The Emperor still has no Clothes: Some Realities about Youth Work Interventions in the Lives of 'Vulnerable' Young People in the 21st Century

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There is enormous contemporary political and policy expectation and pressure on youth work to secure the 're-engagement' of young people already in, or at risk of, circumstances of social exclusion. That re-engagement is judged around issues such as 'citizenship' and 'employability', though – like youth work itself – those words have variable and flexible meanings and understandings. But even the very best of youth work practice neither has, nor is, a magic bullet. It is a professional process based on the establishment of trust and positive relationships with young people. It takes time, even more with young people who come from cultures of socio-economic disadvantage and who hold doubt and suspicion about the likely benefits of social interventions of any kind.

Yet policy-making persists in asserting that youth work can provide a 'quick fix'. This paper is based on some of the more grounded realities that inform such interventions. It suggests that the political rhetoric attached to this kind of targeted youth work is based on *mythical assumptions, irrelevant practice and unachievable targets*. Drawing from a much-cited paper first published over a decade ago in relation to the political climate that then prevailed in the United Kingdom, this paper considers the challenges around connecting youth work to policy aspirations at the European level around social inclusion, the promotion of citizenship and labour market insertion.

Key words: *youth work, youth policy, youth 'disaffection', social inclusion, citizenship, employability*

Some years ago, I published an article with a colleague that was designed to provoke debate about the realities of youth work and the condition of

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many young people's lives, rather than continuing to construct targeted (and presumed to be 'effective') youth work on *mythical assumptions, irrelevant practice and unachievable targets* (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.13; emphasis added).

The background to the paper lay in the expectations placed upon my co-author. His employer had secured a three-year grant to achieve the 'social inclusion' of a considerable number of young people in six neighbourhoods characterised by significant socio-economic disadvantage. He was appointed well into the start of the first year of the project and, only months after starting, found himself having to prepare an annual report proclaiming how he had achieved the initial targets set out in the project proposal. Having struggled to construct a largely fictitious account of such 'success' (he was told by his manager that, unless the funder was persuaded that credible progress towards identified targets had been achieved, the future of the project would be under threat), he called me in frustration. I asked him to write a brutally honest account of his endeavours to make contact with young people, to build relationships with them and to convince them that the next step might be a return to education, training or employment. He wrote about the challenges facing a stranger in these neighbourhoods, the entrenched suspicion on the part of young people about 'yet another project' (that, as they saw it, was not likely to make much difference to their lives), the need for many trust-building stepping stones before any discussion of the real project objectives could be broached, and – critically – the fact that many of these young people had already established alternative cultures of existence and survival, within which education, training and employment was not an item of focus or discussion. It was that account that served as the basis for the paper we subsequently wrote together. I reproduce sections of it here simply to anchor a more contemporary debate that is unfolding across many European countries about the meaning, purpose and methods of youth work, which was subjected to a robust interrogation during a European youth work conference held in Antwerp – the European youth capital 2011. The original paper was set within the context of UK policies focused on social inclusion; this paper takes into account recent proposals at a European level for something called 'youth work' to be at the heart of not only contemporary EU youth strategies (Council of the European Union 2009) but also broader initiatives concerned with economic competitiveness and social cohesion (such as the Europe 2020 strategy, its youth 'flagship' Youth on the Move and, indeed, new proposals for a unified education programme entitled 'Erasmus for All').

Notwithstanding the detail that informed the context of the original paper, the general contextual points have a continuing resonance today. First, there is the debate about the 'disengagement' of a significant minority of young people; indeed, one of the EU's priorities for young people is to reduce the

number of 'early school drop-outs' by 10%. Secondly, there is the ongoing development of a range of youth policy initiatives designed to both secure the re-engagement of so-called 'disaffected' young people and to promote more preventative forms of social inclusion. Third, related to this, is the endeavour to strengthen the 'active citizenship' of the young, providing platforms for the exercise of responsibilities (as well as the claiming of rights). Youth volunteering is now forcefully on both national and European policy agendas; indeed at the end of 2011, building on earlier European commitments to develop voluntary activities by young people (see European Commission 2002, Williamson and Hoskins 2006), there was an EU-funded conference held in the Netherlands on service learning and volunteering. Fourth, there continues to be a lobby for the further professionalization and recognition of 'youth work'; the first European Youth Work Convention held under Belgium's Presidency of the European Union, in Gent in July 2010, provided a forum for debating the role and visibility of youth work within broader youth strategies at a European level. And fifth, the momentum towards partnership working and inter-agency collaboration does not appear to have slowed; indeed, economic hard times have pushed different agencies to explore even further the benefits of closer co-operation.

