

# **Participatory Internet Radio (RadioActive101) as a Social Innovation and Co-Production Methodology for Engagement and Non-Formal Learning Amongst Socially Excluded Young People**

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## Abstract

This paper describes an original interlinking of a conceptual frame and co-production methodology of a participatory internet radio intervention (RadioActive101) that supports engagement and non-formal learning amongst socially excluded young people. This considers the inclusive learning of socially excluded young people as a social innovation that is realised through a participation and co-production methodology that is inspired and informed by Paulo Freire. These are combined to develop an innovative pedagogy that has led to relatively high levels of participation (163 young people facilitated by 29 youth workers) and youth-led co-production (33 radio shows) that supports the reported development of psychosocial dimensions and 21<sup>st</sup> Century (21C) and employability skills of young people in London in the UK. This approach and its evaluations suggest that our method (RadioActive101) involves harmonizing emancipatory learning through co-production with an instrumental approach to skills development, to support a holistic approach to learning. The foundation and 'key' to this holistic learning appears to be the co-development of confidence and communication in ways that lead to the thoughtful and effective use of voice to underpin and support the development of 21C and employability skills.

**Keywords:** Social innovation, co-production, participatory radio, non-formal learning, 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, pedagogical issues.

**Preamble:** During the week in which I was finishing this article I heard some tragic and particularly poignant news, and I think it's important that I make a personal and illustrative connection between this terrible incident and the impactful research reported in this article. The headlines in the newspaper read:

Horror as boy, 15, knifed to death in the street  
(London Evening Standard, 2 May 2019, front page)

This young person died in a vicinity that was further down the same main road as the area where the work reported in this article was originally piloted. This was an idea at the time, to see whether participatory internet radio could serve as a positive and 'diversionary' educational activity for young people in an area of social housing and high crime. I later read<sup>1</sup> that the victim had been expelled from school. As I read on the newspaper article reported a staggering and heart-breaking statistic – at this time on average 5 young people a day suffered knife injuries in London.

This article is not about directly preventing knife-crime, but it is about giving marginalized, vulnerable and 'at-risk' young people, including those who could be or have been excluded from school and 'on the street', the opportunity to develop their voice, to reflect upon and express their lived experience, and be listened to. And just as importantly, to support such socially excluded young people to develop the sort of skills that can lead to improved educational opportunities and life-chances. This is a personal reflection and connection in relation to this tragic event, that, like many similar ones, powerfully demonstrates the urgency and importance of fostering the engagement and education of socially excluded young people. It is clear, that we need to do this, not just to move towards greater social justice and educational equality, but also to, indirectly or directly, potentially save lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported in London Evening Standard, 3 May, 2019 (online).

## **1. Introduction: Socially Excluded Young People, Participatory Radio and Social Innovation**

*“Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning”*

*Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (1970), p50*

The Preamble above gives some local context and conveys the urgency of addressing the problem of the social exclusion of young people (Levitas, 1998), that has been further defined and emphasised by a number of people in recent years (e.g. Caliendo and Scmidl, 2016; Sealey, 2015; Weil et al., 2017). In a previous article (Ravenscroft et al., 2018) we described this growing societal challenge of how we need to include and support the learning of these young people who are marginalised or ‘at-risk’, and experiencing various forms of social exclusion. I argue that this is a prescient issue for inclusive education, in that we should not only be arguing to make traditional educational approaches and organisations more accessible and inclusive, through lobbying for policy changes for example. But also, exploring innovative and typically non-formal ways, of making the learning practices themselves more implicitly relevant, engaging and inclusive to those who are socially excluded or at-risk of becoming so, and who are often excluded from or performing poorly in traditional settings. This could be paraphrased by saying that we should be developing new pedagogical approaches that are more ‘naturally’ inclusive, and not just aiming to improve broader access to, and adaptation of, more traditional approaches to education. This stance can be catalysed through conceiving inclusive learning as social innovation, a position expanded upon and exemplified through the remainder of this article. We have previously described an international approach to addressing this problem, using participatory internet radio (RadioActive101) as a complex educational intervention that is transferable across local contexts (community organisations) and EU countries (e.g. UK, Portugal, Germany, see Ravenscroft et al., 2015). In this article I go a level deeper into this work, and also consider its relevance more widely. I focus in more detail on the conceptual foundations and co-production methodology in one particularly challenging context, of youth organisations in London in the UK. The ultimate aim of this article being to provide an improved conceptual and methodological platform for participatory internet radio (RadioActive101, see [radioactive101.org](http://radioactive101.org)), as a method to learn from and/or adopt more widely, nationally and

internationally, to support the inclusion and non-formal learning of socially excluded young people.

