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# YOUTH & POLICY

**No. 114 MAY 2015**

## **PRE-ELECTION ISSUE**

**Youth Policy: Future Prospects?**

**Young People and Housing: A Review of the Present Policy and Practice Landscape**

**Young people, health and youth policy**

**Youth Crime and Youth Justice 2015–2020**

**Youth Work**

**Austerity youth policy: exploring the distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice**

**Innovation and Youth Work**

**Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times – Revisited**

**Thinking Space: The Fortified College**

**Reviews**

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## About *Youth & Policy*

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

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

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

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

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

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*Youth & Policy* Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

## Youth Policy: Future Prospects?

*Aniela Wenham*

OVER THE LAST thirty years scholars have drawn attention to how young people's lives have become more complicated, fragmented and difficult to navigate (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). While youth transitions are now recognised as non-linear and more complex, policy has predominantly focused upon transitions that are deemed problematic as a result of their association with 'poor' welfare outcomes (teenage pregnancy, NEET, homelessness). However, since the 2007-2008 financial crash and subsequent austerity measures, debates surrounding youth transitions have gained renewed prominence resulting in some commentators talking of a 'lost generation'. Research exploring indicators of economic inequality in the UK since the financial crash show how young people have been hit particularly hard. Between 2007-2013 the most striking change is the deteriorating economic position of young people (Hills et al, 2015). It is well established that social inequalities shape young people's choices and opportunities. Poignantly, the choices and opportunities available to young people are predominantly interpreted as a lack of aspiration rather than the wider structural determinants that provide a backdrop to their lives.

Economic and social policies entrench disadvantage. While concerns surrounding young people's labour market transitions have tended to focus upon youth unemployment, growing concerns have also been voiced with regards to the impact of underemployment. Commentators such as Shildrick and colleagues draw upon longitudinal biographical data to illustrate how young working class youth transitions often involve long-term churning between precarious, low quality jobs and unemployment (Shildrick et al, 2012).

Within the current climate of austerity and the decimation of youth services, young people are left with limited opportunities and little support to forge and navigate increasingly complex, and for some, increasingly marginal transitions to adulthood. What provision does exist often perpetuates the discourse that the lack of opportunity is one of individual responsibility and deals with them punitively as opposed to supportively. Within this context, social policy can also be criticized for focusing upon young people in deficit terms – concentrating on them as a problematic group with particular issues that need to be targeted and addressed through professional intervention. It is rare that the voices of young people come to the forefront of political and media commentary. When combined with a toxic public discourse that vilifies the most marginalised young people in society there is little indication of a more supportive and compassionate approach towards the most vulnerable.

This special issue seeks to stimulate a more comprehensive debate surrounding youth policy with a particular emphasis upon ‘working with young people’ via a youth work approach. (See Wylie, Mason, Jeffs, and Davies). However, by encompassing a closer examination of the key policy areas of housing, health and crime we are able to take the initial steps towards forging a broader ‘vision’ for youth policy.

The articles highlight the need to reflect upon the multiplicity of issues that impact upon young people’s lives and how these issues often interlink and overlap with one another. It is clear from the discussions in this issue of the journal that the complexities of young people’s lives require a holistic and integrative approach in response (Coles, 2000). The examples of housing, health, and crime illustrate how the policies and practices of major welfare institutions continue to influence and shape young people’s transitions. Social inequalities are built into these welfare and control systems – and an investigation into how these institutions serve to reproduce inequalities needs further analysis and discussion.

Rugg and Quilgars article focuses upon young people’s housing biographies. They illustrate how housing trajectories have become more complex and difficult to navigate, and like wider youth transitions, are best represented as non-linear, extended and precarious. The failure of housing policy to meet the needs of young people is evidenced via an overview of recent policy interventions before highlighting how short term interventions do little more than perpetuate exclusion from mainstream tenures in the medium and longer term. They draw attention to an increase in the number of young people who are likely to follow chaotic housing pathways and conclude that a fundamental re-examination of how the tenure system works for young people is required if young peoples housing needs are to be met in the future.

Coleman and Hagell’s analysis of young people and health provides a detailed overview of statistical data that paints a rather complex picture of ‘success’ (via reductions in teenage pregnancy, drinking and smoking), but also, of contemporary concerns surrounding young people’s mental health and the impact that austerity measures have had upon CAMHS in particular. They highlight examples of services and interventions that demonstrate ‘good practice’ whilst also drawing attention to areas that are likely to gain traction in the forthcoming policy arena (for instance, research on the adolescent brain, sleep and nutrition).

With regard to youth crime, Pitts undertakes a searching, evidence-based analysis of the issues that are currently pertinent and asks about the significance of these for the next five years for the new government. Pitts draws attention to how policing will have to change as a consequence of budget cuts and the subsequent wider re-structuring of public services. Here, Pitts believes we will increasingly witness policing functions offloaded to welfare agencies. He argues this can either be interpreted as the ‘criminalisation of social policy’ (Rodger, 2008) or the de-criminalisation of the consequences of social deprivation. Issues of youth crime are also the focus of Belton’s critical



assessment of the impact of the planned ‘secure (or ‘fortified) college’ for 320 young offenders in the *Thinking Space* section of the journal.

*Youth & Policy*, since its inception, has been concerned with the impact of policy upon youth work that offers a holistic approach to educational and welfare work with young people, unique in its focus upon the voluntary participation of the young. Wylie’s discussion of youth work provides a compelling account of its value, but also its displacement since the financial crash. Wylie argues that cuts in public spending have had a devastating effect on youth work resulting in making the case for investment rarely being more important or more difficult.

Mason offers an overview of policy initiatives since the 1990s, focusing upon how these have affected open access youth work. He draws upon the results of three years of ethnographic research to illustrate the practical impact of contemporary policy. In particular, his evidence highlights the tension in youth work practice created by the expectations of policy-makers and the reality of youth work in the current funding climate.

Understanding the devastating effect of years of attrition in the youth work sector, Jeffs suggests that an entirely new and comprehensive approach is needed if youth work is to survive at all. Grounding his discussion in the historical value of the work, he argues that the work needs to be refocused on the question of education for democracy, and can only succeed in the future if it is reconstructed as a secular practice of value by those who are committed to its worth in these terms. This suggests working outside the control of statutory and commercial funding regimes.

The Articles section ends with a new Manifesto for Youth Work. The first Manifesto, published in this journal, and as an independent booklet in 2005, set out what in that context appeared to be the necessary and fundamental conditions for the continuing survival of youth work as a distinctive set of practices in work with the young. In this issue, Davies reviews and rewrites the Manifesto for the contemporary situation. This new Manifesto will also be launched as an independent publication in Birmingham in April 2015 in an event supported by *Youth & Policy*, In Defence of Youth Work, and the Coalition for Independent Action.

While these articles very much stand alone, all authors provide careful reflections on the social policy needs of young people, what they consider to be the key issues for young people today and what this means for the future direction of policy. It is hoped that not only will the articles provide stimulating food for thought as we approach a key transitional phase; the juncture between the Coalition Government and the likely change in governance to take place from 2015, but also that they will inform ongoing debate and political activity which works for the benefit of young people in our society.

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

# Young People and Housing: A Review of the Present Policy and Practice Landscape

Julie Rugg  
Deborah Quilgars

## Abstract

*Young people's housing consumption is distinctive, with extended periods living in the parental home, an increasing reliance on the private rented sector and constrained access to owner occupation and social housing. This article discusses some of the recent policy and practice responses to this issue, including: shared and low-cost home ownership; high-density 'young professionals' lets; and lets through access schemes and social lettings agencies. The article finds a confused policy landscape, where interventions may be regarded as short-term, and without adequate pathways to move up and out of the housing provided. These initiatives have meant that associated policy issues, such as limited access to social housing, have been neglected. A high degree of cross-party consensus means it is likely that present patterns of housing consumption amongst young people will continue into the future. If young people's housing needs are to be met more adequately, there needs to be a more fundamental re-examination of how the tenure system works for young people in the UK.*

**Key words:** Young people, housing, tenure, policy, interventions.

IN THE UK, any discussion of housing is framed and defined by tenure difference, and the comparative supply, demand, performance, advantages and disadvantages of the three principal tenures of social housing, private renting and owner occupation. It has long been acknowledged that the meanings and values attached to tenure are socially constructed (for example, McKee, 2012; Rowlands and Gurney, 2000) and that policy relating to tenure frames housing consumption (Clapham, 2004). The consumption of housing by younger people is distinctive: a higher proportion live in the private rented sector (PRS) compared with the wider population. In part, this is explained by students residing in this sector, although the increasing proportion of younger people particularly in their later twenties and early thirties in the private sector is notable. Alongside this, increasing proportions of young people are staying in the parental home for longer than previous cohorts. These developments have predominantly been explained by problems accessing social housing and the owner occupied market (Alakeson, 2011), as well as reflecting lifestyle choice (Kenyon and Heath, 2001).

This article discusses some of the recent policy and market responses to the prevailing housing landscape for young people, and considers whether these interventions will improve the housing prospects for young people over the next five years. The responses include: shared and low-cost home ownership; high-density 'young professionals' lets; and lets through access schemes and social lettings agencies. The article will interrogate some of the discourses surrounding these policy developments, and locate points at which contradiction and tension become evident. The article asks whether these interventions are too short-term in nature; if they misconstrue the housing needs of younger people; and whether they constitute 'ersatz' tenures that lack the essential qualities of social housing or owner occupation. The article also identifies neglected gaps in present policy and assesses the likelihood of these being addressed in the next five years. The article begins with an overview of where young people are living now and recent shifts in their housing patterns.

### Young people's housing status

Within the last few years, a number of changes have taken place to the housing status of young people, and within the wider population, as can be charted by analysis of the English Housing Survey (Table 1). These changes have been in train since the early 1990s but have become more marked since the economic downturn from 2007. Overall, across all age groups, there has been a shift in tenure proportion, showing a decline in owner occupation (from 67.9 per cent in 2008/9 to 65.2 per cent in 2012/13), a less marked decline in social housing (17.8 per cent to 16.8 per cent) and an increase in the proportion of private renters (14.2 per cent to 18 per cent). The overall changes to the housing market have been the subject of a great deal of speculation, which has tended to focus on the limited supply of newly-built property to the owner occupied market; a slowing down of the mortgage market; and a decrease in the number of social housing completions. It has been calculated that, on average, working young families have to wait twelve years to save up a deposit to buy their own home, and 6.5 years for couples without children (Shelter, 2013).

It has always been the case, historically, that younger people are most strongly represented in the private rented sector. This sector is the most readily accessible, and allows for a degree of mobility that most young people require as they move away from home to study and negotiate entry to the labour market. However, it is notable that amongst this group, tenure shift in favour of private renting has been marked, particularly amongst the younger cohort. The biggest changes have been a decline in the proportion of social renters aged 16-24, by 23 per cent; the proportion of private renters aged 25-34, up by 43 per cent; and a decrease in the same age category of owner occupiers, by 37 per cent.

**Table 1: Comparison of the percentage of heads of household in a range of age groups, by tenure, 2008/9 and 2012/13, England**

Age ranges	PRS		Social renting		Owner occupation	
	2008/9	2012/13	2008/9	2012/13	2008/9	2012/13
16-24	58.1	67.7	27.5	21.1	14.4	11.2
25-34	31.0	44.6	17.5	15.8	51.5	39.5
35-44	15.6	21.4	17.2	16.9	61.7	61.8
45-54	9.4	12.0	16.5	16.1	74.1	72.0
55-64	7.0	7.2	14.0	15.8	79.0	76.9
65-74	4.2	5.1	18.3	15.8	77.5	79.0
75+	5.2	5.1	22.9	19.4	71.9	75.5
Average	14.2	18.0	17.8	16.8	67.9	65.2

Source: English Housing Survey.

The figures in Table 1 represent the housing tenure of ‘heads of households’ in England. For young people there is also what might be considered a fourth tenure, and this is residence in the parental home, irrespective of whether that house is owned or rented by the parents. Berrington and Stone calculated the proportion of young people living in the parental home, noting a marked gender difference: at the age of 20-21, 69.1 per cent of men and 55.6 per cent of young women were living with their parent(s); at the age of 25-29, this proportion had dropped to 26.9 per cent and 13.3 per cent respectively (Berrington and Stone, 2014). However, aggregating all age groups there was an increase in the proportion of younger people living in the parental home between 1998 and 2012, with that increase being more marked for younger women who have traditionally left the home earlier than their male counterparts (own analysis of data in Berrington and Stone, 2014). A recent survey (Shelter, 2014) found that less than a quarter (23 per cent) of working adults aged 20-34 living in the parental home wanted to be there, and that the lack of affordable housing was the main stated reason for still living at home.

These statistics on parental home highlight the need to acknowledge that the housing experiences of young people are not homogenous. In addition to being framed by gender, these experiences will also be mediated by ethnicity and class (Heath, 2008). It is this perhaps last issue that carries particular weight with regard to understanding the housing prospects for young people over the next five years. Wider changes in the economy and labour markets have made it harder for young people to enter, remain and progress in employment, with higher underlying proportions of young people unemployed (Tunstall *et al.*, 2012). Support from family, both financially and emotionally, has become increasingly important in accessing the more constrained and increasingly costly options. In contrast, young people with low incomes, little family support and low eligibility for social housing face the most difficulties in accessing appropriate accommodation. It was estimated that

at least 78,000-80,000 young people experienced homelessness in 2008/9 (Quilgars *et al.*, 2011); the lack of reliable data make comparison over time difficult, but there is evidence of mounting pressure on the increasingly constrained homelessness services for young people (Homeless Link, 2014). Whilst most areas of the country has some supported accommodation available for homeless young people, emergency accommodation is often unavailable or inappropriate and moving young people on from the sector is increasingly difficult with fewer social tenancies and high competition for private lets (Homeless Link, 2014).

## Housing policy interventions: confusion and conflict

The housing experiences of younger people are now increasingly discussed in terms of housing careers or pathways (Ford *et al.*, 2002; Calvert, 2010; Beer *et al.*, 2011; Clapham *et al.*, 2014). This approach seeks to model a number of trajectories that are in evidence in housing biographies, as younger people leave the parental home and seek to live independently. It is acknowledged that these pathways have become more difficult to negotiate in recent years (Clapham *et al.*, 2014), and the process of ‘leaving home’ has become increasingly non-linear and extended with young people often moving between dependence and semi-independence, including ‘boomeranging’ back to the parental home when difficulties arise (Beer *et al.*, 2011).

A number of housing policy interventions have been directed at this difficulty. However, it is clear that some pathways are viewed more favourably than others by policy makers, and housing interventions have been targeted accordingly. A long-standing cultural pre-occupation with owner occupation exists with the ‘housing ladder’ as a central trope in housing consumption, indicating that it is desirable for young people to aspire to become first-time buyers, and that some degree of state support is appropriate to enable younger households to gain a foothold on the ‘first rung’. At the same time, difficulties in the housing market post-2007 have created mortgage restrictions that have led to a growing number of young would-be owners renting privately instead. Here, the issue of young people and home ownership becomes embroiled in competing rhetoric. Recent government statements have indicated: ‘We want to help more young people achieve the dream of home ownership’ but also, ‘We want to support the private rented sector to grow, to meet continuing demand for rented homes’ (HM Government, 2011; Cameron, 2014). Consensus around the need to support continued growth of the private rented sector is strong as a tool for supporting a mobile labour force and to neutralise the UK’s vulnerability to housing market volatility (Scanlon and Kochan, 2011; Stephens, 2011).

At the same time, rhetoric has become further confused by changes in attitude towards tenure embedded within the neo-liberalisation of welfare delivery. Over time, state assistance with housing has moved from the state subsidy of social house building to personal support with rental payments delivered through the benefit system. There has been a presumption that the private rented sector can deliver ‘social housing’ through the mechanism of rental payments through housing benefits,

or – more recently – local housing allowance. Under the Localism Act, 2011, local authorities are now empowered to discharge their homelessness duty to households deemed statutorily homeless through the offer of a twelve-month private rented sector assured shorthold tenancy. Younger single people, who as ‘non-priority’ cases have largely been excluded from social housing provision as a consequence of their perceived lower level of need, are now increasingly in competition for property with ‘priority’ households that have in the past been offered a social housing tenancy. The failure to meet the housing needs of young people is predicated on a presumption that the parental home will always be available if affordable privately rented property is not available.

To date, no government has been able to offer a coherent housing policy for young people. Rather, a number of interventions have been brought forward within a rather confused housing policy context that carries multiple competing agendas including, for example, support for the house-building sector and retention of workforces. Below, the article considers a number of recent developments in housing for young people, and the likely impact of those interventions over the next five years.

## Recent housing interventions for young people

### *‘Fizzy Living’: up-market student rental?*

For a number of lobby groups, the most appropriate solution to the prospect of younger people staying longer in the private rental sector is to create a niche brand within that market that carries identifiable advantages over what might be considered a standard rental experience. ‘Fizzy Living’ is one such initiative, and was launched in February 2012 by Thames Valley Housing, a London-based housing association. For Henry Downes, inventor of the ‘Fizzy Living’ concept, ‘young people being excluded from the market is an ever-growing problem. Putting in place an affordable, well-run rental sector must be the solution’ (Downes, 2012). ‘Fizzy Living’ comprised the establishment by the housing association of a number of blocks of flats containing one – to three-bedroomed apartments. The properties have been aimed at young professionals with rents set at 40 per cent of after-tax earnings of average graduate incomes. Substantial attention was paid to branding and design, with a strong advertising campaign declaring that ‘life’s too short to put up with shonky landlords’ (Heavenly, 2015). Facilities included TV/media packages, on-site parking, in some instances gym facilities and on-site property manager. Indeed, the brand has strongly targeted aspirational living, recently developing new laundry and flat cleaning services for its ‘time-poor professionals who want the hassle of dry-cleaning eliminated’. The flats are made available on flexible lease terms, with a presumption that if young people wanted to move to larger or smaller flats within the complex as their needs changed, then transfer would be straightforward. It is clear that the concept aims to deal with a number of difficulties associated with private rental: the short-term nature of rental contracts; the uncertain probity of landlords and letting agents; high rents; and poor standards.

Thames Valley Housing has since 2012 successfully secured investment from Silver Arrow, a subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, to build new complexes. Overall, the development appears to fulfil the government objective both of ‘growing’ the private rented sector and increasing the level of institutional investment. It is notable how far the ‘Fizzy Living’ concept echoes the market for private sector halls of residence. Indeed, the *Economist* noted that ‘investors made a packet on the student housing Fizzy Living calls to mind’ (*Economist*, 2012). This comment suggests that, long term, the concept may mirror the trajectory of private sector halls of residence, where high-density build and lower management costs made for attractive returns. However, it is notable that problems with this kind of student development are beginning to emerge. As yet, no linkages have been created to the newer ‘young professional’ brands but some associated problems might be anticipated. First, the inflationary impact of higher-specification private halls on the wider student housing market has been noted (Unipol/NUS, 2012). Thames Valley Housing aimed to use profits from the development to cross-subsidise social housing and have aimed to keep ‘Fizzy Living’ rents competitive. However, if the concept proves to be viable financially, then future investors without a strongly developed social agenda are likely to push for higher rents reflecting the better amenity standards. This development may eventually have inflationary impacts on the wider rental housing market.

### *Mediated private rented sector tenancies*

It has been indicated that the private rented sector is the housing tenure for the majority of households in younger age groups. Traditionally, that usage has rested on the long-standing tradition of renting ‘digs’ as a student. The student housing market remains a substantive subsection of the PRS (Rugg *et al.*, 2002). Outside this market, landlords do not look favourably on the prospect of letting to younger people, reflecting both the restricted nature of their local housing allowance eligibility and the fact that younger people are believed to be more prone to anti-social behaviour and rent arrears. However, from the early 1990s, third sector agencies have increasingly seen use of the PRS as one way of resolving youth homelessness. This work was generally undertaken through access schemes, which helped their clients secure accommodation by actively recruiting PRS landlords, dealing with requirements for rent in advance and/or deposits, and generally supporting the tenancy. In 1996, it was found that around a third of voluntary sector access schemes then in operation had young people as their target client group (Rugg, 1996). However, those schemes have themselves had to negotiate progressive reductions in assistance for younger private renters. In the mid-1990s, housing benefit for under-25s was restricted to the level of shared accommodation, and in 2010 it was announced that the ‘shared accommodation rate’ would be extended to claimants under the age of 35.

Despite these restrictions, access work has continued to expand to encompass a number of services and approaches, and the homelessness charity Crisis has been at the forefront of co-ordinating the development of best practice (Luby *et al.*, 2012). In 2010, the Crisis Private Rented Sector Development Programme was developed with funding from Communities and Local Government



to expand the number of access schemes in operation, and to target difficult-to-help groups including younger people. Increasingly, emerging new practice has focussed on the arrangement of shared housing options and ‘peer landlord’ approaches. However, the longer-term sustainability of these approaches may be questioned, and not necessarily because of the cost of the rentals being created. Rather, these interventions require continued mediation which is increasingly difficult for third sector agencies to deliver under ‘austerity’ cuts in local social services budgets. Many of the schemes set up under the Private Rented Sector Development Programme met difficulties in securing new funding once their Programme funding had come to a close. As yet, there has been little progress in setting up ‘social lettings’ approaches, where the cost of tenancy management is met through charges to the landlord, rather than through charitable donation or statutory funding. Unless access work is better co-ordinated, services targeted at young people remain vulnerable to being pushed out of the rental market, particularly given competition from local authority homelessness teams offering incentive payments to landlords to house ‘priority’ cases.

### *Shared ownership*

First arising in the 1970s, shared ownership is now an established part-rent/part-buy hybrid ‘transitional’ tenure targeted at those unable, at the time of purchase, to fulfil their ambitions for full homeownership. Whilst this model is not solely aimed at young people, it is often marketed to young professionals as a ‘stepping stone’ to full homeownership and statistics confirm that in the period 2000-10 two thirds of new shared owners were aged 17-34 (Nanda and Parker, 2015). Whilst the last major evaluation of this model was undertaken over a decade ago (Bramley, *et al.*, 2002), available evidence suggests that shared owners derive benefits from the psychosocial qualities of being a part-owner, but that the sector offers relatively constrained opportunities to accumulate housing wealth and to either staircase up and/or out of the hybrid sector (Wallace, 2008; 2012). Furthermore, younger people are likely to be accessing shared ownership just prior to the point at which first family formation starts. Where there is uncertain ability to move into larger, family-sized accommodation, then it may be possible that young families become ‘stuck’ on this first rung, unable to move upwards (Rugg and Kellaher, 2014). Other problems include a relatively low level of satisfaction with the housing, particularly around the landlord-tenant relationship, responsibility for repairs and lack of legal security of the shared owner’s equity (Wallace, 2012). With a growing ‘affordability gap’ for homeownership, some parts of the housing sector are calling for an expansion of shared ownership to make it a fourth mainstream tenure (Orbit Group and CIH, 2014). However, some have argued that the model poorly meets the needs of young people, as it is less flexible than either renting or full ownership, so conflicting with their need to be mobile in the labour market (Kelly, 2012). It seems certain that shared ownership is unlikely to meet the needs of the majority of young people in the future.

### *Other subsidised homeownership initiatives for young people*

Aside from the predominant shared ownership model, there have a number of other types of subsidised homeownership initiatives that have been partly, or fully, aimed at supporting young

professionals into home ownership. For example, in the mid to late 2000s, the Key Worker Living Programme assisted key workers such as nurses, school teachers and police to purchase property in London, the South East and East via ‘Homebuy’ (offering equity loans) and a shared ownership scheme (and reduced rental scheme) for new build housing association properties (Battye *et al.*, 2006). However, the main aim of this policy was to ensure the attraction and retention of an efficient public sector workforce, rather than to meet the housing needs of young people more broadly (Raco, 2008).

Such schemes were extended to other home buyers and, since April 2013, the Help to Buy equity loan scheme has offered buyers a 20 per cent equity loan that can be used towards the cost of buying a new build home, allowing people to buy with a 5 per cent deposit. A mortgage guarantee part of this scheme also exists for new-build and older homes in the UK, also with a 5 per cent deposit. To date, more than 48,000 people have bought a home through the scheme with 82 per cent of scheme completions being first-time buyers and 94 per cent of completions outside of London.<sup>1</sup> There are no statistics available on the ages of the household members participating in the scheme but it is likely that a significant proportion will be young first time buyers. An extension of the scheme has also been signaled by the Coalition Government: ‘I want young people who work hard, who do the right thing, to be able to buy a home’ (David Cameron quoted by BBC News, 2014). This was followed by the announcement of a new Starter Homes scheme in December 2014. Presently out for consultation (DCLG, 2014), the scheme would involve planning changes to deliver up to 100,000 new homes at a minimum 20 per cent discount below open market value in five years. Proposals suggest that the scheme should only be available to first time buyers under the age of 40. No evaluation has been undertaken on the Help to Buy scheme, but commentators have warned that such a scheme will fuel affordability problems by overheating the mortgage market, and the initiative is more about increasing sales for developers than for meeting the housing needs of the nation (e.g. Powley, 2013; Sarling, 2014). Whilst the average house price of Help to Buy properties has been lower than the UK average, the cost is likely to remain outside the reach of most of young people in the next five years apart from those on higher and/or dual incomes. Nevertheless, the 2015 Budget continued this policy trend, announcing up to £3,000-worth of tax breaks for first-time buyers (Straus, 2015).

## Neglected policy areas

Whilst academics increasingly think in terms of housing trajectories of young people, there has been little policy focus or research on the longer-term impacts of the various housing interventions on those trajectories or pathways. The available evidence suggests that moving up and out of the housing provided through these types of interventions is not necessarily straightforward, and that some initiatives are not sustainable for young people in the longer term. There is a risk that short-term interventions aimed at younger people do little more than perpetuate exclusion from mainstream tenures in the medium and longer term.

A recent projection suggests that there will be a significant rise in the number of young people aged 18-30 living in the private rented sector to 3.7 million in 2020 from about 2.4 million in 2008 (Clapham *et al.*, 2012). If correct, policy needs to better respond to the prospects of increasing numbers of young people renting into their 30s. Delayed family formation is already an issue in the UK, and whilst the PRS does meet the needs of some young people well, it works much less well as a longer term tenure for families. The fact that social housing might well be an ideal solution for many younger households has no traction in the policy domain at present, largely as a consequence of a political disengagement with the principle of state ownership of any resource deemed to carry social benefit. Social housing is regarded as being inimical to aspiration, and is considered to be responsible for fostering economic dependence. Yet for a significant minority of young people, social housing remains their preferred tenure of destination, paid for with a protracted ‘wait’ in the private rented sector. For many of those young people, a preference for the sector rests not just in security of tenure, but also in the prospect of being able to secure work that might cover the full cost of the rent, with no recourse to housing benefit (Rugg and Kellaher, 2014).

The numbers of young people following a chaotic housing pathway is also predicted to increase up to 2020 (Rugg, 2010; Clapham *et al.*, 2012). Political parties have focussed on getting young people into owner occupation or smart rental properties but omit any acknowledgement of youth homelessness. The traditional presumption – that younger people have recourse to the parental home – has been bypassed by the introduction of the ‘spare room subsidy’, which penalises parents in social housing for keeping a room free in case their adult children may need to return (Rugg and Kellaher, 2014). At the same time, provision for young people at risk of homelessness has been cut back under austerity measures. Whilst policy has correctly focused on prevention in this area, further support is needed to develop housing first options and reduce the numbers of young people becoming stuck in expensive transitional accommodation schemes (Quilgars *et al.*, 2011).

## Conclusion

Although Labour have signalled they will look at policies impacting on ‘Generation Rent’ if elected, the outcome of the next general election is unlikely to affect future housing for young people substantively. Since New Labour, there has been cross-party consensus on the value of owner occupation, reduced political support for social housing, and a desire to see the private rented sector play a more substantive role in the housing system. Here it is argued that the early housing careers of younger people are to a large degree determined by the tenure presumptions held by policy-makers. In the last ten years, those presumptions have created an increasingly complex and confused housing landscape, fraught with internal contradiction. The interventions aiming to ameliorate the difficulties faced by young people seeking independent housing have often constituted awkward tenure hybrids, and access to mainstream tenures remains elusive. Young people see current options as ‘stifling ambition, career goals and family plans’ (Pennington, 2012). It is probable that young people will face extended and often complicated housing trajectories into

the future. Inter-generational inequalities between ‘housing poor’ young people and ‘housing rich’ elders will increase (Stephens, 2011; McKee, 2012), as will inequalities between the children of owners with equity and the children of renters with none. A fundamental re-examination of how the tenure system works for young people is required if young people’s housing needs are to be met more adequately in the future.

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## Note

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/help-to-buy-helping-first-time-buyers-onto-the-housing-ladder> accessed 26 February, 2015.

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

# Young people, health and youth policy

John Coleman and Ann Hagell

## Abstract

*In this article we review public attitudes to the health of young people. We note that too often concerns about the health of adolescents are linked with a notion of risky behaviour. We review trends in health indices, and show that there have been improvements in many aspects of adolescent health, such as teenage pregnancy, smoking and drinking. We discuss risk in the context of health, and identify factors which might contribute to risky behaviour relating to health. We outline a range of interventions that may contribute to prevention strategies. We list some 'hot' topics in the sphere of health research concerning young people, including research on the adolescent brain and on sleep. Other 'hot' topics requiring attention include nutrition and mental health. Finally we discuss measures that would lead to the improvement of young people's health, and we link these considerations to more general youth policy.*

**Key words:** Time trends, risk, intervention, prevention, health improvement.

IT IS ONLY relatively recently that young people's health has become a topic to which researchers and policy makers are paying serious attention. As West (2009:331) put it: 'Twenty years ago the health of young people barely featured on the social and health agendas of national and international institutions'. Today this situation has changed, and yet there remain serious misconceptions about adolescent health. In the first place, in spite of the fact that adolescents are the healthiest group in society it is still the case that they usually attend primary care several times a year – in fact an average of 4.5 visits for young women aged 15 to 19 (Hagell et al, 2013). In addition, studies of health inequality show that the adolescent population is very much affected by the social divisions in society. Young people living in poverty and deprivation have poor health and have particular needs in terms of service delivery (Marmot, 2010).

Another strand of discussion has to do with the fact that, broadly speaking, health indicators in Western countries have shown progress in all other age groups but less progress in the adolescent population. Viner and Barker (2005) pointed out that adolescence is the one age group where there was no discernible improvement in health between 1984 and 2004. Interestingly this may have changed in the last ten years, as we will show below. The same point, however, is made by Eckersley (2009). In reviewing health trends in Western countries, he argued that social change in these countries has led to a deterioration in the health of young people. In his view,

‘Notwithstanding the complexities and uncertainties, the totality of the evidence suggests that fundamental social, cultural, economic and environmental changes are impacting adversely on young people’s health and well-being’ (p.359).

There is also a discourse about risk-taking. Commentators who write in this vein often take a gloomy view of adolescent health. They point to substance misuse, binge drinking, suicidal behaviours, road traffic accidents, sexually transmitted infections and other so-called ‘risky behaviour’ to illustrate that the current generation of youth has no regard for healthy living. They argue that these behaviours are a drain on the health service, and call for better health education. A good example of this view can be found in the British Medical Association report on adolescent health (Nathanson, 2003).

In this article we will take a closer look at the trends in adolescent health, drawing on the most up to date statistical information. We will review the literature on risk-taking, and argue that while it is easy to stereotype this generation, the evidence does not support the view that risk-taking in the health context is an inevitable feature of adolescent development. We will consider some current ‘hot topics’ in relation to adolescent health, such as sleep, nutrition and mental health. We will look at prevention and early intervention and at health education and promotion, and finally we will outline some strategies that might be developed to enhance the health of young people.

## Recent trends in adolescent health

In spite of the fact that there is a negative tone in some of the writing we have quoted above, a surprising number of trends identified in recent data sets show an improvement rather than a deterioration in overall health (see Hagell et al, 2013). To take some examples: firstly, in the UK there has been a continuing fall in teenage conceptions since 1998. Data reporting conception rates in 2012 indicate that there has been a 41% reduction in these rates over a 14 year period (Office for National Statistics, 2014a). Secondly, there are also continuing reductions in smoking rates among young people, as well as a fall in the prevalence of drinking alcohol. Thirdly, in 2012 the rates of drinking were the lowest since 2000, with a fall of nearly 50% over this period in the 11-15 age group (HSCIC, 2014). Lastly there have also been falls in the use of illegal drugs, with 16% of adolescents reporting using illegal substances, a rate which is the lowest since 2001 (HSCIC, 2014).

Of course not all health behaviours have shown the same downward trend. In some areas where there have previously been increases, the trends appear to show a levelling off after rises in previous years. Two good examples here are obesity and chlamydia. Both these areas of health, one to do with eating behaviour and the other to do with sexually transmitted infections, have been areas of concern in recent years. Recent data, however, illustrate that the apparently remorseless upward trends have possibly been halted, at least for the present (Hagell et al, 2013).



One of the areas of greatest uncertainty as far as trends are concerned is mental health. This is partly because it is difficult to collect data on some aspects of mental ill-health, such as self-harm, and partly because the UK government has not been investing in appropriate research in order for trends to be monitored. The last large scale study of mental ill-health among adolescents in the UK was carried out in 2004 (Green et al, 2005). The one area in which we can be relatively confident about the data is that to do with suicide. The most recent data show that there was a downward trend among young men aged 15 to 24 from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. This trend has now levelled off, and there has been little change in the rate of suicide in this age group since 2005 (Office for National Statistics, 2014b).

