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# PhD by Published Works: Youth Work Curriculum

Jon Ord

PhD

2008

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## DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .....  ..... (Candidate)

Date ..... 15<sup>th</sup> July 08 .....

## STATEMENT 1


This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD by published works.

Signed .....  ..... (Candidate)

Date ..... 15<sup>th</sup> July 08 .....

## STATEMENT 2


This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged giving explicit references and a Reference section is appended.

Signed .....  ..... (Candidate)

Date ..... 15<sup>th</sup> July 08 .....

## STATEMENT 3

I hereby give consent for me dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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## **Critical Summary of Published works by Jon Ord (2004 – 2007)**

### **The Works to be considered:**

Ord, J. (2004 [a]) The Youth Work Curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work Agenda. *Youth & Policy* Volume 83, pp43 – 59

Ord, J. (2004 [b]) The Youth Work Curriculum as Process not as Output and Outcome to Aid Accountability. *Youth & Policy* Volume 85, pp53 – 69

Ord, J (2007) Youth Work Process, Product and Practice: Creating an authentic curriculum in work with young people. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

### **Introduction**

The two distinct, but related tasks of this critical review, are to 'evaluate the field in which the works are located' and perhaps more importantly 'indicate the original contribution therein'. However there lies a potential problem, relating in particular to the first criteria, for there has been a distinct lack of academic writing on curriculum in youth work. There is therefore very little 'field' to evaluate, or indeed to locate the work therein. This problem is not insurmountable in that, given that there is an insubstantial body of knowledge on curriculum in youth work, the published works submitted for this PhD, it will be argued, do fulfil the second, perhaps more important criteria, 'an advancement of the body of knowledge', as much of what is contained herein is therefore an original contribution to the field.

A curriculum for youth work is regarded by many (though not, it must be stressed, by myself) as necessarily problematic (see Ord 2007, chapter 1.3 for an account of the main objections to curriculum, as well as my responses to them). However, this problematisation has not, by and large, been debated. Jeffs (2004) rightly points out in his reply to Ord (2004 [a]) 'As you will have undoubtedly realised when researching your contribution, this journal has been starved of articles on the topic' (2004:55). The assumption about the lack of fit between 'curriculum' and youth work (evidenced by many of the responses to my original article (Ord 2004 [a]), (for example, Jeffs (2004), Stanton (2004) & Robertson (2004) ), had largely been assumed and the objections to a youth work curriculum had remained largely implicit. Until, that is, the debate in the journal 'Youth & Policy' which was precipitated by my original

paper: Ord, (2004 [a]) 'The Youth Work Curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work Agenda'.

I would argue that I have both directly and indirectly considerably advanced the field of literature on curriculum in youth work. Ord (2004 [a]) prompted this academic debate consisting of eleven papers over five editions of the journal *Youth & Policy*. Ord (2004 [b]), my response to the main objections to my original paper, helped to sustain and advance this debate. Those two papers form my initial claim in fulfilling the criteria of advancing the body of knowledge. These two papers are included herein. The most significant other papers from that debate: Merton, B. and Wylie, T. (2004), Jeffs (2004), Stanton (2004), Robertson (2004) are also provided, in an appendix, for context.

What the debate made apparent to me was that a number of misconceptions and problems exist in relation to curriculum in youth work. The first, and one which I did begin to address in Ord (2004 [b]) (but addressed more fully in Ord (2007) ) was the misconception that curriculum itself was synonymous with a product curriculum and that an alternative view was not just possible but essential for a curriculum in youth work; namely a process curriculum. Secondly, a number of writers including Merton and Wylie (2004) and Harris, R. (2005) seemed to be arguing that curriculum in youth work only accounted for a part of the sum total of youth work. This is evidenced by Payne's claim that 'Most educators engage in both formal (curriculum activities) and informal education (conversation based) learning (2001:195). This seemed to me to be fundamentally problematic and was a point that needed addressing. Not least because it seemed to imply that much of informal education (or youth work) had no aims, no specified content, no outcomes, and no discernable educational framework, features of educational practice which are all articulated through a curriculum.

Another important feature of the curriculum debate was the relative ignorance that commentators had of the 'use' of curriculum by practitioners in the field, as well as a lack of reference to the numerous curriculum documents which had been produced (other than Jeffs' (2004) rather dismissive view of them). An important contrast to the often unspoken objections to curriculum from academics that existed prior to this

debate, is the relative ease with which practitioners have embraced the notion of a curriculum and since 1989 have unproblematically been articulating their work in terms of a curriculum. However this usage has not necessarily been premised on a sound theoretical basis, nor has this usage been analysed or assessed. Whilst my two initial papers began this task (the first is primarily a criticism of an imposed framework from the DfES / NYA and the latter is primarily a response to criticisms of that paper by Merton and Wylie (2004) and Jeffs (2004) ). The two papers do also begin to set out a theoretical framework, for example by proposing that the work of Stenhouse (1975) can provide a theoretical basis for a process curriculum. Significant though it is the work in the two papers is however only superficial, and needed considerable outworking. The book (Ord, 2007) takes this as its primary task, that is advancing a theoretical basis for a curriculum in youth work. In so doing the book provides four chapters (2.1 to 2.4) dedicated to the theoretical analysis of curriculum in youth work as 'content', 'product', and 'process', as well as providing five chapters on 'essential elements of curriculum' (chapters 3.1 to 3.5)

A brief account of the history of curriculum in youth work, and an exploration of the limited debate on its emergence will begin to clarify these points.

### **Historical background:**

The first explicit reference to curriculum is attributed to Ewen (1975), who was head of the National Youth Bureau, the semi independent government funded body whose role was to support and develop youth work. He wrote a paper entitled 'Curriculum development in the Youth Club', proposing that the notion of curriculum was a credible term to answer the question: 'What are we doing in our youth clubs'? He reissued this again with little change as a second edition in 1983. However, little if any debate ensued about the term, whether advocating its relevance or decrying the possibility of its incorporation. Prior to this Jeffs (2004) claims for over a hundred years youth & community work has successfully delivered its practice without recourse to curriculum.

The significant milestone in the development of the incorporation of curriculum in youth work came in 1989 with the 'First Ministerial Conference on Youth Work', the papers for which are collated in *Danger or Opportunity* (NYB, 1990). The conference

was a specific attempt by the then parliamentary under-secretary of state for Education and Science, Michael Howarth MP, to introduce a curriculum for youth work, on behalf of the government. He was aware it was controversial but made it quite clear in his keynote address that he regarded the aims of the conference as three fold:

- 1 Clarification on core business of youth work
- 2 Priority outcomes of youth work
- 3 Agree concept of 'Core Curriculum' for youth work

NYB (1990) [34]

Howarth was very specific about what he meant by '...core curriculum – that is the priority outcomes which the youth service should seek to provide' (ibid)

Clearly the context for what appeared to be the imposition of curriculum in youth work was the Education reform Act 1988, and the creation of a National Curriculum for schools. Youth workers were perhaps wary of the same being applied to youth work. The principal youth officers and heads of voluntary youth organisations who represented the field at the conference were therefore quite clearly hostile to Howarth's proposals (NYB 1990, Davies 1999 [b]). As a result, he was far from successful in achieving his identified aims. Though two more conferences followed in subsequent years NYB (1991), NYA (1992), ministerial changes occurred and representatives of the government failed to attend them. Little agreement was made therefore on issues of curriculum. Instead the field of youth work agreed their own 'Statement of Purpose' NYB (1991), which differed so radically from the original intentions of the first conference that it was subsequently ignored by government (Davies 1999 [b]).

Following the ministerial conferences it was not however a return to the status quo. Importantly an expectation was placed on local authority youth services to produce their own locally agreed curriculum documents. It might appear therefore that Howarth had in part achieved his objective of introducing a curriculum in youth work. But whether or not this was a curriculum as outcomes as he had originally intended, and to which there had been so much opposition was a question that was unanswered, and had until Ord, 2004 [a] and Ord, 2007 remained unanswered.



Despite the shock waves that the series of ministerial conferences (NYB 1990) sent through the youth work field, it did not, by and large, trouble the academic fraternity overly, and little was written commenting on, or analysing the incorporation of, the notion of the curriculum in youth work. Bar that is, one significant paper written by Davies (1991) entitled 'Whose youth service curriculum?' within which he particularly takes Howarth to task over the outcomes focused curriculum. He was so concerned about the implications for youth work practice of such an imposition that he sought it necessary to reiterate:

- *That what is distinctive about youth work is its process*
- *That it is neither possible nor desirable to prioritise between 'content' and 'process'* (Davies 1991:6)

Davies, in realising the lack of fit between how a curriculum geared specifically towards the achievement of outcomes runs contrary to the process of youth work, implicitly alludes to a fundamental distinction at the heart of the youth work between either a 'product' or 'process' curriculum. That is, a distinction between different types of curriculum. This has however largely remained an untapped resource for understanding and articulating the youth work curriculum, until that is the works of Ord 2004 – 2007.

Before focusing on these specific works it is necessary to exhaustively account for other limited contributions to the 'field of work' on curriculum in youth work.

Immediately prior to the first ministerial conference Smith (1988) in his book *Developing Youth Work*, does briefly mention the curriculum in youth work but dismisses it for its association with formal education and suggests that youth work practice has historically not needed to resort to curriculum. Smith's logic is flawed however because by his own admission he explicitly follows Hirst (1968) and accepts a product based definition of curriculum: 'A programme of activities ...designed so that pupils will attain so far as possible certain educational and other schooling ends or objectives' (Smith 1988:137).

In the same period Newman and Ingram were commissioned by the Further Education Unit to undertake an action research project to explore the development of curriculum amongst local authority youth services in the north west of England (Newman and Ingram, 1989). This research was interesting in the way it elicited an entirely different response to the notion of curriculum from its participants, than from those at the ministerial conference. The practitioners participating in Newman and Ingram's study, not hampered by the constraints of having a particular type of curriculum imposed on them, found it relatively easy to articulate their existing work in terms of curriculum (see Ord 2007: 3-4).

The only two other documents of any significance in the decade following the ministerial conferences are Ofsted (1993) 'The Youth work Curriculum' and the guidelines for planning a youth work curriculum from the National Youth Agency: NYA (1995) 'Planning the Way'. Neither of these documents are particularly helpful in understanding the youth work curriculum as they are theoretically weak, not advocating or articulating a particular form or notion of curriculum. By the same token they are consistent with the expectation on local authorities to develop their own ideas, concepts and frameworks for a curriculum.

Ofsted (1993) is primarily a discussion document which accounts and describes some of the key areas of educational practice such as 'arts' and outdoor education. Importantly it does acknowledge the 'process' of youth work. Planning the Way (NYA, 1995) is structured around content areas such as bullying, assertiveness and dealing with discrimination and offers practical advice and guidance to workers in terms of games and activities, with references to other sources for information in relation to these areas. But it is theoretically neutral and says little about what a curriculum is, or should be based upon. Little reference is made to 'Planning the Way' (in particular in Ord, 2007) because it has been superseded by the 'joint' DfES / NYA curriculum guidelines from within Transforming Youth Work (DfES, 2002) and the NYA, with their Booklet: 'Towards a Contemporary Curriculum for Youth Work (Merton, B. and Wylie, T., 2002). A critique of this particular 'product' based curriculum framework was the primary task of Ord (2004 [a]) and was expanded upon in Ord (2007)

### **Context and Purposes:**

An important context, for this collection of works is what I describe as ‘the ever widening gap between youth work theory and youth work practice’. (2007:12). This gap is evidenced by the fact that practitioners have in statutory youth services since 1989, increasingly articulated and delivered their work in terms of curriculum whilst theoreticians of youth work have consistently held the view that curriculum is anathema to it. This gap has to some extent remained implicit since the emergence of curriculum, and was only made extant by the debate on curriculum in Youth & Policy.

This gap between theory and practice requires a resolution as it sets up a dilemma: either youth work has shifted in its formulation and delivery, veering towards a conceptualisation of youth work as an approximation of formal education, or the dominant theory of youth work as informal education, which it is proposed encapsulates youth work (Smith, M. K., 1988, Jeffs, T. and Smith, M.K.,1990, Jeffs, T. and Smith, M.K., 2005,) has erroneously opposed the notion of curriculum.

*‘This book sets out to solve this dilemma by formulating a viable theoretical base for curriculum in youth work. It analyses curriculum theory from the formal educational sector, and assesses its suitability for a youth work curriculum. It also draws on existing curriculum documents produced in the field, assessing their appropriateness. Ultimately utilising a combination of relevant theory and examples from curriculum in practice a framework for a viable curriculum for youth work is established’ (Ord, 2007:12).*

In further attempting to resolve the above dilemma the works also, initially in Ord, 2004 (b) and more fully in chapter 1.3, Ord, 2007, analyse and confront the objections to curriculum from proponents of informal education. In systematically responding to and refuting the objections to curriculum in youth work I highlight inconsistencies at the heart of informal education. This is highlighted by the proposal that as an educational practice it is both defined by its opposition to curriculum and yet “Informal educators can and must employ more formal approaches from time to time” (Jeffs & Smith,2005:81); and importantly by formal approaches they refer explicitly to both the ‘negotiated curriculum’ and the ‘set curriculum’. This raises important

questions about the validity of informal education, and to its prominence as the primary explanatory theory of youth work.

This latter point, important though it is, is not the primary purpose of the works. They are, first and foremost, concerned with youth work and its relationship to, and with, curriculum. This relationship has in recent years become strained by the imposition of the 'joint' curriculum framework (DfES, 2002; Merton, B. and Wylie, T., 2002,). Ord (2004 [a]) dealt exclusively with a critique of this framework arguing that it contravened important principles of the 'process' of youth work. In many ways, significant though this was (judging by the response from chief executive of the NYA Tom Wylie and his counterpart Brian Merton (Merton, B. and Wylie, T. 2004)), Ord (2004 [a]) and the response to Merton and Wylie (Ord 2004 [b]) only scratched the surface of what was required: What was evidently required was a detailed examination of both curriculum in practice and more importantly an exploration and outworking of the process curriculum of youth work. This was the primary purpose of the book: 'Youth Work Process, Product and Practice: Creating authentic curriculum in work with young people' (Ord, 2007).

## **Contributions to the Body of Knowledge**

The submissions make a substantial contribution to the body of knowledge pertaining to youth work theory and practice in a number of key respects:

### **1. Application of educational theory to youth work curriculum**

Though some elements of curriculum theory have been discussed in the context of informal education (Smith 1996, 2000) and it is this short piece which provided the theoretical basis of the first paper, (Ord 2004 [a]). Smith however does not provide an *application* of curriculum theory to youth work, merely a brief discussion and description of some of the broad categories into which curriculum theory can be broken down: syllabus, product, process and praxis. However this discussion is flawed in certain key respects. Most notably it fails to comprehend or articulate the importance of procedural principles in a process curriculum. Instead, proposing that it is a merely a curriculum driven by aims, as opposed to one driven by objectives; though this is the case, it misses the point. In failing to appreciate the importance of procedural principles in the process curriculum, it fails to realise the extent to which the process curriculum, applies directly to the process of youth work. (see chapters 2.3 and 2.4 for clarification)

Smith appears often without legitimate foundation to want to avoid considering the possibility of youth work (articulated in his terms as informal education) to be understood as operating within or articulated by curriculum. This is exemplified by the fact that he updated the piece on curriculum on the Infed website after the curriculum debate of 2004/ 05, but made no reference to it. Indeed he explicitly refers to the 'so called youth work curriculum' (Smith 1996, 2000). Smith appears implacably, almost illogically opposed, to curriculum. Indeed in 'Developing Youth Work' (Smith, 1988) he dismisses it because of its 'association' with formal education.

The submission, particularly Ord (2007) it is claimed is, significantly, the first work to 'apply' curriculum theory to youth work. It does this primarily through the formulation of curriculum as 'content', 'product' and 'process' (Kelly, 2005). But it also considers other formulations including the 'child' and 'society orientated' curriculum; as well as in part the 'vocational' versus the 'utilitarian' curriculum. The

application to practice is achieved through an analysis of the extent to which the documents produced in the field equate to the various models as well as analysis of youth work practice itself. A significant proportion of the book is dedicated to this task, and is to be found in section 2 (Ord 2007:20-44). Whilst much if not the majority of this section it is claimed is original and adds to the body of knowledge. Specific examples of this original analysis are to be found in the extent to which information equates to curriculum as content, as well as the legitimacy of outcomes as 'products' of youth work, and whether or not, this equates to a product approach to curriculum. A further example of this original contribution would be the proposed working definition of curriculum for youth work as: 'The method by which the educational values, purposes, methods and possible outcomes are made explicit' (2007:10). It is perhaps however the process model of curriculum (chapters 2.3 and 2,4) which I would claim is one of, if not, the major contribution to the body of knowledge.

## **2. Formulation of a process curriculum for youth work**

Whilst much of the submission it is claimed is original analysis and adds to the body of knowledge, it is the formulation of a process curriculum which is the primary achievement of the works. Following the debate in Youth & Policy in 2004 I realised that a significant misunderstanding appeared to be evident in much of the objections to curriculum in youth work. In that most, if not all, of the antagonists suffered from what Grundy refers to as a belief in 'the gospel of curriculum'(1987:1). The overwhelmingly dominant theory of 'curriculum as product' which operates to exclude all other possibilities of alternatives. Many including Jeffs (2004) Robertson (2004) and Stanton (2004) operated from this misconception. That whenever anyone talked of curriculum they were referring to a product curriculum. The task therefore was to formulate a process curriculum for youth work which dispelled that misconception.

Ord (2007) (particularly, though not exclusively, through pages 32 to 44) provides this extensive 'outworking' of process curriculum. This is achieved in three parts. Firstly with reference to Stenhouse (1975), and to the work he undertook to formulate a process curriculum in direct opposition to product models. This incorporates his reliance on procedural principles rather than objectives as a 'guides for practice'.

Important parallels are made between Stenhouse's rationale and existing principles which have been devised to guide the process of youth work e.g. Davies (2005); as well as links between existing curriculum documents which highlight the process of youth work including Devon (2002) and Isle of Wight (2000) which actually utilises a model which implicitly incorporates procedural principles.

The second part of the process curriculum is based upon the child centred curriculum. It is argued that there is a correlation between the traditional 'child centred' curriculum, which Ross (2000) traces back to Rousseau and the young person centred approach of the youth work. Indeed if one rejects the one problematic principle of Rousseau's which emphasises education in isolation, the four remaining principles operate as abiding principles of both the child centred and the youth work curriculum:

- Children will develop naturally, given suitable environment.
  - Children's development is best self directed
  - Subject discipline divisions are artificial
  - The role of the teacher is to enable learning not transmit knowledge
- (Ross, 2000:138)

In addition the child (or young person) centred curriculum is also partly founded on the work on experiential education by John Dewey (1997, [1933]) which cites 'experiential situations' (1997:42) as the primary grist for the educational mill.

The third important strand of the process curriculum follows Kelly (2004) and focuses on the principle of development. It focuses on the developmental potential of the curriculum and argues that any curriculum founded within a liberal democracy must initiate young people into that democracy. The curriculum must therefore be based on 'principles of democratic empowerment' not indoctrination. He argues 'The means by which the moral and political dimensions of democracy can be advanced is through a concept of curriculum as development, that is the process by which individuals 'are developing a real sense of involvement and control of the social context of one's own life (Kelly 2004:89, cited in Ord, 2007:37).

The concept of curriculum as development is advanced through Ord (2007) initially by drawing important parallels between Kelly's curriculum as development, and the

work by Young (1999, 2005). Young's seminal text 'The Art of Youth Work' cites the developmental potential of youth work as one of its primary foci. Clear parallels can be drawn between the concept of curriculum as development and the expansive developmental role of youth work articulated by Young.

Ord 2007, however continues to elaborate on the developmental aspects of curriculum, perhaps most notably in chapter 4.4. This chapter relates Young's contention that youth work should enable young people to 'make sense of their lives' (1999:90) to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927). It argues that the youth work curriculum must embrace the notion of young people living through and in time. Important implications result from this argument about outcomes in youth work. Not only should they therefore be person centred they must be meaningful to young people and set in the context of their own lives; where they have come from the issues they face in the present, and their aspirations for the future. 'Distance travelled' does provide a basis for 'accounting' for outcomes in this perspective but it is suggested that young people's 'narratives' provides a more legitimate framework as they are necessarily the young people's stories and not an adult imposed interpretation.

Ironically, and as further evidence of the confusion and misconceptions at the heart of youth work curriculum debate, some of the detractors, including Jeffs and Smith (2005), Stanton (2004) implicitly acknowledge the importance of some of the above aspects of curriculum as process. For example Jeffs and Smith and Stanton rely heavily on Dewey in their articulations of informal education, but they utilize these aspects of practice to oppose curriculum.

### **3. Other implications of process curriculum:**

Much follows from an acceptance of and a commitment to, a process curriculum. Firstly, there are important **implications for planning** of youth work sessions, activities and interventions. It would be easy to see, with the current focus on outcomes and accountability in youth work (DfES, 2002, 2003), as well as the push to impose an outcome / product based curriculum (DfES 2002, Merton & Wylie 2002), how the practice of youth work would begin to shift towards treating session plans as a means of planning for specific outcomes; as well as the need for objectives to be set



for them. The process curriculum is a stark reminder of the flaws in this approach as it is both philosophically flawed and it runs counter to the unfolding, developing and responsive nature of youth work practice.

The second important implication for understanding youth work practice deriving from a commitment to the process curriculum is what I have described as the '**paradox of process**'. Though this has some origins in Smith's description of the incidental nature of learning (1988), the paradox of process offers an extension of this idea, suggesting that it is not only claimed that learning can be or is often incidental but that it is 'necessarily' so. That is at the heart of a process approach, particularly in relation to personal and social development, it is actually necessary to 'not' focus on the ultimate end product. (see the example of confidence Ord 2007: 92-94).

Thirdly the process curriculum necessarily incorporates '**emergent outcomes**'. Outcomes cannot be meaningfully set with any degree of certainty prior to the process of youth work. Beyond that is the broad articulation of educational aims. This is in part because the process curriculum is person centred, as well as the fact that the learning emerges as a result of, and often within, an experiential context which is interactive and dynamic, and of course not least because of the paradox of process.

Given the current climate's increased emphasis on accountability this brings problems with a process approach. I suggested that as a result of a commitment to process, it does not follow that youth work is not, and should not, be opposed to accountability. Only that it should approach accountability differently, than the present emphasis on pre-specified objectives. Firstly youth work practice should at least in part be **accountable for its inputs**. This has it is pointed out in part been the case with elements of the Ofsted framework for inspections. (Ofsted, 2001, Ord 2007:90)

#### **4. Critique of government policy on curriculum and related issues of youth work practice**

- **Transforming Youth Work (DfES, 2002)**

Ord 2004 [a] was written with the clear intention of critically assessing the curriculum model proposed within Transforming Youth Work ((DfES 2002, Merton & Wylie

2002). Transforming Youth Work was arguably one of, if not, the most radical reworking of youth work principles and practices by government. The policy had received some criticism, for example by Smith (2003) who details six key features of practice that he considers are radically altered by Transforming Youth Work. No mention is made however in any of the critiques about the model of curriculum proposed within this policy, nor the specific alignment of NYA with the DfES on this issue.

Ord (2007) advances the critique of Transforming Youth Work considerably, for although now five years old it continues to have, it is argued, a lasting detrimental effect on practice through the 'managerialist' targets (DfES, 2002). Ord (2007) analyses in detail how these specific targets influence practice, as well as assessing the adequacy of the recent attempts by the NYA (Flint, 2005) to explain and interpret these targets for practice. Ultimately it is argued that the emphasis on a 'systems approach' to accountability is detrimentally affecting practice. Importantly however Ord 2004 [b] and Ord (2007) show how the process of youth work and its necessary lack of a causal relationship between inputs and outcomes is inconsistent with this systems approach.

- **Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003)**

Little, if anything, is written about the impact of Every Child Matters on youth work practice, beyond the commentaries in the youth work press in magazines such as Young People Now, (Barrett, 2004; Goddard, 2005). Ord 2007, offers an insight into the impact of this policy, initially assessing how the curriculum documents in the field have responded to the demands placed on them to work towards the 'Five Outcomes' (DfES, 2003). However uniquely it is proposed that the 'real story of the five outcomes' (Ord 2007:105) is that they are in actuality merely a device, to enable a number of disparate professions to be 'homogenised', through the 'integrating of services' in the establishment of Children's Trusts (DfES, 2003). It is this integration of youth work and youth services alongside other larger and more dominant professions that is a cause for concern. Whilst even those within the NYA themselves have acknowledged this (e.g. Wylie, cited in Rogers 2005), Ord (2007) begins to assess in some detail how the mechanisms of integration including the 'Common

Assessment Framework' and the sharing of information across professions (DfES, 2006) affect practice.

- **Youth Matters (DfES 2005)**

The most recent youth policy: 'Youth Matters' (DfES 2005) is also considered within Ord (2007), which brings the impact of policy on youth work curriculum up to date. A number of commentaries and critiques are collated and summarised, including the noting of the welcome emphasis on young people's empowerment through the establishment of the Opportunity Fund. However overall, it is proposed that Youth Matters offers a rather bleak future for youth work. Not least because there is a lack of any educational focus in Youth Matters, a point which is echoed by Jeffs and Smith (2006). It is noted with some irony that despite the flaws of Transforming Youth Work, at least it did have an explicit 'educational' curriculum ('if not a particularly youth work friendly one' (Ord 2007:108). Youth Matters with its emphasis on 'activities', seemingly as mere ends in themselves or as retrogressive means of keeping young people out of trouble, is inconsistent with the progressive person centred 'process' curriculum of youth work.

Ironically from my point of view it is a mixed blessing that the attempts to bring in the Opportunity Card, are faltering (Chandiramani 2006) for, though this is to be wholly welcomed, as this attempt to establish a demand led 'market' for youth work threatened to 'drive a coach and horses through the network of youth projects' (Ord 2007:108); it immediately puts the book out of date, just in fact *before* it is published!

##### **5. Critical review of youth service curriculum documents**

The original paper (Ord, 2004 [a]) was written in relative ignorance of the perceived status of youth service curriculum documents within the academic fraternity. The response by Jeffs (2004) confirmed this denigrated position. He maintains they are generated by fear and a desire for status: 'A brief acquaintance with the bullet-point dominated listings and the formulaic language of youth work curriculum documents confirms these are certainly not inspired by hope. They are products of their time and it sadly shows. Cooked up to meet the expectations, assumed or real, of the inspectorate, politicians and managers – people up the chain of command' (2004:57). Jeffs fails to see why, if youth and community work has operated successfully for

over 100 years without recourse to curriculum, it should resort to it now. Concluding that 'Curriculum is, I maintain inappropriate, indeed fundamentally incompatible with what historically youth work has come to represent' (ibid).

This attitude is without legitimate foundation and not based on a detailed examination of such documents. These documents are a requirement of the inspectorate of youth work (Ofsted), and have been since 1990. When inspected, services will be specifically criticised if they lack a substantive curriculum framework (for example Halton 2004). Given this requirement they at least require a detailed analysis. They certainly cannot be dismissed as a result of this context, as Jeffs seems to imply. As Ord (2004 [b] and Ord 2007 shows they are much more than a means of appeasing policy makers (for example see Ord 2007, chapter 5.1 and the role of curriculum in the development of a community of practice).

One of the strengths of the book is that it collates and analyses over sixty such local authority youth service curriculum documents. Davies rightly points out in his forward, that this 'has not been attempted before' (Ord 2007:x). Indeed Davies concludes that: 'This gives it [the book] an evidence base which takes many of its interpretations and conclusions beyond the rhetoric which has characterised previous discussion in this area' (ibid). I maintain, as a result of the detailed analysis of the curriculum documents, that they are deserving of analysis, should not be dismissed as irrelevant and are important both as guides for practice as well as insights into that practice.

- **The role and purpose of curriculum documents**

The credibility and value of curriculum documents has it is hoped through Ord (2007) been advanced. They should now be viewed as legitimate expressions and articulations of practice which have an importance at a local level. This is explored in some detail in the penultimate chapter 5.1 which assesses the role of curriculum in terms of its ability to legitimate, communicate and develop practice. Firstly they legitimate practice as they are a formal recognition and agreement of priority areas and foci within a given local authority. Ord 2004 [a] notes how a senior officer from West Sussex stressed the identification of 'anti-racism' in the curriculum and how this enabled work to progress unhindered in a seemingly un-racially problematic

geographical area. Secondly, they communicate practice to both workers within an authority or agency, to neighbouring workers and, perhaps more importantly in the context of Every Child Matters and integrated services, to those who youth workers are expected to work with, but who may not necessarily know much about their respective practice.