To help us in moving towards this aim, and tackling such a complex problem is why I have offered inspiration from the famous quote from Paolo Freire (above). This foregrounds what is arguably fundamental for formulating relevant pedagogy, that there will be an essential role for *communication* in developing and sharing human *meaning*, and therefore also sharing *experience* during the learning and educative process. Three elements that are fundamental to our participatory radio approach (RadioActive101) in any context and situation; where young people have the opportunity to communicate about their lives, communicate with others, communicate to an audience, communicate to learn, and generally, communicate as a platform for reflection and action. To embrace this idea implies that we also need to consider learning within a broader and more holistic frame than any conventional and institutional curriculum. In our case, when working with socially excluded young people we have proposed that pedagogy needs to be conceived as a ‘complex intervention’ (Ravenscroft et al., 2018) that acknowledge the challenges of *inclusion and engagement* in addition to *participation and learning*.

This holistic and pragmatic framing of inclusive education of socially excluded young people is informed by related work into the use of participatory media with disenfranchised youth that has been proposed by Conrad (2015), who makes a clear argument for ‘social innovation in education’. She develops this idea based on her work with “street-involved youth” in Alberta (Canada), in a project called “Youth Uncensored”. This work, and her previous research has been given a suitably nuanced and practically informed framing, as she says:

“I refer to my work as “moving toward social innovation” because, based on my experiences and according to literature in the area (Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, 2007), social innovation is not something we ever entirely arrive at, but is, instead, something for which we strive.”

(Conrad, 2015, p3)

Other important characteristics of Conrad’s (2015) description of social innovation are that it is part of “reimagining” education for public good and basing this on ethical imperatives,

that have worth beyond economic value. An interesting technical characteristic that she draws into her description refers to Westley et al's (2007) work that describes social innovation through the lens of complexity theory. This holds that social innovation aims to bring about change and make things happen in a complex world, where this needs to accept the social challenges at play along with often having a tolerance to ambiguity and accepting the need to be responsive to unpredictable events. This conceptualisation informs our<sup>2</sup> approach to inclusive education through the non-formal learning of socially excluded young people because this also needs to embrace the challenges and complexities pointed out by conceiving learning as social innovation. Specifically, this harmonises with our approach to inclusive educational intervention through participatory radio that is realised through a process of 'complex intervention' (Ravenscroft et al., 2018). Similarly, continuing with this theme of complexity, based on community arts practice, Conrad (2015) draws on the work of Diamond (2007) and Capra (1983) to argue how social innovation has a broader community impact that interconnects people:

“Likewise, notions of interconnectedness inform my participatory arts practices, with the conviction that engaging groups of individuals, in expressing and critically analyzing their worlds, will have a ripple effect upon the larger community and ultimately affect social change.”

(Conrad, 2015, p5)

Conrad (2015) points out that an implication of her conception of education as social innovation is that initiatives in this area are more centred on identified social problems and challenges rather than being based on particular disciplines. I would argue that another way of saying this is that education as social innovation is an interdisciplinary approach to promoting learning that is socially relevant in a challenging, complex and changing world, and importantly, as emphasised earlier, it is a dynamic and ongoing initiative.

This socially responsive framing, that sees social innovation as an ongoing and sustained iterative process, not simply a problem-solving one, is an approach that is embodied in our own work using participatory radio for the inclusion and non-formal learning of socially excluded

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<sup>2</sup> In this Article the author refers to “our” or “we” to denote activities that were the result of collaborative work and co-production (as referred to in the acknowledgements), the term “I” is used to denote parts that are solely the work and thinking of the author.

young people (Ravenscroft et al., 2015). A good definition of social innovation, reported by Conrad (2015), that links it to methodology is given by the Canada Policy Research Initiative:

“social innovation was described as “responding to [social] challenges that are not being addressed through conventional approaches...often requiring new forms of collaboration...[and] including ‘co-creation’ and ‘co-production’ among citizens and institutional actors” (Canada Policy Initiative, 2010, p1).<sup>3</sup>

(Conrad, 2015, p4)

The difficulty of social innovation is also nicely presented by Westley, Zimmerman and Patton (2007), who describe it as “Getting to Maybe”, because they say it involves having a vision for change that is also tolerant of ambiguity and needs to entail responsiveness to unpredictable events.

This conceptualisation of education as social innovation is highly relevant to our research and development into using participatory internet radio for the inclusion and non-formal learning of socially excluded young people internationally (Ravenscroft et al., 2018) and particularly in the challenging context of London in the UK that is focused upon in this article. In particular, we build upon and extend the connections made by Conrad (2015) who has argued that Freire’s (1970) vision of education in “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” developed alongside the complementary research process of participatory action research (PAR), a position she exemplifies her support for when she says:

“Freire’s (1988) early article on PAR entitled “Creating Alternative Research Methods: Learning to Do It by Doing It,” sounds much like social innovation in action.”

