains (Education Scotland, 2014; YouthLink, 2012).

While CfE has offered new possibilities for youth work in Scotland, services in other parts of the UK appear to have been constrained or become subject to excessive reductions in resource allocation. In this sense, youth work embodies what Batsleer (2010) calls 'a constant state of flux...valued and in demand on condition that it constantly reinvents itself (p. 153). We have previously identified an urgent need to defend social and democratic youth work against the threat of service cuts (Gormally and Coburn, 2013). However, we have become increasingly puzzled by reluctance among some youth workers and academics who, in arguing voluntary association as sacrosanct, are unable to shift from this position. There is active resistance to reinvention, which can be galvanising but can also be a destructive force that places unnecessary constraints on practice, Holding on to a strong set of values and principles is of course important in sustaining a distinctive community of practice, but in some instances these same values and principles can mitigate youth work practice in places such as schools or prisons, reducing it to something *other* than youth work. To examine this further we identify those aspects of practice that are pervasive and deemed untouchable.

'Hidden Knowns'

We conceptualise engagement strategies that are routinely utilised by youth work professionals, or taken as givens, but rarely openly critiqued as 'hidden knowns' which are central to the relationship building process. Sometimes assumed outside of consciousness, we identify four hidden knowns that are taken for granted or assumed as the underpinning fabric of practice.

1. The Voluntary Principle

The voluntary principle as discussed by Davies (2005) and Smith (2002) asserts that a defining characteristic of youth work is that young people have chosen to participate in a process where relations are voluntarily enacted by those involved. While the education and welfare of young people is argued as a core purpose for youth work (Spence, Devanney and Noonan, 2006), upholding the voluntary principle would negate engagement within the formal schooling system as being youth work, especially where young people now have to stay in some form of education or training until 16 in Scotland and 18 in England, and, because they are not free to choose their engagement with the formal educational system.

However, as Coburn (2010) and Ord (2009) have argued, this interpretation of the voluntary principle is problematic and potentially limits the scope and impact that youth workers can have when engaging with young people in a wider variety of settings. Further, despite the formal educational schooling system undeniably limiting opportunities of choice, there is still

a degree of choice as to whether a young person meaningfully engages within that context. Harland et al (2005) and Morgan et al (2008) argue that the voluntary nature of a young person's participation should not be compromised when working in co-operation with other professions. Yet, according to Harland and McCready's research 'youth work…[was]… developed as the boys matured across the five years' and went on to identify the possibility for ' shared training in certain areas for teachers and youth workers…[in order to]… promote closer working relationships between formal and non-formal education' (2012:85). This idea of negotiated relationships over time, and of inter-disciplinarity, is particularly cogent when thinking about youth work as education, and in considering how a form of voluntary engagement might be constituted and negotiated within the confines of a school setting. If the negotiated aspects of relationship building are clearly visible, then the voluntary principle need not hold the 'deal-breaker'status it currently occupies.

2. Analysis of Power

Here, another 'hidden known' comes into play. As we have argued elsewhere (Gormally and Coburn, 2013), youth workers, engage in constructed interactions that are underpinned by analyses of power that seek to mitigate power imbalances. Davies (2005) proposes that the balance of power should be tipped towards young people, through youth work, to challenge and change dominant discourses, especially where negative stereotyping has been problematic (Devlin, 2006). However, as an alternative to a purely negative interpretation of power where adults give up power in favour of young people, or, where young people take power from adults, a more fluid analysis where control shifts from adult to young person and back again through their interactions with each other (Hill et al., 2004) may be more beneficial. 'Power is a positive concept and is about having the ability or capacity to act' (O'Brien & Moules, 2007, p. 397), thus power may be exercised from both top down and bottom up. Within the context of schools, we need to be careful not to simply socialise young people into existing dominant power structures without any critical reflection on the benefits and/or negatives of these structures on young people (Cooper, 2012). Youth empowerment is often limited within contemporaneous social systems and structures (Podd, 2010). Sercombe (2010:24) asserts:

> The power of youth work is in the quality of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person…[where]…unlike many other professional relationships, youth work operationalises friendship-type relating styles, overtly pursuing a more equal style of relationship.

In this sense, the role of the youth worker within a structured educational environment is not to perpetuate these limitations, but rather to facilitate alternative analyses. While this is 'known' as part of the underpinning value-base of youth work practice, it is not always obvious, or routinely brought into focus.

3. Environment- Informal/Formal Engagement

Youth work within schools is perceived as being a resource to work with young people who are seen as problematic within a formal classroom setting. This instantly has an impact on the power dynamics and the capacity to engage and build rapport with young people who have already been institutionally labelled.. In youth work, spending time informally with a young person within their chosen environment can facilitate relationship building and rapport. However, within a formal educational setting this environmental choice is not as readily

apparent. Nevertheless, a skilful youth worker will still manage to engage in a relaxed conversation (Geertz, 1973, p. 5-6) over an allocated period of time which helps build rapport and trust. Davies (2005:9) highlights that workers 'negotiate and re-negotiate the terms of engagement with young people so that youth work's distinctive style and processes can be allowed to develop' . Youth workers' capacity to engage in informal conversations in groups or with individuals, around a specific activity or issue, can facilitate dialogue (Spence, Devanney and Noonan, 2006), and can also make a positive contribution in formal educational settings. Giving young people who have been negatively labelled, a space to express their views, to be listened to and to have an adult to build positive relations with can be extremely beneficial, and can complement and enhance formal educational endeavours.

