YOUTH & POLICY

Youth & Policy:
The final issue?

Towards a new
format

Editorial Group

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: The final issue? Towards a new format

Youth & Policy: The Journal of Critical Analysis was formed 35 years ago in 1982, to address a need for 'a serious journal of analysis and review which focused its attention upon the whole area of youth policy'. The journal aimed – and continues to aim – to address itself not only to youth work, youth services and education, but also to the wider field of young people and how young people are impacted by (and how they have an impact on) policy. The journal has been highly influential in the field and valued by students, researchers, lecturers, practitioners and activists. Those who set it up, and those who have been involved throughout the last 35 years – editorial group members, reviewers, writers, proof-readers, and others – should be justly proud of what it has achieved. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed in any way.

However, the time has come for a change. In recent years, *Youth & Policy* has faced a few challenges, including:

• A steep fall in the numbers of high quality articles submitted. We are always glad to see excellent articles from our valued, committed and regular writers and new contributors, but overall the numbers are falling, and this means we do not have enough quality articles to release the journal on a regular basis. There are a number of factors underlying this decline in quantity and quality. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) and similar processes internationally tend to incentivise academics to submit to journals with high 'impact factors' – and while we know that an article in Youth and Policy has more likelihood of being read than one in most ostensibly 'higher impact' journals, readership does not count for a great deal. At the same time, academics' and practitioners' workloads are increasing exponentially, hence there is reduced time for any of us to write (or, for that matter, to peer review, edit and coordinate journals)! Sadly, it seems that many lecturers in the field of Youth Studies and Youth and Community Work are given negligible time – if any – for research and writing.

• A growing proportion of inappropriate and irrelevant articles are being submitted, which do not meet the remit of our journal and/or are not in any way ready for publication. Presumably this is also due to the 'publish or perish' culture. Often it feels as though we are receiving articles that have been rejected elsewhere and have not been adapted for our journal – we are not talking here about articles from the field, but irrelevant articles that do not address the aims of our journal and have often not been proof-read. It takes a great deal of (voluntary) time and energy to read through these submissions and provide helpful feedback.

- Technological challenges and workload pressures amongst some members of the editorial group have conspired to take the journal offline for periods and/or hold up the publication of some issues for an unacceptably long time. We realise that this may feed into the first challenge – the lack of quality submissions – but because the reduction in quality submissions predated our technological challenges, we feel that this is not the main factor.

We know that *Youth and Policy* continues to be valued, particularly by lecturers, researchers, students and (to some extent) practitioners in the field of youth and community work. We also aim to reach and contribute towards wider youth and policy related networks, beyond 'youth work' and its related practices, but it is less clear how successful we have been in regard to this aim in recent years. Overall, we have had a general feeling that *Youth & Policy* is not responsive enough (we know that we are too slow to publish time-relevant articles), is not reaching a wide enough audience, and is not attracting sufficient high quality submissions to sustain the publication of a journal that is produced regularly enough to contribute in a timely way to present policy debates. As REF-type procedures and heavy workloads are likely to continue to affect the quality and volume of articles received, we feel the time has come to make a change.

The way ahead

We have decided to move towards a more responsive format. The new *Youth & Policy* will continue to be free, open access and online, yet rather than having 'issues' we will instead publish individual articles, which can be published as soon as they have been prepared. Most of these articles will be much shorter – up to 2000 words in length. We are setting up a new website that will be easier for all of us on the editorial group to access and edit. We have now had all our 'hard copy' back issues scanned (a garagantuan task!) and will host these on the new website, alongside the full range of our existing electronic editions.

We recognise that there will be some disadvantages to the new system, but we are confident that any that arise will be outweighed by the benefits. Needless to say, we will monitor and review the new format closely during the months following the launch. However, there are also clear advantages in terms of a much easier process, which will enable quicker publication. We believe that the new format will be easier for researchers, lecturers, students and practitioners to access and read, and hope that it will be read and shared more widely and attract more high quality contributions. We will still exercise a system of quality control, through a simplified and streamlined peer review process, and those academics who need to be able to say they are submitting to a peer reviewed journal will still be able to do so. We will occasionally invite longer journal-length articles, but these will be the exception rather than the norm.

We will continue to seek articles which provide a critical analysis of current policy issues affecting young people. We are keen to host original articles on a wide range of themes – education, employment, justice, health, identity, equality, youth services, media, campaigning, and many

more. We hope existing contributors and new writers will be keen to contribute, so do look out for our guidelines for submissions. Our new format site will be up and running (at the same web address) within a few weeks of the publication of this final edition and we will launch the new format at an event in the autumn. We will also continue to organise conferences and seminars – note the advance date for our forthcoming '*Youth Policy: Then and Now*' conference, March 9th – 10th 2018, which will draw together historical and present themes and research. We hope to see you all at these or other events in the near future.

The editorial group.

Youth Work and Informal Education: Finding common ground

Tony Jeffs

Abstract

Youth work and informal education belong to a rich intellectual tradition that primarily seeks to foster educational experiences via the mediums of dialogue and conversation. This focus, upon dialogue and conversation, is one that other adjacent forms of practice operating both in the UK and elsewhere share. It is an approach that possesses a long, rich history. This article seeks to locate youth work within this tradition and identify those elements that provide continuity and focus. Youth work and informal education principally occur within the setting of civil society, that is outside of the orbit of the formal education setting and corporate sphere, and the article concludes with a discussion of the difficulties this can pose for the future of both these forms of practice.

Key words: youth work; informal education; civil society; dialogical education, community.

ACROSS EUROPE and elsewhere we encounter many forms of non-formal education and 'outreach' work taking place within community settings. Professionally those undertaking such work employ various labels to explain to others, and themselves, who they are and what they do. Social pedagogue, community worker, animateur, adult educator, youth worker, community educator, youth pastor or minister, street worker, informal educator, foyer worker, community development worker and community organiser are just a few of the labels adopted. Each of these, and others unlisted, speak of discrete histories of inconsistent length and exclusivity. All draw upon theoretical and intellectual traditions of variable substance to simultaneously help them sustain and provide a *raison d'etre* for their autonomous existence. Such variations are something we must, for the foreseeable future, accept as a given. Not least because one encounters little enthusiasm amongst practitioners to abandon their existing niche and embark on a quest to find a new all-embracing professional classification or title – one that might be universally embraced.

Lightly brushing aside these variations is not advisable but it is feasible to disinter attributes shared by all these assemblages. First, to varying degrees, all are engaged in the process of education. Each seeks via different, at times discrete, methods to help others extend their knowledge and understanding. Practitioners, whatever their specific designation, will lay claim to a desire to improve the lot of their fellow citizens and the communities they seek to serve; and surely they all believe in the transforming potential of education and the importance of helping themselves and others better understand the benefits of asking the 'why of things'. Integral to their work is

the task of helping themselves and others think with greater clarity; reduce levels of ignorance, confusion and misconception; and cultivate at every given opportunity heightened intellectual analysis, reflection and enquiry. These educators, like colleagues in universities and elsewhere, will seek to initiate those they are in contact with 'into the mysteries of a human condition: the gift of self-knowledge and of a satisfying intellectual and moral identity' (Oakshott, 1989: 72). It is an educational approach in which achieving a check list of outcomes is neither a desired nor feasible outcome. It works from the assumption that education is what economists term a 'post-experience or credence good'; those who acquire it will usually not know the worth and value of what they are getting until long after they have seemingly 'consumed' it (for a discussion of this relation to higher education see White, 2017). All these interventions are, at root, educational processes that seek to promote understanding and assist in the acquisition of wisdom and, as such, are not skills led.

Second, these practitioners commonly undertake their work outside of the venues of formal education – they teach but not in the classroom or lecture theatre. Rather, they labour in settings where individuals and groups freely gather or in buildings where they can arrange events and happenings that others will voluntarily attend. This implies that whatever their chosen designation they are wholly or partly informal educators. 'Informal' because they predominately work outside of the classrooms of the formal sector, comprising schools and colleges. In venues that require them to first and foremost educate via the mediums of dialogue, conversation and the modelling of behaviour. Therefore, although they possess ambitions and goals regarding what they wish to achieve or teach, which some might label 'outcomes', what and how they educate is not determined by the constraints of either a curriculum or a syllabus. The point of commencement is the voluntary encounter initiated via the medium of conversation. Which for the educator will be, as Newman explained, the 'medium of something more than an idle pleasure' being the 'very active agent in circulating and forming the opinions, tastes, and feelings of a whole people' (1931: 95). Conversations that serve as an entrée to association and dialogue provide the very foundations of an education fit for free men and women. For as Bohm notes 'if we are to live in harmony with ourselves and with nature, we need to be able to communicate freely in a creative movement' (1996: 4) and be open to the ideas and viewpoints of others. However, the obverse is that dialogue and conversation rarely blossom in an environment or culture dominated by hierarchies wherein equality is denied. That is why, for example, despite gallant efforts to do so, informal education, including youth work and adult education, so rarely prospers in school settings.

Although a great deal of common ground exists much separates these occupations and professions one from another; for instance, the:
• Age of the prime clientele;
• Locale of the work;
• Focus of the intervention;
• Degree of professional closure. In particular, with regards to entry into a given profession

or vocation and the extent to which opportunities for those lacking an officially 'approved' qualification are allowed to 'practice'.

In addition, we must not forget that each of the professional titles is of itself contested, both internally and when it crosses national and regional borders. Internally, practitioners constantly dispute amongst themselves what is and is not acceptable practice much as they question whether, or not, a given intervention falls within the purview of what they define as, say, community work or adult education. Equally, such headings have acquired inconsistent meanings and foci in discrete localities. For example, social pedagogy has come to mean something significantly different in the United Kingdom from the interpretation placed upon it in, for example, Germany (Sanderman and Neumann, 2014).

Origins

During the nineteenth century, epidemiologists took infinite care compiling maps showing, by locality, where particular diseases were more, or less, prevalent. Likewise, those researching poverty assembled maps to expose the dispersal of distress. If such maps were to be assembled in relation to the distribution within Europe and elsewhere of the types of institutions dialogical educators work in, for example, Folk High Schools, Community Centres, Youth Clubs, Social Centres, Foyers, and Full-service Schools; or where given professions, for example, Street Worker, Animateur, Community Educator, Youth Development Workers, Social Pedagogues, Youth Minister or Adult Educator operate these would show narrow concentrations in specific localities alongside a nil or minimal presence elsewhere. The solidity of these representations speaks of the degree to which certain modes of practice are embedded as well as the failures of those who have endeavoured in the past to transpose these from one setting to another.

Noticeably, forms of intervention which prosper in some localities have failed to secure even a foothold elsewhere. A not atypical example of this failure to thrive in an 'alien environment' can be witnessed in relation to the Folk High School movement. First established in Denmark during the 1840s, these spread rapidly outwards and by the close of the century, approaching 150 were operating in Scandinavia (Rorodam, 1965). A limited number had been opened elsewhere in Europe, mostly in Germany, and by 1920 a dozen or so were to be found in the United States, predominately in the mid-west in those localities where immigrants from Scandinavia settled in significant numbers. Despite their self-evident success and the degree to which influential educationalists from overseas celebrated their achievements, the concept never acquired serious momentum outside of the Nordic countries (see for example Foght, 1914; Sadler, 1926; Lindeman, 1926; and Haggard, 1911). Similar tales can be recounted concerning the Settlement movement inaugurated in Britain in 1882, but which grew even more rapidly in the United States during the following half century, yet failed to flourish in mainland Europe (Malleier, 2005; Johnson, 2001). Likewise, the Cultural Centres found in France and Belgium; Foyers; Community Schools; Youth Centres; Full-Service Schools; the Youth Development model; and Street Work; as well

as organisations such as the Catholic Workers Movement, YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides – all similarly developed spasmodically and flourished in restricted environments.

This pattern of uneven progression was not the result of either an absence of effort or knowledge. For example, we know that hundreds of visitors from Europe and the United States, including the future Czar of Russia, visited New Lanark in the decade after it was launched in 1814, to assess the merits of Robert Owen's educational and social experiment. To view at first-hand his pioneering welfare programmes and appraise what were possibly both the original purpose-built community school and community centre. Similarly, word regarding the ground-breaking innovations of Pestalozzi, Fourier and Grundtvig spread far and wide being discussed and debated throughout Europe and North America by those interested in educational reform and democratic alternatives to the then dominant models of practice. Unfortunately, 'policy tourism' and literary interest rarely translates into tangible change or replication.

Scant evidence exists that modes of working can be readily transplanted from one setting or country to another unless deep and substantive commonalities already exist between these environments. In recent years, British politicians have displayed a wretched weakness for 'buying-in' ready-made packages in relation to youth policy and the third-sector, notably from the United States. Recently, they have tried 'full-service' schools, mentoring programmes, charter schools and youth development all of which singularly failed to take root. Whilst, from France, Foyers were toyed with for a brief moment in time before being quietly erased from the agenda. Currently, it is social pedagogy that is being 'imported' in a seemingly desperate attempt to raise the quality of the UK's hopelessly inadequate residential care sector. However, like all the others, it has arrived stripped of its history, without even a post-hoc effort being made by policy-makers, or, for that matter, practitioners to explain to themselves or others what it was that enabled these modes of intervention to thrive in their lands of origin. It seems that as with the importation of fauna and flora we should be chary about introducing an 'alien' genus without assiduously assessing its suitability. Like the Cane Toads or Rabbits introduced to Australia which subsequently wreaked havoc, acquiring 'off-the-shelf' policies may seem an attractive, quick solution to an immediate problem but ultimately most either wither on the vine or prove more harmful to their host than the initial predicament they were shipped-in to alleviate.

These failures or the existing diversity encountered on our trek are not things we should axiomatically regret or bemoan. For, like the differentials in relation to welfare systems across Europe, they reflect genuine variations in the political, social and religious make-up of the states and regions of Europe and between the UK and USA (Cousins, 2005: Esping-Andersen, 1990: Hulme, 2006). Human affairs, it must always be acknowledged, are 'too complicated and difficult for any one kind of government to be universally practicable or desirable' (Gray, 2007: 126). The welfare state may have emerged as an integral product of the logic of industrialisation and as a consequence of modernity but those forces were always mediated in ways that ensured the

appearance in assorted localities of varied, one might even say incompatible, structures. Likewise, variable forms of practice in relation to informal and dialogical education are dissimilar for equally sound reasons. In this case, perhaps more so than in others, because the 'family' of agencies and professions loosely amalgamated by the common usage of the label 'informal education' as a mode of intervention predominately operate within the sphere of civil society. A sphere where by definition uniformity is something that can, or should, not be enforced. Working as they do with and alongside voluntary participants and via the medium of conversation and dialogue freely entered into by both parties; the strength and vibrancy of such agencies invariably waxes and wanes as the relative strength and vitality of civil society itself is re-configured over time. Working in the here and now means progress can never be assumed or success guaranteed. Because they belong in and relate to civil society – this means that in a democracy they rely on the existence of an animated middle or "third" that is equipped to resist the intrusion of the state on one side and corporate capitalism on the other. Their independence therefore in large part relies on the presence of a civil society that is healthy and effervescent. It is the pool in which they swim – consequently if it is either polluted or evaporates they have nowhere else to go. Unfortunately, state funding and corporate sponsorship alike have a predisposition to foster a milieu that is antipathetic to the formation of democratic dialogical educational practice. By nature, their preferred ambience is hierarchical, authoritarian and deferential and they will always, whatever they may profess, ultimately seek to impose a top-down chain-of-command. Each is uncomfortable in the presence of criticism and will, out of self-interest, seek to stifle emancipatory dialogue for the very rational reason that it always undermines managerial structures. That is why professionals and activists engaged in informal and community education must play their part in safeguarding the waters of civil society from unwarranted incursions or contamination by the state and capital alike. This is not a struggle that will yield an ultimate victory rather it is one that demands unceasing vigilance. For history shows, much to the chagrin of many naïve practitioners, that our modes of intervention are of themselves never politically and ethically neutral; which means that like formal education and social work the techniques of informal education can be employed to great effect by others who seek to achieve outcomes that most contemporary practitioners would not endorse. Indeed, both the state and capital constantly seek to colonise and incorporate these modes of practice to achieve their own ends. These dangers should not be exaggerated and a sense of balance within the context of our liberal democracy is required if practitioners are to avoid attracting ridicule for being unduly alarmist. However, as for example, Sunker and Otto (1997) with reference to social pedagogy, Schnurr (1997) with regards to social work and Kelly (2007) and Becker (1946) in relation to youth work showed, these modes of intervention can, with at the most minimal adaptation, be employed to secure anti-democratic and oppressive ends. Similar tales can equally be recounted in relation to community work and community development. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the counsel of Freire (1970) that the strategies of 'education', both formal and informal, can with equal facility serve the causes of 'oppression' as they can those of 'liberation'. For that reason, it is naïve, even self-delusory, to assume that there are say fixed 'youth work' or social work' values; values that are of themselves axiomatically liberatory.

What unites?

If we can agree, and it is a big if, that the locale of our practice as educators does, or should, lie predominately within the sphere of civil society then perhaps we can begin to unearth what it might be that unites, rather than divides, the family of professionals and professions itemised in the opening paragraph. To recognise that, although we may be starting from different sides, we are all ultimately educators endeavouring to climb the same mountain. To this end, I would wish to propose that although within this family of professions we encounter varied histories and dissimilar foci we share substantive commonalities that unite us one with another. First, we possess a common origin which can be traced back to the Athenian *Agora*: a special place where Athenians partook of one of their favourite pastimes – lively animated discussion. Such debate and discussion was not a distraction or amusement, although it was frequently playful and awash with raillery, rather it lay at the heart of a social and political system founded upon the participation of all the citizenry; for as Pericles explained 'we differ from other states in regarding the man who holds aloof from public life as useless' (quoted in Thucydides, 1972: 147). Here then was not only a place of association and conviviality, but above all else the locale where democracy lived. That Athenian model has provided the tap root for much contemporary practice; which also places great emphasis on mutual learning via conversation and dialogue, and frequently opts for direct rather than representative democracy as a *modus operandi*. However, it must be recognised that the Athenian model of democracy was relatively short-lived and to all intents and purposes suppressed by church and state until revived in the small towns of New England and the Cantons of Switzerland over 1,500 years after it ended in Athens. This absence embodies a warning that should still resonate; namely that democracy once gained can be lost or squandered. For at every historical juncture, not least our own, there are forces and demagogues who hold democracy in contempt waiting in the wings and who if given the opportunity will unpick the threads and weave with them a straight-jacket of authoritarianism. Moreover, freedom, as Oakshott (1991) explained is, it seems, not an ideal that can be exported but a practice that grows up in particular historical circumstances. Yet Athenian democracy, even when denied the environment in which it might flourish, remained an inspiration for those who prized freedom. Although according to Habermas (1989) it was not until the turn of the eighteenth century that anything akin to the Agora, surfaced, this time in the coffeehouses of England. What made these tiny places unique was that they created what Habermas called a 'public sphere' where men and women from various walks of life might discuss politics, cultural matters and ideas without fear of arrest or harassment. To their supporters and habitué these were 'penny universities', venues where people might debate, interrogate and share the 'dangerous' ideas that toppled princes and shook the foundations of science. Seats of liberty where men and women, such as Addison, sought out not those who might confirm their prejudices and reinforce their existing viewpoint, but those who disagreed with them, who would test the mettle of their analysis and their reasoning. To their enemies, however, these were 'seminaries of sedition' (Miller, 2006).

If the tap root goes deep down to the Athenian tradition, the town meetings of New England and the

'public sphere' of the eighteenth century, wherein the Enlightenment flourished, the surface roots are to be found nearer to hand. In the clubs, associations, adult education programmes, study circles and social pedagogy of the early to late nineteenth century. Many of which sought to re-create free open spaces wherein unfettered dialogue and conversation thrived, and where the coinage of ideas might be freely exchanged. Created by individuals who shared Shelley's wish to scatter the 'winged seed' and Grundtvig's desire to let the 'winged word' take flight (Lundgreen-Nielsen, 2003: 228); supporters believed like Newman that 'truth is wrought by many minds working freely together' (1931: 71). However, we should acknowledge these projects and programmes, like our existing formal education system, the modern university, the technical school, welfare and social work, emerged along with industrialisation and urbanisation. Although they arrived in the wake of the steam locomotive, factory system, trade unions and mass political parties they were not like the bulk of the formal education system predominately designed to service the needs of industry, landowners and religious sectarianism. Rather, they were under-pinned by an egalitarian belief, one shared by John Stuart Mill, that 'the idea is essentially repulsive, of a society held together only by the relations and feelings arising out of pecuniary interest' (1929: 742). They embraced a worldview and an analysis that inspired not merely a different curriculum but a search that continues into the present for alternative educational methods to those of didactic instruction and routinised learning. Democratic pedagogies were sought that would of themselves strengthen rather than erode civil society by fostering engagement and participation via conversion, dialogue and association. Hence what we might now view as discrete traditions are barely two centuries old and in most cases half that. It is worth reminding ourselves that, for example, the concept of a Foyer is less than a century old; the mixed youth club barely seventy years; the social and community centre maybe two hundred years in the making; community development just over half a century; social pedagogy around one hundred and fifty years; and the outdoor pursuits centre eighty years. Professional training as an entity is even more recent, apart from the tiny programmes run by Springfield College (Massachusetts) in 1885 to train YMCA secretaries and a similar but short-lived course established in Germany in 1912, it cannot be viewed as having a substantive presence prior to 1945.