Many of the trends outlined above are positive, yet there is no room for complacency. The actual rates of some health problems are still at a level above that of other high-income countries. One example may be drawn from the mortality statistics, which show that whilst mortality among adolescents in the UK has fallen in recent years, the reduction has not been as marked as in other similar Western countries (Viner et al, 2014). It is also noteworthy that there are substantial differences in health among different adolescent populations in the UK. There is large variation in rates of suicide, teenage conception, sexually transmitted infections and other health indicators, depending on the geographical locality of the individual adolescent. Analysis of data from the Health Survey for England has shown strong links between income inequality and general health among young people (Vallejo-Torres et al, 2014).

## Risk and health

The concept of risk is a difficult one, and it is important to distinguish between risk factors and risky behaviour (see Coleman and Hagell, 2007). Thus risky behaviour, as we have already indicated, might include unsafe sex, serious substance misuse, binge drinking and so on. Risk factors, however, have a different meaning. We have already referred to health inequalities. This term indicates that those growing up in certain environments, such as poverty and deprivation, may experience a higher level of poor health than those growing up in affluent circumstances. In this sense the environment may be a risk factor for health. Here we will first of all consider the concept of risky behaviour before discussing risk factors in adolescent health.

In any discourse on health in adolescence, it is almost inevitable that the notion of risky behaviour will be considered. Many believe that adolescents will expose themselves to risk, whether they are engaging in the use of substances, becoming sexually active for the first time, binge drinking or eating unhealthy foods. It is this belief that lies at the heart of so many of the gloomy predictions about the health of young people today. Some sociologists go even further, talking about ‘the demonization of youth’. In his article about young people, drugs and alcohol, Blackman (2009:270) states:

*It would appear that the demonization of youth in relation to intoxication ... shows youth conforming to one social type, that of the 'deviant other'. In the twenty-first century the media and popular magazines have used this 'othering' to concentrate on youth difference and to highlight youthful indulgence.*

The alternative view is that taking risks may be seen as part of a learning process. Without experiencing health behaviours that involve risk, adolescents cannot develop notions of what is safe and healthy for them. If all behaviours that have potential risks for health were to be avoided, then adolescents would not be able to learn how to manage challenges and overcome obstacles. In a thoughtful article about risk, Michaud (2006) pointed out that there is a close association between a general negative stereotype of young people, and the belief that they are likely to engage in high risk behaviours. He argued that the negative stereotype damages relationships between the generations, and that it is something we need to question at every opportunity. In fact risk behaviour in adolescence is not universal. Whilst most adolescents will experiment in one way or another with some health behaviours that could lead to risk, many do so in a responsible manner.

Behaviours such as the use of illegal substances, or early sexual experimentation can be seen as a threat to health, but they can also be seen as part of a phase of exploration. This fits with the conclusions reached by researchers such as Engels and van den Eijnden (2007), who studied alcohol use among adolescents. They pointed out that drinking has what they called a facilitating function for young people. In their view drinking helps adolescents deal with social situations and develop important social skills. Of course there are young people who take risks with their health, but they are in the minority, and of these many are likely to come from backgrounds of disadvantage or deprivation. It is for this reason that, Michaud (2006) argued, we urgently need to address the need for good quality health education among all sectors of society.

In recent years much of the discussion about risk-taking and risky behaviour has been influenced by research on the adolescent brain. This discussion has also focussed on the limitations of young people, and is very much of a piece with other deficit models of youth. Here the argument goes that during early adolescence two sites in the brain undergo especially significant development. One site is the prefrontal cortex, the location of thinking, reasoning and problem-solving. The second site is the amygdala, linked to sensation, arousal and reward-seeking. In recent years most neuroscientists have argued for a notion of 'developmental mismatch'. By this is meant that one site, the amygdala, develops faster than the other, the prefrontal cortex.

This notion is directly relevant to risk-taking, since if the area in the brain linked to reward and sensation-seeking develops faster than the area related to thinking and reasoning, then it is possible that this could be an explanation for risk-taking in adolescence (Smith et al, 2013). However it is clear that not all young people are risk-takers, and other factors apart from the brain, such as the family environment, will have an impact on behaviour. Nonetheless recent studies of the

adolescent brain have been taken as support for the view that risk-taking is an inherent feature of adolescent development.

Turning now to a consideration of *risk factors*, it will be evident that there are a large number of possible factors which will impinge on an individual's health. One way of classifying risk factors is to distinguish between those that are independent and those that are non-independent (Coleman and Hagell, 2007). Events outside the control of the individual are considered to be independent, and may include poverty, family environment, accidents, natural disasters and so on. Non-independent events are those related to an individual's own behaviour, which may include relationship problems, taking risks with health, and so on. Another approach to understanding risk factors is to categorise them into individual, family and community factors. Some of the following are examples of these categories:

- *Individual factors*: temperament, intelligence, motivation;
- *Family factors*: genetic predisposition, parental health behaviours, conflict and stress within the home, trauma such as death or divorce, sibling behaviour;
- *Community factors*: economic circumstances, quality of housing, quality of schooling, the behaviour of the peer group, neighbourhood resources, availability of sports facilities.

Clearly this is not an exhaustive list, but it does provide some indication of the sorts of risk factors affecting health that may originate from different sources.

## 'Hot' topics in adolescent health

In recent years a number of topics have come to the fore as being of special notice due either to new research becoming available, or because of increased public concern. We will select three of these for consideration here. These topics include sleep, nutrition and mental health. Let us first look at *sleep* in adolescence. The hormone melatonin has an effect on our sleep patterns. When the level of melatonin rises in the body we become drowsy, and this helps us to go to sleep at night. As many people now know, research on adolescent sleep patterns has shown that among this age group melatonin levels rise more slowly at night, whilst the circadian rhythm is also altering, thus making it more difficult for young people to get to sleep.

This finding has important implications for health. We know that young people need at least 8 hours sleep at night, but if they are going to sleep later, and waking in time to get to school, they may be suffering a sleep deficit. Studies show that sleep deficits affect both learning and behaviour. This conclusion has led schools to reconsider their start times in the morning, and it has recently been announced that the Wellcome Trust and the Education Endowment Trust are to fund 100 schools in the UK to delay start times and monitor future exam results for pupils who will be going to school later over the next five years (Education Endowment Trust website). In terms of health specifically, evidence is starting to appear showing that fatigue due to sleep deficit may also

lead to a higher level of accidents among this age group, as well as more common illnesses, stress and mental health problems (Orzech et al, 2014). It is important to note that much can be done in the home to help young people establish regular sleep patterns. Having a half hour to wind down before going to bed, turning off electronic devices, listening to soothing music and other strategies can all assist adolescents to take control of their sleep. The evidence is clear that the amount of sleep that young people are able to have, especially during the early years of adolescence, will make a difference to many aspects of health and behaviour.

The next topic to consider is that of *nutrition*. From the mid-1990s onwards there was a major public health concern about obesity in children and adolescents. However as the upward trend in obesity and overweight has begun to level out, attention has turned to dietary habits, healthy eating, the consumption of fruit and vegetables, and so on. The ‘five a day’ campaign has highlighted the fact that young people are not getting anywhere near the recommended level of consumption of fruit and vegetables. On average 11 to 18-year-old young women are eating only 2.8 portions of fruit and vegetables, whilst young men only eat 3 portions a day (Bates et al, 2012). Young people have also been shown to have low levels of daily intake of the necessary minerals, such as iron. In addition a significant number of British secondary school children report daily consumption of foods high in fat, salt and sugar. These foods are of course low in nutritional value (Zahra et al, 2013).

It should be noted, however, that nutrition in children and young people has many determinants. Food choice is to a large extent a social and cultural phenomenon. Diet will be influenced by family values, by family finances, as well as by the behaviour of the food industry. In recent years it has been recognised that schools can play a part in influencing diet, but there is a limit to the scope of this influence. Even more significant for adolescents is the fact that food choice has to do with identity. Young people use food to define difference, and this has echoes of the discourse about youth being the ‘other’ in our society. Adolescents choose foods that define them as different from adults, and in this way pizza, pot noodles, and fast foods become symbols of adolescent identity (Cote, 2009).

Despite many years of focus on *mental health* in young people, it remains one of the most pressing issues for this age group. Whilst most young people report high life satisfaction (Office for National Statistics, 2014c), mental health problems are not uncommon in this age group. According to the most recent large scale study (Green et al, 2005), around 13% of boys and 10% of girls in the 11-15 age group have emotional, behavioural or hyperactivity disorders. Half of all lifetime cases of psychiatric disorders start by the age of 14, and three quarters by the age of 24 (Kessler et al, 2005). From the young person’s point of view, the concept of health is very much tied up with questions of stress levels, anxiety and depression. From the service perspective, much attention is being paid to the introduction of new therapeutic methods, and in particular the introduction of the NHS England’s programme under the title ‘Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies’ or IAPT. Many believe

this is a positive step, whilst others, especially practitioners, have serious concerns as to the suitability of what is essentially a cognitive behaviour therapy model to all adolescent mental health problems.

In addition to all this there is a worrying reduction in funding going into the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). CAMHS has been particularly hard hit by the cuts in services over the last five years, and waiting times for a CAMHS appointment are currently longer than they have been for decades. However it is quite hard to keep track of what is happening in CAMHS at a national level. CAMHS services are not subject to mainstream comparisons and performance analysis across the NHS. There is much variability in what is on offer from one area to the next, and the thresholds for receiving treatment also vary. And CAMHS is only a small part of the story. At most the specialist services see around 1.5% of the age group or less (NHS Benchmarking Network, 2013). As we have suggested, a much higher proportion are likely to have symptoms that would benefit from intervention. This means that we need to broaden our attention to other delivery mechanisms for mental health interventions for this age group including making the best use of the services of the voluntary sector, primary care and counsellors in the education setting.

It is perhaps worth noting that, in considering the possible stresses and challenges facing young people today, many commentators see the digital world and the pressures of social media as being an important contributor to increased mental health problems. Issues such as cyber-bullying, as well as the constant demands involved in messaging and sharing images and content on-line may possibly lead to higher levels of stress or other disorders. Yet as researchers such as Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2014) indicate, there are numerous advantages and opportunities provided by the internet. It is important to retain a balanced view of the impact of new technologies on young people, and there is as yet no clear evidence that links rates of emotional disorder with the challenges of the digital world. In addition to the digital world, other suggested explanations for changing rates of mental health problems have included increasing experience of examination stress and the insecurities that have come with the collapse of the youth labour market (Hagell, 2012). However, at the time of writing we lack good trend data on young people's mental health problems over the last 10 years so it is not quite clear what we are trying to explain.

## Prevention and intervention

One way to bring together thinking about risk factors and health is to consider how to approach the problem of prevention and intervention. For a variety of reasons the adolescent stage is a critical time for intervention. A major process of maturation is occurring at this time, and a wide range of behaviours are in the process of becoming embedded which will have significant implications for health. Before we commence this section it is important to note that prevention and intervention do not necessarily mean the same. Some universal interventions might be given to a whole population, with the intention of preventing future health problems. On the other hand some interventions may be put in place as a form of treatment where prevention is no longer possible.

Although the phrase ‘early intervention’ tends to be used to refer to programmes aimed at young children, in fact it is important to recognise that interventions in adolescence are especially important at this stage, particularly where health is concerned. What are the reasons for this? This is primarily because many of the potential threats to physical health emerge during this stage. Thus smoking and drinking are likely to occur for the first time, as are early sexual experiences. Patterns of exercise and diet become established during the adolescent phase, and it seems likely that the individual’s set of attitudes and beliefs about health develop as part of wider identity formation. In addition to the threats to physical health, we know that many mental illnesses emerge during adolescence. Young people move through a sensitive period, with rapid brain development and newly manifesting genetic factors which influence health and illness. Rates of depression rise markedly as young people enter adolescence (Maughan et al, 2013), and other mental illnesses such as psychosis, obsessive compulsive disorder and suicidal behaviour begin to appear at this stage of life.

Due to the special characteristics of adolescence there are particular levers for health interventions that can be utilised at this time, increasing the potential for effectiveness. These levers include behavioural flexibility because health habits and attitudes are not yet fully formed, the possible role of the family, both parents and siblings, as mentors and agents of change, and lastly the key role of the peer group as a source of norms and influence. Furthermore there is the potential role of the educational context, whether school or college, as a context for health education. It is to this that we now turn.

It will only be possible in this article to highlight a few examples of interventions relevant to young people’s health. The first illustration of such an approach is a school-based programme aimed at smoking reduction. Smokers who start before the age of 16 are twice as likely to go on to be adult smokers as those starting after 16, and as a result these early smokers represent an important target for health promotion. One prevention programme which has been successful is the ASSIST programme (A Stop Smoking in Schools Trial) (Campbell et al, 2008). This is a peer-led intervention aimed at preventing smoking uptake in secondary schools. Influential students are trained to act as peer supporters during informal interactions outside the classroom. Results have shown a 22% reduction of the likelihood of being a regular smoker in an intervention school compared with a control school. If this were to be implemented on a wider scale across many schools it could lead to a significant reduction in adolescent smoking. It is especially interesting as it illustrates what we said earlier about the levers available at this life stage. It deliberately sought to exploit the school context as well as informal channels of information exchange and peer influence outside the classroom.

An illustration of a different approach to intervention is the use of Motivational Interviewing to address alcohol or substance misuse, or violent behaviour. Motivational Interviewing usually consists of relatively brief sessions that do not attempt to pass on information or teach skills.

Rather the sessions explore and reinforce the young person's intrinsic motivation towards more healthy behaviour. Motivational Interviewing has a strong focus on autonomous decision-making, thus facilitating the adolescent's need for increasing independence. The sessions emphasise the importance of young people being able to make decisions for themselves, thus it is a good fit for the maturing adolescent as it is non-judgemental, empathic and collaborative.

It is a short intervention, usually consisting of one to three sessions, and can be delivered in different modalities, either in individual sessions, in a group or on the telephone. There are now in excess of 80 randomised control trials indicating effectiveness, particularly for substance misuse. It has been tested in a variety of different localities including primary care, education and youth work settings. It works well in situations where young people attend for a different reason, as for example in hospital Accident and Emergency departments (Barnett et al, 2012).

As a third example we will consider school-based resilience programmes. One of the most well-known of these is the Penn Resilience Programme (PRP). This is a programme that was developed in the USA by Seligman (1996), but was imported into the UK in the mid-2000s. It consists of sessions usually spread over two school terms and it is delivered by trained facilitators. The PRP is based on a combination of cognitive behaviour therapy and social problem-solving skills. It includes sessions on assertiveness, negotiation, decision-making and relaxation. Lessons use role play, short stories and discussions to develop skills. It has been used widely in UK secondary schools, and the programme has been subjected to a large number of randomised control trials, indicating that it is successful in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. In 2009 three UK local authorities signed up to its use, and the evaluation showed that, in schools where the PRP had been fully implemented, there was significant short-term improvement in depression symptom scores, school attendance rates and English attainment (Challen et al., 2011).

These three examples are indicative of the types of early intervention that are possible with this age group. They have all been subject to the most rigorous level of evaluation, namely the use of randomised control trials. Of course there are numerous interventions that may have some impact on health that do not reach this level of evaluation. The examples that we have chosen show that it is possible to make a difference to health behaviours at the adolescent stage, and interventions such as these should be part of any health improvement programme for this age group. We will now turn to some other possible strategies to influence health behaviours and enhance the health of this age group.

## Improving the health of young people

In the previous section we have looked at prevention and intervention, and it is now time to turn to other facets of health improvement. One key element here is the way in which health is perceived by the different generations. High on the agenda of most adults when thinking about young people's

health will be smoking, drinking and drugs. However these are not the most pressing health issues for young people. For this age group issues such as appearance, nutrition, sports injuries, sexual and social relationships, and emotional well-being are likely to be of more concern. This fact has to be taken into account when planning health education programmes.

A strong theme which emerges from research into young people's attitudes is their desire to be able to act autonomously and have control over their own personal decision-making. Adolescents usually wish to make their own minds up about health behaviour after obtaining reliable information. The needs of young people in relation to their health can thus be summarised as follows:

- A chance to discuss implications freely without foregone conclusions.
- Information based on the context of their lives.
- Tailored resources for different genders and different ages.
- Up-to-date, relevant and non-judgemental information.

The fact that young people have their own views about health, and that in most cases they wish to be able to have control over decisions relating to their health has to be taken seriously when adults are planning health education or organising services. Far too often it is the case that adults decide what is best, forgetting that young people are service users whose needs may not necessarily be the same as those of adults.

These points link closely with considerations about the type of services that are best suited to the needs of young people. For ten years or so the Department of Health in London has promoted a set of criteria, known as the 'You're Welcome' quality standards. These standards were at first applied to primary care, but have now been extended to hospital care as well. The standards of 'You're Welcome' include:

**Accessibility.** A service should be available outside school hours, should be accessible by public transport, and it should be possible for a young person to make an appointment without the involvement of an adult.

**Confidentiality.** It is essential that professionals understand the importance of confidentiality for young people, and that services make their confidentiality policy clear to their adolescent patients. Young people, including those under the age of 16, have the right to a confidential service.

**The environment.** Waiting rooms and other public spaces should be welcoming to young people, and should provide useful and age-appropriate information.

**Staff training.** All medical staff should have basic training in communication with young people, and ideally should have some introduction to adolescent development.



***Involvement of young people.*** Health professionals should get feedback from young people about services and about their suitability for this age group. If at all possible the views of young people should be taken into account in any practice developments.

While these criteria will facilitate more youth-friendly services, it is essential to understand young people's health against the background of the wider social influences on their behaviour. Most importantly young people need to be provided with the information and support which will enable them to face challenges and choices in relation to their health. Of course information alone is not sufficient, since knowing about the consequences of a particular behaviour will not necessarily lead to appropriate actions. Adolescents may well have good information about nutrition without engaging in healthy eating, just as they may know about safe sex but not be able to make use of that knowledge when it becomes directly relevant to behaviour. Most commentators take the view that social context is almost certainly the most important influence on health behaviours in adolescence. It is important therefore to understand the meanings young people themselves attach to their behaviours, as well as to acknowledge that young people, very much like adults, may well act in a contradictory fashion when it comes to health behaviour.

## **Conclusion – health and youth policy**

To conclude this article we will consider how the topics covered are relevant to youth policy. In the first place there is the question of negative stereotyping, or the 'demonization' of youth. As we have seen this has a profound influence on how adolescent health is understood by the adult world. It also has a critical influence on how services are organised and delivered. It is essential that commentators, policy makers and practitioners seek to address the negative stereotype whenever possible, and ensure in their work that the stereotype is challenged so that a positive, strengths-based approach can be taken at all times.

Our second point has to do with the voice of the young person. In this article we have highlighted examples of interventions and services where the adolescent point of view is taken into account. This may be where young people are asked about service delivery, or where they are given an opportunity to state what they want from treatment rather than have an adult view thrust upon them. All the evidence shows that the more young people can be given a voice in health matters, the more they will engage with health and the more likely they are to pursue a healthy lifestyle. As an example of this approach the National Youth Agency developed a programme called 'Hear By Right' (Badham and Wade, 2005). This programme challenged adult-led organisations in the health field to ask themselves to what extent they were listening to young people in their work.

The point about youth voice has clear links to notions of participation and empowerment. The more young people believe that their voice is being heard, the more empowered they will feel. However, as Mackinnon (2007) points out, young people can participate without feeling empowered, and

indeed they can be allowed to speak without anyone taking any notice of what they say. For this reason it is as much the quality and intention of the involvement of young people that makes the difference, rather than the formal arrangement established by the adults involved. There are many types of participation, ranging from the tokenistic to the fully engaged and involved, as has been well rehearsed in discussions about Hart's Ladder of Participation. It goes without saying that the greater the degree of genuine participation, the better it will be for the health of young people.

Finally it is worth underlining the importance of differentiating the needs of young people from the needs of children. All too often in the field of health, children and young people are seen as one group. Services are planned for and delivered to one group, and health data are very often collected in one age group, as for example 5-19, or 0-15. We cannot emphasise too strongly the necessity of understanding and recognising that adolescents have a range of different needs when it comes to health service provision. As we have pointed out, this stage is a time of gradually increasing autonomy, when it is essential that young people start to take responsibility for their own health. Adult professionals must be trained to recognise that adolescence is a stage, and that it has particular characteristics that should inform health services, health interventions and health promotion. To achieve this would represent a significant step towards better health provision for all young people.

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

# Youth Crime and Youth Justice 2015–2020

John Pitts

## Abstract

*This article considers current issues in crime and justice in the UK and how these may bear upon young people over the next five years. It looks first at the ‘crime drop’ and observes that while conventional crime is falling, cyber crime is growing exponentially and that this may impact disproportionately upon the young. It examines the data on ethnicity, crime and victimisation and concludes that young Black men face particular dangers, particularly if they find themselves caught up in the penal system. It asks whether sexual offending is increasing, as the available data suggests, or whether it is just more widely reported and investigated and it raises questions about how it is to be policed in the future. It asks whether gang crime is growing or changing and, finally, it speculates about how the major parties may deal with ‘law and order’ in the run-up to the May 2015 election.*

**Key words:** Youth crime, justice, policy, law and order.

THE U.S. PRESIDENT Harry S. Truman is supposed to have said, ‘Somebody get me a one-handed economist! All my economists ever say is “On the one hand this – but on the other hand that ...”.’ But when asked to predict what might happen in the fields of crime and justice over the next five years, we have to concede that Truman’s economists had a point.

## Conventional crime may continue to fall

As far as we can tell, the types of crime reported to, and routinely recorded by the police are falling. According to the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) (ONS, 2014), which garners the experiences of 40,000 ‘heads of household’, the number of victims of *Property and Violent* crime has halved since the mid-1990s. This reality flies in the face of popular fears, regularly stoked by the popular press that we are in the middle of a crime wave. Similar falls have occurred throughout the western world and are variously attributed to the removal of lead from petrol, abortion law reform, (fewer unwanted crime-prone children) an ageing population, (no longer able to climb up drainpipes) and, of course, better policing.

Although in recent years some pessimistic criminologists have predicted a reversal of this trend as

a result of wage stagnation, benefit cuts, and persistently high levels of youth unemployment, this has not happened. Whether recorded crime continues its steady decline, or surges in the wake of further government cuts, remains uncertain.

## But it is still more dangerous to be young and Black

Between the 1980s and the first decade of the 21st century, those people most vulnerable to criminal victimisation and those most likely to victimise them were progressively thrown together in Britain's poorest neighbourhoods. Writing in 2010, Will Hutton observed that:

*The unbalanced structure of economic growth over the past decade has fed straight through to a disastrous social geography, bypassing the least advantaged and rewarding the wealthy. Throughout the country the poor and disadvantaged live in ever more concentrated wards that are blighted by run-down social housing and over-stretched schools (Hutton, 2010)*

One of the consequences of this economic and social polarisation has been that while overall recorded crime, has been dropping steadily since the 1990s, crime in areas of acute social deprivation has, in many cases, become far more serious. (Bullock and Tilley, 2003; Pitts, 2008).

Crime and disorder in the poorest neighbourhoods in England has become distinctive in several ways. It is *youthful*, because the population is a young one and, in consequence, both victims and perpetrators tend to be children and young people (Pitts and Hope, 1997). It is *implosive*: likely to be perpetrated by and against local residents. It is *repetitive*: the same people are victimised again and again (Lea and Young, 1988, Wilson, 1987; Bourgeois, 1995; Palmer and Pitts, 2006; Pitts, 2008a; 2008b; Matthews and Pitts, 2007; Palmer, 2009). It is *symmetrical*, in that victims and offenders tend to be similar in terms of age, ethnicity and social class. It is also disproportionately violent and this violence tends to be intra – and inter-neighbourhood, and largely, intra-racial, tending to take place on the street and in and around schools. More recently it has involved the use of firearms (Pitts, 2007; 2008a; 2008b). It is also under-reported: victims and perpetrators in the poorest neighbourhoods tend to know one another and the threat of reprisal or local loyalties often prevents them from reporting victimisation (Young and Matthews, 1992). It is 'embedded'. Youth offending in these neighbourhoods tends to intensify because, being denied the usual pathways to adulthood, local adolescents fail to 'grow out of crime' and so adolescent peer groups are more likely to transmogrify into youth 'gangs', the age range of which may well expand, linking pre-teens with offenders in their 20s and 30s. And from the mid-to late 1980s, many of the more serious manifestations of youth crime in these neighbourhoods were related to the burgeoning markets in class A drugs (Auld and Dorn et al, 1986; Pearson, 1988).

As we note below, while it is true that in most of the 33 areas targeted by the government's Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) initiative, what the police describe as *Most Serious Violence*, which includes murder, grievous bodily harm, attempted murder and wounding, has fallen in the

last two years, rates of violent crime amongst younger adolescents in these areas remain extremely high. The victims of this crime are disproportionately young Black men. In London in 2009, 75% of all victims of firearm homicides and shootings and 79% of all suspects came from the African – Caribbean community. Even accepting that in the UK the BME population is a young one, this constitutes a huge over-representation. Marion Fitzgerald’s analysis of youth homicides in London between 1999 and 2005 (2009), makes this point with alarming clarity. She found that in London 63.6 of all male homicide victims aged 10-17 were of Black African-Caribbean origin whereas the White population furnished only 29.5%. And this is one of the reasons why the BME young people are over-represented in our prisons and Young Offender Institutions. Programmes like EGYV can chip away at the problem but if nothing is done to ameliorate the social and economic conditions which generate violent youth crime in our cities, there is no reason to believe that the historically high levels of violent crime and victimisation perpetrated by and against BME young people, and their disproportionate incarceration will not continue.

### **And there is another crime wave that nobody seems to have noticed**

While the 2013 CSEW (ONS, 2014) showed that property and violent crime were falling, it also revealed a remarkable 25% rise in fraud over the period and, increasingly, this fraud is occurring in cyberspace. Findings from the 2006/7 CSEW indicate that just one per cent of adult internet users who experienced hacking or unauthorised access to their data reported it to the police. This compares with 81 per cent who reported burglary and 55 per cent who reported robbery. Many victims didn’t know to whom they should report the crime, others thought the police would be unable to do anything about it anyway, while most others reported it directly to their bank or internet service provider (McGuire, 2013) who tended to absorb the cost themselves. It was a similar story with online business fraud, with just two per cent of incidents being reported to the police (Home Office, 2013). Yet a study by the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance undertaken in 2011 assessed the total cost to the British economy of cyber crime to be a massive £27bn. per year. Interpol believes that this is the fastest-growing area of crime, noting that:

*New trends in cybercrime are emerging all the time, with costs to the global economy running to billions of dollars (Interpol, 2014)*

But why should this matter to young people? It matters because they are the main market for the new mobile devices, tablets, smart phones and the like and as such, they are a major target for cyber crooks. Facebook is attacked more and more frequently to secure personal data, while downloading an app onto a phone or tablet, while far simpler than installing a new programme on a computer, is far less secure. Recent research by Sophos (2014) concluded that the Android Market’s instant-download feature presents a *serious security threat*, because of the ‘background’ nature of the app installation process. As mobile devices proliferate, without far-reaching government action, attacks on personal data can only increase.

## Has sexual offending risen or are we just hearing more about it?

In 2009/10 the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), a division of the National Crime Agency, reported that 10% of the 3,652 reports it received concerned online grooming. However, relatively few grooming offences are reported to and recorded by the police. This is due to the embarrassment or the intimidation of the victim and the fact that for grooming to be recorded as an offence there must also be an offline meeting. Because online perpetrators remain extremely hard to trace, this form of sexual offending will not be easily eradicated.

An area of sexual offending that is definitely growing is ‘sexting’, the generation and exchange of indecent images. In 2012/13 the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recorded over 14,000 charges for making, and over 3,800 for possession of an indecent photograph of a child. The actual amount of sexting is far greater than this however.

CEOP (2012) suggests that sexting represents an important shift in the nature of online sexual offending and the biggest online risk to young people. Most commentators expect to see this offence grow in the future (see for example, Furnell, et al, 2008).

In the year ending June 2013 there was a 9% increase in sexual offences recorded by the police. This was partly a result of the Operation Yewtree investigation which followed the Jimmy Saville inquiry. While some of this increase was a direct result of Operation Yewtree, there was also a ‘Yewtree effect’; an increased willingness on the part of victims of sexual offences to come forward and report historical abuse. If the ‘Yewtree Effect’, the discovery that powerful abusers who had previously seemed beyond the reach of the law could be brought to book, were to be sustained, we can expect to see a rise in the reporting of such abuse in the future. However, historic abuse accounted for only around 10% of all recorded sexual offences: there was also a 5% rise in reports to the police of contemporaneous sexual offending. This increase was mirrored by an increase in reports of serious sexual abuse to the NSPCC helpline, which suggests an increased willingness on the part of victims of sexual abuse and sexual violence to come forward.

In Rotherham the victims of organised sexual exploitation and violence came forward, only to be discredited and discounted by the agencies and organisations responsible for their protection. In Rotherham, between 1997 and 2013, an estimated 1,400 children were subjected to abduction, rape and sex trafficking by groups of predominantly British-Pakistani men. In the light of the revelations in Rotherham, Oxford and Rochdale, the detection and prosecution of this type of organised crime, which is often interlinked with drug dealing and extortion, has become a major priority for all police services and the National Crime Agency, as has the requirement that the police share information with their partners in Children’s Services, Health, Youth Justice, Probation and Youth Projects. This will create serious information sharing dilemmas for all of these groups, but it is likely to lead to many more investigations of, and prosecutions for child and adolescent sexual



abuse. But this raises questions about what a significantly reduced police force will have to stop doing in order to deal with this.

## Policing will have to change

The other motivation for the police to work in partnership and share information with other agencies is budget cuts. In 2010 the government announced its intention to cut £2bn. from the Ministry of Justice £9 bn. budget. At the time it was estimated that this would mean losing 15,000 of the 80,000 people employed in the justice system. Thus, for example, Greater Manchester Police has to find savings of £135,000,000 between 2011 and 2015 (GMP, 2012) resulting in job losses of around 2,700. To achieve savings of this magnitude, adjacent police forces are planning to share ‘key functions’ but they are also having a serious rethink about their role. One of the fruits of this rethink is a plan to reallocate some traditional policing functions to other agencies.

The government claims there are around 50,000 families experiencing ‘multiple social, economic and health problems’ and a larger group, of as many as 70,000, who are at heightened risk of developing these problems. These are the 120,000 families identified by the Department of Communities and Local Government *Troubled Families Unit* (TFU) led by the apparently indefatigable, Louise Casey. Government statisticians estimate that the 50,000, ‘hard core’ families cost the country between £250,000 and £350,000 per year each, by dint of the support and containment they receive from health, welfare and criminal justice agencies. The government claims, for example, that one of these 50,000 families required 250 interventions in one year, including 58 police call-outs; five arrests; five 999 visits to Accident and Emergency; two injunctions; and a Council Tax arrears summons (DCLG Press release, 29 June, 2012).

If, it is argued, Troubled Families can place a worker, or indeed a small team, with each of these families, to preempt or respond to the many day-to-day crises previously dealt with by the police and the courts, the cost savings could be substantial. Police forces, some of which are subsidising the TFU, are enthusiastic because, even if the interventions make no difference to the troubled families, it could make a huge difference to policing budgets.

Whether this off-loading of policing functions to welfare agencies represents the ‘criminalisation of social policy’ (Rodger, 2008) or the de-criminalisation of the consequences of social deprivation is a moot point. Whichever it is, we can expect to see more of it over the next five years.

## Is gang crime diminishing or changing?

The Troubled Families Unit is also working in liaison with the Home Office’s national *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* (EGYV) programme which is targeting 33 gang ‘hot spots’ in England. With a budget 40 times greater than the EGYV programme, it is clear that the government believes the

problem of rioting, gangs and youth violence lies, ultimately, with Troubled Families. This has led to the development of projects with the families of gang members in several of these areas and, over time, these interventions have paralleled reductions in youth violence. However, it remains unclear whether this is a product of the ‘family work’ or of changes in the nature of gang crime in these areas. In London, for example, ‘turf wars’, the main purpose of which was to boost the reputations of the warring parties, have declined as gang members have grown older and turned their attentions to money-making. Whereas a decade or so ago London’s ‘Woolwich Boys’ were a notorious, predominantly Somali, fighting gang, today the protagonists are older, their ethnicities more diverse and their illicit activities far less visible. Over the period they have become, in effect, an organised crime group, heavily involved in the importation and distribution of illegal drugs throughout the UK.

Chaotic ‘turf wars’ have given way to a more measured use of violence to protect or extend drug dealing territory, while new alliances have been forged between previously antagonistic groups to ensure ‘business as usual’. If developments in North America are any guide, we might expect these processes to continue for the foreseeable future.

## Will politicians continue to believe that imprisonment may not be a solution?

In his Mansion House speech on 13th July, 2010, Justice Secretary, Ken Clarke observed that:

*There is and never has been, in my opinion, any direct correlation between spiraling growth in the prison population and a fall in crime. Crime fell throughout most of the western world in the 1990s. Crime fell in countries that had, and still have, far lower rates of imprisonment than ours.*

In so saying, he was telling the assembled bankers and stockbrokers that the coalition government had no intention of expanding the penal system.