There is of course potential for youth workers to engage with young people outside of the traditional classroom setting, through drawing on personal experiences and utilising experiential learning. Currently, this requires institutional recognition of the benefits accrued through such 'alternative' methods and is often developed through informal networks, rather than common inter-professional understandings. While this recognition of benefits remains hidden, the engagement of youth workers in school-based work remains a response to young people who do not 'fit' with standardised formal educational methodologies. This stance suggests utility in promoting youth work methods more widely in order for this kind of informal education to be viewed as equally important to traditional teaching and learning methods.

4. Emancipatory Praxis

The underpinning drive of youth work is its emancipatory praxis which encourages young people to explore and be critically aware of power relations on micro and macro levels, and to act on these to achieve a more just society (Batsleer, 2008; Coburn and Wallace, 2013). Youth work has an educational role in engaging young people, rather than simply filling them with information. As Freire (1996:81) notes:

> Whereas the banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of the consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality

As emancipatory praxis, youth work facilitates young people's active participation in the educational processes of liberation, not as recipients of powerful hegemonies that seek to oppress and suppress their creativity. Whilst being aware of the complexities of 'voluntary engagement' and 'non-formal settings' this type of practice resonates with a conceptualisation of education as the practice of freedom (Freire, 1996; hooks, 1994) and is consistent with youth work methodologies that are:

> …distinctively educational and involves constructive interventions with young people in non-formal settings…primarily concerned with personal and social education, and…characterised by the voluntary engagement of young people

> Harland and McCready (2012, p. 85)

This type of youth work engagement can complement the work carried out by school teachers to address social, educational and personal growth among young people. This suggests that

youth work would be beneficial to all young people, in helping them to experience a more informal educational relationship, as distinct from targeting those who are designated as being 'disengaged' from formal schooling structures. Yet, sometimes the drive to demonstrate value for money and achievement of specific outputs, and to claim outcomes as a result of paid for intervention, refocuses practice towards short term goals rather than the emancipatory praxis through which social change and social justice may be realised. Again, this calls us to question whether this 'known' is so well hidden that youth work practice is reduced to one of containment as distinct from an aspirational practice of freedom (Coburn, 2011).

Over to you…

To what extent do the 'hidden knowns' identified here resonate with your own experiences of practice?

How might more open and critical discussion of these 'hidden knowns' impact on day-to-day youth work practices?

Are there other 'knowns' that are hidden? Why is this and how can we work towards making these visible?

In light of these hidden knowns, we propose that the role and value of youth work as informal education should be viewed as distinct from the role of school teacher as formal education. Yet, while these roles are distinct, we believe they are not incompatible and should not be viewed in competition to each other. Both can incorporate ways of engaging young people in order to develop or co-construct new knowledge and new ways of understanding the world. Simply put, the educational offer in youth work is distinctive from formal education in that the young person is always the first focus of practice as 'primary client' (Sercombe, 2010). Although many teachers would subscribe to a similar value base, the marketisation and competitive nature of the broader educational system can result in a centralised focus on educational enhancement and employment driven outcomes as opposed to a more holistic engagement with young people. Acknowledging that increasingly youth work is also developing in this way, it must be made clear that the role of the youth worker is not solely to engage with young people to ensure that they uncritically subscribe to pre-set curriculum outcomes. Rather, through application of the hidden knowns, there is a drive to facilitate young people's engagement with education as a means of developing their criticality and capacity to be 'active citizens.'

While the hidden knowns are important in guiding practice, we also recognise that they are not always to the fore in everyday consciousness and in some instances may limit or constrain practice, for example, in over emphasising the voluntary principle or in creating barriers to hybridising formal with informal methods of education to create new methodologies. Thus, we return to aspects of Freirian pedagogy in order to consider how youth work as border pedagogy (Coburn, 2010) might be a useful concept in helping youth workers consider new or shifting perspectives that redefine what youth work is. Seeing youth work as border pedagogy helps us to explore the nature of professional practice and identity when we are required to work in situations where the hidden knowns are compromised. Such liminality enables us to work on the boundaries of what is known about practice. It is in this sense that we have found the idea of threshold concepts useful in developing new perspectives for youth work.