We raised these points at the end of the 1990s and I do so again more than a decade later because the implicit and often explicit focus of these debates, developments and expectations are those young people most firmly positioned at the margins and on the edge. There are many ways to describe them, in relation to structural disadvantage, cultural attributes, personal attitudes and orientations, or socially ascribed characteristics such as offender or drug user. I once described them as possessing a 'tangle of pathologies' (see Istance et al. 1994), including educational underachievement, health risk behaviour (various forms of substance misuse in particular), and criminality. This is often compounded by ethnicity or disability. I am aware that such shorthand suggests some rather heavy labelling and I do not intend that. Rather it is to set the human and cultural context against which the political and social policy context outlined earlier needs to be positioned. We all know these young people and, as we wrote in the original paper about new initiatives to re-engage them in education, training and employment, „the advocacy of the potential of young people and the need to procure effective participation and 'empowerment' has a clear flip side – their abject disillusionment with the proffered opportunities to participate" (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.14). These young people have seen it all before, either directly or through the stories of relatives and neighbours, and they can see through the veneer: „each new variation on this theme [education and training] is dressed up and paraded before these communities when everyone knows that the emperor has no clothes" (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p15).

Indeed, around the same time as the original article was published, I wrote a fictional piece about a mythical character called Tommy Butler. That he (or possibly she, though young men tend to significantly outnumber young women in relation to 'disengagement') had the same initials as the then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was not co-incidental. Blair had just launched another policy initiative, *Bridging the Gap* (Social Exclusion Unit 1999), directed as 'disengaged' young people and I tried to imagine the transition of 'Tommy Butler' in each decade since World War II. Tommy was much the same disadvantaged kid throughout, but the world around him was changing. Early on, he found his way back into 'responsible adulthood'. By the 1980s and 1990s, he had come to be ignored, abandoned or overlooked – socially excluded. Blair committed to re-including him and, indeed, his 'new Labour' government did establish a host of policy measures directed towards this end. But I projected forward to the Tommy Butler born in 1990, nearly ten at the time of writing, who would be a 'disaffected' teenager in the mid to late 2000s:

> Tommy is 10 and will soon start secondary school. Ahead of him lies a raft of possibilities, some already in place, some being developed in practice, and some still awaiting formulation at policy level. His transition to adulthood will be a rocky road, with plenty of obstacles along the way but he has been told already that there will be people there to support him and to guide him on the way. Tommy has already learned some skills for survival. Growing up in a 'poor neighbourhood', he sometimes thinks that 'signing on' [as unemployed] is what everybody does. He lives with his mother, an older brother and two younger sisters (his dad left when he was seven, and he only sees him occasionally). His mother is on benefits, but does a cleaning job for cash in hand. His older brother has offered him a 'spliff', but he wasn't interested. Mind you, he thinks he'll give one a go soon. His mother's much younger sister lives round the corner. She had a baby when she was sixteen, and is proud to be a young mother; the alternative was possibly mind-numbing factory work at the local electronics plant or, more probably, nothing. Tommy ponders that such an option is not open to him. Tommy doesn't think too much about the future. He enjoyed attending a summer learning programme this year, which was a bit like school (but more fun) and it has helped him to improve his reading. He's mischievous and cheeky, quite capable of holding his own in his environment (he's adept at nicking sweets from the local shop, which stands him in good stead with his pals), but he's not alienated from learning. In fact, he displays a curiosity that serves him well with his teachers. They rather like him; sure, he's a bit of lad, but he's also got potential. Sadly, they're not convinced it will be realised.