Meanwhile in a series of lectures and publications, the French social scientist Loic Wacquant (2009) has argued that the criminal justice and social policies of neo-liberal states have, together, spawned what he describes as ‘the third age of the great confinement’. In the process, Wacquant contends, the ‘Economic State’ and the ‘Social State’ are supplanted by the ‘Penal State’ and, more contentiously, that a ‘carceral catastrophe’ is already upon ‘us’. In an earlier paper on the same theme he wrote

*The invisible hand of the market and the iron fist of the state are complementary and combine to make the lower classes accept desocialised wage labour and the social instability it brings in its wake. After a long eclipse, the prison thus returns to the front line of institutions entrusted with maintaining social order. (Wacquant, 2001).*

This view is supported to a greater or lesser extent by other ‘post-Marxist’, ‘post-Foucauldian’, ‘post traditional’ (etc) theorists who, like him, also foretell impending ‘catastrophe’, (cf Beck’s *Risk Society* (1992), Rose’s *Death of the Social*, (1996), Young’s *Exclusive Society* (1999) and Garland’s *Culture of Control* (2005). This ‘punitive turn’ remains a central prop of contemporary Left-Liberal and mainstream criminologies.

However, if the promised carceral catastrophe was actually occurring, we might expect the *Penal State* to focus its attentions on the discipline and punishment of the most volatile segment of the lower classes, namely, *young people*, and for this to be evidenced by the numbers entering the youth justice system.

Yet, in 2008, the widely criticised and ‘resource intensive’ ‘sanction detection’ Key Performance Indicator (KPI), imposed upon the police by government earlier in the decade, was abandoned and replaced by a KPI concerned with reducing the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system. This pragmatic rediscovery of ‘diversion’ had a marked effect upon the numbers of children and young people entering the system *per se* and on the number of first time entrants, in particular, which fell from a peak of 104,361 in 2006/7 to 74,003 in 2008/9 (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which had in the past served to swell the numbers entering the penal system, having peaked at 4,122 in 2005 fell steadily to 2,027 in 2008. In 2010, Home Secretary Theresa May announced that they would be phased out.

One of the results of reducing the numbers of young people entering the ‘front end’ of the youth justice system has been a decline in the numbers being incarcerated in the ‘secure estate’ at the ‘back end’. Having peaked in 2003 youth incarceration has been falling fairly steadily ever since (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, 2014).

**Children and Young People Sentenced to Immediate Custody (Moj, 2014)**

1998 .....	4294
2001 .....	5440
2003 .....	7110
2004 .....	4326
2006 .....	4209
2008 .....	3421
2012/13 .....	2780

This swing of the penal pendulum (Bernard, 1992), back towards non-intervention and decarceration, is occurring in both the UK and the USA. In the case of the USA, this ‘regression to the norm’ follows a three decade long carceral bonanza. Although this shift is supported by

evidence that most first time entrants to youth justice systems would have desisted from crime of their own accord and that incarceration tends to compound nascent criminal careers, it is almost certainly prompted by dwindling policing and youth justice budgets.

Ultimately, the importance governments assign to any particular policy area is signified by the resources they are prepared to dedicate to it. In 2009/10 four Secure Children's Homes (Kyloe House in Northumberland, Sutton Place in Hull, Orchard Lodge in London, and the Atkinson Unit in Exeter) were closed, as was Huntercombe Young Offenders' Institution (Ministry of Justice, 2010) (The number of Secure Children's Homes in England has fallen from 30 to nine in the past decade).

In 2010 the UK economy was teetering on the brink of meltdown. Meanwhile recorded crime in general, and youth crime in particular, had been falling steadily for nearly two decades. Furthermore, penal reform was one of a number of 'lines in the sand' drawn by the Liberal Democrats in their post-election Coalition negotiations with David Cameron's Conservatives in May 2010. This was not a sticking point for the Conservative 'modernisers' on the Tory front bench however, who were more than happy to distance themselves from the 'Old Tory' 'hangers and floggers' in their own party. Moreover, it is a tried and trusted truism that, when they need to, Conservative governments are able to achieve far more radical penal reforms than their Labour counterparts because, in the popular imagination and the tabloid press, they remain the *Natural Party of Law and Order*. Besides, as new Labour found out, *Law and Order* crusades cost a great deal of money, and the Coalition doesn't have any.

Will the fall in youth imprisonment continue or will we see a swing back towards hard-nosed Law and Order policies as the Conservative leadership endeavours to shore up support from its right wing prior to the 2015 general election? Or, will the Labour Party, having been wrong-footed by the Tories on both the economy and Scottish devolution, take a leaf out of Tony Blair's book and try to outflank the Tories on their Law and Order record? The apparent recent surge in sexual offending, foot-dragging on child sexual exploitation, deep cuts to policing, and the growing unmanageability of our prisons, if cleverly spun, could open up a fresh battleground and a new political opportunity.

## Has the prison become part of the problem?

The substantial over-representation of Black African Caribbean prisoners in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) has been a hotly debated feature of the English justice system for several decades (Pitts, 1988). An analysis conducted by the Ministry of Justice in 2012 found that, for comparable offences, Black and Asian defendants were almost 20% more likely to be sent to jail than their white counterparts. Moreover, the average prison sentence for Black defendants was seven months longer than for whites.

As we have seen, in the youth justice system the total number of young people being incarcerated has been falling since 2004 but the proportion of African Caribbean young people within that population has been rising steadily. However, since 2011, as a result of the exemplary sentencing in the wake of the riots and the prioritisation of gang crime by the police the numbers of Black young people in Young Offender Institutions has risen sharply. Whereas in 2006 Black prisoners represented 23% of the YOI population, by 2009 this had risen to 33% and by 2011 it had reached 39% (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, 2014). With funding for the social intervention element of the EGYV programme running out and a renewed focus on improving practice in the areas of enhanced prosecution and joint enterprise, we might expect this disproportionality to grow.

As we have noted, this rise was paralleled by severe budget cuts at the Ministry of Justice which has led to staff cuts in penal establishments. An investigation of Feltham YOI by HMIP in July 2013 (HMIP, 2014) found that nearly two gang-related attacks were recorded every day on the institution's CCTV. The investigation was triggered because the authorities had found that warders at Feltham B, the wing reserved for inmates aged 18 to 21, used batons significantly more than at any other prison. The Prisons Inspectorate found that gang markings were daubed inside cells and prison officers were forced to move groups around in order to prevent disputes escalating. Nick Hardwick the chief inspector of prisons described Feltham B as 'a very disturbing place ... If you were a parent with a child in Feltham you would be right to be terrified. It would be very hard not to join a gang in Feltham' (Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013).

Isis Young Offenders Institution in Thamesmead, London, opened in April 2010. In January 2012, HMIP identified the quality of staffing and gang violence as the two major problems afflicting the prison. Later in 2012 the report of the Isis Independent Monitoring Board observed that:

*Probably the most serious local issue facing the institution is the high level of violence and bullying, mainly gang-related, among offenders and the resulting fears for personal safety (p5).*

In February 2014, following a surprise visit, the Chief Inspector of Prisons expressed concern that many of these violent incidents were serious, often involving gangs, with a higher proportion than usual involving weapons (HMIP, 2014). They also noted that many of these assaults were planned and involved a number of inmates attacking a single prisoner.

In March 2013 the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee indicated that the 2012 MoJ spending cuts had increased the level of risk in prisons, noting that:

*We are concerned about safety and decency in some prisons and the fact that more prisoners are reporting that they do not feel safe. Assaults on staff, self-harm and escapes from*

*contractor escorts have all increased. The agency should ensure that savings plans have regard to the potential impact on risks to standards of safety, decency and respect in prisons and in the community (p.10).*

Whatever the logistics of the current crisis, the question is whether a strategy of concentrating gang-involved young people in particular jails and YOIs makes sense. Most of the research suggests that prison violence tends to be ‘imported’ into jails by gang members (De Lisi et al, 2004) and that previously uninvolved young people are likely to become gang-involved as a means of self protection (Pitts, 2008). It is also suggested by some gang members that the proliferation and consolidation of gang-related drug-dealing networks is facilitated by throwing large numbers of gang-involved people into the same place with very little to do apart from fight and plan for a more lucrative future.

Given the high profile of the issue of prison gangs it seems likely that the MoJ will adopt a new strategy which may involve the dispersal of gang-involved prisoners throughout the system. This raises further questions about whether, by moving seriously gang-involved young people to other wings or institutions, one is solving the problem or sowing the seeds for the proliferation of the prison gang.

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

# Youth Work

Tom Wylie

## Abstract

*This article focuses on the place of youth work which is presented as a distinctive form of practice with young people complementing other approaches such as schooling or social work. In summarising the place of young people in contemporary Britain, it notes the particular pressures of poverty and unemployment on their lives. The main features of the New Labour and subsequently the Coalition governments' policies towards youth work are identified with particular reference to the consequences of recent austerity policies that have taken place from 2010 onwards. It offers suggestions on how youth work can be re-built.*

**Key words:** Young People; Youth Work; Social Policy; Voluntary Sector.

THERE HAS NEVER been a golden age for youth work in England.<sup>1</sup> Only occasionally has its contribution to the range of services for young people been appreciated and new funding allocated. These periods included a few years in the 1960s after the Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education, 1960), and again in the first decade of the 21st century with 'Resourcing Excellent Youth Services' (DfES, 2002) and 'Aiming High' (HM Treasury, 2007). Most of the time it has had to 'make do and mend'. With no capital to replace outworn buildings and, in the absence of national standards for what should be available in communities, recurrent spending has drifted towards capricious decision-making by local authorities mixed with voluntary endeavour and charitable fund-raising. From the late 1990s the National Lottery contributed *ad hoc* to different themes concerned with young people, but this source diminished with the demands of the 2012 Olympic Games. By then, the full force of the Coalition government's austerity programme was shredding much local youth work, especially those aspects funded by local authorities, and the likelihood of these cuts continuing casts a long shadow over the years ahead.

Sporadic policy interest in the contribution which youth work could make to the range of policies and services for young people often reflects a lack of clarity about the very term 'youth work'. For this author, the term 'youth work' encompasses three key features that make it distinctive when compared to other ways of working with young people such as schooling and social work. These three features are: a primary focus on the personal and social development of young people; the use of a distinctive methodology which may be described as 'experiential learning', alongside the crucial role of voluntary relationships with trusted and skilled adults; and adherence to a set of ethical principles which, *inter alia*, put the needs of young people first and sees them as individuals

rather than an undifferentiated mass. Since youth work is provided by a range of bodies in a myriad of settings it has often struggled to present a coherent definition to policy makers. This would be so, even if the disputatious youth field could itself reach agreement on its central propositions about how it meets the diverse needs and changing circumstances and interests of the young.

While many young people continue to flourish, substantial numbers lie within a population of some 13 million who are living in poverty (DWP 2014). The gulf is widening, in financial, human and social capital, between those who are doing well and those left behind (Dorling, 2013). Employment in secure jobs for young people and young adults has fallen sharply, often the only offering is of minimum wage jobs on zero hours contracts in a casualised labour force, thus entrenching poverty and deprivation (Shildrick et al., 2010). Social mobility has stalled and the constraining contours of wealth, class and privilege are evident. The recession of 2008-14 was particularly brutal for people without qualifications in those regions which have suffered long-term economic decline and changes to the social security benefits system (with added sanctions) have helped drive many young people deeper into poverty (Clark and Heath, 2014). The consequences of unequal, underachieving societies are well evidenced (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010), but for young people in particular, a raft of poor welfare outcomes such as teenage pregnancy, youth offending and youth homelessness are often highlighted (Coles *et al*, 2010). Despite difficult economic times, public support for welfare has declined markedly over the last decade. A lack of social solidarity and collective commitment to spending on social welfare means that it is likely to be constrained for years to come. Personal debt and family poverty result in limited opportunities for new, imaginative cultural experiences. Anxiety about educational achievement and precarious future employment means that for many young people it is not a good time in which to grow up. For some, their natural exuberance and aspiration may change to passive depression behind closed doors; for others, their peer loyalties can imprison them in anti-social gang cultures. Despite its occasional extravagant claims, youth work cannot remedy all these social ills. Nevertheless, cuts in public spending are having a devastating effect on what is offered to young people in their leisure time by the local authority and voluntary sectors alike. A service such as youth work with a weak statutory base is always vulnerable during times of economic difficulty. In consequence, the approach to advocacy for young people and for youth work has to be re-thought and re-fought.

## The 'New Labour' legacy

History will judge how successful the Labour government of 1997-2010 was in managing the UK economy in the face of global corporate power; on its approach to reforming public services; and on its funding of social welfare including hospitals and schools. There can be no doubt, however, that despite occasional bursts of financial sunshine and sporadic policy interest, it missed the opportunity to develop a vibrant youth work sector which would have the resilience to ride out what became an ice storm once a Conservative-led Coalition took office. In the later Labour years there was a little capital to improve the decayed building stock. A few short-term programmes were

introduced; marginal improvement was made to the legal basis for youth work; and some attention paid to strengthening the voice of young people in decision-making. Little was done to enhance professional training, although there was some attempt to encourage generic training for various youth-facing professionals working in different sectors (Davies, 2008). Many of those who worked in the youth sector felt diminished by the absence of consistent policy support for their values and approaches, by unpredictable funding and by the endless re-structuring of services, especially for work with those aged over 16.

Labour's eventual configuration, from 2005, of local Children's Services followed the botched design and clumsy implementation of its previous Connexions policy and structure: this even sought to suppress the name 'youth worker' in favour of 'personal adviser' (who was intended to have a triage function and not actually do much by way of personal and social development). Similarly, authors of official documents struggled to use the term 'youth work', which they saw as too vague and dangerously *laissez-faire*, preferring to speak of 'positive activities' to imply the brisk air of vigorous intervention and target-setting favoured by New Labour (albeit with echoes of Baden-Powell). Despite its good intentions, the all-encompassing concept of 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003) served to further marginalise the place of young people as distinct from children; of their personal development as distinct from safeguarding; and of youth work as a profession which can complement others and not be subsumed by them. This new structure reflected a continuing search for the holy grail of joined-up services – another New Labour mantra – but came with a good deal of vagueness about what it meant in practice for local youth work, for support to voluntary bodies, and for the roles of those in the workforce. It also sought much greater reporting of perceived outcomes for the young – preferably to be immediately apparent – which did not sit easily with the general philosophy of youth work and its emphasis on process rather than product (Ord, 2007; Spence and Devanney, 2007; Young, 1999).

The Labour government's 'Aiming High' review of July 2007 held out the prospect of a 10 year strategy which would give greater access to a wide range of opportunities, stronger approaches to youth empowerment and the development of a skilled work force (HM Treasury, 2007). Importantly, as it was led by the Treasury, this review had both policy and financial heft, but any leap forward was derailed by the banking crisis and then by the change of government.

## Enter a Coalition government

Despite their rhetoric, modern general elections rarely provide a critical break between the approaches of different administrations. There is often much continuity in policy, albeit with some stronger emphases, for example after 2010, towards reducing welfare support and promoting the academies programme for schools. More profoundly, the Conservative-led coalition elected in 2010, introduced severe levels of cuts on public services which fell disproportionately on urban and northern local authorities and on youth work everywhere (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011). It

also emphasised three underpinning themes in its approach to young people. First, encouragement of high levels of individual (and family) responsibility: young people were to become the authors of their own destiny and take increasing responsibility for establishing individual career paths and managing their personal lifestyles. Deep-rooted social problems, including poverty, were thus to be seen as an expression of individual dysfunction, rather than vice versa. Young adults who could not manage to find housing which would enable them to live independently were expected to stay in the family home. All were to be inculcated at the age of 16 into civic responsibilities through a scheme of National Citizen Service. Second, as a matter of principle not just of financial stringency, the role of the state towards providing wide-ranging local opportunities for the personal and social development of the young would be reduced. Instead, national government emphasised the need for local decisions rather than offering national direction or setting standards for local practice (Padley, 2013). Third, within a rather nebulous concept of the ‘Big Society’, the private, philanthropic and voluntary sectors were expected to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of the state; indeed, they were encouraged to do so by devices such as commissioning and, if possible, by ‘payment by results’ mechanisms (Barnard, 2010). Since few voluntary bodies have the financial capacity to operate to any scale, especially while awaiting payments for their services, they are tempted into acting as ‘bid candy’ to enable larger organisations or profit-making companies to win government contracts. Absent was a clear system of local democratic accountability. Nor was there an adequate balance of those responsibilities to be carried by individuals, as a reflection of their personal agency, and those to be discharged by the state through supportive and enabling social structures.

At the outset of the Coalition’s term of office, youth work in England still found itself as a policy responsibility of the Department for Education with one of the junior ministers as its political lead, along with his usual extensive list of other responsibilities, such as children in care. A year after taking office the government launched its main, indeed only, policy document entitled ‘Positive for Youth’ (DfE, 2011). As in several previous Labour documents, this sought to cover the wide landscape of policy areas affecting young people and youth work as such, had a relatively marginal place and little specific policy drive or associated initiative. Much reference was made to the important contribution of young people’s views on provision both locally and nationally, but despite such warm words the actions drew back from the more specific steps which the previous Labour government had begun to take to strengthen the role of young people, for example in participatory budgeting and local service design (HM Treasury, 2007). Saying more about an enhanced role for the British Youth Council or the UK Youth Parliament was little compensation, especially as there was little evidence that government actually listened to them, though some local authorities and a few commercial bodies continued to see benefit in drawing on the views of young people in designing and delivering their services.

The only significant new development with youth work implications was the introduction of National Citizen Service, intended as a blend of a personal development programme and

community service in school holidays and targeted, at least initially, at a small section of the 16-year old cohort. The Department of Communities and Local Government funded a modest grant programme for some uniformed youth organisations such as the army cadets and the Scouts but the dominating narrative throughout the whole term of the Coalition government was the savage reductions in overall financial support to local authorities and thus, inevitably, to services less sheltered by statutory obligations. Youth work was a major loser in this process.

Since government no longer collects reliable figures, and Ofsted has effectively ceased to inspect youth work, it is difficult to provide an accurate account of the reduction on Youth Service spending across England since 2010: one official figure suggested over 20% but most estimates put it nearer a third, with some authorities making reductions of 100% (Network of Regional Youth Work Units, 2014). Inevitably, the bulk of these cuts have been made to those clubs, centres and detached work provided directly by local authorities. Some places have attempted to shift responsibility to local or national voluntary bodies but the scale, diversity and probably the quality of provision, have fallen sharply. As overall levels of volunteering in disadvantaged areas has diminished with the recession, much has been left to the continued commitment of a few individuals. What remains in the local authority sector has often moved away from open-access provision to more targeted work sometimes using general ‘hubs’ rather than neighbourhood centres. There has been a small-scale emergence of ‘mutuals’ – forms of worker /community co-operatives – though these still need to secure finance from somewhere (Network of Regional Youth work Units, 2014). The voluntary sector, which has long sought a larger role and has been, on occasion, critical of the perceived priorities and expectations of local authorities, now often finds itself over-burdened and under-supported for the task; a demonstration of the injunction ‘be careful what you wish for’. A number of voluntary bodies, for example Rathbone and Fairbridge, have gone into liquidation or merged. Any hope for substantial commercial entrepreneurial activity has not been fulfilled as individuals and bodies can find it difficult to marry charitable purpose with profit. Several universities have withdrawn from providing qualifying training for professional youth and community work as it no longer fits the academic profile the institutions seek and, in any case, the job market in direct youth work for such graduates has fallen substantially, affecting recruitment.

The all-party Education Select Committee, alert to the sudden decline in leisure time opportunities for the young, mounted an Enquiry. Based on the traditional approach of a series of hearings from expert witnesses, it produced a report strongly critical of the DfE’s overall stewardship of youth work and very sceptical of the National Citizen Service (House of Commons, 2011). While recognising the important place of open-access provision and urging the youth sector to be more concerned about demonstrating its effectiveness, it expressed doubts about some form of ‘payment by results’ from government, including social investment bonds, and about the prospects of the private sector stepping in to invest in such unfashionable work. It called for more leadership from the DfE, especially in respect of setting expectations and standards for local authorities. It did not get it. The DfE, especially its then zealous Secretary of State, was pre-occupied by his agenda of

re-modelling the school curriculum and qualifications and in turning all schools into academies. He also wanted to shield his schools' budget by shedding the Department's more marginal functions. In the summer of 2013 policy responsibility for youth work was transferred from the DfE to the Cabinet Office: for the first time since direct state intervention began in 1939, youth work was no longer rooted in educational policy.

Reports by HM Inspectors had regularly described the effective contribution youth work made to young people's lives (HMI 1987, 1990) but the sector was not well-equipped to face harsh economic winds. Since these now bore down on all public services, how was youth work to argue its case in competition with cancer screening or care for the elderly? Or even with other parts of the wide children's and young people's sector including early years and youth justice. Making the case for investment in youth work had rarely been more important. Or more difficult.

### Advocating for the cause

The decimation of youth work has not gone unchallenged. A number of localities have campaigned against the loss of particular youth provision in their neighbourhoods though generally with little success. But the national campaigning voice is weak especially when compared, say, with the arts or library sectors. A coherent, consistent argument has not appeared and national media engagement has been virtually zero. By contrast, in the run-up to the general election of 1997, the National Youth Agency had drawn together all the key representative bodies – of local authorities, voluntary sector, trade unions and young people themselves throughout the UK, to agree a persuasive campaigning text, 'Agenda for a Generation' (NYA 1996) – and backed this up by running events at party conferences, engaging with parliamentarians, and securing a regular national media presence throughout the Labour years. Now, faced with the much greater challenge to the very survival of youth work across the country, the sector fragmented and key national bodies, including the National Youth Agency and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, have retreated from playing their part on a joint battlefield, hunkering down and defending their own organisational interests. The most vigorous campaigning has been left to the Community and Youth Workers section of 'Unite', the trade union, with support from the 'In Defence of Youth Work' (IDYW) network which has sought valiantly and persuasively to articulate the key features of youth work's principles and practice (IDYW, 2009). One difficulty in creating a common voice for youth work is the longstanding disagreement between parts of the diverse voluntary sector, which do not always define themselves as doing youth work, and elements of the professionalised local authority system which helped to maintain the infrastructure and financial support as well as providing directly in some places where the more traditional voluntary sector was reluctant to tread. Some academics have long urged the voluntary sector to keep its distance from the state, to rely on organic development in communities, and even seemed to prefer the use of the term 'informal educators' rather than 'youth workers' (Jeffs and Smith, 1992).

Structural issues aside, this author has written elsewhere of three different approaches to how the case for youth work is often made (Wylie, 2013). The three traditions of advocacy may be caricatured as the ‘romantics’, the ‘managerialists’ and the ‘pragmatists’. The first tend to emphasise the stories of how youth workers support individuals and groups of young people and generally eschew any talk of outcomes (the IDYW network has been a key proponent of this argument). Instead of metrics, they assert the enduring nature of the voluntary relationship and the convivial conversation round the pool table. Although this is an important dissenting, almost quixotic, position to hold in the face of a target-driven culture, tales of personal success with individuals can add colour to a narrative but, in the experience of this author, rarely convince even sympathetic politicians or civil servants in good times. The second approach seeks to win support by accepting the latest ideology or national policy approaches. In recent years such approaches have sought to identify or target particular groups and specify outcomes. It is this approach that is reflected, for example in work commissioned from The Young Foundation (McNeil et al, 2012). Those who pursue a rather mechanistic, target – driven approach appear to have little understanding of how good youth workers, whether centre – or street-based, engage with young people in their communities over the long term. The third group – the ‘principled pragmatists’ – endeavours to draw from the deep well of youth work values but believes that youth projects need to be able to express cogently their contribution to the broader goals of contemporary social policy, using appropriate metrics as well as stories to demonstrate impact. In the case of ‘Unite’ and others (including this author), they argue for an important continuing role for the state as a facilitator and, where necessary, as a provider (Unite, 2010, 2013).

As the Coalition has continued its slash-and-burn approach to local services, some ideologues have gladly asserted their intention to ‘shrink the state’, though they have not been so keen on picking up the bill when the consequences arrive by way of unemployment or poor health (Dorling, 2013; Kessler, 2007). The ‘Big Society’ has proved not to be the solution for the more intractable social issues or problematic localities and the term has faded from the political rhetoric.

Funding pressures during this long period of pitiless austerity re-opened a longstanding debate on priorities. Youth work has always aspired to be universal and has usually resisted any suggestion that it should focus, or target, its activities just on those disaffected with life or in trouble with society’s institutions (Davies, 2008; IDYW 2009). Moreover, services for the poor often become poor services, as well as extremely stigmatizing. Nevertheless, the weak funding of local authority youth services may reflect not only doubts about their efficacy, especially in the form of seemingly unstructured activity in youth clubs (as illustrated in a misused and damaging study (Feinstein et al, 2007)); it also expressed a lack of engagement by middle class parents on behalf of their children who were not encouraged to participate in council-run provision. Whatever the explanation, money has never been made available for youth work to be established as a universal service and, in practice, local authority youth services, and some voluntary sector projects, have tended to concentrate in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in order to offer opportunities otherwise

denied. This can be argued as a wise allocation of limited public resource; indeed as one which is socially just and representing an approach sometimes described as ‘progressive universalism’ or what some theologians call ‘the option for the poor’. This focus – of providing opportunities for the more disadvantaged – is a rather different stance on how to shape priorities than by targeting particular individuals or groups, such as those caught up in the justice system; but youth work as a whole has been reluctant to embrace it, even in respect of public spending in the sector.

## Good youth work; prospects for practice

The popular and dominant academic perceptions of youth often view them rather stereotypically, frequently focusing on the ‘deviants’, the deficits and on intermittent moral panics such as gang culture or teenage pregnancy. In fact, notwithstanding considerable diversity in the youth cohort, the adolescent years overall remain a dynamic developmental phase in the life cycle that can offer a chance to build on physical and neurological changes, to help some young people over the emotional roadblocks of disorderly homes or insecure environments, and to change the trajectory of their lives for the better. Effective educational practice can use the assets of these years, not least their concern for others, their friendships and their personal drive for agency. Some services are better placed than others to help facilitate successful transitions to adulthood; schools for instance, may often be seen as purely instrumental and controlling institutions and, in any case are not present in over 80% of young people’s time, nor do many concern themselves with young people’s needs in the round. Effective non-formal education and support through youth work can make a difference by establishing dialogue and reciprocity with the young. Youth work’s core strength lies in the fine grain of how trusted adults build and sustain voluntary relationships with individuals and groups, aiming at their growth and development. It can offer young people space for reflection, new experiences, even moments of joy – for youth work is concerned about young people’s lives in the present not only about what they may become. It requires workers who can seize encounters ‘on the wing’, not just in structured programmes. Workers who will stick by those often deemed as ‘troubled’ who may have few continuing, supportive relationships with adults. Over time, successful practice helps those young people who need it to make changes in their behaviour and take those chances which are within their reach. As well as helping individuals with benefit claims, sexual exploitation or brushes with the justice system, it also involves encouraging access to cultural experiences such as theatres and galleries and thus strengthens their skills and confidence to participate freely in unusual surroundings.

Increasingly, a key activity will be that of building partnerships and working with others for changes which will improve the lives of young people in their communities and in those institutions, such as schools, which are meant to serve them. Such tasks, and curriculum design and evaluation in non-formal settings, have always demanded a high level of skill from youth workers. So the development of a competent, idealistic workforce, both voluntary and professional, requires a training system nationwide to make available a range of qualifications to meet the needs of



individuals in different roles. Good youth workers think about their practice and take responsibility for becoming better at it; the stories of youth work can have impact if they are shared and analysed by practitioners themselves for the nuances of how they make contact and work developmentally with young people (IDYW, 2013). All youth workers need continued professional development if they are to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. They have to learn how to apply their approaches and values in changing circumstances, for example in handling potentially confidential disclosure, in working with gangs or dealing with embryonic political extremism. Youth workers need easier access to research; to cogent interpretation and critical analysis of policy; to stimulating journals; to reasonably priced seminars and conferences shaped to promote debate not conformity; and to international experience to redress the insular perspectives of much English youth work. The sector needs champions: bodies and alliances which help youth work better express its role, inform and lobby parliamentarians, celebrate young people's achievement, and challenge not only policy-makers but also the sector itself. Perhaps reflecting a general distaste for quantitative approaches, the youth sector is not good at building a cogent economic case with evidence of impact and the conditions which make it so. Ensuring youth work receives the recognition it deserves requires a commitment to build a strong evidence base to support its potential impact (Wenham, 2015).

While consideration of the roles and skills of adults and the structural configuration of local services are important, it is also necessary to enhance those structures and processes which enable young people, individually and collectively, to give their own testimony about their needs, to be involved in local budget-setting, to support their peers, and to learn how to make decisions by creating and running more projects for themselves. Good youth work, through assisting the voices of young people to be expressed, can influence wider policies and services affecting their well-being (Right Here, 2014). As with local youth councils, they also play a part in developing democratic civic engagement, a feature which will be even more necessary if the franchise is extended to age 16.

As well as the variety of specialist voluntary organisations, there remains a place for the neighbourhood open-access centre, ideally acting as a gateway for groups and individuals to engage in more structured programmes or experiences as well as association with their peers. Local services for the young need to be able to adapt quickly in order to meet immediate, often complex needs, as well as offering longitudinal provision which can be there routinely as young people grow up. Careful consideration is required on where youth work should position itself alongside other local services for the young, notably schools and colleges but also the neglected arena of the arts, especially drama, music, film, dance and the social media. At its best, youth work has been a service shaped by local imperatives so, as a national drive to offer direction diminishes, the consideration has to be how it can establish its place within varied local structures which identify needs and determine, plan and fund the shape of provision for young people, for example through local authority Health and Wellbeing boards as well as the more traditional educational structures, now increasingly fragmented.

While youth work has an educational role, concerned primarily with personal and social development, it can play its part before problems become deep-seated. Whether this role can be funded through some form of social investment is more doubtful since it is immensely difficult to attribute long-term outcomes to particular interventions except in very narrow circumstances (See Coles et al., 2010). But just as doubtful is whether the form of Youth Service structure envisaged by the Albemarle and Thompson Reports (DES, 1982) can now be re-created as the organisational basis within which the distinctive approach of youth work can be secure and its practice develop. The post-Albemarle years created a space for a secular approach to youth work whose style was well articulated in the influential ‘Social Education of the Adolescent’ (Davies and Gibson, 1967) and in other contemporary writing on group work (Batten, 1967; Button, 1971). Individuals and organisations motivated by their religious beliefs will continue to play an important role in provision for the young, not least the more marginalised, but local diversity is essential in order to maintain choices for young people; one reason why the faith sector should not dominate as local authorities decline or move away from open-access provision into excessive targeting on specific groups.

## Conclusion

The recent years of austerity have shredded local youth services and these will take decades to rebuild. In many places the sector has returned to the condition it had in the 1950s. We need to rethink the role of the state and how it can better support and empower young people in their communities. This will mean some re-making of the respective roles of national agencies, local government and voluntary sector (Elvidge, 2014). The latter can bring important strengths in securing local community involvement. It can often take risks to road test new approaches but does not have the capacity to take bright ideas to scale. It also lacks the democratic mandate of local authorities and the latter’s ability to connect across different public services. It is now essential that parliament places an explicit duty on the Secretary of State for Education to promote and secure sufficient youth services – with youth work at their heart – focussed on the personal and social development of young people and achieved through partnership between local authorities, voluntary organisations and young people themselves. This core national duty would underpin central government’s leadership role and from it would follow the functions of setting national standards, providing adequate funding and rebuilding a skilled workforce. The latter should focus particularly on the needs of the disadvantaged young; building their resilience, physical and social skills and creativity and encouraging them to remain hopeful in what are extremely difficult times. The central moral purpose of youth work is the exploration with young people, individually and in groups, of the question ‘what kind of person do I want to be?’ and helping to create the opportunities for that question to be answered. In a barren and bleak landscape where the language of the utilitarian, neoliberal marketplace often holds sway, youth work should advocate the politics of the common good and demonstrate, in numbers as well as stories, how good youth work achieves it. To adapt some words of Robert Kennedy, it is the great task of youth work: ‘to see injustice and try to end it; to see prejudice and strive to overcome it; to see potential and seek to nurture it’ (Schlesinger, 1978).

Despite the best efforts of families, schools or voluntary groups, little is likely to change for the better in many young people's lives, or in what youth work can do to support them, until central and local government re-discover their own enabling and leadership roles. But young people and their needs will still endure. It is especially incumbent on those in leadership roles in youth work to develop more coherent, consistent and compelling arguments to campaign on their behalf. And, bound together by common values, to demonstrate a greater sense of solidarity with others in the sector as well as with the young.