(Conrad, 2015, p9)

Conrad (2015) further supports this position through referring to the previous work of Park et al., (1993) who argued that PAR was a means of producing knowledge, having community dialogues, education and also mobilising for action. A position that is emphasised in a pragmatic

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<sup>3</sup> This was presented at an international roundtable discussion of the Canada Policy Initiative in 2010.

sense by Reason and Bradbury (2006) who argued that it creates practical ways of knowing in pursuit of “worthwhile” human purposes.

In the rest of this paper I develop this connection and approach, linking social innovation and Freirian participatory action research to achieve inclusive education of socially excluded young people, through:

- 1) describing how RadioActive101 is adopted by youth organisations as a method for social innovation through inclusive education;
- 2) explaining the context, expectations and opportunities for young people developing important 21C and employability skills;
- 3) drawing on previous literature that allows us to consider the value of radio as a context for “Learning to Do It by Doing It”, and connecting this to a Freirian approach to co-creation and co-production supporting non-formal learning leading to the development of 21C and employability skills (or ‘contemporary’ skills); and;
- 4) provide highlights and a summary of evaluations, to show how the co-production methodology leads to psychosocial and contemporary skills development.

## **2. Performing Social Innovation through Collaborating with Youth Organisations Co-Producing Participatory Radio**

*“Having ideas is easy, putting them into practice is the hard part”*

(David Bailey, Photographer, BBC News at Ten, 30 October, 2017)

The young people that were involved in RadioActive101 in the London in the UK were between 12 and 25 years old, and represent those whose needs are typically not well met by traditional educational institutions based on neoliberal values. By this, I mean a system where performance is divorced from challenging social factors that adversely affect it, such as poverty alongside poverty of aspiration, often within a family offering little support or guidance. A point that is comprehensively pointed to by Abrahms (2010) in “Learning to Fail”, and also

mentioned by Ainley and Allen (2010) in “Lost Generation”, In brief, these authors emphasise how traditional education prioritises performance measures over considering how social and societal challenges can adversely influence performance, and therefore “squeezes out” those young people who need more nurturing and support.

The young people were all members of youth organisations, and experienced various forms of social exclusion whilst living in highly challenging situations. From the social innovation perspective I introduced earlier, we were responding to a challenge that is not well-addressed by conventional educational organisations and approaches. Similarly, the point about ‘the journey’ towards social innovation and inclusion that I have given above is particularly poignant to our context of inner-city London in the UK. Many, if not all, of the young people associated with the youth organisations that we collaborated with are facing an unprecedented collection of, often severe, social challenges including combinations of: high levels of poverty and social deprivation; illegal gang activity; knife-crime and violence combined with the constant fear of both (as illustrated in my Preamble); increasing levels of mental health disorders; and, often, alienation from conventional organisations and structures (such as schools, the police and the work-place). Given this context, it’s important to understand ‘up front’, this complex and deep-rooted state of affairs, and the role of RadioActive101 as a project and experiment, following Conrad (2015), that is an example of “educational research moving towards social innovation” in an incremental way, as these complex problems and challenges cannot simply be ‘solved’ in a straightforward and time-limited fashion. We have explained in Ravenscroft et al., (2018) how the RadioActive101 initiative develops in an incremental and organic way, as partnerships and participation grow through networks with related social and educational challenges.

The three organisations with which we collaborated with on this project, that are included in this article, can be described in the following ways.

- The first organisation (Organisation 1, 40 young people) was a youth organisation specialising in ‘targeted provision’, aimed at providing specific types of support, for young people in an area of low income and social housing with high crime and gang activity in East London.

- Another organisation (Organisation 2, 99 young people) had members who attended on an ‘open provision’ basis where members attended voluntarily from the local community and were mostly from the Bangladeshi community, living in social housing, and who reside in living environments rated as in the 10% lowest in England, despite being located close to London’s Theatre district.
- The third organisation (Organisation 3, 24 young people), based in South West London, had members who were all young people with learning disabilities.