Finally, and perhaps more interestingly the role of curriculum documents in the 'development' of practice is considered. The need for the curriculum to be both owned by all the workers both vertically and horizontally throughout the organisation is stressed. But more importantly links are made between the curriculum and the extant meanings and learning structures within organisations in their respective 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998; Lave, & Wenger, 1991). It is emphasised that if any given curriculum is to maximise its ability to both communicate and develop practice it must link into these communities of practice. Indeed if these informal structures are utilised to the full 'the curriculum has the potential to provide a symbiotic developmental role where by both the communities of practice and the curriculum itself are developed' (Ord 2007:133).

## **6. Additional Contributions**

- **Pro active responsibility of the educator**

The consequence of confronting the arguments against curriculum as well as criticising informal educator's (Jeffs and Smith, 2005) emphasis on the need for workers to 'go with the flow' of existing conversations, lead to a realisation that what was missing from informal educators accounts of their educational practice, particularly when it is applied to youth work is their implicit denial of the 'pro-active responsibility of the educator'. Parallels are drawn between Freire's emancipatory view of education (Freire, 1972), which is often held up as an exemplar of good practice (e.g. Forrest 2005) and the seemingly erroneous desire of informal educators to eradicate both the power (in terms of knowledge above and beyond 'the educated') and responsibility (in terms of the role and expectation placed on them) of the educator. (see 2007: 12 -15)

- **Voluntary participation?**

Ord (2007) makes a radical departure from existing accepted beliefs within youth work about the primacy of voluntary participation as a necessary condition of its practice. Jeffs, T. and Smith, M.K (1998/99), Young, K. (1999) and most if not all commentators on youth work practice, as well as many curriculum documents emphasis voluntary participation. Indeed Davies (2005) suggests that it is 'the defining feature'. This statement is however often asserted and rarely analysed. Ord 2007 (chapter 3.3.) scrutinises this aspect of practice arguing that the youth work curriculum is much more than 'whether a young person has chosen to attend', and that though some aspects of practice may logically follow from that choice to attend, in terms of youth work's educational practice. Ord (2007) radically argues that youth work should concern itself more with 'enabling engagement' in environments where young people both choose to attend or are under some form of compulsion (e.g. school); than being overly concerned with whether or not practice that occurs without the precursor of voluntary participation is indeed youth work.

- **Critical evaluation of Kolb (1984) and experiential learning**

A small but significant section of the book is dedicated to a detailed reworking of Kolb's theory of experiential learning. Ord (2007: chapter 3.5) concludes that Kolb is probably the least understood and most misrepresented of all theoreticians in youth work, and perhaps beyond. He is consistently misrepresented as advocating a simplistic model of experiential learning both within curriculum documents (Ord 2007:68) and youth work academics alike (e.g. Smith, 1988; Young, 1999). Reference to Kolb's actual theory, his diagrams, as well as the sources which he draws upon (including Lewin, Piaget and Dewey), show at best these interpretations are simplistic and are a misrepresentation. Kolb is necessarily, at least in part, describing a dynamic process of learning, which requires both immersion in experience as well as reflection on it, often at one and the same time.

Kolb's theory has been interpreted, perhaps even at times described by Kolb himself, in terms of a technocratic view of learning, which is inclined to interpret learning as linear, sequential and organised into definable products, rather than a dynamic engagement with an experiential process. The key concepts of assimilation and

accommodation are consistently omitted from interpretations of Kolb, and I offer a reworking of Kolb which includes these essential elements.

## **Areas for Development**

### **1. The role of Praxis?**

Readers will know doubt notice that a minor shift occurred in the means by which curriculum is analysed from Ord (2004 [a]) to Ord (2007) in that the early paper utilises content, product, process and praxis and Ord (2007) ignores praxis. This is primarily because Ord (2004 [a]) took as its single source Smith (1996, 2000) which proposed the four methods of analysing curriculum. The research for Ord (2007) revealed that Praxis is not an embedded concept in the field of curriculum theory, beyond perhaps Grundy, (1987). In addition, it was felt that if too much emphasis was placed on praxis the primary task of articulating the process curriculum would become masked by secondary explanations of praxis. (As Smith (1996, 2000) himself admits praxis is itself a version of the process curriculum). Also 'praxis' is not an embedded concept in youth work like 'process'. It does not appear in any of the curriculum documents analysed for the purposes of the book and a decision was made to exclude any reference to it, primarily to ensure that the inclusion of praxis did not skew the focus away from 'process'

### **2. 'Informal' versus 'Social' Education?**

A debate of wider significance which is implicit at times throughout the book is the role of informal education as the primary educational theory underpinning youth work. Ord (2007) raises questions about the suitability of informal education, both through its objections to curriculum as well as in its seeming refusal to acknowledge the proactive role of the educator. A decision was made to leave the question of the appropriateness of informal education implicit, as to consider it directly, would certainly have shifted the focus of the book. It is noteworthy however, that informal education has not always been the dominant philosophy of youth work as Bradford (2006) notes: 'The concept of social education has provided youth work with a relatively consistent, though shifting, centre of gravity since the late 1960's' (2005:59). Social education certainly appears to provide a common thread for practice from Davies (1967), through to the late eighties. Indeed the shift from social

education to informal education was precipitated by Smith (1988) when he argued in his book *Developing Youth Work* for a change from one to the other. The work of Jeffs and Smith (1990, 2005), and Smith, (1994) have subsequently reinforced the dominance of 'informal' over 'social' education.

The shift from social education to informal education is not mere semantics. There are clear differences in terms of their educational rationales. Social education frames its outcomes in part, in terms of the relationship between the individual and the society in which they are located. There is necessarily a 'socialising' aspect to its curriculum. Informal education is opposed to this in at least two key respects, firstly as informal education is loathe to specify any of its outcomes, beyond the promotion of well being (Jeffs and Smith 2005). Secondly any notion of socialising puts a greater onus on the credibility of the educator in defining the desirability of the end products, which is inconsistent with its approach.

Another key difference between informal and social education appears to be the different approaches to 'the individual'. Social education is grounded in the individual, it is comfortable with articulating its educational practice in response to individual needs and their development (though of course much of this development occurs in groups). Informal education appears at times to be 'anti-individualist' with its emphasis on 'community'; evidenced by Jeffs and Smith's claim: 'We argue that as educators we strive so that all may share in the common life. Part of our task may, thus, be to work with people so that they do 'fit in'' (2005:21). This difference is further exemplified by the different attitudes towards empowerment from within the traditions of social education. Whilst empowerment is seen as an essential element of youth work as critical social education (Ord 2007, chapter 3.1). Informal education is much more suspicious of empowerment: '...problems arise when we talk of empowering others... To talk of empowering people is to risk being anti – liberatory' (Jeffs and Smith 2005:21).

Social education is clearly problematic when not seen as education for the liberation of the individual from the constraints of society simply as a means of controlling or containing them. It is argued in Ord 2007 (chapter 5.2) that a commitment to critical social education incorporates both sides of the educational equation: That of both a concern for individual development within existing social structures, as well as



offering a critique of the social structures within which individuals are located. But a specific area for development and one that was intentionally not focused on in this book, but perhaps in another, are the relative merits of social education and informal education.

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# **Critical Evaluation of Dewey's Experiential Learning as a Theoretical Basis for a Youth Work Curriculum**

## **Introduction**

This paper sets out to critically analyse experiential learning in youth work. Whilst there appears almost universal acceptance of the concept as a corner stone of youth work (Young, 2006; Blacker 2001; Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 2005), there are some important theoretical problems about its incorporation which I will address. Experiential learning when applied to youth work in the main appeals to Kolb (1984), and not to the original work of Dewey (1900, 1916, 1938). This has significant implications for the use of the concept in youth work. While Kolb attributes much of his theory to Dewey, my suggestion is that Kolb's use of the concept – and in particular the interpretation of Kolb within youth work – is a simplification of Dewey's theory, overlooking its underlying complexities and so misrepresents experiential learning. Dewey offers a number of significantly different aspects to experiential learning which are absent from the Kolb's simplified alternative.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to argue that John Dewey's theory of experiential learning should be acknowledged, and utilized, as one of the key theoretical constructs underlying youth work and its curriculum. The first part of the paper offers an appraisal of the existing literature on experiential learning in youth work, to establish whether, and how, Dewey's theories and experiential learning *per se* have already been applied. This is followed by an exposition of Dewey's theories, and in turn a detailed critique. Finally the implications of Dewey's 'educative experience' as a key theoretical principle of the youth work curriculum will be assessed.

## **Experiential learning in youth work literature**

The earliest reference to experiential learning in youth work appears to be from Mark Smith in his *Creators Not Consumers* (1980), as part of a characterization of youth work:

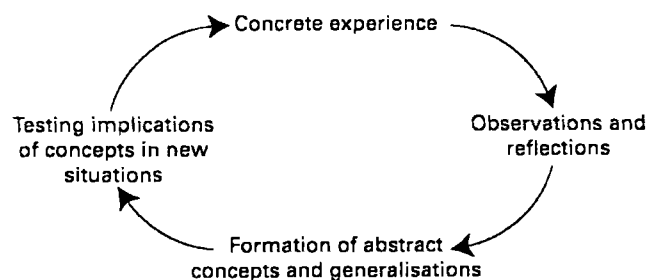
Learning by doing [experiential learning] is based on three assumptions, that

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to distinguish between Kolb's theory (1984) and the interpretation of Kolb in youth work (Young, 2006; Blacker 2001; Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Kolb's theory, it will be shown is contradictory. At times he appears to give credit to some aspects of Dewey's theory, in particular the dual aspect of experience, with his reference to accommodation and assimilation, at other times however he runs counter to this with his emphasises on a simplistic four stage cycle of learning. Importantly the interpretation of Kolb and its application to youth work almost entirely ignores the dynamic nature of experiential learning suggested by Dewey.

- people learn best when they are personally involved in the learning experience;
- knowledge has to be discovered by the individual if it is to have any significant meaning to them or make a difference in their behaviour; and
- a person's commitment to learning is highest when they are free to set their own learning objectives and are able to actively pursue them within a given framework (Smith, 1980: 16)

Smith also refers to the common depiction of Kolb as a four stage model of experiential learning (overleaf). This is invariably the model of experiential learning which is attributed to Kolb (Young 2006, Blacker 2001) as well as later by Smith himself (Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 2005).



**Figure 3.5.1** Lewin's experiential learning model (cited in Kolb, 1984: 21) <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Despite his conversion from social to informal education, as the basis for youth work, Smith (1988) still places a firm emphasis on experiential learning. Citing Houle he suggests:

For many practitioners, informal education is synonymous with a pattern of learning that might be described as experiential, "education that occurs as a result of direct participation in the events of life" (Houle, 1980: 221). Such a pattern starts with concrete experience, with people doing things. (Smith, 1988: 130)

Smith (1988) also still maintains that the model proposed by Kolb provides an appropriate theoretical framework for this educational practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is noteworthy that no such diagram was generated by Lewin himself to describe his conception of learning. (Lewin, 1948)

Young (2006) also locates youth work with experiential learning: 'Learning [in youth work] is seen as a dynamic process, which leads to action. In other words, to be meaningful, learning needs to be tested in reality. This process is reflected in Kolb's experiential learning cycle' (Young, 2006: 79). Likewise Blacker (2001) articulates Kolb's four stage process. It is also in the list of specific criteria defining youth work devised by Tom Wylie, recently retired Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency (NYA). Wylie maintains that: '...youth work is the application in work with adolescents of a form of practice which has three defining characteristics-their personal and social development; the deliberate use of experiential learning and transformative relationships; and adherence to a set of values (which inter alia puts the interests of young people first)' (Wylie, 2008: 54). In addition experiential learning is explicitly cited as a key feature of youth work in official guidance on youth work from the NYA (2007: 1).<sup>3</sup> The above literature does not mention experiential learning explicitly in relation to curriculum. Experiential learning is, however, one of the features of Merton and Wylie's (2002) conception of a curriculum, which was subsequently incorporated into the DfES' Transforming Youth Work Strategy (DfES, 2002).

Jeffs and Smith (2005), in their account of experiential learning, make some reference to Dewey, utilising his suggestion that the 'business of education might be defined as an emancipation and enlargement of experience' (Dewey 1910: 340, cited in Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 58). They suggest that the enlarging of experience is as much about deepening the understanding of our experiences as it is about building them up, arguing that we 'work with people so that they may have a greater understanding or appreciation of their experiences' (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 59). In so doing learning by experience is liberating: 'We interpret what is going on and this allows us to be "set free"' (ibid). Jeffs and Smith also refer to Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) and their three facets of experiential learning: returning to experience, attending to (or connecting with) feelings, and evaluating experiences. In addition they also refer to the work of Schon (1983) who distinguishes between 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. However importantly with regard to the process of youth work, Jeffs and Smith still make specific reference to Kolb's learning cycle, regarding this as a useful model for conceptualising the process of experiential learning, suggesting that: 'this is a helpful way of looking at the situations we face as educators' (Jeffs and Smith 2005: 66). However they admit it is not without its problems, not least that learning is not necessarily sequential in the way it is presented within the cycle. Thus they claim that we 'should not rely too heavily on the mechanical sequence' (ibid).

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<sup>3</sup> 'Youth work methods include support for individuals, work with small groups and learning through experience' (NYA, 2007: 1)



Likewise Blacker (2001) makes reference to the work on experiential learning by both Schon (1983) and Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985). He also makes a brief mention of Dewey (1910) in relation to his ideas about a 'forked road' being a stimulus for reflection. However it is Kolb's familiar four stage cycle that Blacker has as his starting point, concluding: 'that theories like these do provide a good framework for reflecting on our processes' (Blacker 2001: 88).

Jeffs and Smith's interpretation of experiential learning is however problematic as they seem to equate experiences exclusively with 'exploratory activity', for example when they contrast it with 'giving information' or when 'individuals or groups may only need or want knowledge or advice – not exploration' (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 67). As we shall soon see when we look at Dewey in more detail, he would be wary of a distinction between experiential learning as specific activities and formal learning as the transmission of useful and relevant information. Any relevant knowledge or information is 'in some sense' experiential as it relates directly to the lived experience of the individuals concerned (Dewey 1916, 1938). This is further exemplified by Jeffs and Smith's explicit contrast between ideas and experience, and between thoughts and action. They maintain that 'to build theories about an experience we need to draw on a repertoire of ideas and images... Book-learning and teaching can give us access to a range of theories and ways of making sense. In other words we need to recognise that a 'starting point' for a lot of our efforts may not be concrete experience' (Jeffs and Smith, 2005: 67). Dewey, as we shall see shortly, would have found problematic the dualistic notions implicit in Jeffs and Smith's separation of 'concrete experience' from 'theories and ideas'. Dewey's instrumentalism<sup>4</sup> (1897, 1910, 1916, 1938) would insist that theories and ideas can make sense only in relation to the lived experience of individuals and communities. As such, ideas necessarily inform and enlarge experience – and therefore thoughts and ideas must be experiential if they are to be meaningful.

Young also makes specific reference to Dewey when she claims: 'youth work is an educational activity and education following Dewey, is a liberating experience that encourages reflective behavior and promotes growth and health, developing the individual and supporting their participation in society' (Young, 2006: 78). She also refers to Dewey in relation to the development of critical thinking (Young, 2006: 81). However she does not go into any depth in relation to Dewey's theory of experiential learning.

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<sup>4</sup> This is explained more fully later but suffice to say that for Dewey thoughts were never abstracted from experience. They always served some function in relation to the lived experience of the individual. Instrumentalism therefore refers to the role or function which thoughts, ideas or feelings have in relation to experience

Interestingly, little reference is made to experiential learning prior to the publication of Kolb's *Learning Style Inventory* (1976). For example, neither Macilster Brew (1943, 1946, 1950, 1957), or the seminal text by Davies and Gibson, *Social Education of the Adolescent* (1967), refer to experiential learning. Neither does experiential learning appear in the Government's Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education, 1960) which marked the 'boom years' of youth work with the unparalleled government funding which in turn led to the large scale building programme of youth clubs in England (Davies 1999). Experiential learning seems to have gathered a pace following the publication of Kolb's treatise 'Experiential Learning' (Kolb, 1984). This is significant; and there is at least a correlation between the explication by Kolb and the incorporation of experiential learning into youth work.

Kolb himself<sup>5</sup> explicitly credits Dewey for much of his ideas on experiential learning and it is to him that we must look for a more legitimate conception of experiential learning. We will return to some of the issues raised here later, where it will be argued that what has issued from the incorporation of experiential learning in the light of (the misrepresentation of) Kolb is actually a rather crude version of learning through 'involvement in and reflection on activities', conceived as experiential education. This, I suggest, is a pale imitation of the educative experience as Dewey conceives it. This would involve a dynamic engagement with the learners' experience of 'being in the world' in its fullest sense.<sup>6</sup> Moreover experiential learning would be a two-way affair. The interaction would involve an impact on the environment by the individual as well as, in turn, an impact on the individual by the environment.<sup>7</sup> It is not simply a matter of involvement in and reflection upon specific 'experiences' provided by the educator. Thus experiential learning has become for example synonymous with the reflection on a team building exercise or an outdoor activity like abseiling, where the educator will try and establish what has been learned as a result of this particular *experience*?

Experiential learning is proposed as an essential element of the youth work curriculum (Ord 2007). I will argue that its theoretical basis should be in Dewey, rather than Kolb. In order to assess the suitability of Dewey for this purpose, a critical exposition of Dewey's theory is required. What follows is an exposition and analysis of his theory, followed by a critical

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<sup>5</sup> See Ord (2007) chapter 3.5 for a fuller critical examination of Kolb's theory (1984) and the inappropriateness (and possible mis-interpretation) of Kolb as a simplistic model

<sup>6</sup> Though not used by Dewey himself but developed later by Heidegger (1927) the notion of 'being in the world' sums up the holistic notion of experience implied by Dewey which explicitly takes account of what belies one's experience -one's past, what is occurring in the here and now—the present, as well as projecting into the future. Dewey's experiential education also acknowledges the location of experience in both the community and the wider social world.

<sup>7</sup> What Dewey referred to as 'trying' on the one hand and 'undergoing' on the other.

appraisal of his suitability. This will be followed by a consideration of the implications for youth work.

## **Dewey on experience and education**

For Dewey education and experience are almost synonymous, as education is defined entirely in relation to experience, as the following makes clear:

The concept of education is a constant reorganising or reconstructing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative. It reaches that end – the direct transformation of the quality of experience... We thus reach a technical definition of education: It is that reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience (1916: 59).

However it is important to ask what Dewey means by experience, and Garforth offers some useful observations:

He [Dewey] does not mean by this [experience] the stored up product of the past; nor does he mean simply the immediacy of the experienced present; nor the mere acceptance of environmental impact by a passive recipient; nor does he contrast experience with thought or reason. Experience is continuous from past through present to future; it is not static but dynamic, moving, in process. It is not unilateral but, as Dewey would say, 'transactional, for the experient is modified by his environment and the environment by the experient in a constant reciprocal relationship (Garforth 1966: 13).

For Dewey a defining feature of an experience is therefore the engagement of the individual with their environment. He refers to this as the 'transaction': 'An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between the individual and what, at the time, constitutes the environment' (Dewey, 1938: 43). As reflected in the quoted passage from Garforth, for Dewey this process is dynamic and two-way; the interaction involves an impact on the environment by the individual as well as, in turn, an impact on the individual by the environment. The two aspects of

this process are referred to by Dewey as 'trying' on the one hand, and 'undergoing' on the other (Dewey, 1916: 104). 'Trying' refers to the outward expression of intention or action. It is the purposeful engagement of the individual with the environment or in Dewey's words: 'doing becomes trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like' (ibid). In action an attempt is made to have an impact on the world. 'Undergoing', the other aspect of the 'transaction' in experience, refers to the consequences of experience on the individual. In turn, in attempting to have an impact, the experience also impacts on us. 'Undergoing' refers to the consequences of experience for us. We may choose to clear litter from a local beauty spot, and in so doing the area is visibly improved (a consequence of 'trying') and at the same time we feel good about the deed that has been carried out (a consequence of 'undergoing'). For Dewey experience necessarily contains these two distinct aspects:

When we experience something we act upon it, we do something; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness of experience. Mere activity does not constitute experience. (Dewey, 1916: 104)

### **Dewey: education as growth**

For Dewey experience is both a means for, and an end to education:

education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing' (Dewey, 1897: 12)<sup>8</sup>

Dewey also refers to the educative process as pertaining to 'growth'. 'The educative process is a continuous process of growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity of growth' (1916: 43). Growth for Dewey is in part grounded in a conception

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<sup>8</sup> Dewey was consistent in his commitment to this belief in the role of experience as both a means and goal of education from his early writings in 'My Pedagogical Creed' (1897), through *Democracy and Education* (1916) up to his later work 'Experience and Education' (1938)

of childhood as a period of 'potentiality'. 'Immaturity designates a positive force or ability – the power to grow' (1916: 34).<sup>9</sup>

For Dewey the educative process and growth are synonymous and importantly both involve the transformation of experience and a reconceptualisation of one's relationship to the world: As Pring (2007) clarifies: 'Growth or [the] 'educative process' ... involves not just more of the same (like a river which gets bigger) but a 'transformation' of what one previously was. One thinks, experiences and feels differently. 'Experience is transformed.' One's understanding of the world is 'reconceptualised' (Pring 2007: 26).

Growth importantly is not a 'fixed end point'. Dewey wishes to make this explicit, making a distinction between growth as ongoing development and the incorrect interpretation of his ideas as advocating a process of progressing from one fixed state to another, from immaturity on the one hand, to the final destination of maturity on the other. In this sense he suggests: 'growth is regarded as having an end, instead of being an end' (1916: 40). Pring summarises this well when he says according to Dewey: 'The learner is a living, social organism, who lives by constant adaptation to the conditions – material and social – in which he or she survives. A significant part of that adapting lies in the reconceptualising of the circumstances in which one is living, and of the 'ends in view' of one's activities, in the light of experience. Such a reconceptualising has no end; it is part of what it means to live'. (Pring 2007: 48)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The childhood state of immaturity though founded in part on 'dependence' is not for Dewey conditioned by impotence, as he believed children had an inherent 'plasticity', defined by Dewey as 'the specific adaptability of an immature creature for growth constitutes his plasticity' (1916: 36). Children for Dewey had an innate potential to learn, adapt and respond to their environment. 'The infant has the advantage of the multitude of instinctive tentative reactions and of the experiences that accompany them.' (1916:36). Importantly however, education as growth is not conceived of as a fixed term process specifically geared towards the appropriate development needs of childhood, although it may be particularly pertinent to childhood. Education as experience is for Dewey explicitly a lifelong process: 'every adult resents the imputation of having no further possibilities of growth; and so far as he finds that they are closed to him mourns the fact as evidence of loss' (1916:34). Dewey asserts that in 'certain moral and intellectual purposes adults must become as little children' (1916:34); implying that they too are in need of developing their attitudes, assumptions and knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> This conception of education as growth has been applied to a contemporary context by Kelly (1995, 2004) in which he acknowledges Dewey as an important philosophical foundation to his explication of 'education as development', Ord (2007) identifies the particular contribution made by Kelly and suggests that this can be applied to youth work, most notably with a parallel to Young (2006) and the developmental aims of youth work.

For Dewey the educative quality of experience<sup>11</sup> is founded on two related principles – continuity and interaction: ‘Continuity and interaction in their union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience’ (1938: 45). Though Dewey claims that these principles do not operate in isolation, to elucidate them further we must look at them separately.

Dewey refers to the first principle as the ‘category of continuity or the experiential continuum’ (Dewey, 1938: 33). By this he means the relationship between past, present and future experience, but in particular the ability of the ‘educative’ experience to inform and develop future experiences. Dewey’s elaboration of continuity is at times confusing as he wants to use it to distinguish between educative and mis-educative experience, and yet he suggests: ‘there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences’ (1938: 37). He goes on to suggest that indeed in that sense: ‘Every experience is a moving force, its value can judged only on the grounds of what it moves toward and into’ (1938: 38). Dewey is aware that this begs the question ‘a move toward what or into what?’. He is aware too that the same argument can be applied to the problem of growth: ‘Hence it is argued that “growth” is not enough; we must also specify the direction in which growth takes place, the end towards which it tends’ (1938: 36). Dewey uses the examples of the burglar, and of the corrupt politician, and suggests that though it appears that they ‘may grow in efficiency the question is whether growth in this direction promotes or retards growth in general’ (ibid). That is, for Dewey, it is not so much a question of whether the burglar has become improved in the art of burglary, or the politician has become more expertly corrupt; the specific improvement in ability or ‘growth’ of each, must be seen in the wider context of the lives of the individuals and the community and society in which they operate.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Dewey did not regard all experience as educational: ‘The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other’ (Dewey, 1938: 25). For Dewey there is educative and mis-educative experience: ‘Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience’ (ibid). Neither does he suggest that the difference between the kinds of educational practices which he is advocating and the traditional practices are that one is based in experience and the other is not: ‘Traditional education offers a plethora of examples of experiences [though they] were largely of a wrong kind’ (Dewey, 1938: 25). In part as we saw above it is the growth promoting aspect of experience, that Dewey regards as educational.

<sup>12</sup> The adequacy of this solution will be looked at in more detail when we consider this and other criticisms of Dewey shortly.

According to Dewey one can only fully comprehend the continuity principle<sup>13</sup> unless it is aligned with the other principle which underlies the educative quality of experience: 'interaction', as he suggests: 'the second chief principle for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force' (Dewey 1938: 42). Two factors underlie 'interaction'. Dewey refers to these as the 'objective' and 'internal' conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*' (ibid). The objective conditions relate to the factors external to the individual which influence the experience: 'The sources outside an individual which give rise to experience' (ibid).<sup>14</sup> An important factor relating to the objective conditions link to wider bodies of knowledge and to social practices. He uses the example of the feeding babies and stresses that the mother does not regulate the feeding and sleep patterns of her baby in isolation but in the light of existing knowledge, in that 'the responsibility is fulfilled by utilising the funded experience of the past' (ibid). This is important for Dewey as he locates social practices to the established scientifically verified forms of knowledge. Not, of course, that the mother blindly abides by these. The mother is at liberty to apply those forms of knowledge, as well as amend, adapt and reform them, in relation to her own experience; which accords with Dewey's own principles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 'the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after (Dewey, 1938:35). In short the experience is educative if it promotes growth.

<sup>14</sup> These can be anything in the external environment: 'of which tools, implements, furniture, electric light and power, are illustrations ... [of] the external conditions (Dewey, 1938: 39). Importantly however the objective conditions are not exclusively physical and even more importantly relate to the social world as well. In relation the objective conditions of an educational setting Dewey stresses that teachers need to 'recognise in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilise the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile' (Dewey 1938:42).

<sup>15</sup> Dewey does not elaborate in depth on the internal conditions in his later work (Dewey, 1938) which tends to focus on his ideas about 'interaction' and within which he tends to emphasise importance of the objective conditions, those aspects of the individual's experience that link to the wider world, historically and politically as well as physically and socially. When he does mention the internal conditions it is usually in counterpoint to the objective ones; e.g. 'Experience does not go on simply inside the person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole story' (Dewey, 1938:41). This is perhaps in part a result of his instrumentalism; where by Dewey views any 'internal' aspects of self necessarily as a consequence of a transaction between the person and the environment, and so he is reluctant to expand in detail on abstract concepts in isolation from the environment in which they have a function. Again he expands on his example of feeding a baby to illustrate what he means by both internal and objective conditions and their interplay. The internal conditions are characterised by: 'The needs of the baby for food, rest and activity' (Dewey, 1938:42). The objective conditions relate to the parent exercising their: 'responsibility for arranging the conditions under which an infant's experience of food, sleep, etc occurs' (Dewey, 1938:42). The internal conditions therefore relate at least in part to the needs of the experient. It is to Dewey's earlier work that one must look to for a more detailed explanation of 'internal conditions', in particular with reference to 'My Pedagogic Creed' (1897), as well as 'Democracy and Education' (1916). Dewey (1916) elaborated on his belief that children had a 'plasticity'; i.e. an innate tendency and potentiality for growth and development, which he explains: 'is essentially the ability to learn from experience' (Dewey 1916:36). Dewey goes on to describe this as 'the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation. This means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions.' Dewey 1916:36). This assumption is in part what underlies the internal conditions of experience. That is human beings have, for Dewey (1910, 1916), a natural tendency to learn and reflect on experience and a predisposition for growth. Thus the argument would go: As an individual has a natural tendency for growth education ought to be concerned with facilitating that growth. The educational process therefore should be

## Criticisms

An initial criticism levelled at Dewey is the lack of comprehensive analysis provided for a number of his basic concepts (Bantock, 1963, Garforth 1966, Warnock 1977, Flew, 1977). Part of the allegation here is that the 'looseness' of his language causes difficulty, and that Dewey often falls short of making sufficiently clear the most basic of concepts within his philosophy, such as 'interests', 'needs', 'instincts' even at times experience itself. However although Dewey's philosophical 'looseness' does create problems it does not preclude an understanding of much of Dewey's central messages about his educational vision (Brickman & Lehrer, 1965; Pring, 2007). Although I would argue in relation to experience Dewey does, with his detailed analysis of the internal and objective conditions, explicate the concept of experience sufficiently well.