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## Note

- 1 *Policy developments and documents referred to in this chapter are primarily concerned with England. Policy on youth work in the other UK jurisdictions did not have such frenetic features in the period being reviewed though youth work practice grappled with similar issues. The prospect is of increasingly divergent policy and structures across the UK.*

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# Austerity youth policy: exploring the distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice

Will Mason

## Abstract

*In the contemporary political and socio-economic context the future of open access youth work remains uncertain. Since the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government came to power in 2010 substantial funding cuts seem to have been coupled with increasing, often misguided expectations for the youth work sector. Emerging from this context are distinctions between youth work in principle, as espoused by contemporary youth policy, and youth work in practice, as experienced by practitioners. This article draws on empirical data to explore these distinctions. Presenting ethnographic material from three years of research with casually paid youth workers, volunteers and young people, the article illustrates some of the contradictions embedded within the Coalition government's youth policy. In this endeavour the discussion also demonstrates respondents' commitment to the principles of child centred, open access youth work.*

**Key words:** Youth policy, youth work, local staffing, partnership working, training.

IN THE CONTEMPORARY political and socio-economic context youth workers and volunteers are faced with the dichotomy of meeting targeted, intervention based policy agendas and 'maintaining the core principles that form the foundation of youth work' (Dunne *et al*, 2014a:7). At the same time, government funding cuts compromise the capacity of the youth work sector, whilst expectations of youth work delivery seem to perpetually increase.

Since the Coalition government came to power in 2010 a number of reviews have directly critiqued its youth policy (Davies, 2011; 2013; Taylor, 2013). However, these reviews would benefit from a firmer empirical grounding in the everyday experiences of youth workers and young people. This article is based on three years of ethnographic field work. The field work was conducted as part of an ESRC funded doctoral research project, situated in and around three open access youth services within two areas of a post-industrial northern city. The research aimed to explore the everyday experiences of youth workers and marginalised young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. In this endeavour, it revealed the value of the local youth services, alongside highlighting the constraints imposed upon them by the contemporary funding landscape and youth policy context.

The central purpose here is to empirically demonstrate some of the contradictions embedded within the Coalition government's youth policy. By representing the everyday experiences of a group of professional youth workers, volunteers and young people (aged 11 – 19), the following discussion illustrates distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice. In so doing, it demonstrates respondents' commitment to open access youth work that is founded on voluntary relationships of trust and respect (IDYW, 2012).

## Mapping the UK youth policy context

Within the UK, the relationship between central government, local authorities and youth work dates back to the 1940s, where youth work was politically supported as a means of helping young people through the disruption created by the second world war (Davies, 2010). Historically, local authorities have had a major role in managing the organisation of youth work in the UK. However, local authorities tend also to have been directed, to a varied extent, by national youth policy, which lays 'out the boundaries within which practice "on the ground" will – perhaps *must* – operate' (Davies, 2010:7). Over the past three decades 'the triumph of neo-liberal capitalism ... expressed initially in Thatcherism' (Taylor, 2013:2) has imposed increasing pressures on the youth work sector. Indeed, the marketisation and privatisation that characterises the neo-liberal project has significantly compromised the character and stability of open-access youth work.

In order to situate the Coalition government's youth policies it is important to briefly explore the foundations laid by the preceding New Labour government.<sup>1</sup> Youth services quickly became the subject of political scrutiny with the arrival of New Labour in 1997. Espousing their prioritisation of 'education, education, education' and getting 'tough on crime' the government's new Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) produced a number of papers on youth issues (Coles, 2006). Reporting on *Truancy and School Exclusion* (SEU, 1998a), *Rough Sleeping* (SEU, 1998b), *Teenage Pregnancy* (SEU, 1999a), and *Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in Employment, Education or Training* (NEET) (SEU, 1999b), the SEU identified interconnected youth policy issues, prompting the funding and development of 'Connexions', a new inter-agency youth service (Mizen, 2003; Coles, 2006).

The £420m Connexions Service was initiated in 2001 with the aim of providing integrated support for young people between the ages of 13 and 19, 'improving the coherence' of what was currently being provided by organisations such as the Careers Service and the Youth Service (DfEE, 1999:9). 'Ostensibly a universal service offering innovative support and guidance measures to all young people' Connexions' priorities nevertheless rested with those 'at risk' of early disengagement from education, demonstrating a movement towards targeted and outcome oriented youth provision (Mizen, 2003:461).

Despite the encouragement of its inter-agency work and some critical, yet reasonably optimistic

reviews (Coles *et al*, 2004; Hoggarth and Smith, 2004), Connexions quickly buckled under the pressure of what was a rapidly changing policy context. As Coles *et al* (2004) demonstrated, the emergence of a new set of policy initiatives between 2001 and 2004 prompted the reshaping and undermining of the Connexions Service, marking simultaneously a shift in the responsibility of youth provision away from central government towards local authorities.

Of particular note were the measures to reform and improve children's care outlined within the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003). Responding to the outcomes of an enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié the *Every Child Matters* proposals required local authorities to integrate services for increased efficiency in the protection of at risk children and young people. Central to this enterprise was the creation of Children's Trusts, which were designed to play a leading role in the coordination of local authority commissioning for children and young people's services. This placed the responsibility for service commissioning, quality and outcomes firmly in the hands of local authorities, undermining Connexions' sub-regional partnerships. In 2004 the *Every Child Matters: Next Steps* (DfES, 2004) paper confirmed that the budgets for Connexions were to be aligned and pooled within the new local authority structures, giving local authorities a considerable level of discretion in deciding how their Connexions Service was funded and delivered (Davies, 2010).

Consolidating the role and resourcing of local authorities the following Green Paper *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) announced the provision of £115 million of ring fenced funding. This funding was to be distributed between all local authorities through Youth Opportunity Funds (YOF) and Youth Capital Funds (YCF) – the first capital funding for youth work in over 30 years. The overall aim of these funds was 'to improve the provision of positive activities for young people, by giving young people the power to decide how this funding should be spent in their area' (Golden *et al*, 2008:iii). Indeed, within their pursuit of integrated and coherent youth services New Labour did demonstrate a financial and social commitment to the youth sector and young people's participation within it. These are commitments from which the Coalition government have largely retreated. However, two significant and lasting tensions were also imposed by New Labour's youth policy:

*The incorporation of the public services, previously known as 'voluntary', into the newly entitled 'third sector' tipped the balance of control over youth work in favour of the central financing bod . As a result, voluntary and community organisations became increasingly reliant on funding that subordinated their practice in alignment with government priorities (Davies, 2010).*

*The prioritisation of targeted provision saw a shift away from open access youth work, towards programmes where those deemed 'at risk' were required to attend (Davies, 2010).*

Despite some gains, New Labour had laid the ideological foundations for youth work by the time the

Coalition government came to power in 2010. Since 2010 a number of policy initiatives, focusing on the financing and delivery of services for young people have intensified the challenges facing youth work practitioners (Davies, 2013). These challenges frame the contemporary experience of youth workers and young people.

On the 1st of February 2010 the Cabinet Office and the Department for Education published the Coalition government's *Positive for Youth* policy paper (CO and DfE, 2010). This paper brought together all of the government's policies for young people aged 13-19. In particular the policies outlined within *Positive for Youth* 'set out a new partnership approach for giving young people more opportunities and better support... with voluntary and community groups and local businesses drawn in as full partners' (CO and DfE, 2010:1). This 'new partnership approach' encapsulated one of the core purposes of the *Positive for Youth* document: 'to play down, if not actually write out, the state's direct role in providing or even funding' youth services (Davies, 2013:9).

*Positive for Youth* stressed the responsibility of local authorities, communities and businesses for the organisation and delivery of youth services. In an attempt to articulate some support for this responsabilisation, the document also committed to making volunteering easier and 'funding improved brokerage between businesses and projects for young people' (CO and DfE, 2010: Ministerial Forward). In other words *Positive for Youth* packaged the Coalition government's economic withdrawal within the rhetoric of the 'Big Society'. Indeed, one year after its publication:

*The existence of hefty budget reductions at local level was confirmed by local authority heads of youth services. For instance, Harry Fowler, Head of Birmingham Youth Service, said that his service was facing 50% cuts over the following two to three years: £3 million from a total budget of £5.8 million* (House of Commons, 2011:33)

Nationally, Davies (2013:18) has recognised that by mid-2011 the average budget cut to education-based youth services was 28 per cent, 'with some authorities cutting by 70, 80 and even 100 per cent'.

At a practical level, the consequences of national youth service cuts have resulted in the redundancy of experienced youth workers, an increase in unqualified volunteers and in some instances, the closure of valued youth work facilities. Reflecting critically on the practicalities of capturing alternative funding from the private sector the Education Select Committee (2011) recognised that smaller youth services found it hard to access these sources. This was particularly the case within the context of private organisations' reluctance 'to provide money to "top up" statutory funding' (House of Commons, 2011:31). Additionally, the Select Committee's (2011) recognition that many youth services were unaware of the alternative social and financial opportunities available to them suggested that the government's commitment to 'improve brokerage' between businesses and youth services had failed to reach those in need of support.



Despite the economic constraints imposed by austerity measures, the Coalition government's youth policy has also raised expectations for those involved in the provision of services for young people. Reflecting the trends outlined within the European Commission's (2014) Youth Work Report, UK youth workers currently find themselves under increasing pressure to emphasise measurable outcomes, partnership working and targeted services in the context of declining 'upfront financing' (Dunne *et al*, 2014a). Paradoxically the push for partnership working has also been coupled with increasing competition between youth work initiatives. As Fyfe and Moir (2013) have recognised, youth workers are often now directly competing for funding at the same time as being expected to work together. Whilst in principle the deployment of services to disadvantaged communities, the integration of agencies and the measurement of outcomes should produce benefits for young people, in practice these expectations are problematic.

For example, the Cabinet Office and Department for Education's (2010) *Positive for Youth* paper; the cross governmental *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* report (Home Office: 2011); and the Department for Local Communities *Helping Troubled Families* initiative (DCLG: 2012a) have all emphasised the integration of local services in the management of targeted young people deemed, problematically, 'at risk' (Turnbull and Spence, 2011). On controlling youth violence, the Home Office (2011:22) report argues that 'police intelligence by itself won't be enough', suggesting that local agencies 'will need to share all the information and intelligence they hold'. This is a contentious requirement for many youth workers, whose professional relationships can balance precariously on young people's confidence in their discretion (Crimmens *et al*, 2004; Davies and Wood, 2010).

The Coalition government's focus on preventative intervention amongst those 'at risk' of becoming involved in 'antisocial behaviour' has also added pressure to youth workers through the introduction of payment-by-results schemes (DCLG, 2012b). The payment-by-results scheme demands increasing evidence of the 'impact' and 'outcomes' of funded youth services (Davies, 2013). However, as the Education Select Committee (2011:83) has accepted: 'the outcomes of individual youth work relationships can be very difficult to quantify'. Outcomes are contextually specific and they are not delivered by single programmes or organisations (Taylor, 2013). Problematically, for 'both principled and operational reasons' (Lehal, 2010:98) this focus on measurable outcomes has led some youth work managers to focus disproportionately on the production of figures whilst 'abandoning critical youth work practice' (Cooper, 2011:14). Indeed, Cooper (2011:1) has gone as far as suggesting that the current preoccupation with government targets 'is closing off opportunities for progressive ways of working with young people and, as a corollary, is stifling the capacity of young people to overcome the structural constraints limiting their life chances'.

As it stands the Coalition government's youth policy expects local authorities to organise, deliver and evidence productive, targeted provision, at the same time as suffering significant funding cuts

(Dunne *et al*, 2014a). The policy push for multi-agency approaches and measurable outcomes, evidenced by the Young Foundation's *Framework of Outcomes for Young People* (McNeil *et al*, 2012), also inadvertently compromises the delivery of critical youth work, leading at worst to the reproduction of structural inequalities through young people's engagement with uncritical practice (Cooper, 2011; Taylor, 2013). For those involved in youth work the current economic and political environment imposes constraints and raises contradictions; complicating the delivery of services, at the same time as diminishing the rewards of inspired practice at all levels.

## Research methods and setting

This article is informed by three years of ethnographic research with professional youth workers, volunteers and young people (aged 11 – 19). The ethnographic approach is immersive and characteristically encompasses a variety of research methods for the collection of data.

Practically, the research was conducted in and around two youth clubs and a homework club. These services were all located within Maple and Meadow, two areas of Forgefield, a post-industrial northern city.<sup>2</sup> Forgefield has a rich history of steel production. It also has an ethnically diverse population of which 19.2% are from minority ethnic backgrounds (ONS, 2011). Amongst others, the city is home to White British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Yemini, African Caribbean, Jamaican, Chinese and Somali communities. This diversity is, in part, the product of high levels of inward migration, during the mid-20th century, to meet the growing demand for industrial labour. However, the subsequent decline of the steel industry has left Forgefield with levels of long term unemployment that are above the national average (ONS, 2011).

Maple and Meadow are both densely populated areas. Over half of the housing in Maple (74%) and Meadow (56.2%) consists of flats, maisonettes or apartments within purpose-built housing blocks (ONS, 2011). On a scale of 1 – 32,482, where 1 is the most deprived living environment, the 2010 Indices of Deprivation ranked the area surrounding the Maple flats 2,864 (ONS, 2011). Similarly, the area surrounding the Meadow flats was ranked 2,962 (ONS, 2011). Maple and Meadow are both economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse. Excluding 'Pakistani' and variants of 'White' all of the ethnic categories measured within Maple and Meadow during the 2011 Census exceeded the city averages.

All three of the youth services involved in this research were open-access. Despite this, the clubs were principally attended by Somali males (aged 11 – 19). The youth clubs were staffed by local, casual workers/volunteers and they were funded by a variety of private and public sources. These sources included the Home Office, the local council, the Football Foundation, the National Lottery, local businesses and the Police. Throughout the data collection period (06/2010 – 06/2013) 14 youth workers engaged in semi structured interviews, 11 young people engaged in two in-depth focus groups and detailed ethnographic field notes were collected for analysis.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed by the author. These transcripts were reviewed line for line and coded using an ‘open coding’ technique. Open coding refers to the ‘process of breaking down, examining, comparing, contextualising and categorising data’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61). This process generated a set of codes for each transcript. The sets of codes were then compared with a mind to establishing themes. Themes were generated according to the principles of analytical induction (Becker, 1998). This required ensuring that the product of analysis genuinely reflected all of the available data, enhancing the ecological validity of the research findings (Bryman, 2012). In order to ensure that the research findings were aligned with the opinions and experiences of participants, participants were verbally updated throughout the process and invited to review written work. Indeed, both the practical and analytic processes involved in this research were guided by the principle of reciprocity. This is a strategy used to challenge the ‘hegemonic practices of traditional, hierarchical research’ which is based on the ‘belief that researchers and participants are equal, and that the research should be mutually beneficial’ (Huisman, 2008:372). Since June 2013 one follow up interview has been conducted, on request by a participant. The primary data collected between June 2010 and April 2014 directly inform the focus of this article.

### Trust and respect: introducing the youth work relationship

The general function of youth work is to develop *voluntary*, informal relationships with young people that are conducive to the provision of opportunities and support that aid positive social development (Willmott, 1966; Huebner *et al*, 2003; Krueger, 2005; IDYW 2012; Taylor, 2013; Dunne *et al*, 2014a). It is the principle of *voluntary* engagement that constitutes one of the most definitive characteristics of youth work practice (Davies, 2005; Lehal, 2010). A worker’s productivity is often dependent on the young people ‘opting in’ to informal interactions that could be the basis for ‘developing real relationships’ (Crimmens *et al*, 2004:28). By ‘opting in’, young people also reserve the right to ‘opt out’, in doing so leaving youth workers redundant. So, to some degree young people are always able to exercise a level of power within youth work relationships, albeit a limited one. ‘Because this is the starting point, practitioners have no choice but to *negotiate* with young people’ and these negotiations are facilitated by the development of voluntary relationships (Davies, 2005:8). The significance of youth work relationships were central to the practitioners involved in this research. The following comment from Abdi, a 30 year old youth worker in the Meadow area reflects this significance:

*Abdi: For me, the relationship is the foundation of youth work. You remove the relationship, that’s the end of what you were gonna do with that young person or what you were gonna do in the area. And, it’s a very difficult thing for a lot of people to comp ehend because if you haven’t done youth work or you haven’t actually observed youth workers, you cannot admire or appreciate how critical having a relationship with that individual is ... consistency is definitely important as well, because they’ve got to see you every week to build that*

*relationship and to strengthen it every week. Erm, so for me the relationship is paramount to this line of work.*

Abdi's comments confirm the foundational significance of relationships within youth work practice. Indeed, all fourteen interviewees agreed that productive youth work was founded on mutual relationships of trust and respect (Alexander, 2000; Crimmons *et al*, 2004; Davies, 2005). For the youth workers involved in this research, both trust and respect had to be earned and this was a process that developed over time. In the extract below Mohammed, a 15 year old regular at the Meadow club illustrates the centrality of trust within productive youth work relationships:

*Mohammed: I don't know like, I just don't know. If it was like, if I just went to a new youth club for instance, and they saw I had a black eye or something I would not tell them. Like it's basically a stranger, I wouldn't tell them what, how I got the black eye an all that.*

*Will: What about if it was in a local youth club in your area where you've known somebody for a long time?*

*Mohammed: Then maybe yeah.*

Mohammed's description of an unfamiliar youth worker as 'basically a stranger' illustrates the failure of the professional 'youth worker' title to equate a trustworthy status (St Croix, 2010). Instead trust, like respect, had to be earned through processes of interaction, often over a sustained and lengthy period (Crimmens *et al*, 2004; Davies, 2005). The youth clubs involved in this research facilitated the development of mutually trusting and respectful relationships proficiently. This was principally achieved through their local volunteering and staffing models. Indeed, casual workers and volunteers from the local areas almost exclusively staffed these services. In part, these staffing dynamics reflected longstanding managerial commitments to the provision of local opportunities. However, local staffing was also a product of the economic constraints imposed by the contemporary funding landscape, which, across the country, have seen volunteers 'increasingly replacing trained and qualified youth workers' (Davies, 2013:14).

## Evidencing challenges to critical practice

Analysis of the data generated by this research highlighted numerous tensions between youth work in principle, as espoused by contemporary youth policy, and experiences of youth work in practice. In particular, local staffing, partnership working and training arose as key sites of policy contradiction. Illustrating these contractions at the level of practice offers important empirical substantiation for contemporary criticisms of national youth policy (Davies, 2011; 2013; Fyfe and Moir, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

## Local staffing

Respondents often described their local ties with the communities in which they practiced as an occupational asset (Crimmens *et al.*, 2004). Workers/volunteers who had grown up in the same areas as the clubs they staffed always had pre-existing relationships with some of the attendees. In the extract below Liveer, a 17 year old casual worker refers to the advantages of locality:

*Liveer: It's like, I've grown up with them (attendees) so basically we know each other very well. If I tell them to stop doing what they're doing, if they're doing anything bad I'm sure they'll listen to me because we've grown up with each other; friends from day one.*

It is true that local staff and volunteers were able to draw on their existing friendships and contextual understandings of attendees' peer groups and familial ties to develop mutually trusting and respectful relationships. However, in practice, local workers'/volunteers' friendships with service users could also *inhibit* their capacity to engage in effective, critical practice. This was particularly the case amongst inexperienced workers and volunteers.

For example, homophobic mockery was commonplace within both of the youth clubs involved in this research. This behaviour was rarely challenged by any of the younger workers or volunteers, fashioning a situation where hegemonic gender roles were reproduced throughout interactions which reinforced discriminative perceptions of alternative gendered or sexual identities. Incidentally, the issues surrounding homophobic mockery notably reduced following the appointment of Lucy, a female volunteer who regularly challenged this behaviour. Lucy's outlook on gendered and sexual orientation was more liberal than many of the workers and, whilst she was from the local area, Lucy did not spend her leisure time with the service users. As a result Lucy was comfortable challenging some of the behaviours which other staff members were reluctant to address. Lucy's successes illustrate the value of diversity within staff teams. Indeed, in a context where the utilisation of local workers/volunteers is an integral part of productive engagement, staff diversity can go some way towards diluting the issues associated with the demarcation of personal and professional identities (Crimmens *et al.*, 2004). Within the following extract, Kel, a 22 year old casually paid worker recalls the challenges of working with his peers:

*Kel: Yeah it was like that when I was volunteering because, I was 18 at that time and a lot of my friends used to come down, and obviously I had managers and things that used to look over us, and I'm not gonna lie, I used to mess about. Just like them, you know what I mean? I used to run around like a headless chicken and just mess about just like they did, because they're ma boys. But then again, you got the managers that are about and they talk to you, and you have the evaluations. Bit by bit you realise like, you know I can make a career out of this, and if I keep going on like this I'm not gonna be nowhere really. I got to take it more serious. It's about realisation really. You've got to just clock onto the time and do it really,*

*just got to get your head down and do it. It's not, it's not easy man. When I was volunteering I wanted to quit because I thought: 'This ain't no fun no more.' I used to come to this youth club and try to work in it but my own boys were coming to this youth club you know? It ain't no fun no more. But then you've got to realise that it's not about fun, you've got to be responsible.*

*Will: And did you find that your mates understood that after a while*

*Kel: Yeah but after a while they stopped coming themselves, and I think when they stopped coming to the youth club it made me like work more.*

Kel's comments clearly articulate the difficulty some local volunteers faced maintaining a balance between informality and professionalism within youth club settings. Additionally – and this is important – for Kel it was the realisation that his voluntary engagement could lead to a career in youth work that marked his transition into responsible practice. This is not a trivial matter, particularly when the austerity measures introduced by the Coalition government mark such dramatic changes in the youth funding landscape. Indeed, if it is the prospect of steady wages that provokes responsible and professional practice for some, then the dissolution of these prospects through the decimation of youth service funding is likely to have detrimental implications for the commitment of local volunteers.

Notably, the decimation of sustainable career prospects for youth workers also coloured youth work managers' perspectives on nurturing local talent. Discussing fifteen years of practice with no pension, Royce, a youth work manager from the Meadow area illustrated this point:

*Royce: Who do I prepare to be my successor from the younger ranks? I would be interested in that if I saw a more sustainable way forward. If I don't see that way forward as an elder, then why should I spend my time preparing somebody to come into this field to be done over like myself? You know? I'm gonna say: 'No, take your intelligence elsewhere because it's not going to get any better anytime soon.'*

This concern illustrates a significant contradiction in the Coalition government's expectations of local and voluntary youth work delivery. Indeed, the ability of youth and community organisations, not just to recruit, but to *motivate* and *develop* volunteers is one of the misguided assumptions of the 'Big Society' agenda (Evans, 2011). If the dissolution of career prospects compromises volunteers' longitudinal engagement, then the traditional development of local talent and the mobilisation of local knowledge will be impacted negatively.

## Partnership working

Brokering partnerships between the local agencies responsible for managing health, education, housing, employment and criminal justice is central to the Coalition government's youth policy. These partnerships aim to provide young people with 'more opportunities and better support' (CO and DfE, 2010:63), particularly those deemed 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' (Home Office, 2011; DCLG, 2012a). In principle this is a rational and responsible goal. However, in practice 'joining up' services is challenging and a range of factors can influence the compatibility of the agencies included within the youth policy vision. Issues of compatibility become pertinent in the context of youth work, which necessarily centres on the voluntary relationships outlined above.

The young respondents involved in this research had the most respect for the youth workers they deemed trustworthy. As a consequence, maintaining mutually trusting relationships was a central part of the youth workers' practice. In some instances this influenced the ways in which youth workers managed their associations with other professionals, particularly the police. As Kel explained:

*Kel: Because it's with authorities, a lot of youth workers these days, young people say that they're involved in police activities, and the trust goes down the hill. We try to upkeep that trust and keep it going, we don't want to lose any trust with the young people. It's hard to get and you keep that bond for a long time.*

*Will: So it's important to sort of, keep a clear line between what you do as a youth worker and more formal authorities like the police?*

*Kel: Yeah yeah you have to keep a line because, then again it's trust. It's all about trust, if the young people see you talking to the police and then they get into trouble... I'll be honest with you, the majority of young people don't like the police anyway, their experiences of like brothers and uncles and cousins that are serving jail sentences, and they can see, it's not fair. But they do realise why they're in jail, but they're still not seeing that family member because of what happened (with the police).*

For Kel, accusations of information sharing fundamentally limited his capacity to engage productively with young people. The fragility of the observed youth work relationships, alongside their centrality to productive practice cemented Kel's reluctance to share information with the police. This reluctance was widely held by the other local youth workers/volunteers, reflecting general 'neighbourhood values' concerning 'informing the authorities about low-level crime and deviance' (Crimmens *et al*, 2004:29). Indeed, for the local youth workers, information sharing risked their youth work relationships *and* their broader local reputations.

Within both Maple and Meadow local relations with the police were poor. In an attempt to address this issue, approximately once every six months Community Police Support Officers (CPSOs) would arrive at youth club sessions, for five or ten minutes at a time. These attempts to develop rapport were predictably fruitless. CPSOs within the youth club were always perceived as an external, intruding group. The following comments from Mohammed (15) and Killah (15) two of the regular Maple youth club attendees illustrate this point:

*Mohammed: The police just judge you for what area you're from. For instance like if (pause) Maple doesn't have like a good reputation does it? I mean lots of crime and all that lot happen, so they'll just look down at you.*

*Will: Those police that come into the youth club a couple of weeks ago?*

*Killah: Yeah we don't like them.*

By showing up unannounced, local CPSOs contributed to the existing divisions between themselves and the youth services. Youth workers/volunteers were much happier to be forewarned about police visits. This meant that they could openly inform attendees in advance and in doing so avoid any allegations of colluding with the authorities. This illustrates the misguided nature of the government's assumption that local, increasingly voluntary service providers will compromise their professional and personal reputations by conforming strictly to partnership working policy initiatives. Indeed, brokering productive partnerships between youth workers and the police in Maple or Meadow would have involved overcoming established cultural barriers, a process that would need to occur over time with sustained support, engagement and compromise.

At this point it is important to recognise that the youth workers' reluctance to work in partnership with the police was not extended to all agencies. In fact, some of the respondents spoke positively about partnerships with social workers and career development advisors. This was because these partnerships added value, producing mutual benefits, without compromising the principles of child centred practice. However, in the context of diminishing resources and the predominance of risk centred policy initiatives (Home Office, 2011) youth workers are increasingly pressured to work alongside agencies that can compromise the foundations of the relationships that are central to youth work. This illustrates a process by which the contemporary funding landscape undermines the voluntary sector through the reduction of possibilities for sustainable, financed provision that promotes the core principles of youth work.

Indeed, in some instances the prioritisation of youth work relationships resulted in youth workers' refusal of potentially lucrative partnerships. At the time of the research, the Maple Homework Club was partially funded by a variety of sources. This club provided homework support for young people in the Maple area, many of whom did not have access to computers, printers or academic



help due to their parent's English language skills. This club was popular and consistently had a waiting list of prospective attendees. During the research one of the local schools approached the Homework Club organisers to broker a partnership, as John, a Maple Homework Club organiser explained:

*John: That's something that we've had discussions with the schools about because there have been times where the schools that the students have come from wanted, well, have possibly offered money to the Homework Club, but they want information that would allow them to measure the effectiveness of the money.*

*Will: Hmm ok.*

*John: And let's see, three years ago that was the first request came in, and the schools said: 'Can you let us know which of our pupils are attending the sessions?' and I said: 'Well we've not asked the pupils permission so we'll ask them over the next couple of sessions' and I was really surprised that 100% of them said: 'No, we don't want the schools to have our names'. I would have expected 50/50, something like that, but all of them said no, so we haven't done that.*

John's example articulates the significance Homework Club attendees placed on the separation of that service from their local schools. Despite the fact that the Homework Club was a space where attendees worked on homework set by the schools, they were uncomfortable with the establishment of any formal associations between the two organisations. This example reflects two points for consideration. Initially, it is clear that the Homework Club attendees *enjoyed* the fact that the club was not 'part of school'. The club had a different atmosphere and a more relaxed code of conduct which was conducive to voluntary engagement. Secondly, the dynamics within the Homework Club actively promoted the empowerment of young people, and in their refusal to share information with the schools, the young people gladly exercised that power. This recognition of young people's agency represents a key factor separating the Homework Club from the local schools. Thus, for these young people, working with the school represented both a symbolic and actual threat to the favourable power dynamics that were structured into their youth work relationships (Davies, 2005).

Clearly the government's expectations of partnership working reflect a limited understanding of youth work. Yet the contemporary funding landscape necessitates financial resourcing through local partnerships. In order to sustain their services youth workers need to seek partnerships which offer mutual investments and outcomes, without compromising the principles of their practice. However, the context of short term funding and part time working which characterises contemporary youth work significantly compromises workers'/managers' ability to seek out these partnerships. Again, this illustrates a contradiction in the Coalition government's youth policy.

If partnership working (CO and DfE, 2010) and information sharing (Home Office, 2011) are to remain central to the government's vision of youth work, then consultancy from youth workers will be needed in order to illustrate how, if at all, these expectations can be delivered without compromising the success and character of youth work.

## Training

The youth work managers involved in this research all reflected on the difficulties of developing professionally capable staff teams on shoestring budgets. Offering regular and innovative training was an integral part of maintaining high quality services. Training boosted the professional capacity of staff teams, it facilitated team building and offered volunteers and workers an important sense of development and progression. Delivering critical youth work practice is both emotionally and intellectually challenging. Volunteers in particular often needed to spend a considerable amount of time engaging with services before they could productively contribute to the delivery of youth work sessions. This posed challenges for youth work managers, who were increasingly reliant on volunteers, yet constrained in their capacity to train them. As Royce, a youth work manager from Meadow illustrated:

*Royce: ... motivating volunteers to stay with you, to train with you and then deliver is the hardest part of the job, because you're trying to create a service that has quality, but also the flexibility to work with young people and working with young people is not a straight road. They will throw a whole load of curve balls at you that you don't expect. I've been in all kinds of situations where, you know, the kid that I never thought would hurt a fly is a sexual deviant, or the kid that you think is the most boisterous or the most trouble causing is actually the most vulnerable. So, you know, you're dealing with all different walks of life, all different kinds of lifestyles, all different kinds of concepts and perceptions of life and you've got to train a volunteer to be open to all of these different elements, whilst not superimposing their own background into the work, which is one of the hardest things... So training volunteers to understand all of that is a hard, difficult process, especially when you don't get no money for training.*

Royce's comments illustrate the complexity of youth work practice. In order to meet National Occupation Standards (NYA, 2014) youth workers require a comprehensive understanding of the values and principles of practice, alongside the communities and young people they engage with. On top of this, youth workers are increasingly expected to shoulder additional responsibilities which require a deep comprehension of complex policy agendas (Thomas, 2011). This necessitates additional training. However, as Sally, the Maple youth work manager confirmed, in the context of contemporary funding constraints, training was increasingly difficult to finance:

Sally: ... *we haven't got funding for extra training. Training costs huge amounts of money because the funders, they want outputs, they want numbers of kids. No funders will give you money to train up your workers to that level of expertise that you can actually manage them. Most of our youth workers have a hotch potch of training. No way near as high as I'd like it to be, because they only work a few hours a week, how are we gonna do that?*

The issues outlined by Sally were amplified by the managers' reliance on private business investment, because for private investors the value of funding youth services lay in its potential to evidence their social, philanthropic activity. This required particular outcomes, such as attendance figures or emotive photographs, which staff training sessions could not deliver. As a consequence there was little or no room for private investment in training. Whilst cheaper in-house alternatives (delivered by members of the youth work team) were attempted throughout the course of the research, the fact that these sessions had to be scheduled on weekends and no financial incentives could be provided considerably reduced attendance.

Workers'/volunteers' perception of youth work as a financially unsuitable career choice also reduced their inclination to attend the training opportunities that were available to them. Indeed, the majority of the junior workers/volunteers involved in this research planned to attend university and pursue alternative career plans. This suggests that the challenges facing youth work managers, in terms of staff development and retention (Dunne *et al.* 2014a), are likely to be associated with the diminishing professional status of youth work, imposed by the dissolution of sustainable funding opportunities.

Ultimately, training plays an integral role in the delivery of professional and critical youth work practice and this is exactly the kind of practice that is necessary in order to deliver the outcomes that contemporary government expectations impose (CO and DfE, 2010). However, brokering partnerships between youth organisations and local businesses (CO and DfE, 2010) does not alleviate the issues that youth organisations face financing this training. In 2008 the National Youth Agency audit reported 47 out of 144 local authorities had spent nothing on continuing professional development. In 2011 the Education Select Committee cited the value of investing in professional youth work development (House of Commons, 2011:49). In 2014 the European Commission's report on youth work suggested that the lack of 'clear learning development pathways...can lead to difficulties recruiting youth workers and result in high turnover in the sector' (Dunne *et al.* 2014a:183). This suggests that the underfinancing of professional development in youth work is a sustained and obstinate feature. Yet, in the context of decreased support and opportunity for young people (Dorling, 2013; Gardiner, 2014), the importance of progressive and critical youth work is more pertinent than ever. If central government expect local community organisations to contribute significantly to the economic and social development of young people (Dunne *et al.* 2014a) then the significance of sustainable practice and professional career development will have to be taken more seriously.