Initially, many of these modes of working were experiments created by organisations that had narrow ambitions seeking only to manage the behaviour of the 'socially deviant' or secure the conversion of others to a given religious or political belief. But because they could only survive by attracting affiliates who attended of their own free-will they were obliged to adopt key elements of a format which subsequently was appropriated by those wedded to the liberal and dialogical educational traditions. For however reactionary the ambitions of the agency the relationship between the 'provider' and the 'user' was essentially a voluntary one, and the means of communication employed were perforce conversational and associational. If these methods were to be expropriated by those seeking to create emancipatory projects then the practitioners and the agency alike were obliged to embody the values they sought to impart; to function as a metonymy which served as an exemplary of the ideals of human life as a whole which the providers held dear. Unlike the

training and instructional model motivated by a wish to ensure the individual 'fits' more efficiently into their allotted place in the world as it exists, this informal version of liberal education was, and is, founded upon an ameliorative belief in the capacity of men and women to improve their world. Dialogue, conversation and critical analysis are not, within these settings, mere affectations but the essentials required to build democracy anew and foster meaningful citizenship. Equally the trust, mutuality and interdependence essential for civil society to thrive were prominent features of so much early informal education because these values encapsulated 'their' underlying purpose. Here was a model based on a belief that democracy could not be learnt in the formal sector by rote or instruction served-up in a classroom, rather if it was to prosper it must become as de Tocqueville so neatly put it a 'habit of the heart'. Hence the need then, and now, for a dynamic informal sector committed to social justice and equality which operates in accordance with those values. This was why the pioneering informal educational programmes and agencies emerged at a time when the struggles for democracy and emancipation were also burgeoning. They were therefore partners in a great enterprise. Moreover, the clubs, associations, settlements, friendly societies, Ragged Schools and the like modelled for their fellow citizens both the possibilities of a democratic society and a system of universal welfare. For besides their formal and informal educational roles these agencies provided welfare services such as access to health care and income support which sought to alleviate poverty and suffering in an era when state provision was either minimal, often harsh and callous, or non-existent.

Difficult times

In fits and starts, the environment has altered to the detriment of many agencies. First, state welfare has slowly usurped the role of the informal education agencies in relation to the alleviation of poverty and the provision of services. Second, the appearance of state sponsored social casework agencies has supplanted much of the individual counselling and support work once picked-up by these agencies. Third, the expansion of state school provision and the more recent arrival of mass higher and post-school education have combined to further marginalise many agencies. Partly because schools, colleges and universities provide leisure facilities and opportunities for young people far superior to those that previously were only to be found in the voluntary sector. But also because they have 'skilled-up' individuals; thereby enabling them to unearth their own independent routes to adult and social education. Fourth, private provision has expanded which via the cash nexus creating superior but socially divisive forms of provision. For example, private health clubs are fast replacing public swimming pools or leisure centres. Finally, the rise of home entertainment and more recently heightened access to computers has pressed forward increasing privatisation and individualisation which has exacerbated the rate of decline of many forms of social provision (Roberts, 2014). Consequently, informal education's pioneering role appears to have run its course. Even before the close of the 1960s many of the early forms of provision were fast losing traction. Settlements, community centres, youth clubs, uniformed youth organisations, adult education centres and others despite heightened state support in many localities and the growing professionalization of the workforce were in retreat. Since then that trend has neither been

reversed nor halted and with respect to some formats in the UK, notably youth clubs and centres, it appears to be accelerating.

What future?

Following a long autumn of decline, it is perhaps important to enquire if this family of informal education professions has a viable future. Growing individualisation has undoubtedly contributed to the widespread collapse of the historic politics of left and right and a diminished presence of those social institutions such as the churches and trade unions that served to bind us together and helped individuals and groups make a collective sense of the world and their place within it. The decline in political commitment is palpable: we have witnessed since the 1980s in Europe and North America a steady unbroken waning in the membership of political parties, only perhaps briefly interrupted in the UK by a rapid growth in the membership of the British Labour Party between 2015 and 2016. In France, the percentage of the population belonging to a political party is now below 2 per cent, as it was in the UK prior to 2015. In every European country except Portugal, Greece and Spain a similar hollowing out, accompanied by declining participation in elections, has taken place (Mair, 2006). Worryingly, it is a cumulative trend. For approximately fifty years, at each succeeding election, the proportion of young people who bothered to cast their vote has fallen thereby tipping the generational balance within the electorate year-on-year in almost every major industrial nation (EACEA, 2013). In the recent referendum on EU membership in the UK we witnessed the almost surreal situation arising where the turnout amongst the over 80s approached almost double that of those under 25. These trends have legitimised the appearance, according to Pitkin, of:

> *a self-perpetuating elite that rules – or rather administers – passive or privatized masses of people…. professionals entrenched in office and in party structures. Immersed in a distinct culture of their own, surrounded by other specialists and insulated from the ordinary realities of constituents' lives, they live not just physically but also mentally 'inside the beltway'.* (2004: 339)

Habermas (2013; 2013a) describes our age as 'post democratic executive feudalism' in which political leaders and unelected functionairies gather to broker 'done deals' unhindered by meaningful democratic accountability. Citizens, it appears, are turning from participants to spectators. Creating what Putman (2001) calls a political malaise, one mirrored by a widespread withdrawal from the daily life of the local community, resulting in a gradual but quantifiable weakening of civil society. What Pope Francis described 8th July 2013 in a speech delivered in Lampedusa, as the emergence of a 'globalised culture of indifference' (Vatican Radio transcript, 2013). Judt is similarly pessimistic. Highlighting the rapid de-mutualisation of so much of our lives with services being transferred from publically owned agencies and accountable providers to private for-profit suppliers; he suggests that as a consequence:

people who live in private spaces contribute actively to the dilution and corrosion of public space … If public goods – public services, public spaces, public facilities – are devalued, diminished in the eyes of citizens and replaced by private services available against cash, then we lose the sense that common interests and common needs ought to trump private preferences and individual advantage. And once we cease to value the public over the private, surely we shall come in time to have difficulty seeing just why we should value law (the public good par excellence) over force. (Judt, 2010: 129)

Isolated voices of optimism counter these pessimistic viewpoints (see for example Donald, 2008). Overwhelmingly though the weight of empirical evidence and the assessments of commentators combine to suggest that we should be fearful regarding the well-being of civil society and the public sphere. Informal and dialogical educators must therefore consider how they might pay due attention to securing the well-being of these spheres given we may be living in an era when the tide is flowing in the wrong direction with respect to both informal education, and possibly democracy itself. Perhaps, in the light of this trend, it would be advisable to acknowledge that the current high rate of closure in the UK of youth projects, leisure and community centres, adult education programmes and social agencies may not solely be a consequence of a staunching of the flow of local and central government funding but a consequence of deeper structural reasons leading to a longer-term malaise.

The hollowing out of politics is only one among many challenges we face. Three others should be briefly mentioned. First is the extent to which capitalism and a crude version of possessive individualism have succeeded in burying themselves deep into our collective and individual psyches. The consumerisation of our daily lives and the unremitting re-configuration of the individual as a 'customer', rather than a citizen, have led to the 'market' as metaphor coming to dominate public debate and increasingly private conversation. Education is almost invariably equated with the earning power it confers upon the 'customer' and for funders with the degree to which it produces individualised 'aspirational citizens' (Raco, 2009). Less and less attention is paid, as a consequence, to the notion that education has an intrinsic value that makes it valuable in and of itself. Organisations employing informal educators are not immune to these trends and are becoming fixated with identifying measurable outcomes, rather than focussing upon the intellectual and spiritual well-being of those they work with. In many instances, they have restructured themselves to match the managerial configurations of the corporate world and turned aside from the historic administrative structures that prevailed within the self-governing realms of civil society. General secretaries who were, as the title suggests, servants answerable to the membership have been transformed into Chief Executives responsible only to ill-defined 'stakeholders'; management committees into boards the members of which are no longer delegates but stakeholders or directors; members have morphed into users, clients or customers; and so on. These modifications are not merely a matter of linguistic sleight-of-hand but a mechanism which serves to lower the expectations of those further down the pecking-order that they have the power

to hold those above them are in any way accountable. The differences between a 'member' and a 'user', 'customer' or 'client' are profound, resonant with ideological meanings. Ultimately to be denied membership is to be denied equal standing and a fully democratic voice. Second, is a growing privatization of public space and the rise of class segregated and *in extremis* gated communities (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Minton, 2009; Glaze, Webster and Frantz, 2011). This development has contributed to asymmetrical living and a prevailing viewpoint that; 'public space – the space occupied by the public – is now regularly seen as a threatening rather than a socialising arena' (Williams, 2008:54). Indeed, the absence of people, notably young people from public space is now judged by one British government audit as a key signifier that a given locale is a superior place to live (Parkinson et al, 2006: 167). Third is a shift to a world of horizontal relationships, linked and driven by social media and the internet; one wherein individuals can opt to acquire multiple identities and affiliate, to a varying degree, to myriad groups and if they desire 'join' at no cost to themselves to innumerable causes. Here is a world where according to Turkle (2013) people become 'alone together ... a tribe of one'. Networks and linkages such as these rather than nurturing social inter-action and a sense of community may in reality be fuelling 'epistemic closure' which curtails meaningful debate by allowing individuals to acquire information and ideas solely from those sources that match their existing belief systems or prejudices (Cohen, 2010). These networks, which have already transformed personal relationships are likely in the near future to revolutionise production via digital fabrication which has the potential to 'individualise' whole swathes of production (Gershenfeld, 2012). Unfortunately, the internet and social media are not a new 'commons', 'public sphere' or segment of civil society. Facebook, Google, Twitter and their like are owned by companies each driven by a desire to maximise profit rather than promote democracy and dialogue. Consequently, they are more than ready to collaborate with repressive regimes and curtail the flow of debate if it suits their own financial interests to do so (Waddell, 2016). Hence it is naïve at best to simplistically view the internet as an up-dated re-vamped version of the Agora. As Aaron Swartz has shown, and discovered to his cost, the struggle to secure a 'free' internet and open access to the knowledge it 'transports' is likely to be as elongated and bitter as bygone exertions to bring a 'free' press into being (Swarz, 2015).

Grounds for hope

An optimistic view would be that although each of the aforementioned may pose a challenge to informal educators and allied professionals they are merely re-configurations of earlier challenges. After all were not settlements established because, as Beveridge (1904) told his mother in a letter written during his time as a resident of Toynbee Hall, 'no man can really be a good citizen who goes through life in a watertight compartment of his own class'? Likewise, did not earlier campaigns to create 'public spheres' and 'commons' span many decades? And have not fears regarding the imminent demise of conversation long been commonplace? Hazlitt for one depicted the fashionable conversation of his era as:

> *flat, insipid, stale, and unprofitable ... Persons in high life talk almost entirely by rote ...*

The fear of giving offence destroys sincerity there can be no true enjoyment of society, nor unfettered exertion of intellectual activity. (1820: 28).

Each of these and many of the other challenges we currently face are unlikely to be in every sense new or novel. Similarly, we should be ever sensitive to the reality that our professional field has always experienced periods of decline and renewal. Whilst giving credence to those realities it would be naïve to assume that renewal is either easily achieved or predestined. The erosion of the commons and the public sphere, growing individualisation and de-mutualisation as well as the arrivals of Turkle's 'tribes of one' throw-up challenges that are new and which may ultimately defeat us. Indeed, subsequent research by Turkle (2015) warns that the Digital Age may be resulting in the citizenry being 'silenced by our technologies' who are losing the aptitude to engage in face-to-face conversations and partake in dialogue with those with whom they disagree. Over three decades ago Hannah Arendt warned that:

The public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its nature. More and more people in the countries of the Western world, which since the decline of the ancient world has regarded freedom from politics as one of the basic freedoms, make use of this freedom and have retreated from the world and their obligations within it ... But with each such retreat an almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place: what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between the individual and his fellow man. (1958: 21-22)

A pessimistic judgement confirmed, in part, by the timbre of the intervening years. Retreat from politics and the public sphere will in turn, according to Arendt, result in the 'basic attitude of the modern individual, who in his alienation from the world can truly reveal himself only in privacy' (1984:24). If that is the case then it may well be that informal and community educators can play a prominent role in confronting that seclusion by offering alternatives to privacy. Doing so will entail reinvigorating existing ways of working as well as creating new, as yet untried, techniques. Both will require practitioners to undertake their own conversations regarding the value base, worth and role of educational interventions that occur beyond the confines of formal settings if we are to unearth fresh ways of generating what Mill called 'spontaneous education' and 'collective deliberation on questions of common interest' (1929: 757). Doing so will entail recognising that community as an entity and concept may be under serious sustained threat; if that is so both traditional and innovative ways of re-building and strengthening it will need to be employed. At the very least we should heed the advice of Parker J Palmer and search out ways to encourage 'all to become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish' (2013). By focussing on their historic roles of fostering association and community via the cultivation of social action, conversation and dialogue the family of professions undertaking informal and dialogical education can make a small but possibly valuable contribution. Building civil society and nurturing democracy and fraternity will involve a willingness to oppose the infiltration of the

state and above all capital into the public sphere; the difficulty here is that doing so may result in practitioners finding that they are working in a less congenial climate than in the recent past. Doing so may result in a curtailment of access to the traditional sources of funding – after all why would either corporate bodies or the state fund the work if it is genuinely oppositional or even egalitarian in ethos? What is undeniable is that the terrain is altering and therefore informal educators, whatever their foci, will be required to develop new ways of initiating conversations and dialogue with their fellow citizens as well as entering into unfamiliar locales in order to foster association. The good news for those whose are skilled in the arts of conversation and who delight in fostering dialogue, whatever their professional title, is that they will discover a society that is as much in need of their talents now as it ever was. Technology may make innumerable crafts and professions totally or semi-redundant in the coming decades but it is unlikely to diminish a need for informal and dialogical educators.

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Beyond the Local Authority Youth Service:
Could the state fund open access youth work – and if so, how?
A speculative paper for critical discussion

Bernard Davies

Abstract

This article starts from the proposition that, given its widespread and continuing demolition since 2010, the local authority Youth Service will have disappeared by 2020 as the state model in England for supporting and directly providing open access youth work. Recognising that 'the state' is a complex and contested concept whose past intrusions into this form of practice with young people have not always been helpful, the article seeks to break out of the neo-liberal mind-set to re-imagine, for youth work, more appropriate state responses. For doing this it tentatively outlines some bottom-line principles which might – just might – help shape organisational structures and forms of resourcing which fit better with the defining features of this distinctive practice. In acknowledging the unresolved challenges and dilemmas which this task poses, the article ends by outlining some possible questions for, hopefully, further collective debate within the field.

Key words: State Youth Service; open access youth work; 'trust and empowerment'; 'public character'; 'performance and value'.

Part 1: Framing a new debate and discourse
Beyond critiques, re-imagining alternatives

THIS PAPER had two initial prompts. The first was the widespread demolition of local authority Youth Services in England between 2010 and 2015; the second, a general election result in 2015 which finally liberated a Conservative government to make all public services increasingly state-lite, if not actually state-free. Taken together, these events faced those of us involved with youth work with an inescapable if hard-to-accept conclusion: that the model for state-funded youth work which we had largely taken for granted for over seventy years would almost certainly have disappeared by 2020.

Many youth work colleagues have resisted this conclusion – particularly those who, despite

seemingly diminishing interest within Parliament, have continued to campaign for a Youth Service Bill designed to strengthen its legislative base. The starting point for this article, however, is that a stage has now been reached where serious thought is urgently needed about possible alternative and perhaps more appropriate forms of state funded youth work and whether and how they might be realised.

This thinking needs to start from a critical review of the local authority Youth Service (Davies, 2015a) whose in-built tendencies to centralised control and bureaucratic structures and its increasing obsession with statistical targets have often seriously impeded open access youth work. (Davies, 2015b; In Defence of Youth Work, 2014). As important, however, has been a need to move beyond the always easier task of just criticising what is or has been – and hopefully also beyond the often paralysing despondency of the current moment – by treating the emerging vacuum as an opportunity to search for ways in which the state might sponsor youth work which fit better with its distinctive features.

For both these reasons, I have appreciated Ian McGimpsey's exploration of how we might 'convert private and privatizing capital into "public money", with the overall goal of sustained resourcing of youth work provision at an appropriate level'. The three underpinning principles of this approach would be:

- 'priority for 'minor groups, populations and collectives … able to utilise and direct capital for their own ends';
- 'an outward … open and democratic' focus'; and
- an emphasis on 'solidarity between people with shared democratic values' (McGimpsey, 2015: web).

These propositions, I believe, merit continuing debate and development in their own right. However, as their focus is largely on capital funding, they leave open the questions of whether and how in the future, day-to-day and week-by-week, the state should and could resource open access youth work. After all, according to surveys carried out since the 1960s (including one published as recently as 2013), this is a practice which is sampled by up to a million young people in the relevant age groups, with up to thirty per cent engaging regularly (NCVYS, 2013). Many of these facilities are, of course, not provided directly by the state. Nonetheless, given the level of take-up, a starting proposition surely has to be that, as an expression of our societal commitment to young people, forms of state funding and sponsorship are still both appropriate and needed.

This paper is a tentative effort to explore that proposition and in particular how, at least in terms of principles, such a state role might be conceptualised. As will quickly become clear, it offers no blueprints for specific, immediate ways of achieving this. Rather, run through with qualifications and dilemmas, it represents a personal and highly exploratory effort to suggest some broad outlines

of an agenda for some future, radically different, historical moment from the present one. At this historical moment, such a proposition may seem naïve and pie-in-the-sky. Yet, is it not precisely in such a moment that we need to step outside the boundaries of thinking and acting set by entrenched ideological opponents in order, collectively, to re-imagine an alternative future – one which, in this case, would nurture forms of state provision designed to liberate youth work's potential as a critical, democratic, process-led and young-person focused practice?

Two prompts to re-imagination

An initial more grounded stimulus for such thinking came from a somewhat belated encounter with a Fabian Society paper published in the run-up to the 2015 General Election: *Going Public – The left's new direction for public services* (Harrop and Tinker, 2014). If used critically and in selective ways, this seemed to point, at least in principle, to some relevant responses to the question: So what form or forms of state-sponsored youth work might we struggle for?

However, two reactions to an early draft of this paper encouraged me to look again at a much older publication: *In and Against the State*. Written by 'a working group of the Conference of Socialist Economists', it appeared originally in 1979 as a pamphlet before being expanded and republished as a book in 1980, eighteen months into the first Thatcher government (London Weekend Return Group, 1979). It was presented explicitly as a contribution to the anti-capitalist and socialist struggles of the period and was underpinned by a class analysis which also at points sought to incorporate race and gender perspectives. It thus clearly had much broader and much more radical purposes than the Fabian Society paper – or than this one! However, by recognising 'the need to reintroduce a measure of imagination into our political struggle', it for me triggered both important additional insights into the (youth) policy terrain I had been struggling to explore and extra critical commentary on possible directions for future travel. In particular, with its sharp and repeated reminders of the broader political, economic and ideological forces which seek to obstruct even small scale challenges to the dominant power structures, it in important ways complemented *Going Public's* concentration on the operational dilemmas posed by the state's attempts to provide public services.

Part 2: What state, and why should it be involved?
'The state': changing meanings and alternative uses.

That the state should have such a role cannot be taken simply as a given. Why, in fact, is this still worth taking seriously, even for a practice as marginal as youth work? And what traps might lie in wait of such an aspiration? After all, as was made clear both by re-engaging with *In and Against the State* and by colleagues' responses to an earlier draft of this paper, the debate on what we even mean by 'the state' has been long and contentious, and remains 'unfinished'.

In taking on this debate, what follows starts from three, admittedly simplistic propositions:

1. that forms of inter-dependence and collectivity are integral to living within a complex modern society such as ours;
2. that with these features come commitments – spoken and unspoken, formalised and informal – to a wide range of shared responsibilities for and to each other;
3. that progressively in the UK from the early twentieth century many of these responsibilities, and certainly some of the most important and onerous of them, were delegated by democratic mandate to what we have chosen to call 'the state'.