There are a limited number of contemporary critiques of Dewey, as interest in his work, and its influence, have waned considerably since the late 1960s (Pring 2007, Westbrook 1991). And perhaps it goes without saying that there are no criticisms of Dewey in youth work. Indeed the height of critique was reached in the 1950s, 'where Dewey's philosophy of education came under heavy attack' (Westbrook, 1991: 542). Bantock, as Entwistle (1970) points out, was 'Dewey's most persistent English critic' (Entwistle, 1970: 35). He criticises what he calls Dewey's 'anthropocentric scheme', claiming it is 'highly subjective'. He refers to the study of geography and claims 'That the geographical structure of the world might form an order of experience independent of man's purpose and desires does not seem to occur to Dewey' (Bantock, 1963: 31). Bantock goes on to criticise the pragmatic basis of Dewey's epistemology. Bantock claims that formulating knowledge exclusively within humankind's practical engagement with its immediate environment both overemphasises the importance of 'problems' in the search for knowledge and misrepresents knowledge itself. This criticism appears to have some weight, and defining knowledge acquisition, and human activity as a whole, exclusively in

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based on a detailed understanding of the basis of that growth and should be organised to adequately respond to the direction to which it is geared. Dewey adds further clarity as to what he means by 'internal conditions' when he maintains that: 'Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight in to the child's capacities, interests, habits... These powers, interests and habits must be continually interpreted' (Dewey, 1897:6).



relation to an active experimentation<sup>16</sup> with the world, and therein 'problem solving', does appear untenable. There would certainly appear to be a case for knowledge not to be framed exclusively in relation to problem solving. This does not however undermine the central argument of this paper, that it is experience and its reconstruction, which should be at the heart of the educational process.

It is however to the principle of continuity that we should turn our attention, not least because this has sustained a consistent level of criticism (Cohen, 1954; Garforth 1966; Bantock, 1963; Woods, & Barrow, 2006; Pring 2007). As alluded to earlier, when analysing the role of experience within Dewey's scheme, experience is both the means and the end of an educational experience, and this is justified in terms of the experiential continuum. That is to say, experience is educational if and only if it leads to 'continuing reconstruction of experience'. To clarify this, Dewey often refers to the reconstructing or expanding of experience as 'growth', as we saw earlier.

Guttek clarifies this further:

Education as a process has no end beyond growth. In evaluating experiences, particular experiences should be assessed to the degree that they contribute to growth, or to the having of more experience.... growth in Dewey's context, means that the individual is gaining the ability to understand the relationships and interconnections between various experiences between one learning experience and another. Learning by experience, through problem solving, means that education, like life, is a process of continuously reconstructing experience' (Guttek 1997: 105).

As alluded to earlier, this is problematic. Dewey's reluctance to identify any ends beyond further experience undermines the integrity of his philosophy. He cannot

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<sup>16</sup> Dewey himself also however refers to his philosophy of education as 'experimentalism' (Dewey, 1916; Guttek, 1997; Garforth, 1966; Berkson, 1965). Experimentalism follows from Dewey's instrumentalism. Importantly for Dewey existence is essentially 'problematic' and therefore central to Dewey's notion of experimentalism is the importance of problem solving.<sup>16</sup> The method of problem solving for Dewey broadly follows the 'conventional view' of the scientific method. It is a means by which learning is the testing of a hypothesis 'in action'. 'By science is meant... an intelligent and persistent endeavour to revise current beliefs so as to weed out what is erroneous, to add to their accuracy, and, above all, to give them such shape that the dependencies of the various facts upon one another may be as obvious as possible. It is, like all knowledge, an outcome of activity bringing about certain changes in the environment.' (Dewey, (1916: 116).<sup>16</sup> The problem solving method or as Dewey referred to it the 'complete act of thought': the scientific method 'broadly conceived', consisted of five clearly defined steps or phases approach in the following five stages': 1, The Problematic situation, 2. Defining the problematic, 3. Clarification of the problem, 4. Constructing tentative hypotheses, 5. Testing the preferred hypotheses (Guttek, 1997: 90)

distinguish between educative and mis-educative experiences without recourse to additional criteria. His instrumentalism<sup>17</sup> prevents him from contemplating the possibility that anything can be contemplated independent of human experience, but ultimately a basis is required for making that judgement. Dewey tries hard to avoid this offering some tentative explanations as to why certain experiences are more educational than others: 'If an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficient to carry a person over dead ground in the future, continuity works in a very different way' (Dewey 1938:38). As Gutek suggests Dewey claims: 'Desirable experiences lead to further experience, whereas undesirable ones inhibit and reduce the possibilities for subsequent experience (Gutek 1997: 105). But the notion of 'dead experiences' implies a qualitative judgement. The problem of growth and continuity are therefore one and the same. And unfortunately they are insufficiently robust as criteria for identifying the quality of experience and lead to undesirable consequences. Dewey (1938) himself uses the example of a spoiled child to illustrate his point and claims that continuity 'works in a very different way' (Dewey, 1938: 38), in that the sorts of experience that the spoiled child has undergone are unlikely, by inference, to 'arouse curiosity or strengthen initiative' (ibid). However, though Dewey tries hard to avoid recourse to any 'yardstick' beyond the instrumentality of the experience, it does not ultimately stand up. The difference between the kinds of experience a spoiled child has and a child that is not spoiled is because we do not value the kinds of attributes, characteristics and behaviours of spoiled children that those experiences bring about. As Bantock (1963) makes clear underlying Dewey's philosophy are a number of implicit value judgements.

This does not mean however that Dewey's theory is fatally flawed. A distinction is necessary between ultimate ends and subsidiary ends. According to Dewey's philosophy of educative experience it is impossible to conceive of an end point, as experience never stops. In this sense he is the architect of lifelong learning. However

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<sup>17</sup> Dewey's philosophy is often described as 'instrumentalist' (Garforth, 1966; Tiles, 1988; Campbell, 1995; Gutek, 1997; Boisvert, 1998; Pring, 2007). Indeed to understand Dewey's pragmatism one needs to comprehend this aspect of his philosophy. For example as Garforth points out: 'Thoughts are not opposed to experience but is a part of it- a product of the transaction between the individual and environment and at the same time an instrument in the modification of environment... Instrumentalism describes the function of mind or intelligence within this processive, transactional concept of experience' (Garforth, (1966: 14). Instrumentalism is directly related to the evolutionary process of sustaining and developing life: as Dewey himself points out: 'knowledge is not something separate and self sufficing, but is involved in the process by which life is sustained and evolved' (Dewey, 1920: 87).

it does not follow from this that there are no ends at all. It is not clear that Dewey implies there are, it is equally possible that Dewey's intractability towards outcomes or ends is based on his desire to maximise the integrity of experience, and believed that acknowledging outcomes or end points somehow assumes experience itself has an end point which clearly it doesn't. Pring (2007) suggests that it is possible to introduce the notion of 'ends in view' to Dewey's scheme, to suggest those temporary end-points, or goals, in the learning process (which when reached automatically lead on to other objectives or goals) whilst maintaining that ultimately experiential education has no end point.

### **Methodological criticisms**

In relation to the selection of subject matter Garforth suggests that one can equally well apply Dewey's reluctance to identify any additional criteria to justify the quality of experience to his treatment of the subject matter of education. Implicitly Dewey is averse to the identification of qualitative differences of subject matter per se and an implication of this is that: 'push pin may be as valuable as poetry' (Garforth 1966: 38). However according to Garforth: 'Dewey's statement can be refuted from his own premises...judged in terms of future growth and by Dewey's own twin criteria it seems impossible to deny that some subjects of study are educationally more valuable than others' (ibid). That is one cannot maintain that all experience is equally valuable and then introduce criteria upon which to distinguish them by.

In response Dewey is not claiming that all experience is valuable, it is not even clear whether he is maintaining all educative experience is equally valuable. The judgement about whether push pin is more valuable than poetry will be dependent on a number of criteria made explicit by Dewey, not least their ability 'to enlarge and expand experience'. By this he means the extent to which they link to both past experience, and develop future experience, as well as develop the interests of both the individual, and the social and community setting within which the individual is located. It would seem that Dewey can consistently argue that push pin is not the equal of poetry from within his own criteria of experience. That is he applies the principle of continuity. In relation to enquiry methods Warnock (1977) concurs with Dewey suggesting that: 'If enquiry is correlated with 'discovery' then a good deal of education must be enquiry based' (Warnock, 1977: 65). However she maintains that a 'pretence is

involved if a teacher has to pretend that he is not providing his pupils with the answers, or at least dictating their questions, when he really is' (Warnock, 1977: 66).

The scenario of the educator attempting to ensure that the pupils discover the answers for themselves, when in fact he or she, as well as the pupils themselves, know full well that the teacher has a 'full knowledge of the facts', would at best reduce the teaching to a ritualistic exercise. Far from ensuring an effective educational environment, this would more than likely undermine the motivation and commitment of the pupils. As Garforth makes clear: 'to dispense entirely with the authoritative transmission of knowledge is impossible' (Garforth 1966: 34). Warnock does not however dismiss the value of discovery methods particularly in relation to contentious issues, or issues related to how one should live one's life. Furthermore, and in line with Dewey, she makes the point that, for them to be successful they must align with the interests of the pupils: 'there is likely to be something unrealistic and absurd about pupils attempting 'discovery' or free enquiry' about subject matter, suggested to them...but about which they have no actual desire to learn' (Warnock, 1977: 66). This is particularly relevant to the process of youth work and there is nothing more frustrating for young people than being left to flounder when they know the youth worker could resolve the problem because they have the knowledge and experience that the young people lack. This is also relevant to discussions around factual issues like sexual health or drugs where it is incumbent on the youth worker to communicate information clearly to the young people in an interesting and relevant manner, but not to expect the young people to discover it for themselves.

A further criticism is levelled by Berkson (1965) in that Dewey's: 'dominant interest in change, process and growth leads, unintentionally perhaps, to depreciate the value of enduring ideas and structural beliefs which direct as well as condition all thinking' (Berkson, 1965: 104). He goes on to suggest that: 'science is far removed from common experience' (Berkson, 1965: 105), and that despite Dewey's wish to unite the cognitive and conceptual with the practical and operational, that is, to unify abstract thought with common sense experience, in Dewey there is an: 'underestimation of the part played by abstract thought in the development of the sciences: failure to give due weight to previously accumulated organised knowledge and formulated principles; and inadequate consideration of speculative, imaginative

constructions but little related to direct experience, or even which seem to contradict human experience' (Berkson, 1965: 104). Berkson admits that this mistake on Dewey's part is not total: 'he is aware of such factors – achievements of past experiences and vision of future possibilities' (ibid). Dewey refers to this as 'the consciousness of the race' (1897, 1916). But ultimately Berkson concludes that: 'failure to give adequate consideration to the conceptual aspects of mind is a neglect of them' (ibid). One can interpret Dewey in the sense that Berkson does, but likewise with his emphasis on the bodies of knowledge in his exposition of the objective conditions, it is certainly not the case that he ignores them, even if, he does not give due regard to them, though I am not entirely convinced this is the case. Berkson's criticism is echoed by a later critique of Dewey by O'Hear (1987, 1991). Essentially an argument for the importance of the established bodies of knowledge extant in any given culture as being the primary basis of any given education, it is both (what he sees as) the child centred ideals of Dewey as well as the ideals of the New Right that he is criticising: 'What is wrong with both the stress on an education that is aimed principally at being relevant to the needs of industry and with the notion which stems from Dewey... that a genuine education can somehow arise from the current experience and expressive ability of the child' (O'Hear 1987: 108). It is possible with O'Hear's 'conservative' view of the almost absolute authority of bodies of knowledge located in traditions, that there is some daylight between his and Dewey's positions but there is, in fact, less daylight than O'Hear gives him credit for. As for Dewey, as has been shown, the reconceptualisation of experience is necessarily in the light of past experience and importantly this past experience is, in turn, linked directly to traditions and collective notions of knowledge (although they are framed as 'warranted' as they are always revisable in the light of new experience).

Dewey is also criticised for his child centred education. For example Bantock suggests that Dewey 'is giving further currency to a conception which has exercised a profound influence since the time of Rousseau; and, to the extent that modern educators have been led to consider much more than heretofore the natural aptitudes and abilities of the individual child' (Bantock 1965: 52). This does however misrepresent Dewey's position as Woods and Barrow (2006) and Pring (2007) concur. For whilst Dewey does suggest the starting point is the interests of the child, this comes with a number of important educational caveats. Firstly it is not mere

whim, which counts as an interest, interests link to motivation and what is intrinsically in the 'developmental' interests of the child. In addition the interests may not be extant, it may be necessary for the teacher to develop interests in the pupils as much as it is for the teacher to respond to the pupils' own articulated interests. Pring sums this up as: 'Interests are not what should be used; they are what should be educated' (Pring, 2007: 85).

### **'Interpretations' of Dewey: impoverished views of experience**

The solutions to a number of these criticisms of Dewey and their relative strength are dependent on the interpretation of Dewey. This is certainly the case with Berkson (1965) O'Hear (1987, 1991) and some of Bantock's criticisms. Likewise it is plausible to read Dewey and see his philosophy as overwhelmingly 'practical', being specifically concerned with the concrete engagement; in providing practical solutions to tangible problems. However it could be argued that this simplifies the complexity of Dewey's formulation of problems and misrepresents the complexity of his notion of 'inquiry' as a solution to them (Pring, 2007). It should be remembered that the problems are experiential and that experience is ultimately much more than concrete activity. Experience is related to action, what one does in the world, but it is much more than mere practical activity. Pring uses the example of: 'the meaning of mathematics [which] to the young person may be different to the professional mathematician. It *means* boredom, frustration and a sense of failure' (Pring 2007: 29).

How one experiences the world, in this case mathematics, therefore impacts directly on how one acts. Importantly experience also relates to a reconceptualising of one's position within the world. If an interest in mathematics can be generated either through successful communication of its relevance or through support in acquiring the basic skills, a number of factors will change in relation to how the student experiences the world, at the very least maths lessons would become meaningful. The student may well also see themselves differently not conceiving of themselves as a failure, and thereby realising a hidden potential. Educative experience is therefore as much about how we understand the world, as it is with acting in it. It is as much about meaning making as, it is with, a concern with the solutions to 'practical' problems. Thus Pring suggests Dewey:

argued in *'Experience and Education'* there is an "organic connection between education and experience" (Dewey, 1938: 25), education is part of that search for meaning – that trying to make sense... Hence, inquiry is an attempt 'to make sense' but in the light of what other people have concluded in similar circumstances (Pring 2007: 65).

Or as Dewey puts it: 'his activity shall have meaning to himself' (Dewey, 1900: 23). A similar response could be made to Garforth's (1966) criticism that Dewey's conceptualisation of human life lacks cosmic significance; this is not the case if the reconceptualisation of experience is framed as a search for meaning, though of course, according, to Dewey, it would not be an individual quest in isolation from the context of social and community life.

That many of the problems attributed to Dewey are down to a problem of interpretation is further evidenced by a contemporary critique offered by Egan (2003). He suggests that it may be as fruitful to 'start with what they can imagine'. (Egan, 2003: 445). Although he is: '... not arguing for ignoring students' prior knowledge and everyday experiences. Rather, I am arguing that these have been taken as implying greater restrictions on children's learning and curriculum possibilities than is warranted when we consider their imaginative lives' (2003: 445). Although not a paper specifically about Dewey, Egan cites Dewey as one of the primary movers in the argument for basing educative practice on prior experience alone. However this again misrepresents Dewey. In fact he quite explicitly refers to the objects of the imagination as a constituent of the external or objective conditions of experience: 'The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with the personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experience which is had. Even when a person builds a castle in the air he is interacting with the objects he constructs in fancy' (Dewey, 1938: 44).

What also underlies a number of the criticisms of Dewey is an impoverished and simplistic understanding and interpretation of experience (Bantock, 1963; O'Hear, 1987, 1991; Egan, 2003). Critics consistently assume a particularly narrow conception of experience and fail to appreciate the depth and complexity to which Dewey affords

our 'experiential' lives. Dewey offers a much richer account of experience itself and arguing that an effective educational process must not only take account of the learners experience but fully engage with it. This is even more notable in the comparison between Dewey and Kolb.

## **Implications for youth work**

### **'Framing' experience**

What is evident from an exposition of Dewey's theory of experience is that it differs markedly from the simplistic notion of experience characterised by Kolb's theory of experiential learning. As we saw earlier it is Kolb's theory, or perhaps more accurately the interpretation of his theory, which has dominated youth work for over two decades (Young, 2006; Blacker, 2001; Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 2005). There are significant differences between both Kolb, and his popular interpretation, and the theory of experience proposed by Dewey. Both within Kolb's theory (1976, 1999, 1984) as well its popular (mis)interpretation, experience is often framed as 'concrete experience'. This implies that it is a particular type of experience; it is 'concrete' as opposed to some other type of experience. If this is not the case it would be unclear why the prefix concrete has been used?

To elucidate, Kolb draws a contrast between the concrete aspects of experience and, what he describes in his model as, its polar opposite 'abstract conceptualisation'. It should be remembered that Kolb (1984) is principally concerned with the exposition of 'learning styles' rather than experiential learning per se and it is only in relation to learning styles that 'concrete experience' and 'abstract conceptualisation' are given some clarity. 'An orientation toward concrete experience focuses on being involved in experiences and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way. It emphasises feeling as opposed to thinking...an intuitive 'artistic' approach...' (Kolb 1984: 68). In contrast: 'An orientation towards abstract conceptualisation focuses on using logic, ideas and concepts. It emphasises thinking as opposed to feeling; a concern with building general theories...and manipulation of abstract symbols...' (Kolb 1984: 69). For Kolb then, concrete experience is a learning mode. It is an attempt to characterise a propensity, which according to Kolb, inclines those susceptible to it, to immerse themselves in experiences rather than stand back and either observe, reflect or analyse those experiences. It is not a description of an



experience. It is a learning style. The degree of engagement in 'concrete experience' (remembering that no one in Kolb's theory is lacking completely in any of the four learning styles) is dependent on the dominance of that particular mode, of relating to and engaging with one's experience, in the individual.

Confusingly however Kolb does not always maintain this simplistic view of experience. For example when Kolb (1984) describes concrete experience however he often makes no such contrast, referring to both James and Dewey he makes comparisons between experience and consciousness: 'we are all aware of the continuity of consciousness and experience to which James and Dewey refer, and take comfort from the predictability and security it provides' (1984:27). When Kolb talks of experience it is sometimes synonymous with Dewey's notion of 'life experience', the conscious awareness of our existence and the medium through which we engage and interpret the world, what Dewey would term the totality of experience. This is however the exception and in the main Kolb frames experience as 'concrete'.

This is not a paper about the subtleties and complexities of Kolb's theory but it has been necessary to explore Kolb to offer some insights into the way in which the theory has been mis-interpreted. Importantly, following Kolb, concrete experience has been exclusively mis-interpreted in youth work as being synonymous with 'activities', 'doing' or the providing of 'experiences' (Young 2006, Blacker 2001; Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Whilst clearly youth work does involve activities (Spence, 2001); and these activities are often provided as an additional stimulus or a vehicle for learning, to conceive of youth work exclusively as the simplistic provision of discrete activities and the subsequent reflection upon the impact of them, misrepresents the educational basis for youth work. More importantly defining 'experience' in learning as something 'other' fundamentally misrepresents experiential learning as Dewey conceived of it.

Youth work, I would argue, is more accurately described with reference to the theory of experiential learning provided by Dewey.<sup>18</sup> Youth work as articulated through informal education is often described as 'learning through life as it is lived' (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Deer-Richardson and Wolfe, 2001). Experience is central to this. However it is not experience as something 'other', which is provided additionally by

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<sup>18</sup> Ironically Kolb himself bases much of his own theory of experience on Dewey and his definition of learning is similar: 'that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb1984:41).

the educators, but experience as the life experience of the participants. This correlates directly with the conception of experience provided by Dewey.

Dewey would therefore provide a more appropriate theoretical framework for youth work. Implicitly this is the theoretical approach taken by early theorists who embraced the critical reflection on the lived experiences of the individuals with whom they worked (Brew, 1946, 1957; Davies and Gibson, 1967; Button, 1971); indeed Button's book was entitled 'Discovery and Experience' and attempted to communicate an approach to group work which worked with the experiential dynamics of the youth groups in ordinary social settings.

Another important implication of a Deweyian basis to experiential learning would be an explicit incorporation of his notion of trying and undergoing, what, in fact, Kolb refers to as the dialectic relationship between assimilation and accommodation (Kolb, 1984: 29-32); and this can be related directly to youth work:

The dialectics of experience is important in theorizing experiential learning as it places a different emphasis on how we conceive of experiential learning. An example of an application of this dialectical tension of experience in youth work could be illustrated with reference to the experience of young women. Their experience can be seen as a tension between the demand to 'accommodate' themselves to the stereotypical expectations of their gender and femininity, in contrast to the extent to which they conceptualise or 'assimilate' the world as an oppressive environment which restricts their own authentic development irrespective of the environmental demands. Similarly the dialectical tension in peer groups could be characterised by the extent to which young people adapt their behaviour to meet the demands of the group, or free themselves through a process of assimilation of information about the experience of peer groups and peer group pressure. They realise that their desires, beliefs or values run contrary to the expectations of the group; discovering that they actually have a choice to conform or not and that this does not necessarily undermine their relationships with their peers. (Ord 2007: 71)

## **The experiential curriculum**

One of the important implications for youth work, which is derived from an acceptance of Dewey's theory of educative experience, relates to curriculum. Many of those who make reference to Dewey: Jeffs and Smith (2005), Stanton (2004), Young (2006) also oppose a curriculum for youth work. Not that they argue directly from Dewey, but they do consistently argue against a curriculum for youth work and at the same time utilise experiential learning in part to inform and articulate the educational practice of youth work. However commitment to Dewey's approach implies curriculum rather than denies it. Dewey (1900, 1916, 1938) did argue against the rigidity of the traditional school curriculum but he did explicitly advocate a curriculum and this was derived from a combination of the internal and objective conditions of experience. The interests, desires and inclinations of the young people on the one hand, as well as the propensity and direction for growth, advocating a 'shifting of the centre of gravity' to the child (Dewey, 1900: 34), however on the other, is the skilful manipulation of the physical and social environment, including the provision of information and advice, which Dewey (1900) refers to as 'guidance'. Neither as we have seen is Dewey opposed to the notion of subject matter. The problems only arise for Dewey when: 'The material is not translated into life terms, but is directly offered as a substitute for, or an external annex to, the child's present life' (Dewey 1900: 202).

In relation to the specification and organisation of curriculum, as well as to the specification of subject matter, the responsibility for the organisation of relevant material remains with the teacher. They do not abdicate their responsibility, as we saw above, and this responsibility relates specifically to one half of what Dewey refers to as 'the objective conditions' of experience. It is beyond the remit of this paper to go into detail about what a justifiable content would be.<sup>19</sup> What it is important to say however, is that for Dewey, method and subject matter are inextricably linked, and a failure to take account of this is fundamentally problematic and is symptomatic of the kinds of formal education he was critical of (Dewey 1900, 1916, 1938,). A failure to appreciate this distinction, and the abstraction of subject matter from the lives of the

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<sup>19</sup> Although clearly as previously shown it must accord with the needs, desires and inclinations of the lived experiences of those being educated. Dewey did elaborate in some detail how certain subjects like history and geography can inform education and, if organised appropriately, embrace the experiential reality of children's lives (see Dewey 1900, and 1916, [esp. chapter 13]).

pupils, will render the experience of the classroom meaningless. As Dewey suggests, only when 'method, purpose, understanding, shall exist in the consciousness of the one who does the work, that his activity shall have meaning to himself' (Dewey, 1900: 95).

What is also the case for Dewey is that the curriculum must accord with the current problems of individual and social life, and provide for the possibilities for growth in relation to both. For Dewey it is therefore the relevance of the curriculum which is most important: 'A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insights and interest.' (Dewey, 1916: 142).<sup>20</sup>

Dewey is opposed to what he regards as the dominant form of education as transmission: 'formation from without' (Dewey 1938: 17) by which 'the subject matter of education consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the next generation' (ibid). Dewey uses the word 'guidance' to refer to his notion of the educators facilitative role, and 'guidance is not external imposition. It is the freeing of the life process for its adequate fulfilment' (1900: 195). What is alluded to here is the relationship to Dewey's fundamental concept of growth which consistently underpins his educational rationale. In addition what also underpins Dewey's formulation of 'guidance' is the need for the educator to understand the child (Garforth, 1966). In Dewey's terms the 'psychological' aspect (Dewey 1897, 1917).

Though consistent with and based upon pupil's interests, the teacher in Dewey's rationale must be a facilitator of meaningful experiential situations which engage in genuine attempts to solve pertinent problems to the children and society at large. In this sense he was therefore categorically opposed to education as 'preparation'; whereby the ends of the education process are conceived of as being deferred to some future date: 'Preparation is a treacherous idea.' (Dewey, 1938: 47). School life for

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<sup>20</sup> Dewey did avoid commentary on the detailed specifics of the classroom environment, believing them to be far too variable to necessitate comment (Peters, 1977). Or perhaps as McCallister observes: 'As a consistent pragmatist Dewey prefers to state the difficulties of the problem and to offer general hints for its solution rather than to suggest that any definite scheme or method is final or sufficient' (McCallister, 1931: 433). He did in a number of 'general' ways identify key features of a method of learning by experience; notably in relation to the role of the teacher. Perhaps first and foremost is the identification of the teacher as facilitator not instructor.

Dewey must be lived experience: 'education, therefore, is a process of living and not preparation for future living' (1897: 6).<sup>21</sup>

The relationship between the teacher and the school group is also different according to Dewey. Firstly the school group itself is different in that it is much more akin to a community group than a traditional classroom of disparate individuals: 'The principle that development of experience comes through interaction means that education is essentially a social process. This quality is realised in the degree in which individuals form a community group': (Dewey, 1938: 58). The fact that the group of students form a community group has implications for Dewey in that the teacher is regarded as a member of that group: 'It is absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group' (ibid). There are also implications for this membership of the group in that: 'The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities' (Dewey, 1938: 59).<sup>22</sup>

Dewey's educational method is best summed up by the following quote:<sup>23</sup>

Traditional education tended to ignore the importance of personal impulse and desire as moving springs. But this is no reason why progressive education should identify impulse and desire with purpose and thereby pass lightly over the need for careful observation, for wide range of information, and judgement if students are to share in the formation of the purposes which activate them. In an *educational* scheme, the occurrence of a desire and impulse is not the final end. It is an occasion and a demand for the formation of a plan and method of activity. Such a plan, to repeat, can be formed only by study of conditions and by securing all relevant information. The teacher's business is to see that the occasion is taken advantage of (Dewey, 1938: 70 -71).

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<sup>21</sup> In his later work Dewey presents an argument that claims education as preparation actually contradicts itself in that if the present educational experience does not take full account of the interests and potentialities of those being educated, it lacks the ingredients to genuinely prepare those pupils for their own futures: 'When preparation is made the controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are sacrificed to a suppositious future. When this happens, the actual preparation is missed or distorted' Dewey 1938:49)

<sup>22</sup> Note that although Dewey is aware of the need for the teacher to become 'a part' of the group he is quite clear about the distinction between educated and the educator, clarifying this by identifying the teacher as leader thereby the teacher retains their educational responsibility, unlike contemporaries of Dewey like Freire (1972) who want to abolish such a distinction on egalitarian grounds (see Ord, 2007:13)

<sup>23</sup> The quotation exemplifies the interplay of (in Dewey words) the internal and external conditions of experience: the impulses and desires of the pupils with the external realities as well as the responsibility of the educator to manipulate and match those interests with experience. The starting point may well be the interests of the child but the learning experience Dewey maintains is to maximise the potential of these interests and desires.