## Conclusion

This article has provided empirical support for some of the pertinent criticisms of the contemporary youth policy context (Davies, 2011; 2013; Fyfe and Moir, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The examples discussed are far from exhaustive, but they do closely reflect the primary concerns of the youth workers, managers and young people involved in the research. Respondents cited staffing, training and partnership working as key challenges to effective youth work practice. Exploring these challenges has identified points of policy contradiction, illustrating how and why local service providers struggle to meet the expectations imposed by the Coalition government (CO and DfE, 2010). Indeed, as youth services are becoming increasingly reliant on volunteers and short term private investment, they are simultaneously expected to provide innovative practices, aligned with government priorities, which produce measurable outcomes. This is simply not feasible.

The Coalition government have suggested that local responsabilisation, information sharing and partnership working will enable youth organisations to provide young people with more opportunities and better support – support which is crucial in the context of sustained inequality and youth unemployment (Gardiner, 2014; ONS, 2014). However, the data presented within this article illustrate a different reality. Whilst the youth services involved in this research were all proficient in the provision of safe spaces for young people, to do their homework or spend their leisure time, the capacity of these services to exceed these opportunities and meet the expectations of government were significantly compromised by the youth policy and funding landscape. This suggests that the Coalition government's youth policy has raised the expectations of youth work at the same time as undermining the capabilities of the sector, a paradox which raises distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice. These distinctions illustrate an epistemic disjuncture between policy makers and youth workers, demonstrating the need for additional research, and knowledge brokering, if more informed and operational youth policies are to be developed. However the fact that youth policy is 'not a government priority' (Davies, 2013:26) does not bode well for this aim. It is also striking given the increasing evidence base for the value of youth work in the European Union (Dunne *et al*, 2014a; Dunne *et al*, 2014b).

Despite these challenges, the youth work sector is resilient. However, in order for open access youth work to realise its potential; to empower and successfully aid the social development of young people, youth workers need to resist the structural constraints that are currently damaging the stability of principled practice, at the same time as preserving morale and developing critical youth work in the context of diminishing resources. This amplifies the need for practitioners, in the plethora of settings within which they find themselves, to unite, define and defend youth work as a distinctive and indispensable discipline (IDYW, 2009; Taylor, 2013).

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## Notes

- 1 *A comprehensive overview of this history is beyond the scope and purpose of this article. For further policy detail see Coles (2006) and Davies (2008).*
- 2 *All locations have been anonymised; for further details please contact the author.*

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

## Innovation and Youth Work

Tony Jeffs

### Abstract

*Innovation has long been central to the survival of youth work as a form of welfare practice. During a period when local and central government spending is being curtailed how can we expect innovative practice to emerge without the stimulus of state funding and in the face of state indifference to youth work per se? The article considers the reasons behind that withdrawal and the impact it has had on practice before proceeding to consider what forms of innovative practice might emerge in the future in response to changes in the life-styles of young people and the social and political environment. It concludes by arguing for the location of youth within civil society and for the development of new forms of civic democratic practice.*

**Key words:** civil society, informal education, development of youth work, contemporary youth work practice, civic and democratic practice.

INNOVATION WAS always woven into the fabric of youth work. From the outset youth work was obliged to remake itself as the social context and the needs of young people altered. Inflexibility was, therefore, never a viable option as practitioners risked being engulfed by technological and social change. During a two hundred year history, this occurred infrequently. Club leaders and youth workers, as a consequence of their recurring contact with young people and communities, most being part-time workers or volunteers functioning in their own neighbourhoods, have rarely been caught unawares by these transformations. They may, at times, have been one step behind. However, rarely was it more than one step. The dialogical basis of their practice helped ensure these men and women were, if they were going about their work correctly, incessantly engaged in conversation with young people. Therefore, those practitioners who listened and were embedded within the local community acquired distinctive insights into the lived experiences of the young. Unique knowledge of this kind meant a significant minority became 'practice-based' advocates arguing within public forums, nationally and locally, for greater public investment in and philanthropic support for youth work. Their practice equipped them to promote reforms able to improve the life-chances of those they worked alongside. From the 1900s onwards, letters penned by youth workers recurrently appeared in correspondence columns of *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Telegraph* as well as those of local press. These communicated the valuable work being undertaken by clubs and the like, described the challenges and difficulties facing members, and urged others to 'lend a hand'. Rightly, because their opinions were founded upon knowledge acquired from the arena of practice, politicians and policy-makers tended to pay

heed to their views. Prominent youth and settlement workers were frequently invited as experts in their field to serve on Royal Commissions, governmental standing committees, and study groups relating to educational and welfare issues. For much of the twentieth century, youth work enjoyed a presence on the political system's inside-track because many leading politicians either had direct experience of working in clubs and settlements or personal ties with those who did. For instance, in 1911, when the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs (NOGC) was founded the wives of both the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, and the leader of the Labour Party Ramsey MacDonald, were active supporters of girls' club work. Margot Asquith, with her sister Laura Tennant, founded a girls' club linked to the Girls' Friendly Society in Scotland prior to her marriage. Subsequently, after moving to London she became a supporter of the Archie Gordon Boys' Club (Hoxton) (Dove, 1996). Margaret MacDonald (nee Gladstone) was a pioneer of club work who first introduced Lily Montagu to the work (Spence, 2004). Come 1945, little had changed. Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, was an ex-boys' club leader and settlement worker and both his wife Violet, and the wife of the leader of the opposition, Clementine Churchill, actively supported the National Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs (NAGC&MC). Moreover, the King, prior to his accession, had in 1921 (when he was Duke of York) launched, and unflinchingly attended the annual fourteen day camps named after him. The participants comprised in equal number members of boys' clubs and public school pupils. His brother, the Duke of Gloucester, was an exceptionally pro-active founder President of the National Association of Boys' Clubs (NABC). When the names of the first four women awarded life peerages were announced in 1958 it aroused no comment that two were longstanding club workers. Irene (Lady) Curzon was one who when elevated had already served for forty years as a leader at the Highway Club (Tower Hamlets) and was President of the London Union of Youth Clubs and Vice-President of the NAGC&MC (the latter, an organisation she almost single-handedly saved from bankruptcy by working almost full-time as an unpaid fundraiser between 1946 and 1947). The second was Katherine Elliot founder of the Pedro Club in 1929 and, for a decade, Chair of the NAGC&MC.

One by-product of this situation was that whenever youth work, or for that matter community work, was discussed in a public forum, amongst those taking part were individuals whose opinions were informed by practice and who retained an abiding affection for the work. A second spin-off was that their commitment provided abundant evidence that here was a valuable activity. After all if the Prime Minister, the King, a healthy smattering of public figures, and tens of thousands of less exalted citizens freely devoted time and energy to youth work and youth organisations then, self-evidently, here was a worthwhile enterprise. Because it was a 'mass movement' comprising thousands of clubs and units; hundreds of thousands of voluntary leaders; and over four million members, youth work encountered no obligation to justify or explain itself. Why should it? Especially when groups of young people often literally, built their own clubs brick-by-brick (Stimson, 1948) and hundreds of thousands raised substantial sums to sustain clubs or units.<sup>1</sup> The value and benefits of youth work were givens. It was as much an essential component of a mature democratic society as an ambulance service, adult education, or homes for the infirm. Moreover,

from this pot-pourri of talents, youthful zest and commitment to public service, emerged a constant flow of innovation. Usually this came from the grass-roots. National youth organisations were, as with so much else, products of this dynamic. Unlike today, when they have only tokenistic memberships, these bodies were controlled from below by active local branches. Innovation within this environment tended to arise as part of the natural order of things; driven by the desire of practitioners to better serve members' changing needs and likewise of the members to better serve their peers. Almost every innovation in relation to practice – be it the concept of the club itself; the idea of a youth centre; detached and outreach work; youth cafes; residential centres; outdoor and adventure provision; mobile facilities; and specialist work with girls and young women, disabled young people, ethnic minorities and gay, lesbian and transgender young people – as a consequence, initially surfaced at the local level.

The once vibrant grass-roots have withered. No longer is youth work a mass-movement but a remnant sustained, where it survives, by a rapidly decreasing posse of paid full and part-time workers. There are exceptions. Noticeably some uniformed youth organisations, specifically the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, who have enjoyed something of a revival in the last two decades and a faith-based sector which, although much smaller than it was a century ago, thrives thanks to a pool of voluntary leaders and an increasing cohort of often poorly remunerated staff. Indeed, in many localities, they are partially or wholly plugging the gap vacated by the once substantial statutory providers (Smith et al. 2015). Therefore, whenever discussion of 'a youth work crisis' occurs one should understand that 'crisis' relates almost exclusively to secular units and typically those that were previously fully or partially funded by local authorities or the boys' clubs.

## Hard times

In April 2015, only 40 per cent of the government's proposed cuts to public expenditure have been implemented. The remaining 60 per cent will be imposed during the next three years (Emmerson et al, 2015). Given that expenditure on the National Health Service, schools, pensions and overseas aid is ring-fenced, and home care and related services are protected by other means, it is inevitable that the cutbacks imposed on youth services will exceed the levels experienced during the period 2010 – 2014.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, the current rate of depletion approximates to 12 per cent per annum (Department for Education, 2014). This will most likely accelerate to 20 per cent or more during the next few years as the search for reductions in non-protected areas of public finance intensifies (Emmerson et al, 2015). Therefore, by the time the process of rolling-back public expenditure is completed in 2017 or thereabouts,<sup>3</sup> little is likely to remain of the once thriving statutory youth sector. A rump may linger here or there but overwhelmingly it, like the once flourishing statutory and university based adult education service, will become a fast-fading memory. Twice before, in the early 1920s and 1950s, local and central government, as a consequence of financial difficulties, withdrew funding leaving a vigorous voluntary sector to carry-on unaided (Davies, 1999; Jeffs, 2015). The Board of Education in the 1920s and the Ministry of Education in the late 1940s and

early 1950s did so apologetically. Not least because the decades prior to the decision being taken to step aside had witnessed substantive growth, in provision and membership. The ship was buoyant and the expectation was always that, once the economic crisis was vanquished, the government would rejoin the crew to lend a hand. Such expectations were well-founded because ministers, civil servants and educationalists believed, when making those cuts, that clubs and youth organisations made a valuable contribution towards the betterment of young people and national wellbeing. And that is what occurred, with reinvestment after the first round of cuts implemented from 1937 when economic recovery became a reality (Jeffs, 1979). After the next substantial cutbacks, reinvestment followed the publication of the Albemarle Report in 1960 in a period of sustained financial growth (Davies, 1999). On each occasion the case for renewal was articulated by authoritative political figures drawn from across the political spectrum abetted by self-confident and assertive national organisations such as the NABC, NAGC&MC (UK Youth since 2001), YWCA, YMCA and Standing Conference of National Voluntary Organisations (NCVYS since 1972)<sup>4</sup> as well as the uniformed organisations. All had a genuine membership base, vigorous local branches and influential officers, which equipped them to lobby from positions of strength. Collectively their presence ensured a foundation existed upon which to build.

Things are radically different this time. Curtailment in state expenditure follows decades of a waning in the number of funded youth centres and clubs, a consistent falling away in their membership and an accelerating decline in the numbers of voluntary and paid workers. Trends that persist despite belated attempts by the last government to reverse them via cash injections, albeit short term, dispensed through schemes such as *Transforming Youth Work*, *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services*, the *Youth Service Development Fund* and the *myplace* initiative. Each in turn failed to bequeath a legacy or reverse the decline. Even after allowing for the fact these interventions were short-sighted, and generally incompetently managed, they nevertheless confirmed that heightened spending could not resolve the underlying structural problems besetting the youth service. *myplace*, in particular, demonstrated that even costly, well-equipped purpose-built, ‘state-of-the-art’ centres were incapable of attracting sufficient numbers to justify the investment (Spence et al, 2011). This confirmed that youth centres as a mode of intervention had no realistic future – they were incapable of attracting the great grandchildren of those who flocked to them in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Ominously, youth service managers and workers seemed incapable of proposing alternative ways of spending the government’s largesse; no alternative *modus operandi* ever made it to the table. Therefore the abject failure of the *myplace* programme effectively sounded the death knell of the statutory sector. The flurry of initiatives ended with the departure of the Labour government and the arrival of the Conservative-Liberal coalition. Michael Gove, the incoming Education Secretary, adopted in relation to youth services a policy of benign neglect – during his first three years in post he chose not to visit a single youth centre, headquarters or project (Puffett, 2013). Eventually, in 2013, Gove decided the Department for Education (DfE) would cease paying the stable fees for a perennially losing horse and off-loaded responsibility onto the Cabinet Office. The rupture appears to have been total. One year on, the then Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency, who

initially welcomed the move (McCardle, 2014a), was complaining that: ‘despite our efforts, they [the DfE] won’t even talk to us’ (McCardle, 2014b). Since 1917, youth work at a national level had unambiguously been viewed as an educational service – residing alongside schools, FE and the universities. Now, it has been unceremoniously transferred to a dustbin department which, apart from co-ordinating the work of inter-departmental committees, undertakes those tasks in which the major spending departments have no interest.

## Cut adrift

Both administratively and philosophically, relocation to the Cabinet Office signified an extraordinary rupture with the past. Administratively, it reflected a prevailing belief amongst ministers and senior civil servants that, when over 80 per cent of seventeen year olds were in full or part-time education and in excess of 50 per cent still there at age 20, it should be schools, colleges and universities who, besides providing education, must be the prime dispensers of support and leisure services for young people. Given the miniscule proportion of 15 to 20 year olds opting to engage with statutory youth workers, the logic underpinning this analysis is difficult to fault. Sixty plus years ago, when approaching 90 per cent of young people were in full-time employment by age 16, youth centres and organisations provided tangible services that addressed real needs. Here were venues where once over half our young workers made and sustained friendships, secured an entrée to leisure opportunities, accessed cultural activities and educational programmes, and sought the advice and support of responsive adults (for data on attendance rates see, for example, Reed, 1950). No longer is this so. Now it is within formal educational settings that the vast majority of young people’s friendships are initiated and sustained (Bagwell and Schmidt, 2013; Blatchford, 1998; Frank et al, 2013). Moreover, schools and colleges can also offer leisure facilities unmatched by any youth centre as well as increasingly professional guidance and support services. Couple this with the emergence of mass home entertainment, growing access to electronic means of communication, and the arrival of evermore sophisticated commercial leisure provision – and it becomes clear why a dramatic decline in the numbers frequenting youth centres or hanging around street corners has occurred and why the closure of centres has had no significant social impact.

Philosophically, the damage wrought by the uncoupling of youth work from the DfE is difficult to exaggerate. This is no minor administrative re-alignment for it speaks of a judgement made by civil servants and senior politicians that youth work has ceased to be an educational service. Youth organisations and leaders once perceived themselves to be simultaneous providers of welfare, educational and leisure provision. By 1939, a more confidently interventionist state had acquired the last vestiges of that welfare role. From that point onwards, their prime *raison d’être* became informal and social education; hence the logical belief amongst youth workers that they were, first and foremost, educators. Less than a decade earlier many had still, with good cause, referred to themselves as social workers, viewing this as a more accurate description of their role. Post 1939, this habit ceased. Legislation corroborated the intellectual re-alignment by making the Ministry

of Education and LEAs youth work's point of political reference. Justifiably, youth leaders now aspired to be designated as 'educators' fully equal to school-teachers and FE lecturers; certainly not mere overseers of unruly youth or leisure-centre managers (see, for example, Brew, 1943a; 1946). Such claims were not illusory. cursory examinations of the programmes and activities of clubs and centres, from their origins in the late nineteenth century until around the onset of the 1980s, would surely convince a fair-minded reader that most set out to provide members with a diet of educational experiences. Like settlements and adult education centres, to which many clubs were linked, they strove to offer working-class young people a *liberalia studia*.

Significant segments of the workforce embodied this commitment. Many were working-class autodidacts, often themselves the products of the Workers' Educational Association, Extra-Mural and Plebs League traditions, who aspired to communicate their own love of learning to an up-coming generation. Others recognised the benefits a grammar school, public school or university education had bestowed upon them and sought to share, via youth work, some of the cultural capital these institutions had given them with those less fortunate than themselves (see, for example, Berger-Hamerschlag, 1955; Blandy, 1967; Forrest, 2013; Jordan and Fisher, 1955; Jeffs, 2015). Together they were drawn to youth work because, via the medium of informal education and cultural activities, they believed they might be able to partially set aside the legacy of the impoverished and impoverishing education their members had received from elementary and secondary modern schools. Youth work was a way whereby they might widen horizons, expand perceptions, encourage empathy and instil respect for democracy. Hence the emphasis within club life not only upon democratic structures and equality but also opportunities to access those elements of a liberal education most likely to instil intellectual discernment, wisdom and a capacity to separate sense from nonsense. For both these constellations of leaders, youth work was an act of faith, based on a belief, articulated by Kant, that 'the human being can only become human through education. He is nothing except what education makes of him' (2008: 443). At their finest, youth clubs were, for a century or more, justifiably viewed by many as educational centres where, in comparison to the authoritarian classroom and hierarchical regimented school, it was possible to teach in ways that 'orient us in action' (Neiman, 2014: 42); enclaves where members might develop those 'habits of the heart' essential for democracy to flourish. Libraries and reading rooms could be encountered in most clubs; art and craft classes were routine; dramatic performances, choirs and music-making commonplace; discussion groups and visiting speakers a fixture within most programmes; and outings to the countryside, theatre, ballet and concerts as much a feature of club life as sport and dancing. Conversation, discussion and dialogue were the 'blood stream' of youth work just as they were of liberal adult education and the university seminar. Fostering an interest in cultural pursuits may have been an up-hill struggle for leaders catering for young people working long hours in arduous occupations but the clubs' gifted leaders offered a matchless opportunity to engage in dialogue with young people, to raise their sights and help them build the world anew. It was because they appreciated the educational value and potential of these small battalions that thousands of secular adults voluntarily sacrificed a portion of their spare time to club

work; to act in a modest way as a ‘guide, philosopher and friend’ (Brew, 1946: 14) to the young people who voluntarily opted to spend time in their company. Secular practitioners, it should be stressed, were often motivated by deeply-held political and educational ‘convictions’ much as others were stirred to engage in youth work by their religious faith. For these, youth work was a means of ‘giving something back’ and of contributing to the vitality of civil society.

## What is the point?

Little remains of those radical secular traditions within youth work today. Pedagogic input is now increasingly dictated by funders – be they governmental departments, welfare agencies, local authorities or commercial concerns. Consequently, interventions are predominately concerned with behaviour modification rather than cultural or intellectual enrichment. The first three are willing to pay in the hope that by doing so they can reduce future calls upon their budgets. They want, for example, young people to not smoke, eat more healthily, steer clear of unprotected sex, do better at school, offend less, spend their money more wisely (thereby avoiding unmanageable debt), not do drugs, be sufficiently resilient to not need mental health services, and to become responsible consumers of alcohol – so they hire youth workers to ‘deliver’ packaged or approved programmes to the more ‘difficult to reach’. Reflection is sidelined by instruction; dialogue sacrificed in order to better meet a prescribed outcome. These ‘inputs’ tend to be ‘delivered’ in bite-size units mixing bribes to attend, such as a trip, with quasi-formulaic instruction. Commercial funders, on the other hand, exploit youth work as a means by which they can improve sales, raise product profile and fashion even more gullible consumers. The absurdity is that whereas one group of paymasters seek to foster a heightened sense of responsibility and (at least in some cases) critical judgement, another endeavours to generate irresponsibility and an unquestioning acceptance of consumerism. Unfortunately, and it says a great deal about the readiness of youth work agencies and staff to accept cash from any source in order to pay their wages, no meaningful debate at any level has taken place regarding the morality of taking money from commercial firms and some state funded agencies (Jeffs and Smith, 2010).

Irrespective of the morality of employing youth workers for the purposes of selling products and delivering behaviour modification, what is clear is that this is not an especially cost-effective means of securing the funders’ desired outcomes. For example, targeted policing, incarceration, electronic surveillance, psychological profiling and intensive casework all offer more effective means of reducing youth offending than detached youth work or programmes delivered to those who happen perchance to be attending a centre or project at a given time. Moreover, the evidence generally shows that if you wish to modify behaviour, it is best to start early. Hence the belief on the part of successive governments, especially since the imposition of a national curriculum, that the most efficient way to change future behaviour is by tinkering with the school curriculum: first, because this allows funders to reach the full cohort; second, because via the medium of inspection and testing, it becomes possible to guarantee what you want ‘delivered’ is actually ‘delivered’. An

almost perfect example of this thinking is embodied in the February 2015 Report of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on ‘Gangs and Youth Crime’ (HoC, 2015). This argues that the most effective strategy is to expand primary school anti-gang education programmes plus appoint a senior teacher to co-ordinate anti-gang measures in schools located in areas ‘blighted’ by gang violence. A second example is the decision of the DfE to establish a *Character Innovation* Fund to develop ‘character education’ in schools. Schools, in order to access this cash-cow, will be expected to teach (in line with the DfE’s definition of ‘character’) perseverance, resilience, grit, confidence, optimism, motivation, drive, ambition, neighbourliness, community spirit, tolerance, respect, honesty, integrity, dignity, conscientiousness, curiosity and focus. In both these instances, in times past, the prime mechanism for addressing these ‘issues’ would have been via the strengthening of the youth services’ capacity to intervene. Now government departments, like commercial firms, see youth organisations as the least attractive option. However, whereas governments can tweak the curriculum to achieve their ends, the corporate sector cannot. Instead, they seek by means, fair and foul, to get advertising materials into schools via such ploys as free ‘teaching’ materials, sponsorship and ‘mentoring’ (McLaren and Farahmander, 2005; Smith, et al, 2004). By 2012, cash incentives meant 80 per cent of public schools in the USA had contracts with either Coca-cola or Pepsi (Philpott, 2012). Similar levels of market penetration are likely to be achieved in the UK in the near future (Monbiot, 2013), unless the political climate changes. Consequently, such firms will surely pay diminishing heed to youth work.

The omens for youth work are not healthy. Salvation will not come via begging for work or by delivering the syllabi and ‘teaching materials’ of external agencies. No White Knight is on the horizon. ‘Something will turn up’ is not a helpful motto to adopt at this point in time. Deliverance will also not be secured by undertaking evaluations and impact studies. For, these ultimately confirm that those currently managing and funding youth work do not actually believe what they are doing has any intrinsic value and worth, that they are in effect flying on a wing and a prayer. Calls for more research into what youth work does and achieves on the part of universities and consultants is almost certainly motivated primarily by self-interest. Juicy contracts and income streams that may potentially stave off redundancies and boost research-ratings play a part in generating pleas for more research into outcomes. Others advocating this route simply raise questions regarding their impoverished knowledge of the field, for an abundant supply of research findings and evaluations already exists detailing what youth work does, can and fails to achieve, as well as an absence of faith regarding the efficacy of current practice (see for example Brent, 2009; Catalano, *et al*, 1990; Conrad and Hedin, 1981; Dishion, *et al*, 1999; Feinstein, *et al*, 2006; Furlong, *et al*, 1997; Goetschius and Tash, 1967; Hendry, *et al*, 1990; Osgood, *et al*, 1996).<sup>5</sup> In this respect, it is difficult to visualize a more depressing council of despair, or admission of failure and irrelevance, than the plea of the recently launched Centre for *Youth Impact* which invites:

*youth organisations and services to come together and address a key issue: the need to articulate how our work changes the lives of young people and how investment in youth*



*services is of benefit to everyone* (Centre for Youth Impact, 2014).

If, after decades of existence, the affiliated organisations cannot articulate what is worthwhile and valuable regarding what they and their affiliates ‘do’, one can only enquire why they have been ‘doing youth work’ and asking taxpayers and others to fund it? Why were they not asking those questions prior to this late stage? Probably these questions are now being posed because, whereas previously youth work had a clearly valued role and purpose, and like day centres for the elderly, nurseries and other welfare services was valued by the clientele and the wider public who willingly paid for it via taxation and charitable donations, this is no longer the case. Rather, the question that should be exercising the minds of those funding and supporting the *Centre for Youth Impact* is not ‘what is youth work’ but rather the far more pertinent ‘what can youth work become’? If secular non-uniformed youth work has a future, which is far from certain, it is only by addressing that question that we will unearth the new roles and innovative ways of intervening in the lives of young people that justify the required investment of time and resources. In the meantime, rummaging around for ‘best practice’, ‘impact measures’ and ‘innovation’ will sadly, as before, prove a fruitless exercise.

## Beginning afresh

Youth work has long been one of the many foundation stones that buttressed civil society alongside the churches, friendly societies, trade unions, co-operatives, cultural clubs, welfare associations, charitable bodies and social clubs. Some still prosper. Others, like youth work, have fallen on hard times and leached membership. Some, like the friendly societies, have virtually disappeared from view (Harris, 2004: 81-84) and others, such as churches and trade unions, have experienced relative decline.

Until recently, youth work was justifiably viewed by a substantive proportion of the population as something to be treasured and nurtured; our evidence for this being the extent to which it was sustained by voluntary effort, freely given gifts and donations, and the scale of membership which reflected, at the very least, tacit parental support. Here was a small but vital fragment of the wedge that kept the democratic system secure from disproportionate incursions by big government and big business. Youth provision linked to faith, cultural and sporting organisations remains rooted in civil society as do uniformed youth organisations such as the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. And it is these, unlike the bulk of what is left after they have been subtracted from the equation, which have prospered during the last two decades; prospered to a significant degree because they possessed the freedom from state and commercial funding that enabled them to be more creative, imaginative and responsive to the changing environment. Because they are not funding led, what they offer is far less likely to be ‘weary, stale, flat and unprofitable’ (to borrow words from Shakespeare’s Hamlet) for it tends to emerge from dialogue involving members and workers. Indeed, they have also held fast to the concept of membership, thereby avoiding the inherent hazards associated with

treating young people as consumers, users, victims or customers. For approaches that ‘marketise’ or ‘victimise’ them render meaningless the concepts of association, allegiance and obligation essential for the survival of civic bodies. A disproportionate reliance on voluntary and unpaid workers within the faith sector, although it brings in its wake different problems, ensures that paying staff wages and meeting overheads does not become the first priority for these groups. Finally, what more than anything else contributes to their flourishing is that these agencies and units customarily possess a clear sense of purpose. A rationale that permits them to be honest with young people; they offer members a transparent contract. Devoid of ambiguity, it guarantees the latter know what it is that motivates the worker and shapes their practice. Rarely is this the case regarding those working in secular and statutory provision.

Despite its relative success it is possible to identify certain weaknesses relating to faith-based youth work. The first flows from the reality that most British citizens are either indifferent to or antagonistic towards organised religion – which means only a minority will contemplate affiliating to faith based organisations. The second is the long-standing problem that faith based organisations, because they are founded on a given belief system, invariably find it difficult, even in some cases impossible, to collaborate with one another. Nevertheless, secular youth projects and the remnants of the statutory sector, evidently have much to learn from the faith-based and uniformed sectors. However, secular and statutory youth work would be seriously mistaken if they assume all that is needed to revive their fortunes would be to cherry-pick the best elements of the faith-based and uniformed sectors’ methodologies. Appropriating some of their practices will not, at this late stage, reverse a terminal decline. For this collapse of secular and statutory youth work does not predominately stem from poor practice or incompetent management, although both played their part, rather it derives from an absence of clarity regarding function and purpose. Faith-based youth work is holding its own primarily because it operates according to a set of shared internal beliefs – educational and spiritual. Beliefs that mean it has ambitions for itself and those it seeks to serve. Furthermore, as it inhabits civil society it enjoys two decisive advantages: (a) immeasurably greater freedom to act; and (b) meaningful linkages with entities possessing active adult memberships. The first means it can act on ideas. Being linked to a faith tradition may result in restrictions concerning what members can study and question. Nevertheless, within that framework, workers and young people can engage in dialogue that predicates autonomous action. This means that if, for example, the club or group wish to do something about, rather than merely discuss, poverty as an issue they can (in most cases) intervene locally, join national campaigns and even demonstrate. Crucially, they will not need to jump through the requisite bureaucratic hoops to acquire the permission of a distant youth office to act and engage.<sup>6</sup> Second, the link to a wider movement means young people can, if they wish, move forward into adult membership. This was once also the case with regards the now defunct but previously substantive youth groups attached to political parties, trade unions and social movements such as the suffrage and co-operative societies – all of whom offered, like contemporary faith-based groups, an entree into an active life in civil society via evangelism, campaigning, social action and dynamic membership. Existing statutory youth provision tenders

no such promise. Membership is, therefore, ultimately a signifier of immaturity and implies an inability to participate unaided in the adult world. Worse, it gifts no toehold into that world. Essentially, it is an educational and social cul-de-sac. Compared to the faith-based sector, and the tiny pockets of provision linked to social and political movements, one encounters a void at the heart of state funded youth work. The latter needs a reason to exist; a justification over and above an ambition to pay wage-bills and service other agencies and commercial interests. This void exists at national and local levels. As a consequence, individuals are displaying a growing reluctance to give of their time to ‘dance to the tune of others’ – that is ‘deliver’ youth work according to the dictates of funders. Similarly, young people appear disinclined to affiliate to organisations that ultimately need them only to meet targets and secure yet more short-term funding. A predictable outcome of these trends has been the gradual, and seemingly irreversible, ‘hollowing-out’ of the national youth organisations. Lacking a membership to whom they are accountable, and a corpus of clubs and units they are obligated to serve, each now competes one-against-the-other to secure funding for themselves rather than for an increasingly mythical field. Paradoxically, they are now simultaneously in competition not only with each other for funding, which makes meaningful collaboration between them implausible, but also with what remains of their own membership. Little wonder they appear unable to protect what exists, let alone create what might be.

### Maybe, just maybe

So, is it a pointless lament to bewail the passing of the secular and statutory youth services and clubs? Or might it be worth trying to invest them with a purpose that could enable them to once more flourish? The answer is perhaps a hesitant ‘yes’ to both questions. Unfortunately, as it currently exists, little is worth saving, so in that respect it would be a pointless lament. A combination of intrusive managerialism, short-term funding and intellectual drift have left a legacy, that apart from odd isolated pockets, does not deserve to survive. However, there may be a role and purpose for a revived and reconstructed secular and independent youth orientated service situated within the realm of civil society. Briefly, four possible roles that might fill the void and provide a new role and purpose are examined below. Doubtless, readers will have alternatives to add to the list, but for the moment these will have to suffice.

First, faith-based youth work acknowledges that schools and further education colleges with their regimented ethos; rigid hierarchies; single-minded focus on test scores, league tables and outcomes; and persistent prioritising of ‘good order’ and instruction, are unsuitable places for the fostering of a meaningful spirituality or empathy towards others. So also must secular youth workers and informal educators similarly accept these institutions are incapable of teaching a love of democracy let alone the competences required to ensure its long term wellbeing. Therefore within any democratic society, especially one such as the United Kingdom, where the central state rigidly controls both what is taught and the types of pedagogy teachers must employ, there exists a self-evident need for settings where young people, in the company of others, can acquire and rehearse

the arts of democracy. Places that will ‘enlarge their mentalities’ and where they can engage in collective action and dialogue in order to learn to become ‘completely human’ (Arendt, 1982: 43) and thereby secure ‘liberation from one’s own private interests’ (Arendt 1977: 242). The need is for settings wherein individuals can work together to build consensus and manage conflict, where the aptitude to live as free, autonomous citizens – rather than as docile consumers, compliant workers and submissive subjects – can be acquired. Settings where it becomes possible to learn alternatives to the narrow market logic of possessive individualism and encounter what Marquand (2004) calls the ‘public logic’. Environments which provide citizens with an opportunity to engage in the fertile life of a deliberative democracy, and which of themselves enrich civil society. As Arendt (1958), once herself a youth worker, reminds us, it is being able to ‘act’ that is the defining feature of freedom and therefore freedom only exists in the context of ‘action’. To give this meaning we must seek out forms of practice that marry philosophical reflection to political and social action. These are not unknown. Indeed, it was pioneered here by the NOGC (Jefferies, 2015) prior to 1914 and the Woodcraft Folk in the 1920s (Davies, 2000). It was also once a feature of the now moribund youth groups linked to the main political parties and now survives as a feature within some faith-based groups. However, it has not thrived for many years, primarily because LEAs, governments and commercial interests predictably refuse to underwrite it; indeed why should they? Yet, much as faith-based interventions involving young people are essential for the survival of a rich spiritual life within the community, similarly a secular civic practice is desperately required to help sustain the vitality of our democracy and encourage healthy public discourse. If Sen (2010) is correct and the essence of democracy lies in ‘public reasoning’ then the creation of new forms of ‘civic youth work’ becomes an urgent necessity. However, to acquire a presence it, like faith-based youth work and the Guides, will have to become predominately self-funding and self-managed. It is evident that existing funders lack any commitment to supporting such forms of practice and, given current funding mechanisms, this is the only way to protect its integrity. Much as the withdrawal from religious adherence can only be countered by direct action on the part of believers, so also the withdrawal from politics and civic engagement must be tackled by collective action undertaken by those similarly committed to sustaining the public realm.