> When Tommy goes to secondary school, he will be doing 'citizenship' education and will be supported by a Personal Adviser from the Connexions service or, if he lives in Wales, through local Young People's Partnerships. If

he starts going off the rails, there should be a person to provide both direct and indirect support, putting him in touch with those who can help him best. Tommy may, of course, not be persuaded that he needs their 'help'. He may well encounter the new Youth Offender Panel which, if he gets into trouble, will frame a 'programme of activities' to divert him from crime. There will be a greater focus on preventative intervention, following the public resources allocated for work with children and young people as a result of the powerful analysis of the reasons for 'social exclusion' by a governmental Policy Action Team on Young People. In school, he may access an 'alternative curriculum offer' instead of being thrown out. Young people are a key strategic priority for a new Drugs Strategy (a substance misuse strategy in Wales); substance misuse education will be part of his PHSE [Personal, Health and Social Education] curriculum and treatment services will be more readily available if he moves beyond experimental and recreational drug use into more dependent routines. Tommy will have the possibility of a variety of routes to achievement in learning; work is currently being developed around the concept of 'Graduation', first mooted in *Bridging the Gap*, which will enshrine not only academic and vocational qualifications but also attention to key skills, community involvement and personal development. He will be encouraged to engage with extra-curricular activities and volunteering.

How will Tommy respond to all this? Much depends, of course, on his character and circumstance. Certainly this framework of public policy carries the prospect of far fewer young people slipping to the edge, but it fails to acknowledge that motivation to participate (to stay on board) is secured largely by the strength of certainty about the destinations that are likely to be reached. Today's globalised world carries little certainty, and the research evidence tells us that retention in learning and the acquisition of qualifications is the best protective factor against all the indicators of exclusion (teenage pregnancy, criminality, drug misuse, psycho-social disorders). But Tommy is not interested in the research evidence. He will try to make sense of these 'opportunities' in the context of his subjective realities. The power in the messages from his local culture and community (however misguided and misinformed) – about what's the point of education, the exploitative nature of government training schemes, the need for a 'live for today' mentality (for the maintenance of psychological well-being), the suspicion of professionals, that volunteering is a cunning ploy to get you to work for nothing, the fact that there are other ways to 'get by', and so on – must not be overlooked. It is how Tommy Butler weighs such information against that provided by the battalions involved in public policy initiatives which will determine the extent to which he connects with the inclusion, achievement and citizenship agenda or opts for something else (Williamson 2001, p.8)

The essential point here is about *culture*, not youth cultures, but cultures of survival and sociality within neighbourhoods and communities where 'getting

by' and 'getting through' is far more the order of the day than 'getting on'. My own long-term study of The Milltown Boys, whom I first studied in the 1970s when they were young teenagers and with whom I have stayed in touch (they are now around 50 years old), demonstrates clearly that those most on the margins get by through combinations of occasional and casual employment, instrumental criminality, gambling and any other opportunistic moment to 'make a raise' [raise some money] (see Williamson 2004). They have no stake or interest (not any more, even if they once did) in the legitimate world of re-training or structured employment. And they have developed alternative ways of getting by that at least somewhat reduce the many risks attached. They have to get by through circumventing as best they can the official systems in which they are enmeshed: claiming unemployment benefits and criminal justice. Playing the system is a critical cultural skill (Williamson 2005). And they have passed this wisdom of the street on to their own children, and many have followed in their footsteps.

The communities and cultures we discussed in our original article were very similar to Milltown. We pointed to the lack of motivation or aspiration amongst the young people – at least in relation to official pathways of transition. Attendance on even 'compulsory' programmes was erratic, and resistance was commonplace. Interventions were perceived as pointless and ineffective. We wrote particularly about 'cultures of work', or rather non-work – the best available forms of making a living lay within the informal and illegal economies. The young people who got by in those contexts looked down with disdain and ridicule on other young people who took up legitimate but low-paid work, or participated in youth training programmes that paid a meagre allowance.

We questioned whether these young people operating on apparently the wrong side of the tracks were in fact 'disaffected'. They may have been genuinely disaffected from the wider society that seemed to them to have dealt them a poor hand, but they were usually well integrated at the local level: „the visible representatives of a well-established local culture which has developed over many years, particularly on estates and in communities where unemployment is acute across three generations and even more severe amongst the young" (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.17). We also suggested that these young people live their lives within 'cultures of resignation and non-participation'. They have to get by on meagre resources and infrastructure support: their best bet is to put faith in their own resilience and the support of family and friends. Anything beyond that is perceived with (understandable) distrust: „they are deeply cynical about the values of the mainstream culture, whose intentions represent a path littered with broken promises and goals that were never (and probably never could be) achieved" (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.19). This is a predictable coping strategy: a work ethic within cultures of unemployment can be a dangerous thing.