Dewey's rationale is not one which puts the educator (teacher or youth worker) at the centre of the process, but one that places the child at the centre. In this sense Dewey describes this as: 'a change or revolution not unlike that introduced by Copernicus'<sup>24</sup> (Dewey, 1900: 34). A shift from a situation where the focus is on: 'the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself (ibid). Dewey argues that the 'centre of gravity' needs to shift where by: 'he [the learner] is at the centre' (ibid). It is easy to see therefore why Dewey is often referred to as a child centred educationalist (Bantock, 1963; Garforth, 1966; Entwistle 1970; Woods & Barrow, 2006; Darling, 1994; Pring, 2007). Dewey himself suggests that indeed the starting point should be, in his terms, the 'internal conditions': 'The child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education' (Dewey, 1897: 4). However whilst it is clearly the case that Dewey is child centred in the sense that he requires the educator to take due regard of the desires, interests and inclinations of the learner, this can be overstated. Education for Dewey is not 'laissez faire' and at the whim of the individual, or an unregulated permissiveness. For example he is critical of the erroneous implementation of some of his ideas in the early progressive schools, aghast that 'some teachers seem to be afraid even to make suggestions to the members of the group as to what they should do' (Dewey 1938: 71).<sup>25</sup>

Another important caveat that should be applied to Dewey's 'person centred curriculum', is that he is not denying the 'expert' role of the teacher or in the

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<sup>24</sup> Copernicus' revolution was to offer an alternative view of the universe which did not locate the earth a fixed body at the centre, but merely as one of a number of bodies which orbited the sun. At the time this presented a complete shift in conceptualisation of the world and man's place within it.

<sup>25</sup> On this basis Dewey is not a romantic idealist in the tradition of Rousseau (Darling 1994, Pring 2007). As Pring suggests there are some similarities '...which cause them to be lumped together, but there are also significant differences [not least] the importance which Dewey attached to the social and community context of growth' (Pring, 2007: 79) Dewey can be clearly contrasted with Rousseau's (1762) naturalistic beliefs maintaining that children were inherently good and would develop naturally given the correct environment and in particular a contrast drawn between Dewey and Rousseau, where with the latter complete authority is given over to the pupil for deciding what to study. It should be remembered that for Dewey education is always an interplay or 'interaction' of the internal and objective conditions. This point needs to be emphasised, as it relates to a more in depth understanding of Dewey's notion of the internal conditions of experience. That is an appreciation of his belief that one must not to see the child's needs in isolation from the social context: 'this educational process has two sides – one psychological and one sociological – and that neither can be subordinated to the other, or neglected' (Dewey, 1897: 4). The psychological must according to Dewey always be balanced with the social. The 'psychological' aspect (Dewey 1897, 1917) of the educational process relates to the internal conditions of experience, and therefore requires the educator to be cognizant of the motivations, feelings, inclinations, desires, interests and potentialities of the pupils. It should be remembered that for Dewey: 'All experience is ultimately social as it involves contact and communication' (Dewey, 1938: 38). Warnock makes a similar comparison with early individualistic notions of growth corresponding to Rousseau, where by education of the individual is undertaken in isolation, and conceived of without reference to the social context; maintaining 'Dewey, on the other hand...thought of growth a social phenomenon, and identified education with the provision of an environment in which social growth was possible (Warnock 1977: 33). Interaction and the resulting experiential learning situations therefore focus as much around the interaction between members of the group, and the learning from, and about, each other, rather than it being narrowly defined as individuals solving their own problems in isolation.

importance of externally provided stimulus by the teacher through a dynamic curriculum, which is relevant, or made relevant, to the lives of the young people. What underpins Dewey's version of the child centred curriculum is however, a detailed knowledge and understanding of the young people who are being taught - 'their interests'. Neither does the 'person centred curriculum of Dewey deny the importance of the objective conditions – the external bodies of knowledge. Importantly this provides a theoretical basis for youth work's long held assertion about the importance of the relationship between a youth worker and the young person (Deer- Richardson and Wolfe, 2001; Young, 2006; Harrison and Wise, 2005; Davies, 2005). Within Dewey's theory one needs to 'get to know' the young people, education is not something that takes place outside their immediate sphere of understanding but must be relevant to it. Education is not separate from the young people's homes and communities (Dewey, 1900) but connections must be made to them. As such the educators would need to get to know and build relationships with the pupils in order to understand their experiences. As Pring points out: 'It takes an experienced teacher, therefore, and one who knows the child well, to identify what the interest really is – indeed, to help the young person to recognise the nature of the interest, which is only dimly perceived' (Pring. 2007: 82)

Finally however, problems still remain as Jackson makes clear Dewey gave very little indication of the practicalities of his method: 'Nor did he anticipate providing practitioners with precise directions about how to teach or how to run a school' (Jackson, 1990: XXV). One is left therefore with broad principles which need to be made more specific in their translation into educational practice. Although one can't criticise Dewey for not doing something which he did not set out to do, his overriding intention was to provide a philosophical basis for an education based on experience which, in broad terms, he achieved. Furthermore it is these broad principles which, in part, provide an appropriate theoretical basis to the youth work curriculum. White poses the question therefore that we are still left with the dilemma of whether we: 'Should we do what the child is interested in or what is in the child's interests?' (White, 1977: 54). No doubt Dewey's response would be: 'both' and this is the necessary tension which imbues a dynamic curriculum which both embraces and attempts to reconceptualise 'experience'. Importantly one cannot balance this potential problem of 'interests' until one engages with the '*situation*' (Dewey 1900,

1916, 1938) within which the young people are located and begin to understand them and their lives.



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# THE YOUTH WORK CURRICULUM

## *and the 'Transforming Youth Work Agenda'*

JON ORD

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The context for this paper is the recent publication by the NYA of *Towards a Contemporary Youth Work Curriculum* (Merton and Wylie, 2002) and by the DfES of *Transforming Youth Work, Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002). I shall argue that these documents propose a conception of the youth work curriculum which significantly deviates from the curriculum that has been developed in the field. Furthermore there is a pre-eminence placed on outcomes for young people, which runs contrary to the processes of youth work. The paper will explore the origins and history of the concept of curriculum, look at some theoretical concepts of curriculum, as well as look at what is meant by curriculum in practice. It will focus on the various curriculum documents in use in the field, and argue strongly for a reintegration of the concept of process into the youth work curriculum proposed by the NYA and the DfES.

The notion of curriculum in youth and community work does not have a long history. It does not appear in any detail, if at all, in the major government reports of Albermarle, Milson – Fairburn or Thompson. There was a widespread consensus amongst the youth work profession from the early 1950s through to the late 1980s that 'curriculum' was the preserve of schools, and had little use or place in youth work. Ewen, in *Curriculum development in the youth club* (1983) did suggest that curriculum is a credible term to use to answer the question 'what are we doing in the youth club' (Ewen, 1983:1) referring generally to the activities, such as sports, arts and some issue based work which went on in the average youth club. Judging by the overwhelming response against the concept of curriculum both at the first Ministerial Conference and the consultation preceding it in 1989 (NYB, 1990), this can be seen as a minority view and most youth workers thought that the idea of curriculum was inappropriate.

The Education Reform Act 1988 provided the context for what would become a radical change in perspective on curriculum. This Act saw the introduction or 'imposition' of the national curriculum in schools. The teachers' relative autonomy over their classroom delivery had gone. They were told what they would teach, what outcomes they would produce and testing regimes were introduced to measure those outcomes. This radical shake up of the school curriculum set the scene for an application of curriculum to youth work, and by 1989 the First Ministerial Conference was planned, entitled 'Towards a core curriculum'. Though

some 'consultation' was undertaken prior to the conference, most involved saw the process as a 'top down' attempt to introduce an unwanted and unmerited concept – the curriculum.

The keynote address at this conference was made by Alan Howarth MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Science. Howarth began by admitting that he was being 'deliberately controversial' knowing that there was great antipathy to the concept of curriculum in youth work. But he very clearly spelt out the business for the conference, as consisting of three specific aims:

- to clarify the core business of youth work
- to prioritise the outcomes of youth work
- to agree the concept of 'Core Curriculum' for youth work.

He was also very clear about what he meant by the concept, '...core curriculum – that is the priority outcomes which the youth service should seek to provide' (NYB, 1990:34) Howarth was keen to distinguish clearly between other aspects of youth work, which he thought might be incorporated: '...by curriculum I mean not the aims of the youth service,.... Nor do I mean the detailed activities or methods of delivery... but the outcomes...' (NYB, 1990: 34).

The conference, attended primarily by Principal Youth Officers and Heads of voluntary organisations, did not whole-heartedly welcome the minister's address. Business was slow and there was considerable opposition to the concept of curriculum. There were no firm conclusions as to what the core curriculum was or should be. In particular there was opposition to any imposition of a curriculum and the evaluation forms reiterated the need for 'ownership' by the field of any 'core curriculum' (NYB, 1990:80).

The background papers and evaluation of the conference, as well as the ministers address was published as *Danger or Opportunity: Towards a core curriculum for the youth service* (NYB, 1990). The title defines the tension between the antipathy amongst the field towards the concept of curriculum and the necessity of the profession to be seen to work with government and not be in opposition to it. This mirrors the present day tension in the profession's relationship to the current Transforming Youth Work Agenda. I shall return to this later in the paper.

At the same time that the government of the day was working hard to implement a core curriculum in the youth service, there was also a shake up of the youth support bodies. This saw the formation of the NYA out of a combination of the National Youth Bureau (NYB) and the Council for Education and Training of Youth

and Community Workers (CETYCW). The NYA became more closely aligned to government policy than the more autonomous NYB had been, and the first chair of the NYA, Janet Paraskeva, was quoted in the TES as saying 'You've got to be inside the system now' (Davies, 1999:129).

Despite what could be interpreted as a lack of achievement in the first conference, a second Ministerial Conference, continuing the theme of a national curriculum, went ahead in November 1990. The second conference refined its objectives to producing a clear statement of purpose. 'An invitation for written submissions produced over 165 responses, - 79 from local authorities and 86 from a variety of 'voluntary and other organisations' (Davies, 1999:133). This alone was a further indication of the difficulty of the task of producing a core curriculum and showed very clearly the pluralistic nature of youth work. The Minister did not attend the conference but gave an address by video link, re-emphasising the importance of outcomes and introducing terms like 'performance indicators' and the notion of an 'outcomes matrix'.

A statement of purpose was agreed, which included a commitment to 'educative and empowering practice' as well as 'to equality of opportunity and challenging oppression'. Importantly this represented the views of the field and to a large extent was contrary to the views of the minister. The Government response was that Howarth distanced himself from the statement, regarding it as 'politically charged' (Davies, 1999). Howarth encouraged decisions to be made locally about the acceptance of the statement of purpose, thereby undermining its credibility, though he did return to the original question of 'a core curriculum' recommending that this was still an important objective.

A third Ministerial Conference was held in June 1992. By this time Howarth had moved on and the momentum had considerably slowed. Some work was undertaken on learning outcomes and performance indicators and the NYA was given the remit to produce curriculum guidelines to help local authorities (NYA, 1995).

Clearly the impetus for the introduction of a core curriculum had slowed. Yet it would be wrong to see Howarth's task as a failure, despite achieving little in terms of his specific objective of creating a 'core curriculum as outcomes', for the task of introducing the concept of curriculum into the youth service had begun. This task was to be progressed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (1993) and by the NYA (1995).

In 1993, an expectation was placed upon statutory youth services to produce a locally agreed curriculum by Ofsted. *The Youth Work Curriculum* (HMSO, 1993)

was also produced by HMIs to offer guidance, direction and to comment on some of the current work being undertaken in the field. The HMI document is not prescriptive and does not attempt to impose a predetermined concept of curriculum. Significantly, it does not emphasise 'outcomes' as being integral to the youth work curriculum and it certainly does not equate the two concepts. In section 2 – 'The Curriculum', the document focuses on descriptions of the educative principles of youth work: 'Educative means introducing young people to ideas and areas of experience from which they can learn new skills and knowledge and develop understanding' (HMSO, 1993:5). It considers methods of delivery: 'Often the method is experiential – learning by doing...' (HMSO 1993:5); as well as going on to describe in more detail some of the broad 'curriculum areas', including Sport, Arts and Outdoor Education. Importantly this document clearly acknowledges the importance of process in the youth work curriculum: 'The youth work curriculum is complex because its dimensions include not only the activities that young people take part in but also the relationships they develop through the process' (HMSO 1993:16).

In 1995, the NYA published *Planning the Way: Guidelines for producing your youth work curriculum* and presented the curriculum in a format the field would be able to both recognise and utilise. It emphasised the process of experiential learning, introduced the idea of curriculum areas and appropriate methods. It also attempted to link objectives and performance indicators to them:

*The [curriculum] guidelines should:*

- *Enable youth workers to talk about their planned curriculum in professional terms; and*
- *Enable youth workers to stand back from their practice in order to relate their decisions regarding process, content and outcomes to professional debate.*

(NYA, 1995:3)

It would appear that a shift in policy on the youth work curriculum had occurred, from the narrow focus of the Ministerial Conferences where curriculum was equated with outcomes, to a broader definition of curriculum encompassing both the processes and products of youth work and incorporating descriptions of the broad educational methods employed. Whether or not this backtracking is viewed as a direct result of the opposition encountered by the government, ultimately the curriculum produced by the field is a more accurate reflection of youth work in practice. However, the importance of the NYA in taking up the mantle of the



youth work curriculum should not be underestimated. They, as well as HMI and Ofsted, played a vital role in encouraging the field to adopt the notion of curriculum (NYA, 1995; Ofsted 1993). As a result many statutory youth services in the early 90s produced their first attempts at curriculum documents. For example, Kingston Youth Service produced the aptly named *Breaking the Mould: A youth work curriculum* (1992).

### **Curriculum Theory**

Mark Smith (1996, 2000) has suggested four ways of approaching curriculum theory and practice:

Firstly 'curriculum as syllabus' is associated with traditional formal education. It is concerned with the transmission of specified content. There is an emphasis on delivery by teacher to pupils who receive the information passively.

Secondly Smith suggests that 'curriculum as product' has become the dominant mode of curriculum theory in late twentieth century. This is based on the idea of the development of competencies, and builds on the work of Franklin Bobbitt (1918). Curriculum as product is synonymous with curriculum as outcomes. 'Objectives are set, a plan drawn up, then applied and the outcomes (products) measured' (Smith, 1996, 2000: 3) Significantly the outcomes are of paramount importance.

Thirdly and in contrast, 'curriculum as process' is conceived of without necessarily having any predetermined outcomes. Learning occurs as a result of the interaction between youth workers (or teachers) and the young people. Understanding is developed out of the process. What is brought to the session is important eg. previous experience, knowledge, as well as what is prepared in advance. But it is the 'dynamics' of the session that are important, in determining the potential for learning.

Finally curriculum can be seen as praxis. This is a development of the process model, which extends the notions of meaning making and developing understanding within the process model and asks questions concerning whose interests are served. The praxis model raises questions of power and oppression (Freire, 1972) in both the educational environment and the wider world. There is some resonance here with the work of Foucault (1974), with conceptions of power as knowledge. Praxis extends this and is concerned with what action will be taken asking what will be done as a result of the new found knowledge or skill.

### **'The curriculum in practice' 1989-2003**

One can appreciate the difficulty which Howarth faced in trying to impose the concept of curriculum onto youth work practice by referring to work in the philosophy of language. In his detailed analysis of meaning, Wittgenstein suggests that the

meaning of words relates directly to the use to which they are put. 'The meaning of a word is its use in language' (Wittgenstein, 1958 [b]:20). 'The use of a word in practice is its meaning' (Wittgenstein, 1958 [a]:69). That is words and concepts acquire a currency based on their use.

Exploring this analysis in relation to the concept of curriculum in youth work provides some interesting insights. Prior to 1989 curriculum had no use in youth work. As a result, there was antipathy in the field to the imposition of what was essentially an alien concept to the practice of youth work – it had no currency, no use, and therefore no meaning and little purpose could be envisaged for it. However, since then, the concept of curriculum has undergone a process of gaining currency and 'usage' in the field of youth work. This has been a collaborative and democratic process involving all levels of the profession, from principal officers to part time workers and volunteers. It has been a 'bottom up' process, which has enabled ownership to be gained of the concept. Ironically this was one of the requests made in the evaluation of the first ministerial conference (NYB, 1989). A use has been found for the concept and it is to that use that we need to look to understand what we mean by curriculum in youth work.

I would suggest that there are aspects of all four of the models identified by Smith (1996, 2000) in the contemporary youth work curriculum. The syllabus model (perhaps the least important), can be seen to be analogous to the content areas prevalent in the curriculum documents produced by local authority youth services. Different documents use different terms to categorise the content, eg Herefordshire uses a list of twenty 'delivery topics', which include independent living, sexuality, citizenship and health. St Helens uses the notion of eight 'curriculum categories' including justice and equality, relationships and Europe and the world. The notion of curriculum as syllabus in its crudest sense as the 'filling of empty vessels', in examples of rote learning, clearly has no relevance to the dynamic learning environment of youth work. But I would argue that it does make sense to talk about 'content' in youth work, and the categorisation of broad areas of learning and the content areas found in curriculum documents equate to this.

The product model with its emphasis on outcomes appears in many documents. However there are clear differences of emphasis between general and specific outcomes in them. For example Shropshire County Council utilises the three broad categories of outcomes provided by 'Skills: personal/actual ability to express creativity'; 'Knowledge: of self, others and issues'; and 'Attitudes: group skills and ability to express feelings'. Plymouth City Council distinguishes between tangible outcomes such as securing paid/voluntary work, and intangible outcomes such as

self esteem and confidence. West Sussex Youth Service has produced a list of desirable outcomes which correspond directly with specific elements of the key curriculum areas. This is an attempt to reduce youth work to individual specific outcomes, which result from specific inputs. This, I would argue is problematic and I will return to this later in the paper, with a broader critique of outcomes.

The process model equates directly with the youth work process. Cumbria County Council articulates part of the process in a description of the youth worker as a facilitator, mentor and guide. Devon Youth Service creatively developed a model of a surfer on a wave to describe the dynamic quality of the process. The process articulated in the Devon curriculum document is organic, and the wave is used to show movement and progression. Leicester City Council emphasises the importance of the relationship with young people describing it as unique and voluntary, based on mutual respect and equality and as such providing the climate for growth.

Praxis is integral to the youth work curriculum, as the learning is not abstract but person centred and relevant to how young people live their lives. Curriculum as praxis relates to action and youth work is about what young people do – their behaviour as well as how they think and feel. The concept of praxis does not appear explicitly in the curriculum documents that I have reviewed but it is implicit and integral to the youth work curriculum documents in use in the field. Broadly praxis can be articulated through explorations of citizenship, which appear in many documents and through the encouragement of responsible community action. However there is a cross-over with curriculum as outcomes: many of the resulting actions described in examples of outcomes, (such as how a young person had the confidence to apply for and get a job), could be described by both models.

It is not possible to say which of the four models has more weight or is more or less dominant, as I have not exhausted the entire range of documents. However this is not my primary objective. It is sufficient to show that firstly the concept of curriculum in the field combines each of the four elements, and importantly the documents include 'curriculum as process'.

The concept of curriculum is used primarily as a framework in youth work. Some local authority documents are actually entitled *Curriculum Frameworks* eg Plymouth City Council, Leicester City Council and Derbyshire County Council. The curriculum documents are essentially descriptive, detailing the variety of aims, content, process, methods, models, values, issues, the planning and evaluation cycles, as well as the 'outcomes' of the work. However, what is important to note is that the curriculum frameworks that have been produced by the field since the early 1990s, describe both the products and the processes of the work. The elements

of the process of youth work, such as building relationships, engagement with the young person as a person on their terms, meeting the needs of young people through voluntary engagement, are essential elements of the youth work curriculum.

The use of the term curriculum in youth work is a synthesis of the unique educational contribution that youth work makes. The curriculum documents draw together key themes and processes that are incorporated in youth work as well as articulating the products and outcomes it can provide. The curriculum now has a currency, which not only provides use as a training aid to members of staff, but is also a method of articulating professional expectations of the youth service to local politicians. The curriculum also has a use in enabling other organisations working in partnership with youth services to better understand the role youth work can play.

Adopting the concept of curriculum has enabled youth work as a profession to be clearer about what youth work is, both to itself and to the outside world. The concept of curriculum 'in use', and that which has gained currency amongst youth workers in the field, (particularly in the statutory sector) is not the narrowly defined 'curriculum as outcomes' originally conceived of by Howarth. It is a creative, dynamic and locally produced expression of the unique educational contribution youth work makes. It synthesises the processes and products of youth work. Perhaps those present at the first ministerial conference did not appreciate it, but the introduction of the notion of curriculum was in fact an opportunity to develop a useful tool.

### **The current climate**

Interestingly the current climate in youth work is revisiting some of the issues initially raised at ministerial conferences. Whilst the concept of curriculum is now to a large extent embedded into the operations of the statutory youth services throughout the country, the new developments within *Transforming Youth Work* (DFES, 2001, 2002) have brought back into sharp focus the tensions relating specifically to 'curriculum as product', and youth work outcomes.

In addition, the relationship between NYA and DfES has also been brought into clear focus within the current climate of *Transforming Youth Work*. Bernard Davies (1999) commented on the dynamics at the NYA's inception, around the time of the ministerial conferences, and the scepticism about whether or not the NYA would become the 'government's poodle or the field's rottweiler' (Davies, 1999:126). Close inspection of the present publications from both the NYA and the DfES gives rise to suspicion and would appear to validate concerns over the autonomy of the NYA and the relationship between the NYA and government policy. There is in fact a near identical match between the government's conception

of curriculum in *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002) and The NYA's chief executive Tom Wylie's conception of curriculum in *Towards a Contemporary Youth Work Curriculum* (Merton and Wylie, 2002).

Should this concern us? I think the answer should be that if the conception of curriculum within both documents is representative of the concept of curriculum that has been embedded in the practice of youth work since the early 1990s, then youth workers should have nothing to fear. However if there are any clear discrepancies or differences then a question should certainly be raised. Unfortunately the latter would appear to be the case.

The two publications use the same three basic elements to describe the youth work curriculum – content; pedagogy; assessment/outcomes. The first, content, is relatively uncontentious as many curriculum documents in practice utilise the notion of curriculum areas, which broadly summarise young people's issues, interests and concerns. One could argue that the choice of four core areas of skill, knowledge and understanding which Merton and Wylie have adopted - emotional literacy, creativity and enterprise, health and well being, active citizenship - do not encompass the totality of the young people's experience. But by and large there is not a distinct conceptual difference between Merton and Wylie's concept of content and the content areas previously discussed in relation to curriculum as syllabus.

The second element of curriculum proposed by Merton and Wylie (2002) is pedagogy. Here there is clear divergence with the conception of curriculum being portrayed within the new agenda and the curriculum embedded in youth work practice. Pedagogy, defined by the Oxford dictionary as 'the profession, science or theory of teaching', is a concept that is transposed primarily from teaching. Pedagogy does not appear, to my knowledge in any of the curriculum documents produced in the field. Pedagogy does have some quite separate links with informal education and youth work through the work of Freire (1972). But this bears no relation to the work of Merton and Wylie. So this raises a question as to why it is introduced by them.

Merton and Wylie's use of the concept of pedagogy may well be a deliberate attempt to use the strong association with formal education and teaching to give added credibility to the 'educational' basis of youth work. However, an analysis of what is meant by the pedagogy of youth work, within their conception of the youth work curriculum does give cause for concern.

I would suggest that Merton and Wylie are utilising the term pedagogy to both legitimise exclusively the product based model of youth work and to avoid the concept of process in their description of the youth work curriculum. Merton and

Wylie describe the pedagogy of youth work (and the resulting youth work curriculum) without reference to fundamental aspects of the youth work process.

*Youth work has a pedagogy which is based on learning by doing, often in small groups; people tackling real life problems and finding real life situations, planned, done and reflected on; lessons learned and applied elsewhere. It is essentially educational groupwork.*

(Merton and Wylie 2002:10)

The above is not anathema to youth work but I would argue an essential element is missing and Merton and Wylie's description of the pedagogy of youth work as educational groupwork, does not sufficiently account for the interpersonal dynamics of the youth work process.

To illustrate let us look at an example in practice of an informal drug education session at a local youth club, described in terms of the four areas of the curriculum. The content of the session could be described as the facts and information, which the youth workers wish to communicate to the young people. The outcomes may be an increased knowledge of the relative harm that drugs can cause, or safer ways of taking drugs. The praxis element of the curriculum may relate to what the young people will do as a result of their newly found knowledge for example, what informed decisions the young people will take about their drug use. The process in the dynamics of this session is important. The extent to which the young people would be able to be involved and engage openly and honestly in sensitive conversations about their drug use would be dependant on the level of trust and the quality of the relationship the young people have with the youth workers. Without this element of the process the possibilities for significant engagement and the consequent learning are limited. Very often the quality of the learning in youth work is dependant on the quality of the relationship. Within Merton and Wylie's description of the pedagogy of youth work as 'educational group work' there is no mention of this aspect of the work.

Youth work is not teaching, but what is occurring is that there is a blurring of the edges between the two. Clearly both teaching and youth work are concerned with learning but this similarity should not be used to disguise the clear distinctions. Merton and Wylie describe the pedagogy of youth work as 'essentially educational groupwork' (2002:10) which is an attempt to describe how youth work is different to the dominant pedagogy of school. I am sure a lot of teachers would consider that they undertake educational groupwork. What is distinctive about youth work and clearly distinguishes it from teaching is the 'process'. Educational groupwork is not synonymous with the process of youth work, it does not sufficiently account

for the interpersonal dynamics of the youth work process. Merton and Wylie's description of educational groupwork do not require the building of a relationship of voluntary participation or mutuality.

What is meant by process? It is complex, and Ofsted (1993) acknowledged this, (HMSO 1993:16). This does not however, mean that clarity cannot be added to the understanding of the concept or that because it is both difficult to understand and to articulate that we must get rid of it. It is true that historically youth work has failed to fully clarify the meaning of process and consequently has been accused of being 'woolly'. I would argue that process is an essential ingredient of the youth work curriculum and without a clear recognition of the place of the process of youth work in the curriculum, there is a danger of undermining both the effectiveness of the work, as well as one of the cornerstones of the profession.

The youth work process is integrally linked to the formation of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person(s). The relationship is characterised by equity and trust, and generally, though perhaps not exclusively, based on voluntary participation, as well as mutuality. Through this relationship young people are safe, and free to explore and address issues of their personal and social development. The 'process' involves learning about your 'self' in relation to others, and through experience.

Why would Merton and Wylie (or the DfES) be so keen to introduce the concept of pedagogy into youth work, describing it as 'educational group work' and ignoring a 'given' in youth work practice – the importance of the relationship in the process? I think the answer gives important insights into the *Transforming Youth Work* agenda. Process is necessarily, at least to some extent, open-ended. It may start with the needs of the young people and perhaps with a specific aim for the session but it does not start with a predetermined notion of what the outcome would be. In the example of the drug education session one could begin with fantastic content, up to date knowledge, well-designed leaflets etc. The workers may have excellent relationships with the young people but ultimately only the young people themselves can make the informed decisions and it would be foolish to predict what the outcomes would be prior to the session or indeed be 100% sure about what they were after the session! Not least, this is because the workers may well not witness the resulting actions. The omission of the youth work process in Merton and Wylie seems to be intentional, as it potentially conflicts with, and could be seen to undermine, what is the primary focus for the new agenda's transformation of youth services to that of an 'outcome-based' model. Merton and Wylie have rather cleverly, though I think wrongly, omitted the youth work

process, and substituted it with the concept of 'pedagogy as educational groupwork' to enable a direct application of the outcome model of youth work. The underlying reason for this I would suggest is the New Labour manifesto commitment to 'improve' public services and their need to ensure maximum accountability. What Merton and Wylie are attempting to do is substitute the 'person centred process' which characterises both contemporary youth work curriculum and youth work practice, with an 'outcome based' model.