Second, as formal education has expanded so its focus has narrowed. The curriculum has been tapered to embrace merely what is testable and proven to increase employability. Consequently, as Ball argues:

*Generally speaking with the new episteme education is increasingly, indeed perhaps exclusively, spoken of within policy in terms of its economic value and its contribution to international market competitiveness (2007: 185).*

This ‘businessification’ (Allen and Ainley, 2007) of education has resulted in the majority of those emerging from state schools being denied access to knowledge deemed ‘economically unproductive’. Even those who do study what were once called the ‘fine arts’ are now obliged to

do so within a framework that defines them ‘as creative industries’ and pathways leading to the acquisition of ‘flexible and transferrable skills’. Literature, art, music and dance are therefore not perceived as what Greene (1995) termed ‘openings’, aesthetic experiences that lead to what we do not know and have not yet experienced. Consequently, young people in the main now receive what Plutarch (1927) dismissed as ‘bottle’ education; one which serves up knowledge without judgement.<sup>7</sup> State schools that once offered a host of after-hours clubs and societies now rarely do so. Partly their demise is an indicator of a weakening of civil society and erosion of the ‘gift relationship’ and altruism amongst teachers. Now few opt to live in the catchment area, frequently commuting long distances and rarely sacrifice their ‘free’ time to run clubs and teams. School managers also increasingly prefer to rent out facilities for profit rather than use them for ‘out-of-school’ activities for their students. Whatever the cause, and there are a number, within the realms of sport and culture it is primarily those fortunate enough to attend fee-paying and boarding schools, where staff reside on campus or close-by and are employed with the expectation they will contribute to extra-curricular programmes, who enjoy the benefits of a liberal education and an extensive range of cultural and sporting activities. Indeed, one survey estimates private schools provide three times more hours of sport per week than state schools (Espinoza, 2015). Inevitably, this had led to a growing ‘domination’ of the worlds of culture, arts and sport by the alumni of private schools and elite universities. It is a ‘domination’ that Michael Gove, in 2012, categorised as ‘morally indefensible’ but did nothing to address. To counter this growing form of inequality we need to construct novel forms of youth and community work and informal education. Much as liberal adult education is creating new formats offering low cost routes to learning such as the University of the Third Age, study circles, free universities, co-operatives and reading groups, similarly creative pathways are now required to tackle the wider educational needs of the majority of young people. In part, this may involve creating partnerships with existing cultural and sporting organisations to expand routes of entry. Equally, ways might be unearthed to replicate the successful 4-H model developed in rural America during the 1920s that enables adults to freely share their talents and skills with young people within their community. Whatever the means employed, it is important to begin by recognising that the unequal distribution of cultural capital is as damaging to the wellbeing of society and individuals as the lopsided distribution of financial resources. For it helps ensure the exclusion of too many citizens from public discourse as well as denying them access to the upper echelons of the job market. Formal education has not only failed to attend to the issue but, almost certainly through a philistine indifference to matters ‘cultural’, made a bad situation worse. Proven ways of addressing it exist, but it will require a shedding of our addiction to state funding and managerialism, and jettisoning our obsession with behaviour modification and measurable outcomes. Redirecting our focus instead on finding new as well as re-discovering old ways of offering young people access to cultural, educational and sporting experiences at nil or minimal cost would surely be at the heart of any project to create a secular civic youth work practice.

Third, we need to recognise that what has long served as a central justification for youth work no

longer has a realistic purchase. Traditionally it was argued youth clubs and groups were essential in order that young people might secure access to their own space. According to this analysis, youth workers and organisations must provide clientele with a haven and sanctuary wherein they might be themselves. When all but a tiny minority of young people aged 14 to 21 were in employment and during their working days in workshops and offices surrounded by adults this made apparent sense. Now it does not. Now the ‘problem’ is that young people spend virtually all their time in those ‘factories of adolescence’; schools, colleges or universities. Now their ‘working lives’ are almost exclusively spent in the company of their peers. And, when alone, they are likely to be in their room either communicating by phone or computer with other young people; usually it seems, their school or college friends (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011). The result is the emergence of a dangerous form of epistemic closure. Hence the challenge now is not how best to create new sanctuaries and bolt-holes for young people but how to break down growing generational barriers. Fashioning ways of fostering inter-action and association between adults and young people. Encouraging mature behaviour and discouraging childishness amongst the young and self-imposed isolation amongst the older generations. These are again the sort of challenges a civic youth work might take up.

Finally, a civic secular provision is required as a counter-weight to faith-based youth work. The latter has manifest strengths and much to recommend it. However, un-challenged it poses real problems to the flourishing of a democratic society. For within that sector one encounters some practice that superficially has much in common with youth work but actually veers towards indoctrination. Groups and units where the leader or adult is not open to a questioning of their fundamental beliefs and assumptions and, therefore, eschews dialogue. Where the practice is driven, for the most part, by a desire to either convert or prevent members from rejecting the faith of their parent(s) and, as a consequence, habitually discourages dialogue based on a mutual search for truth. Where leaders discard the possibility of doubt (Davies, 2015) and opt instead to hold fast to a belief in an absolute truth, be it religious or ideological, this will result in ‘an end to discourse and thus to friendship, and thus to humanness’ (Arendt, 1968: 26). The proportion of pupils attending schools controlled by religious groups is currently 37 per cent and growing year-on-year. Much as we should offer alternative educational venues to those provided by the regimented school, so it is equally important to do so apropos to those ‘trapped’ in faith schools. Such young people should have alternatives to the closed world of the faith school and faith-based youth club. Places where they can freely mix with others of a different or no faith. Places where they can encounter ideas that demand they clarify their world view. Abundant examples exist, not least nearby in Northern Ireland, of the dangers originating from school systems structured to prevent young people from sharing a desk with those from differing religious traditions. Ultimately, religion is a matter of choice, unlike gender, age or race. Anything that restricts the capacity of individuals to make informed choices regarding their religious, political or cultural beliefs should therefore be challenged. Schooling and youth provision designed to prevent access to ideas that question a given religious, political or economic orthodoxy should be confronted for, as Camus put

it, 'We gasp for air among people who believe they are absolutely right' (2007: 252). Ultimately, a pluralist society requires pluralist informal education which will include provision for young people. The presence, and indeed the fostering, of doubt within education is crucial for individual and societal growth. Moreover:

*if we are to live in harmony with ourselves and with nature, we need to be able to communicate freely in a creative movement in which no one permanently holds to or otherwise defends his own ideas. (Bohm, 1996:4)*

## Conclusion

Each of the four examples implies that secular civic youth work may have a future if it adopts new paradigms. The seemingly unstoppable rise of corporate capitalism and the unforeseen growth of digital communication and surveillance are coalescing in ways that will oblige youth work to entirely re-think its role and function if it is to survive, let alone flourish. However, what slim chance it does have of enduring depends on it first reclaiming its lost autonomy. An autonomy that allows it to practice in the realm of civil society. For that to happen, it must learn to operate according to a civic not a commercial or statist logic. A logic that will enable a genuinely secular civic youth work to engage with the lives of young people in ways that unambiguously prioritise their interests and those of their fellow citizens, rather than those of either the state or corporate sector. To achieve that end, secular civic youth work must stop trying to justify its existence by employing the language of others (Lakoff, 2006). Instead, we must seek to construct a democratic language and metaphors that enable us to explain what it does, both among ourselves and to others, without recourse to the terminology employed by the state and corporations (Lakoff and Wehling, 2012). Until we do so, we will continue to lose every debate regarding core priorities, and the slide into oblivion will not be arrested let alone reversed. Marketing youth work as a 'brand' or an agency for inculcating 'transferable skills' and 'delivering outcomes' will not arrest the current decline. This is because the collapse of youth services results from the same causal factors that are generating a wider withdrawal from politics and the public realm. Leading to what Unger describes as the thinning of the social bond 'to the point of breaking' (2007: 204). We can only begin re-building a battered youth service when that task is linked to the mission of re-building the battered public realm. In an environment where alienation and the retreat into the private sphere is a growing phenomena, that will not be an easy task; the number of people who report they feel isolated has doubled in the US and most of Europe (Cacioppo and Patrick, 2008). Whilst in the UK, a quarter of the adult population feel emotionally unconnected to others, and one third do not feel connected to the wider community (Pinker, 2015). In slight but significant ways, youth work, liberal adult education, community work and social pedagogy historically strove to counteract isolation and alienation, to strengthen the frail bonds that give life to civil society. That was once a core role. Indeed, all those forms of practice at their best sought to foster what matters, namely:

*the faculties of thought and Imagination that make us human and make our relationships rich human relationships, rather than relationships of mere use and manipulation* (Nussbaum, 2010: 6-7).

Relationships that the author stresses make democracy a possibility. Perhaps it is time we acknowledged that creating the foundations upon which these can be built within the realm of civil society is now the prime function of youth work and informal education.

Given the dire position it currently finds itself in, secular youth work might as well strike out and begin seeking both new languages of practice and fresh paths to follow. After all, it has nothing to lose. Both these options require it to face up to the intellectual challenge of unearthing these; if it does so then innovations relating to practice will inevitably arrive in its wake. Form, as always, should follow function and in this instance the imperative is to uncover via collective debate a worthwhile function for youth work. A useful starting point for the debate might be to revisit the questions Brew asked of her fellow workers in 1943 during the midst of a world war, namely: 'How can the desire for truth be awakened, the love of beauty stimulated, the passion for righteousness quickened?' (1943b: 6). My own suspicion is that secular youth work will not be able to secure an independent future and that practitioners must be prepared to become members of a broader pedagogic church that will include all those other educators operating within civil society and outside the formal and statutory sectors (Jeffs, 2014). But, that does not mean that those who do believe youth work can carve out an independent future in that arena should not be encouraged to embark on a journey to discover it. We should wish them well, whilst preparing an alternative destination for them if they fail.

## Note

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## Endnotes

- 1 *The author was a part-time leader at a club on a new housing estate which after operating for a couple of years in a school hall was given by the LEA three rather derelict huts that had previously served as over-spill classrooms for a local primary school. The members in the space of three months first educated these to a shell then re-built and re-furbished them as a luxurious club complete with a coffee-bar, main auditorium with stage, meeting room, office and changing room. Everything was done by the membership, without outside help, which included in its ranks trainee dress-makers, milliners, plumbers, roofers, electricians, carpenters and engineers. During the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s this was a fairly commonplace story and no way exceptional. You did not consult with the young people as to the colour of the curtains they took the measurements then a week or so later appeared with them ready-made.*
- 2 *Although not officially 'ring-fenced' the Better Care Fund effectively ensures that home care and related services for the elderly cannot be cut by a local authority. In order to secure substantive cash transfers from the Better Care Fund a local authority must sign a legally binding document guaranteeing that they will continue current levels of expenditure. Obviously it is in their interests to therefore reduce expenditure in other 'optional' areas such as youth provision which is what is occurring.*
- 3 *Clearly the election taking place in 2015 may alter this date; however, it is unlikely to alter the outcome. The Conservative Party has announced its intention to eliminate the 'deficit' by 2017, the Liberals by 2019 and Labour by 2020. Both Labour and the Liberals suggest that by extending the timescale they will free up funds to spend on infrastructure projects. Given no infrastructure projects relating to youth work have been mooted this means the erosion in provision will almost certainly continue unabated whatever the outcome of the up-coming election.*
- 4 *The names used here are those current in 1960.*
- 5 *These are just a few examples. Many others can be cited: however it needs to be stressed that findings are not universally flattering or supportive. Indeed Cousse noted they do not always 'hold out a lot of hope' (2009: 7) for those seeking to promote youth work. Perhaps that is why they are overlooked and advocates continue to promote research in the hope it might produce more supportive 'outcomes'?*
- 6 *The author was recently involved in a community arts project designed to work alongside existing youth projects funded by the NHS. It was an experience that confirmed all one's worst fears concerning this problem. When it was suggested it might be worth asking some*

senior Girl Guides to be involved I phoned a local vicar and explained the project. She immediately responded by saying this was an excellent idea and that a member of the group would ring me to discuss their involvement. A few days later I was contacted by that member who asked me what it involved and said she would talk it over with her peers then ring me back. Two days later she did so and invited me and the photographer to their next meeting, and from that moment on they became active participants. When it came to co-operating with a statutory group it was little short of a nightmare. After contacting the youth worker I was invited to County Hall to be grilled. Then after a committee meeting I was called back again to answer more questions, supposedly raised by members of the committee. Finally after weeks of delay I was allowed to meet the worker I had originally contacted. However, when I and the arts worker arrived to do so I was ushered into a different office to be interviewed by a senior office , who did not introduce herself and who I had never met before. After a bout of ill-mannered questioning we were finally allowed to meet the worker I had first contacted at those months earlier.

- 7 The full quote is 'For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for truth'.

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Youth & Policy Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

# Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times – Revisited

Bernard Davies

The Youth & Policy editorial group are delighted to re-publish Bernard Davies' *Manifesto for Youth Work*, re-framed to reflect on the current context for the field. Originally published 10 years ago in 2005, Davies' Manifesto has been an influential document in both practical and academic discussions of what constitute the key features of youth work. We hope it stimulates reflection on the role of empowerment, voluntary participation and working with groups in youth work practice today. Re-publishing it in our 2015 election issue of the journal feels timely as we face what feels to be a critical juncture for youth work and youth services.

## Policy: how it looked in 2005

When *Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times* was published nearly a decade ago, it opened with what was for me, at the time, a perplexing question:

*Has youth work ever been so fashionable – or at greater risk?* (Davies, 2005:7)

At the heart of this paradox, the paper suggested, were two conflicting sets of priorities. On the one hand were those of the managers and workers in a range of 'youth services' who, having recently 'discovered' youth work, wanted it to help them achieve what were, for them, 'pressing and precious outcomes'. Rubbing tensely up against these expectations were the concerns of youth workers themselves and many of their managers, who regarded most of these outcomes as difficult, if not impossible to achieve through youth work, and who were experiencing their imposition as undermining its distinctiveness as a practice. What the new youth work enthusiasts seemed to be demanding was a cherry-picked, if not a de-rooted, version of youth work practice, re-engineered largely to stop young people from dropping out of school, offending, taking drugs or displaying other kinds of 'anti-social behaviour'. Within this refiguring, only incidentally (if at all) was youth work's core educational commitment to tapping into young people's personal potential being endorsed or even recognised.

Even as early as 2005 then, in its analysis of the policy context of the period, the Manifesto displayed some major concerns for the future of youth work. For example, though it suggested that

the ‘new youth work chic ... perhaps promise(d) finally to move it from the recreational margins of public provision for young people’, what it saw as most in demand was youth work’s product. The process necessary for generating the desired outcomes was likely to be treated with impatience, the paper suggested, especially once it became clear how lengthy and labour-intensive it could be. As a result, because what was being offered in the name of youth work ultimately wasn’t youth work at all, there was a real danger that it was being set up to fail – that once the new converts came to realise that the practice as they conceived it couldn’t ‘deliver’ on their terms, youth work would end up losing credibility.

The original Manifesto also judged youth work to be at risk because it saw the organisational environment in which it was operating, comprising the then emergent Children and Young People’s Services, as less and less congenial to it. In particular, by prioritising younger children and child protection, these services were bound to rate the skills and knowledge of some practices, especially social work, as more equal than others. Increasingly, therefore, youth workers and those managing them, were finding themselves at the bottom of these departments’ long lines of accountability, far removed from the centres of power and decision-making and overseen by senior managers with little, if any, understanding of, or even perhaps sympathy for, how they practised.

Nor were voluntary sector organisations seen as having any reason to feel complacent. The Manifesto acknowledged that as the future role of statutory provision became more uncertain, voluntary organisations were likely to be courted by central and local government, to take over services. Once the bottom-line principle of ‘piper calling the tune’ had been applied, however, the paper envisaged that here too there would be ‘a serious diversion from the kind of youth work which the voluntary sector had pioneered and still widely prioritised’ (ibid).

All of this led to the speculative question:

*How much will be left of the Youth Service – the only agency which, with all its flaws, has had an explicit public remit to nurture and develop this practice as a distinctive way of working with young people? (Davies, 2005: 10).*

This rehearsal of the threatening policy trends of a decade ago is not meant to demonstrate the prescience of the original paper. (On the contrary, who today even remembers most of the policy initiatives listed on its first page or why they then seemed so significant?) Rather, what emerges ten years later as much more telling, are features of the policy environment of the period to which the paper gave little or no attention. Most striking here is the absence of any explicit discussion of the dominant neo-liberal ideology which by the time the Manifesto appeared had been shaping the ‘modernisation’ programmes of New Labour’s public services for nearly a decade and which was to have profoundly negative consequences for youth work (see Davies, 2009). By the mid-2000s, this ideology was already embedded in political, policy and media discourses. A deep

suspicion of the state-as-provider precipitated imposed notions of competitive and market-driven public services. This prompted repeated and major bouts of organisational restructuring and built demands for a practice which, through stringent forms of managerialist control, would demonstrate it was achieving ‘hard’ (ie. statistically measured) ‘outcomes’ with the ‘risky’ and the ‘at risk’.

Against this background, the original Manifesto’s failure to give close critical attention to *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (REYS) (DfES, 2001) particularly stands out. This after all was a state paper which had (correctly) been described by the minister who launched it as a ‘landmark document’ for youth work. By the time the Manifesto appeared two-plus years later, it was being experienced by youth workers and their managers in England as seriously constraining and often diversionary – forcing them to meet targets which many felt had little to do with the real needs and expectations of the young people they were working with. In response, all the Manifesto had to offer was one passing second-hand reference.

## Policy a decade on

As this revised version of the Manifesto is being written, the catastrophic effects of the worst ‘recession’ since the 1930s – more accurately described as the near-collapse of the capitalist banking system – are taking a huge toll on public services in general and local authority Youth Services in particular. In the most material and crushing ways, these are largely resolving the youth work paradox posed by the original Manifesto. For whatever fashionableness youth work had had in the early 2000s rapidly dissipated under the Coalition government. Though ‘traditional’ youth work has been sustained in parts of the voluntary and faith sectors, under pressure from government ‘austerity’ programmes, one local authority after another has followed Warwickshire County Council’s very early example by ‘ceasing’ its Youth Service and closing all or most of its youth centres. Where provision has survived, it is refocused on projects strictly mandated to target pre-identified ‘vulnerable’ or ‘anti-social’ young people, often using money for ‘early intervention’ or so-called ‘troubled families’.

A July 2014 Cabinet Office survey captured the stark consequences of all this when it revealed that between 2011-12 and 2013-14:

- council spending on Youth Services fell by 22.3%;
- the proportion of that spending committed to open access provision fell from 55.25% to 47.5%;
- 75% of the 97 survey respondents were predicting that, within three years, between 75 and 100% of their budget would be for targeted work.

The survey also revealed at least 58% of those 97 local authorities, by their own admission were failing fully to meet their legal obligations (McCardle, 2014).



## Why a Manifesto in 2015 – and in what form?

If good grounds existed in 2005 for youth workers to make the case for youth work, by 2015 the need for this has become overwhelming. Ultimately, of course, as the original Manifesto emphasised, the most convincing way of making such a case is likely to be through a practice whose quality and impact speak for themselves, particularly through the voices of young people. However, with fewer and fewer settings available for undertaking such practice, youth workers need, as never before, to be clear, confident and articulate about just what their practice involves and how its distinctiveness enables them to reach parts of the adolescent population that other practices cannot or do not reach.

What follows is an attempt to reconstruct such a statement for a very different historic moment from that out of which the original Manifesto emerged. This has had the benefit of collaboration with colleagues from the In Defence of Youth Work campaign, in particular in producing ‘This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice’ (IDYW, 2011) and in running the nearly thirty youth work story-telling workshops which flowed from this (see IDYW, 2015). From its launch in March 2009, the IDYW campaign has advocated strongly for a conception of a practice with defining characteristics – what it terms its ‘cornerstones’ – that overlap substantially with the distinguishing features of youth work proposed by the 2005 Manifesto. As the facilities providing for this practice have been increasingly dismantled, the campaign has also sought to reach out to workers who, in settings where a very different kind of practice is being required, are struggling to sustain this way of working.

In making the case for youth work as a distinctive practice, the Manifesto is not suggesting that it is superior to other practices with young people. Nor is it denying the potential added value for young people of using so-called ‘youth work approaches’ and ‘youth work skills’ in agencies whose structures and approaches are very different – in schools and pupil referral units, youth offending teams, employment training, health promotion and drugs projects. Nor is it overlooking the fact that the actual practice in some self-defined ‘youth work’ organisations may be very different from how youth work is conceptualised in this paper. Indeed, far from being treated as some final ‘set-in-stone’ statement of position, what follows needs to be seen as the latest stage in a search for clarification of the distinctive nature of youth work which for me has been going on for many years (see, for example, Davies, 1979; 1981; 1999).

Nonetheless, though often dismissed as idealist and passé, the paper’s arguments are quite deliberately presented in an assertive and hard-line way, not least because, as a Manifesto should, it seeks to lay down some clear bottom-lines both for policy-makers and professional worlds outside youth work. Equally unashamedly, it aims also to concentrate minds within youth work on what at this moment, clearly and boldly, needs to be articulated if the practice is to be defended.

This purist position is retained for what I consider to be three very positive reasons:

1. Far from being a pick-and-mix collection of skills available for selective transfer into other ‘youth practices’, youth work is, and needs to be, understood as a practice in its own right, with characteristics which, in combination, give it an overall coherence and distinct identity.
2. For this practice to occur, settings are required which themselves have crucial defining characteristics; above all, that they are self-chosen by young people to use in their discretionary (leisure) time and so have an ethos which is welcoming and comfortable for them, not least because it is substantially shaped by what *they* would expect and want.
3. Evidence exists that a significant minority of young people have been making this choice for decades and that they continue to do so. Surveys from the 1960s right up to 2013 indicate that between a fifth and a third of 13 – 19 year olds regularly use some form of youth work facility with up to six in ten saying they try them at some point in their teens (NCVYS, 2013).

## Searching out youth work’s distinctive identity

The contention of this paper is that, for youth work to be on offer, positive answers are needed to the following questions:

- Is the practice taking place in *settings which are ‘open access’* and to which young people have chosen to come, that is, is their *participation voluntary*?
- Is the practice proactively seeking to *tip balances of power in their favour*?
- Are *young people perceived and received as young people* rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of adult-imposed labels?
- Is the practice *starting where young people are starting*, particularly with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and enjoy themselves?
- Is one key focus of the practice on *the young person as an individual*?
- Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to *young people’s peer networks*?
- Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to *young people’s wider community and cultural identities* and, where young people choose, is it seeking to help them strengthen these?
- Is the practice seeking to *go beyond where young people start*, in particular by encouraging them to develop their personal potential and be critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them?
- Is the practice concerned with *how young people feel* as well as with what they know and can do?

## Interrogating practice: towards a clarification of youth work's defining features

*Is the practice taking place in settings which are 'open access' and to which young people have chosen to come – that is, is their participation voluntary?*

Since the original Manifesto appeared, interpretations of 'voluntary participation' have been a focus of some healthy debate in youth work circles (see for example Williamson, 2007: 38; Ord, 2007: 58-62). This has happened, however, at a time when even key players within the youth work field have been collapsing 'youth work' into any form of 'work with young people', including ones which require or even legally compel attendance (see, for example, Davies, 2013: 21-22). In these circumstances, it has become increasingly urgent to reassert young people's participation in self-chosen 'open access' settings as a – perhaps *the* – defining feature of practice which claims 'youth work' as its title.

In this context, 'setting' does not just refer to buildings such as youth clubs, youth centres, drop-in centres and cafés which have been specially provided to attract young people in their leisure time. It also includes spaces where young people congregate spontaneously, without any prior adult endorsement, and into which, on young people's terms, detached and outreach workers seek to negotiate some right of entry and, perhaps, ongoing contact. At least implicitly, all this also assumes that workers in these settings will go beyond merely tolerating young people's voluntary participation, to positively embracing it as an integral – again, defining – element of their relationships with young people.

Nor, as has sometimes been suggested, is the rationale for this position just theoretical or ideological – 'conservative' or bloody-minded youth workers holding onto a belief which has passed its sell-by date. Rather, it is a position with both deep historical roots and a continuing pragmatic rationale. From the earliest days of 'youth leadership', even its powerful and often evangelical 'pioneers' accepted that 'in the first place the boys had to be persuaded to come...' (Russell and Rigby, 1908:18). More immediately, 'the voluntary principle' continues to ensure that, in their dealings with the institutions which provide youth work and with the practitioners who deliver it face-to-face, young people retain a degree of power. Though the action may never be framed in this way by either adult or young person, each knows that at any point the young person, simply by walking away, may leave the adult powerless in the relationship. This unique feature of our society's public provision for young people is perhaps one hidden explanation as to why youth work in the current neo-liberal climate is so out of favour with politicians and policy-makers. The young person's sense of power may be limited, and to some degree negative, in the sense that attendance at a youth work facility may be the least worst option available in a neighbourhood. Nonetheless, it exists because of the role and the status which are structured into the relationship between user and provider.

Because of this balance of power, youth workers have no choice but to negotiate their way into their relationships with the young people they meet. Nor can this just be a ‘tactical’ manoeuvre focused on easing the young people through ‘boring’ but pre-set and essential tasks *en route* to later, more rewarding outcomes (as it may need to be in teaching for example). The youth work negotiation has to be part of a built-in, authentic and reciprocated give-and-take, sustained throughout the young person-adult engagement. Only then are the young people likely to exercise their power in favour of staying long enough to become exposed to the educational opportunities which youth work might offer – and so sustain a personally committed participation rather than a merely compliant attendance.

The voluntary principle also impacts significantly on the *content* of what is on ‘offer’. Because young people engage in youth work ‘in their own’ time’, youth work proceeds on the presumption that it must deliver returns which are *valued* by young people in their terms. Moreover, and integrally linked with the requirement to negotiate, these ‘valued’ returns need to be valued by the young people in their own right, in the here-and-now or at least pretty soon, and not just as a promise of some later gain. Given the terms on which young people attend, youth workers cannot assume that gratification too long delayed is an option, of the kind, for example which many school students settle for, on the decreasingly credible promise that even on syllabi experienced as ‘irrelevant’, hard work today will eventually bring tradable qualifications and well paid jobs ...

The voluntary principle has significant implications, too, for the ‘hidden’ curriculum’ – including those interpersonal exchanges between teacher and student which can have such an impact on motivation and learning. In many educational environments these can indeed remain hidden, or at least treated as secondary to the real business of getting through the syllabus. In youth work, however, such process questions have to be addressed openly and directly. This is partly because learning experientially about people and their relationships is so central to youth work’s overt ‘curriculum’. However, it is important too, because any youth worker who patronises, rides roughshod over or simply ignores the views or feelings of the young people they meet, is liable to find themselves without a clientele. In more positive terms, young people also often make this clear when they report that what they especially value in their encounters with youth workers is that ‘They treat you like adults’; ‘They don’t judge you ... They don’t stand over you and give out to you’ (Davies and Merton, 2009:11; Devlin and Gunning, 2009: 41).

In the conditions of early 2015, especially the funding climate, many employed as youth workers in non-youth work settings increasingly find themselves needing to apply their skills to convert young people’s enforced attendance into a form of ‘voluntary’ (or at least less compliant) participation. In the process, as was suggested earlier, they may have been able to add significantly to the value of the work for the young people involved. For a much bigger constituency of young people, however, none of this can be a substitute for the open access provision to which they came voluntarily (or not), over whose style and content they had some genuine leverage and whose

distinctive benefits were often only achievable because of the more equal power relationships between adult and young person.

*Is the practice proactively seeking to tip balances of power in young people's favour?*

As the discussion above has highlighted, for youth workers the centrality of 'the voluntary principle' makes a confrontation with questions of power – who has it and how is it used – unavoidable. For many policy-makers and youth agencies, such questions are now newly fashionable as they struggle with how to tap into 'young people's voice' and provide some (carefully bounded and controlled) 'participation' programmes.

However, for the youth worker such goals are not incidental luxuries – the icing on the cake – while implementing them is often not achieved through committees or other formal machinery. Rather, they are pursued through the workers' everyday routine exchanges with the young people who turn up; exchanges whose built-in power balances mean that, from day one and throughout, they have to be shaped by 'participatory' principles and the mutuality of respect and influence which these assume.

The power which young people actually exercise within the youth work relationship is, of course, relative. It is relative, still, to the degree of formal power (for example, over money, buildings and equipment) which remains with the youth worker. And, even more significantly, it is relative to young people's very limited formal power, sometimes coming close to powerlessness, in other spheres of their lives – at home, within education more widely, within employment and (unless they have real money in their pockets) even in their leisure. Indeed, despite the high profile official initiatives to foster their 'empowerment', the fundamental shifts over the past two to three decades in their structural, and especially economic, position in the labour market, the benefit system, the housing market, even now higher education, have very substantially weakened their control over key aspects of their lives.

Youth work's commitment to tipping these balances in young people's favour needs to be seen in this contemporary context. But it needs to be understood, too, in a much broader way: explained bluntly as 'young people are citizens, too – and now'. Though apparently a simple notion, this needs to be asserted uncompromisingly at a time when so many current policies assume that, just because young people (and indeed children) have to be prepared for citizenship, they are therefore *not already* citizens.

For youth work the proposition to tip the balance of power is an entirely contrary one. This insists that the need for preparation and support cannot be merged into a denial that young people now possess some basic civil and legal rights. At a time when all the talk is about 'a lost generation', re-affirming this proposition has never been more urgent.

Again exceptionally if not uniquely youth work's commitment to these more equal power relationships has in some form been embedded in its public remit throughout its history. For example:

*A girls' committee ... is a very important element of a girls' club* (Stanley, 1890: 62).  
*(S)elf-government is a basic principle of the club method ...* (Henriques, 1933: 79).

As such, it has been practised neither as a grudging concession nor merely as a tactical manoeuvre to convince a potentially sceptical clientele to 'give youth work a chance' or to draw them into adult-designed and directed programmes. Rather, it exists as an integral element of the practice. It is there in its own right, rooted as we have seen in young people's choice to attend, to be proactively nurtured and resourced, including, as appropriate for the young people concerned, in arenas without as well as within the youth work context.

Are young people perceived and received as young people *rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of adult-imposed label* ?

Youth work can and does work with 'special groups', including focusing on their specialist interests, needs and concerns. The young people who are engaged may also take a variety of routes to that engagement, including on occasions their (voluntary) follow-up of a referral from a specialist non-youth work agency.

For youth work, however, the *raison d'être* of the work stems solely from the fact that its 'users' belong to a section of the population who are at a particular stage in their personal development, with some specific needs, demands – and opportunities – flowing from this. This in turn assumes a holistic perception of, and set of responses to those needs, demands and opportunities. The practice which emerges will therefore, as far as possible, not be blinkered by any of the (often pejorative) labels attached to young people by powerful adults and adult institutions.

As always in such practices, this stance is not without its contradictions. One of the trickiest is that, especially in today's climate, 'young people' has itself become a pejorative label. Once attached, it is liable to have the same kinds of consequences as any other such prior and rigid categorisation of an individual: prejudgement of personalities and behaviour; a masking of more personal characteristics or of alternative (perhaps self-chosen) identities; a resultant lowering of expectations leading to defensive rather than expansive and affirmative responses to those concerned.

Youth work seeks to guard against such negative effects of the 'young person' label in a number of ways. Some are captured later in this article as other key constituent elements of youth work are explored, in particular, through youth work's adoption of potentiality rather than deficiency 'filters'

through which to view the young person, and in its respect for, and active response to the different collective identities young people may choose to take on.

Nonetheless, a crucial youth work starting point is an acceptance of young people as young people, at a particularly formative stage in their lives and development.

*Is the practice starting where young people are starting – not least with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and enjoy themselves?*

‘Connect, only connect’ with the person, with what they know, how they feel, what they want from the encounter: this has long been an equally crucial starting point for any educator aiming at internalised (‘owned’) and transferable learning. In more formal educational environments like schools, colleges and universities the main connection sought is likely to be with the learner’s intellectual starting points. In these environments, but perhaps especially in non-formal educational settings, emotional connections will also be seen as important, focusing for example on the learners’ levels of confidence, on their self-esteem or on the ‘baggage’ they may be bringing from, say, past educational or family experiences.

Though the youth worker will also be seeking connections with these starting points, other connections will be vital. One, initially and maybe ongoing, will be with young people’s own ‘territory’ – with the physical and geographical spaces which, certainly for leisure purposes, they come to regard as ‘theirs’, where they hope to ‘freely associate’ and where they feel most comfortable. Often these will be public spaces which for periods of a day or week they use and even take over – a key arena, as suggested earlier, for detached youth work.

However, in part again because young people are choosing to participate, they will need to experience even the more institutional contexts and environments in which youth work takes place, to a significant degree as *theirs*. Adult – as well as young people-defined rules and boundaries will usually, and necessarily, operate within these spaces. Nonetheless, sufficient freedom and informal and sociable control of their use will need to exist (or be created) to enable their users to experience high levels of ownership of them: as safe, welcoming, flexible, consultative, dialogical, in significant ways responsive to their starting points.

Ideally, of course, these environments will be of high physical quality offering good, even state-of-the-art, facilities. Even when they are very basic, however, young people may still be willing to engage because workers, working with the young people themselves, have developed an environment which is young people-oriented and to a significant degree young people-driven. Key to defining and creating this ethos will be the creation of another crucial connection: starting with the concerns and interests, and especially, but not only with the leisure interests, of the young people actually involved. It is these that can open up new opportunities for enjoyment

and relaxation and for informal education which, as we shall see later, is another of youth work's commitments. Hence, we see young people's use of youth clubs in even the drabest of community halls and of detached work contacts made on the bleakest street corners or in a 'youth shelter' stuck out in the middle of a field.