It is now important to consider what sort of skills could potentially be valuable to and developed by these young people, particularly in the context of them mostly being in inner-City London. Locally, there is a burgeoning in creative and digital industries, and demand for 21C and employability skills, where both include digital skills. This is briefly discussed below, to contextualise our social innovation ambitions, before we describe a Freirian approach to co-production that emphasises “Learning to Do it by Doing it”. Although previous work has described Freirian approaches to co-production and education with adult learners (e.g. Kidd and Kumar, 1981) and as a community intervention (e.g. Durose et al., 2011), this article is the first to describe the application of Freirian co-production to the inclusive education of socially excluded and at-risk young people within youth organisations. Similarly, it is also the first time that a Freirian approach has been elaborated to combine liberational learning with engaging and instrumental activities that lead to the development of particular contemporary skills, such as 21C, employability and digital skills.

### **3. 21C Skills and Employability Skills**

Researchers and practitioners in the contemporary learning landscape are considering the need to review our conceptualisations of skills<sup>4</sup> that are suitable for the 21C, and particularly in the context of current and future employment (Beers, 2011). I can only consider this debate

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<sup>4</sup> Although there is a nuanced debate between what is a “competency” and what is a “skill” (Neelen and Kirschner, 2016) I deliberately avoid this debate in this article, as the terms are mostly used interchangeably to mean the same or similar concepts. So I use these terms as they have been used by others and interchangeably and stylistically depending on their ‘everyday’ usage.

concisely for the purposes of this paper. Although there is some debate about what exactly these new skills are, and, their relationship to more traditional ‘knowledge focused’ learning (Dede, 2009; Forum for Youth Investment, 2009; Sardone and Devlin-Scherer, 2010), there is some consensus that "*21st Century skills*" represent a commitment to more process oriented, applied and authentic (or ‘real-world’) learning, such as the development of the ‘4 C’s’ - Collaboration, Communication, Critical-Thinking and Creativity (NEA, 2016). Also, in considering the importance of these new skills, researchers have pointed out (Dede, 2009; Conneely et al., 2013) that we also need to consider ongoing advances in information and communication technology, that is also linked to the consideration of changing forms of working practices that are becoming less based on material goods and services, and more focused on knowledge and information. Although I acknowledge that there is another extreme position that questions whether the 21C skills actually exist (Neelen and Kirschner, 2016; 2018), I propose a more practical and arguably consensual position than being extremely ‘for’ or ‘against’ 21C skills, and domain knowledge versus generic skills. Instead I suggest considering a specific element of Bialik and Fadel’s (2018) work. This proposes that it is the capacity to become proficient in and *transfer* meta-competences, that are also considered 21C skills, that is important - such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity. This can be considered without holding that these 21C skills can occur without domain knowledge. Also, digital skills can be considered as important elements of 21C skills and employability skills. A connection that is demonstrated by IBM, who whilst being the world's largest IT and consulting services company, suggest there are at least three aspects to Employability Skills: Teamwork - how working with others will achieve shared goals; Communication – the ability to present and receive information clearly, precisely and succinctly; Problem solving – by reasoning through logic and putting forward innovative ideas, (IBM, 2016).

So given this ongoing debate about 21C skills and employability skills, the research reported in this article did not seek to deliberately favour one stance or conceptualisation of 21C skills over another. Similarly, we wanted our impactful research, working with young people ‘on the ground’ to investigate this debate, rather than test fixed a priori assumptions to support one position over another, that have often been argued for on more abstract and theoretical grounds (e.g. Neelen and Kirschner, 2016; 2018). Therefore, we adopted a position that accepted that

there seemed a justified need to consider the move towards *conceiving learning as having a greater emphasis on the developing and transferring the 4C's given above (Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking and Creativity) along with employability skills that support problem solving in applied and authentic situations*. Also, for consistency going forward, when referring to a collection of 21C and employability skills I will use the collective term *contemporary skills*. In taking on board this debate, we considered whether these contemporary skills would be more actively developed through a processes of co-production in teams, and collaboration within the production space of participatory radio, where this is considered an inclusive and active space for non-formal learning.

#### **4. Internet Radio as an Active Learning Space for Non-Formal Learning and Developing Contemporary Skills**

We have explained elsewhere (Ravenscroft et al., 2018) how our work considers and builds upon relatively longstanding work on local radio (Jones and Lovett, 1971), combined with other applications of community radio (e.g. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 2002), particularly in the context of youth culture (Gustafsson, 2012). With respect to the latter a useful way to define RadioActive101 is through comparing it with the “Youth Radio” work of Chavez and Soep (2005). This was essentially a collaboration between adults and young people to co-produce radio according to a “Pedagogy of Collegiality”. The aim for Youth Radio was to produce radio content that could be broadcast on local and national outlets in the US. It recruited young people through relatively formal outreach activities (e.g. giving talks at schools) and also involved a structured training scheme. It also advocated a central tenet of youth-driven media that was:

“Youth-driven media starts where young people are and provides a vehicle for them to tell their stories, using dialogue, reflection and action to convey and also challenge what is taken as truth”  
(Chavez and Soep, 2005, p410)