To illustrate this further, we must look at the third element of the curriculum proposed by Merton and Wylie: assessment/outcomes. It is in relation to this element that the convergence between the NYA and DfES is most evident. In fact the text is at times identical, eg 'Such broad goals need to be expressed in a set of more specific outcomes if they are to be helpful in the planning and in practice. The more clearly we can specify the ends, the better we will be able to choose the means for achieving them' (DfES 2002:11; and Merton and Wylie, 2002:2)

The above quote exemplifies the extent to which Merton and Wylie have adopted a model of curriculum as outcomes. It shows that the starting point is in fact the end product -the outcomes. This is exemplified in the statement: 'the more clearly we can specify the ends, the better we will be able to choose the means'. Such a position runs counter to the youth work approach wherein the ends or outcomes develop out of the process and *ipso facto* cannot be specified in any detail prior to the activity, session or experience. Both means (or methods of youth work) and ends (outcomes of youth work) cannot be specified until the young people have been engaged with, a relationship built up and their needs identified. It is the process that develops from this that will lead to the outcomes. Merton and Wylie are in fact 'putting the cart before the horse'.

The extent to which outcomes take precedence in Merton and Wylie's model is further illustrated by their suggestion that in fact we need to ask the question, 'What might one expect a personally and socially developed person to be?' (Merton and Wylie, 2002:2) Their idea is that we can best undertake youth work if we know the specific end products. Whilst this may make sense if we are concerned with broad outcomes, what Merton and Wylie are proposing is a strict application of the outcome model, necessitating specification of individual outcomes for each particular piece of work. This does not apply to youth work. It may make sense to talk of general or broad outcomes or aims before engaging young people in a process but to frame youth work at the outset in terms of specific outcomes bears little relation to its reality.

Let me illustrate. It is widely accepted that youth work is concerned with personal and social development. Let us look at a one aspect of that: human kindness. (This



relates to youth work as well as to everyday situations of friendship and parenting etc.) Few would argue, that as a rule, if you genuinely show kindness, care and attention to someone consistently and reliably over time this will have a beneficial effect on how the recipients of that behaviour will feel about them selves, they are more likely to think of themselves as worthy of care and their sense of well being will probably improve. They will also probably behave towards others 'with care', and the quality of their relationships with others will improve.

It is a different thing to argue that as a result of specific acts of kindness one can specify outcomes in terms of a person's well being. One is guilty of the fallacy of arguing from the general to the specific. Yes, each individual act of kindness played a particular part in the overall behavioural change but it is impossible to say which one was most important, if in fact, there was one. It is also difficult to say at which stage in the process the changes or learning had taken place.

The first description is a general rule relating to a process of interaction, which has broad outcomes. One can only even begin to be specific about the outcomes in terms of the degree of change and be clear about end products after the event. The outcome model of youth work curriculum fails to account for the complexities of people, and the complexities of learning associated with the personal and social development. Personal and social development is necessarily complex and the process will reflect this.

Broadly a distinction can be drawn between the 'open ended - person centred - educational process' contained in the youth work curriculum in practice, with the 'Outcome based model' proposed by Merton and Wylie. Youth work is not about producing specifically predetermined outcomes, it is about the personal and social development of young people.

*Youth work is educational and therefore following Dewey, it is not an activity for inculcating rigid patterns of socially acceptable behaviour. It is not a static yard stick but a set of processes which must be reassessed to meet the needs of individual, situations and circumstances.*

(Young, 1999:79)

The relationship between outcomes and process is further illustrated by what Smith (1988) refers to as the 'Incidental' nature of learning. That is the learning or outcomes in youth work develop out of a process but are indirect. They are a consequence of the process, but are not necessarily specifically attributable to any specific part of it. Learning results from purposeful activity, but does not directly result from a single or series of specific inputs. The learning is not accidental but

incidental. The acquisition of social skills is like this, eg young people may learn appreciation of each other. But this learning will derive out of a process of interaction over time. Even if each individual involved could attribute their learning to a specific incident within that process, where perhaps their need was met specifically by someone's intervention, in truth the change is most likely to be due to a complex interplay of a number of factors and incidences. And certainly even if this was the case it is another thing to suggest that one could have anticipated such an eventuality and planned the activity accordingly, having previously specified this as a desirable outcome.

One of my contentions in this paper is that there has been shift in policy at the NYA, most notably by its director Tom Wylie, in how youth work is conceived; and that this is exemplified in the recent descriptions of curriculum. (DFES, 2001, 2002; Merton and Wylie, 2002) This shift is further evidenced by a comparison of the Merton and Wylie (2002) version of curriculum with his previous paper on curriculum: *Developmental youth work 2000* (Wylie, 1997). A clear change is evident. In the former paper, Wylie places no emphasis on outcomes within his description of curriculum. The similarities between the reference to curriculum areas, processes of informal education and experiential learning, and the educative, participative and empowering values of youth work, as well as the importance of the promotion of equality of opportunity are strikingly similar to the various curriculum documents produced by the individual youth services. Merton and Wylie (2002) ignores many of these embedded principles, wrongly replacing the youth work process with the concept of 'pedagogy as educational groupwork' and implicitly advocating an outcome based curriculum model.

The change in policy at the NYA, at least by its principle advocate, Tom Wylie, coincides directly with the election of New Labour and the new agenda of *Transforming Youth Work*. This new agenda focuses heavily on accountability, which underpins the commitment to improving public services, though this is arguably through a managerialist regime of target setting. It could be argued that this signifies a return to the Thatcherite emphasis upon increased accountability in public services. The commitment to accountability was the primary motivation for the original introduction of the curriculum in 1989 by Howarth from within the Thatcher government. Without clear, predictable outcomes specified prior to the activity, the youth service would be less accountable. Perhaps part of the original antipathy to the notion of curriculum by youth workers at the time was the implicit assumption by youth workers that such accountability would imply a loss of independence to prioritise process in their work.

This paper is not arguing against accountability *per se*. But it maintains that if youth work is to be brought to account this should be on the basis of what youth work is; what youth work 'is' should not be changed to fit into a system or method of accountability!

We are in a new climate and it is evident that a government for the first time has officially recognised the role of youth work (DfES, 2002). However, whilst on the one hand it acknowledges the benefits of quality youth work, sadly at the same time it is denying the main tool utilised for that benefit – the youth work 'process'. The NYA ought to draw some distance between itself and the government and return to the consensus on curriculum. Reintegrating the importance of the relationship in to the youth work process as an essential element of the work; and this should be emphasised rather than attempt to devise, in cahoots with the DfES a new and irrelevant framework for the work which doesn't relate to youth work in practice and if implemented would undermine quality.

The role of the NYA as champion of the profession and communicator of youth work to the wider world, has been undermined by this shift in policy. Interestingly the initial questions over the role of the NYA were raised the first time a government tried to introduce notions of a youth work curriculum as outcomes (NYB, 1989). Merton and Wylie (2002) and DfES (2002) have shown such clear convergence, that suspicions have again been raised. Furthermore the commonalities are clearly at odds with both the current youth work practice and the curriculum documents which describe and communicate this practice.

To conclude, prior to the implementation of the *Transforming Youth Work* agenda, the various locally determined models and frameworks of curriculum in use in youth services added to the armoury of those services. The documents have a wide range of uses, eg as training aids for volunteers and part time workers, to facilitate partnership work or to educate local politicians. They have the potential to enhance the quality of youth work and enable both workers to be clearer about their work and for others to be clearer about what they do.

Importantly, despite the impetus for the introduction of the concept of curriculum in youth work at the first ministerial conference, with an attempt to impose 'a core curriculum as outcomes', the production of these documents has been organic and democratic. This has embedded the concept into youth work practice.

To understand the meaning of curriculum in youth work one must refer to how the concept is used, not to any externally imposed criteria (Wittgenstein, 1958[a] 1958[b]). The use of curriculum in youth work practice reflects all four models of syllabus, product, process, and praxis outlined by Smith (1996/2000). The curriculum

documents are creative locally devised frameworks used to describe and explain what both youth work is in the locality, what its essential elements are and what it can provide.

The changes proposed by Merton and Wylie (2002) and DfES (2002) defining curriculum as the three essential elements of content, pedagogy and outcome is essentially a shift from the person centred curriculum embedded in youth work practice, which includes the essential element of 'process' in youth work, to a reintroduction of the outcome based model. This approach unnecessarily formalises youth work and ignores the role of the process. The context of the person is being lost to an application of a method of delivery. This method exclusively emphasises specific outcomes. It fundamentally ignores the importance of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person(s) as the primary vehicle for producing both the products and the processes of the work. 'Curriculum as outcomes' does not accurately reflect the curriculum in practice or the substance of youth work.

The fundamental alterations in the description of the youth work curriculum will over time produce alterations in practice and any undermining of the importance of the process, if implemented, will undermine the effectiveness of the work. The limited aspects of youth work best approximate to this model, like the quasi-school based sessions, which are illustrated by prior - specific learning outcomes. For example the sexual health workshops, which set out to increase young people's knowledge of methods of contraception, will become the norm. Sessions will be organised to focus on those few specific issues, which fit the model. The depth of work and potential for genuine growth through involvement in personal development processes will be lost. Youth workers will end up ticking boxes relating to knowledge or skills which the workers had decided in advance they would be 'teaching' and fail to engage fully with the young people in a equitable relationship, to begin to ascertain and meet their real needs.

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# Curriculum Debate: The Youth Work Curriculum as Process, Not as Outcome and Output to Aid Accountability

*Jon Ord*

If ever I needed any reminders of just how contentious the concept of curriculum was in youth work, *Youth and Policy* Volume 84 containing responses to my original paper 'The Youth Work Curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work Agenda' (Ord, 2004) certainly provided me with one.

I thought it only right and proper that I replied to some of the criticisms of that paper, as well as continuing the debate, not least because I think my original argument for process as a necessary condition of the youth work curriculum is still valid.

## A response to Tony Jeffs:

Dear Tony,

I read with interest your reply to my paper, and certainly no offence was taken. I would refer you to my reply below:

### ***The Taming of the Tiger: The 'Youth Work' Curriculum***

I was stuck with the task of trying to establish what the 'bottom line' was for Jeffs. What exactly is it that 'sticks in the craw' so much about the concept of curriculum in youth work? Jeffs is quite willing and able to equate youth workers with 'teachers' a parallel which I think only helps to further the confusion between formal and informal education. My suspicion is that many youth workers would have more 'affinity' with the notion of curriculum than they would with seeing themselves as 'teachers'! However I am not going to take Jeffs to task over the concept of teaching as I think quite rightly he has a particular notion of 'teaching' and his articulation of the dynamic role of an 'informal' teacher is clearly not inconsistent with the principles and practices of youth work. But the question remains, if he is so willing to think of youth workers as teachers why is he so unwilling to entertain the concept of curriculum in youth work?

I think the answer lies in his misconception of curriculum. Unfortunately he too conceives of curriculum as product. He states quite clearly that 'curriculum is the course to be run. It has a beginning, middle and end – it clearly has an outcome' (Jeffs, 2004:57). I argued that curriculum as product is the dominant 'ideology'. Curriculum is a contested concept and is not exhaustively defined as he describes. I would argue that curriculum as process does have an educational tradition. (Stenhouse, 1975, 1980, 1983, Rudduck, 1995). Furthermore curriculum as process does not presuppose a destination. More importantly curriculum as process is integral to the curriculum that has been produced in the field of statutory youth services (Ord, 2004).

A model of curriculum as process, was initially put forward by Stenhouse, in 'An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development' (1975). Stenhouse was an educationalist who, though writing about schools and formal education, had progressive views about curriculum. He died before the education reform act of 1988 and no doubt would have been appalled by the imposition of a national curriculum with rigid prescribed outcomes. He proposed that a curriculum based on a process model is more suited to education concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Unlike the acquisition of information and skills, knowledge is often controversial, and understanding can always be deepened so on both counts the achievement of pre set objectives or specific intended outcomes is less appropriate.

Interestingly there are also parallels between role of the youth worker and how Stenhouse saw the role of the teacher in the process model. He conceived the teacher not as an expert, but as a 'senior learner capable of offering something of value to the junior learners with whom he works'. The process model 'implies teaching by discovery or inquiry methods rather than by instruction' (Stenhouse, 1975:91). The teacher is therefore active in the learning environment, engaged in a process which, while having defined purpose, does not necessarily have specifically definable outcomes, at least not prior to its initiation.

Applying this principle to youth work, a youth worker might be working with a group of disengaged young people who are on the margins, involved in petty crime – in modern parlance they would be 'NEET'S' (not in Employment, Education or Training), and be a priority for intervention from a number of services. What objectives or outcomes would it make sense to set for an intervention? It would make no sense even to begin to specify outcomes to work with the group, until a worker could establish relationships with the group and engage them in a process. Applying the process model, it would not be necessary to set any pre-specified outcomes. Any talk of outcomes before engagement would be putting the cart before the horse.

Clearly there is a political context to the production of curriculum. 'An expectation to produce a locally agreed curriculum was placed on statutory youth services by Ofsted' (Ord, 2004:45). However I would take issue with Jeffs' analogy of this expectation as: 'jumping off a cliff to escape a tiger' (Jeffs, 2004:56). This both misrepresents and devalues what actually happened in the field. What Jeffs fails to appreciate is that the 'expectation' did provide an opportunity. Gone were the strict dictates of curriculum as outcomes, and though they would be subject 'at some point' to an inspection and comment by Ofsted, the lack of prescription did provide a space for documents to be produced and agreed locally. It is true that the documents would never have been produced without the pressure from Ofsted; that youth workers had never conceived of curriculum in relation to youth work before, that the long tradition of youth and community work bears little relation to curriculum, and youth work had survived previously without it. But just because youth work had never utilised the concept of curriculum does not mean that the curriculum documents that have been produced are worthless or that it is a bad thing that curriculum 'has gained currency amongst youth workers in the field' (Ord, 2004:50)

The curriculum documents have been produced in the 'space' provided by the lack of prescription from Ofsted, the NYA, and central and local government. This is evidenced by



the diversity of the documents in use. More importantly the curriculum documents became the arena within which arguments about what the work was about could take place. For example, I remember having a conversation with an officer from West Sussex in which he was describing how, now that they had anti racist work clearly identified in their curriculum document, it made it easier and more legitimate to undertake such work. He continued to explain how the new battle ground in West Sussex was now work on homophobia, the importance of which had not been agreed locally and was yet to be explicitly referenced in their curriculum.

Contrary to Jeffs' and Robertson's (2004) arguments, it is legitimate to describe the curriculum documents as 'bottom up'. In an important sense they are. For example between 1990 and 2003 Kingston Youth Service has had three distinct documents; all levels of the service were involved and consulted in their production. The ideas, concepts and frameworks utilised came from the knowledge and experience of the workers in the service. No external agency or organisation was used or referenced in the drawing up or agreement of the curriculum. All the decisions on content and format were taken locally and importantly, no external prescription, advice or guidance was either taken or needed. They were ratified by elected members and that has the advantage of adding legitimacy even though on occasion it can create problems.

Perhaps the litmus test for curriculum is who has the final say on content. The case of Somerset youth service can elucidate this point. Somerset has devised a 'curriculum development matrix' (CDM) (Somerset, 1999). It has the benefit of being able to plot the level of participation of young people in any given youth work session. However, Ofsted claimed that, 'the understanding and effective use of the CDM by youth workers varied widely and many found it too complex and mechanistic' (Ofsted Somerset, 2002 [b]). Clearly Ofsted would like it to see it changed. Somerset have introduced a curriculum strategy within their action plan to improve the understanding of their matrix, and have commissioned research into its effective use, but the CDM remains intact. The level of ownership and local agreement is strong enough to withstand the criticism, and it would appear that those within the service disagree with the Ofsted claim.

The youth work curriculum is clearly not 'bottom up' in the sense that the idea of curriculum or the importance (nay necessity) to have one came from the field, but it is 'bottom up' in terms of both what the curriculum has come to mean in practice and that there is ownership of the documents by youth workers in their locality. They are not as Jeffs describes them, anathema, at least not to practicing statutory youth workers.

Curriculum exists in the interface between youth work and the wider 'modern' world. Youth workers do not necessarily need a curriculum to talk to or agree with each other about the work (though I think it can help with this as well) but curriculum has gained a currency in the environment of partnership and modern local government with an emphasis on professional transparency, inter agency working and accountability.

That, I think, is Jeffs' real 'beef', not with curriculum, but with modern local government. It is patronising and disingenuous to describe local authority youth workers and managers as merely 'jumping through the required hoops' (Jeffs, 2004:55). There are many who choose

to battle on in a difficult context of competing priorities and agendas and who do make a difference to the lives of young people. Curriculum has not hindered that process. In one sense it has assisted it because it has enabled youth workers to have something to back up what they do, which has local agreement, with both youth workers and local politicians, as well as having national endorsement from Ofsted. This has helped erase the rather vague image of youth workers as people who 'just hang around and chat to young people with no particular purpose in mind'.

The question is, can a curriculum for youth work authentically describe the vibrancy and dynamism of the work. I argued that a sufficient condition of this would be an explicit reference to both product and process in equal measure. Jeffs informs us that youth work has a long tradition which does not refer to curriculum. But history shapes the future it does not define it in its entirety. Youth work in the statutory sector has changed and, like it or not, curriculum is a part of it. We can either complain from the sidelines or be part of the debate and influence the kind of curriculum we need.

As meaning is founded in use (Wittgenstein, 1958), a search for an authentic curriculum therefore must look to the use to which the statutory youth service have given curriculum. Importantly it is a distinct and unique meaning. It is a holistic concept which describes the whole of youth work. Unlike Wylie and Merton (2002), whose curriculum is a partial curriculum: 'the term does not describe all of youth work.' (2004:66). For a curriculum to be authentic it must reflect the 'meaningful' curriculum that has been produced in the field, as well as accurately reflect and describe youth work itself; a necessary condition of this would be an incorporation of the youth work process.

It is on this point that I must now return to Merton and Wylie.

***Response to Merton and Wylie: What exactly did happen to 'Process' ?***

Merton and Wylie (2004) claim I make three key points. But I think that misreads and selectively interprets my article. I suspect those points are the ones that it is felt can most easily be countered – perhaps regarding a slight historical inaccuracy. I should like to make it quite clear that I am making one central key claim:

*That the concept of youth work curriculum (Merton and Wylie, 2000; DfES, 2002) does not sufficiently account for the central 'process' of youth work and is therefore fundamentally flawed.*

Interestingly this point is not new. Bernard Davies in his paper 'Whose Youth Service Curriculum' (1991) made the same point in response Michael Howarth's original attempts to define 'curriculum as outcomes' (NYB, 1990). His central point echoes my key claim that the youth work process is being undermined by the formulations of curriculum whereby: 'outcomes' were talked up, [and] "process" was systematically (and at times quite disparagingly ) talked down or even simply ignored' (Davies, 1991:5). Importantly at the time Davies argued for 'vigilance' and 'resistance' to this systematic undermining of core principles. This is as relevant today as it was in 1991.

Process is an accepted educational principle of youth work (Smith, 1988; Deer-Richardson

and Wolfe, 2001; Jeffs and Smith, 1996; Young, 1999) and as I have outlined above, has a philosophical and educational validity in the work of Stenhouse. Yet though Merton and Wylie make cursory reference to it in their reply to my original article 'yes, you see, we do recognise the process!' (2004:65), they have chosen to supplant it in their conception of curriculum with the notion of 'pedagogy of educational groupwork'.

I argued that this represents a fundamental change in their conceptions of curriculum, from earlier notions such as that found in 'Developmental Youth Work 2000' (Wylie, 1997). But they have kindly drawn our attention to other material which they have produced which also evidences this claim. For example in 'Effective Youth Work' (DES, 1987), they describe youth work in a way which gives centrality to both processes and products of youth work, giving significant reference to the importance of the youth work relationship, as well as implicitly recognising the centrality of process.

Smith describes 'Effective Youth Work' as 'one of the last English government reports to promote open youth work' (Smith, 2003 [b]:1). Davies summarises 'Effective Youth Work' as showing:

- *That what is distinctive about youth work is its process*
- *That it is neither possible nor desirable to prioritise between 'content' and 'process'*  
(Davies, 1991:6)

An emphasis on 'pedagogy of educational groupwork' as opposed to the products and processes of youth work would certainly appear to be a significant recent change.

Merton and Wylie's response to my claim that educational groupwork was not a legitimate methodology for youth work has been to refer me to work of additional authors such as Batten, Button, Klein and Milson. I do not regard this as a sufficient explanation of what Merton and Wylie mean by educational groupwork in the context of a contemporary curriculum for youth work. The question still remains. Why is the term educational groupwork utilised instead of the first principle of youth work, the 'process'?

Do Merton and Wylie regard them as synonymous and identical? Do they think educational groupwork sufficiently accounts for the 'process' of youth work?

If they do regard them as synonymous why the preference for the term educational group work? If they are identical why has educational group work supplanted the accepted and embedded concept of process in the principles and practices of youth work?

If Merton and Wylie do not regard educational groupwork and process as synonymous, what is additionally provided by educational groupwork which is not accounted for in 'process'? What cannot be accounted for by process which is explained more fully by educational groupwork?

## **Specificity to 'Outcomes'**

I can only assume that the terms are not regarded as synonymous and that the preference

for educational groupwork and the reason behind this preference is the following key difference. Unlike the traditional youth work process, pedagogy as educational groupwork has what I would describe as: 'specificity to outcomes', i.e. the outcomes are specifically related to the inputs. Merton and Wylie are keen to avoid the claim that they are advocating an outcome or product model of curriculum 'we consider such a mechanistic and routinised approach would be the kiss of death of youth work' (2004:65). Yet I see little within their writing, or in the Transforming Youth Work agenda, which explicitly highlights a methodology like the original process of youth work which necessarily has the outcomes as indeterminate at the outset and is open ended in its conception.

I am not saying that all youth work is indeterminate. Some of the work is very clearly outcome focused. Perhaps youth work needs to be even clearer about articulating its outcomes. Nor am I saying that the process of youth work is aimless and that youth workers do not need to be clear about the outcomes that emerge from the process. But what I see occurring in the new agenda is a wholesale emphasis on outcomes to the detriment of the process, and a formulation of a methodology in pedagogy of educational groupwork which is determinate and specific in the relationship between inputs and outcomes. In their attempts to 'tighten up' the work and make the relationship of youth work to its outcomes more distinct, Merton and Wylie have 'thrown the baby out with the bath water'.

If this is not the case, why have Merton and Wylie chosen to utilise 'Assessment' as the third part of their curriculum progression. Assessment only makes sense if it is assessing the content which has been inputted into the youth work session, and delivered through educational groupwork.

## **Process Outcomes as Indeterminate**

Process explicitly has the possibility of being indeterminate. It does not necessarily know what is going to arise out of it. It is creative and dynamic; there is a freedom to it. Brent (2004) eloquently articulates the subtle interplay of product and process, as well as how powerful outcomes arise out of the youth work process which could not have been foreseen, at the outset, in his account of 'The Arch' (2004:71)

The work starts with an idea based on a perceived need to acknowledge the death of young people connected to the centre: 'So the idea grew of converting a scrap of land outside the centre into a garden of remembrance with at its centre some kind of monument'. The idea grew and they: 'employed a sculptor with a wide brief to design and construct, with the young people, something for the garden'

The process was participative and young people become involved in the embellishment of the arch. 'The project took on its own energy'. The process of working on the arch became a vehicle for grief itself. For 'one young man, whom I had seen self-anaesthetised by drink and drugs at the funeral of his brother, ... It was the first time I think he had properly grieved'. The project took on a meaning for the young people that could not have been predicted at the outset. It became their project and their expression: 'it was young people who explained about the deaths and the purpose of the arch'.

How does one even begin to apply Merton and Wylie's description of curriculum to this piece of work. What was the 'content'? Was it the idea to produce a monument? Was it the monument itself? Was it the number of deaths associated with the centre, was it the unresolved grief? What assessments of the delivery of educational groupwork are being made? Yes, a group of young people are being worked with, but not in a crude sense of the delivery of content, the effectiveness of which will later be assessed. Perhaps most importantly, outcomes of the project emerged out of it and many, in particular the level of genuine grief that was articulated through the construction of the arch, were certainly not intended or conceived of at the outset.

The truth is the Merton and Wylie model of curriculum (2002) does not adequately explain or do justice to, both this type of youth work, or many others like it. That is because it is work which involves a process; in the example of the arch a very powerful process. The process was initiated with the idea of producing a monument and this process was followed through with some skilful intervention of youth workers.

The outcomes are not achieved with any degree of specificity to the content or the inputs. They are often not planned at all. For example, the grieving that was enabled through the production of the arch was neither as a result of the educational groupwork nor the provision of any content. It emerged out of a process, not least because of young people's own commitment to and involvement in the project.

Residential youth work also illustrates the indeterminate nature of the youth work process. It offers an invaluable and distinctive process by providing the experience of living together in a new and perhaps challenging environment. This is in itself a sufficiently good reason for undertaking youth work with a group of young people in a residential setting. The variables which the process offers between young people and workers, amongst the young people themselves and between young people and the environment provide limitless 'grist for the mill' in the process of personal and social development. Who knows what opportunities taking young people out of their own environment will 'throw up'?

One may choose to focus the learning specifically and organise the process to maximise specific learning. For example: If you want to confront the sexual stereotypes between a mixed group, you may choose to organise a programme which challenges the boys' perceptions of the girls, and emphasise the need for the boys to undertake traditionally female tasks such as washing up and cooking. Or if you are working with a group of drug users you would want to emphasise abstinence as a prerequisite and perhaps organise a programme for generating 'alternative highs'.

But should a pre requisite of undertaking a residential necessarily be that the workers' have specified an intended outcome? The workers would have relationships with the young people they are taking on the residential and will therefore know them as well as some of their agendas, and no doubt they will have tried to do some work with them before going about what they wanted to 'get out of it'. Clearly there would be an issue if the workers had no idea why they were going, but there is a wealth of difference between having a general aim and the work being purposeful and having a specific intended outcome. More importantly if a youth worker was so concerned with the achievement of pre set objectives

and intended outcomes they would miss numerous opportunities for learning which would arise spontaneously out of the process.

Perhaps the importance of the youth work process is best exemplified by looking at that often 'mis-used outcome – the growth in confidence'. How often have youth workers stated 'young people grew in confidence' as the recorded outcome of their work with young people after a particular session, as a result of undertaking an abseil, or assisting with the coffee bar, learning new skills like DJ-ing or cooking, or learning how to produce a C.V.? How authentic are these claims in relation to confidence? One could be forgiven for thinking that confidence is the kind of thing that young people are filled up with, like empty vessels with a deficit of the right substance and youth workers can quite readily give them a top up! Not that I blame youth workers, they know that what they have done has been worthwhile, but they are told they need to produce a specific outcome of each session.

Confidence and self esteem are the most elusive and complex of human characteristics. How difficult it is to have a genuinely 'grounded' level of confidence that can withstand the regular knock-backs of everyday life, never mind attempt to confront the many hardships with which young people are forced to grow up. Genuine self esteem is what young people need, a depth of belief that they have a worth that is not dependent on having the latest trainers or jeans, haircuts or shirts.

How does one instil that kind of confidence? The answer is it is very difficult. But over time engaging in a process with young people youth workers can 'be with young people' through ups and downs of their daily fortune and misfortune, pointing out the positives, supporting them through the negatives, challenging their perceptions of themselves, allowing them to see the injustices of which they are victim. Gradually, slowly 'a depth of confidence' may emerge, not one that is dependent on the support of others but one that is based on a belief in themselves.

## **The Importance of Relationships**

In my original article I argued strongly for the importance of relationships within the youth work process and that this was fundamental to both explanations of, and the effectiveness of, youth work practice. I gave what I thought were well worked examples of how the quality of relationships affects the quality of even the most pre-planned and specific of youth work settings like a drug education awareness session. These examples were dismissed 'as set up by him [Ord] as straw men to be dismissed' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:65). Merton and Wylie should refer to 'some of their own work', 'The Revised Ofsted Framework for Inspections' (Ofsted, 2001[a]) for further reasons why the centrality of relationships within conceptions of youth work should be reinstated.