*Is one key focus of the practice on the young person as an individual?*

Liberal educationists (which in this context include youth workers) have historically given high priority to 'the individual' and their development:

*... in a club of a hundred members each officer will know every boy* (Russell and Rigby, 1908: 33).

*The head of the club must ... get to know and to understand really well every individual member* (Henriques, 1933: 61)

Underpinning this focus, at least rhetorically, is a societal commitment long endorsed by youth workers to help realise the potential within each of us to become more than we are presently, and even perhaps – if we can break the constraining bonds of material or social circumstances – more than we have ever envisaged ourselves becoming.

In our neo-liberal era, however, these individualistic perspectives require renewed critical scrutiny without being abandoned altogether. Individualistic values have become so deeply and matter-of-factly embedded in our everyday culture that all educational practices, including youth work, are now expected to concentrate almost exclusively on ensuring that each young person becomes 'resilient', 'self-reliant' and 'enterprising'. What such goals mask, are the constraints on any individual's opportunities and self-expression built into such an intensely competitive environment which, in order to guarantee some winners, is bound to leave many as 'losers'. This individualism is therefore likely to play out for many young people as a zero-sum experience which makes far more promises that it can possibly deliver.

Therefore, aspirations for youth work, as for all educational practice, are needed which go beyond and, indeed, sometimes override this elevation of the individual as the only legitimate focus.

*Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to young people's peer networks?*

Youth work seeks to be respectful of and responsive to young people's networks through a commitment to working with and through the 'collectivities' to which young people are, or could be attached. At the very least, these include their peer networks and (considered later) those rooted in community and culture.



Because most young people give such high priority to their relationships with their peers, working with and through their self-chosen friendship groups has to be central to a practice committed, as youth work is, to *starting where young people are*. Most obviously, such groups operate through young people's shared leisure interests and activities – formal and informal, casual and organised, some admittedly less individually affirming or socially acceptable than others. These provide them with opportunities for new experiences which, again, are often valued in their own right, for their here-and-now impact. They, therefore, help balance adults' overwhelming preoccupation with adolescence-as-transition, with ensuring young people make the 'right' moves to become skilled and conscientious workers, contributing and law-abiding citizens, caring parents. Working with and through young people's peer groups is, therefore, one of the ways in which youth workers can attend to, indeed, positively affirm the value young people themselves place on their present. Though, as suggested earlier, to gain access to young people's 'present' on terms which are acceptable to those young people, youth workers will need to assume that a negotiation is essential.

For young people, however, involvement in these networks has other powerful outcomes, some of which in fact, do contribute to adolescent transition as well as having important individual pay-offs. Their often intensive interactions with friends are, to a significant degree, constructed precisely to create a separation of time, space and activity from parents and other power-holding adults – social and emotional 'territory' exclusive to their age group. Here they find leeway to start to define a distinctive and more autonomous adult identity for themselves: what is special about them and their potential, how they wish to express this difference, who other than parents they might wish to recognise as 'significant others'. More positively, this also offers support as well as often painful challenge from those in the same adolescent group as themselves – both vital for navigating this tricky process of self-definition.

The gains can be much more than individual. Working with and through this collectivity whose very label (peer group) too often limits expectations of it – making use of the extra human resources and capacity generated by strength in numbers – can also produce valued shared outcomes: a play, a music group, a sports team, cooking and eating together, to say nothing of 'mere' sociability. By focusing on their peer relationships, youth workers seek to encourage young people to make gains which may only be achievable because the whole at times develops into much more than the sum of its parts. The potential also exists here for redressing the increasingly organised and articulate influence on policy-makers of often youth-averse 'grey power' groups – an influence, as current government policies vividly demonstrate, which is now seriously distorting the state's allocation of resources.

In order to establish productive connections with young people and to have impacts which they value, acceptance of the reality and indeed centrality *for them* of peer interactions, experiences and networks is thus located at the very heart of youth work practice. Though not exclusive to youth work, this remains an exceptional position. As we have seen, our most powerful educational and

welfare ideologies continue to be overwhelmingly focused on the individual – sometimes on her or his potential, too often on their defects. When young people’s groups do appear on the radar of the institutions applying these ideologies, most still (implicitly if not explicitly) see and treat them as unhealthy, risky, threatening – as cliques to be broken up, gangs to be decriminalised. Youth work, on the other hand, starts from the premise that, because such peer networks are so binding on the individual young people who belong to them, they represent a crucial point of access to and arena for working with them. Precisely because this proposition is so exceptional in educational and welfare practice, it embodies one of youth work’s key defining features.

Though peer networks constitute a vital point of contact for the youth worker, not all of course are benign – to be treated as ready-made sites for the realisation of either the young person’s unique talents or the wider social good. Like all collectivities they can also be restrictive, oppressive and even damaging, not least for young people themselves. Many young people are on the receiving end of unwelcome pressures such as bullying and sexual and racial harassment which, if anything, have become more intense in an age of social media. Here, therefore, the agreements being sought through the youth work negotiation will not only need to be acceptable and credible to the young people, they may also need to be challenging to a group’s norms or status quo.

For the most part, however, a much more creative view of the potential of young people’s peer networks shapes youth work practice – a perspective which here too has been at its heart from its inception:

*The boy has a natural instinct for association. The club must organise that association so that it is profitable to the members and to society as a whole* (Henriques, 1933:8).

Increasingly, this has assumed that a key area of youth work ‘skill’ is the proactive development of these group experiences. Using a range of media, which non-youth workers have often dismissed as mere ‘treats’, including sport, the arts, outdoor activities, residential experience, youth work seeks to harness the positive potential of peer interaction and the shared interests and concerns which it can build on to draw young people into new and stretching experiences.

This emphasis on the collective does not of course rule out a deepening of individual relationships including, where appropriate, some intensive personal support and agreed referrals to specialist services. Indeed, these can often emerge out of group situations precisely because, over time and in their own chosen milieu, young people have been able to test out the trustworthiness of this adult called ‘youth worker’. Nonetheless, youth work’s core perspectives and many of its core activities remain negotiated interventions into the self-formed groupings through which, in our society, young people experience influential, if often highly informal, developmental opportunities.

*Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to young people’s wider community and*

cultural identities *and, where young people choose, is it seeking to help them strengthen these?*

A youth work practice which seeks to take its lead from where young people are starting also requires a commitment to respect and be responsive to other collectivities, significant for them.. Those of ‘community’ and ‘culture’ are of particular importance since, often in profound ways, they also help shape the long-term development of the young, as well as their everyday experience. In this context, ‘community’ may be defined geographically or by a group’s commonality of interests and concerns; ‘culture’ by their consciousness of the values, norms and practices which they share with each other through immediate family, wider kin, friends and neighbours as well as through their class, disability, sexuality, ethnicity and/or gender. Indeed, it is particularly these overlaying identities which ultimately undermine those one-size-fits-all explanations of ‘adolescence’ referred to earlier.

For youth work, here too there are both negative and positive perspectives at work in how the individual is placed by society in relation to these collectivities. Youth work resists the assumptions that personal growth is determined *only* by individual choice and effort, and that individual failure is the product *only* of family pathology. For many young people (and indeed adults) with little power to be proactive or indeed even answer back, our society can be experienced as isolating and dislocating, excluding and demonising, not least for those who choose to retain and publicly assert the ‘otherness’ of their community and culture.

Here, too, contradictions and dilemmas are embedded in such a practice. Like peer networks, these collectivities, as well as being supportive and liberating, can be constraining and even oppressive. Some may support cultures which marginalise, harass or actively reject individuals or whole groups through their own oppressive definitions of ‘otherness’. Even where such prejudicial attitudes are not culturally endorsed, an individual’s efforts to balance self-expression and personal growth with respect for and adherence to community or cultural expectations can be painful and even, at the extreme, destructive. This ambivalence can be experienced particularly sharply where those individuals, though wanting to sustain their identity, nonetheless come to resent some of the demands and limits this places on them.

However, in such situations, youth work will be seeking positive and supportive interventions, perhaps by offering the young people alternative affirming experiences or contact with others who are struggling in similar ways. In conditions where the playing fields are far from level, encouraging such collectivities can provide individuals and groups with the extra support, security and identity which derive from some additional strength in numbers. These collectivities also have much more positive and developmental dimensions which fit closely with youth work’s educational and developmental aspirations. Strong community and cultural identities can be decisive in helping young people establish a clear and confident intellectual and emotional self-identity as well as helping them enrich their lives socially. Involvement can also raise consciousness of shared issues

and concerns from which wider political engagement may flow.

Because youth work has to work within these tensions, working with and through the community and cultural identities central to young people's lives is therefore never straightforward or one-dimensional. This of course is likely to be especially true where the worker does not or is not seen to share those identities personally. Once again, therefore, carefully negotiated entry into the collectivities young people define as significant for them emerges as vital. Here, too, a mutually acceptable, if often tense, reconciliation may at some point be needed between, on the one hand, the starting points for this negotiation as defined by the young person themselves and, on the other, the youth worker's judgment on if and where she or he might need to move beyond these.

In this delineation of the 'wider networks' on which young people draw, one 'absence' is particularly striking: that of 'the family'. This is not because most young people do not value their familial relationships, often broadly defined. Nor is it to suggest that youth workers seek to work deliberately against these, or – whether or not they are supportive – that they underestimate their significance for young people. It is, however, to recognise that, for youth work, families do not have the same profile or priority as either community or culture. This is because, in starting where young people are starting and by working on their territory, youth work engages with young people at just those moments and in just those contexts where, often explicitly, they are seeking some separation from familial, and particularly parental, oversight and control.

Clearly circumstances will occur where involvement with family may be necessary and even urgent – occasionally in spite of what an individual young person might choose. Dilemmas, sometimes acute, are also likely where the lines between 'family' and 'culture' are especially blurred, for example, by class or ethnicity. However, where the choice presents itself: 'Whose side am I on – the young person's or the family's?'; the 'default' response, set once again by the young person choosing to engage with youth work, is for the youth worker most likely to be: 'the young person's'.

*Is the practice seeking to go beyond where young people start, in particular by encouraging them to develop their personal potential and be critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them?*

Because of its emphasis on process, youth work is liable at times to give too little priority to task and product (see, for example, IDYW, 2011: 46). This is a tendency which is likely to be exacerbated by the current obsession with demonstrating 'hard' outcomes. However, the risk also exists because so much youth work is located within young people's leisure time and so often starts from what, to a casual observer, looks like mere recreational distractions. At times, youth workers themselves reinforce such perceptions by taking a line of least resistance, avoiding the often tough process of negotiation with the young people they meet and settling for unchallenging

‘pass-times’. In doing this they may, in effect, keep the young people in the already circumscribing traps of limited opportunity, experience and self-expectation.

Crucially, underpinning youth work is a commitment to working from a potentiality rather than a deficiency model of the young. This assumes that each young person, particularly a young person still at an early stage of their development, is capable of more than she or he has yet achieved; and indeed, as suggested earlier, more even than anything they may have yet imagined for themselves. And so, rather than just going along with their immersion in the world as it is and as it has always been, delivered to them by their more powerful elders, a key youth work rationale is to provide secure arenas for young people to risk more critical and creative responses.

As we have seen, for fuelling such movement, the links made with young people’s starting points – with the expectation of relaxing and having fun; with their needs, interests and aspirations as individuals; with their identification with peer, community and cultural networks – are vital. But they are just that: starting points. Or, more actively: they are launch pads from which lift-off can begin into a newer and more developmentally stretching and liberating orbit of personal and collective achievement and satisfaction. Though, objectively, this may look quite modest, subjectively the distance thus travelled, the personal altitudes reached, can for the person feel quite giddy.

Here again, the notion of process is central because such expressions of this new self in new actions are rarely instant events, especially if they are to be sustained. Nor are they often brought about in isolation, insulated from the stimulus and sustained support of others. Few of us, whatever our class background, gender or other prescribed social role or situation, achieve raised self-expectations and the personal development these can generate without the prompting and prodding of others, including often, of course, our peers. Indeed, what is often most significant about this process is that, far from exercising major influence as the currently fashionable ‘role model’, the youth worker is as likely to act as facilitator, particularly of relationships which for the young person will be with ‘people like me’.

*Is the practice concerned with how young people feel as well as with what they know and can do?*

A single-minded focus on process can result in youth workers underestimating the importance for young people of the new knowledge and ‘hard’ skills to be derived from the activities which youth work makes available to them. Such ‘outcomes’ may be largely or wholly defined by the young people themselves and, so, are very different from those relentlessly demanded by current policy-makers. Nonetheless, for those young people they can be both valuable and valued. They can also be key to a youth worker’s successful negotiation with them of a more long-term involvement.

In the youth work context, however, young people are also likely to be looking for something more. Given that most often they choose to come with their friends in their ‘social’ time, as important and motivating for many will be responses and experiences which touch them in quite personal ways: which respect them for who they are, what they think, how they feel; which allow them to speak for themselves, be heard and have some control over what goes on, especially in their encounters with adults; which take their peer relationships seriously and affirm their wider identities. By closing down the space or blocking the responsiveness needed for addressing these more expressive tasks, practice which is obsessively instrumental, preoccupied only with the technicalities of what is to be done, is always at risk of being alienating.

Essential to reversing these kinds of negative processes is therefore another of youth work’s markers: a sensitivity to and prioritising of what and how young people feel – about themselves, about others, about their wider world. This again will need to include specific attention to their here-and-now as well as to the futures (which for many in the current context feel quite elusive) that adults are urging or requiring them to attain. For whilst youth workers view young people as citizens now, they see them also as people now – with feelings needing to be recognised and affirmed, emotional needs to be satisfied and actual as well as potential ‘emotional intelligence’ to be tapped into and endorsed.

## Configuring youth work

Clearly many other practices-with-young-people would lay claim to some, or even many of the characteristics set out above. Those working in further and higher education, for example, would probably say that they too rely heavily on participants’ voluntary engagement. Like other educators, they are also likely to see themselves as working hard to start where young people are starting, and then helping them to develop well beyond those starting points. Practitioners in a range of fields would assert their commitment to the client or student, or indeed patient, as an individual, to showing respect for their community or cultural identities and to connecting with their feelings.

However, even where there is common ground, youth workers are likely to be looking to push beyond some often taken-for-granted boundaries, for example, beyond consulting and informing young people, to a more genuine form of power sharing; and beyond respecting, to actively embracing their peer group and collective identities, including helping them to assert these more confidently. Even more fundamentally, however, other practices are unlikely to see all the features outlined as requiring the high priority they have within youth work or to insist that their close interrelationship and interdependence constitute an overall configuration which defines their practice’s distinctiveness.

How then might this ‘configuration’ show itself in a practice like youth work which takes place ‘on the wing’ (DES, 1987: 2), in largely unstructured environments within highly interactive face-to-

face situations? In dealing with such a question, practitioners are prone to fall back on ‘intuition’ – ‘it’s just what we do, subconsciously’. Yet where recognisable youth work is occurring, the practice, far from being simply random and off-the-cuff, will at the very least be guided by a prepared mind and shaped by some practised tactical responses often called ‘skills’. Like jazz, its process will at the same time be improvised for the moment, and disciplined.

Set out as a series of open-ended questions, the final section of this paper seeks to capture some of the elements of both these qualities – of the preparedness and the tactical responsiveness. Even ten years after the originals were first framed, they remain a ‘work in progress’, included as material to encourage critical debate and further input. Here, I believe, face-to-face practitioners’ contributions will be crucial since credible ‘answers’ are only likely to emerge from searching, systematic and collective as well as individual reflection on practice, of the kind, for example, which IDYW’s youth work story-telling workshops have often stimulated (See IDYW, 2015).

Such reflection might be built around the following questions:

- *Who are **these** young people?*
- *Why are **they** here?*
- *Why are they **here**?*
- *What individual abilities, interests and aspirations are they bringing with them?*
- *What are their levels of confidence and self-esteem:*
  - as individuals;
  - in their relationships with their closest friend or friends;
  - within their wider informal peer group structures ;
  - with – which – adults;
  - in possible relationships with us, the youth workers actually in touch with them?
- *What are, for them, important peer relationship/group contexts?*
  - What are the power relations, rules and sanctions within these?
  - What effects are these having on individual young people – positive and/or negative; defined how?
  - What effects are these likely to have for any youth work intervention?
- *What, for them, are explicit or possible wider identities which need to be respected and embraced?*
- *How are structural factors – poverty, (un)employment, class, race, gender, disability, sexuality – likely to be affecting them, individually, within their peer groups, more widely?*
- *What do these ‘readings’ suggest as possible/promising connecting points for any youth work intervention?*

*Is some youth work intervention in these young people’s lives **justified**?*

- *Are there ethical factors to take into account before making such an intrusion into these*

young people's relationships, their leisure – their lives generally?

- What would be the justification for making such an intervention?
- On what evidence?
- How motivated are these young people likely to be to receive/respond to such interventions?

*How do we personalise this first contact?*

- How do we tailor a first contact to respect these young people's right to choose whether or not to become further engaged?
- How do we tailor this to who they are and where they have reached in their (personal and group) development – particularly as young people?
- How do we tailor it to their wider collective identities?
- Where could this contact best happen?
- Who should try to make it?
- Does the identity of the worker(s) matter – whether, for example, they are local or 'an incomer'; male or female; black or white; gay or straight, (dis)abled?

*Within what 'activity' or on what other 'territory' could the contact be best initiated?*

- What are the (stated or implied) individual and/or collective interests, concerns, aspirations, preoccupations, of these young people?
- What are the points of youth work access to and entry onto this territory?
- Where will an appropriate youth work intervention fit on an informal-formal continuum of activity and structure?

*What connections might be made between these young people's starting points and ways of moving on beyond them – for prompting additional developmental opportunities for these young people?*

- Again: What individual abilities, interests and aspirations have these young people brought to their meetings with youth workers?
- And: What are their levels of confidence and self-esteem?
  - What connections can be made between these starting points and potential developmental opportunities?
  - How motivated are these young people for actually looking for, making and acting on such connections? What barriers might exist to this happening?
  - What youth work inputs might be needed to create/increase this motivation?
  - What youth work inputs might be needed to build these connections?

*Within all this, how best to tread the delicate line between, on the one hand, supporting and increasing and, on the other, weakening or undermining these young people's autonomy and control over their lives?*

- How do these young people define:
  - their starting points, including their starting motivation;



- their interests, abilities and aspirations;
- their levels of confidence and self-esteem;
- their significant peer relationships and community and cultural identities?
- How far do the potential youth work definitions of each of these co-incide with those of young people?
- Where are there significant discrepancies between the two?
- What are the justifications for trying to go beyond – maybe even override – these young people’s own perceptions and definitions?
- In seeking to do this, what might be the cost-benefit balance for these young people?

The youth worker with the prepared mind will also, however, need to be ready for another set of (usually unspoken/implicit) questions which, again, often ‘on the wing’, in the midst of the action, will require some kind of response, even if this ends up as a non-response. These may, for example, include:

- *Do I correct that factual error – or that one? Or just ignore both?*
- *Do I follow up that implied personal disclosure? Now? Later, in some more private space? Or just keep a watching brief because at the moment the implication is so weak or because I’m not sure the young person would respond to a follow up?*
- *Do I react to that racist remark now? Or later? By a confrontational challenge? By a more indirectly questioning approach, by prompting a one-to-one discussion? Or by looking for some group activity or experience which will address the issues more implicitly and tangentially?*
- *Is that really an expression of an interest in music/football/discussing relationships between the lads and the girls/challenging the council’s cuts to the Youth Service? Might some of the group be willing to follow it up? If so, initiated how, when, by whom? Or was it just a passing remark? To be followed up anyway?*

## **An unfinished practice in an outcome-oriented world**

These questions are offered as an attempt to illuminate, to bring to life some of the realities of the process likely to be set in motion when the core and defining features of youth work outlined earlier come together into an interdependent whole – an overall configuration. Such continuing (self-) questioning also helps to highlight how, to be implemented, a worker’s strategic vision of where these young people might go, what they could become, will require grounding in a tactical ‘nous’ involving balance, timing and nerve. It is here particularly that responses will need to make the how of the worker’s interventions consistent with the messages she or he wants the young people to take away from their encounters with them – in other cruder terms, to put their actions where their mouth is!

The questions are also intended to illustrate something else: the essentially ‘unfinished’ nature of a youth work practice which, to be effective, requires practitioners – to say nothing of the young people they work with! – constantly to negotiate uncertainty: to make balanced choices, resolve dilemmas, take the risks which are integral to youth work’s, and indeed many other of life’s, shifting informal human exchanges (see Davies, 2015). All of which explains why (very unfashionably) it can offer no guarantees of reaching certain and final ‘outcomes’ least of all ones which have been externally laid down before any of those ‘*who-are-these-young-people*’ questions have been confronted.

All of this returns us with a bump to our starting point – to the fact that, by its very nature, youth work will (at best) often be able only accidentally to sight its targets with the clarity, or demonstrate its impacts with the neatness, demanded by most current policy-makers. In this managerialist age, this of course is not just youth work’s dilemma: which teacher or social worker or, indeed, doctor would not recognise it? However, because it is so process-driven, the challenge for youth work has become especially sharp as, in their search for ‘measured impacts’ and ‘hard outcomes’, other agencies working with young people extract from the practice what makes it youth work in the first place.

At this critical, historical moment in the struggle for youth work, such negative stances are unlikely to have much resonance or impact. More positive responses in that struggle will certainly be required, including as an important (though on its own far from sufficient) contribution, a spirited and coherent articulation of what distinctively defines the work as youth work. This will especially need to highlight how often it is these defining features of the practice which make it attractive and acceptable to young people in the first place, particularly ones not being reached by other services; and how these distinctive ways of working can motivate them to make the kinds of personal and educational gains which policy-makers and funders repeatedly claim to want for them.


This paper is offered as a contribution to that articulation – for others to amend, build on and refine as their situation demands.

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# THINKING SPACE



## The Fortified College

Brian Belton

AS SOMEONE WITH a long time association with youth work around the world, and a serving magistrate, I have been increasingly disturbed by the British Government's plans to build an £85m 'secure college' for 320 young offenders. This facility is due to open in 2017. For me the idea seems the most ill conceived of any response to youth crime, education and reform I can remember. It also poses a question for us: at what point do we place the punishment of the young before their well-being?

The 'fortified college' as some are calling it, is a contradiction in terms. However, it is probably quite an apt title, as the institution is to be built on land next to Glen Parva Youth Offenders Institute (YOI) in Leicestershire, surrounded by a high perimeter security fence. A competition is to be initiated for private organisations to bid for education contracts at the current publicly-run YOIs and it is intended that this will ultimately include the fortified college. However the Labour Party has expressed concern about the fortified college. Sadiq Khan MP, Labour's shadow Justice Secretary, argued:

*Building the secure college won't even begin until after the next general election. Education is crucial in reforming criminals but building one new establishment in the future will do little to reduce the re-offending rate across the rest of the country (Khan, quoted in Casciani, 2014).*

A range of organisations concerned with young people and young offenders, as well as campaigners for prison reform and civil liberties, concluded that the resources used to set up and staff the fortified college would be more appropriately invested in community based support for children. Many were signatories to an open letter, headed by Children's Rights Alliance for England, protesting

against the concept of and intentions for the fortified college. The group claimed (based on a huge amount of evidence) that investment in smaller units would produce better results.

The alliance of 29 children's organisations and other groups included the NSPCC's Chief Executive, Peter Wanless; Professor Sir Simon Wessely, the President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists; Kathy Evans, the chief executive of Children England; and Shami Chakrabarti, director of the human rights group, Liberty. The alliance declared:

*The Government plans for the largest children's prison in Europe are bad for children, bad for justice and bad for the taxpayer. Children in trouble with the law are some of the most vulnerable and challenging in our society. Many have been the victims of abuse and neglect. Small, family-like, secure homes that focus on rehabilitation and tailored, individual learning are better at helping children turn their lives around. Instead we get a plan to create massive child prisons and no details on how they will be run (Wanless et al, 2014).*

The group wrote that the money '... would be better spent on investing in what works rather than an expensive and dangerous child jail' and that 'warehousing children in massive prisons is the surest way to create more problems for the future' (ibid).

Over the last six years, the number of boys and girls in custody has fallen by 65 percent, but campaigners say the authorities continue to breach the human rights of locked-up children. This point was confirmed by a tragic review of the situation of young people being placed in large custodial institutions early in 2015 (Guardian, 2015).

In the 12 months concluding June 2013, just 6.3 percent of all young offenders sentenced were given a custodial sentence. The Howard League for Penal Reform found that 60 percent of children held on remand go on to be acquitted or receive a non-custodial sentence. The charity revealed that the number of under-18s in custody fell from 3,019 in August 2008 to 1,068 in August 2014. At that point there were just 71 detained children in the East Midlands (where the 320 bed institution is due to be built). This being the case, if the fortified college is built, children from other regions will be incarcerated hundreds of miles from home (Leicester Mercury, 2014).

The Head of Crime and Justice at Policy Exchange, Max Chambers, has said:

*Much of what is left in the youth prison estate is a hardcore group of young men who have been convicted of serious violence – a lot of which is gang-related.*

*Tackling these young offenders and turning them into productive members of society is a hugely difficult job*

Frances Crook, chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform, has stated that building a secure college would replicate ‘the mistakes of the past’:

*Privately-run ‘secure training centres’ were designed to educate, yet they have failed to reduce reoffending and children have died within their walls. Building a larger version of this failed model and calling it a ‘fortified school’ will lead to more crime and increased costs. Indeed, the definition of madness is to do the same thing again and again and expect a different result (Howard League, 2014)*

This conclusion is borne out of the figures for the 12 years ending December 2011: 71 percent of young offenders re-offended within a year of leaving custody, compared to 46 percent of adults leaving custody. There is little sign of this situation becoming significantly better.

Crook continued by declaring that the ‘millions of pounds’ set to be spent on the new facility would be better invested in community support for children. She argued:

*Children in prison have a range of complex needs, including mental health problems, learning difficulties, self-harm, and histories of abuse and neglect*

*Low levels of education must be seen as symptoms of these underlying problems.*

*Tackling the fact so many children in custody have been excluded from school in the first place would be more likely to produce the positive outcomes we all want to see...recognising the reality of why children offend.*

*When the number of children in prison behind bars is falling, the government’s plans to build Europe’s biggest jail for children are, frankly, bizarre.*

*The children in prisons today have complex mental health, learning and social needs that cannot be addressed in a penal institution.*

*I have seen children with cuts they have inflicted on themselves who swallow objects or attempt to hang themselves.*

Rod Morgan, former chairman, Youth Justice Board called the proposal a ‘serious step backwards’ and said that it would not be ‘...the rehabilitative, educational “pathfinder” it is said to be’. Morgan added:

*Economies of scale are fine for the production of nails; they don’t work for seriously troubled adolescents. What are needed are relatively expensive, small, local, intimate units, closely*

*linked to the community agencies with whom troubled children and their families dealt prior to their custody and with whom they will have to relate on release. Large, misleadingly cheap, geographically distant institutions will, despite the best efforts of their teaching staff, fit the description the minister wants to put on the tin: colleges – but of crime. The likely outcome will be the displacement and closure of the local authority [relatively smaller scale] secure units (Guardian, 2014).*

The fortified college is designed to meet what a plethora of youth-and-prison-related charities see as an improbable aspiration: to educate young offenders out of crime. It is hoped *intensive* education and training, delivered within a regime of strict discipline, will have a positive effect on re-offending rates among young criminals. But in reality is the whole project anything more than a transparent cost-cutting strategy? Young offender institutions are hugely expensive. The cost per prisoner, per year, is an average of £65,000. Secure children's homes cost even more – an average of £212,000 a year. The underlying motivation for the fortified college is clearly based on 'stack em high' economics. Places in the fortified college will start at £100,000 a year – but this is still three times more expensive than a place at Eton.

Crook has accused the Government of supplying 'false and misleading' information. She said that there is no substantive evidence for Ministry of Justice claims that the fortified college will be a significantly different secure establishment to a prison for children; a custodial facility, premised on education. In fact there have been changes from the revised plans produced in 2010 which translate to a reduction in the size of the proposed learning and skills block. She has questioned claims made that similar centres elsewhere have cut re-offending, pointing out that the Howard League, that opposes the concept of secure colleges in their entirety, is not aware of any such facilities or any evidence to suggest they are '...anything other than large prisons, which pose risks to the welfare and well-being of hundreds of children incarcerated in them at any one time' (*Leicester Mercury*, 2014). Crook has also argued that the intention to place girls in the fortified college with hundreds of teenage boys creates serious, unprecedented safeguarding risks.

The figures demonstrate that the fortified college will hold close to one in three of all young offenders from England and Wales. Given that there are so few young people living in the immediate area to the fortified college that would be assigned to such an establishment, young people would need to be drawn from all over England and Wales. This would present huge problems for families needing/wishing to visit their children. Many of these families are among the less well off in society. During an era when transport has never been more costly, alongside other child and/or elderly care responsibilities, the situation draws parents, grandparents and siblings into the punishment nexus. The angst, frustration, sorrow and psychological impact of this on the children incarcerated and their families promises to produce something of a powder keg situation, both in terms of control considerations within the institution and the personal well-being of inmates and staff.

Under the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution, cruel and unusual punishment includes, ‘...any fine, penalty, confinement, or treatment that is so disproportionate to the offense as to shock the moral sense of the community.’ In the British context, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, now embedded in English Law by virtue of the Human Rights Act, states: ‘No one shall be subjected to ... inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.’

The fortified college, given the context and situation it is being placed in, flouts both of the above.

Penelope Gibbs, chair of the Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ) has claimed, echoing others, that young people in custody have a range of very serious needs, including mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, and histories of abuse, trauma and violence. According to her:

*Simply focusing on education is misguided and will not address the underlying causes behind their offending that need to be tackled if children are to be turned away from a life of crime.*

*A more holistic therapeutic model is needed rather than a gimmicky repackaging of our current costly and broken approach to child custody (Gibbs, 2014).*

Juliet Lyon, director of the Prison Reform Trust, said:

*... it is worth investing in our most troubled young people before they become the adult prisoners of the future.*

*Too often, young offender institutions have been little more than colleges of crime.*

*While education is vital, provision for young people must take account of mental health needs, learning disabilities and addictions.*

*Small, local, intensively staffed units with a focus on taking responsibility, making amends to victims, gaining skills for employment and having a safe home to go to will cut crime far better than putting hundreds of teenagers together in over-large institutions (Evening Standard, 2014).*

Pam Hibbert, Chair of Trustees, National Association for Youth Justice said that the Government’s costly proposals in connection with the fortified college were, ‘... outrageous at a time of swingeing cuts to other services for children and young people.’ She claimed that the plans for the institution contradict evidence demonstrating that children who need to be detained should be consigned to ‘... small local units with a social care and therapeutic regime which are most effective.’ Hibbert said that although education might be,



*... an important component in helping children who are in the criminal justice system, it is counterproductive to suggest that locking up even more of them is the way to ensure rehabilitation.*

*The average time spent in custody is 11 weeks, and children who end up in custody have a myriad of needs which are unmet before and after their sentences. Providing education in a 'fortified school for a short period and, for many children, at a great distance from their home and community, will not deal with the impoverished lives, mental health and learning difficulties and lack of opportunities that most of them will return to. It will neither protect the public nor help children to stay out of trouble (Guardian, 2014).*

At the end of 2014 the fortified college was discussed in the British House of Lords.<sup>1</sup> Lord Ramsbotham, as a former inspector of young offender institutions, said that he was, 'appalled that anyone should have dreamt it up.' He declared that the claims made in its favour were, 'spurious' and 'entirely untested and unevaluated' in the face of overwhelming evidence that smaller facilities for young offenders are more effective. As such, the proposal to establish, 'the biggest children's prison in the western world' would likely do further harm to already vulnerable and damaged children with a range of problems, 'not just lack of education'. Ramsbotham recalled a recent lecture by Nils Öberg, head of the Swedish prison service, that described how after protracted and conscientious research into the needs of their young offenders, the Swedish authorities had found that most young offenders benefited most by working with trained experts in small establishments of no more than 10 offenders (Öberg, 2015). His Lordship argued that the proposed fortified college effectively declared every organisation and individual in the UK who knew anything about managing troubled young people to be incorrect about their specialist areas of work.

In the same debate, Lord Beecham noted that apart from representations from a wide range of major, national bodies, '...eight national women's organisations concerned particularly with the problem of girl offenders in these institutions.' On this subject, Baroness Benjamin argued that that girls and younger children should be 'kept out of secure colleges'. She cited the NSPCC's contention that it would be unsafe, inappropriate and potentially damaging to hold girls in such institutions alongside many older boys. She pointed out that girls in custody are highly likely to have experienced sexual abuse. Benjamin declared that placing girls in custodial institutions, 'may be traumatising and damaging to their rehabilitation' and that the fortified college, "will cause serious and unprecedented safeguarding risks.'

We can either choose to remain silent about their potential to hurt or even to kill young people, waiting for the inevitable fall-out so we can do what we can to deal with that. Who knows, our agency might gain a little funding for its trouble, and gain some sense of relevance in the process. Alternatively, or maybe at the same time, we can look to raise consciousness and awareness, educate or else pressurise for a second thought. Ultimately we can actively protest against unwise

or clearly stupid and malicious (if money saving) state intentions.