For the past three or four decades, these propositions have been confronted by an increasingly dominant, highly individualistic ideology – what, as early as 1980, *In and Against the State* captured as '… the process whereby situations … are progressively changed so we are dealt with singly or as families'. As such values have come to be treated as everyday 'common sense' (Hall and O'Shea, 2011: 1), commitments to mutuality have been systematically and indeed strategically marginalised in public policy and in the wider public discourse. Within this neo-liberal rhetoric, a crucial corollary has been that out-sourcing public services to for-profit companies is essential because, by definition, the latter are both efficient and cost effective in ways which the state, by its very nature, can never be.

Both evidence and arguments are now slowly emerging which challenge these neo-liberal shibboleths and the 'rational' assumptions on which they rest (see for example Garton Ash, 2016; Monbiot, 2016). Thus, while holding seemingly unquestioningly to her strong market perspective, Mariana Mazzucato has asserted that 'the constant depiction of (the state) as a heavy-handed impediment to innovation and entrepreneurship is based on ideology not empirical evidence' (Mazzucato, 2013: web). The corollary of this position is to be found in the emerging examples of out-sourced services which have in practice been neither cost-effective nor efficient, with some having to be taken back into state, especially local authority, control (Presser, 2016). More positively, complementing these insights is the suggestion that as the population ages (or also perhaps as higher birth rates hit schools and post-schooling provision) far from assuming we can't afford a welfare state, we will actually need to be asking: can we afford not to have one? (Beresford, 2016).

Neo-liberal regimes have always had contradictory threads running through them. Major global trade treaties, as well as more behind-the-scenes agreements, have increasingly restricted market freedom when major business interests saw this as to their advantage. And, far from being able to do without the state, these same interests have, when it suited them, continued to give it high priority in a range of important policy areas. When the financial crisis hit in 2007-08, for example, the taken-for-granted (indeed knee-jerk) assumption of even the most extreme of neo-liberals was that the state would, of course, save the banks from collapse. State powers in recent years have

also been considerably strengthened and resources increased to meet perceived security threats and to contain 'subversive' oppositional groups. In the name of making the UK more competitive in a globalised market, as the 'academisation' proposals again clearly illustrate, the state has taken a strong lead too, in reshaping the education system and its curricula.

What neo-liberal governments have de-prioritised – indeed demonised – have been the forms of state-sponsored mutuality and collectivity which motivated and underpinned the post-1945 social democratic 'welfare settlements', with their assumption that a 'caring' state would focus on citizens' personal, family and community wellbeing, development and support. Here the ideology's obsession with individual responsibility has taken its deepest hold – and cruellest toll – most crudely expressed in the UK through the us-and-them language of 'strivers' and 'skivers', 'hard working families' and 'benefit scroungers'.

This significant rebalancing of acceptable forms of collective (state) action away from these 'soft' and towards 'hard' societal priorities has had a direct impact on a practice such as open access youth work. Most obviously in the period after 2010 this took the form of rapid and substantial cuts in state funding. However, given the rise and rise of the National Citizens Service and the additional funding provided for uniformed youth organisations including the cadet forces, even here this might be more accurately understood as a *redeployment* of state resources into ideologically preferred outlets seen as better able to 'discipline' young people and shape their 'character' in acceptable ways. (Morgan, 2015).

For youth work the state's shift to demanding these kinds of outcomes has also shown up in non-financial ways. It can be seen for example in the removal of youth work's explicit 'community' focus prompted by the 1970 Fairbairn-Milson reports. (DES, 1969). It led, too, to the abandonment of the liberationist 'anti-discriminatory' and 'anti-oppressive' practices injected into the work in 1970s and 1980s by black and women workers, to be replaced by 'Prevent' policies which in effect require practitioners to start by assuming that all Muslim young people are potential terrorists. And, albeit flowing from wholly understandable motives, it has generated state responses to the sexual and other forms of abuse of young people which – to quote one example from practice – now mean that youth workers cannot let young people into their buildings even when it is raining without a second worker being present. The 'reimagining' propositions of this paper represent a very tentative and open ended attempt to retrieve some of this lost ground for youth work – financial certainly, but also ideological and practical.

Funding youth work: reclaiming a role for the state

My justification for arguing for state funding for youth work thus starts from the basic premise that, to activate our society's potential collective strengths and its commitments to mutuality, the state and its over-arching structures and processes can provide one crucial (though – see later –

not the only) means of reaching beyond the depressingly narrow Thatcherite formulation of 'just individuals and families'.

From this, other propositions then follow. One is that all members of that society are citizens who will have access to a range of shared services essential to 'the good life'. Committing positively to this principle of 'universal' provision is not only important in its own right. It also de-legitimises the philanthropic sense of entitlement integral to the neo-liberal project with its embedded assumption (presumption) that it is for those with power and wealth to choose which of a society's citizens are deserving of those services – and which are not.

A second more practical consideration embodied in this proposition is that only through the state and its collective processes of fund-raising and distribution – in effect via its various taxation systems – can there be a chance of bringing together in democratically accountable ways sufficient resources to provide, not just the range, but, equally important, the necessary quality of health, education and other essential services. And thirdly, at a time when privatisation and out-sourcing are the order of the day, only by giving the state such a role can we ensure that public assets such as public spaces and buildings continue as-of-right within citizens' democratic control and use rather than being handed over to sectional interests whose bottom line is private profit.

'The state': negotiating the contradictions and dilemmas

Given these starting points, this paper is rooted in the assumption that those now de-prioritised 'soft' collective state responsibilities are not only legitimate but need to be pro-actively re-embraced. In taking this stance, however, the paper also recognises that in the past, not least for a provision like youth work, the state's performance in fulfilling those responsibilities has been full of contradictions. These have left behind some very testing questions about how it can and should be organised and how it should act.

Which 'state' are we talking about – with what kind of structures?

One such question is: how can we break free of the centralising and depersonalising structures and processes which have predominated in the state's actual 'delivery' of those services (in itself a telling phrase) including through local authority Youth Services? Whether by accident or intention, since 1945, these have been the widely adopted features of the way much state provision has operated – in preference for example to the more collective, user-involving and co-operative forms of organisation which had characterised some earlier working class activism and even sometimes their self-generated 'services'. Moreover, even when it was much less subject to central government control than now – indeed when it had considerable discretion and room for manoeuvre – that ostensibly alternative local version of the state, the local authority, was also very prone to these ways of operating and to the rigidities they produced. The result too often was cautionary tales

of parents corralled outside school gates, of the colour of tenants' front doors dictated by distant council officials – and of youth club members in effect being told: 'This is the programme: take it or leave'.

It was precisely such behaviours which, by the late 1970s, were leading *In and Against the State* to describe the state as 'contradictory, oppressive, frustrating' and to conclude that it 'is not "our" state. It is "their" state, an alien, oppressive state'. More specifically and immediately, under what it was calling 'corporatism' and what today we can recognise as an emerging neo-liberalism, it was pointing to 'a tightening of the relations of power. Fewer interests are "consulted", fewer have access to the processes of decision-making'. It was also noting the signs, even by the early 1980s, of the intrusions of what we later came to know as New Public Management – that for example already '[t]he state's day-to-day priority is management'; that '… the entire structure of the local authority reinforces a technical rather than a political way of looking at the issues'; and that 'the move is towards pulling the reins tighter, more supervision and control from the centre'.

For a practice which, like youth work, claims to take as its starting point what its 'users' bring to it and then seeks to negotiate a genuinely personal ownership of the resultant educational activities, any future formulation of state sponsorship will clearly need to escape from these distant and distancing processes. In particular, it will need to build in much more effective bottom-up forms of commitment and engagement – approaches which, as we shall see later, though not entirely absent from how the local state has sought to operate at some periods and in some areas, have certainly not predominated.

Where to draw the boundaries?

There is also the matter of where the boundaries of the state's role are to be drawn, particularly in its relationships with other legitimate (often alternative) providers. *In and Against the State* reminds us that, here too, by the 1970s, '… pressure from the authorities [on voluntary organisations] tends to demand a management committee and a director who is … answerable to the authorities'. More recently, governments made up of all the main political parties have for their own strategic purposes increasingly blurred these boundaries, particularly by incorporating the now renamed 'third sector' into the state's agendas and its ways of implementing them. In the process, not only has the independence of many of those individual organisations been undermined, often seriously constraining their freedom to decide on the basis of their local knowledge what services are needed. They have also been inhibited from acting as a critical friend to governments with the result that the ungoverned space we know as civil society has been seriously weakened and a crucial arena of democratic activity significantly narrowed.

Increasingly over this period, the boundary between the state and 'the market' has been blurred as the latter's individualistic values and goals have been systematically embedded in the management

of public services. As a result, the lines have been greyed between citizens' rights on the one hand and that search for private (especially corporate) profit on the other. In the process, even as those same state policy-makers have been encouraging (if not requiring) 'partnership', the pressure to compete has weakened if not actually destroyed long-standing co-operative relationships with deep local community roots (See National Coalition for Independent Action, 2016; Davies, 2014).

For any argument in favour of the state as a provider of public services, these clearly are challenging dilemmas to be addressed and negotiated, requiring a hard-headed and tough-minded analysis of what the role of the state should be and how it might be achieved and played out. They do not, however, constitute a rationale for simply dispensing with that role altogether.

Part 3: In search of a 're-imagined' state role for youth work
The 'Going Public' framework: some cautions …

Clearly targeted at a hoped-for future Labour government, *Going Public* starts from a much more optimistic view of the state than *In and Against the State*. However, by the time it became a focus for this article, and even allowing for any later 'Corbyn effect' on the wider political discourse, in the aftermath of the 2015 General Election, many of its prescriptions already read as dated and out of reach.

Moreover, with its focus on public services generally, the paper gives limited attention to young people and how neo-liberal state policies have left them amongst the most exposed of the new precariat. Thus, though 'withdrawing services such as youth centres' is in passing used as an example of '"a race to the bottom" response to financial pressures', it leaves under-analysed the flaws in the alternative priorities of current policies. It, for example, largely takes for granted the long-term benefits of 'early intervention' and so encourages a 'frontloading of public services into the first years of a child's life' which would further tip any available state funding away from the post 13 – and certainly the post-16 age group.

From a youth work perspective, the paper adopts other questionable positions for developing the kind of state role youth work will need in the future. Thus, as keen as the authors are to distance themselves from New Labour's neo-liberal entanglements, the values and assumptions underpinning these still seep into their analysis and proposals. For example, its frequent expressions of faith in commissioning and 'commercial involvement' as routes to planning and funding public services do not fit comfortably with a highly person-centred practice like youth work. Its also fails to contextualise its endorsement of the currently fashionable notion of 'resilient' young people in the huge structural obstacles which so many of that generation now face in developing and expressing their individual 'capabilities'.

In emphasising that 'narrow professional competence is not enough' the paper also overlooks

an often challenging dilemma for all those seeking to integrate such professionalisms with the democratic user-led processes advocated in the paper. That is: how to make the fullest use of the power and expertise of front-line professionals while ensuring that they remain respectful of users' own understandings of their situation and their preferred responses to them.

Moreover, in seeking to reconcile itself to professionalising perspectives, youth work has its own special struggles which, perhaps not surprisingly, are not on *Going Public's* radar. One stems from youth work's continued (and very proudly presented) reliance on volunteers – something which Cameron's 'Big Society' transposed into a national policy strategy designed, as *In and Against the State* predicted three-plus decades ago, to 'reduce the number of paid workers in the "caring" jobs of the state'. A second set of tensions is liable to emerge when this deeply rooted commitment to that volunteering tradition rubs up against youth work's tendency to define its professional distinctiveness largely (even only) in terms of the training and certification of its paid, especially full-time, workforce.

Renewed prominence has recently been given by the Jay and Casey enquiries into child sexual abuse in Rotherham to a third way in which the professionalisation of public services has long been an area of struggle for youth work. Both reports document in detail how, with the practice of key 'professional partners' often being shaped more by self-protection than by a responsiveness to victims, youth workers – often the only ones with trusting relationships with the young people – were repeatedly dismissed as non-, sub – or even un-professional (see Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015).

… and the possibilities

Given these significant limits to *Going Public*'s analysis and prescriptions, what have its proposals got to offer to a practice like youth work? One positive is its overall critique of UK governments' embrace of neo-liberal values and prescriptions and the destructive effects these have had on the state's role in providing public services. Though failing fully to contextualise this criticism in the 2007-08 'crash' and its wider repercussions, *Going Public* nonetheless explicitly points to New Labour's:

> … twin dogmas of markets and top-down control;
> … love affair with what is known as New Public Management;
> … excesses of centralism … – the hundreds of targets, performance indicators, plans and ringfenced budgets.

It also adopts a sceptical view of 'austerity', which it describes as:

> … driven by ideology as much as economic necessity
> … the excuse … to embark on a permanent retrenchment in the role of public services in British life.

More positively, starting (as this articles does) from the admission that 'the left has been better at saying what it is against than what it is for', *Going Public* sets out three specific principles for redeveloping public services which seem to offer a framework for conceptualising the kind of state role youth work will require in the future. Like Ian McGimpsey's 'public money' proposals, and not without some overlaps with them, these argued for:

1. Strengthening the 'public character of services' – defined as '… the purpose, ethos and values that should set services funded and organised by government apart from the market …'
2. Spreading trust and power 'downwards and outwards' to encompass '… a cluster of ideas relating to citizen control and participation, employee empowerment, frontline institutional autonomy and collaboration and the devolution of power from central government …'
3. Establishing 'a permanent commitment to (services') performance and value' – explained (more problematically) as '… demanding the best possible achievement from public services from the lowest reasonable level of resources … proving that public services can provide excellent quality at an affordable price.'

Principle 1: Trust and empowerment

Though the paper's framework focuses first on the purpose, values and ethos needed to underpin the public character of public services, when looked at from a youth work perspective its 'trust and empowerment' principle offers a more helpful entry point. This is because this engages in very direct ways with a key defining feature of open access youth work, whether state-sponsored or voluntary sector: its explicit engagement with the process of workers' encounters with young people out of which ultimately any 'owned' educational outcomes will be developed. In particular, although all the suggested locations for the 'trust and empowerment' principle are important in their own right, for youth workers the paper's notion of 'citizen power' has especially strong resonances.

Not that all of this principle's features fit neatly with their practice. Understandably given its broad focus on public services, the paper assumes that power will always need to be 'spread downwards' and so advocates 'a commitment to empower others'. However, many youth workers have in the past distanced themselves from the somewhat patronising notion of 'empowerment', not least because in open access settings where the young people they meet choose to engage with them, they from the start find themselves *sharing* power with their 'users' to a degree which is unusual in most public services, especially when those users are young. In any future state provision, funders and managers, as well as face-to-face workers, will need not just to recognise but to positively embrace and nurture this provider-user power balance, including by offering appropriate training and support.

Nonetheless, the 'trust and empowerment' principle does help legitimate a number of open access youth work's defining characteristics. It could therefore provide important safeguards against the ways in which the practice has been undermined within many local authority Youth Services in the past and which have become endemic with the shift to targeted programmes. It could also give explicit and positive endorsement to other features which distinguish it as a practice with young people.

For example, the paper's conceptualisation of service users as citizens would confirm youth workers' view of young people as citizens now. In doing this it would challenge the currently dominant and taken-for-granted focus of so many youth policies on young people's 'transitions' with their implication that these are merely citizens-in-the-making with reduced rights. This in turn would help endorse a view of young people as partners[1] – 'involved in bringing achievement about' including through 'participation in strategic decisions' shaped by more than the priorities of powerful adults.

The emphasis of the 'trust and empowerment' principle on 'stronger, more mutual relationships between citizens and public service employees' would also validate another set of features central to open access youth work. That is: its explicit focus on a relationship-building process which starts from young people's interests and concerns and requires providers 'to take the citizens' perspective – to look outside "in" – and focus on people's experience and not just narrow results'. This process-led practice could also draw considerable strength from the principle's confirmation that 'transactions matter too' – with, later in the paper, 'the power of peer networks' being explicitly embraced. Within these positions, too, is an emphasis on the 'unique personality, sense of vocation and values' of the providers, particularly the front-line practitioner.

Within the limits outlined earlier, the 'trust and empowerment' principle thus lays out some appropriate and much-needed underpinnings for open access youth work as a state-sponsored provision.

Principle 2: Strong public character

The focus of the 'strong public character' principle explored first by the Fabian Society paper is on 'the purpose, ethos and values that should shape services funded and organised by government'. Though at times making some questionable concessions to for-profit companies' involvement in delivering these services, one of the arguments offered in its favour is that it sets public services apart from the market. The paper thus makes clear that it is looking for 'an alternative to a more economistic approach where public services are defined as responses to market failures'. Indeed, it explicitly acknowledges that '… where a market relationship is time limited, services can tend to a short term perspective which is inconsistent with being a strong enduring institution'. And it highlights that '…the fragmentation and competitiveness of market relationships is … likely to undermine the potential for collaboration between organisations'.

The 'strong public character' principle also starts from the proposition that it may be little in evidence in public bodies 'if they are distant, unresponsive bureaucracies' and is dismissive of how 'ministerial command has trampled on broader, more inclusive versions of public accountability'. In adopting these positions, it offers youth work some protection against the heavy-handed, top-down policy initiatives imposed by New Labour – such as, in 2002, the 'outcome' targets set for local authority Youth Services and, in 2005, the out-of-the-blue ministerial 'ruling' that youth work is '[p]rimarily … about activities rather than informal education' (see DfES, 2002; Barratt, 2005).

Going Public also offers more positive expositions of the 'public character' principle relevant to youth work. These include an emphasis on 'a more organic statecraft' and proposals for a 'style … where the public interest is identified through inclusive democratic and participative forms of decision-making'. The 'descriptors' spelling out these positions in more detail – its 'six maxims of public character' – include:

- adopting 'a broad range of goals, defined holistically from the perspective of the citizen or community';
- endorsing '[u]niversal access – available to all as a democratic right';
- committing to 'explicitly favouring disadvantaged groups (on grounds of low income, gender, race, disability, age etc)';
- seeking to ensure that '[d]ignity, respect and empowerment define the user experience …;
- recognising that '[u]sing services is a collective experience' whose aims need to include 'seek[ing] to build a strong community … creating social bonds, shared identity and community affiliation' and to 'serve the collective interests of society';
- committing to '…broader purposes that go beyond their narrow remit; and to '[a] sense of permanence, with a long-term perspective'; and
- aspiring to organisational 'improvement, innovation and adaptation' rooted in 'intrinsic, internal processes.

All this, it seems important to add, is based in a conception of services' ownership which goes beyond the 'nationalisation' model which has so dominated Labour Party thinking. Ownership here is seen as needing to be developed as '"shared" between stakeholders – both in spirit and in formal governance arrangements' – and is later explained as organisational 'heterogeneity' rather than 'identikit agents of state delivery'. It is also assumed to operate on the premise that 'it is the qualities which services exhibit not their legal structures that matter' – to include how they act as well as what they provide.

Principle 3: Performance and value

For those seeking appropriate forms of state sponsorship for open access youth work, key elements of *Going Public's* third principle – explained as '… demanding the best possible achievement from

public services from the lowest reasonable level of resources' – are, to say the least, challenging. After decades of having their 'performance and value' judged in increasingly inappropriate ways, youth workers will, justifiably, be sensitive – indeed resistant – to some of the paper's propositions and the market-type language in which they are expressed. Being urged for example '… to sustainably achieve the same outcomes for less money or better outcomes for the same money'; to seek 'cost-focused innovation'; and to go on accepting league tables and 'quantifiable measures and performance incentives' – all these are likely to contain too many uncomfortable echoes of youth work's very debilitating recent, and current, experience.

The paper does however deny that it is proposing 'a cuts agenda', acknowledging that under recent governments this has produced that 'race to the bottom' which has worked against 'enhancing value for money or achieving long-term sustainability'. It is at pains too, if only by implication, to distance itself from the Cameron 'big society' fantasy by emphasising that 'supporting mutual support, volunteering and neighbourhood institutions is not cost-free – it takes time, effort and money'. It also starts from the assumption that central government's 'main task should be to support public services to put in place their own arrangements for performance and value'.

For youth workers, however, *the* most sensitive issue remains: how precisely will their practice be assessed and evaluated? Will the overwhelming focus still be on numbers – on 'measuring' via 'tick-box' returns how far pre-set targets have been met? Here the paper strives for a very delicate balance – accepting on the one hand (as youth work must) the need for accountability; while on the other trying to hold at bay the metrics mania. It thus argues for the need 'to develop clear objectives, quantifiable measures and performance incentives that capture the broader mission of services beyond the narrow metrics often used today'. And more broadly and with some significant analogies with youth work practice, it notes that:

> Schools do not exist just to achieve exam results but to support children to become well-rounded, capable citizens. So services should adopt a rounded and holistic understanding of success… Some of this cannot be measured, which is why 'public character' cannot just be collapsed into an expanded concept of performance.