Assessments of the quality of the relationships youth workers have with young people are an integral and important part of youth work. So much so, that they are an embedded part of the revised Ofsted Framework for Inspections (Ofsted, 2001 [a]). Reports on youth services will specifically and consistently make comments on the relationships youth workers have with young people as part of their assessment of the 'Quality of Education Provided',

in how they ‘...establish and sustain positive relationships with them...’ (Ofsted, 2001 [a]:8). Some recent examples include:

**Quality of Education Provided (point 2)**

*In most provision youth workers had good relationships with young people (Bradford Ofsted Report, Ofsted, 2002 [a]).*

**Quality of Education Provided (point 4)**

*Staff were caring, patient and committed to the development of young people. Their relationships with young people provided a firm basis from which they could challenge and encourage (Cornwall Ofsted Report, Ofsted, 2001 [b]).*

**Quality of Education Provided (point 4)**

*Experienced and tenacious staff, including many who work part time have, over time, developed very good relationships with young people (Manchester Ofsted Report, Ofsted, 2003).*

**Quality of Education Provided (point 3)**

*Relationships with young people were always good. Outreach and detached youth workers were particularly skilful in engaging with vulnerable young people and developing a level of trust that enabled them to offer support and guidance to those at greatest risk of social exclusion (Wirral Ofsted Report, Ofsted, 2001 [c]).*

Some reports also make reference to relationships when assessing the ‘Educational Standards Achieved’, for example in the inspection of Wirral Youth Service:

*In all projects and units, their relationships with youth workers and with each other were very good (Wirral Ofsted Report, Ofsted, 2001 [c]).*

Merton and Wylie make us aware that they ‘successfully managed the Inspectorate’s youth work team between 1985 and 1994’ (2004:1). So as former inspectors I am sure they are aware of the importance of relationships in assessing ‘quality of education provided’ by youth workers. Again this raises questions as to why relationships do not figure prominently in their recent formulations of curriculum. If relationships are sufficiently important to be identified by Ofsted as bench-marks of the quality of education, why are they not sufficiently important to be identified in their concept of curriculum?

As Smith (2003[a]) has also argued there is a move away from relationships in the conceptions of youth work within Transforming Youth Work, as ‘workers face losing “relationship” as a defining feature of their practice’ (Smith, 2003 [a]:48).

## **The process as young people’s passage ‘through’ and ‘over’ time**

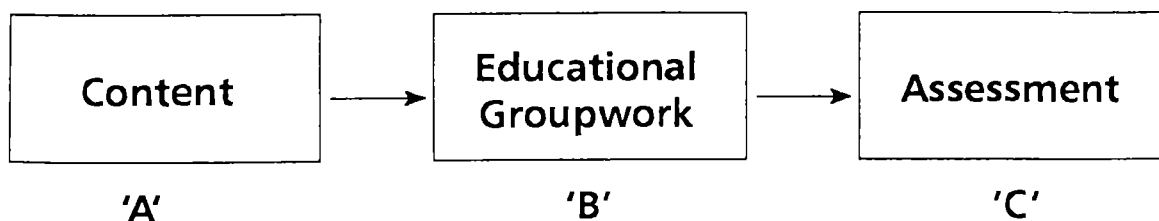
An important though often implicit and understated aspect of the youth work process which also needs to be emphasised for its lack of acknowledgement within Merton and

Wylie's notion of pedagogy of Educational Groupwork is 'time'. The youth work process necessarily takes place over time. The youth work process cannot be understood and therefore youth work itself cannot be understood without reference to a concept of time – not the time spent with youth workers in terms of the number of sessions or hours in some crude calculation; but genuine appreciation of a 'development through time'. Youth workers work with young people discovering aspects of both themselves and their past and perhaps helping them to come to terms with both who they are and where they have come from. They explore issues in the present and responding to what is relevant in their daily lives as well as helping young people formulate plans for the future. Only a concept of 'process' can account sufficiently well for this concept of personal and social development over time.

Importantly, though the quotes from Ofsted are in their own right powerful indictments of the importance and centrality of the youth work relationship, they also offer further evidence of the continuity of the youth work process over time. Relationships can only be achieved if care and commitment are demonstrated to young people, patience and tenacity are required by the workers, and a quality of support and guidance is essential. These factors underpin the formation of relationships and can only be achieved over time. Relationships are necessarily 'built over time'. Trust is hard won and easily lost. Only a concept like process can account for this dynamic.

### The Paradox of Process

Another reason why I contend that Merton and Wylie prefer educational groupwork to process would be that it enables them to have a structure of the learning which is 'linear'. Their curriculum (Merton and Wylie, 2002) equates with a notion of a specific progression. Whilst they maintain 'we do not think, as he [Ord] suggests, that we are proposing a strict application of the outcome model' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:65), I see no other way of conceiving of their curriculum. They have a starting point 'A' with the specified 'Content', through the provision of 'B' the delivery of 'Educational Groupwork', and arrive at an end point 'C' with the 'Assessment'.



The learning in youth work is generally not like this. I am not saying that it isn't ever, but importantly much of the most important learning through personal and social development isn't. This is why the process is so important. Within the notion of process, outcomes are 'emergent'; they emerge out of the process and are not necessarily related to any one particular intervention or series of interactions. Learning in personal and social development is certainly not linear. Outcomes cannot be reduced to specific inputs. In Ord (2004) I used the example of the human kindness which illustrates this point. However, as this was dismissed (erroneously I would argue) by Merton and Wylie as a 'straw man' let us



reconsider the example illustrated above of 'confidence'.

Whilst it makes sense to say a youth worker is working towards building the confidence of the young people s/he is working with, how would we apply Merton and Wylie's concept of curriculum as Content, Pedagogy of Educational Groupwork and Assessment to this legitimate youth work aim? What would the content be like? What miraculous educational groupwork session could 'produce' confidence? Yes a youth worker could do the sorts of things that are intended to 'build confidence', and over time, all things being equal, they should. But there is an important distinction. Confidence is not a tangible 'thing' which is taught. It is not produced through the subtle manipulation of group dynamics. It can't be assessed like the skill of DJ-ing.

Confidence is not a skill at all, though it often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly (Berry, M. 2001; Huskins, 2003), wrongly referred to as one. That is the problem. Confidence is a human attribute, or characteristic, not a skill. According to Ryle (1949) this would be described as a 'category mistake'; a conceptual error, based on a misconception of what it means to be a person, which belies the problem. It makes sense to say in a given situation one is feeling confident or not. One may say one is either a confident 'person' or not. One can learn to be more confident, but one does not acquire that confidence like one acquires skills. The same models or methods of teaching the acquisition of knowledge or skills cannot be applied to learning in personal and social development. The benefits of personal and social 'development', which are characteristics of a person cannot fit into a model of learning skills.

Confidence emerges out of the youth work process; it is not reducible to its inputs. Brent (2004) echoes this conception of learning in his description of 'The smile'. Kelly first attends the youth club as a 'shadowy appendage of her boyfriend. She looks miserable and unhappy, ... Gradually she gets to talk a bit... she starts confiding to one staff member' (2004:70). Kelly begins to explain her problems concerning her school, home life, eating, 'Problems for which we have no solutions.' Youth workers attempt to formally intervene to find her a flat, but this does not appear to be the real issue and it is quickly forgotten. Over time she begins 'to smile' a transformation appears to have taken place and 'she throws her self into the life of the centre'. 'There has been no product, no target met, no plan completed, yet all the evidence points to there being a profoundly important personal outcome for Kelly.' (2004:70) To what can the smile be attributed? This is the important point. It makes sense to talk of youth workers taking an interest in her well being, offering her support etc., in a broad youth work sense, within the concept of a process of engagement. It certainly does not make sense to start reducing the outcome to any one or a number of interventions.

This conception of the process is evidenced further by the recent analysis of self esteem contained in 'Self Esteem and Youth Development' (Richards, (ed.) 2003). This is a collection of papers from the seminar held at the Brathay Institute which contains analysis of, and responses, to Emler's research: 'Self Esteem: the costs and causes of low self esteem' (Emler, 2001).

Guidance is offered against the search for immediate outcomes in relation to objectives

such as self-esteem:

*When we adults attach ourselves too strongly and focus too closely on the behavioural outcomes then we fall into the trap of missing the relational opportunities offered by process work which is fundamental in enhancing self esteem (Smith, B. 2003:83)*

Likewise in relation to facilitating changes in self-esteem the importance of the relationship is highlighted:

*the major factor that enables positive change to take place is the quality of the relationship between teacher and pupil, young person and youth worker (Peel, 2003:57).*

The lack of specificity of process to its outcomes, the indeterminate relationship between what the youth worker does and the young people's learning, exemplified by the examples of 'The Smile', the analysis of 'confidence', and the recent work on self esteem, is described by Smith as 'incidental'. 'A central consideration has been the apparently incidental manner in which learning may occur in informal... situations' (Smith, 1988:127).

This indirectness of end product or outcome to the youth work process has always been seen implicitly as a problem. Smith (citing Brookfield, 1983) is quick to assure critics that the indirectness is not accidental and that the learning arises from 'much that is purposeful and deliberate' (Brookfield, 1983:12-13). The youth work and informal education field has always been defensive about this state of affairs and the educational merits implicitly have been downgraded as a result of this lack of specific relationship between input and outcome; as is evidenced by the currency of terms like 'woolly' to describe the work.

Far from being a weakness the 'indeterminedness' is a necessary condition of 'process' learning in much personal and social development. In fact as well as being indeterminate, paradoxically for the process to be successful, it is often necessary to specifically NOT focus on the end point or the desired outcome to enable its achievement.

In our example of building confidence or in the example of Kelly's smile, the focus is on 'the person', not the end point of increases in self confidence or the production of a smile (or for that matter increases in Kelly's well being). The relationship is developed, the engagement with the person is genuine, interventions and interactions purposeful and meaningful and over time outcomes emerge. Importantly it is only possible to achieve those outcomes if one doesn't focus directly on them. Clearly the interventions and interactions must be the kind of things that would ultimately support the development of those characteristics but the outcome is incidental to the process of achieving it, and it occurs specifically because one does not focus directly on its achievement.

This kind of philosophical paradox is not new. A number exist which appear to underlie the circumstances of 'being human' (or our phenomenology), which illustrate this point. For examples John Stuart Mill was the first to identify a paradox in relation to the achievement of happiness:

*But I now thought that this end [one's happiness] was only to be attained by not making*

*it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness[...] Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness along the way[...] Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so (Mill, 1909:94).*

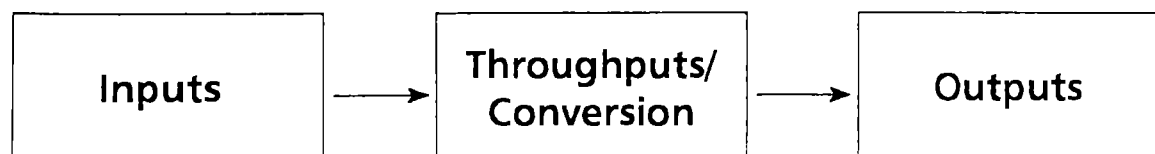
Similar paradoxes exist in relation to success, self-realisation, hedonism etc. The point is that in certain aspects of our humanity whether it be happiness, well being, success or confidence, the achievement of it arises incidentally, as a result of engaging in a process. The process is instrumental in bringing about the end point but the focus is not on the end point in its achievement.

Thus the youth work process can be seen as paradoxical; not therefore as loosely articulated and lacking in clarity, but in actually accurately describing something uniquely and necessarily human. If Brent (2004) had specifically set out to make Kelly smile, or achieve 'a profoundly important personal outcome for Kelly', it would have been impossible to achieve as focusing on that end would have derailed the process, not least because a lack of genuineness would have been apparent to Kelly.

## Curriculum as Output

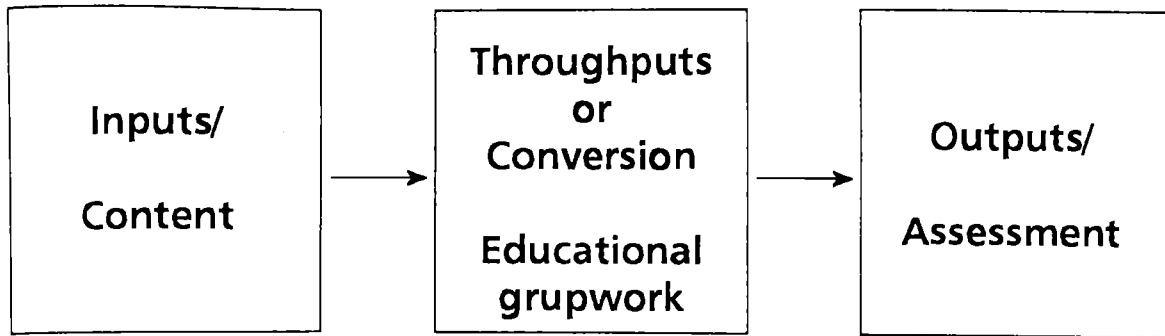
Why did this model come to be utilised as a conception of curriculum? In my article I concluded that it must have been the DfES that put pressure on the NYA, and this appeared the only plausible explanation for the change from process to product based curriculum. But clearly Merton and Wylie are adamant that this did not happen: 'this charge is close to being actionable' (2004:64). That it is solely the enterprise of the NYA, I find even more perplexing. Why should the body promoting and supporting youth work be reformulating the work and removing one of the key principles: the process. Perhaps the answer lies in a perceived need to make youth work more accountable.

There are striking similarities between Merton and Wylie's model of curriculum and the models of performance management utilised to aid accountability. For example through Systems Management Theory (Cole, 2004) which utilises a model of production, which in its simplest form can be shown as:



This theory has its origins and is embedded in the practices of private sector business management. It is a way of framing the management of production to maximise performance. That is, input of raw materials is converted through manufacturing into outputs or products for sale. It has been applied to the public sector in an attempt to improve performance and accountability; and applied specifically to youth work through the work of Ford Management Partnership (2003). Importantly it puts an emphasis on the progression of inputs through to outputs upon which accountability rests. One can quite easily see how Merton and Wylie's conception of curriculum (2002) as content, educational

groupwork and assessment is comparable to this model:



The content is inputted into the youth work session, converted through the delivery of an educational groupwork session into outcomes in terms of increased knowledge or skills, which are subsequently assessed. For example: in a sexual health awareness session, the content of knowledge and skills about how to use condoms is inputted into a groupwork session and converted into increased awareness in young people about contraception, as well as a concomitant output of a reduction in teenage pregnancies.

Interestingly in utilising 'assessment' instead of outcomes in the their curriculum, this enables Merton and Wylie, and subsequently the NYA and DfES in practice, to introduce assessments of outputs, as well as outcomes, initially in the guise of accreditation (DfES, 2002) and latterly the assessment of the amount of time a youth worker has with each young person; as 'contact'.

Merton and Wylie say they want to avoid 'some kind of Fordist production line with a fixed body of knowledge, skills and intended outcomes' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:66), but that is what their curriculum has ended up looking like. This I would contend is the real story of the youth work curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work agenda: that youth work has ended up with a model of curriculum which is not based on the educational principle of 'process', but is founded on a model of performance management. In their attempt to 'win sufficient resource from the public purse' (2004:66), they have formulated a methodology of youth work, which relates inputs more directly to outputs and outcomes, and enables greater accountability. They have not as they would claim 'put the learner – not the worker – at the centre' (2004:65), they have actually put the manager centre.

## Conclusion

Merton and Wylie are adamant that they have remained true to the core principles of youth work proclaiming that, 'Effective youth work practice is an expression of human artistry deploying both imagination and radical feeling... [it] entails nimble footwork to build on the ebb and flow of young people's interest and enthusiasm' (2004:66). They also assert that 'some of the better youth work is done "on the wing": that is improvised from the day to day situations in which youth workers and young people relate and interact' (2004:65).

Like the laudable 'Youth Work Values' the 'Local Authority Pledge to Young People' contained in Transforming Youth Work (DfES, 2002: Annex 1 and Annex 3), Merton and Wylie's commentary is not inconsistent with certain principles of youth work. However, it

should be remembered that despite these statements, based upon which Merton and Wylie would have us believe there have been no significant changes to the conception of youth work, this is not the case. What is at issue is both the 'methodology of youth work' and the methodology contained within the 'curriculum'. We now have a prescribed curriculum which does not make any reference to the process of the work.

In addition according to Merton and Wylie we now have two distinct types of youth work:

- Youth work based on Merton and Wylie's Curriculum
- Youth work 'on the wing'

This is a simplistic and erroneous distinction and does not do justice to the reality of youth work in action. For example which category would Brent's 'The Arch' (2004) fall into? Is it 'curriculum' or 'On the wing'? Answer: neither provides a sufficiently good account. That is because 'The Arch' is purposeful youth work, which has the elements of process and product embedded within it, and like a lot of good youth work it will have both planned and spontaneous interventions.

Interestingly according to the definition of curriculum (Ord 2004), which is based on the curriculum documents in use in the field, 'The Arch' is encompassed by curriculum and that is because the definition of curriculum in use is a holistic concept, a necessary condition of which is the youth work process.

It is unclear exactly what Merton and Wylie regard as youth work on the wing, but if it is seen in contrast to their curriculum it will be the less explicitly planned and targeted work. Perhaps they are utilising the notion of work 'on the wing' to avoid the criticism that they have entirely removed 'open' youth work.

We do not need a new distinction at the heart of youth work between 'curriculum youth work' and 'youth work on the wing'. All youth work is purposeful and involves a process, and the process accounts for both planned and unplanned work:

*Process: one of the strengths of youth work is a dynamic nature which allows youth workers to respond appropriately to the needs of young people through a range of planned and unplanned approaches*

(West Sussex Youth Work Curriculum, 2000:8)

And importantly where is 'youth work on the wing' in the Transforming Youth Work agenda (DfES 2002)? To divide youth work up into two specific types is a dangerous precedent. One thing is for sure, once we only have a partial, product based model of curriculum for youth work, which is based on planned content and assessed outcomes and outputs, embedded in a government document with no explicit reference to open and process based youth work, this will have significant detrimental effect on the nature of youth work in the future.

Merton and Wylie admit that 'There is a danger that any attempt to conceptualise the curricular tasks of youth work risks misrepresenting its approach...' (2004:65). Unfortunately I think in their case it is clear that this has happened.

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## Curriculum Debate: a letter to Jon Ord

Tony Jeffs

Dear Jon,  
I hope you will not be affronted by this public response to your article in the last edition of *Youth and Policy*? You will surely let me know if you are disgruntled with this rejoinder.

I was elated to receive your article. As you will have undoubtedly realised when researching your contribution this journal has been starved of articles on the topic. Academics teaching on Community and Youth Work programmes in British universities have again predictably failed to deliver when they had the opportunity to influence a crucial debate. Practitioners have, as you demonstrate, by way of contrast, been hyper-active. Devoting countless away-days, committee meetings and flip-charts to churning out oodles of curriculum documents. Merrily jumping through the required hoops. But seemingly oblivious of the need to ask if their efforts are worthwhile. Managers (or as is often the case docile consultants) have produced curriculum guidelines and the like by the score. Without one readily at hand it appears you now stand naked before Ofsted. Guaranteed to have your box ticked – failed if you haven't a youth work curriculum. Every youth worker and every youth organisation it seems must now have one. All well and good but have you tried asking a number of fairly obvious questions regarding this flurry of activity? For example what is a youth work curriculum? Or how does a curriculum differ from a programme? Or why after managing for over a century without curriculum and curricula these are all of a sudden *de rigueur*? Or has anyone a scrap of evidence to prove all these curriculum papers, guidelines, documents, directives have enhanced practice one iota? It is worth posing these sort of questions but beware. Asking them frequently generates irritation. At best it will lead to your dismissal as a curmudgeon or worse a fool. However, such enquiries never seem to elucidate a coherent response.

By now you will have guessed your article fell onto my desk like manna from heaven. Offering, as it did, a belated opportunity to kindle a debate in *Youth and Policy* on the youth work curriculum. So, I immediately sent copies to a number of people inviting a response. Obviously Bryan Merton and Tom Wylie, who you specifically take to task, had to be offered a chance to submit a rejoinder. Others were simply asked to react in any way they felt appropriate. Attached are responses from Sue Robertson and Jeremy Brent. Included in the initial trawl were two individuals working for Christian training agencies. Despite following up these requests, for whatever reason, neither replied. A pity but I did my best? Who knows perhaps someone from within that sector may, having read these commentaries, decide to pen a reaction? Hope you will now not mind me exploiting an editor's prerogative by commenting upon your article?



We definitely agree on two points. On the need for considered debate apropos the role and purpose of curricula within youth work. This response is hopefully evidence of that mutual concern. And, although we might quibble over the precise date when discussion regarding a youth work curriculum began in earnest, we are of one mind that the concept took flight following the emergence of the National Curriculum imposed on schools post-1988. That, I suspect, is about the extent of our accord. Now I would like to explain why that is so.

## Acquiring a curriculum

First, we do agree about the historical moment when curriculum became a live issue within youth work. It was occasionally discussed before 1988, much as the case for a national curriculum for schools had been (see for example White 1973; Barrow 1984). However it was not until a National Curriculum, or Code to give it its original, and more apposite, nineteenth century title, was re-introduced that people within youth work began to pay it serious attention. Certainly it would be difficult to invalidate the conclusion of Smith, written before the National Curriculum appeared, on this matter, who found that whereas the 'literature of schooling exhibited a longstanding concern with "curriculum" ... that of youth and community work has not' (1988: 137). We can debate all day as to whether the man being chased by a tiger jumped or was knocked over the cliff. Irrespective of whether the tiger reached him or not it definitely caused him to jump. Youth work's sudden affection for a curriculum was akin to that man's impulsive urge to try abseiling without a rope. You are mistaken when you paint a rosy picture of curriculum building as a 'bottom-up' 'democratic' process. Youth workers after 150 years of indifference did not suddenly awake one morning with an insatiable desire to spend valuable time busying themselves creating curricula. They saw a tiger on the horizon and decided not to hang around but to leap. Some, certainly not all, youth work managers and workers predicted that a centralising, right-wing government, determined to curb the autonomy of professionals and the 'unrestrained progressive liberalism of the 1960s' would sooner, rather than later, impose a national curriculum on youth work. Just as it had done on schools. They were possibly correct although they assumed wrongly that it would be the big bad Tories that reined them in, not, as it turned out, a centralising Labour government determined to curb the autonomy of professionals and turn back the progressive tide of the 1960s. We shall never know what would have happened if they had not opted to prematurely jump. What we do know is that the appeasers won the argument. Youth work without being coerced by legislation fell into line. It meekly adopted all the mumbo-jumbo of curriculum, evaluation, proxy-markets and performance indicators that wreaked havoc on the school system (see, for example, Griffith 2000). By the time *Transforming Youth Work*, with its targets and outcomes, hove into view to tidy things up, youth work, without being coerced by legislation, had fallen into line. By then it had incorporated not merely the need for a curriculum but also all the paraphernalia of what Leys (2001) describes as 'market-driven politics' – managerialism, an unspoken acceptance that competition is healthy, a product-driven model of education and a view of young people as customers.

The importance of all this is that consciously or unconsciously the drive to formulate a youth work curriculum, locally and nationally, has been motivated by fear. Fear of what would happen to youth work if it did not have a curriculum. Fear that youth workers would lose

status if, unlike school-teachers, they did not have a curriculum, and attendant objectives to work towards. Fear that without a curriculum youth work would lose its claim to be an educational service. Fear that without a curriculum youth workers would drift ineffectually, devoid of clarity concerning their aims. Fear that if youth workers did not manufacture their own curriculum the government would do it for them. Sadly, as Russell reminds us, nothing 'inspired by fear can further life. Hope, not fear, is the creative principle in human affairs. All that has made man great has sprung from the attempt to secure what is good, not from the struggle to avert what was thought evil' (1916: 116). A brief acquaintance with the bullet-point dominated listings and the formulaic language of youth work curriculum documents confirms these are certainly not inspired by hope. They are products of their time and sadly it shows. Cooked up to meet the expectations, assumed or real, of the inspectorate, politicians and managers – people up the chain of command.

## What is the purpose?

Second, I think I understand the rationale behind your spat with Merton and Wylie but from my perspective it all seems rather trivial. Reminiscent of the sort of doctrinal debates bedevilling the world of religion. The type of disputation that turns all believers into sectarians whilst offering endless amusement to atheistic bystanders such as myself. You see, I cannot comprehend why youth work needs a curriculum any more than a house needs wings. Advocating a curriculum for the youth service is not akin to calling for more funding, better qualified staff and a higher profile for the work. For unlike those three, that basically imply the need to improve what youth work does, the former demands a fundamental shift in the nature of the undertaking itself. A curriculum is, I maintain, inappropriate, indeed fundamentally incompatible with what historically youth work has come to represent. Wallace Stevens, the poet, once suggested that 'reality is not what it is. It consists of the many realities which it can be made into'. One sometimes feels that 'curriculum' has been made into 'many realities' and some people are busily making it into something it is not. For that reason it is helpful to go back before going forward. Etymologically curriculum is the course to be run. It has a beginning, middle and end – it clearly has an outcome. Some of the earliest usage, Hamilton (1990) tells us, was found in the Calvinist Leiden and Glasgow Universities where it embraced the concept of ordered learning. It is more than a syllabus, or 'table of headings', the contents covered by a course of teaching. A curriculum is a planned intervention. Someone, politicians, managers or teachers will determine a series of learning objectives to be pursued by the pupil. They then construct means of testing whether those objectives have been met. Finally a process is initiated where using whatever means are judged appropriate by the teacher, manager or politician the pupil is initiated into that knowledge. Wilson sums it up thus:

*The first condition of application for 'curriculum', then, is that we can use the word only where learning is in question. Second, the learning has to be planned or intentionally organised by the educators: unpredictable or chance-learning-experiences, however valuable, would not count. Third, and more importantly, the learning has to be to some degree sustained or regular, and (I would say as a sighting shot) serious ... Finally 'curriculum' involves the notion of some content which has to be mastered in stages or in some kind of order. (1977: 66-67)*

The content can be reactionary or radical, the learning tested by rigorous examination or vague questioning, attendance voluntary or compulsory. All those matters are important but they need not concern us. Even who determines the content can be set aside, for the moment. What is vital is that we recognise that a curriculum is an ordered and worked out entity. Or as Pring defined it a curriculum 'is a planned way in which we help children learn' (1989: 97). He is mistaken to specify children – for adults can follow a curriculum on a voluntary basis or because a court makes it legally binding. But the error is excusable because almost without exception the literature on curriculum focuses on schools and on children's learning. Of course it can be delivered in places other than a classroom, for example a community centre, barrack room or hillside but that is rarely the case. Why? Because the person delivering it must seek to reduce the possibility that the learners are distracted or that extraneous material intrudes into the learning environment. Also he or she will be anxious to minimise the risk that the pupils will usurp his or her control over the outcomes. Therefore the place of delivery must be a locale the teacher controls and where their selection of what is to be learnt goes unchallenged. Of course what is selected as worth learning and what is discarded as less important and left to the arena of extra-curricular activity, or informal learning, or the media is open to negotiation. However, the choice of what is core knowledge and what is peripheral is highly charged and controversial. Powerful forces battle to control the school curriculum. In England since 1988 the government has taken unto itself the ultimate power to determine what comprises the school curriculum and to a large extent the FE curriculum also.

Logically a school without a set of curriculum relating to different subjects would cease to be a school. It would simply be something else – a nursery, a children's home, a youth centre, or a warehouse for young people. Schools always have and always will have curricula. Also, conflicts will ceaselessly rage over who controls them and what they embody. Youth work has not. That is because it emerged from a different educational tradition. Neither a better nor inferior tradition but an older one for education long pre-dating schools. One based upon voluntary association, debate, dialogue and negotiation. Of course modern youth work has always had a social control component, just as schools since industrialisation have provided a place where young people could be 'dumped' to enable parents to work, the streets made safe and the unemployment figures artificially reduced. Schools as we know embody contradictions. Likewise youth work. However, youth work was always, as much as the school sector, a conduit of learning, a setting where educational experiences were offered. Youth work, from its earliest beginnings, always amounted to much more than a service to manage the leisure time of recalcitrant youth (see Jeffs and Smith, 2002).

Youth workers have never been single subject teachers, nor have they constructed curricula, except for limited and specific purposes. Rather their dominant mode of working was around the concept of the programme, a configuration of activities designed to capture the attention of young people. Activities that were worthwhile in themselves but which were fundamentally offered in order to foster association. Association with each other – this

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am talking of the genuine article, not peer instruction whereby young people are trained to offer a pre-prepared script to other young people in the hope that the message will thereby be made more palatable. Most peer-education projects sadly are really little more than a contemporary makeover of the discredited Victorian monitorial system. The participants being only 'peers' in the limited sense that they are members of the same age grouping.

offered opportunities for peer education<sup>1</sup>. Association with adults in order to offer both the adult and the young person opportunities to utilise this relationship for educational ends. Through conversation and dialogue each could potentially learn from the other. Of course it was not in every respect an equal relationship (is any?) for the adult usually possesses a greater measure of authority and power plus greater knowledge and maturity. However, unlike the relationship with their school-teacher here the young person can always walk away either because they deem the 'apprenticeship' concluded, they wish to find a better educator or they are unwilling to invest time and energy in the process of learning. Also, unlike the school setting, here young people who opt out are not punished by being denied a qualification that they are told has a 'marketable' value. All these elements have given youth work a unique character and ambience. They have set it apart from schooling and located it within a tradition of autonomous learning that reaches back unbroken to Athens and beyond.