Although RadioActive101 also adopts the position above, and considers these characteristics – stories, dialogue, reflection, action - as the driving force for engaging in

learning it is articulated differently, in terms of the roles and dynamics of the relationships. In our case the older youth workers acted as facilitators of the young people's collaboration and co-production. This happened within the whole production and performance space of participatory radio that is considered a rich learning context, where the produced broadcast and content are not only a focus, but are also the catalyst and vehicle for a range of related learning activities. In other words, for us, learning through radio is as important, if not more important, than learning how to do radio. So unlike other community and youth radio projects (e.g. .g. Jones and Lovett, 1971; Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Chavez and Soep, 2005), RadioActive101 prioritises engaging young people who are often the most difficult to engage, and similarly, supports active learning in ways that are more engaging and inclusive because the activities are meaningful and relevant to the lives of these young people.

#### **4.1. *Co-production of Participatory Radio Through Applying the Work of Freire***

An earlier article by Ravenscroft et al., (2018) has concisely explained how RadioActive101 applies the theoretical work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Below we expand upon the influence of Paulo Freire and his seminal work on the "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)*". Although Freire covered a number of themes in this book, the most relevant to our approach in RadioActive101 are his emphasis on:

- Communication and dialogical relationships;
- Locating education within the 'lived experience' of the learners;
- Naturally forming groups that co-created and co-produced together;
- Problem-posing to address generative themes;
- Developing a 'critical consciousness' that can transform reality; and,
- Praxis – action and reflection being informed by and linked to values.

Freire's (1970) thinking influenced our approach through these aspects, but it was not strictly applied and followed because, as well as strong relevance, there were also some important differences between his approach and ours, for pragmatic reasons connected with our context. For example, participation in RadioActive101 internet radio was offered to the youth organisations and young people because it is an attractive and tangible media activity that

showed potential for supporting personal, interpersonal and contemporary skills development. A more pure Freirian approach would spend a lot of time developing the main pedagogical mediums. Related to this, we had a priori assumptions, through a feasibility study, about the specific properties of internet radio to engage and sustain participation of young people, and also extend the numbers involved in an organic way. Additionally, most youth organisations deliberately support emancipatory and liberational learning alongside instrumental learning (e.g. of useful contemporary skills), which does not necessarily map neatly on to Freirian ideas, that may prioritise consciousness raising over skills development. We deliberately wanted to be pragmatic, and investigate what ‘blend’ of learning and development, emancipatory and instrumental, could work and be relevant to the young people involved. Below I show how the key Freirian concepts that were considered valuable were incorporated and applied through RadioActive101, where often a number are supported through particular radio production and broadcasting activities.

First, as highlighted by my opening quote, the centrality of communication as the main way to develop mutually respectful relationships, support learning and create and share meaning, is the ‘DNA’ throughout RadioActive101. From the initial relationship building, to performing collective brainstorming of generative themes and having editorial meetings, and co-producing and refining dialogue content – communication and dialogue are central.

Second, all the radio activities are performed by self-organising collaborative teams where individual roles are negotiated within those groups.

Third, every show involves the young people problem-posing and suggesting and deciding upon the generative themes that are relevant to themselves and their local lived experience. Hence, the co-produced content showcased generative themes and sub-themes such as mental health, knife crime, young LGBTQ people ‘coming out’ and bullying of learning disabled young people.

Fourth, the communication-rich activities involved in making radio support the development of a more critical consciousness through activities such as: negotiating, researching,

discussing and reflecting upon a generative theme for a show; interviewing different stakeholders who have different perspectives on a particular theme; and, providing a balanced narrative structure to these often alternative positions.

Finally, this critical consciousness can lead directly to praxis, as the broadcasts themselves are targeted towards particular groups who the young people want to influence ‘on the ground’, and this can be achieved through social media marketing of the shows or direct requests, ‘in person’, for particular people to listen to particular shows. There are also other concrete examples, for instance as referred to in Ravenscroft et al., (2018), one example occurred through the production of a broadcast on bullying, where because the work was rooted within that organisation, participants built upon their emerging awareness about the causes and impact of bullying (conscientização) in creating a peer-led anti-bullying policy for young people and staff (praxis).

#### *4.1.1. Summary and Outcomes of Co-production: RadioActive 101*

A fuller description of how the RadioActive101 approach was developed and implemented is given in Ravenscroft et al., (2015 and 2018), below I summarise this for the purposes of this paper.

The methodology included an approach to facilitation and cascaded learning that allowed several organisations (three in this case) to work with their own membership of young people to support relatively high levels of co-production and participation (163 young people and 29 youth workers).