Yet this is precisely what policy is seeking to cultivate. And in communities where time structures and lifestyles are at odds with the disciplines, routines and expectations of education and training programmes (and employment), policy initiatives on this front produce a cultural battleground. There are, of course, some wins (for policy), in that young people do take part, though we may wish to ask *which* young people sign up and what the wider consequences for them may be, especially in the longer-term if their decision to buck their local cultural trend backfires and the policy programme yields no discernible benefit. But, by and large, initiatives come and go, and the most intractable population of young people remains untouched. The initiative has usually failed to make contact with them, at least not for sufficient time to have any prospect of engaging them, or they have skilfully and studiously avoided it. Either way, the *practice* has been largely ineffective, even though the paper trail no doubt testifies to the successful re-engagement of young people, at least in sufficient numbers to ensure the reputation of the organisation that has 'delivered'. It is a significant, if not absolute cycle of delusion.

In the world of addictions, a huge influence on harm reduction practice has been the work of Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) on 'cycles of change'. Why this has not been translated and transferred to the world of learning is rather puzzling. In short, it advances the rather simple idea that people do not, perhaps cannot, change until they are ready to do so. For sustainable change to be achieved, they cannot be compelled or coerced. People have to be *motivated* to change. Young people are no exception. It is such motivation, often triggered through personal circumstances and experience, that can also be nurtured through youth work. Recent research has, indeed, made this very point: youth work is about supporting and even effecting *personal* change – in attitudes, orientation and understanding – that may be the precursor of *positional* change, such as returning to learning or finding work (Merton et al. 2004), but youth work should not be expected to effect or secure positional change. Yet that is precisely what youth work is increasingly expected to do. Though once described by an English youth service minister as the 'can't do, won't do' service, youth work is now thought to have a role to play in addressing some of the big youth challenges of our time: school exclusion, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, substance misuse, and youth offending. Coussée (2008) has drawn attention to the youth work paradox (indeed, a number of them!): that youth work works for young people who least need it and does not reach those who do. This has not prevented the European Commission from placing significant store by youth work. Youth workers, defined in the EU youth strategy document as 'socio-educational instructors' are almost centre stage in the strategic aspirations to promote opportunity in education and employment, extend access to sport and participation, and strengthen solidarity between the generations.

But here lies the rub. The increasing recognition of youth work (and youth workers), and the focus on professionalism, if not professionalization,

has been accompanied by a far more hard-nosed and technocratic, almost 'business model' for youth work: targets, outcomes, performance, indicators, measures. Method and process have been relegated, almost rendered invisible, possibly even irrelevant, as have words such as trust and relationships. Only outcomes matter. Youth work will be judged on that basis. In opposition to this, I have argued on many occasions that youth work can never been a scientific start and finish exercise: it is an organic and dynamic journey with evolving groups of young people, involving various combinations of the constitutive group, the issues addressed, the contexts in which it takes place, and the methods invoked. It is indeed the professionalism of the youth worker that makes some contributory judgements about the form and content of these combinations, but it is also dependent on the young people involved. Their proactive decisions or reactions to their behaviour and interests are also ingredients in the youth work process. This is a subtle and sophisticated process, and it requires an especially nuanced approach when dealing with the kinds of young people described above, those who are reluctant to engage with projects and initiatives coming in 'from outside'. I have suggested that those kinds of projects need what I have termed 'advanced skill practitioners': like advanced car drivers, through experience and training, they are swifter and smarter about knowing when to apply the brake (backing off a bit) and knowing when to press on the accelerator (cajoling and encouraging). In that way, youth work can at least engender reflection amongst some of the most disengaged about their circumstances and the direction in which they want to take their lives. My colleague and co-author Robin Middlemiss was such a practitioner, but clearly his organisation felt that he was not accelerating fast enough towards the pre-planned destination. In his view, that was not possible: he would have veered out of control, lost direction and, indeed, lost the young people he was working with. He was right, of course: it has been argued that youth workers whose explicit job is to re-engage 'disaffected' young people in education, training or employment are not considered to be youth workers by those young people they are expected to 'target':