Autonomy does not come without a price. Youth work is a 'risky' enterprise for the worker. First because without the safety net of a curriculum the young person can shape the learning experience, can demand to be taught what the youth worker is not prepared, or expecting, to teach. Second, because it is freed from the constraints of the curriculum it can, indeed often will, involve the elenctic technique of question and answer. Creating encounters that foster uncertainty and ambiguity, stimulate self-questioning for both parties. The curriculum promises a destination, this alternative *modus operandi* merely a quest. Youth work, stripped of its curriculum, offers what some universities and very few schools do, namely, as Steiner put it, an opportunity 'to teach greatly ... to awaken doubts in the pupil, to train for dissent' (2003:102). Once you recognise these exhilarating opportunities and the dangers inherent in them it becomes easy to understand why so many managers and funders fear what youth work, unbridled by a curriculum, might become. And why timid workers seek to wrap themselves in the safety blanket of a curriculum.

## Teachers or not?

This brings me to a final point of disagreement. You unambiguously proclaim that 'youth work is not teaching' (p52). This may be an oversight. You may have meant to say 'youth work is not school-teaching'. A statement I would unreservedly endorse. However, just in case it was not an understandable lapse, I wish to respond. Not least because this statement is frequently encountered in discussions with practitioners who often define themselves, in part, by saying 'I am not a teacher'. They and you are wrong. Teachers are to be found operating wherever people gather. For to teach, to be willing to pass on to others our knowledge and experience, is a component of being human. Of course if one picks up a book with *Teacher* in the title it will almost inevitably be about teaching within the context of schools, colleges or universities. It is one of the tragedies of our time that teaching is now overwhelmingly discussed, in academic and general discourse, as a paid activity trapped within classrooms located increasingly within hermetically sealed buildings. This is nonsense. Baloney that needs to be challenged not least by youth workers. Who are also teachers seeking to 'lead people out' to understanding and discernment. Youth workers consciously create and exploit opportunities for others to learn. They intervene

to teach. That does not mean they require a curriculum but it does mean they should not be ashamed of their calling. They teach in the world – wherever young people are. In the world the young people occupy, even partially control. They teach primarily through conversation and by example 'building bridges between concrete, everyday ideas and more abstract, academic concepts, they are fostering critical thinking' (Meyers, 1986: 77). Youth workers can and do act as instructors feeding young people facts and information, as and when it is required they do so, but that is not the essence of their role. They do not merely pass-on the knowledge of others to young people. Good youth workers are active agents constantly seeking to identify and problematise the experiences of young people, to teach by reflecting back those experiences to young people for scrutiny. These are not the sort of teacher Oakeshott (1972) dubbed a 'dancing master'. Rather they come closer to matching his paradigm than those serving up the curriculum pottage in our schools. For Oakeshott teaching is a wide-ranging activity wherein:

*To teach is to bring it about that, somehow, something of worth intended by a teacher is learned, understood and remembered by a learner. Thus, teaching is a variegated activity which may include hinting, suggesting, urging, coaxing, encouraging, guiding, pointing out, conversing, instructing, informing, narrating, lecturing, demonstrating, exercising, testing, examining, criticising, correcting, tutoring, drilling and so on – everything, indeed, which does not belie the engagement to impart an understanding. And learning may be looking, listening, overhearing, reading, receiving suggestions, submitting to guidance, committing to memory, asking questions, discussing, experimenting, practising, taking notes, recording, re-expressing and so on – anything which does not belie the engagement to think and to understand. (1972: 25–26)*

To observe a skilled youth worker 'operating' is to witness someone employing all the dexterity and skill outlined above. But without the sanctions legally gifted the school-teacher. Once you shed the prejudice that the only real teachers are school-teachers and look at the essence of what 'teaching' is it becomes impossible to view the youth worker as anything but a teacher. Albeit one fortunate enough to be operating beyond the classroom.

## Conclusion

Curriculum is not a neutral tool. It is not like a white board, a mere teaching aid. For it is selective. 'It defines some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as the official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day' (Apple, 1995: 91). Once the youth worker adopts a curriculum, other than in exceptional circumstances, they break with the historical mode of practice that has given them a unique place in the tapestry of education. Like the occupant of the barrel heading for Niagara Falls they find themselves buffeted and tossed every which way but always driven in a direction over which they have no control. Furthermore, as over time the curriculum is refined and the details added and foci adjusted so the potential for them and the young people to control and determine, through dialogue and negotiation, the learning experience will diminish. Like their colleagues in schools the 'experts' will determine the curriculum and the modes of delivery. Others, more powerful than themselves, will inevitably tell them why it is important what youth workers must 'teach' the young. The pressure will gradually escalate until it is irresistible. Then they will be subordinated to the roles of 'curriculum doorkeepers,

curriculum customs officers and curriculum security guards' (Hamilton, 1990:45).

The siren call to try the 'curriculum route' is potent, and will become more so during the coming months and years. For some practitioners, especially the lazy, the ill-educated, the uncultured and the nervous, the allure is very likely to prove irresistible. But it must be resisted. Because for youth workers it will become, as it has for school-teachers, a syphonism. Initially bearable, even comfortable, it will ultimately prove to be a self-inflicted punishment, a halter that obliges one to look down, never up or straight-ahead. Far better to strive to maintain whatever autonomy we have and to hold fast to our faith in dialogue, association and emancipation through self-activity. To remain true to the calling of the teacher, for as Steiner reminds us;

*there is no craft more privileged. To awaken in another human being powers, dreams beyond one's own; to induce in others a love for that which one loves; to make of one's inward present their future: that is a threefold adventure like no other. (2003: 183-184).*

All that remains is to thank you once again for the article and add a bibliography.

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# The Youth Work Curriculum

**Sue Robertson**

Writing this piece has brought back some powerful memories of the 'great curriculum debate' of the 1990s. As I have been involved in the youth service since 1979 it is inevitable that personal recollection and reflection will be involved in any discussion of the topic I undertake today. When one looks back at history it is always shaped by one's own interpretation and personal interpretations of past time are often in conflict with the official version (Steedman 1988). I hope that my thoughts can still have a general relevance.

The nature of curriculum has been argued in school teaching as much as in youth work. Lawton (1973) felt there had been a subtle change in writing about curriculum, in the past tending to emphasis the content of a teaching programme, but in 1973 much more likely to be defined in terms of the whole learning situation. It would seem that the pendulum has now swung the other way, with the transmission of specified content, 'curriculum as syllabus' and 'curriculum as outcomes' being the models in schools (Ord 2004, quoting Smith). The National Curriculum introduced by the Conservative government in 1988, ended what one primary school teacher described as the 'dead pigeon' method of teaching, that is the teacher finds a dead pigeon on the way to school and builds his lessons around it. The children discuss it, draw it, weigh it, measure it and write about it, maybe even photograph it thus learning all sorts of different things. Now lessons are planned to the hour. As a school governor I observed a lesson about shadows. The idea was to put a stick in the playground and watch the shadow move. Unfortunately it was raining, so-the children just did the drawings anyway! The teacher had programmed it in for that day and didn't want to change her lesson plan!

The development of a curriculum in youth work followed chronologically on the National Curriculum for schools; the question is whether it is a different beast. As Ord (2004) points out the youth work 'curriculum' is a relatively recent idea. There is no mention of a 'curriculum in youth work texts such as Davies and Gibson's *The Social Education of the Adolescent* (1967) or Bunt and Gargrave's (1980) *Politics of Youth Clubs*. As a new youth worker in 1979 group work was the dominant concern, especially the Button (1974) model. Programming was encouraged but initiatives such as girls' only work were not defined as a part of a 'curriculum' of youth work. The first I remember hearing about a curriculum was the notion of the 'hidden curriculum' ie, what the youth worker tries to do without telling the young people about it, (they think they are coming in to play pool while workers are trying to get them to address their drug use). This surfaced in 1986 in Cheshire's Youth Service Draft 3 Year strategy for development which also said that;

*'good practice is needs based and acknowledges that the needs of the young people are best articulated by them' but 'too much programming is demand led and likes based – The Service responds far too often to the wants rather than the expressed or unexpressed needs of young people'.*

My feeling at the time was that there was some contradiction and confusion in this section. *What price participation if I know best anyway. What she says she wants isn't really what she needs and what she thinks she needs isn't really what she wants?' I agree we need to offer more than young people might expect but if what we are really here for is building relationships, we must above all listen to what young people are saying.*

(Taken from; Response to Cheshire Youth Service Draft 3 year strategy, Sue Robertson)

I still feel that youth workers are there to listen to young people and not impose our own views of what their lives should be like.

By 1990 Curriculum must have meant something as, when I was appointed as a youth advisor in Croydon, applicants needed the following qualities; *'Understanding and experience of curriculum design and evaluation as it relates to the youth service'.*

If I had had to define curriculum then I would probably have talked about process based on the model of the Soda Glass, consisting of micro learning cycles as the bubbles, described by the Further Education Unit, which had been recently published. The FEU curriculum research project was set up by the North West Regional Youth Service Unit. They felt that;

*following the 1988 Education Reform Act, it is essential that the Youth Service is able to defend successfully its existing role and mark out clearly its contribution to work with young people within the education service and with other agencies. (Newman and Ingram 1989: vii)*

The report saw curriculum as an organic process – the offering and acceptance of learning. This does seem to imply that youth workers are deciding what young people should learn, rather than facilitating situations for them to learn from each other. When the National Curriculum for the Youth Service was proposed it was not greeted with delight by many. *The Times Educational Supplement* noted that it sounded like a 'bizarre extension of Whitehall rule, conjuring images of totalitarian regimes' (TES 8.12.89). They noted that youth workers, whom they described as the guerrillas of the education system were not noted for their readiness to take orders. This was probably one of the reasons why I went into youth work, and why I was against a national curriculum. Would youth workers still be described in that way?

Following the National Curriculum Conferences youth services developed with curriculum documents. Ord (2004) suggests that this was a *'collaborative and dynamic process involving all levels of the profession ... a "bottom up" process which has enabled ownership to be gained of the concept.* I feel this is an exaggeration. Certainly in Croydon there were clear divisions regarding the relevance and practicality of a curriculum and attendance at the curriculum working party which was set up was spasmodic. Many workers were like the one described in the *Big Red Book of the Curriculum* (Nightshift 1992) – confused and panicky.



These exercises took place all over the country and most services developed statements on curriculum which were about empowerment, equal opportunities and participation. Unfortunately, the government then wanted us to measure our work, the Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte report (1991) which followed the Ministerial Conferences was concerned with the establishment of performance indicators. There was an idea prevalent that youth work was not sufficiently recognised because it had failed to make its case. This was coupled with a feeling that if we don't get our own house in order they'll do it for us, or even, if we don't come up with the goods we'll cease to exist.

Anne Foreman, writing in 1990, felt that *'The ambivalence of some youth workers towards the term curriculum, and the lack of an agreed acceptable alternative, has kept youth work in the wings'*. In 1996, in *Quality Youth Work with Young People* Huskins set out a Curriculum Development Model. He suggested that *'Nationally, over recent years, the Youth Service, ... has failed to convince central and local government that it has a vital place in the overall educational provision for young people'* (1996: viii). The thinking seemed to be that if only we could describe what we do better then we would have had resources thrown at us. For instance, the Director of The NYA, Janet Paraskeva stated that the national curriculum would *'put the service further up the educational agenda and demonstrate the need for proper resourcing'* (Davies 1999). There had been severe cuts in local authority expenditure throughout the 80s and 90s. However, in my view, the funding cuts experienced by the youth service were not because we couldn't describe what we did, or because what we did was bad, but because the government was cutting public expenditure to the bone and the youth service, with no statutory minimum proscribed, did not even have a bone to be cut back to! From the early 1990s youth services started describing its work in ways that it thought the government and local authorities wanted to hear, ie in terms of a curriculum, learning outcomes, performance indicators and accredited achievements in the vain hope that 'they' would give us more money. This gave face-to-face workers the impression that what they did was not appreciated, and managers were often too busy devising performance indicators to visit projects or meet workers for supervision. Many youth services started appointing team leaders and senior workers to relieve managers who were so overloaded with meetings and paper work, and workers carried on feeling unappreciated while trying to get their heads round the idea of curriculum, and trying to keep the roof in the youth club from falling down due to lack of maintenance.

The introduction of a curriculum led also, I feel, to a decline in new forms of practice such as girls' work. The introduction of a curriculum came when girls' work was perhaps at its zenith. My post in Croydon started in 1990 and I had an explicit brief to develop girls' work. This development, however, found itself overtaken by imperatives of curriculum, and a move towards a service concerned with measuring and indicators. The style of youth work, which was fighting its corner nationwide, with varying degrees of success, in the 1980s, was a democratic and empowering way of working through conversation and small group work, above all emphasising the importance of the collective. What the curriculum debate was about was a more structured and monitored, individual approach, for example to record young people's involvement and document factual information about them (Williamson 1990). My main issue with the curriculum in youth work is that it has trapped us into a concentration on being 'educational' and prescribing outcomes. Youth workers do not see young people as empty jugs into which knowledge is poured. Youth work is about building

and maintaining relationships as the purpose of the work, not its by-product. The relationships that young people make with each other in a youth project are just as important as the relationship they make with a worker and it is the workers job to ensure this process. Today, this is often disregarded and everywhere youth workers describe how targets and outcomes are taking over their work. This can make it difficult to accept young people as who they are rather than who 'the government' wants them to be. While I am not denying that youth work is educational in the broadest sense, by constantly using this educational term we lay ourselves open to being asked to assess and evaluate and have learning outcomes, as the school and HE curriculums do. In fact, that is how Alan Howarth defined the curriculum he asked the youth service to formulate in 1990, 'by curriculum I mean not the aims of the youth service ... nor the detailed activities or methods of delivery but the outcomes which you as planners design your services to achieve' (Howarth 1990).

Nowadays, as Jeffs and Smith (2002) point out, schoolteachers spend a great deal of time demonstrating they have met the curriculum, keeping lesson plans etc. Jeffs and Smith feel this has meant a decline in the time teachers spend building relationships and developing extra curricular activities. This has also happened in youth work. When I was first in youth work administration this was something you fitted in round the work with young people. Many workers now seem to do the opposite. Youth workers are now asked to plan sessions in advance and accredit young peoples learning, but surely the essence of good youth work must be our ability to adapt to the situation and create learning experiences wherever we are. A youth club that sticks to delivering a drugs workshop on a Tuesday night when young people have arrived upset because they have been excluded from school, or arrived excited because they are off to a party, will soon be a club that no one goes to. The whole idea of informal education is that it is informal, and it can't always be planned. It is not the role of the youth worker to decide which of many outcomes that occur is desirable; it is rather to provide the relationship and the opportunities through which young people develop knowledge, skills and abilities. There is nothing wrong, in fact there is a great deal of good, in young people doing something because it is fun now rather than because it will bring them some credits for the future. Writing a piece for *The Times* in 1990 Anderson said that youth workers saw their main job as offering: '*a space apart for the young themselves, an area where their desires come first and where their present needs take priority over preparation for their futures*'. It seems the youth service is no longer so clear about this. We are, or should be, a voluntary service. After all, young people choose us after a hard day at school, in their leisure time. One of the problems of the service today, described by Bradford, is that there are actually several very different types of provision calling themselves 'youth work'. Bradford feels it is an ambiguous practice 'infinitely fluid, flexible and mobile' (2004: 246). The youth service curriculum tries to cover it all and it might be better to declare that some of this work isn't youth work, and let someone else have the money. There is mentoring work, work in schools, youth justice work, counselling, personal advising work to be done, but why do youth workers have to do it? The problem with the term curriculum in my view is not that Wylie and Merton (2002) have changed it but that workers got taken in by it. Somehow we thought it would make us important, like teachers! We forgot that it was our credibility with young people that was important, not our credibility with other professionals or politicians. Or can we keep both? I would argue for a return to first principles, voluntary participation, association and fun, and let those who want to teach have a curriculum.

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# The Youth Work Curriculum and the Abandonment of Informal Education

*Naomi Stanton*

Jon Ord (2004) succinctly describes the political history and development behind the youth work curriculum that has led us to the position we are in today. I agree with Ord that the curricula developed in practice thus far are often somewhat different to the product-obsessed models thrust at us by the Government and The NYA, but I would question whether any curriculum is 'healthy' for youth work. Only by succumbing to the idea of curriculum at all have we reached a point where we are expected to collate measurable outcomes. We have effectively told those in power that we are willing to compromise the informal educative values of youth work. Summing up Jeffs's response to Ord's article: we have given up without a fight, some of us have even jumped right in. In voicing frustrations about the restrictions of formal schooling in America, Nocenti (2004:42) exclaims 'You have to betray the system. . . You have to operate as a saboteur in the system'. Perhaps some of us in the field of youth work should heed such advice.

The lack of attention to informal education in Ord's original article reflects its diminishing significance in youth work. Many youth work practitioners and academics no longer consider informal education to form the value-base of our methods. Informal education had been swapped for this idea of the youth work 'process' which, as acknowledged by Ord, has not been well explained. 'Process' is linked with the notion of 'the relationship', but surely youth work is about more than just the ability to foster a relationship with a young person? It is dependence upon such ambiguous concepts that suggest the need for curriculum in the first place.

Youth workers are compromising the values underlying their practice and submitting to the Government Agenda primarily because of funding. This is why The NYA's published thoughts on the youth work curriculum have moved ever closer to those being enforced by New Labour until, as argued by Ord, they seem to have become identical. Local youth services are creating curricula as a means of measuring their success in order to please Ofsted and secure Government funding; but measurable education implies formal education. A common excuse among ground level youth workers for the acceptance of curriculum is that it enables them to justify themselves as educators. This seems an easy way out of the necessity of explaining the complexity and values of informal education as a valid educational method. Yet introducing aspects of formal education into youth work threatens its holistic core.

## What is education?

To understand the role of curriculum in education, one must first understand the term 'education'. True education, which must be distinguished from the mere acquisition of knowledge, inspires explorative thinking. Therefore to have a pre-conceived depiction for the learner's response defies it. Jeffs and Smith (1999: 12) state that 'Education is concerned with all aspects of thinking.' According to Kelly (1980):

*[E]ducation must be centrally concerned with the development of those qualities in mind that enable the individual to make critical judgements, to reach informed opinions and, in general, to think for himself . . . [F]or an act of teaching to merit the description of education the teacher must regard it as being of value and must intend that, ultimately if not initially, the pupil will see it in a similar light . . . [S]uch value shall be regarded as intrinsic to the activity and shall not be defined . . . in terms of instrumentality to some extrinsic end or purpose. If these criteria are not met, it is argued, that what is occurring may be instruction or training or socialization or even indoctrination, but it is not education. (Kelly, 1980: 8)*

Dewey (1956: 36) refers to the interpretation of education from its Latin meaning: 'The statement so frequently made that education means 'drawing out' is excellent, if we mean simply to contrast it with the process of pouring in'. It is questionable whether curriculum allows for such 'drawing out', or whether it is more concerned with the 'pouring in' of knowledge. Inflexible curricula assuming specific behavioural and emotional outcomes may restrict rather than aid education. But in educational policy the idea of education, as a measurable empirical 'science', has become increasingly popular and this is now affecting youth work.

## Models of Curriculum

Ord considers the four models of curriculum identified by Smith (1996; 2000): 'curriculum as syllabus', 'curriculum as product', 'curriculum as process', and 'curriculum as praxis'. The first two are only compatible with formal education and therefore not appropriate within youth work. The second two are more problematic in relation to the informal educational approaches of youth work.

### ***The 'Syllabus' Model***

The syllabus model or 'subject curriculum' at its most basic is the traditional form consisting of a syllabus of subjects, in which each are usually taught separately by different specialists. Smith et al (1957) summarise the criticisms of this model which 'ignores the interests and activities of the learner' (p. 245), 'fails to develop habits of effective thinking' (p.249), and is 'divorced from current and persistent social problems' (p.248). In defence it has been argued that the syllabus model provokes certain questioning and that 'children express their interests in the questions they ask' (Smith et al, 1957: 251). However it can only inspire limited questioning on certain accepted topics and such a rigid model of curriculum does not allow for such questioning to fall outside its boundaries.

### **The 'Product' Model and the Core curriculum**

The 'behavioural objectives' or 'product' curriculum model came into vogue during the 1960s and has had a long-lasting effect on curriculum theory and practice. It is this approach which inspired Nocenti's (2004:42) characterisation of the education system as 'compulsory, factory-farm-style McSchooling.' Although initiated as a movement away from the idea of 'education as content' (Kelly, 1980), it continues the obsession with content and remains restrictive in that it prescribes learning outcomes and disregards individuals. The product model assumes that the learner's reaction to education can be fully predicted beforehand:

*[It] is said [that] we need a curriculum in which detailed lists of objectives are set out. Such objectives are to be the statements of what learners are to 'think, act, and feel' as a result of a course of instruction. They must be precise, unambiguous, and measurable (Sockett, 1973: 150).*

It is debatable whether such an endeavour to dictate the learner's thought processes, actions and emotions is 'education' and whether the restricted acquisition of information is not merely a manipulation of required thoughts and actions. As Kelly (1982: 121) argues, 'the notion of an educational objective might be a contradiction in terms'.

In the 'behavioural objectives' a 'hierarchy of goals' is used to set 'intended learning outcomes' for education, starting with knowledge acquisition, ending with the ability to evaluate. A second dimension involves the different categories of behaviour to be predicted: 'the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor' (Kelly, 1982:93). Reinforcement incentives condition what are deemed to be appropriate learning responses. Such a closed rigid structure is nearer to indoctrination than to education and is therefore invalid for informal educational youth work (Kelly, 1982; Smith, 1994).

The strongest criticism of the behavioural objectives/product model relates to its reductionist explanation of human behaviour. It acknowledges neither human complexity nor the issue of values that face all people. It denotes humankind as determined, lacking in free will and analyses people 'scientifically' as if they were mere objects.

*To adopt this kind of industrial model for education is to assume that it is legitimate to mould human beings . . . according to certain clear-cut intentions without making any allowance for their own individual wishes, desires or interests (Kelly, 1982: 99).*

The idea of 'core curriculum', central to the language of curriculum in youth work, is a branch of the behavioural objectives model. The core curriculum can be manipulative or person-centred depending on its application. Early core curricula were concerned with the 'concentration' of subjects. This involved identifying certain 'central subjects' to be taught, around which fitted the 'subordinate subjects' (Smith et al, 1957). Later developments of the core curriculum became more concerned with communicating common social values, as societal problems became more apparent and 'a conception took place which visualised the school as an instrument for deliberate social reconstruction and reintegration' (Smith et al, 1957: 314). This approach is implicit within the youth work curriculum where healthy, but also socially acceptable, behaviours denoting 'citizenship' are promoted to young people.

Although it values and attempts to implement through its 'processes' key aspects of liberal democracy, the core curriculum remains distinctive from truly flexible, open forms of education because it has a structure around the social values that those in power see fit to impose. The flexible content of the core curriculum is determined by structural change rather than by the individual needs of learners. Through embracing 'common values', it disguises a lack of flexibility regarding individual specialisation. Teaching is primarily task-orientated rather than process-orientated; the presence of democracy in the curriculum is only due to it being a prioritised social value and the required outcomes are ultimately of social conformity.

### ***The Process Model***

According to Kelly (1982) the process curriculum replaces pre-specified objectives with the principles underlying education. Such principles are integral to process rather than product. Probably the earliest example of the process or 'activity' curriculum is 'The Dewey Laboratory School' founded at the end of the nineteenth century. Dewey valued experimental learning, and believed that education should not be separate from the real world. He rejected traditional education which required learners to engage in passive listening rather than action on instinct, and which conceived learners as a uniform mass rather than as individuals. Dewey promoted an educational style centred around the learner and allowed 'the introduction of more active expressive, and self-directing factors' into schooling (Dewey, 1956: 29). He fostered an 'organic connection' with experience which nurtured motivation in children to learn (Dewey, 1956: 24). Dewey's intention was to embrace the activities of children and to give them 'direction'. He favoured an educational process as an 'organic whole' where, for example, children learnt to read and write as the need arose within their developing activities. This is sympathetic with youth work values as 'Youth workers should relate to young people first and foremost as individuals' (NYB, 1991: 19).

Dewey's programme is appropriate to informal education in its emphasis on education through application to the real world, without ulterior motives beyond learners' needs. His approach cannot involve pre-planning because it focuses on the child at present. Although the values of the activity curriculum are noticeable in his theory and practice, Dewey rejected the notion of curriculum altogether for its restricting features. Applying Dewey's arguments to youth work, rather than obsessing about curriculum styles, we would question whether we need curriculum at all.

In some examples, the process curriculum has used content as a method of raising questions and enquiry (Stenhouse, 1975). This was apparent in the ideas of Josephine MacAlister Brew (1946), a pioneer of informal education and youth work, who believed that it was possible to use any subject to communicate an educational message. She considered the subject matter as a vehicle for education, deeming the topic itself irrelevant (Smith, 2001). The process model of curriculum makes it practicable to 'reconcile the idea of rational curriculum planning with that of education as a continuous lifelong process to which terminal goals cannot be attributed' (Kelly, 1982: 116).

Although this model was devised for schools, it does not fit well with formal education; it is incompatible with examination procedures for example. There are no specific learning outcomes, no emphasis on syllabus or objectives; it is 'essentially a critical model, not a marking model' (Smith, 1996; 2000). In youth work, on the other hand, a programme

of activities is often present as part of planning and content but the informality of the educative situation allows this content to be used as a vehicle rather than as the focus of education.

### ***The 'Praxis' Model***

Smith recognises potential in the process model for informal education, but proposes a more suitable fourth model that is 'a development of the process model': curriculum as praxis. Smith differentiates praxis from process curriculum as holding values of 'collective human well-being' and 'the emancipation of the human spirit'.

*The praxis model of curriculum theory and practice brings these to the centre of the process and makes an explicit commitment to emancipation. Thus action is not simply informed, it is also committed. It is praxis. (Smith 1996; 2000)*

The commitment to emancipation does not justify, rather it contradicts curricula imposing social values upon young people. For Smith, an educator utilising a curriculum approaches learning with a 'proposal for action', but

*Informal educators do not have, and do not need, this element. . . Rather, they have an idea of what makes for human well-being, and an appreciation of their overall role and strategy (Smith 1996; 2000).*

Whilst curriculum theory and practice make sense in relation to related concepts such as 'class', 'lesson', 'course', these are only appropriate to formal schooling. The impact of using such concepts on the informal educational situation is therefore, according to Smith, to formalise it:

*[W]hen informal educators take on the language of curriculum they are crossing the boundary between their chosen specialism and the domain of formal education . . . [W]e should not fall into the trap of thinking that to be educators we have to adopt curriculum theory and practice. . . Education is something more than schooling. (Smith 1996; 2000)*

It could be argued that education has been destroyed by the formal structures of the school and that informal education encompasses the true characteristics of education. The current demand for proof of effectiveness through the measurement of outcomes in both the formal and the informal setting requires us to sacrifice holistic education for a quantitative scientific approach akin to indoctrination and unworthy of the title 'education'.

## **What is informal education?**

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. Traditionally, youth work has adopted informal education as its main method of working with young people. Jeffs and Smith



(1999) define it 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. (Jefferis and Smith 1999:7).*

The use of the adjective 'informal' derives from the setting, voluntary participation, and the absence of curriculum in informal education. Insofar as it is purposeful, other major characteristics include dialogue as 'an invitation to critical thinking' (Jefferis and Smith, 1990:9). Such education should be intrinsic to everyday life experience and hence, 'informal educators work where people are' (Jefferis and Smith, 1999:6). 'Another essential of informal education is that one should use the language of the people, and be both clear and homely' (Brew, 1946:40). The nature of language used and setting created by the educator are essential in ensuring people are comfortable enough for dialogue to take place. Because informal education is non-compulsory, the educator must be an 'interesting', 'warm' and 'engaging' person that people want to learn from and with (Jefferis and Smith, 1999). These characteristics work together to create a context for informal education to take place.

## Curriculum and Informal Education

The dilemma in applying a curriculum to youth work is that it replaces informal education. If all the characteristics of informal education are to be adopted by the educator, then the use of an inflexible curriculum with a pre-determined structure is impossible. Jefferis and Smith (1990:11) state that 'A concern for staying with the developing understandings of the participants is central to informal education'. Curriculum does not allow for this. By implementing a curriculum many of the values of informal education are compromised and its true meaning lost.