Collectively, these young people co-produced 33 original shows averaging 41 minutes. They were mostly pre-recordings that were scheduled and then broadcast live, or occasionally broadcast completely live (in real-time), before being archived and made available to play any time<sup>5</sup>. The scope of the content of these maps to the generative themes referred to previously. A typical show, such as the one on “Youth Violence and its Impact” for example, contains

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<sup>5</sup> Archive available at: [radioactive101.org](http://radioactive101.org), select ARCHIVE.

interviews with young people, youth workers, the police and other community groups. The show can be heard through the archive of broadcasts: [radioactive101.org](http://radioactive101.org), and search “youth-violence-and-its-impact”.

## **5. Summary of Evaluation and Illustrative Comments from the Young People**

The evaluation of RadioActive101 was interlinked and followed two phases that informed one another. The research was approved by the University of East London Research Ethics Committee.

The evaluation involved an investigative and descriptive study 15 months after the project had started, and then a broader study performed after 31 months, that are referred to in detail in Ravenscroft et al., (2015).

In this article I make selections from this broad and detailed evaluation to illustrate the main themes I have introduced, while these remain representative of the more detailed picture reported in Ravenscroft et al., (2015).

The initial study used a mixed-methods approach of a focus group, interviews and questionnaires with a critical case purposive sample of 48 participants from a population of 156 at this stage of the project. The results showed that the young people reported that they were engaged and developing a constellation of related psychosocial dimensions and contemporary skills. Here, I refer to ‘psychosocial’ as a stance that considers people in terms of the combined influence of psychological factors and surrounding social and environmental ones. Two dimensions that were being developed, understood from this psychosocial perspective, were confidence and motivation. This seemed to occur alongside the development of 21C and employability skills, including team-working (e.g. through collaborating on joint shows), communication (e.g. through interviewing, editorial negotiations and broadcasting), critical and creative thinking (e.g. through proposing and deciding between different generative themes and

considering how to articulate these through show formats) and technical skills (e.g. through sound recording and editing). They also reported that they felt they were developing their voice, in an enjoyable way, and also that they recognised the value of developing these dimensions and skills in the context of their future employment and prospective performance in job interviews.

To illustrate some of the findings above, I present and describe some particularly insightful comments made by the young people during interviews, who are referred to according to their Subject Number, e.g. “S1”, “S2” etc. Collectively, these give us a relatively deep narrative snap-shot of the experiences of the young people, and how these reflected the findings given above. These are presented and described for particular young people, and then considered collectively. The first young person (S1) makes an explicit link between the psychosocial dimensions of confidence and motivation, and indicates how this encouraged their sustained engagement:

*S1. Maybe it makes, like, 'cause I'm more confident, it makes more motivated to do it again.*

Later they then go on to describe how they needed to negotiate, talk and decide as a team, and then linking the application of these employability skills to the potential of a future career.

*S1. Like, when we was doing the script, we needed to agree what we want on the script, so we had to talk more and decide as a team... Yeah, I think it's a skill for everyone really, just need to understand when to work as a team and 'cause if you don't, how are you going to negotiate with other members, 'cause you need it in your career too.*

Another young person (S2) describes how their participation has helped them to develop their voice, in an enjoyable way, and also enabled them to overcome shyness and participate in group

activities, that they were previously reluctant to do<sup>6</sup>, suggesting they were also developing more self-confidence and a greater sense of agency:

*S2 ...I think the project has given me a voice, so I can speak to anybody who's listening and like, the radio project's helped me to speak more and like, enjoy myself, yeah.*

*S2: Yeah, I think very much, because at school, I would, like, I wouldn't join a group, I would just sit there and if anybody doesn't have a group, I would just join them or like, the last pupil, I just join them. But now, I just go straight into a group, so I'm more involved.*

A third young person (S3), when asked about if they had made any continuous improvements talks about the progress they have felt they had made in terms of technical skills.

*S3: Yeah, erm, the technical stuff. It's all, like, I've learned a lot, like how you set up the mic, how you would edit all the things. And that's like, I'm not there fully but I am learning quite a lot of stuff,*

Another young person, who had been a co-presenter and was interviewed in a pair (with S5), points out how this presenting has developed their communication skills in a way that could help them to speak more fluently in job interviews.