I do not think we have to accept the necessity or even practicability of such options. I have been to places much like the one focused on in this article; I've breathed the air and felt their harsh caress. I have known kids that have survived them and others who have not. So I have no choice but to hope you have read my words sympathetically.

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## Note

- 1 *The House of Lords is the upper house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Like the House of Commons, it meets in the Palace of Westminster. It is an active, independent institution that has a key role in making and shaping laws and checking the work of the government. The US equivalent of the Lords is the Senate; both are the ‘upper house’ in bi-cameral systems. See <http://www.parliament.uk/education/about-your-parliament/mps-lords-monarch/what-is-the-house-of-lords/>*

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*Youth & Policy* Special Edition:  
The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people

## Reviews

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*Kitty te Riele and Rachel Brooks (Editors)*

### **Negotiating Ethical Challenges in Youth Research**

Routledge 2013

ISBN: 978-0-415-80847-7

£26.99 (pbk)

pp. 200

Wayne Richards

THIS BOOK OFFERS an insightful exploration of ethical challenges that can arise whilst conducting research with young people. Case studies are introduced by contributors to twelve chapters which bring a welcome international perspective in their reflective commentaries; where real ethical dilemmas experienced are balanced with critical reflection. The balance between theory and reflection works well for most of the chapters although, at times, the theoretical discussion distracts from the narrative structure of the case study. Critique of the universal application of standard ethical frameworks is a consistent thread which runs throughout the book. The limitations of these are examined in the light of the need for shifting frames of reference in order to encompass the complexity of different cultural perspectives and in order to be sensitive to distressing social and environmental factors faced by different communities and participants.

The book is structured around the three key themes of ‘power and agency’, ‘protection and harm prevention’, and ‘trust and respect’. The introductory chapter provides a sound exploration of formal ethical frameworks which sets the context for examining challenges in youth research. The conclusion offers an excellent synthesis of the challenges introduced by contributors to the three core themes. The three central sections of the book each consist of four chapters where the contributors share their reflections on ethical dilemmas that are seen to specifically relate to conducting research with young people in a variety of contexts.

The four chapters exploring ‘power and agency’, the first theme, bring attention to the asymmetric power relationship between the adult researcher and young people. They are also cognizant of race and hegemonic cultural perspectives alongside age as factors which impact on the relationship. Chapter 2 on conducting research with young people in the Global South examines how the expectation of informed consent in formal ethical frameworks is troubled in a variety of ways: by constructions of youth, including their status and responsibilities in communities stressed by AIDS

or poverty; by working and communicating across language barriers or literacy competencies; or by working with or through gatekeepers. The remaining chapters in this section explore the representation of young people and the challenge of participatory research with young people, and raise questions regarding how youth researchers are prepared and supported. Chapter 3 begins to enter that uncertain territory where practice and research overlap and when the research label needs to be applied, consequently triggering the need for ethical approval. This is a significant area that could have been developed further in the book. Chapter 4 considers how researchers select the way in which the lives and experiences of young people are interpreted and portrayed. It argues that the tendency to depict the lives of young people in relation to risk and deficit may be pragmatic in relation to bringing attention to need. However, this is also likely to pathologise young people and fail to give a holistic representation of the range of perspectives available. Chapter 5 considers how hegemonic influences on young people, rather than empowering their voices, may encourage them to adopt models and approaches which are observed and legitimised in the adult world.

Chapters in the ‘protection and harm prevention’ section explore how research can generate troublesome knowledge in working with sensitive issues. The ethical challenges explored include, duty of care, social justice, negotiating access, balancing confidentiality and protection where research leads to disclosures, and the uncovering of privileged knowledge. Throughout this section the potential for symbolic violence is examined – where young people are having to resist becoming trapped in a spiral of negative representations. The clear message in the chapters of this section is the need for researchers to adopt a situated ethic where decision making and discretion is applied to individual cases rather than prescribing a standardised framework of ethics.

The ‘trust and respect’ section offers a particularly pertinent set of ethical dilemmas around privacy and the ownership of data. This is poignantly introduced in chapter 10 which considers the death of a participant in a longitudinal research project and the subsequent status of the participants’ data and duty to his family. Regarding ownership of data, reflection on access to online data in chapter 13 raises interesting questions around what is private and what is public when it comes to consent and confidentiality. Chapter 12 on ‘negotiating the ethical borders of visual research’ with young people raises many dilemmas around confidentiality and anonymity which are conflated with cross cultural concerns regarding permission – giving and protection. The dilemmas introduced in this chapter are challenging and perhaps needed further unpacking.

The structuring of the three themes within different sections of the book does successfully identify core areas and provide a strong focus. The chapters however show significant overlap and are not easily contained in discrete sections. Issues of power, protection and respect are factors in all the chapters and do not necessarily justify separation. Chapter 11 on research with young people on female circumcision for example, which is in the trust and respect section, could just as easily have been placed in the section on protection and harm prevention. This is only a minor point but it does cause a little confusion in navigating the book.

It is evident throughout the book that ethical challenges become sharper when the researcher is not an objective outsider but instead enters the subjectivities of young people's lives. In saying this, the book does not give sufficient recognition youth researchers being practitioner researchers and instead defaults to the researcher being the objective social scientist. For the practitioner researcher the contingencies of space in which unexpected ethical demands arise are not uncommon. Within this scenario, professional ethics have to be considered alongside research ethics to take account of professional boundaries and dual relationships. There is perhaps a missed opportunity in this book to explore this further and to pursue the question of when it is appropriate to use the label research in more depth. This however is a well written book that I would recommend for students and practitioners interested in research ethics.

**Wayne Richards is a lecturer in youth and community work and course leader for MA Transformative Practice at university of Worcester.**

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Roger Matthews

**Realist Criminology**

Palgrave/Macmillan 2014

ISBN: 978-1-137-44569-8 Hardback

£75 (hbk)

pp. 179

John Pitts

IT IS SAID that in his declining years the legendary footballer George Best was lounging in his Park Lane hotel room, accompanied by a beauty queen, quaffing the finest champagne and toying with a spoonful of the best caviar, when a hotel bellboy popped his head around the door and asked: 'George! Where did it all go wrong?' And this is, in effect, the question that Roger Matthews is asking contemporary criminology. The exponential growth of the discipline since the 1970s, overshadowing the other social sciences and generating ever more university courses and solvent research centres, would seem to suggest that criminology is in rude health. But, just as George Best was really writing his own epitaph, criminology, for all its apparent opulence is, Matthews believes, on a road to nowhere.

Roger Matthews aims to transcend the factionalism, partiality and sheer naiveté which, he claims, currently threaten to confound the subject, by breathing fresh life into the quest for a politically engaged, theoretically informed discipline. In this, a concern with the damaging impact of crime upon its not infrequently, socially disadvantaged victims, would be inseparable from its attempt to devise constructive and humane responses to the perpetrators of crime, while addressing the criminogenic circumstances in which many of them lead their lives. This project was originally set in train in the 1980s by the late Jock Young, to whom *Realist Criminology* is dedicated. However, it fell from favour with the demise of New Labour with which, (for both good and ill), what

Matthews and Young (1992) described as 'Left Realism', became associated.

But *Realist Criminology* is not simply a reworking of yesterday's big idea. Its ambition is far more audacious. It aims to present both a thoroughgoing critique of where, why and how the various strands of contemporary criminology have gone wrong and a blueprint for how the discipline might be rescued from what the author sees as its intellectual and political irrelevance.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Chapter 1, 'The Successes and Failures of Modern Criminology', has a lot more to say about the latter than the former. Matthews locates the germs of criminological realism in the politically engaged radical criminologies that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s whose strengths lay in their problematisation of previously taken-for-granted assumptions about crime and deviance and the revelation that social and judicial intervention often boomeranged, producing outcomes at stark variance with their stated intentions.

However, in their rejection of what C. Wright Mills (1959) called abstract empiricism, many of these radical liberals simply turned empiricism on its head. If mainstream criminology believed that 'drug abuse' or 'mental illness' were unproblematic descriptions of real problems, the radicals dismissed them as the 'social constructions' of 'moral entrepreneurs' who had a political or financial interest in 'labelling' people as socially deviant. They dismissed 'crime' as having no ontological reality and 'mental illness' as a pejorative label slapped onto free spirits who didn't conform to oppressive, taken-for-granted, ideas of sanity.

However, this intellectual position, lampooned by Stanley Cohen as *Homage to Catatonia*, ignored the reality that many ordinary people, particularly the poor and the powerless, were profoundly affected, and sometimes scarred for life, by robbery, burglary and violence, and that mental illness, the experience rather than the label, was a source of profound distress for millions. With the advent of post modernism, Matthews argues, these left idealists abandoned the pursuit of 'truth' altogether in favour of the absorbing but pointless post-modern pastime of interrogating randomly selected 'truth claims', no matter how bizarre.

This position is not only intellectually lazy, it is also politically irrelevant, and Matthews challenges liberal paranoia about creeping state-control and its pessimism about the possibility of effecting positive social reform. Far from intruding ever further into private lives, he argues, it is the withdrawal of the state from key areas of social life that is generating the social anxiety and fatalism that characterise 'late modernity'. But liberal pessimism has its upside, particularly for academics because, having accepted that 'nothing can be done', one can simply lie back or, more accurately, fly off to international conferences, at considerable expense to one's hard pressed students, to pontificate ironically on the folly of those who are actually trying to make things better.

The feminist criminologies of the 1970s have had a profound impact upon theory, policy and

practice in criminology and criminal justice. Highlighting criminology's obsession with young male perpetrators, feminists drew our attention to the very different origins of female criminality, while highlighting the immense scale of the usually hidden victimisation of women and children in a patriarchal society. Today, the legacy of their early work is to be found in changed legislation and policy as well as a seemingly endless stream of TV documentaries, and on the front pages of the national press.

Some feminist criminologists also demanded a new methodology to replace what Carol Smart has called 'malestream' criminology (1976). This new 'situated' or 'standpoint' methodology rejected the idea of a shared reality that could be investigated using conventional methods of 'value free' scientific research. In its place, there emerged a methodology which supplanted a notion of the 'real' with a plurality of 'realities', each shaped by different people's experiences of an inequitable, racist and patriarchal society. In this formulation there were no criteria against which the veracity of these perceptions of reality might be tested and, as Matthews argues, rather than finding a new and deeper reality, standpoint criminologies simply replaced one partial view of the world with another similarly partial view which said that the world wasn't like that at all.

In the 1980s, the radical criminologies of the 60s and 70s were confronted by two new phenomena; a right-wing intelligensia and a 'right realist' criminology. While Charles Murray (1984) argued that poverty was the product of an overweening welfare state that rewarded fecklessness, undermined individual responsibility, discouraged parental propriety and produced a culture of entitlement wherein sexual profligacy and criminality became the norm; James Q. Wilson and George Kelling's 'broken windows' thesis (1982) had it that the relentless policing of low-level incivilities in lower class neighbourhoods could prevent a drift into more serious crime and violence, thus enabling the poor but law abiding to reclaim public space, and avert ghettoisation. Like Iain Duncan Smith's Broken Britain, the ideas presented by Murray and Wilson and Kelling proceeded from the assumption that the aetiology of these problems lay in a moral crisis which took the form of a kind of cultural 'conduct disorder' amongst the poor. This formulation was, of course, music to the ears of the 'neoconservatives' who had assumed power in Britain and the USA in the 1980s, but anathema to liberals, who saw the gains of the 60s and 70s being trampled underfoot by the onward rush of the radical right. What right realism said to John Lea and Jock Young (1984) however was that a radical criminology that ignored the working class victim, the person most vulnerable to lower class criminality, was both intellectually bankrupt and politically impotent. Left realism, of which *Realist Criminology* is the latest and fullest manifestation, was born.

Roger Matthews wants to advance the project by constructing a new 'post-adolescent' criminology based upon 'critical realism'. But what is critical realism? Whereas positivistic social science is only able to draw causal inferences from observable events that commonly occur sequentially, critical realism's central aim is to reveal the mechanisms and structures which produce these



events and generate social action because, as Marx once observed, social reality may be very different from its empirically observable surface appearance (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003). Moreover, in contrast with the subjectivism of left idealist and standpoint criminologies, critical realism holds that the human beings inhabiting these social structures are capable of reflecting upon them, comprehending their real nature and, having reflected, changing their circumstances through social action; a process that may be facilitated by social scientific research. Thus, central to critical realism is its political project which, Matthews contends:

*... is practically and politically engaged and takes the concerns of members of the general public seriously, seeing them neither as dupes or irrational. Most importantly, it aims to develop a critical approach that stands in opposition to forms of naive realism that see crime as unproblematic (p.29).*

This aim will be fulfilled, he argues, if we recognise the ‘primacy of theory’. The problem here is not that the other criminological perspectives discussed are atheoretical, it is that these theories are ‘not up to the job’. The problem with the theoretical underpinnings of Left Realism, Standpoint Feminism, Right Realism and mainstream Administrative Criminology, the latter of which leans upon either Rational Choice theory (‘in the right circumstances we’d all do it’) or Routine Activities theory (‘it’s what people like them do’), is that they all fall at the first hurdle. That hurdle is the question, ‘Why don’t they all do it?’ And this is because they fail to distinguish between the, big, pre-disposing factors, like poverty, racism, inequality, patriarchy, moral decline, rationality or routine activities, which may place pressure on members of vulnerable populations to engage in particular forms of criminality, and the precipitating factors which propel or lure actual people into crime. To find out what these are we must ask another question, namely: ‘What is it, specifically, that causes these people, in this place, at this time, to do this, and not something else, in the particular way that they do?’ If we are to think about crime seriously or to do something to stop it, a theory that helps us to answer this question is vital.

And this leads Matthews inexorably towards Cultural Criminology. Although cultural criminology has had little to say about contemporary problems of crime and justice, Matthews applauds its challenge to mainstream criminology, arguing, as it does, for a critical re-examination of criminal motivation and criminal values. Rejecting positivism, rational choice theory and administrative criminology, cultural criminology has synthesised Chicago-style ecological theory, labelling theory, subcultural theory and feminist theory into a powerful explanatory tool. Drawing on the work of Jack Katz (1988), it maintains that criminal involvement is neither a purely rational act, involving a calculation of risk and reward nor an irrational act carried out by pathological subjects.

Cultural criminologists call for the development of different and more imaginative methodologies with which to target hard-to-reach and outcast groups and, along the way, they castigate university research ethics committees for standing in the way of their development.

But what is missing from cultural criminology, Matthews argues, is an appreciation of the victims of crime on the one hand and the role of public opinion and social norms on the other. Cultural criminologists he says ‘tend to use terms like “deviance”, “crime” and “transgression” interchangeably, thereby blurring the distinction between the serious and the trivial; the legal and illegal’. Like the labelling theorists of yesteryear, their discussion of ‘crime’ tends to focus upon crimes without victims while criminal acts are presented, as often as not, as a kind of David and Goliath struggle between the hapless ‘offender’ and the forces of ‘social control’. There are few vicious muggers and greedy burglars in the alluring world of cultural criminology. Yet, while street gangs may represent an exotic subcultural response to the vagaries of urban life for the radical criminologist, a lot of people, particularly if they are poor, young and Black, live in fear of, and are sometimes badly injured or killed by them.

Clearly, cultural criminology does a lot of what Roger Matthews thinks a thorough-going realist criminology ought to do, but its romanticism and its failure to examine what the despised ‘control agencies’ actually do, and on whose behalf they do it, represents a serious weakness. Like much liberal criminology, Matthews argues, cultural criminology’s anti-statism and its aversion to any attempt to ‘correct’ the ‘deviant’ mean that, at present, it can make only a limited, theoretical, contribution to crime reduction or attempts to limit the victimisation of the poor and the vulnerable.

And this is the challenge confronting a thoroughgoing Realist Criminology. While Matthews’ book is a genuine ‘tour de force’ it is also a work in progress. In its dissection of contemporary criminology it shows us both how far we have come and how far there is to go. Nonetheless, the great strength of *Realist Criminology* is that, unlike any other publication available today, it points to a way forward.

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Mark Naison

**Badass Teachers Unite!**

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ISBN: 9781608463619

£12.99 (pbk)

pp. 200

Kao Nou L. Moua and Alexander Fink

*BADASS TEACHERS Unite!* is Mark Naison's call to action for teachers, parents, and young people against corporate involvement in education reform. The likes of Teach for America, the Harlem Children's Zone, and Bill and Melinda Gates are under attack for their promotion of the charter school movement, which, in combination with No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, Naison sees as scapegoating American teachers for education's failure to serve all children and using corporate influence to promote a narrow and ultimately failing reform agenda. The book is a compiled series of blog posts from Naison's activism in the Bronx, divided into three sections titled (1) Education Policy Critique and Advocacy, (2) Youth Issues and Student Activism, and (3) Lessons of Bronx Schools.

The first section demonstrates the possibility and risk of the blog format. We found ourselves arguing with various 'posts', noticing that the short-form format felt like an invitation to engage in debate and served, therefore, as a broader invitation Naison offers to readers to engage in conversation about education reform (a first step toward the activism he hopes to encourage). However, these fragments of analyses left us filling in a lot of assumptions. For example, who does Naison include as a 'teacher'? In his writing, we are left to believe teachers are professionals in a school, serving *in loco parentis* (in the stead of a parent), and responsible for working with our children. They are the ones who will save public education and we need to lean on their wealth of experiences and knowledge. And yet, he worries that corporate education reformers wrongfully blame teachers for the failure of the public schools. In his pushing back, Naison accepts the terms of the corporate reformers, leaving schools, administrators, and teachers framed in the same corporate rhetoric he seeks to fight. Rather than shift the conversation, Naison seems to be interested primarily in propping up 'the other side'. He offers an 'us vs. them' mentality, though the 'us' only includes the normal players. What if the category of 'teachers', was more inclusive, we wondered? Could it include the voices of parents, community members, and students? Another group organising in a similar area for school reform was the Black Power movement. Among other things, they sought community control of schools so that the community – parents and young people included – could make choices about what was taught and who taught it.

On the whole, this leaves Naison's analysis of education policy wanting. He seems to adopt a standard leftist view of education reform – anti-testing, pro-public education, less corporate involvement, stronger teacher unions. These proposals are not new: as educational historians

Lawrence Cremin (1990) and Diane Ravitch (2010) have noted, reforms in education over time in the United States have tended to oscillate between various poles: local and national, student choice and standardized assessment, and debates about quality. For example, Naison several times mentions and valorizes vocational education in Germany, without a critical analysis of issues – like race and racism – in the German education system, or a sense of how it would map onto a distinctly different context like the United States. These oversights demonstrate the lack of nuance that carries through the book in Naison’s assessment of education.

At the centre of Naison’s argument is engaging youth. In the second part of the book, Naison provides historical, current, and personal examples of young people’s activism, resistance, and participation. He shares poignant experiences of mentoring young men. He writes about the importance of building relationships, physical touch, and the role of caring adults in the lives of young people who face incredible challenges. However, as compelling as Naison’s argument is that young people must be engaged in education and education reform, missing throughout the book is a clear sense of whether or not Naison sees young people as conscious activists for change or, as the music sections indicate, simply showing their diversity and difference through their presence. Rather than allow young people to share their experiences from their own perspectives, Naison shares experiences of and with young people through his own perspective as an adult. Naison reminisces about his own past – what schools used to be, what teachers used to be, and what neighbourhoods used to be. Unfortunately, this nostalgic tone – ‘when I was a young person’ – further isolates today’s young people from the conversation.

Naison’s last section details examples of activism from the Bronx. These examples range from arts and history projects to rallies and individuals who have challenged school reformers targeting public schools and public school teachers. For example, Naison shares the story of the Pruitts from the Bronx, a family of educators and school administrators. Naison recalls at Upward Bound reunions, men of colour exchanging their experiences of Jim Pruitt and remembering Jim Pruitt’s mentorship. As youth workers reading this book, we see the Pruitts’ work with young people encompassing some of the essentials of youth work: a focus on relationships, inclusiveness to all, and a focus on valuing young people’s interests and voices. We see the Pruitts as educators, whether their work happens inside the classroom or outside the classroom. We also see the ‘badass teachers’ educating young people throughout Naison’s book as all the adults struggling to create positive and healthy opportunities for young people, whether or not they have licenses to teach. Perhaps most importantly, we see young people as active agents of change and at the centre of education reform. As youth workers, steeped in the traditions and practices Naison sometimes names in this text, we are able to make sense of his lessons from the Bronx and use those lessons to support our own work with young people. But what of licensed teachers? What are ‘badass [licensed] teachers’ going to do with this book? If this book is a call to arms for teachers, the first section on education policy and advocacy offers something (though still lacks the substantial knowledge we need for deep reform), but the second and third sections are significantly less direct.

If the purpose of this book is to inspire teachers toward real alternatives to the corporate education system that will value and work for all young people, unfortunately, it does not accomplish that.

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*Bonnie Thomas*

### **How To Get Kids Offline, Outdoors and Connecting With Nature**

Jessica Kingsley 2014

ISBN: 978 1 84905 968 8

pp. 269

Maxine Green

THE FIRST impression in glancing through this book is that it is a treasure trove of useful and interesting exercises and ideas for working with children and young people in the outdoors. Even the most experienced youth and children's worker will find something new to take away and use.

The author, Bonnie Thomas, comes from a therapeutic background and this runs through the whole of the book, so many of the exercises are framed to encourage healing and to provide support. For example, the first chapter is called 'Incorporating Nature in Your Therapeutic Practice', and later there is a profound chapter called 'Nature-Based Therapy and Grief Work with Youth' by Karla Helbert. Both of these chapters have a level of sensitivity and care combined with some practical 'tools' that children and young people can use. Thomas describes how to make and use 'wish dolls and worry dolls' and Helbert has a lovely exercise for articulating grief using 'a natural body of water'. These contributions feel as if they have been formed from many encounters with children and young people so this moves the book from a 'how to' guide to one which has authenticity.

The chapter entitled 'Relaxation and Mindfulness' is a great introduction on how to support children and young people to become present in the moment. For anyone who wants to try using guided meditations there are two in the book which can be used and are gentle, restorative and safe. Thomas also explores self esteem and positive connections which she connects to nurture and giving. There are chapters on gardening and how to use natural contexts such as snow, fields and grassy areas, puddles and mud, and sand and beach. Her approach is creative, fun, caring, and practical.

The author is American so there is the inevitable need to translate from one culture to another. The exercise of using a ‘natural body of water’ may be more difficult in normal British temperatures and there are only some parts of the country at some times of the year when it would be possible to build a snow fort. Another criticism is that the book lacks an underlying structure, both in terms of the way the book is laid out in a somewhat serendipitous way and in terms of the underpinning values. The spirituality in the book feels a bit untested so there were some areas where caution would need to be used in undertaking the exercise. For example, encouraging children and young people to identify with totemic animals might be fine taken at a surface level but there could be a complexity to this which is not properly explored in the book.

This should not detract from the book’s use as a creative and at times beautiful resource which should really help the reader to start using nature as part of their work or develop more skills, knowledge and confidence in this area.

**Maxine Green is the Principal of YMCA George Williams College and has an interest in the spiritual development of young people and the role of the spirit in work with young people.**

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*Momodou Sallah*

**Global Youth Work: Provoking Consciousness and Taking Action**

Russell House 2014

ISBN: 9781905541847

£14.95 (pbk)

pp. 120

Yvette Smalle

GLOBAL YOUTH Work provides a succinct and interesting introduction to the contested understandings of this area of youth work and work with young people. It critically unpacks and explores Global Youth Work (GYW) as terminology, concept, process and praxis. It does this by clearly locating GYW in the changeable world of youth work and youth policy. Here the author addresses a range of interrelated social, economic, and political changes that impact on young people across the world and it contributes to struggle, understanding, defining, and applying of GYW.

In each chapter, Sallah provides the reader with a synopsis of central contemporary themes and issues, informed by chief commentators and relevant research. Writing in user-friendly language, Sallah meticulously introduces and debunks key concepts and ideas, including globalisation, capitalist hegemony, dogmatism and relativism. Students will find this useful in building a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes GYW and a global practitioner; it will also assist students in developing a conceptual framework for their critical thinking and practice. Students will find especially useful as a model; the way and clarity in which Sallah sets his framework

and declares his stance that GYW should be rooted in, ‘...social justice; social justice in a world of grotesque inequality and pervasive distribution of world’s resources; social justice for a world in which 80% of its resources are consumed by only 20%...’(p.iv). This argument is proclaimed from the onset and is unpacked and threaded through discussions in subsequent chapters, and fully uncovered in Chapter 5.

As a text book, with questions, reflection points and case studies, drawn from across the world, it provides students (postgraduate and undergraduate) with added opportunities to develop their reflexivity and to begin to build on locating themselves as individuals and practitioners in the global arena. I also found useful the autobiographical and biographical examples used to narrate and reflect on salient points; these helped to make accessible and make sense of the highly political and complex issues covered by Sallah.

In Chapter 5, ‘What is Global Youth Work?’ Sallah starts by setting out, as he did in the previous chapters, the contestation around notions of GYW and related concepts. He reiterates that GYW is by no means universally understood or practised in a unitary way. This chapter is particularly useful in engaging readers with the difference between the terminology, used to describe what is essentially the subject matter; teaching / passing on relevant issues, and GYW as a process and a particular philosophical approach to education. Education that includes a commitment to fighting against injustice and for a more just society: personally, locally and globally.

This chapter offers readers insight into a range of definitions and understanding of what constitutes GYW. Sallah suggests the definition that provides the most clarity and distinction between the nature of GYW and development education is from the DEA (Development Education Association), which states:

*GYW is a form of development education. However, what makes GYW distinct is it starts from young people’s own perspective and experiences and develops a negotiated agenda for learning. Although it shares many of the values and principles that underpin good youth work, development education often has its own agenda from the outset, linked to specific campaigns or concerns and has historically taken place in more formal educational settings (DEA, 2004, cited on p.68).*

Sallah adds that his understanding and practice of GYW is informed by Paulo Freire. A Freirean approach to GYW advocates that education is essentially about liberation of the oppressed. This implies that the central purpose of any education, especially education on global issues, has to be about promoting a critical understanding of self, other and society. From a critical understanding, Sallah reiterates Freire’s position that this is more than just passing knowledge on global issues; it is about promoting a critical consciousness that leads to informed action against social injustice, on a global perspective (p.73).

As Sallah himself identifies, this is fundamentally good youth work, which is essentially informal education and youth work principles that are based on Freire's liberatory ideas. Although I largely agreed with Sallah, I am left wondering: why the need to have a distinction made between 'youth work' and 'global youth work'? Is this not just a matter of semantics? If global youth work is essentially about starting where the young people are at, helping them to understand and construct their reality and support them to locate themselves in the wider world (p.71), is this not simply youth work? I am of the opinion that this chapter, and in fact the book, would have benefited from a further unpacking of youth work versus global youth work versus radical youth work.

In conclusion, as indicated above, *Global Youth Work* is logically and critically argued; it leads readers into engaging with current social justice and global issues that inform the ongoing contested debates and understanding of what constitutes GYW. Although this book covers an expansive range of material, it is brief and to the point, making it a good introduction to key concepts and interrelated issues. It sets a clear framework for locating practice, and provides examples and case studies taken from across the globe and related approaches. This is an accessible text book that provides an essential introduction to GYW; it will be equally useful reading for postgraduates and undergraduates students, helping them to build on their understanding of GYW and to situate themselves as critical, global reflexive practitioners.

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*Jaber F. Gubrium and Margaretha Järvinen (editors)*

### **Turning Troubles into Problems – Clientization in Human Services**

Routledge 2014

ISBN 978-0-415-52252-6

£85 (hbk)

pp.235

Jan Huyton

I APPROACHED this book with the expectation that it might be premised on the process described by Habermas (1987) as therapeuticocracy. Indeed the influence of Habermas is present in the book, and it resonates with Chriss (1999) who examines the role of government and professional organisations in the encroachment of a therapeutic mentality into areas of life where this is not warranted. What we have in this book is not a Frank Furedi style thesis on the therapeutic turn



(2003). Rather it offers a series of critiques written by an international group of social researchers who highlight the complexity of the roles played by policy and practice in a series of chapters firmly rooted in social and community practice.

In Chapter 1, 'Troubles, problems and clientization', editors Gubrium and Järvinen outline the underpinning ethos and inspiration behind the book's creation. The introduction offers an excellent overview of the manner in which the 'human services' can disempower people by pathologising some of life's trickiness and challenges; elevating troublesome life events into problems requiring therapeutic or state intervention. Gubrium and Järvinen refer to this process as 'clientization', resonating with the determination of youth and community workers to resist labeling the people we work with as 'clients'. Youth and community workers may take from this chapter some inspirational themes and concepts which serve to sensitise us to the proliferation of specialist workers waiting in the wings to fix problems which might otherwise have been addressed through the dialogue of youth work relationships and community engagement.

Likewise youth and community work educators in the higher education context may recognise parallels with the tendency to problematise some of the challenges faced by students who are making personal, professional and academic transitions (Earwaker, 1992), and a concern that the existence of specialists should not mean the denial of opportunities for students to discuss with tutors troublesome matters associated with being a student (Macfarlane, 2007). The book's exploration of 'clientization' offers underpinning theory which may support discussions about the role of professional judgment in relation to the boundaries both of youth and community work and higher education, and the extent to which this is being eroded by an increased emphasis on 'turning personal troubles into manageable problems' (p.85).

The anthology is inspired by two seminal texts – Emerson and Messinger's article 'The micro-politics of trouble' (1977) and Lipsky's (1980) book *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Gubrium and Järvinen refer to a 'discretionary border' and 'inexorable interplay' between troubles and problems in everyday life. Emerson and Messinger's work (1977) is used to frame the notion that a private trouble may, if picked up by the 'clientization' radar, be transformed and reified into a form of psychological, medical or criminal deviance, thus beginning a chain of predictable professional responses by the human services. Gubrium and Järvinen purport that troubles, when left in the social sphere, are commonly muddled and undefined. Once they become subject to the gaze of professionals they become clearly defined, specific dysfunctions for which an expert professional is required; vaguely defined troubles become clearly articulated, manageable problems.

Lipsky's work is in identifying the locus of social policy in relation to service provision. Gubrium and Järvinen draw attention to Lipsky's (1980) theory of 'street-level bureaucracy'; encouraging practitioners to examine the extent to which 'clientization' takes place through the interventions and

interactions of practice. As practitioners we need to acknowledge how programmed interventions are not suitable for addressing the murky front-line activities of the conditions of society. Whilst this terminology may be considered evocative of Schön's 'swampy lowland' (1987), Lipsky's thesis is more radical in its assertion that there may be areas of contention and struggle between citizens and individual front-line workers; matters worthy of consideration via the dialogue and dialectic (Belton et al, 2011) of the practice of supervision. Indeed this book offers some useful theoretical perspectives which may make a contribution to the teaching and practice of supervision in youth and community work, raising our awareness of the roles we may play as practitioners in exacerbating the 'clientization' process.

Each chapter considers 'clientization' in relation to a particular service area, many of which address attempts to tidy up and standardize a messy 'client group' and to transform them into serviceable clients. The book is organized into sections, the section 'Collective challenges' being particularly interesting as it introduces a number of projects for young people which we might, in the UK, refer to as supported housing. In Chapter 5 we learn about a residential project in the USA for young adults with dual diagnoses of mental illness and drug addiction. This chapter reports on an ethnographic study of a residential, therapeutic community and is as much a commentary on documentary or narrative methods of interpretative research in action, as it is about the research findings; a lovely exemplar for teaching this methodological paradigm. Fundamentally the project under investigation is presented as one where mental health is viewed as a continuous on-going process rather than a fixed, diagnosed state. The narrative method is also used as a means of open and pluralistic diagnosis within the project – the young adults who live there being empowered and encouraged to offer peer diagnosis and support within the framework of the therapeutic community. The inevitable challenge comes in convincing funders who are concerned with achievement of outcomes for individual service-users, a familiar scenario for UK colleagues. We learn that the project has developed a fusion of approaches which satisfies funders in relation to demonstrable, established forms of clinical treatment, whilst maintaining an ethos of fostering empowerment and collectivism.

Chapter 6, 'Wild Girls and the deproblematization of troubled lives', looks at a support project for girls in a large Danish city. Vitus critiques the Danish context of social welfare provision describing it as a process which 'combines neo-liberal sentiments with empowering clients who have become consumers of welfare services' (p.87). Vitus describes how this particular support project for girls has attempted to circumvent the clientization process by silencing problems and making the girls visible – leaving the girls to define themselves in order to 'change the self-image of the problem-ridden "system-child"' (p.89). The chapter serves as a case study of power-sharing and negotiation between the staff and the young women who use the project, incorporating what is termed 'girl-ruled space'. Vitus describes this as a means of avoiding practices by which the organisation becomes 'a party to creating the social problems the organisation seeks to handle and repair' (p.99).

The merit of this book lies in its applied context; revealing how theories such as therapeutocracy become more complex and nuanced when played out in grassroots practice.

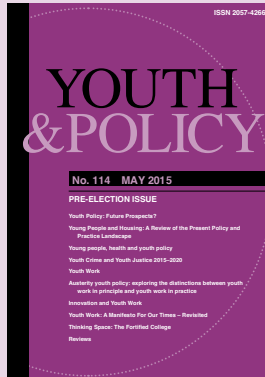
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