Brew (1946:30) believed that 'the true educator can teach most things through one subject'. It could be argued here that a true educator could then educate around learner-defined needs through any subject, including those restricted by a curriculum. However a curriculum intrinsically forces the educator to consider ulterior objectives above and beyond those defined by the learner. Informal education should be 'natural and spontaneous' (Jefferis and Smith, 1990). Merton and Wylie (2002) argue that 'a curriculum does not preclude spontaneity: rather it helps the spontaneous, intuitive action to find its place within an overall direction' (Merton and Wylie, 2002: 7). They suggest that via curriculum, needs can be categorised into learning areas when they arise and are thus justified or 'given direction'. However, a learning need arising that does not fit into the curriculum is potentially disregarded; Because of the unexpected way a new unforeseen need can be made known to the informal educator and the immediacy with which it must be addressed, curriculum is obstructive to informal education.

*Within this style there is no fixed body of knowledge necessary to be passed on. Learning begins with that which immediately confronts the learner. It is not imposed externally through a curriculum. There is encouragement for divergent and creative thinking and a general striving for whole-person education. Emphasis is placed on discovering and learning things by experiencing them (Rosseter, 1987:53-54).*

Informal education involves experiential learning. The educator does not impart knowledge but facilitates through dialogue the learner's critical thinking in relation to their needs. A curriculum cannot be applied to natural conversation, the tool of informal education. As stated by Dewey (1956), education is concerned with 'drawing out', curriculum is concerned with putting in.

## Three Modes of Education

Education can be split into three different types: formal, informal and non-formal. Formal education is the easiest of these to define and the least ambiguous. It is that education with a structured curriculum, taking place in a formal setting where attendance is compulsory. Informal education has often been misunderstood and non-formal education is often not known. They can be defined as follows.

*[I]nformal education is the lifelong process in which people learn from everyday experience; and non-formal education is organized educational activity outside formal systems. (Jefferies and Smith, 1999:118)*

Informal education has often been mistaken as any education occurring in an informal setting but this is often actually non-formal. Informal education is a process that creates an appropriate environment for assessing and responding to the learner's needs, whereas non-formal education would be that education in an informal setting that has pre-planned content and potentially a curriculum.

*Formal education is linked with schools and training institutions; non-formal with community groups and other organizations; and informal covers what is left, e.g. interactions with friends, family and work colleagues (Jefferies and Smith, 1999:118).*

This suggests different settings for the different types of education. However it is often not as clear-cut as it might seem here; the different types of education can overlap. For example, the formal and informal can merge.

*It is difficult to make a clear distinction between informal and 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).*

Rather than justifying the use of curriculum or other contradictions in informal education, this description of the possible overlap suggests that formal education can take place in the informal setting of a youth club. If curriculum is applied to youth work, then education becomes non-formal, even formal. The current emphasis upon curriculum poses the danger of youth centres, clubs and projects becoming formal settings where, although attendance is voluntary, participation in curriculum is compulsory, education is structured, ulterior motives are present, and many of the pre-existing values of youth work are lost.

## The Youth Work Curriculum and National Agenda

The Government acknowledges the unique element of youth work in comparison with other services for young people and regards it as beneficial: 'Only the youth service has as its primary purpose the personal and social development of young people' (DfES, 2002: 6). However having recognised the potential of youth work, it then attempts to impose controls upon it, and thus undermine the essence of it.

The curriculum as described by Merton and Wylie (2002) and the DfES (2002) sets objectives or pre-determined outcomes for youth work: 'The more clearly we can specify the ends, the better we will be able to choose the means for achieving them' (DfES, 2002: 11). At least these 'ends' are to be set at local level:

*It is not appropriate to lay down nationally what constitutes a curriculum for the diversity of youth work across the country. But each local authority and national voluntary youth organisation should have a document which sets out the curriculum framework for its youth work. (DfES, 2002: 27)*

However there are requirements for content, such as 'an emphasis on promoting active citizenship and engagement with democratic and political processes'. Meanwhile, the focus on individual needs should lead on to 'reflect wider social issues' (DfES, 2002: 11). There is a strong focus on citizenship, and the acknowledged needs such as 'employability' and 'drugs and alcohol education' seem to fit nicely into it as means of eradicating anti-social behaviour and ensuring that 'every young person participates fully in society and the economy' (DfES, 2002: 3). Merton and Wylie (2002) reiterate the aims stated by the Government in 'Resourcing Excellent Youth Services' (DfES, 2002) including 'assessing progress' and 'outcomes' of youth work. Yet it could be argued that one of the values of youth work lies in its egalitarian approach of not assessing the progress of young people and thus not creating divisions by highlighting differing levels of ability and achievement.

Merton and Wylie defend the curriculum that pre-specifies learning outcomes.

*The specification of learning outcomes can provide . . . a means of explaining the processes and benefits of informal learning to young people, policy-makers and other stakeholders. A curriculum can render transparent what sometimes seems to be the invisible art of youth work. (Merton and Wylie, 2002:7)*

The argument returns to the idea that curriculum can justify the youth worker's role and hence, public funding.

But how can a curriculum justify the educational style it contradicts? Surely, there would be more credit in explaining the nature of informal education than adopting a formal educative tool to defend it. Brent (2004) argues that the introduction of scientific methods of measurement such as outcomes and performance indicators 'have robbed youth work of its ability to express and explain itself on its own terms and in its own more subtle vocabulary'.

Merton and Wylie (2004) claim that they are not proposing a 'mechanised routinised

approach' to implementing a youth work curriculum. Perhaps then they should consider why people are misinterpreting their proposals; 'Towards a Contemporary Curriculum for Youth Work' certainly comes across as valuing pre-specified objectives and rigorous assessment of the progress of young people. By acknowledging that 'some of the better youth work is done "on the wing"' and is 'improvised' (Merton and Wylie, 2002:6), they merely demonstrate that they are distracting the practitioner from such 'better youth work' with their proposed framework. You cannot put a youth worker under the influence of a curriculum that measures their effectiveness, and yet claim to value the spontaneous nature of good youth work. Such spontaneous work is destined to be disregarded by the worker seeking to meet the demands of curriculum. As Robertson (2004) recognises, the instances of incidental learning that used to be the core of youth work have become mere 'by-products' in the journey toward specific outcomes. The curriculum puts pressure on the worker to respond first and foremost to its stated priorities and not the needs of the young people. As Brent (2004) asks: 'Whose success is it, the youth worker's, or the young person's?' What exactly does the curriculum measure?

Merton and Wylie (2002) describe what they consider to be the strengths of a curriculum for youth work.

*A curriculum offers purpose, structure and focus to youth work activity where it can be lacking. It can introduce important considerations such as breadth, relevance or differentiation for individual needs and progression as young people develop (Merton and Wylie, 2002: 7)*

The problem with this is that if youth work is to remain as informal education then structure is a hindrance. All spontaneous learning needs are relevant to the young person concerned; a curriculum merely filters out the needs irrelevant to that curriculum. As far as differentiating between learning needs is concerned, a curriculum only allows prioritisation according to that curriculum. A curriculum is more controlled, more monitorable than the individual worker's discretion, but no part of the situation in which the corresponding needs arise is taken into account in differentiating between and prioritising needs. Contrary to Merton and Wylie's suggestion, informal education lacking in curriculum is concerned with young people's progression and development; it simply chooses to remain informal and accepts that certain aspects of humanity cannot be scientifically assessed through reductionist means.

It has been suggested that a youth work curriculum simply provides a testable model for educating young people in a context where '[Youth Workers] have not developed literature-based models of learning' (Newman and Ingram, 1989:26). This is incorrect. Youth work theorists have provided models of learning (e.g. Kolb's Learning Cycle, [1984]) without resorting to curricula, but these models have not been adopted as the basis for assessing the value of youth work. Newman and Ingram argue that by rejecting curricula and other structures as a reaction against more formal styles of education youth workers have isolated themselves:

*The time has gone when the Youth Service could survive by ignoring the rest of the world of education. What is important is how it responds to changes, as this will*

*determine whether the characteristics which make it unique will continue to be available to young people* (Newman and Ingram, 1989: 41).

However it is the lack of curriculum and formal structures which form a substantial part of the uniqueness, values and success of youth work as informal education. The Youth Service can certainly interact with other educational agencies, and often does so, without abandoning informal education and its refreshing uniqueness from other forms of education.

The curriculum style currently being set for youth work is not even one of the most flexible radical forms. It imposes outcomes, acting then as a means to an end. Curriculum is necessary because Government requires it, and there are simply not enough informal educators refusing submission to such policy. The only potentially appropriate curricula are the self-directed models set at ground level and moving at the learner's pace. However, all forms of curricula restrict informal education and response to spontaneous needs to some extent and ought to be more correctly categorised within the framework of non-formal education. Although the process or praxis curriculum does have some potential to allow youth work to continue functioning as informal education, such models for curriculum development actually contradict the accepted definitions. They are more concerned with direction than specific content. Many curriculum theorists opting for a more flexible style of curricula use the term 'organic' in its definition (Newman and Ingram, 1989; Hunter and Scheirer, 1988 cited in Jeffs and Smith, 1990). However there is nothing organic or natural about the imposed structure that is generally understood as curriculum. Newman and Ingram (1989: 1) acknowledge that curriculum is constantly being redefined and that 'The trend has been to widen the meaning of the word'. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for youth work to reject the notion of curriculum altogether than to redefine it: 'if curriculum is process then the word curriculum is redundant because process would do very nicely!' (Smith, 1996; 2000).

## **A Youth Work Curriculum in Practice**

In a study I recently carried out on a local authority youth service, I examined the effect of a recently implemented curriculum on young people and staff. The study involved an analysis of the curriculum document, a questionnaire survey of the views of young people and interviews with staff in one school-based unit of the service, two focus group discussions with young people using the unit, and an interview with a youth service manager.

It could be observed from the service's curriculum document that local youth services are being forced to find a compromise between informal education and the need for evidence of educational success. Thus Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (REYS) has had a major impact in the design. For example, REYS states that 'The youth work curriculum includes the totality of experiences, opportunities and challenges provided . . . through an organisation's method, structure and programme' (DfES, 2002: 27). The eight curriculum areas devised in this local authority seemed to cover all possible needs that could arise for young people. However, specified outcomes from each curriculum area are described as 'possible' in a bid to use the curriculum to support the use of informal education. As required by REYS, 'citizenship and engagement with democratic and political processes' is a key area (DfES,

2002: 11). However the aim is to implement curriculum in response to the identified needs of young people and the stated values are in line with article 12 of U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: it is intended that young people are continually involved in determining how the curriculum is implemented in each unit of the service. Some forms of accreditation are suggested in the document under the relevant curriculum areas (e.g. first aid courses) but generally this local authority curriculum is intended as part of a process and as a means of planning and reflecting on work with young people.

The service's curriculum document shares some common features with other examples and also has some differences. For example the ten areas outlined in the Torbay curriculum framework (2003) are similar to the eight areas of the curriculum under examination. However, while the possible outcomes identified by the local youth service which I studied relate just to young people's development and not to any impact on community or society, Torbay also state specific overall 'societal' outcomes. The main priority in the former is the personal development of the young person without much consideration of the benefit to society as a whole (though this may have informed some of the possible outcomes, it is not the targeted outcome itself). The development of the young people may affect their community but this is not the objective of the curriculum. This is closer to an informal educational approach where the focus is on the individual; the learner may contribute to society as a result of education but only where it stems from an identified personal need, the benefit to society is not the aim of the process.

Although the curriculum of the youth service studied seems to primarily focus on the most prevalent needs of the young people, it does have a motive to mould them into 'socially acceptable' adults, influenced by the demands of REYS for youth services to emphasise 'active citizenship' (DfES, 2002: 11). As Lawton (1975) suggested, the main purpose of curriculum is to communicate appropriate social behaviours and values down the generations. The question is, who defines these 'appropriate' behaviours and values?

From the 208 questionnaires completed by young people accessed via the school in which the youth work unit was situated, leisure activities were most desired. Least popular were youth forums, community involvement and youth achievement awards. Yet the highest priorities for youth work from the Government are participation and citizenship (e.g. youth forums and community involvement) and accreditation for young people (e.g. youth achievement awards). One of the focus groups of young people stated that they valued participation but 'don't like it that citizenship is imposed' upon them.

The main point made by the youth work manager during interview was that curriculum was needed to 'defend' a profession that had been badly justified thus far. She felt that due to some bad practice as well as an inability to explain the work, curriculum was essential now to justify the youth worker's role as an educator. It is true of any profession that the quality of its work is uneven across the field. Curriculum has been adopted in response to 'bad practice' and to guide 'good practice' in order to improve the overall quality. The manager made it clear that she values informal education and had attempted to design a curriculum that will allow it to continue. There is some potential for this as the areas cover all issues that could arise. However as acknowledged by the youth workers at ground level, 'The worker has a choice – respond to the young people then apply it to the curriculum, or act on the curriculum and attempt to apply it to young people'. A worker may feel pressured

to respond to the curriculum before the young people; they cannot ignore the fact that it is there to assess their practice.

The part-time staff interviewed in the study believed that they personally implement the curriculum only as it corresponds to young people's needs. One of the young people's focus groups supports this as they said that the areas most relevant to them were covered in the most depth. However the workers did admit to feeling some worry about how they use the curriculum. The pressure to plan more structured activity around the curriculum areas was criticised by one of the workers due to 'the unpredictability of needs'. The youth work manager stated that the curriculum should not change their work, a position adopted by the National Youth Bureau in the context of the First Ministerial Conference held at the outset of Government attempts to impose a curriculum on the Youth Service:

*[T]he task is not so much a case of 'inventing' a curriculum, but rather of examining and evaluating [youth work] practice in order to identify and state clearly its unique contribution for the future. (NYB 1990: 29)*

Although the workers in my study believed that they have not allowed the curriculum to affect their work to a great degree, they did feel it had lowered the quality of their reflection. If the 'quality of evaluation is compromised' then the curriculum is defying its intentions. By improving overall 'scientific' evaluation, individual workers are losing the quality of reflection they had from reviewing their work as a whole; instead they are subdividing it into 'boxes'. However not all units of the service were previously engaging in any written reflection, so it might be that overall having any such procedure in place is an improvement.

The eight curriculum areas do seem to encompass all the needs of young people. Those who completed the questionnaire rated all of them as approximately halfway between 'not important at all' and 'very important' on average while the young people in the focus groups found all of them important (bar one area per group). But leisure activities were the most popular provision with 78% of young people desiring day trips and 64% leisure facilities. All other suggestions for provision and activities scored less than 38% except for the 70% desiring an internet café. Holiday activities and residential trips were followed by dance, drama and sports in popularity. 86% of the suggestions made by the young people in the 'other, please state' sections of the questionnaire were strictly leisure activities.

Although recreational activities can have educational value of their own, the informal educator often uses them as a vehicle to foster an environment for informal education, where young people are comfortable and their needs can be assessed. Rather than being a separate curriculum area, such activities are the vehicle for education around all of the other areas. The REYS document states that youth work 'may use the arts or adventurous activities as vehicles for learning' (DfES, 2002: 6). Informal education is 'the process of fostering learning in life as it is lived' and 'Informal educators work where people are' (Jeffs and Smith, 1999: 6-7). Thus leisure activities enjoyed by young people are an ideal setting for informal education as they are unthreatening and part of everyday experience. They can act as relationship or rapport building exercises between the youth worker and the young people prior to informal education, or they can create the atmosphere and situation

where informal education occurs as needs arise and are addressed. Torbay Council's (2003) 'Informal Learning Activities' curriculum area is perhaps the most appropriately named.

During a recent Ofsted inspection of the service studied, a dominant question arising from the inspectors, both in focus groups with staff and on unit visitations, was that of how the youth worker knows they are effective without measurable evaluation procedures and accreditation for young people. A question in response is how can scientific controls be applied to a holistic phenomenon? They cannot. Brent (2004) states that 'Accreditation should not be confused with achievement. Better things can happen than gaining a certificate!' and reminds us that youth work is an ongoing process: 'the outcomes . . . have not ended – they will run on through those young people's lives'.

## Conclusion

The most important feature of 'curriculum' is its purpose to ensure that quality, worthwhile, and relevant education takes place. Ideally curriculum would not be necessary, but in the current political climate, curriculum has become an accepted part of most forms and methods of education. Proof is required of effectiveness of all services receiving Government funding, and by many other sources of funding. A 'curriculum' is one means of monitoring education, and serving as documented evidence. However in controlling education, it also restricts it.

Curriculum allows for outside influence, ulterior motives, and the imposition of national policy agendas; thus the learners' needs cease to be first priority. Curriculum serves as a tool for manipulation and a means to an end. It is not primarily an educational tool; it is a measurement device. Without curriculum and the predetermined definition of outcomes, education is considered unregulated and unaccountable, giving the individual educator the opportunity to manipulate unseen, to their own ends, should they choose to do so. Such a criticism is often made of informal education, but curriculum is not an appropriate answer. Curriculum was designed for use in formal education, which is specific and controlled.

The 1989 Ministerial Conference document discussing a core curriculum for youth work acknowledges that 'A significant number of young people felt a reduction in their choice of learning as a consequence of the national curriculum' (NYB, 1990: 46). It was felt, across the field, that the youth service should not impose the same restrictions. It can be argued that where a strict curriculum is enforced, education cannot take place. However, despite this criticism, rigid forms are widely used. There is potential for flexible models of curricula such as the process model to work educationally but such models have been largely abandoned within formal education. The praxis curriculum as defined by Smith (1996; 2000) has some potential for application to informal education and the youth work setting but in some senses, the use of the term 'curriculum' is hardly necessary for this approach.

Curriculum has been applied to youth work to ensure Government objectives are met. Its benefit to the youth worker is that it enables them to justify their role and status within the educational sector, something they may be constantly defending to other educational practitioners. However if a youth worker is committed to an informal educative delivery style, this would be more effectively done by explaining and justifying informal education



rather than undermining it. The values of informal education may be lost by the constant attempts to control, justify, and measure it, instead of celebrating its unique qualities from other forms of education. As curricula are increasingly applied to education of an informal nature, it is likely the values of informal education will be sacrificed, and questionable whether true education will remain.

If youth work is to continue to value informal education as its predominant method of work, then the notion of a curriculum for youth work is an oxymoron. Curriculum is restrictive whereas informal education is not. It is a high priority of informal education to reject curriculum. Youth work is becoming less about the needs of the individual and more concerned with national agenda. So the youth worker is faced with a decision: do they choose to submit to national policy and abandon informal education, and with it the rare affinity they are able to have with young people? If so, youth work will take a new form that is separate from informal education. Alternatively, do they continue to embrace informal education and fight to maintain it as a priority for youth work? Too many workers are quietly attempting to fit it around the requirements placed upon them from above. The youth worker's unique, somewhat equal, trust relationship with young people, free from ulterior motives unlike that of the teacher or the social worker, is in danger of being lost. Surely if we submit to even small compromises of our flexibility in a culture that prizes the scientifically quantifiable, more such demands will simply be imposed upon us.

Youth work has now succumbed to the pressure to adopt curriculum as an evaluation procedure thus giving Government agenda a powerful influence in its work. The purposes and some of the consequences of curriculum remain the same however mild the particular example. The Youth Service no longer has the personal needs of young people as individuals as its priority. The youth work curriculum framework imposed by the REYS document is not even one of the most flexible forms of curricula (e.g. the process model), it promotes the setting of 'specific outcomes' for our work (DfES, 2002). The only logical conclusion to be made is the stark reality that youth work is abandoning informal education as its method of work with young people. It now remains to be seen whether in our attempts to keep the funding, we will also keep the young people.

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## The Youth Work Curriculum: a response to Jon Ord

*Bryan Merton and Tom Wylie*

Jon Ord's article in Issue 83 of *Youth and Policy* has three themes. He raises a set of concerns on the use we make of the term 'curriculum' in youth work in our booklet (Merton and Wylie, 2002); he recounts some of the recent history of youth work; and he comments on The National Youth Agency's relationship with government. Our response to his article inevitably reflects our own engagement in policy development in youth work through our roles as HM Inspectors of Education, including successively managing the Inspectorate's youth work team between 1985 and 1994. This involved us in the authorship of various HMI publications including *Effective Youth Work* (DES, 1987) which set out for the first time an Inspectorate view of the educational purpose and methodology of youth work and, later; the Ofsted inspection framework for youth services (Ofsted, 1993a) which Ord praises. Our HMI roles brought us close to how the Department of Education has shaped policy towards the Youth Service over the last 25 years, including the Ministerial Conferences (1989-1992). One of us has been Chief Executive of The National Youth Agency since 1996 and hence closely involved in the development of the government's *Transforming Youth Work* agenda. We have written about some of this history elsewhere (Wylie, 2001; 2004) and do not wish to repeat in detail our version of events.

But two historical matters to which Ord refers require further comment. First, in respect of the ill-fated Ministerial Conferences on a Core Curriculum (1989 – 1992), we regard their titling as something of a distraction. The political problem that the Department of Education was facing, then as now, was the lack of a clear perception in ministerial minds of the purpose and benefits of youth work. Picking up on the then recent introduction of a National Curriculum for schools, the DES used the term 'core curriculum' as an attempt to express the goals and intended outcomes of youth work. One of us has already written elsewhere about the process they adopted:

*The attempt to produce a consensus across such a wide field of endeavour... and in a form which would be genuinely useful was doomed from the start. It was made worse by the failure to offer clarity about the meaning of the very word 'curriculum' ... The Department's great project was also handicapped by the generally hamfisted management of a series of ministerial conferences by an alliance of DfES officials and the newly-formed, and still mistrusted, NYA ... the result pleased no-one. (Wylie, 2001)*

But we agree with Ord that, whatever the Department originally sought, a deeper benefit was that 'many statutory youth services in the early 90s produced their first attempts at curriculum documents' (2004, 47). Further that the conferences enabled 'the concept of curriculum to undergo a process of gaining currency and usage in the field of youth work

... a collaborative and democratic process involving all levels of the profession ... which has enabled ownership to be gained of the concept' (ibid., 48). Indeed, it was immediately following the second of these conferences that HMI conducted and later published a survey of the youth work curriculum (Ofsted, 1993b) as conceived and applied by the youth service in England at the time, drawing on the themes contained within the service's (in?)famous Statement of Purpose.

The second key event is more recent. It concerns the government's *Transforming Youth Work* agenda and its inter-relationship with The NYA. The NYA and its predecessor body, the National Youth Bureau, has always concerned itself with curriculum matters. As Ord notes, John Ewen (NYB Director 1970–1976) wrote about it. But Ord misleadingly cites the second edition of Ewen's work: the original text was published in 1975 which shows that the term 'curriculum' was in use in youth work long before Ord is claiming. The NYA stayed with the curriculum debate down the years and was heavily involved in the Ministerial Conferences and, more recently, in the *Transforming Youth Work* process. Ord implies that The NYA is now following a line specified by government (and, indeed, in a set of ad hominem remarks, that one of us even changed his mind on curriculum as a result of an over-identification with New Labour – this charge is close to being actionable!). Ord writes:

*Close inspection of the present publications from both The NYA and the DfES gives rise to suspicion and would appear to validate concerns over the autonomy of The NYA and the relationship between The NYA and government policy. There is in fact a near identical match between the government's conception of curriculum in Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (DfES, 2002) and The NYA's chief executive Tom Wylie's conception for curriculum in Towards a Contemporary Youth Work Curriculum (Merton and Wylie, 2002) ... The change in policy at The NYA, at least by its principal advocate, Tom Wylie, coincides directly with the election of New Labour and the new agenda of Transforming Youth Work. (2004, 50-51)*

Actually, the truth is the converse of what he implies: the similarity of the texts used by the DfES and The NYA is because the DfES copied material supplied to it by The NYA, not the other way round. Indeed, large elements of the various DfES documents were generated within The NYA (the story of The NYA's policy influence has been told in more detail in (Wylie, 2004).

This brings us to the central thrust of Ord's article, his challenge to our booklet *Towards a Contemporary Curriculum for Youth Work* (2002) which is one of a series of documents published by The National Youth Agency as a contribution to national debate. We welcome Ord's thoughtful contribution to this debate. We take the view that disputes about education 'always reveal the ideological tensions occurring in a society as it struggles to come to terms with changing cultural circumstances and new economic conditions' (Carr and Harnett, 1996). What is true for societies is also true for services – especially those that serve the young. There is a political imperative for youth work continually to refresh its view of itself and present it better to others. As Ord himself says, 'adopting the concept of curriculum has enabled youth work as a profession to be clearer about what youth work is, both to itself and to the outside world' (2004, 50). Ord seems happy enough about our use of a relatively standard way of thinking about curriculum construction viz content;

pedagogy; assessment. Indeed, he seems content to go along with what we suggest should be the areas from which 'content' could usefully be derived, for example emotional literacy. He parts company, however, on 'pedagogy' even though we expressly declare (in our para 27) *'youth work deploys a pedagogy which is different to the dominant focus of teaching and learning used in school'*. We go on to assert the importance of experiential learning and educational group work and have already (in our para 19) declared:

*some of the better youth work is done 'on the wing': that is, it is improvised from the day-to-day situations in which youth workers and young people relate and interact. This is an essential tool of the youth worker's trade.*

How do such statements confirm Ord's proposition that we are *'utilising the term pedagogy to legitimise exclusively the product-based model of youth work and to avoid the concept of process'*?

He further goes on to describe some examples of youth work practice which purport to represent the result of adopting our approach: these are not drawn from our writing but are set up by him as straw figures to be knocked down. If he wants further guidance on the use we make of the term 'educational group work' we commend him to the work of Batten (1967), Button (1971), Klein (1961) and Milson (1973) who long ago influenced our own praxis as youth workers. He makes a similar assault on the notion of 'outcomes', used in this case to mean assessing what young people may have learnt over time as a result of their involvement in youth work. We do not recoil from raising these questions. We think it right to put the learner – not the worker – at the centre. And we draw attention to the need to ensure that any assessment devices are fit for purpose: *'we should resist trying to grade and measure the learning of soft skills in precise terms ...'* (our para. 43). Yes, we do think that youth work is an educational process that seeks the personal and social development of young people. But, we do not think, as he suggests, that what we *'are proposing is a strict application of the outcome model, necessitating specification of individual outcomes for each particular piece of work'* (Ord, 2004: 54). Indeed, we consider that such a mechanistic, routinised approach would be the kiss of death to youth work. We think it would be foolish for youth workers to nail down the outcomes with great specificity of detail they are after through a relationship that entails negotiation, give-and-take, and from which outcomes will emerge hopefully with the thumbprints of the young people clearly visible. But that does not mean that youth workers have no intentions in mind. That they do not enter into a programme or project without some idea of the attitudes, ideas and understanding, they expect the young people to be able to draw on in the process. (Yes, you see, we do recognise the process!). Surely one of the main purposes of youth work is to introduce young people to a broader canvas of ideas, information, imagination and intelligence from which they can choose to develop their own?

We think that youth work needs to be clearer about what constitutes its core goals and methods and we hope our little booklet helps with that. There is a danger that any attempt to conceptualise the curricular tasks of youth work risks misrepresenting its approach and how it deals with the reality of the world of the young and their everyday narratives. There can be a difficulty in connecting with these narratives – and in helping young people to move them on and not be so trapped by their own past or the contours of their local circumstances that they do not fulfil their potential. So, for the avoidance of doubt, let us

re-state briefly the core of what we believe.

Youth work is concerned with the social, personal and political development of young people. It provides this in a social, economic and educational context that does not always help the young to learn or youth work to thrive (Wylie, 2004b). We want to encourage young people to make sense of their physical, moral, social, and political worlds by, for example, recognising the very importance of context. This cannot be achieved by some kind of Fordist curriculum production line with a fixed body of knowledge, skills and intended outcomes. Effective youth work practice is an expression of human artistry deploying both imagination and radical feeling and subscribing to certain values about the learner. It also entails nimble footwork to build on the ebb and flow of young people's interests and enthusiasms.

If it is to win sufficient resource from the public purse, youth work needs to articulate its purposes and methods clearly and it cannot choose the ground on which it has to do so. We think the term 'curriculum' helps with the task of campaigning and communicating youth work's key messages and with the work itself, not least because, for educators, it carries with it such key concepts as relevance, progression and differentiation. But the term does not describe all of youth work: detached work or counselling, for example, are not curriculum. Nor should they lead to accredited learning. A relaxed, *laissez-faire* approach to its pedagogy will not serve either. Good work displays intentionality: an effective youth worker seeks to generate learning, as well as trying to seize opportunities on the wing. As the philosopher, Hannah Arendt put it:

*education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, not to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something foreseen by no-one, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing the common world. (Arendt, 1976)*

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