The paper also strongly endorses the need for – indeed, the intrinsic place of – innovation for achieving anything recognisable as 'good performance' in human relations practice. Included in its list of conditions for ensuring this are, again, some which are integral to open access youth work:

'high levels of autonomy and empowerment';
'an appetite for controlled risks';
'a diversity of inputs and perspectives';
'flat organisational structures';
'high levels of internal communication including channels for the upward flow of ideas'.

However, out of this search for a definition of a 'performance and value' principle which fits with both 'public character' and 'trust and empowerment', two significant gaps emerge which are particularly pertinent to the youth work field. Given *Going Public's* commitment to thinking outside today's dominant neo-liberal and managerialist methodological boxes, one is its failure to give explicit endorsement to the qualitative forms of evaluation needed for responding to the unpredictability of so many practices-with-people. In fact, an opportunity has surely been missed here to advocate for the resourced and systematic development of these methods and for building recognition of them as at least as valid as, and often more appropriate than, the number crunching which today so obsesses policy-makers and funders.

For youth work and indeed for many other public service practices, the other related (and even tougher) accountability question which *Going Public* skirts is: how can we evaluate – that is, explicitly, systematically and yet appropriately give credible accounts of – the impacts of the *process* dimensions of these practices and their contributions to those purportedly 'demonstrable outcomes'? The question is at least implicit in the paper's example, quoted earlier, of the need for schools to be 'measured' not just by exam results but also (emphases added) by how far and how well they 'adopt a rounded and holistic understanding of success: in this case, based on an understanding of child development'. In light of the albeit largely anecdotal evidence of students making key subject choices on the basis of whether or not they like the teacher, such 'outcomes' seem likely often to depend at least as much on the 'how' of a practice – on young people's experience of the human exchanges within their places of learning – as on an actual curriculum or syllabus.

Here, given how integral it is to youth work, the openness of 'open access' youth work will need to get full and explicit recognition. One crucial dimension of this is, of course, its openness to all-comers who choose to be involved. However, accountability schemes will also need to address its openness to the interests and concerns which young people bring with them and to drawing on these as prompts to their hoped-for educational engagement and growth. If future state sponsors are to respond appropriately to these core characteristics of the practice, they will need to endorse and indeed actively cultivate much more process-focused approaches to 'assessing impact and effectiveness' than are currently seen as valid.

Part 4: Towards a framework for state-sponsored youth work?
The principles in action: some bottom lines

In comparison to what *In and Against the State* presented for its time, the Fabian Society's location of its analysis of the state in its wider ideological, political and economic contexts is limited. Nonetheless, its suggested framework for the future development of public services assumes a complex inter-play of principles, structures and processes which offers prompts for a debate on how a revived form of state-sponsored open-access youth work might be funded, managed and held accountable.

Framing the debates ideologically

Conceptualising this restructuring and re-resourcing would, explicitly and proactively, start by rejecting a number of neo-liberalism's currently dominant premises and practices. Particularly important here would be challenges to its assertion of the need for economic policies shaped by 'austerity'; for a central role for 'the market' in public services; for the competitive relationships between providers which come with this; for top-down controls of field staff exercised through new public management; and for accountability procedures largely or wholly dependent on 'metrics'.

By contrast, rooted more positively in what *In and Against the State* suggested as 'a vision of what is possible', a range of alternative ideological and policy perspectives would be openly adopted. These would start by re-imagining the state as a vehicle for implementing important shared responsibilities for and to its citizens and therefore for providing services as a citizen's right. In doing this the state would be conceived, not as a bureaucratic centralised entity, but as a vehicle for devolved processes of active citizen participation, including in the design and evaluation as well as the implementation of services. These would also endorse and embrace the independent, critical and collaborative contributions of civil society as provided particularly by relevant voluntary organisations and community groups within it.

Organisational structures, operating styles and cultures

Crucially here, definitions would stem primarily, not just from organisations' legal status, but from the qualities of the services they offer young people, focused on long-term commitment and success and providing young people with self-chosen universal access. The providing structures would adopt broad purposes which give high priority to a diversity of goals and inputs and which work holistically with the young person's developmental potential. They would therefore reject externally imposed labels such as 'NEET', 'anti-social', 'at risk' – what *In and Against the State* calls 'misleading categories' – and, by starting from young people's own interests, concerns and important shared identities, would give high priority to *their* definitions of the problems they face and the outcomes they wish to see.

For these principles to take root, structures would need to be 'flat' enough to allow for effective up-and-down flows of information and ideas, including to and from young people and workers. Operating on a commitment to 'shared ownership' by all key stakeholders, they would thus assume policy-making processes which encourage and sustain inclusive, democratic and participative roles for all stakeholders, including as far as possible young people's involvement in strategic as well as operational decisions. Such structures, as intrinsic features, would also embrace organisational improvement, innovation and controlled risk-taking, both culturally and, more formally, through the arrangements for internal governance.

Personal relationships and processes

Shaping these structures would be a conscious search for that often tense balance between, on the one hand, high levels of workers' and managers' 'professional' autonomy and, on the other, a commitment on their part to a citizens' perspective – to, as *Going Public* calls it, 'look outside in'. Specific attention would therefore be given to expressive transactions, not only because of the significant contributions these make to achieving more instrumental outcomes, but also because young people so often value them as 'outcomes' in their own right. Moreover, as in the youth work context these transactions are always likely to occur within and through young people's peer relationships, these would be seen as providing positive opportunities for, for example, addressing their increasingly individualised lives and experience and for developing what *Going Public* describes as 'social bonds, shared identity and community' with key adults and wider collective networks.

According to *Going Public*, underpinning all of this would be an explicit recognition of the 'unique personality, sense of vocation and values' of those providing the service. For youth work, alongside the trained and paid 'professional' workforce, the distinctive motivations and skills of volunteers would also be incorporated and nurtured, not least by ensuring and resourcing appropriate support and developmental opportunities.

Power relationships within the providing structure

A key conceptual underpinning for these state structures would be that, as citizens now, the young people using them would not just be service recipients but partners whose concerns and priorities act as important drivers for what is provided. The reality within such provision anyway would be that, as the young people are choosing to engage, integral to the practice would be power relationships – with funders, managers and other influential adults as well as with face-to-face workers – which are tipped more towards its users than is usual in state services, especially for young people. In addition, and no less integral, this practice would be seeking to balance that power further in young people's favour, not just within and but also beyond the actual youth work provision.

Forms of organisational accountability

Informed by *Going Public*, such services would take as the starting point a 'focus on [young] people's experience and not just [on] narrow results' and would define 'performance and value' in ways which were congruent with the youth work practice being provided. For achieving this, priority attention would need to be given to qualitative criteria, including proactively developing evaluation procedures which record how the youth work process has contributed to what young people take away from their engagement as this is understood by them as well as by workers and other stakeholders.

The principles in action: some pointers from the past – and their dilemmas

Colleagues' responses to the earlier draft of this paper included reminders that some past forms of local authority provision might be seen – tentatively and with qualifications – as having applied some of these principles. Most obviously here were the grants programmes for voluntary organisations – both neighbourhood-based and those focused on 'communities of interest' defined by, say, their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability. In the 1970s and 1980s these initiatives overlapped with what might be termed 'indigenous' self-help community development projects, some emerging from within those same constituencies. Some local authorities also developed 'area resourcing strategies' which, while steering clear of targeting pre-labelled individuals, allocated funding on a geographical basis according to (sometimes nationally defined) criteria of need. Some councils also applied versions of these devolved approaches to their own direct provision – for example, by allocating funding through management committees of local residents and councillors who were then allowed considerable discretion in how to spend the money.

None of these approaches were without their dilemmas, however. Where there was no agreed procedure for re-assessing relevance to current need, grant allocations to voluntary groups could become merely 'historic', with the same organisations receiving funding year after year as an assumed right. Over time, too, as they 'entered the mainstream in exchange for resources, influence and representation', many grass roots community development projects lost, not just their radical edge, but much of their independence of thought and action (Shukra, 2007: 4).

In the search for 'alternatives' other potential dilemmas would need to be anticipated. How, for example, from inevitably limited funding pools, would allocations to both state and non-state bodies be balanced and prioritised, and on what criteria? How would realistic time periods for such allocations (and, where necessary, re-allocations) be determined? And what genuinely democratic processes could be devised for selecting and appointing those who will use, manage and account for the public money handed over to the devolved structures and facilities?

The principles in action: questions for future debate

Such questions, moreover, are ultimately only specific examples of much broader, more strategic and more testing ones which any critical application of the *Going Public* principles would need to resolve in proactive ways. Such as:

- Where in 'the state' – local and/or regional and/or national – would/could this provision be located; and, if shared between them, what would be the relationship and balances of power?
- On the premise that competitive commissioning and outsourcing are neither appropriate nor cost-effective ways of allocating state money to state services, including for a

provision like community-based open access youth work, what alternative procedures and processes could be developed?

• In light of *In and Against the State's* caution that:

> Too often even left-wing Labour councillors see the battle as taking place within the council chamber rather than in the schools and housing estates

– will the 'electoral politics' in which *Going Public* invests so much faith for ensuring democratic accountability be capable of creating re-imagined ways of operating that are rooted in the public service principles it advocates? And, if they do not, who then, via what forms of democratically accountable machinery, would decision-makers, playing what role(s), be recruited?

• Where and how would independent civil society providers (voluntary organisations) sit within and relate to such decision-making structures and processes?

Finally, and perhaps most elusive of all, can tough but crucial 'transitional' challenges be addressed, some of which were posed explicitly by *In and Against the State*:

• Can state employees really 'step outside the brief'; 'reject managerial priorities'; and 'bend and break [the rules] in a politically effective way' in order to go beyond 'individual acts of rebellion with little political consequence' – and if so, how?

• Can 'a continuity between oppositional forms within the old society' be built, and if so how? Do those 'oppositional groups' even exist now in any credible form, never mind as possible models for 'the way the new society comes to be organised'? To what extent (if any) could we look for any of this re-imagining to the trade unions, Choose Youth, the campaign for a new Youth Service Act, In Defence of Youth Work, the new youth work mutuals and co-ops?

• Do any realistic and principled possibilities exist for building progressively from current programmes or initiatives towards the kinds of alternative structures for which this article has been searching – from, for example, the National Citizens Service; the On Side youth zone projects; the so-called 'social action' and 'Delivering Differently for Young People' funding; the Institute of Youth Work; the Centre for Youth Impact?

Ending this article with questions rather than conclusions seems essential. Its assumption throughout has been that unless 'the youth work sector' grapples with some very testing unknowns and uncertainties, dilemmas and contradictions, it will go on being merely reactive to what others – very powerful others – do, and so stay trapped within their inimical frameworks of values and starting propositions. Re-inventing itself as a genuinely public – state – service (assuming it even wants to do this), will require it to be much more independent, focussed, assertive and collective in conceptualising and organising around what such a provision might mean and how this could support and nurture a distinctive practice like open access youth work.

If that practice is to survive in any substantial form, those tasks, starting with the comradely debates needed for tackling them, now seem very urgent indeed.

Afterword

This article was completed in late April 2016 – that is, well before the announcement in the Queen's speech that the National Citizens Service will be placed on a permanent statutory footing. This decision clearly carries a bitterly ironic message for all those within the youth work field who, as noted in the article, have over a number of years been campaigning for a Parliamentary Bill designed to give the local authority Youth Service a stronger statutory base.

For the broader arguments I have tried to make in the article, however, the NCS proposal contains some other deeper (though of course unarticulated) messages. One surely is that, even in a policy environment dominated by neo-liberal ideas and values – indeed even amongst some of neo-liberalism's strongest advocates – state intervention is seen not only as allowable but ultimately as essential for achieving ends they see as desirable and necessary. Secondly, the announcement demonstrates that, even in an era of austerity, deficit reduction, budget balancing and the rest, once such a priority has been set state money can be found – in this case apparently to the tune of £1.2bn over four years. And thirdly, the decision illustrates – indeed illuminates – how in such circumstances ideology can ride roughshod even over economics, not least for neo-liberals. For behind all the references to supposed evidence of the scheme's impact – even beyond its status as a Prime Minister's vanity project – lies its emphases on promoting core neo-liberal values such as the individual resilience and effort needed to ensure 'employability', 'citizenship' and the Government's new (but, for youth workers, so old) buzz word 'character'.

Youth work campaigners, I believe, therefore need to look beyond the harsh immediate reality that the NCS strategy has triumphed over their goal of reviving the local authority Youth Service. Rather, as I argue in the article, far from giving up on the state support and indeed state funding, we need to go on asserting that this is needed as much as ever; pressing for its reinstatement; and above all debating and clarifying how this could most appropriately play out for a practice like youth work. If the Queen's speech announcement proves anything it is surely that the state remains a key player – and not just, it seems, for saving banks seen as too big to fail but even for guaranteeing a scheme as apparently marginal as NCS.

Acknowledgements

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Endnote

1   Though welcome, this of course is far from a new idea. Over fifty years ago the Albemarle Committee (HMSO, 1960: paras 173-176) recommended that young people be identified as 'the fourth partner' in Youth Service provision alongside the Ministry of Education, the local education authority and voluntary organisations.

Scientism, governance and evaluation: Challenging the 'good science' of the UK evaluation agenda for youth work

Deirdre Niamh Duffy

Abstract

The UK government's evaluation agenda for youth work has been the subject of significant debate. Its opponents have highlighted the ends-oriented model of evaluation – Theory of Change – proposed by the UK government as incompatible with youth work's open-ended, fluid approach (Ord, 2014; In Defence of Youth Work, 2012). However, this model of evaluation has gained a great deal of traction among local authorities and youth work organisations (including the National Youth Agency). This is potentially due to the government's claim that their aim is simply 'good science' using the language of 'scientific rigour' and 'better assessment'. This article argues that the approaches being marketed – and adopted – are an example of regulatory 'scientism' wherein allusions to 'good' science are used to govern youth work. However, evaluation of youth work should not be rejected entirely as it can also provide opportunities for innovation and change.

Key words: Youth work; evaluation; policy; research

YOUTH WORK and the daily practices of youth work are subject to increasing regulation. As numerous critics have noted, the practice is currently being subsumed within an overarching discourse of managerialism oriented towards achieving pre-set impacts and outcomes (Ord, 2014; Davies, 2013; Issitt and Spence, 2005). Connected to this, according to youth work commentators (Ord, 2014; Cooper, 2012), is the production of evidence through particular forms of evaluation research. Following the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) White Paper *Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002) and the House of Commons Education Committee's (HCEC) review of youth work (2011), youth work organisations are now compelled to conduct 'scientifically rigorous' evaluations (ibid) which can clearly demonstrate the impact of their engagement with young people. Subsequent guidance has identified 'Theory of Change' evaluation as the preferred approach (Young Foundation, 2011).

This article is located within the debate about youth work evaluation in the UK as one strand of the broader discourse of neoliberal governmentality which the practice operates within. It is important to note, as others have (Issitt and Spence, 2005), that the current UK youth work evaluation agenda is a vehicle for governing youth work through research – a 'scientism' (Torrance, 2008: 522) or facade of systematic, scientifically rigorous analysis masking a decidedly non-scientific neoliberal political strategy. However, it is equally important not to reject the basic premise of this agenda,

namely, that youth work should be subject to evaluation. While even the HCEC does not question the benefits participation in youth work brings to young people and communities, it would be wrong to assume that youth work is inherently more positive than other forms of engagement or that youth work is above critique. Youth work exists within and is the product of the same discourse as other organisations and thus embodies the same subjectivities and power relations. At the very least, youth work's position as a more positive alternative to formal education (for example) needs to be critiqued in order to gauge the validity of this claim. Moreover, as a publicly-funded sector, youth work needs to articulate its merit and give an account of itself to the people who support it.

However, evaluation does not necessarily have to be restrictive in the way the current approach is. Arguably it is through such critical reflection that youth work can become aware of the power relations and disciplinary discourses within it and open up opportunities for innovation for new ways of thinking and being. As Foucault and Rabinow (1997) suggest, it is through developing an awareness of ourselves that possibilities for 'mutation' or challenging discourse in its current form emerge. Moreover, following Deleuze (1991) and the 'new empiricists', it is only through reflection that the abstract, imagined body can be brought into being in the present moment. In other words, evaluation allows youth work to bring what it believes itself to be (its abstract self) to be known, touched, and embodied (its actual self). Further, in actualising the abstract (Bignall, 2007), youth work can bring itself closer to its future self (both known as an aspiration and unknown as a future aspiration). This self is addressed by Spinoza (Scruton, 1999) as the not yet or a self that exists in futurity if not in materiality.

What I contend here is that the approach being imposed upon youth work – Theory of Change – does not facilitate this and an alternative approach is needed. I do this by outlining the problems with the conflation of a single method with more rigorous scientific research (HCEC, 2011), demonstrating why Theory of Change is a poor fit for youth work and arguing that it facilitates 'governance through research' rather than productive evaluation contributing to 'social betterment' (Mark et al, 2000: vii). Throughout this discussion I adopt the labels 'scientism' or 'bad science' to describe the current evaluation model being imposed. This is in response to the claim by policy-makers and organisations like the Young Foundation that their structures produced more 'scientifically rigorous' evidence than the personalised accounts (labelled as 'anecdotal' by the committee) submitted during the HCEC review. That said, my aim here is not to present a unified model of 'good science'; as Kuhn (1953) notes the term 'science' covers a broad *disunified* range of approaches and perspectives. Rather, my aim is to suggest – albeit tentatively – a way to improve youth work evaluation, in a way which does not replicate the regulatory impacts of the current scientistic approach, without rejecting evaluation entirely. I will try to open up a discussion as to how to create a dialogue between evaluation and policy so that the critical possibilities of evaluation can be exercised while still being useful to policy-makers.

The position this argument takes is twofold. First that the notion of 'good science' alluded to by the

UK government under their evaluation agenda for youth work is principally another mechanism for reconfiguring youth work towards a more 'manageable' system oriented towards meeting pre-set goals. This is demonstrated by the poor fit of the model promoted – Theory of Change. Second, the promotion of Theory of Change is an example of methodological fundamentalism – where the method is more important than the subject of evaluation. The article highlights how such fundamentalism is problematic not only because it subverts the research process – wherein methods are selected based on their appropriateness – but also because, following thinkers such as Oakley (2000), it silences particular types of evidence and experiential knowledge. Furthermore, following Foucault and Deleuze, it limits the ability of evaluation to facilitate critical thought that could potentially lead to innovation in youth work practice.

Theory of Change and youth work

Following the demand by the HCEC review for better evaluation of youth work, a framework document – *A framework for positive outcomes for young people* (Young Foundation, 2012) – was published. Commissioned by the Department of Education and produced by the Young Foundation, with the support of a consortium of youth work-oriented agencies, local authorities and private sector firms – this document outlines a model for conducting 'scientifically rigorous' evaluation of youth work's merit. The framework focuses on social and emotional capabilities organised in a seven-point cluster and sets out 'a matrix of available tools for measuring these capabilities [and] outlines a step by step approach in practice' (Young Foundation, 2012: 4-5). Central to this evaluation matrix is the identification of desired outcomes and outputs by programme managers at the beginning of the intervention. The rationale for this is threefold. According to the Young Foundation report, a priori identification of outcomes and outputs will:

- *Clarify what the programme is trying to achieve (content) and how (process)*
- *Establish where the programme is working well and where further improvements are needed*
- *Close the loop with feedback on progress against business needs* (Young Foundation, 2012: 24)

The framing of 'scientifically rigorous' evaluation as involving the pre-identification of outcomes and outputs is further entrenched by the Cabinet Office's flagship programme for improving evaluation in youth work: the Centre for Youth Impact (CYI). Launched in November 2014 and proposed as a support agency for youth work professionals looking to develop their research skills, the CYI will 'provide overarching support for all impact measurement initiatives that are relevant to the youth sector' (Cabinet Office, 2014). Importantly for this article, despite claiming that the methodological frameworks they suggest to professionals will be 'bespoke', the first stage to conducting a good evaluation according to Project Oracle, one of the three key organisations leading the CYI, involves identifying desired goals and outcomes. This is made explicit on Project

Oracle's own advisory website where they explain evaluation as requiring the clear identification of outcomes. Project Oracle argues that the 'validity' of an evaluation can be assessed by comparing the evaluation against what they call the Standards of Evidence. An evaluation that meets the minimum standards of scientific rigour, they argue:

> has provided a coherent and plausible description of the logic that lies behind it. This includes a description of the project activities, intended outcomes and aims, how these are connected and what assumptions are being made (Project Oracle, 2014)

Here again 'scientifically rigorous' evaluation is constituted as research which both identifies desired outcomes and outputs in advance and illustrates whether these outcomes and outputs were successfully achieved.