> The young people who are creating social policy concern will simply draw the line at a different point. Where they previously avoided contact with the careers service or the police, they will now steer clear of such so-called youth workers (Williamson 1998, p.3)

None of this is easy. In the same article from which the quotation above is taken, I also wrote:

> The youth service must be ready for engagement with the broad social agendas around health, training, crime and volunteering while, simultaneously, arguing forcefully for the first step requirement of open access traditional youth work (Williamson 1998, p2)

Youth work has to look both ways – towards the politics and policy that recognises and funds it, and towards the young people it serves. Some young people are 'ready' for programmes and projects, with accompanying structures, goals and outcomes. But others are not. Without open space provision – once described as the 'base camp of youth work' – there can be no starting point for a significant minority of young people, notably those from more vulnerable, disadvantaged and sceptical backgrounds. Without that access point, they cannot get on to the ladder of participation and engagement because the first rung of the ladder has been removed and the second is too high to reach. Those making policy remain deluded if they believe or argue otherwise. There is a reason why ladders have rungs (Williamson 2009)!

The European youth work conference in Antwerp, the European youth capital of 2011, was specifically focused on youth work with vulnerable groups. The format of the event combined some theoretical keynote contributions, a variety of workshop presentations, and site visits to relevant projects around the city. A concluding summary was shaped on the basis of the discussions and observations that had taken place (Coussée and Williamson 2011). It is this presentation that forms the final part of this paper, for the strength of some arguments as well as the ambivalence of others demands dissemination and debate. By way of setting the scene, there were some broadly agreed foundation thoughts. First, youth workers had no option but to be 'two-headed', looking two ways at once, both towards their sources of political and funding support, and towards the young people with whom they worked. Second, 'vulnerability' was present in all young people but some young people had considerably more access to protective resources than others. Social disadvantage produces greater exposure to risk and vulnerability. In other words, vulnerability is relational and contextual, contingent on circumstances and support within the family, neighbourhood, social welfare regimes, the market – and, arguably, youth work. But only if youth work possesses the flexibility to complement or contest the balance between stability and openness in young people's lives. It is that balance that can counteract vulnerability and provide young people with the necessary blend of self-assurance and acceptance of new possibilities: a positive identity to meet the challenges of the complex world of transition in the 21st century. Youth work needs to adapt its working practices in its engagement with different groups of young people, if it is to fulfil its mission to serve both as a 'transit zone' and as a 'forum' for young people (see Verschelden et al. 2009), and not end up empowering the powerful and neglecting the marginal. There are, inevitably, persisting arguments regarding the role – or as one workshop at the conference put it, the 'core business' – of youth work, or its changing nature over time. Is it about preventing risk or promoting talent? Is it about reducing early school leaving or delivering non-formal education? Is it about

guiding young people towards active citizenship, or towards education, training and employment? Is it for all young people, or just for young people 'at risk'? These are critical questions in times of the ascendancy of neo-liberal governments, and endeavours to harness youth work to wider political objectives, especially those around youth labour markets and employability. Deep disquiet was expressed in Antwerp about some of the directions youth work appeared to be taking or in which it was being propelled.

Some quite distinctive positions – core themes – were asserted almost unanimously, as well as a number of recurring dilemmas, both of which capture some essential features of contemporary youth work practice, especially with more vulnerable young people. With regard to the core themes, the essential proposition, almost a statement of principles, was that youth workers had to convey *acceptance* (though not always approval) of young people, display *respect* for the person (not the problem), work at the *pace* of the individual and ensure an appropriate level of *patience*, when things did not run smoothly, as would inevitably be the case on many occasions when working with 'challenging' young people.

A second set of core themes were depicted as anchors, compasses and bridges – providing starting points, directions and links. All this was premised on working with young people in groups, offering a sense of belonging. It was not social inclusion in the broad rhetorical, political sense but more, through 'living together' (an often used phrase for describing intense, almost intimate, youth work practice), a form of social integration. It was this group context that offered a platform for enterprise, experience and exchange, sharing initiative, embarking on shared activities, and swapping perspectives and ideas. Through this communication, over time, young people participated, at least at the local level of the youth project, though rarely in ways that more formalised practices of 'participation' delineate.