Threshold Concepts

Land, Meyer and Baillie (2010) argue that, just as passing through a doorway or 'portal' enables new perspectives to come into view, some concepts help us to take a step forward in seeing things differently. As a 'conceptual gateway' threshold concepts are identified as:

- Transformational – bringing a shift in perspective
- Integrative – exposing previously hidden connectivity
- Irreversible – unlikely to be forgotten or unlearned
- Troublesome – taking people out of their comfort zone, encountering the unknown
- Liminal/Transitional – crossing from partial understanding to a new way of being can be unsettling

Adapted from Land et al (2010, p. ix –x)

Land et al assert that when operating in sub-liminal mode, practitioners experience a sense of loss and often reject new meanings in responding to shifting perspectives or troublesome ideas. This seems to resonate with contemporary debates in youth work. These include the extent to which engagement can still be called youth work if hidden knowns are compromised. For example, if young people have not freely chosen to attend, or if power and the practice of freedom are mitigated by funder determined outcomes and expectations?

Land et al suggest that their ideas resonate with theories of transformative learning and conceptualisations of disorientating dilemmas (Mezirow, 2009). However, they suggest a different starting point from Mezirow in asserting that learners must, 'be open to the possibility of transformation in the first place' (Land et al, 2010, p. xii). In this sense educational transformation is not something that happens passively and unconsciously,; rather it is a conscious act of knowing and re-knowing.

Border pedagogy has already been suggested as a useful way of framing a conceptualisation of youth work (Coburn, 2010). Taking this as a threshold concept for youth work in schools, it is possible to also conceptualise the possibility for youth work as education (Harland and McCready, 2012); we argue that this methodology can be applied in a range of settings if hidden knowns are consciously critiqued. Making sense of the world and creating new meanings by working on boundaries in order to deconstruct inflexible borders, takes us outside of current discourse to create new ideas or alternative forms of knowledge (Giroux, 2005). For example, grappling with the idea of professional boundaries in school based youth work, and the social and cultural boundaries that are created, experienced and sustained by youth workers and young people, seem useful in thinking through new possibilities for youth work. In turn, consideration of the borders that are, or may be, crossed when such boundaries shift, affords opportunities for transformation of ideas and of professional praxis.

In this sense, we propose the concept of border pedagogy (Giroux, 2005) as a threshold concept for thinking about youth work in schools. This potentially helps us to re-learn what it means to be a youth worker and to reconceptualise the processes of youth work in those settings where, as Ord (2009) suggests, we 'think the unthinkable' in taking youth work into schools or into other places where hidden knowns are compromised. It is useful at this stage to compare our concerns about the hidden knowns in youth work with the key phases in the

process of professional transformation. According to Land et al. (2010) these are linked to receptivity, recognition and grieving.

Our position is that because these knowns have been (or are becoming) hidden we need to:

- Re-engage in the kind of rigorous debate that opens up the possibility of 'alternative expressions of meaning' (Boyd and Myers, 1988: page?)
- Be receptive to the possibility for changed perspectives.
- Recognise that our established meanings or assertions may no longer be valid, and that we may feel the need to grieve this loss.

Adapted from Land et al, (2010)

We believe that internationally, youth work discourse is already in a liminal state, defined as:

A time when the old configurations of social reality are increasingly seen to be in jeopardy, but new alternatives are not yet in hand…liminality is a safe place in which to host such ambiguity, to notice the tension and unresolved without pressure, but with freedom to see and test alternative textings of reality

Brueggemaan (1995, p. 319-20)

In light of this, we assert that youth work in schools exemplifies moves towards new social realities for youth workers while on-going conversations in literature and at conferences we have attended, have begun to tentatively test alternative views. Proposing youth work as education (Harland and McCready, 2012) asserts the need for professional equity across educational methodologies (inside and outside of schools). We propose that border pedagogy offers a threshold concept which aids discussion regarding the future for youth work: where the unthinkable can be realised in new configurations of methodological praxis across a range of professional domains.

Over to you…

How does thinking about border pedagogy as a threshold concept can help us to shift perspectives towards new possibilities for youth work?

You might like to discuss this with established youth workers and ask them to identify their own 'portals', through which practice has changed in the past? What threshold concepts helped them to shift perspectives?

How might you engage with people who are not at the doorway yet – especially those who are not receptive to change or who are experiencing grief at the loss of past understandings of practice?

Conclusion

Seeing youth work in schools through the lens of border pedagogy has helped us to identify that, despite inherent tensions in what we have called 'hidden knowns' in youth work, it is possible to create conditions on the boundaries of professional practice to help shift perspectives towards new understandings of educational methodologies . In this sense, we propose border pedagogy as a threshold concept that can be useful in helping youth workers to reconceptualise practice, particularly in those settings where the hidden knowns are

compromised. We argue that on-going conversations have opened up the possibility for new ways of knowing, and that youth work literature and conferences offer spaces where historical practices can be celebrated, and new practices forged. This is a process of transformation and reinvention that resonates with youth work in schools, but which is also relevant to professional practitioner development.

Further Reading:

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Harland, K. and McCready, S. (2012) Taking Boys Seriously: A Longitudinal Study into adolescent male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland. Department of Education and Department of Justice, *Centre for Young Men's Studies Publication*. This report introduces a conceptualisation of youth work methodology as distinct from other professions.

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