Methodologically this follows a Theory of Change model of evaluation research (something which Project Oracle make explicit on their website). First designed by Carol Weiss of the Aspen Institute (Weiss, 1995; Connell et al, 1995), Theory of Change (ToC) is a framework for conducting evaluation of social programmes which encourages programme stakeholders, in collaboration with evaluators, to make explicit the 'long-term vision of the initiative' and 'consider the necessary outcomes that will be required by the end of the programme if such an aim is to be met' (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007: 443). Importantly, ToC is not intended to act solely as a tool for social inquiry, ensuring accountability or assessing value/merit – three core features of evaluation according to researchers like Greene et al (2004), Alkin (2004), Feinstein (2012) and others – but as a means of assisting organisations to produce and put into practice evaluation research. ToC ostensibly makes evaluation practicable by constructing a feedback loop within the programme. In addition to encouraging stakeholders to make the long-term vision and necessary outcomes explicit, a ToC approach demands that 'those involved in the programme consider the most appropriate activities or interventions required to bring about the desired change' (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007: 443). In doing so, ToC effectively creates a roadmap for programme stakeholders to follow and refer back to as the programme is implemented.

Advocates of ToC (Weiss, 1995; Connell and Kubisch, 1998) argue that this approach to evaluation can 'sharpen the planning and implementation of an initiative' and 'helps guide choices about how and when to measure [activities' impact]' (Connell and Kubisch, 1998: 2). ToC is also framed as useful in providing 'actionable' evidence, i.e. evidence which can be 'deemed adequate and appropriate for guiding actions in real world contexts' (Julnes and Rog, 2009: 96). This is due to the fact that the process of designing a ToC evaluation involves constructing both a programme and an implementation theory (Weiss, 1995) which stakeholders can follow to achieve the pre-stated outcomes and aims.

There are a number of problems with the promotion of ToC evaluation in the context of youth

work. Some of these problems have been alluded to by youth work advocates – the work of In Defence of Youth Work campaign, Cooper, Issitt and Spence, and Ord are particularly notable here. What I want to interject into this body of writing is that the central problem with applying ToC to youth work is that it reconstructs a complex system into a simple one, thereby serving to *regulate* youth work to meet particular targets rather than evaluate the merit of youth work more generally.

While what constitutes a 'simple' system is still the subject of much debate within evaluation science (Mowles, 2014), there has been a degree of consensus over what the core features of a simple system within the context of social policy are. These can be labelled as regularity, linearity and movement towards equilibrium (Callaghan, 2008). A simple system evolves at a steady rate along a continuous path towards a point of equilibrium. Coupled with this regularity, a simple system is characterised by its 'boundedness'. A classic example used by systems theorists is that of a drug treatment regime for a specific health complaint. A drug treatment regime is designed with a fixed end point or goal in mind. The desired results and point at which the system can be considered complete are planned in advance.

ToC approaches, while presenting themselves as useful tools for evaluating complex social programmes (Connell and Kubisch, 1998) implicitly construct the programmes they investigate as simple systems. This is demonstrated by the fact that both identifying desired outcomes and designing an implementation and programme theory pathway or roadmap which will lead to the achievement of those outcomes are key stages in conducting a ToC evaluation (Weiss, 1995; Connell and Kubisch, 1998). The guidance and statements published by the UK government on the topic of youth work evaluation advocate for the wider adoption of this methodological approach. The Framework for Outcomes, for example, outlines a model for youth work organisations to follow – a programme theory – in order to improve young people's emotional and social capabilities. Conceptualising youth work as a simple system in this way suggests that, through good practice, young people can be impacted by interaction with youth work organisations and professionals in a consistent fashion and that these interactions, when of a consistent standard, can result in the achievement of specific positive outcomes.

Despite the range of outcomes the Framework identifies, the system it constructs is a relatively simple one. It suggests the possibility for a linear, causal relationship between the implementation of particular practices and the achievement of outcomes to exist. This argument is further entrenched by the Framework which depicts a model of working with young people which can, through implementing particular practices, result in specific outcomes (the 'seven clusters' of emotional and social capability) (Young Foundation, 2012). This is a fundamental misunderstanding of youth work which, according to authors such as Young (1999) and Sercombe (2010), is much more fluid and responsive – taking young people as its primary constituent (Sercombe, 2010) and designing approaches and activities around their needs. It therefore represents a complex rather than a simple system.

Complex systems are very different to their simple counterparts. According to commentators such as Callaghan (2008) and Gilchrist (2000), complex systems are characterised by a lack of regularity, linearity and movement towards equilibrium. They operate, in the words of Barnes et al (2003), 'at the critical point on the continuum between rigidity and randomness characterised by a state of "untidy creativity"' (Barnes et al, 2003: 278). Unlike simple systems, such as that depicted in the Framework for Outcomes, there is no underlying roadmap which complex systems align themselves to. On the contrary, complex systems are constantly moving towards 'the edge of chaos' (Gilchrist, 2000: 267). Importantly, the identification of systems as complex by theorists such as Gilchrist is not intended to be a process of clarification or labelling. Gilchrist and others, in outlining what differentiates complex from simple systems also advocate for greater acceptance of complex approaches. The 'untidy creativity' and 'chaos' which characterises complex systems, according to complexity advocates, enables periods of 'exponential' development (Callaghan, 2008), encourages innovation and openness to new ways of thinking and acting (Gilchrist, 2000).

While there is still a good deal of discussion on what characterises a complex system, some attempts to identify its chief characteristics has been made. As a general guide, Cilliers (2005) argues that complex systems are dynamic, unbounded and non-linear. They are self-referential in the sense that order is negotiated as the system evolves. Their functioning is not reducible to their parts – there is no direct link between the components of the system and its operations. Finally, there are no causal pathways within complex systems. Any developments which emerge are erratic, unpredictable and cannot be explained as resulting from specific actions. Complex systems – although undesirable to proponents of approaches such as the Framework for Outcomes which campaigns for the production and achievement of regular, pre-set goals – are increasingly common within social programmes. This is due to the fact that social programmes are now designed to operate at multiple levels affecting, for example; individuals, communities, national populations and international populations (Barnes et al, 2003). Moreover, social programmes are intended to be adaptive to emergent issues and changes in conditions and to be open to avenues for programme development which emerge unexpectedly and opportunistically (Benjamin and Greene, 2009).

The model of complex systems outlined above has clear resonances with youth work practice. Youth work, as Sercombe (2010) argues, does not follow a particular framework but is always in a state of emergence. Youth work organisations' practices are constantly being reconstituted in collaboration with the young people they have contact with (Sercombe, 2010; In Defence of Youth Work, 2011). Youth work, according to its advocates and commentators, is an 'iterative' (Ord, 2014) practice which eschews forward-planning or fixed targets, arguing that these inspire instrumentalism (ibid) and reproduce the coercive relations of power between practitioners and young people that youth work is attempting to subvert (Sercombe, 2010). Moreover, within youth work, the scale of outcomes or impact is not reducible to the type of activity or approach adopted. The intensity of and effort needed to sustain a particular intervention may not be reflected in the outcome of the intervention. Seemingly small practices – a game of pool, a conversation –

can yield benefits for the young person which far exceed the resources supporting the activity (although there is, of course, a skill to mobilising these practices effectively). Given the disavowal of specific targets and opportunistic ways of working adopted by youth work, the application of ToC-resonant frameworks is a mistake.

Governance, 'good science' and the UK evaluation agenda

The above discussion indicates the dissonance between youth work and ToC evaluation, highlighting how the latter restructures youth work artificially into a simple format which is at some distance from its established complex form. However, this article is not just intended to problematise a specific method but challenge the evaluation agenda more generally through demonstrating that this agenda uses the notion of 'good/bad science' as a means to govern youth work rather than to either develop further understanding of it or facilitate the emergence of better approaches.

Centrally, what I want to demonstrate (and criticise) is that the current evaluation agenda for UK youth work is overly concerned with the application of a specific method – Theory of Change – and ignores the pluralist nature of social inquiry. Resultantly, youth work evaluation does not generate concepts and data which can further our understanding of the nuances of youth work and limits the capacity of evaluation to assist in the emergence of innovative ways of working or developing new knowledges. Crucially, this is intentional. It is another vehicle for a neo-liberal inspired programme for youth work targeted at structuring and orientating the practice in a particular direction (one which will yield pre-set outcomes). 'Science' within this discourse is there to legitimise and reinforce policy and assist in regulation. This use of 'science' to regulate complex systems is not novel; Oakley (2000), Denzin and Giardina (2006; 2010) and Trinder and Reynolds (2000) all describe how campaigns to introduce more 'scientifically rigorous' research in health and social care and education are mobilised as mechanisms for legitimising particular policy approaches – e.g. *No Child Left Behind* in the United States – and regulate interactions between practitioners and service-users at a local level.

However, this is not to say that all evaluation is regulatory or that youth work should not be requested to provide an account of itself. It would be a mistake to argue that we should simply accept youth workers' promotion of their practice as positive without requesting supporting evidence from them. This is not my intention. Indeed, as I will note later on, evaluation can be a positive experience as it encourages organisations to critically reflect on their practices drawing out, as Deleuze (1991) notes, the points of disjuncture and tensions. Following Foucault and Rabinow (1997) it is at these points that possibilities for new ways of interacting with young people can emerge and problematic relations between subjects (youth worker – young person, young person – adult and so on) can be disrupted. Furthermore, given that it is often publicly funded, youth work has a responsibility to demonstrate how the financial resources it draws upon are used. That said, as before, what I want to demonstrate are the problems with the current evaluation agenda.

Within this discussion I want to consider three points: (i) why the promotion of one method over others has been (and should be) opposed; (ii) how such methodological fundamentalism ignores potentially beneficial pluralist forms of evidence and inquiry, and (iii) how it restricts the critical possibilities presented by evaluation research and serves to regulate organisations. To assist in this latter point, I will draw from broader writing on 'new empiricism' which explores research of 'sense-data' or experience more generally, positioning evaluation research as part of this.

Accusations and discussions of 'methodological fundamentalism' have been most prevalent in writing on the application of Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) in social programme evaluation (particularly educational programmes). Drawn from the natural sciences, the objective of RCTs is to demonstrate and identify the outcomes and impacts of particular programmes – and their socially curative potential – through the application of treatments in structured experiments (Torrance, 2010; Donaldson et al, 2009; Oakley, 2000). As a number of authors from the US and UK have argued, from the early 2000s on, RCTs have been increasingly positioned as the method de rigueur in evaluation research. While their promotion has been more explicit in the US (Shaker and Ruitenberg, 2007), analyses of guidance on how to ensure quality in evaluation research point to similar trends in the UK (Torrance, 2010) albeit through the language of 'pilot programmes' (Cabinet Office, 2003) and command that 'findings/conclusions [need to be] supported by evidence' (Cabinet Office, 2003: 22).

The complaint of critics of RCTs is not that they are an inherently 'bad' social science research method or incompatible with social programme evaluation. Indeed, Howe (2009) explicitly warns against an opposition of RCTs on these grounds as risking the construction of an equally problematic dogma of 'scientific' versus humanities-inspired approaches. Rather the central criticism is that the 'heavy promotion' of a particular methodology over all others:

> ... [reverses] the logical and time-honoured order of decisions when conducting social inquiry. First, one identifies the inquiry purposes and questions, and only then selects a methodology that fits these purposes and questions (Greene, 2009: 157)

By emphasising a specific methodology, policy-makers marginalise questions of relevancy or desirability – whether the method is the most useful tool for assessing the value of particular approaches or whether the information gathered will be what policy-makers want (Torrance, 2010). As Shaker and Ruitenberg (2007) write:

> It is quite possible to design random experiments [...] in the field of education – but nothing in that test design itself guarantees the desirability or relevance of the research questions or outcomes (Shaker and Ruitenberg, 2007: 211)

Fundamentally, opposition to RCTs is rooted in a professional ethic which resists the subservience

of research to policy, i.e. that research should deliver what policy-makers want, arguing that the maintaining quality in social science research 'cannot be ensconced in a single research method' (Torrance, 2010: 73). The pre-eminence of RCTs as a 'gold standard', authors such as Denzin and Giardina (2006) argue, presents 'scientism' as science.

Importantly, the promotion of RCTs – or indeed any single outcome-oriented method – is not just problematic in terms of preserving the norms of the social science research process, it also has a profound impact on the subjects of research, serving to discipline them to masculinist logics of 'hard' 'reliability' (in terms of their regularity in producing particular outcomes) as opposed to 'softer', more feminine, 'unreliability' (Oakley, 2000). The foci of evaluations are turned into objects which can be controlled and manipulated in order to yield outcomes which can be measured and compared. As Oakley's (2000) feminist critique of gender and method in social science research argues: 'experiments are inherently 'objectifying' and alienating' (Oakley, 2000: 38) and lead to 'all bodies, whether human or animal, being seen as machines' (ibid: 39).

Connected with this methodological fundamentalism, the government's evaluation agenda for youth work is problematic due to the lack of recognition it gives to the pluralist nature of social scientific inquiry and indeed the 'disunity' of science (Kuhn, 1953). There are any number of methodological approaches which can be used to gather evidence of a social phenomenon. Despite the so-called 'paradigm wars' (Taylor and Balloch, 2005: 1) between advocates of different approaches, there is a general consensus across contemporary philosophies of science and social inquiry that there is no 'master epistemology' (St. Pierre, 2002) which can be universally applied. The general acceptance that the idea of a perfect source of evidence is illogical is reflected not least in the promotion of 'critical thinking' amongst the scientific community and need for researchers to be explicit about the faults in their own research designs and approaches.

On one level the UK government appears to recognise the pluralist nature of social science. Both the HCEC report and the Framework for Positive Outcomes criticise the supposed over-reliance on quantitative measures of participation – 'headcounts' in particular – in evaluation of youth work and advocate the inclusion of more diverse forms of evidence. At the same time, this seeming commitment to pluralism is accompanied by the labelling of evidence submitted to the HCEC review as 'non-scientific' or 'anecdotal' (HCEC, 2011) and the promotion of a very specific metric for measuring youth work organisations' impact through the Framework. Ironically, in rejecting oral and written submissions by young people and youth workers which illustrate the transformative effect of youth work through case studies and storytelling as insufficiently 'scientifically rigorous', the government evaluation agenda promotes the notion of a 'master epistemology' a belief which, according to contemporary writing on pluralist social inquiry, is indicative of scientific reductionism (Greene, 2009; St. Pierre, 2002).

The exclusion of submissions to the HCEC from the umbrella of scientifically rigorous evidence

is underpinned by an implicit prioritisation of particular ways of knowing and forms of knowledge over others without much justification as to why. Such prioritisation appears all the more confusing given that, in the Framework for Outcomes and description of the CYI, the government promotes gathering evidence from stakeholders. However, there are two potential explanations for the rejection of stakeholder evidence by the HCEC. The delineation between evidence from stakeholders submitted voluntarily to the HCEC as 'unscientific' and evidence gathered through the Framework for Outcomes matrix as 'scientific' reflects a specific understanding of the dynamics of knowledge production whereby knowledge is not constructed by participants but gathered from them. Such an understanding follows a discourse of credible knowledge and scientific inquiry which prioritises the figure of the external, value-neutral 'expert' as the only legitimate collator of information (Donaldson et al, 2009). This is much discussed and criticised by thinkers such as Oakley (2000) who argue that it reflects deeply entrenched social biases and unequal power relations between communities who experience a particular phenomenon and supposedly more learned scientists.

The treatment of knowledge gathered as of greater scientific value than knowledge volunteered can also be found elsewhere in UK policy. *The Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government* (HM Treasury, 2011), for example, states that participatory research methods where knowledge is co-constructed with participants rather than gathered from them through researcher designed matrices are not legitimate approaches in evaluation research. This is despite the extensive literature highlighting not just the methodological appropriateness but scientific legitimacy of participatory research methods (Weis and Fine, 2004; Greene et al, 2004; Whyte, 1991) for developing better understandings of the dynamics of social programmes. Moreover, advocates of participatory methods have consistently argued that these methodologies are more 'actionable' and more useful for facilitating social programme development and change than traditional researcher-directed data collection approaches. By depicting the HCEC submissions as 'unscientific' the UK government are, at best, inaccurately representing accepted norms of good practice in social scientific research which do not discount evidence on the basis of whether it was gathered or volunteered.

Another, interconnected, explanation for the disavowal of submissions to the HCEC as 'anecdotal' rather than 'scientific' relates to the politics of evaluation (Taylor and Balloch, 2005; Greene, 2009). This explanation has less to do with how knowledge is understood and more to do with the politicisation of research. According to Greene (2009), within contemporary policy debates, evidence is labelled as not meeting the standards of 'scientific rigour' when it does not facilitate the advancement of particular political projects, rather than when it is representative of 'bad science'. In the context of youth work and evaluation, this argument has already been outlined in some depth by In Defence of Youth Work (2011), Ord (2014) and others. These commentators argue that the HCEC rejected submissions indicating the 'transformative' effect youth work participation has as they did not sit well with contemporary neoliberal-inspired discourses of public and social

policy management which insist on organisations and services becoming oriented towards the achievement of targets (In Defence of Youth Work, 2011). From this perspective, the standards of 'scientific quality' applied by the UK government were directed not by contemporary philosophy of science and social inquiry but by political ideology.

The third issue which I wish to consider in this critique of the blanket promotion of ToC is the critical possibilities empirical research presents and how the current agenda undermines these. Here I will draw on debates regarding 'new empiricism'. Rooted in the writing of Gilles Deleuze – particularly his commentary on the work of David Hume (Deleuze, 1991) – this emerging area of discussion considers (amongst other things) the role of theory in empirical research. According to Deleuze, a key function of empirical inquiry is to connect disparate, partly-unknowable bodies which exist in abstraction with the concrete world and, in doing so, to highlight the disjunctures between the body in abstraction and the 'actualised' body. Importantly, new empiricism and Deleuzean theory do not limit the term 'body' to 'a particular discrete entity [...] but to any form, including both material bodies and bodies of knowledge or ideas' (Bignall, 2007: 202) and as such it can be applied to studies of organisations or practices such as youth work.

Taken into the context of evaluating youth work, a new empiricist perspective positions research, not as a way of producing a verifiable generalised theory of how youth work organisations operate but, as a mechanism for generating new forms youth work can take or new practices it can engage in. The purpose of evaluation – even in its summative form – is not to surmise what youth work is but provide a means of articulating youth work as a complex array of meanings and positionalities. As Bignall (2007) explains, new empiricism argues for empirical reflection on:

> *the sites in one's own self where one's identity is multiple and perhaps contradictory [...].*
> *These apparent points of disjunction in one's own identity [...] signal points where the*
> *constituting discourses are unstable. It is in seeking out and finding such points of instability,*
> *Deleuze and Guattari suggest, that a person becomes most advantageously placed to*
> *experiment with the assemblage they embody and with the [abstract body] they might access*
> *in order to become identified otherwise* (Bignall, 2007: 210)

Concepts assist in this process by acting as 'thought experiments' (Adkins and Lury, 2009: 12) which help think through the conditions necessary for abstract bodies to come into existence and recognise the points of 'undecideability' (Bignall, 2007: 210) within them. These should not be complete representations of how organisations work or direct what organisations should do but facilitate critical thinking about the zones of undecideability within an organisation where new practices or new ways of being could be explored and experimented with.

However, the promotion of ToC undermines this extension and experimentation. Under this method, reflection is not used as a mechanism for generating mutation or critical openness

(Foucault and Rabinow, 1997) but as a corrective (Deleuze, 1991) – the aim is not to open spaces for experimentation but to ensure adherence to pre-set understandings. The manipulation of 'scientism' to restrict the capacity of organisations to experiment and introduce new ways of working is exemplary of how organisations are 'rendered governable' in contemporary society (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). By consistently positioning ToC/outcomes-oriented evaluation as of a higher standard than participatory approaches (through labelling the results of the latter 'anecdotal' and 'non-systematic'), government agencies have constructed a discourse of evaluation research where openings for stakeholders in youth work to express their experiences or challenge the targets set by government are closed down.

In adopting the language of 'science', the political nature of the UK evaluation agenda – highlighted in great depth by youth work commentators (Issitt and Spence, 2005; Ord, 2014) – is both being played down by government agencies and accepted by local authorities. That said, as the In Defence of Youth Work campaign indicates, the evaluation agenda is being rejected and questioned by some youth work organisations. However, the list of signatories to Framework for Outcomes demonstrates that the model of 'science' peddled by government is also finding a good deal of support among national youth work agencies.

A way forward?