*S4: So... 'cause...we don't really plan what we're gonna say but things flow in our mind and then that's what we...we just say it and then so if we were to...I don't know, go for a job interview one day, then it helps us speak fluently.*

They later return to the theme of developing their communication skills, in terms of 'thinking before responding' and how this is also important for job interviews:

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<sup>6</sup> The first example of S2 below is also reproduced in Ravenscroft et al., (2018)

S4: *Yeah. So, next time something unexpected happens or as again, job interviews or anything important if they just say something that you wasn't expecting...*

S5: *Yeah. Then...*

S4: *...then you can just cope with it. I'm gonna have a good few seconds to think and then...*

These young people (S4 and S5) also both summarise what they consider they have learned that is most valuable:

S4: *If you've got...I think you definitely need communication to, like...you need both, like. If you've got good communication you'll have the confidence to speak.*

S5: *Yeah but. They're more...If you think about it, they're both...they both go with each other. So if you don't have confidence you can't speak.*

These comments suggested that once the young people had developed psychosocial dimensions (motivation and confidence) and interpersonal skills (communication, negotiation and working as a team) they then considered the instrumental value of these in terms of future employment prospects.

A second and broader study was conducted after 31 months and followed an 'Appreciative Inquiry' approach (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999), because we were evaluating a living system in ways to improve it, and it is reported in more detail in Ravenscroft et al., (2015). An online questionnaire was used to implement this approach, for accessibility, to get the broadest participation. It was completed by 89 participants that included mostly the young people who were working on the project (80), alongside other youth workers or project staff (9).

These findings generally reinforced and elaborated those arising during the initial study. For example, the highest reported impact was on ‘self-confidence and motivation’, followed by ‘creative skills and abilities’ and then some specific employability skills (organisation, time management and problem solving skills), ‘communication skills’ and ‘knowledge and understanding of technology’. The lowest impact was on mathematical competences, which supports the validity of responses, as this had more limited emphasis in the activities.

Responses to open questions were subjected to a content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) that showed: the most powerful experiences were a ‘sense of belonging’, and then ‘building confidence’; the key success factors were a ‘high level of engagement’ and ‘sense of self-value’; and, two of the main lessons learned were ‘not being afraid’ and ‘plan things in advance’.

## **6. Discussion**

To structure the discussion below I return to the main themes, namely: learning as social innovation and the inclusion of socially excluded young people; the application of a Freirian approach to co-production and learning; and, the development of psychosocial dimensions and contemporary skills reported in the evaluations.

### **6.1. *Inclusive Learning as Social Innovation***

The framing of inclusive learning as social innovation (Conrad, 2015; Westley et al., 2007) that I have adopted is important because it acknowledges the complexity and deep-rooted nature of the problem of social exclusion, for young people like those we worked with, and how it is not well addressed, if at all, by traditional learning organisations and approaches. It also raises the importance of education from an ethical perspective, which in our case focused on working with young people who were socially excluded, and for whom learning can be a liberational and empowering experience and not ostensibly an exercise in attainment linked to economic value. In this sense, engaging in co-production and collaborative learning linked to developing young people’s voice, and developing the social capital of the youth organisations, meant that

RadioActive101 was also an authentic way of developing the agency of young people and their youth organisations.

Our complex intervention also harmonised with Westley et al., (2007) notion of applying complexity theory as a lens with which to understand social innovation, which is more inclusive because it links the social challenges in young people's lives to learning activities, and 'makes pedagogy out of problems'. This position also emphasises the need to understand that in such cases, we are more likely to be on a journey towards enhanced and sustained social innovation. Our evaluations also demonstrated the importance of this stance, because, by implication, it emphasises the need to learn about the innovation process as it is ongoing. For example the significant influence of psychosocial dimensions such as confidence, motivation, and a sense 'belonging' and 'self-value', emerged as particularly important. This incremental and ongoing innovation process, can also be an advantage, through facilitating adaptations, and thus far there have been two. The first has been to use RadioActive101 as a curriculum innovation within a University, where it has been adapted as an employability placement for third year Music Performance students, that has also been generalised into a generic employability module. The second, through embracing this significant influence on psychosocial dimensions, is adopting RadioActive101 as a psychoeducational intervention for positive mental health, working with similar youth organisations and also Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in East London.

## **6.2. *A Freirian Approach to Co-production and Learning***

Similar to Conrad (2005) the research reported in this article demonstrates a synergy between conceiving learning as social innovation, and realising this through a Freirian approach to co-production and learning.

The number of young people engaged (163) is relatively high compared with other projects in participatory media with socially excluded young people, such as the "Youth Uncensored" project described by Conrad (2005), who reported the participation of 50 young people, and the "Music and Change" project reported in Zlotowitz et al.' (2016) that reported the

participation of 15 young people. Although I would add, although a useful guide, such numbers should not be considered in isolation from contextual factors.

