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'The Use of Self' in a Youth Work Context
Jean Hatton, University of Huddersfield, June 2014

Abstract
'Relationships are, and always have been, at the heart of youth work' (Young, 2006:62). This is not something new. To understand the nature of this relationship it would seem necessary to understand something about the importance of practitioners knowing 'who they are' as a youth worker so that the youth worker can attempt to be the '*authentic self*' (Rogers, 1961).

On researching the youth and community work literature it seems that very little has been written about the 'use of self' or the nature of the identity that might be seen as this 'authentic self' in a youth and community work context. This presentation will seek to explore what we might mean by 'the use of self' in a youth work context in 2014. The interest of the author started with issues around LGBT identity for youth workers but this presentation will take a wider perspective looking at what is meant by 'identity' for professionals in the context of youth work practice as well as touching on some of the issues that LGBT workers may have in common with practitioners from other 'minority groups'.

The presentation will examine what is meant by 'identity'; mostly from a sociological perspective but also taking a glance at other perspectives. It will acknowledge some of the literature from the 1980s about identity and youth work practice (Trenchard and Warren, 1983; Carpenter and Young, 1986) as well as touching on ideas from Counselling and Social work literature where ideas about 'the use of self' have been explored in depth over the years.

The presentation will go on to examine how identity is viewed within a professional perspective: examining ideas of how the importance of self-awareness and one's own life experiences impact on practice. It will also look briefly at the role of reflective practice in deepening this self-awareness within a youth work context where unpredictability and the lack of clarity around boundaries are part of everyday experience

As this is' a work in progress' for the author the session will aim to be interactive and there will be opportunities for colleagues to contribute to the discussion regarding their views of 'the use of self' within a youth work context.

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Identity 'is an interchange between self and structure, a transforming process' (Kearney, 1998, p. 169 citing Rutherford, 1990)

'Youth workers must look young people in the eye not in the back' (Nichols, 2012) page???

'The conscious use of self requires willingness of practitioners to 'give themselves' (Fusco, 2012, p. 34)

1. Introduction:

This paper is building on my interest in how Lesbian and bi-sexual women youth workers consciously use their own identity when working with young people. It sets out to explore some of the concepts used to examine the idea of the 'conscious use of self' within a youth work context. These themes are more or less the same for all youth workers so there will not be much of a focus on issues of gender or sexuality within this paper.

A range of authors from a different professional backgrounds suggest that little research has been undertaken around the topic of how professional use their own identity or themselves when working with clients - even though social workers counsellors, health practitioners and care-workers, as well as youth and community workers, all focus on 'the use of self' on in their work (Kubiak, 2011; Lunn, 2002; Reupert, 2007).

Fusco (2012), one of the few writers who to focus on the theme and writing from an American youth work perspective, discusses how 'the use of self' is not something static but is always ongoing and changing. Relationships are about how young people and the practitioner interact and how they co-construct the relationship. This supports Ord's suggestion, when citing Dewey, that experiential learning or experience is something that the practitioner acts upon but this experience also affects the practitioner in return (Ord, 2009, p. 493).

Can you think of instances where your views or even your identity has been challenged by people that you come into contact with outside your professional work setting?

> *For example: a counsellor who suggested that I should ask my GP for anti-depressants rather than try and cope with the depression just through talking therapy; a close friend going through health issues with a very positive outlook on life my challenge my everyday habit of moaning about health issues*

2. What is the 'self'

So what is the 'self' or what is this identity that youth workers might use in their practice when building relationships with young people? - the very heart and foundation of youth work (Ord, 2007; Young, 2006).

'The self' or 'identity' is not a simple idea. It can be examined from a range of different academic perspectives including sociology, social psychology, anthropology and history (Wearing, 2011). Taking a postmodern sociological approach it can be said that 'identities are contested and negotiated in everyday life' and often labelled in a binary manner (Wearing, 2011, p. viii).

What are the labels that you link to your own identity? How can you challenge the binary division?

Woman/lesbian (but meaning?)/ 50s (so what?)/ feminist (but meaning?) / parent (how does this impact on me as a youth worker/lecturer?) /sporty/fat/middle class.

Our social identity is relational as (formed through and by social relationships) and also contextual as it is shaped by the context in which the relationships happen (Wearing, 2011).

For example the issue of my sexuality is important at times: when supporting students that I know are not straight; when challenging homophobia or lack of understanding of gay/queer issues; when talking about working with young people who may be questioning their sexuality but at other times this identity is unimportant. Issues of social class, more easily forgotten may have more impact within a teaching setting. Examples from your experience or youth work practice?

Focussing on 'professional identity' makes the concept of identity or the self even more complex. Professionals may wear more than one hat at any one time - 'there are ambiguities, sometimes paradoxical and complex, around the phenomenon' (Wearing, 2011, p. xi). At times the actions of the youth worker or other professional may belie their own perceived identities or may be contradictory to how others perceive them (e.g. a youth worker may not identity, or not be 'out' regarding their sexuality or other 'private' issue with the young people or other clients).

For example not 'being out' with young people that lived in the same village as me in the 1990s when working alongside youth workers who were well aware of my strong opinions about issues of sexuality. Being seen as bolshie, aggressive and putting people down when I perceive myself as very empathetic to students
==Does this link to Bourdieu's habitus?== (as cited byMa'ayan, 2011).