In light of the preceding arguments – particularly the implication that the methodological fundamentalism demonstrated by youth work evaluation policy is a strategy of regulation – it would be easy to resist any form of evaluation. However, such a knee-jerk reaction is equally problematic as the policing through campaigns for scientific rigour, in that it ignores the very real pressure on governments to demonstrate that publicly financed programmes are productive (Torrance, 2010). It also ignores the potential of evaluation to assist campaigns for social justice and democratic dialogue (DiStefano, 2000). Youth work scholars have already recognised the potential for research practice to encourage young people's critical learning and political participation (Coburn, 2011; Gormally and Coburn, 2014) and for evaluation specifically to strengthen the socially transformative possibilities youth and community organisations present (Cooper, 2012). If then the problem is the form of evaluation being projected as 'good science', not the aim of evaluating youth work per se, then it is crucial to explore alternative research practices which do not artificially structure youth work into a simple system or act as a 'corrective'. This is a daunting task and one which requires a much longer conversation. But, in reaction to the arguments introduced above I wish to make two suggestions for how to circumvent the disciplinary effects of the current discourse of scientifically rigorous evaluation espoused in the UK's agenda for improving youth work.

Based on the critiques of methodological fundamentalism and 'gold standards' (as silencing and exclusionary) presented by Oakley (2000) and others, the starting point for a discussion on how to

integrate evaluation with youth work without restricting the latter should be to unsettle evidence as the main concern. RCTs and ToC are manifestations of a discourse of science obsessed with the application of methods in order to yield particular forms of evidence. Indeed, the HCEC's report and the CYI are both dedicated to the production of evidence. This is decidedly wrong-headed given the relativistic and malleable nature of data (a discussion covered in some depth by MacLure, 2011, in her analysis of 'the ruins' of evidence), the dependence of evidence on interpretation and the inherent incompleteness of evidence (Deleuze, 1991).

As an alternative to this, a key focus should be developing an understanding of the different elements of youth work – an exercise of shining a light on or 'stripping back non-cognition and sliding towards cognition' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 14) – while at the same time accepting that not everything will be 'knowable'. The aim is not to gather particular forms of evidence but to come close to knowing as much about youth work as possible. This will not just involve broadening acceptance of qualitative research such as storytelling (an approach used by the In Defence of Youth Work campaign) but also lead to the forms of quantitative data-gathering which the HCEC dismisses as 'counting' being valued for the demographic information they provide. As Oakley (2000) notes, numerical evidence is not in itself problematic so long as it is not promoted over other forms of evidence in an artificial dualism of 'good'/'bad' science.

The second tentative step towards a less disciplinary evaluation agenda would be to unsettle measuring economic 'effectiveness' in favour of fiscal transparency. These are conflated within the UK government's evaluation guidance as part of the 'three e's' – economic, effective, efficient – but as a focal point for evaluation research have very different impacts on the subject of evaluations. Fiscal transparency is in essence an exercise in description (what was money spent on, by whom, to what end) whereas economic effectiveness measurement is an exercise in monitoring returns for investments. Given its complex nature and the range of variables impacting upon its outcomes (i.e. the neighbourhood it operates in, the type of young people involved) youth work's ability to clearly demonstrate economic effectiveness, according to a cost-benefit analysis, is limited. However, economic effectiveness is not the only indicator that public expenditure is managed well. Transparency in what spending takes place can also give a clear indication of the work done in and by youth work organisations and allow policy-makers to meet the basis expectation that the public will be able to know the destination of their investments.

The fundamental difference between economic effectiveness and fiscal transparency relates to *determinism*. An evaluation dedicated to measuring economic effectiveness is focussed on determining whether spending was warranted or well-managed; an evaluation focussed on fiscal transparency is more interested in uncovering and describing what went on rather than assessing whether money could have been better spent directly (although this may well be one of the ways such an evaluation is subsequently used). Less disciplinary evaluations, according to theorists such as Mark et al (2000), should eschew determination:

Determination implies a role for evaluation that cannot be justified. It suggests coming to a fixed answer or settling a question. The very origins of the word suggest coming to an end. In evaluation, these connotations are unfortunate and undesirable. For one thing the limits of evaluation argue against using a term that implies finality (Mark et al, 2000: 55)

This connects back to the arguments made above, that the ToC model being imposed on youth work is problematic as it promotes a focus on ends – or finality – rather than innovation or progression.

Conclusion

As this article demonstrates, the model of 'good science' proposed under the UK government's evaluation agenda for youth work is highly problematic. It artificially constructs an image of youth work as a simple system, overlooking its complexity. As a result, rather than allow organisations to articulate and shine a light on the complex dynamics of their work, as others have noted, it forces youth workers to focus on achieving pre-set goals. This runs counter to youth work's professional ideology of responsiveness and non-coercive relationships (Sercombe, 2010). Moreover, in addition to this managerialism, the evaluation agenda is overly reliant on a specific method – ToC – and limits the potential for evaluation to facilitate innovation and critical thinking. It is a methodologically fundamentalist, 'corrective' approach. To illustrate the problems with single-method reliance, the article has looked to critiques of Randomised Control Trials as a 'gold standard' in educational research, drawing on the work of Oakley (2000), Torrance (2008; 2010) and others, arguing that this is a form of 'scientism' where the application of particular methods takes precedence over the subject of research on the grounds that 'science is science is science' (Lather, 2004).

However, the article has also recognised that, where youth work is publicly funded, there is a political imperative for policy-makers to evaluate the practice. For that reason, it has not discounted evaluation but proposed two ways that the current problematic discourse of 'good science' could be disrupted: displacing evidence as the main concern and replacing economic effectiveness with fiscal transparency as an objective of evaluation research. These tentative suggestions are intended to flow into a larger, on-going conversation about how to find a 'nexus' (Gormally and Coburn, 2014) between research practice and youth work which may lead to transformation (Cooper, 2012).

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Extending democracy to young people: is it time for youth suffrage?

Kalbir Shukra

Abstract

Across Europe, there has been a growing interest in lowering the voting age to 16. Campaigners have met with some success in Scotland, Norway and Austria, but the age of franchise in England remains 18. Arguments on each side of the lobby are hampered by a lack of empirical data from real examples. This has left commentators relying on supposition and the voting patterns of the slightly older 18-24 year old group. This article addresses that evidence gap with election data from London Borough of Lewisham youth elections, gathered as part of a wider evaluation of the Young Mayor Programme. This evidence, set alongside experiences in Scotland, Norway and Austria, brings a new perspective and points to the need for a further, more open review of voting age.

Key words: youth participation; citizenship; equality; elections; votes at 16.

WHO SHOULD and shouldn't be allowed to vote in a representative democracy is a normative question. The answers to questions such as these reflect how a society views itself, which of its people should have decision-making rights, what sort of decisions need to be made and how the process should operate. In sum, the topic raises questions about what sort of democracy we want to live in and which people we view as citizens. Citizenship rights once granted or denied in the past on the basis of land ownership, wealth, taxes, migration, ethnicity, gender or literacy have changed (Engerman and Sokoloff, 2001). While some of these are still present around the world, there is a consensus against such exclusions across Europe and the USA. Current campaigns for votes at 16 press us all to acknowledge that there is also a youth vote question and remind us that, in the future, we may view today's voting age restrictions as another undesirable exclusionary practice.

This article contributes to the issue by exploring the main arguments for and against voting rights for young people that were played out in the run-up to the 2015 General Election and draws on data from exit polls piloted in 2014 and 2015 in the London Borough of Lewisham, where young people have been voting for their youth representatives since 2004. The polls were undertaken as part of a larger study of Lewisham Young Mayor's Programme and shed light on the voting behaviour of under-18s and enable some of the disputes relating to the lowering of the voting age to be addressed. Although the polls originated as a pilot to test out a data collection tool on voting behaviour, they became important as the only source of data available to examine the quality as well as quantity of youth turnout in the case of an actually existing youth franchise in England. As

such, it also allows analysts to replace their assumptions with research findings. The findings add to analyses of 16 year olds voting in the Scottish referendum (Eichorn, 2015), Norwegian local elections (Odergard et al, 2014) and Austrian national elections (Zeiglovits and Aichholzer, 2014).

Expansion of suffrage

Who we think ought to have a formal say in decision-making is something that changes over time. In recent years, there has been a debate across Europe as to whether prisoners or young people ought be allowed to vote – questions that would have been unthinkable fifty years ago. Unequal voting rights framed by race, class and gender, have been challenged and changed in most parts of the world, also many states have lowered their voting age from 21 to 18 (CIA, undated). However generally calls in most countries to reduce it further have met with cynicism and resistance. Bids for lowering the voting age further echo calls from important moments of the past, when social groups excluded from the franchise questioned existing orthodoxy and mobilised for change. Historically it was often young people who supplied the energy, time and vision needed to promote the extension of the suffrage (De Schweinitz, 2009). Yet people under 18 are rarely permitted to vote in national elections. Paradoxically, opportunities are constructed to enable young people to participate in participation programmes concerned with 'youth development' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013), but are excluded from the political realm. It is assumed they lack the capacity to make sound political judgments. Whilst being denied a vote, young people are nonetheless affected by government policy and taxed if they work. They also bear the brunt of austerity policies (European Trade Union Institute, 2013; Nunn, 2015) including spending reductions in education, young people's services, health and other public sector budgets. Protest movements and campaigns for a youth franchise challenge the idea that political representation should be an adult privilege and encourage politicians to pay greater attention to extending rights to young people.

In Europe, harmonisation of voting age down to 18 was enforced from 1997. In the UK the change was marked by the 'Representation of the People Act' 1969. Twelve years later Council of Europe (2009) ministers proposed an 'expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16'. As it was resolved to leave the matter to member governments votes at 16 has remained a national campaigning issue ever since. In the UK a British Youth Council led coalition has campaigned to reduce the voting age, involving youth organisations, politicians and young people under the banner of 'votes at 16'. This operates in alliance with the League of Voters at European level (Imafidon, 2014; Youth Citizenship Commission, 2009). The campaign gained significant momentum after 16 and 17 year olds were permitted to vote in the 2014 Scottish referendum and Sky News began running its high profile 'Stand up, be counted' campaign, enabling young people to interview politicians and air their views in the run up to the 2015 general election. In June 2015 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) passed legislation to enable 16 and 17 year olds to vote in elections in Scotland. On the same day, an amendment to the EU Referendum Bill rejected the right of 16 and 17 year olds to vote in the 2016 referendum.

Opposition to a youth vote

Resistance to a youth vote has persisted, despite young people lacking the political leverage they need to address their disadvantaged position (Nunn, 2015). A primary concern has been whether young people can be trusted with a decision around political representation. In addition, experts have expressed a fear that a youth franchise might exacerbate a 'democratic deficit' by increasing the proportion of non-voters. The first concern is based on the view that under-18s lack political interest and maturity and so cannot be relied on to vote intelligently, knowledgeably and appropriately (Chan and Clayton, 2006; Bergh, 2013, Electoral Commission, 2002; 2004). The second worry comes from viewing a call for 'votes at 16' as missing the broader problem of widespread political disengagement and non-voting (Mycock and Tonge, 2015). It is argued that since first time voters and young adults turn out to vote disproportionately less than older voters, a lower voting age could prove counterproductive as it might increase the proportion of non-voters or turn abstention into a norm (Russell, 2014).

In 2009 a UK Youth Citizenship Commission (2009) considered arguments for reducing the voting age but rejected them on the basis that of an 'evidence gap' and the government's view that human rights are not affected. But the UK did produce some data when 16 and 17 year olds were temporarily granted the franchise for a referendum on Scotland's future in the UK. At the time, there were fears that the youth vote would skew the results but young people's votes alone did not determine the outcome of the referendum. Rather, they contributed to a vibrant public debate and excitement about the decision (McInnes et al, 2014). Despite what was widely seen as a positive political experiment, those 16 and 17 year olds who voted in the referendum were not able to vote in the General Election a year later. This sort of inconsistency in voting age is evident in other parts of the world where, for example, under-18s have a vote in municipal elections but not in national ones. Norway, Germany and the US have experimented with lowering the voting age to 16. Some countries have also considered offering votes to young people younger than 16, though this is rare (Wall, 2011). Austria has lowered the voting age threshold to 16 in national elections, matching Cuba, Brazil, Guernsey, Isle of Man and Jersey. UK political parties, academics, youth experts and young people remain divided on the issue, despite research from Austria and Scotland having pointed to the experiences as positive (Wagner et al., 2012; Bergh, 2013; Eichorn, 2015). In England, the closest equivalent youth voting opportunities are the annual elections of Young Mayors.

Youth elections

Some London boroughs and UK cities have a 'Young Mayor' connected to a Young Mayor's Network overseen by the British Youth Council. Each 'Young Mayor Programme' (YMP) varies in structure and organizational culture. Lewisham has the longest running YMP and it offers a unique opportunity to study youth democracy in action. For over thirteen years, it has activated young

people's right to vote for municipal youth representatives and combined youth voice with a youth vote. It is being simulated in other parts of Europe and the UK and serves as potentially valuable source of data about young people, voting and citizenship.

Lewisham youth elections are an important source of evidence around whether and how young people under the age of 18 cast a vote in formal elections. While sceptics argue young people would not engage in voting, almost ten thousand young people vote annually in Lewisham. Every October, the Electoral Services Team runs an election overseen by the Returning Officer, using methods that mirror those of formal adult elections. These elections have been a way of young people electing their four borough-wide youth representatives, who are supported by a group of Young Advisors.

Secondly the elections in Lewisham are important for testing the argument that young people under 18 aren't mature enough to make an informed decision. Locally they are popular visible annual events that involve 11 to 18 year olds, bringing them into the civic realm, identifying and debating issues of importance to them and voting for representatives. The 13th election was in October 2016. A review of data from these elections addresses the reliance on the voting behavior of 18-24 year olds. As the voting behaviour of the older age band may not be comparable to that of under 18s, it is useful to explore the two main arguments against a lower voting age: that young people wouldn't turn out to vote if given an opportunity and if they did vote, they wouldn't make a mature decision.

Youth voter turnout

Explanations of low voter registration and turnout among young adults (18-24 year olds) are frequently used to justify the current voting age and framed either as voter apathy or voter disengagement and distrust (Cammaerts, et al, 2014). The voter apathy perspective attributes low engagement to a lack of interest, understanding or commitment to politics on the part of voters. The voter distrust argument focuses responsibility on politicians or the political system (Franklin et al, 2004). Both discourses conclude there is a continuing and growing youth democratic deficit. Youth participation projects have sought to influence these for over a decade (Shukra et al, 2012) but research on the 2010 General Election showed that, despite projects and initiatives to increase young voter participation, turnout remained low. 76 per cent of those aged over 65 voted, whereas turnout among 18-24 year olds was stuck at 44 per cent (Ipsos-MORI, 2010). Research has also demonstrated that this gap has increased over time and 'turnout inequality' has negatively impacted on non-voters, including young adults (Lodge et al, 2014). Measures such as citizenship education and postal voting were unsuccessfully introduced to increase voter participation and demands for compulsory voting for first time voters were even suggested but rejected.

A central strand of arguments against votes at 16 is based on concerns that only a small percentage

of young people would turn out to vote even if the voting age is lowered. As this has been based on the conviction that young people are not interested in politics (Chan and Clayton, 2006), some researchers have attempted to prove that young people are interested in non-traditional politics. They conclude that 'politics' is too narrowly defined and needs to incorporate volunteering, petitioning and discussions (Cammaerts, et al, 2014; Henn et al, 2005). As few have explored the hard evidence of under-18s' voting behaviour it is pertinent to ask whether, given an opportunity to do so, young people use their vote in Young Mayor elections. Table 1 shows that the votes cast in Lewisham Young Mayor elections over the last 12 years ranged between 42 per cent and 56 per cent of the electorate.

Table 1 – turnout in Lewisham Young Mayor Elections 2004 – 2015

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Votes Cast	7087	8110	7967	8316	9327	9616	9363	8076	9341	9417	8961	9624
Turnout %	45%	47%	43%	45%	49%	53%	47%	42%	53%	49%	49%	56%

The youth election turnout shown in *Table 1* was stronger than turnout in standard local elections. For example, in 2012, a council by-election was overshadowed by a Young Mayor election in the same week when a 22 per cent turnout of adults was surpassed by a record 53% turnout in the youth election. A month later, 2012 Police Commissioner elections were marked by low adult turnout rates across the country, ranging from 11.6 per cent to 20 per cent (BBC News, 2012). The reality of young people voting in the Young Mayor elections flouts the reasoning used to oppose a youth franchise in the 2015 General Election (Russell, 2014) namely that young people do not vote when given an opportunity to do so.

The evidence from Scotland is consistent with the Lewisham experience of youth turnout being higher than adult turnout. In Scotland 89 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds had registered to vote for the Scottish Referendum (McInnes et al, 2014). Public opinion research reported by the Electoral Commission (2014) identified turnout for under-18s in Scotland at 75 per cent compared to 54 per cent for 18-24 year olds. In a telephone survey, Eichhorn (2015) found that young people were at least as interested in politics as adults.

In Norway, the voting age was reduced to 16 for local elections in 20 selected municipalities in 2011, as part of an experiment. The turnout for 16 and 17-year-olds was 58 per cent compared to 18–21 year olds at 46 per cent (Ødegård et al, 2014). Despite this, under-18s in these elections did not have a higher turnout than first time voters in the 2013 national elections (ibid; Bergh, 2013). What did appear to be significant, was the level of information about procedures and voting options – those municipalities that provided plenty of information had a higher turnout than those

that did not.. This suggests that engaging voters about the political system increases turnout of young voters and that 'a lowering of the voting age may in the long run contribute to improved focus on political information towards young voters' (Ødegård et al, 2014).

Researchers of Austrian elections concluded that 'findings contradict the studies that assume low electoral participation of 16 – and 17-year-olds because of lack of political interest (Chan and Clayton, 2006; Electoral Commission, 2004; Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014). The evidence from these diverse contexts and circumstances contradicts the view prevalent in the UK that 16 and 17 year olds are significantly less likely to vote.

Political maturity

Having established that 16 and 17 year olds have in fact turned out to vote when given the opportunity it is important to acknowledge that it is a right and not a compulsion. If a proportion of the population chooses not to participate that does not invalidate their right or the claims of others to that right. On that basis the argument that young people should not have the right to vote because they wouldn't use it becomes immaterial. The more significant argument from opponents of votes at 16 is that young people lack 'political maturity' until the age of 18 (Chan and Clayton, 2006). Underpinning this perspective is a view of young people as less capable than adults. Youth organisations, including the BYC, have testified that young people are as capable of casting a vote as adults. Young people's vote may be based on a shorter life experience but everyone's life experience is different. Whether or not someone has cast an acceptable vote in a contest is by its nature subjective. One person's well reasoned vote might be another person's idea of poor judgment and irresponsible voting. Indeed all voting decisions are a matter of opinion.

Research based on under-18s voting in Austria found that offering votes at 16 reduces age differences in voter turnout (Bergh, 2013; Wagner et al, 2012). The analysis of data from Austria also contests the maturity/capacity argument:

> First, we do not find that citizens under 18 are particularly unable or unwilling to participate effectively in politics. Second, while turnout among this group is relatively low, we find no evidence that this is driven by a lacking ability or motivation to participate. (Wagner et al, 2012: 381)

This brings us to what the Lewisham exit polls tell us about the judgment exercised by young people when they were voting. What informed their voting choice? What factors were important to them in making their voting decision? Did the electoral opportunity engage them?

Young Mayor exit polls

Exit poll surveys were introduced as a tool in a wider evaluation study of Lewisham Young Mayor Programme in order to understand the basis of young people's voting decisions. The surveys were conducted at a selection of Lewisham Young Mayor polling stations to collect data from under-18s immediately after they had cast a vote. They were not intended to predict the outcome of the elections, as increasingly happens in general elections, but to examine how voting decisions were being made. In reviewing theories of voting action Visser argues that:

> as a general principle, voting action is determined by a totality of factors' such that 'the vote may be conceived of as a field determined action. Since the field exists of the person and the environment as he sees it, it becomes crucial to uncover the person's subjective experience. (1998: 89)

The main questions were about which candidate the voters supported and why, to acquire a sense of what the voter thought his or her decision was based on. Further questions sought to find out how far campaign activities and backgrounds relating to ethnicity, gender, age or religion may have been an influence. It was also possible to gain contextual information about the surroundings and group factors by noting the school of the voter. The level of influence of specific aspects of election campaigns was sought through questions about the importance of speeches, manifestos, videos and social media.

The exit poll sample in 2013 comprised voters at five secondary schools selected on the basis that they were spread across the borough and of varied type and size (n = 252) and in 2014 increased slightly (n = 292). The random polling aimed to target every tenth voter over the course of three hours to complete an anonymous survey. Despite the limitations related to sample size this is the only data from a live youth election in England that can provide a check on how young people respond to being given an opportunity to vote.