A final set of core themes clustered around young people's futures, the structures affecting their wider lives, and their prospective destinations. Here youth workers were cautious about prescribing or predicting outcomes. They were supporting young people at the start of myriad journeys, rarely clear about where they might end up. They were 'gardeners', not 'mechanics' – seeking to cultivate young people's potential for growth rather than putting right young people as a problem. As such, the youth workers believed in their advocacy role, sending 'signals to society' about how to improve support for young people. Their role, in relation to other agencies (such as schools, the police, careers advisory services and others), was viewed as complementary not collaborative. Youth workers were cautious about engaging too closely with those wider agendas, though they did see that they could sometimes extend young people's networks and thereby contribute to enhancing their 'bridging' social capital.

Such clarity as there was around these core themes was accompanied by areas of tension and contradiction, if not confusion. These 'recurring dilemmas' fell into three groups: practical, professional and political. The key issue amongst the practical dilemmas was whether or not youth work was about supporting young people in the life they lead or supporting young people to lead another life. This, in turn, raised issues about the extent to which youth workers should adopt a 'laissez-faire' (youth-directed) approach rather than a youth worker-led practice involving proactive intervention and direction. At the extremes, some saw the former as authentic practice while others viewed it as an abdication of practice. Related dilemmas concerned open or more targeted provision, with the accompanying issues of 'open' provision becoming dominated by particular groups of young people and whether or not there was a need to understand those who had stopped attending, and the reasons why. Some saw the prevailing dominance of one or another group of young people as the normal order of things, while others felt youth workers should be more proactive in equalising the distribution of youth engagement. Here, further questions were raised about the different forms of participation that could or should be engendered through youth work activity.

At the professional level, old chestnuts surfaced once again, not least in the tendency of youth workers to define themselves *against* other professionals ('not a teacher', 'not a social worker') rather than by a clear conceptualising of their own role. „That's not my job" was, for some, a persistent mantra, as that group of youth workers denied the need for any bridge-building or shared practice with the likes of school teachers, police officers, or careers and guidance counsellors. Others felt that it was important to forge such links and work more closely 'in partnership'. Both sides invoked different arguments or interpreted legal responsibilities and ethical guidelines in different ways. The complexity of these debates, and finding points of consensus and resolution, is not helped by the fact that, in different countries, youth work (and street-based youth work in particular) is governed by different thresholds of confidentiality and different requirements for information-sharing.

However it was at the political level that various dilemmas were most pronounced. Recognising that the real problems facing the 'vulnerable' young people they worked with were largely structural, many youth workers saw the limitations of individual support and argued that attention had to be given to structural inequalities. But they were unsure whether engagement with political authorities should be through 'top down' political dialogue or through the presentation of 'bottom up' practical case studies. Such tensions were exacerbated when youth workers were being expected to meet various political requirements which did not always square with youth rights and principles of supporting youth participation. Finally, within the context of political preoccupations with performance, measurement and outcomes, youth workers had different views about identifying what was important

(and unimportant) on these fronts and about the mechanisms by which they might oppose those aspects that were considered to be unimportant. As the old saying goes, not everything that can be measured is important, and not everything that is important can be measured. The unmeasurable youth work relationship was of paramount importance to these youth workers, but there was uncertainty about how to broach these issues at a political level. They may have been helped by the observation during Filip Coussée's plenary speech that 'you don't grow grass by pulling it' which returns us to the gardening analogy: if you want to grow grass, you have to water it.

It was this imagery that informed our concluding remarks. Implicit in the debates throughout the conference was the view that youth work with more 'vulnerable' young people was being dehydrated through a misguided political and policy preoccupation with targets, outcomes, measurement and performance at the expense of relationships, trust, process, space and time. Unless the two sides of these scales are rebalanced through the rehydration of the latter, youth work will wither and die. There will, of course, be other 'work with young people' but it will not be the transit zone and forum that a scholarly and systematic scrutiny of the history of youth work in Europe has characterised youth work's past (Verschelden et al. 2009). For it to have a future, there must be a stronger, renewed professional understanding of what youth work entails, and a stronger, renewed political commitment to that 'brand' of youth work, not current versions that are a gross distortion of the realities that can and do make a difference to the lives of more vulnerable young people.