The self may be seen as an 'instrument': 'an identifiable person … her idiosyncrasies … her height, her age, her sex, her ethnic origins, her temper, her energy, her prejudices – these are the qualities that she has to work with, for better or worse' (Reupert, 2007, p. 107citing Davies, 1994 pp174-5). Reupert likens this to how a painter uses brushes
E.g. me compared with Peter Joseph or Leanne Rivers
Reupert distinguishes between this use of self as an instrument and the use of self as a process. Quoting from Cournoyer (2000:35) 'social work practice involves the conscious and deliberate use of oneself; you become the medium through which knowledge, attitude and skills are conveyed' (Reupert, 2007 p107). Other writers (Ganzer, 2007; Yan & Wong, 2005) focus more on the postmodernist idea that the self is continually constructed through, not

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only life experiences, but also in relation to the very people that a professional works with. Ganzer (2007, p. 107) suggests that 'the self is one that is dialogical, contextualised, decentred and multiple' and places an emphasis on the co-construction of meaning within the relationship between the professional and the client.

For example my experiences of working with 2 very 'street wise' brothers in the East End of London in the 1980s taught me a lot about young people and the issues that they face and possible ways of working with them. Working with young men who liked to comment on the size of my tits encouraged me to develop a thick skin regarding my physical appearance as I was supported by a very wise supervisor to suggest loudly and on the street sometimes that these boys may have a 'thing' about tits. Again did this change the young men? I don't know but it probably assisted in my own view of myself. Working with a young woman who had witnessed her mother stabbing her father to death in self-defence after many years of domestic violence had a profound effect on my 'feminism' and understanding of DV issues.

These ideas [are they postmodern?] are also noted by Katz and Keller (2011) citing Erikson's (1959) suggestion that identity is formed through both cognitive and social processes; Vygotsky's (1978) idea that our experiences must be seen within the context of the society in which we operate and Savin Williams' (2005) idea that how we views our own identity will be limited by the pool of potential socially constructed identities 'defined by the culture and the time in which one lives' (Katz-Wise and Keller, , p34 citing Savin Williams, 2005).
E.g. me and sexuality when growing up! Any other examples?

'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour nor … in the reaction of others but *in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going*' (Gauntlett (2008, p. 108), quoting from Giddens (1991:54). This suggests that the strength (is this the best word?) of the narrative depends on the person's ability to create a credible 'story' and to act out or adjust the face or body language when communicating with others (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 113 citing Goffman 1959).
E.g.an able parent; a sports woman; a youth worker

3. The use of self in a professional context and reflective practice

The focus on how 'the self' may affect the way that a professional acts and reacts to others is discussed by Fook (2002) who emphasises that the use of self in a professional relationship 'is about looking at one's own presence and perspective and how these influence … practice' (Fook, 2002, p44). Fook (2002, citing Sands, 1996), writing in a social work context, suggests that 'the self' of a professional could be seen to have 'situated subjectivity' or 'positionality' (p74/75?). So the 'self' is seen to, not only change over time, but may have contradictory aspects operating in different contexts *(e.g. confident professional/nervous learner; able youth worker/challenged parent; good manager/poor timekeeper)* Fook calls this 'narrative identity'. Professionals create coherence for their identity even though they view their identity as being fluid. These narrative identities are partially driven by 'ascribed' or given identities (e.g. marital status, ethnicity those that Reupert (2007) suggests above) and partially by life experiences which are 'driven by the cultural forces that play on us' (Fook, 2002, p. 75).

Knowing about 'our own background, embodiment, personalities and perspectives' (Fook, 2002, p. 44) is crucial when examining the impact that this can have on professional relationships with young people or other clients.

> 'We bring our personal characteristics, worlds and histories' with us into practice (Wendt et al, 2011:196)

This can also be seen as knowing about 'our own personal journey … making available to oneself what we already "know" but haven't brought to consciousness and so don't fully understand'. (Davies, 2006, p. 71). This 'personal journey' can include family and religious backgrounds, one's own educational experiences, recreational passions and politics (Davies, 2006, p. 71).

So for me this will be my religious upbringing, my membership of/leadership within a strong youth group as a teenager; working with destitute women in the slums of Nairobi when in my early 20s that taught me more about feminism than I had learnt on an undergraduate degree in Social Policy; working alongside feminist youth workers who were 'out and proud' lesbians in the 1980s; passion for outdoor education that also brought me into contact with confident women, many of who were lesbian; the pain of bereavement

Much has been written about reflective practice in a range of professional settings and with a focus on youth work particularly (Blacker, 2001; Emslie, 2009; Ord, 2009; Richmond, 2008). Much of this discussion seems to be focus on performance within professional practice, rather than examining the impact of the professional's own belief system and behaviour on the setting and young people. Some authors, however, do focus on the impact of personal beliefs and experience on the interaction with young people in a youth work context (Trelfa and Richmond, 2008; (Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Ord, 2012). Ord (2007, pp. 51-52) suggests that as 'the starting point is the relationship with the young people … the boundaries between personal and professional life are narrower [than in counselling]'

Other issue:
A range of authors (including Rogers cited by (Ord, 2012; Rowan, 2002)) discuss the importance of authenticity when building relationships. A focus on issues such as 'resilience … positive emotions … internal meaning … [and] optimism' (Wendt, 2012, p. 197). This may be a useful addition to this perspective.

How the personal experiences of practitioners impacts not just on the practice of that individual but also on the whole community or practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2014).

Power and relationships: (Johnson-Bailey, Brown, & Cervero, 2000)discuss how the power discourse from the world are carried over into learning relationships

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