The exit poll survey results in 2013 and 2014 showed that young people's voting choices are as diverse as those of adults. In both years the majority of reasons given for voting for a first choice candidate related either to issues/policies or personality with 60 per cent reasons given in 2013 falling there. In 2014 the proportion reduced to 42 per cent, but remained the top two categories.

Table 2 – example exit poll statements

Examples of the diverse statements classified as 'issues/policies'	Examples of the diverse statements classified as 'personality'
Because her campaign is about teen mental health illness which is important	I liked what she said and she sounded like she was reliable.
I liked the idea of having more facilities for young people to use	She had ambition
Because I like what she is going to do	Because he is inspirational
He has been successful in youth events and could make a change	I met her and she has was very nice and she had a good future for Lewisham
Because he don't want to change Lewisham, he just want to make Lewisham a better place	Because I really like his idea of the media project.

As the examples in *Table 2* demonstrate statements classified as issues and policies tended to indicate knowledge or awareness of a problem or strategy that the candidate might address. Some statements conveyed broad perceptions of a need for change in the locality whilst others demonstrated an awareness of specific topics highlighted by a candidate. The statements coded 'personality' indicated that some voters made decisions based on their perception of the candidate's character, charisma, profile or abilities.

The school and age of the voter, in both years, had a significant influence on who voters picked. The poll showed the majority of voters in the samples supported a candidate from their own school or college. Across the two exit poll samples, nine out of ten schools produced a majoirty of first choice votes for a candidate from the host school. In the tenth school a school candidate balloted second highest votes. The strong influence of school could be read simply as voters' loyalty to their schools, but not all schools host candidates (though the schools in the polls did). Data returns from voters pointed to some complexity. Voters were asked to rate the importance of pre-selected factors in their voting decision and school affiliation turned out to be a mid-frequency answer in both samples. 53 per cent of the 2013 sample and 34 per cent of the 2014 sample indicated that supporting a candidate from their own school or college was 'very important' or 'important' to them. Other motives were more frequently cited as important. But if voters didn't vote for candidates from their own institution primarily because of their attachment to it as school students then what else did they think informed their voting decisions?

The most cited motives related to issues, policies, personalities, campaigning and speeches while school affiliation and knowing the candidate were mentioned least. Since voters were likely to be more familiar with the issues, policies, campaign and personality of their own school candidate(s) than with candidates from further afield, this more consistent voter contact and interaction with the promotional material and candidate(s) from their own school, is more likely to be what won them over than a desire to support the institution. In short, candidates seemed to be at an advantage within their own schools in instances where their campaigns were well profiled at the school during the campaign period.

Candidate engagement with voters was important; during observations and interviews with candidates in four consecutive elections, candidates reported they could not assume that school based voting applied. Candidates had hoped to draw significant support from within their own schools but had not been confident they would achieve that. During the campaign periods they were nervous and often surprised when they experienced supportive assemblies. Indeed some candidates reported cynicism and difficulty in garnering support from within school. The recognition amongst candidates that they could not take votes at their own school or college for granted was more acute where there were several candidates studying at the same institution.

While the culture of support for a candidate within a particular school community became an almost semi-automatic act of solidarity in some schools, the data in *Table 3* points to the campaigning activities and materials of candidates as key in voters reaching a decision. In questions about factors the voter felt to be of importance in making a decision it turned out voters valued hearing speeches, meeting candidates and reading about what the candidate stood for. In other words, the candidates reaching out to voters made a bigger difference than a candidates faith, ethnicity or gender.

Table 3 – percentage of the sample that marked a factor as important or very important in their voting decision

| Factor	2013	2014
Speeches	88%	76%
Manifesto	84%	65%
Meeting candidates	80%	62%
Posters/leaflets	77%	58%
You tube video	59%	41%
School candidate	53%	34%
Candidate popularity	42%	21%
Shared ethnicity	32%	17%
Facebook/Twitter feeds	31%	36%
Good looking candidate	24%	22%
Wanted to elect a young woman	34%	20%
Wanted to elect a young man	24%	19%
Shared faith	26%	13%

Table 3 shows candidates' backgrounds seemed to be less important to the voter than the link or relationship built up during the campaigns. A candidate's proximity to voters within his or her own school offers stronger opportunities to build up direct contact. Candidates' faith background seemed to be of least interest to the voters. 26 per cent in 2013 and 13 per cent in 2014 considered it to have been of importance and this is interesting given that the UK population that describes itself as belonging to no religion was 50.6 per cent in 2013 and only 30.7 per cent amongst 18-24 year olds reported religious affiliation (British Humanist Association, 2016). Given the low proportion of young adults with a religious affiliation, the percentage of young people who thought that their shared faith with a candidate contributed to their voting decision might be of significance.

Overall the survey found most young people take their voting decisions more seriously than they have been given credit for. For example there is a widespread myth that young people would vote for someone on the basis of physical attraction and that this doesn't happen for adult voters. However in adult politics there is also a great deal of media commentary surrounding the look of particular candidates – including what politicians consume, wear and how they speak. In the London Borough of Lewisham's youth elections many adults had imagined teenagers are swayed primarily by the attractiveness of a candidate and as this opinion was echoed by some of the candidates who were interviewed a related question was incorporated into the exit poll. However, the outcome was that 76 per cent in 2013 and 67 per cent in 2014 did not consider it important to vote for a 'good looking' candidate compared to 24 per cent in 2013 and 22 per cent in 2014 who did think it was of importance to them. Importance was evenly proportioned between male and female voters in 2013, but in 2014 it was more important to the females in the sample. Whilst for some voters, voting for a subjectively good looking candidate is a factor and it remains a possibility that for others its an unarticulated contributory factor, the poll results to date undermine the view that votes are cast primarily on the candidate's appearance or attractiveness.

Young people as election candidates

Young people's political maturity can also be measured by a high willingness to participate as candidates and campaigners.

Figure 1 – number of Young Mayor election candidates 2004-2014
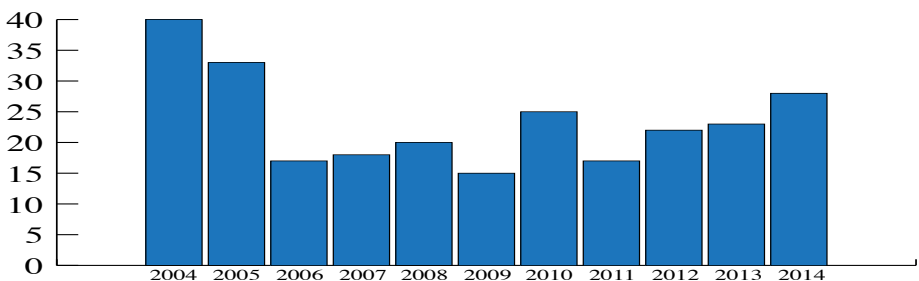
Not only has the number of candidates in Lewisham's youth elections remained high, but the engagement of most of the candidates in the campaign process has been strong. The campaigning process young people engaged in was opaque to adults not involved in the programme, so the interviews and ethnographic aspects of the study were needed to shine some light on that. An understanding of what goes on was gained through shadowing staff working closely with the candidates, conducting interviews and group evaluations with candidates and gathering updates from young people attached to the programme. This was supplemented with ethnographic observation while young people were engaged in campaign activity.

As with candidates in adult elections some youth candidates were more active and earnest in seeking votes than others. Candidates campaigned in whatever public spaces they could reach; schools, youth clubs, buses and shopping centres. Chicken shops and burger bars frequented by teenagers after school were targeted by some candidates, as were online spaces. All of the candidates who came in the top four during the study were active in speaking and leafleting. Each of them had attended assemblies, hustings and been seen campaigning. In the absence of party political machinery of the sort that adults rely on in elections young people created more flexible and, by necessity, cost effective alternatives in the form of personal election teams. Candidates said they felt it was important their faces were more visible than those of their campaign teams. They appreciated the need to build a clear relationship with voters while their campaign team kept them motivated.

Part of the candidates' development process included learning that in standing for election, the relationships they were building were important and they were moving into the public realm and needed to construct a public-political identity. Social media, You Tube and radio were important means of projecting their public identities and speaking to voters. Those candidates already comfortable with online spaces used them during their campaigns with ease. Several candidates over the years have been particularly familiar with a variety of contemporary social media and digital video formats which enabled them to draw on links with MCs and various artists. Many candidates set up separate election pages on Facebook and the older candidates with more experience in digital methods were able to make the most of social media networks.

The winning candidates in 2012 had made greater use of social media than their competitors but in 2013 social media usage reached a higher level than before. The top two candidates made strong use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other formats. In 2013 the winning candidate demonstrated an extraordinary capability of combining social networking sites and a You Tube channel with face-to-face contact through school visits, hustings and street campaigns. He developed a personal election machine that he maintained after being elected and merged his personal following with that of his official identity. Although the majority of voters didn't consider the Facebook or Twitter feeds of candidates to be important (69 per cent in 2013), in this candidate's case a process of 'likes' and retweets helped to create a distinctive profile and momentum. He utilised what was

then an unusually wide range of social media networks, including BBM, Vine and Instagram. This meant he became a talking point amongst young people whether they were eligible as voters or not. Moreover he had thousands of You Tube hits which were popular because they were entertaining and considered amusing. This was borne out by the exit polls: You Tube was cited as important by 59 per cent and 41 per cent of the two exit poll samples in deciding who to vote for.

The winning candidates each year covered a lot of ground in campaign terms. They invested time and energy in developing a message and communicating it as widely as possible whilst recognising that their own contact with voters was key. Far from showing political immaturity the candidates developed a strong understanding of social networking for political gain.

Despite young people engaging in youth elections it did not follow that they viewed adult elections positively. On the question of whether they would vote in a national election, three young women each took a distinctive view:

A: **I don't like big politics.**

B: **But what if no one voted for you to be young mayor?**

A: **Big people politics, Labour and Conservative... I don't agree with their policies ...**

B: **You're not going to agree with all of them, you have to start somewhere.**

A: **I don't mind voting, just not for parliament.**

B: **You have to vote because every vote counts... that's all the work we've been trying to do... or you're not practicing what you preach.... that one vote could've been the vote that won Labour... I'm voting, I have to vote or the BNP will come in.**

C: **Yes, I'm voting because it counts ... it annoys me when people don't vote and then moan about it.**

While young people do vote in youth elections they may also perceive adult elections differently to the Young Mayor elections. This may be due to what Franklin et al describe as the 'character' of an election:

> *Turnout changes, if it does, because elections change their character or because of changes in the proportion of an electorate that pays attention to the character that elections have. Elections have changed their character in recent years mainly by becoming less likely to bring about policy change. This is what is meant by a less competitive election. At the same*

time, more voters now respond (because younger voters are less set in their ways) to the fact that there is little reason to vote in an uncompetitive election. (2004: 143)

Youth elections tend to be more vibrant and competitive than in adult elections. In particular they speak directly to young people's interests and concerns. Similarly the excitement and fervor that emerged in the referendum in Scotland was produced by candidates organising around a clear policy demarcation and led to a strong youth turnout. It has been argued, across the spectrum, that a reduction of voting age would first require additional formal political education and that more 18-24 year olds are likely to vote if school based political education is developed. Eichhorn's survey analysis in Scotland pointed to schools as an important feature:

Lowering the voting age to 16 in combination with a detailed rethinking of the role schools play in political education may therefore be positive development worth exploring beyond this referendum. (2014: 13)

In Lewisham, schools were central to the success of the Young Mayor elections. School based initiatives included assemblies on the theme of understanding democracy, linking Young Mayor democratic processes to school council elections. By hosting candidate activities and polling stations, schools partnered in an experiential learning process which developed youth 'political literacy', a term described as 'invented to mean that someone should have knowledge, skills and values to be effective in public life' (Crick 2004: 82). Overall, the Lewisham model allowed young people, whether as voters, campaigners or candidates, an opportunity to engage in the politics of representation alongside the politics of deliberation and social action. It offered something more directly relevant, creative and imaginative than the traditional youth wings of political parties. Rainsford (2014) found mainstream youth factions struggling to recruit, too marginal to be able to influence party policy and unable to offer a youth voice. She called for a review of party political relationships with their youth wings, greater participation and a louder voice for young people within them. In avoiding a connection between the YMP and party politics Lewisham produced a creative non-partisan programme that facilitates youth voice and influence.

Why young people vote

Although one of the key arguments against lowering the voting age is that young people wouldn't vote or aren't mature enough to make an informed decision, Lewisham Young Mayor Programme offers a different view of young people. Lewisham has a model of youth democracy that involves schools, community, civic and youth centres across the borough in creating a culture in which youth perspectives are included in all strategic decisions, service design and delivery. In 2014 it was recognised by the World Forum for Democracy and the 26th Session of the Congress of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg which asked Lewisham YMP to advise them on how young people can participate in and contribute to local and regional democracy. The programme engages

all 11-18 year olds who live or go to school in the area by automatically registering them as voters in annual elections of their Young Mayor, Deputy and UK Youth Parliament representatives (Quirk, 2006). The Young Mayor model in Lewisham is understood to offer something important in youth democracy and it has always been hoped that success in voter engagement would stretch into voting in adulthood. This is a notion that was supported by the conceptualisation of voting as a 'habit' (Franklin et al, 2004). Once learned the habit tends not to be broken. On this assumption Berry argued that 'lowering the voting age would lead to higher turnout among all young people, as it enables a habit of voting to form' (2015: 16). Voting as a 'habit' does not readily apply to voting behaviour if the action of voting is conceived of involving a conscious decision based on a rational choice. Voting as a duty, or ritual as a commitment emerging from 'political literacy' (Crick, 1998; Kerr, 2015) are alternative ways to view the act of voting. Whether votes are cast out of habit or civic duty, however, there is potential for young people to develop positive emotions and identification around voting (Cammaerts et al, 2014:7) and become more familiar or literate around voting principles and processes (Crick, 1998).

Beyond the exit polls the broader evaluation of Lewisham YMP confirmed that young people engage in the programme and its elections because it fosters positive emotions and identification around voting, by creating a sense of civic pride, institutional responsibility and political literacy through a real experience of voting and community support. The annual elections are hard fought, exciting, visible and vibrant in a way that adult politics simply isn't. This is the answer to the question posed by local politicians expressing admiration for a high turnout achieved in youth elections when adult candidates and parties struggle to persuade adults to vote. Their reflection is at odds with experts' worrying over whether 16-18 year olds might decrease national voter turnout statistics.

Conclusion

Since 2010 there has been continuing concern about young adults not engaging in elections, making it more difficult for under-18s to win a right to vote. Assumptions that young people would not turn out to vote, would not take their decision-making seriously and would not understand what to do, is challenged by data emerging from England as well as Austria and Scotland. Exit poll surveys of the Lewisham Young Mayor elections in 2013 and 2014 indicate young electors take their vote seriously and a higher proportion of teenagers vote for a directly elected Young Mayor than adults do for a directly elected Mayor in adult elections elsewhere. However we cannot assume from this that the same voters would turn out at a general election. This is partly because the polling for the Young Mayor candidates occurred in schools and colleges and both are open on the day of the Young Mayor election, making it easier to vote than in general elections. It is also because Young Mayor candidates are voters' peers, making the election feel immediately relevant to their lives. Whereas the age threshold for Young Mayor candidates is 13 and general election candidates must be over 18, the youngest MP elected to Parliament was 20 and only elected in 2015.

During the 2015 general election campaign, some opposition parties spoke up in support of a youth franchise and the House of Lords is now in favour of it. A youth vote would extend the expectation that young people be consulted and engaged in the political sphere: if it is legitimate to argue that young people's views should influence local policies why not give young people direct access to a vote and representation in national, regional or European elections? The recent elections for the Mayor of London and the EU referendum offered a chance to review our democracy and whom we think should have a say in the decisions that affect all of our lives. At the same time, we could remind ourselves that democratic politics is more than voting in elections: votes are a small expression of a wider political engagement that can be expected of us all.

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Youth and adult perspectives on representation in local child and youth councils in Ireland

Shirley Martin and Catherine Forde

Abstract

When we consider young people's participation in democratic societies, we have to ask to what extent young people are or should be representative of the communities they are active within. This paper is based on findings from a participatory research project which examined young people's perspectives on taking part in Comhairle na nÓg, the local youth councils in Ireland. The article considers how differing understandings of the concept of representation may impact on the experiences, provision and structures of participatory initiatives for young people. The findings reveal differing attitudes between youth participants and adult support staff towards the meaning of representation. Many of the adult personnel refer to representation in terms of accessing and retaining younger age-groups and "seldom heard" young people, while significant numbers of youth respondents indicated that they understand representation as having a voice, being heard, and making a difference, rather than necessarily about representativeness and they view themselves as being representative of other young people.

Key words: youth councils; youth participation; representation.

Participation and Representation

When we look at children's and young people's participation in democratic society, we have to ask to what extent they are, or should be, representative of the communities they are active within (Sinclair, 2004: 112). Faulkner (2009) highlights the fact that the issue of representation has previously been considered in relation to both the types of young people who tend to be involved in participation initiatives and their links to other young people in their community. Representativeness within youth participation is affected by issues such as 'race', disability, socio-economic class, education, and family and community context (Checkoway, 2011). Head highlights the concern that:

> The already confident young people (i.e. those who have knowledge, communication skills, and organisational navigation skills) are more likely to become involved, and the vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups may be overlooked. There is little research on how to promote a culture of inclusion among organisations and in the community, where young people's participation can then more meaningfully influence public decision-making.
> (Head, 2011: 546).

However, profile data is hard to come by as most projects seem to feel that it is inappropriate to monitor who takes part (Sinclair, 2004: 112). Representativeness raises issues such as young people sometimes being expected to speak on behalf of other young people, which Cairns and Brannen argue has inhibited both young people's voices and their influence (Cairns and Brannen, 2005 cited in Willow, 2010: 52). As well as this, seeing young people as representative of other young people by virtue of their shared age and location can allow authorities to claim to have consulted young people after consulting just some young people, without critically considering the standpoint of the group as a whole (Cairns, 2006: 224–225). Such a conceptualisation of consultation may also mistakenly assume that all young people can participate equally without the kinds of local and structural supports they might need to do this effectively (Sinclair, 2004: 112). When such a partnership model is applied with children and young people, it risks creating a class of children who, in order to participate in decision-making structures, are taken away from the familiar environment of their communities and their peers and placed within pre-existing, centralised structures that may or may not reflect or address the concerns of those they leave behind (Lansdown, 2006: 145).

> *Whilst wholly worthy, the push towards developing youth-centred spaces of participation has resulted in the development of a distinct set of political institutions, which generally operate outside of the adult realm. In these terms children and teenagers are merely afforded the status of 'taking part'.* (Weller, 2009: 15)

Participation structures emerging across Europe in response to UNCRC Article 12 are frequently based on adult democratic institutions, such as local councils or corporations, which can have the effect of inhibiting the involvement of young people who do not or will not conform to adults' expectations of behaviour or interactions (Tisdall and Bell, 2006). There has been ongoing criticism that formal participation initiatives such as the UK Youth Parliament are populated by articulate middle class young people and lack representation for lack of socially excluded young people (Landsdown, 2006). Tisdall and Bell argue that civil servants are firmly in control of who participates, how they participate, and what they participate in, and it is they who also ultimately decide which voices will be prioritised in formulating policy (Tisdall and Bell, 2006: 119). Some notable trends are that older young people and females are more likely to participate and the minority who do get involved are not always representative of the target population (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Checkoway (2011) asserts that the most active young people in formal participation activities tend to be those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of education than the general population. Children who have few dealings with local youth organisations too, are often left out of consultations (Sinclair, 2004). Indeed, project-based models of participation can overlook non-mainstreamed forms of participation, such as local community-type involvement more common among lower socio-economic groups:

> *Differential participation by low-income youth does not mean that they are disengaged from*

democracy. On the contrary, they do participate in public affairs, but rather in activities which are more appropriate to their situation, and which mainstream social scientists find difficult to document. (Checkoway, 2011: 342)

Although Article 12 of UNCRC and Article 7 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) have incorporated children's right to be heard,[1] younger age groups and those young people who have disabilities are frequently seen as having diminished "capacity" to make informed choices, and as such, their views are not sought, or are overridden by adult gatekeepers.

In relation to the representation of young people on youth councils in the US, Taft and Gordon (2013) assert that some young people involved do not actually represent other youth as they are appointed by adults as opposed to democratically elected by other young people. Taft and Gordon present evidence that other 'youth activists' question the authenticity of this 'representation'.