One of the Antwerp youth projects visited by conference participants was a bus project that started eight years ago. Developed through voluntary effort until recently, its strength lies in its reliability and non-judgemental approach – it has been open every single Friday night since its establishment, and its work often runs overnight into Saturday. The key point about this project is simply that it is there, and is known to be there. Some young people use it as a haven, some as a springboard – but it is up to them. Too many other youth projects come and go, engendering doubt and cynicism, rather than the intended development and commitment in young people. As we wrote in our original article:

> Once bitten, twice shy: after a dozen or so bites, withdrawal is the only sensible option. In such a context, individuals who put themselves forward for volunteering, training or employment are the exceptions that prove the rule. They may be heralded as examples of the potential for intervention, but invariably they do more to demonstrate the massive breach that has to be overcome if a wider population is to be reached. The pull of competing cultural pressures on the many is too great (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.23)

And our concluding remarks are as relevant today as they were then:

„We have lost sight of the bases on which young people make their decisions; projects directed at young people are overwhelmingly constructed from a top-down rationalist position with neat target-setting, methodologies and considerations of 'value for money'. Practitioners at the sharp end, required to operationalise such crisp strategic thinking, are being set up to fail. The real challenge is to get into dialogue with young people and other residents within these communities to find out what is really going on. Only with a clearer understanding of the values that underpin everyday behaviour can we even start to think about how to redirect the cultures of such communities towards a more constructive agenda. An insight into those values and patterns would almost certainly convey an internal logic and would explain much of the lack of engagement with projects apparently designed on their behalf. This would, in turn, tell us one of two things:

To give up and go home; or – more critically –

To rethink the nature of our interventions, in terms of both its content and timescale, as well as appropriate 'outcome' considerations

Either would at least put an end to the cycles of delusion which are currently being played out by funders, projects and workers – with no benefit whatsoever to many of the young people who are allegedly the 'beneficiaries' of such initiatives (Williamson and Middlemiss 1999, p.24)

Youth work is clearly not just about practice with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people but, if such groups are a major focus for contemporary youth work practice funded by the public authorities, then somebody, once more, has to point out when the emperor has no clothes.

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Car je i dalje go: Neke činjenice o intervencijama rada sa mladima u životima „ranjivih" mladih ljudi u 21. veku

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U današnje vreme, postoje velika politička očekivanja i pritisci na rad sa mladima kako bi se obezbedilo ponovno uključivanje mladih ljudi koji se već nalaze u situaciji socijalne isključenosti ili im ona preti. O ponovnom uključivanju sudi se u vezi sa temama kao što su „građanske vrline" i „mogućnost zapošljavanja", iako – kao i sam rad sa mladima – ove reči imaju promenljiva i fleksibilna značenja i shvatanja. Međutim, čak i najbolja praksa rada sa mladima niti ima čarobni štapić, niti to jeste. Ona predstavlja stručni proces zasnovan na uspostavljanju poverenja i pozitivnih odnosa sa mladim ljudima. Proces iziskuje određeno vreme, čak i više vremena u slučaju mladih koji potiču iz kultura sa nepovoljnim socioekonomskim položajem i sumnjaju u moguće koristi od bilo kakvih društvenih intervencija.

Ipak, pri stvaranju politika, uporno se insistira na tvrdnji da rad sa mladima može da stvori „brzo rešenje". Ovaj članak zasnovan je na mnogo utemeljenijim

činjenicama koje su u osnovi takvih intervencija. Tvrdi se da se politička retorika koja prati ovakvu vrstu ciljanog rada sa mladima zasniva na *mitskim pretpostavkama, irelevantnoj praksi* i *nedostižnim ciljevima.* Oslanjajući se na veoma citirani rad objavljen pre više od jedne decenije na temu političke klime koja je u to vreme preovlađivala u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu, ovaj članak bavi se izazovima koji prate povezivanje rada sa mladima sa težnjama politika na evropskom nivou koje se tiču socijalne inkluzije, promovisanja građanskih vrlina i uključivanja na tržište rada.

Ključne reči: *r*ad sa mladima, politike za mlade, nezadovoljstvo mladih, socijalna inkluzija, građanske vrline, mogućnost zapošljavanja