Following Freire (1970), our co-production processes and produced shows demonstrated the key aspects of his ideas that I introduced earlier. Three foundational elements of the co-production, were the ‘stories’, ‘lived experience’ and ‘perceived problems and challenges’ of the socially excluded young people. These became the drivers for dialogical methods and relationships, such as brainstorming show ideas and having editorial meetings, where these incorporated problem-posing to identify show ideas and themes, linked to surfacing the generative themes in the lives and local contexts of the young people. What is particularly important and liberating about this, is that *pedagogy can be made out of problems and challenges*. This is what happened when the young people co-created radio content about the challenges and issues they faced in their everyday lives, such as youth crime, mental health, and LGBTQ young people ‘coming out’. The notion of developing a more critical consciousness in young people is quite difficult to ‘prove’, but the nature of the themes that were addressed in some shows, such “Who cares: Is the UK care system fit for purpose?” and “Women, body image and the media”, clearly demonstrated critical thinking and counter narratives to more popular perceptions about the lives of young people, and their resistance to popular stereotypes. These sort of shows along with the communication rich processes that led to them, could be precursors to – ‘mobilising for action’ that could realise more *praxis*.

### **6.3.        *The Findings Across Evaluations***

The evaluations had been relatively in-depth during an initial investigative phase and then broader during a second phase. These strongly suggest that RadioActive101 co-production led to reported improvements in the non-formal learning of ‘21C skills’ (such as communication, critical thinking and creativity) and employability skills (such as team working and organisational skills). These were the reported alongside improvements in psychosocial dimensions - like confidence, motivation and the propensity to communicate one’s voice. The skills that were acquired are also evidenced ‘in action’ through the publicly available archive of

the broadcasts that the young people produced (see [radioactive101.org](http://radioactive101.org) and select ARCHIVE). This focus on cultivating a constellation of related dimensions in support of learning corresponds to what Boyle and Ravenscroft (2012) called a more ‘gestalt’ approach to designing learning and understanding the learning experience.

#### **6.4. Critique and Further Work**

It could be a criticism of our work that we didn’t adopt more formal evaluative methods and a quasi-experimental design, following a pre-test and post-test approach for example, to measure learning, and more clearly test the efficacy (or not) of our methodology. This wasn’t possible, although it was considered, because working sensitively with marginalised and at-risk young people meant that we had to prioritise engagement and building trust leading to co-production, prior to negotiating and agreeing evaluation methods. These challenges share some similarities with those reported by Zlotowitz et al., (2016), in their “Music and Change” project that focused on mental health through working with excluded young people affected by street gangs. These contexts necessitate a creative, careful and sophisticated approach to methodology that foregrounds co-design, co-production and negotiated evaluation, which is what happened in our case to promote engaging and inclusive education.

Going forward, we would refine our approach by incorporating additional structure and skills recognition within our methodology to assist in developing and recognising the specific skills that are acquired. This would more clearly define the roles involved and link these to the contemporary skills that they map to. In practical terms, this means refining an electronic badges system (see Ravenscroft et al., 2015; 2018) by linking it to particular roles in radio production and broadcasting. As part of this refinement of skills and implied refinements in our mapping process we will review the likely near-future landscape for valuable skills, considering expectations for more digital skills and their application to what is commonly called “Industry 4.0” (Shwab, 2016).

## 7. Conclusions

This paper has presented an original application of interlinking a conceptual frame (social innovation) and methodology (co-production) to support the inclusion, non-formal learning and broader psychosocial development of socially excluded young people through participatory internet radio (RadioActive101). This framing as social innovation is important because it acknowledges the complexity and deep-rooted nature of the problem (of social exclusion) along with the need to understand that in such cases, we are more likely to be on a journey towards enhanced and sustained social innovation and inclusive education. Given this difficulty of the problem, our methodology can be considered successful given the relatively high number of participants engaged (192) in their considerable co-production (of 33 shows) alongside the young people's reported improvements in psychosocial dimensions (motivation and confidence) and contemporary skills (21C and employability) that were developed through this methodology. It appeared that improvements in confidence and motivation combined with the development of more instrumental contemporary skills, suggested a sense of empowerment amongst the young people. In returning to my opening quote from Freire, the work in this article suggests that there is an additional dimension to young people communicating in ways that allow their lives to hold meaning. This research shows that they might often need to be specifically facilitated in cultivating their confidence to communicate, and similarly be encouraged to improve and develop their communication skills and voice as a foundation for further learning and development, where this is a holistic process. Adopting methods, such as RadioActive101, or other complex interventions that emphasise fostering this confidence, motivation and voice could be the 'key' that opens the door to further instrumental learning for socially excluded young people. A door that, perhaps, can then lead to potentially better 'readiness' for employment and improved life-chances and a greater role in society in general.

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