... the youth involved do not necessarily represent other youth nor engage with other youth in their schools and communities to create collective ideas about solutions to community problems. Arguing for more horizontal forms of democratic engagement (Taft, 2011), they reject the youth councils as a form of participation that produces a few student 'leaders' rather than empowering many youth for political action. (ibid: 95)

The rejection of these youth councils as unrepresentative sites by other youth in the same communities raises the important issue of selection processes for participatory initiatives. Gatekeepers can severely limit or expand who participates, and can be formal or informal, including parents, youth workers, and other adults in positions of authority over children and young people. Schools are often the primary sites of information about and recruitment into participation initiatives, and their role as gatekeepers has been the focus of attention by a number of theorists. Cairns argues that in most cases students have no legal right to be involved in decisions in their schools, and this makes schools the worst equipped structures to enable young people's meaningful participation (Cairns, 2006: 223-224). In a UK study which explored teenagers' spaces of citizenship Weller found that while the 'school council was regarded ideologically as good practice, there was some degree of ambivalence over whether it constituted a *meaningful* space of participation' (2009: 21). Wells explores the role played by schools in creating children and young people as a kind of class, as schools reproduce the kinds of nationalism and the types of citizens required by their particular society (Wells, 2009: 32–33). As schools are the arm of the state entrusted with reproducing conservative civic values, this results in a scenario whereby only those students who will best maintain the status quo get selected for participation. A recent study by Gilleece and Cosgrave (2012) on civic participation in schools in Ireland found that the home background of students influenced their participation activities and that students from homes with large numbers of books had higher levels of civic participation. Gender differences also emerged in their research and they found that boys' civic participation was substantially lower than girls when the boys perceived that

they have a low level of influence on decision-making. The authors conclude that this: (i) reflects 'the reciprocal relationship between motivation and action' for participation and (ii) highlights the need for 'meaningful opportunities for student engagement' (Gilleece and Cosgrave, 2012: 237). It is also important to acknowledge that while the focus of this article is on a formal participation structure further analysis of youth participation unveils a complex landscape of informal and formal participation and civic engagement. Young people are more likely to be engaged in non-traditional forms of political participation such as activism, boycotting and protests and there is evidence that young people are moving towards new forms of civic engagement rather than complete rejection of traditional democratic practices (Horvath and Paolini, 2013). These new forms of participation illustrate the growing centrality of participatory actions that are 'less institutionalised and more flexible' such as anti-globalisation protests (Forbrig, 2005: 141). These activities are a response to social, economic and political turbulence and evidence of young people's desire to have their voices heard within local, national and transnational politicised spaces that transcend their physical and virtual social worlds. For example, young people have been active initiators and participants of sometimes radical or even violent political movements around the world (Wells, 2009). Forbrig (2005) cautions us that the participation of young people in these sometimes radical contexts such as anti-war rallies and anti or alter-globalisation movements demonstrate that young people are not apathetic about political participation and civic responsibility, but instead these participatory actions can form the basis of new cultures of political participation and the reinforcement of civil society (Forbrig, 2005). Horvath and Paolini (2013) also suggest that new forms of political participation are not in contradiction to traditional forms such as voting but can be viewed as complementary.

Background to the Study

Ireland ratified the UNCRC in September 1992, and since then the Irish State has made a number of commitments to give credence to the voice of the child and to include children's views in policy-making processes. In line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Irish Government committed itself to promoting the participation of children and young people in civic society. A key policy strategy aimed at meeting these commitments is the National Children's Strategy 2000 – 2010. The National Children's Strategy makes an explicit and central commitment to include the voice of the child, and Goal 1, in particular, states that 'Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity'. Since 2000, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (formally the Office of the Minister for Children) has established a number of participatory initiatives to support the implementation of this goal through children and young people's participation including the establishment of local and national child and youth councils in 2002. This article is primarily concerned with Comhairle na nÓg, the local youth council. Local youth councils, known as Comhairlí na nÓg, represent an important element of these collective decision-making processes. Comhairlí na nÓg are a structured forum for children and young people to input into decision-making in the development

of local services and policies and act as a consultative and participative forum for children and young people. They are funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs through the thirty-four local authorities throughout the country with the support of national voluntary youth organisations such as Youth Work Ireland and Foroige. The lifecycle of each Comhairle na nÓg council is two years and in 2013 the total membership of the thirty-four local Comhairlí was 1,021 children and young people. This article is based on a larger study comissioned by the DCYA and the Irish Research Council to examine the experiences and outcomes of participation for children and young people who have been involved in participatory initiatives of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs since 2000. While the overall study investigates the perceived impacts of participation for children and young people this discussion focuses on the findings related to young people's understandings of representation.

Research Methods

The research design consisted of a number of stages and the participation of children and young people was central to this research project. Children and young people's lives need to be better understood and, crucially, by involving them in research, we can improve the chances of their views being used to influence policy (Kellett, 2009: 52; Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010: 137). The project utilised participatory research methods, which treat young people as experts and agents in their own lives and allow for reflexivity in the research process. This investigation encompasses a holistic conception of participation that is underpinned by four realms of impact – personal, familial, communal and institutional (Ackermann et al, 2003). A project Steering Group was established at the outset of the project and included six youth participants from DCYA initiatives, the project team and two members of the DCYA Participation Unit. In addition to the inclusion of young people in the project Steering Group, an important part of the study has been the training of young people as researchers involved in data collection and analysis for the project.

The research methodology was iterative in nature and used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Methods included surveys of past and current participants of Comhairle na nÓg, focus groups and in-depth interviews with participants and decision-makers at all levels in order to generate, modify and approve content. The survey of present members was administered by the youth participants of 17 Comhairlí who distributed the questionnaire to their members. Four focus groups with young people were carried out by Young Researchers. The open response format of a focus group provides an opportunity to obtain rich data in the children's and young people's own words and can capture perspectives, original ideas, and insights which are often neglected in more traditional research. The questionnaire data were entered into SPSS for analysis.

The research sample of young people in this study is a purposeful sample and contains both a sample of young people who participated in the surveys (237 current and past participants) and a smaller number who participated in focus groups (27 participants) and in-depth interviews (8

participants). Random sampling was conducted to identify seventeen of the thirty-four Comhairlí to take part in the survey of current participants and to identify a further seventeen Comhairle facilitators/coordinators for interview. The average age of the current respondents was 15 years and the majority were attending second level education. The average age of the past participants was 19 years and the majority were attending third level education. Research findings need to be mindful of the fact these are the views of the young people who are involved in participation structures and do not include young people who chose not to participate in formal participation structures. The adult sample consisted of 17 in-depth interviews with Comhairle na nÓg coordinators and six key national support staff connected to the DCYA participation structures.

Findings

Young people's views on representativeness of participation structures

It is important to consider the issue of representation because Comhairle na nÓg is considered the main contact point for any consultation with children and young people by the majority of local authorities in Ireland and therefore plays a very important role in representing the views of children and young people to decision-makers. An adult participant stated that Comhairle na nÓg was 'very much now in the minds of local decision-makers...they see them as a vehicle for getting things for young people' (Adult Participant 4). While this is positive for the participants in Comhairle na nOg in relation to recognition of their voice it also presents a challenge in terms of representation of children and young people not involved in Comhairle Na nÓg. If local decision-makers consider Comhairle na nÓg to be a key contact point with children and young people, those not involved may be excluded from having their voices heard. This also demonstrates the prioritisation of formal participation spaces in allowing decision-makers access to children and young people.

The study found that young people felt strongly that they were positioned to represent the views of other young people through their participation activities. Over three-quarters of youth participants indicated that they consider Comhairle na nÓg to be broadly representative of young people in Ireland. Participants were asked to identify any potential impacts their participation in Comhairle na nÓg had on their wider community or wider society and from this a strong sense emerged that they viewed themselves as representing other young people in their communities.

> *I feel it's representative; because I feel that it's, like, run by the young people and that it's all our opinions and ideas. Whereas if it was run by like, politicians or something, it would be what they would think is wrong for young people, rather than young people figuring out the solutions themselves.* (Youth Participant 5)

When looking at the impact of participation on their local communities youth participants identified the two most positive areas as:

(i) their ability to bring ideas and problems from young people in their community to their Comhairle na nÓg meetings

(ii) the increased awareness of children and young people's issues in the young person's own community.

Significant numbers of past and present members indicated that they joined Comhairle na nÓg to have a voice, be heard, and make a difference. For some this means actively representing other young people:

> *I took it as an opportunity for my voice to be heard, to represent young people and help to make a change. It made me feel like an important citizen and that I now finally have a role in my community.* (Youth Participant 23)

Over a third (38%) of respondents identified this as the main reason for their involvement as an opportunity to have a say in young people's issues and in decisions that affect their peers. In relation to this theme respondents wished to 'voice my opinions and see what other people have to say', '... [it is] important for those who don't have a vote to still be heard', and a 'chance to speak out for people my age'. Respondents felt that exercising their opinions was '...a chance to make a difference' and 'to help bring change to the lives of young people including myself in my area and in Ireland'.

Several of the adult interviewees suggested that many Comhairle members see their role as acting as a voice for other young people. These results echo the aims of state-led participatory initiatives, which seek to give children and young people 'a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level' (DCYA, 2011: 8). It also echoes the findings of an Australian Study on young people's views about their motivations for participation which found that the most frequently cited reason for engagement in youth participation was 'the desire to contribute to a process of change which would result in improved outcomes for young people and the community' (Vromen and Collin, 2010: 105).

Youth participants were also asked about their ability to bring issues to the media. A slightly lower percentage of present participants compared to past participants were positive about their ability to bring issues to the media from Comhairle na nÓg meetings (53% responded positively). However a much higher percentage (67% responded positively) felt that the media listened to Comhairle na nÓg as being representative of young people. While the survey results from the young people suggest that they view themselves and the participation structures as representative a more nuanced understanding of the issues affecting representation emerges from the qualitative data collected in the study, particularly the views of adult facilitators.

The mechanics of representation – who shapes youth participation?

Participation practitioners have to ask how the processes and mechanisms that they use can influence who gets involved and who is excluded from the selection processes, can significantly impact on who takes part in a particular project and can access certain skills and resources (Sinclair, 2004). The role of adult allies (Checkoway, 2011) or participation champions such as youth workers or teachers in encouraging young people to become involved with Comhairle na nÓg was the strongest motivating factor for youth participants to initially join Comhairle na nÓg. The majority of Comhairle na nÓg members are elected at an Annual General Meeting. Young people are invited to attend these meetings by the local Comhairle na nÓg coordinators through local schools and local youth organisations. According to the official Comhairle na nÓg literature the 'aim is to have a broad representation of the young people of the area as possible. At the AGMs, a large number of local young people come together to discuss the issues that are of importance to them'.

This process of election at the AGMs presents both challenges and opportunities in the context of representation. The selection and election process raise a number of key issues related to representation. It is clear from the survey results and from the interviews with adults that the membership of Comhairle na nÓg is mainly drawn from older teenagers between the ages of 15 and 16 (see also McEvoy, 2011). This suggests that despite DCYA guidelines that specify a membership between 12 and 18 years, much of the membership is drawn from young people doing Transition Year in the senior cycle of school. This reflects more general trends in youth participation where the voices of younger children are often excluded. Younger age groups are frequently seen as having diminished 'capacity' to make informed choices, and as such, their views are not sought, or are overridden by adult gatekeepers. Creating an appropriate balance in the selection of young people for participation initiatives was something with which many of the adult Comhairle Co-ordinators were concerned. Many felt that this is an important focus of their work and the links with youth work organisations and other children and young people's support groups were seen as central to creating a more diverse population of child and youth participants.

The role of schools in shaping participation

There is evidence that schools play a key role in shaping who participates in the selection process for Comhairle na nÓg and this can be a barrier to some children and young people, particularly those who feel shy, in putting themselves forward for Comhairle na nÓg. Schools are often the primary sites of information about and recruitment into participation initiatives, and their role as gatekeepers to initial involvement in participation initiatives was highlighted by almost all of the adult participants in this study. Many of the youth participants came to be involved in Comhairle na nÓg because of their prior involvement in their school student council. A number of youth participants mentioned being nominated by their school for attendance at the Comhairle na nÓg AGM but not being clear why they were nominated. In other cases, the students heard about the

AGM through their CSPE (Civic, Social, and Political Education) teacher or their Career Guidance teachers. The relationship with schools was viewed by the adults interviewed for this research as very important in accessing young people, particularly in the initial recruitment of children and young people to attend Comhairle na nÓg AGMs which are often the initial point of contact between participation initiatives and young people. As an example of gatekeeping by schools, some adult participants felt that it is difficult to access the students directly and information about Comhairle na nÓg often stays with the school secretary or the school principal and is not filtered down to students. Relationships with the school were often dependent on individual good-will and some Comhairle Co-ordinators were not clear who they should be contacting in the school as there was no consistency between schools. School principals tended to give the information on Comhairle to just the Transition Year Co-ordinators and Comhairle was consequently viewed as an initiative only suitable for Transition Year students. As a result students from other years, particularly younger students, may not be informed about Comhairle which reinforces the exclusion of younger children from participating.

Some of the adult and youth participants indicated that schools sometimes tell students to attend the Comhairle na nÓg AGMs without giving them any information on what is required of them or the types of activities in which they will be involved. Moreover, as agents of socialisation and as hierarchical entities schools are likely to select young people who manifest conservative values and who are therefore less likely to challenge existing arrangements. The youth participants in this current research felt that there is a perception that young people must be on school student councils to be involved in Comhairle na nÓg and suggested that the strong links between Comhairle na nÓg and student councils might put other young people off joining Comhairle na nÓg. Some respondents suggested that the perceived weakness of the student council model as a participative structure within the school environment may have an impact on the perception of other youth participation initiatives by children and young people. School councils are susceptible to adult manipulation and methods of pupil selection may well not meet standards of democratic representation (Hill et al, 2004; Keogh and Whyte, 2005).

A related issue is schools' tendency to put forward high achievers or 'star' pupils. These 'super participators' (Cockburn, 2010: 315) may be involved in a number of social, youth and community activities and are often both experienced and confident. There is also a tendency among schools to send students who are seen as high academic achievers or who are 'model participants' to represent the school rather than representing the views of other young people. Some participants were critical of this selection process and felt the schools are 'not sending a fair, a broad representation of the population of young people':

The schools send their A students, student council or debating team but they are the top notch; they are what the school would like to see the school as being viewed as. No matter what I say, we always get the cream of the crop which is unfortunate as I am sure there are

other kids there with opinions. I think they see it as status, if we are going on a youth council we have to have our A students. (Adult Participant 7)

They always send you the best student, when you contact the school they say 'oh I know who I will send' which we are trying to get across is it's not always the best person. The school wants to show off. They might choose the best student in the school but they might be very quiet. (Adult Participant 1)

Student councils in schools were viewed as a key site for recruitment of young people for participation initiatives but many of the adult participants were critical of the school authorities in only putting forward school council members for attendance at the Comhairle na nÓg AGMs. The pattern of sending student council members to the AGMs confines selection of youth participants to young people who are already active in participation initiatives and might narrow the youth voice. Also, this method of recruitment means that local Comhairlí na nÓg 'very rarely would get a seldom heard young person in through the school' (Adult Participant 14). This reflects findings from research on children's views of participation in the UK (Davey et al, 2010) that children who were clever, popular, well-behaved and good attendees were disproportionately represented on school councils and other children felt this was not representative of the school community.

Child and youth power within schools is itself a challenging topic for youth participation to focus on. Members of the focus group of adult Comhairle no nÓg Co-ordinators felt that young people in the school system are not often encouraged to question, think critically, creatively or challenge and that there need to be changes in the education system to prepare children and young people for participation. Some participants viewed the youth participation agenda as at odds with the school environment and the passive role of young people within educational settings. Also a number of participants felt that there are limited mechanisms in place for members of Comhairle na nÓg to feed back to other young people on their work or to influence change within their own schools which has a negative impact on representation.

In relation to alternative methods of recruitment that were less dependent on the student councils, participants made a number of suggestions. These included more official recognition of participation initiatives by the Department of Education and Science and the development of guidelines to recruitment to these initiatives. There is evidence that a cultural change is slowly occurring which may be due to recognition from the Department of Education and Science that time spent with Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg is regarded as 'official' school-time. It was suggested by adult participants that in order to achieve a broader representation of young people co-ordinators need to work with a network of staff within the school, including Home School Liaison Co-ordinators, PE teachers, Transition Year Co-ordinators and the School Completion Programme, which operates throughout the country as a key support agency in supporting seldom heard young people and assisting through the funding of transport and support for young people who are participating,

where available. Also, it was suggested that teachers and school support staff receive training on child and youth participation to support them. The recruitment of young people through other organisations such as youth clubs or agencies which support seldom heard young people was seen as critical to providing a wider representative group of children and young people.

Seldom heard young people

A key area concerning representation is the participation of seldom heard young people.[2] According to McEvoy (2011) on average 21% of young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg are from seldom heard groups. Comhairle na nÓg co-ordinators in this study were very aware of the importance of involving seldom heard young people. Some of the adult and youth participants pointed out that participation can initially be easier for young people from middle-class backgrounds. For example one adult participant felt that some of the young people participating in her Comhairle na nÓg were initially intimidated by the confidence levels of two members who attended a private school. Similar sentiments were expressed by some of the youth participants in the research and one of the focus groups with youth participants conducted by the Young Researchers in an urban area discussed the role that socio-economic class plays in membership of Comhairle na nÓg. They discussed the perception that it is viewed as a middle class organisation and that schools from the more affluent parts of the city tend to send delegates to the AGMs. Turkie (2010: 262) contends that young people who have higher levels of educational attainment/success in the school system can dominate youth participation. Over-representation of middle class children was also identified in an audit of child and youth participation in Ireland:

> *Some organisations argued that the majority of children and young people involved in participation at regional and national level are well-educated, articulate, middle-class children and young people, who do not necessarily represent those in Irish society who are most in need of supports and services….'Formal children and young people's participation at regional and national level almost always consists of young people well on their way to making a career in decision-making!'* (Roe and McEvoy, 2009: 38)

While this view was also held by many of the adult participants there was also a consensus among adult participants that Comhairle na nÓg created a safe space for some seldom heard young people and a safe space to discuss issues of difference and social justice. An adult respondent described a young person who 'was struggling with his sexuality and half-way through the year he came out to all the lads and since then has been setting up a LGBT group in the county' (Adult Participant 15). Participation spaces can provide a young person with not only a safe space but also with an opportunity to advocate for other young people and to provide support to others. Many of the adults interviewed discussed the extensive work which they do to recruit and prepare young people from seldom heard backgrounds for participation in Comhairle na nÓg.

We do go to the disability group and Travellers groups and say to them if you want to get involved send people on the day. The work in those groups is in the preparation. I go out to the groups three to four times before they go to Comhairle, to their own groups to where they feel safe and talk them through the day ... (Adult Participant 7)

Much of this work is done in partnership with agencies which support the participation of seldom heard young people including youth groups, Youth Reach, and Garda Diversion Projects. When adult participants were asked about participation of seldom heard young people they tended to focus on the Traveller community.

Adult participants highlighted some of the challenges in recruiting and maintaining participation by seldom heard young people and in particular members of the Traveller community. Children in care and young people from the Traveller Community were identified by adult participants as two groups who were more likely to drop out of participation initiatives before projects were completed. In relation to the participation of young people from the Traveller community a number of issues emerged. There is often a high level of interaction between Comhairle Co-ordinators and Traveller support workers. The role of the Traveller support agencies is crucial in supporting the young person's involvement and many of the adult participants interviewed have a strong working relationship with local agencies to support Traveller participation. The experiences of some of the Comhairle Co-ordinators are that young people from the Traveller community tend to come initially to meetings with a lot of support but then leave. Literacy issues were also perceived as a barrier for some members of the Traveller community. However there were also a number of examples of very successful participation experiences of members of the Traveller community.

Last year's theme was social inclusion and the girl from the Traveller group stood up and said her name and said she was from the Traveller group and said I live social inclusion and then sat down. You wouldn't hear a pin drop and she came in second highest in the voting... her first couple of meetings were wobbly, she wasn't sure of herself but now she is coming in to her own. (Adult Participant 17)

A small number of participants spoke about trying to create the conditions for participation for young people with disabilities:

The Disability sector is one that we have found challenging to get. There are physical challenges but we have always had a venue that is suitable but there are other challenges as well, the confidence isn't there or they don't feel comfortable being there on day one with 100 young people and you have to be there on the big day. We do endeavour through the steering group to have links to them, personnel from the HSE (Health Service Executive) are on the Comhairle Steering Group. (Adult Participant 9)

A number of other adult respondents described initiatives that their Comhairlí were involved in to support the participation of young people with disabilities through partnerships with disability groups and organisations.

Participation of seldom heard young people appears to be dependent on networks of support from other organisations and involves multi-agency work as evidenced by the work with Traveller organisations and Disability groups. Other activities linked to the recruitment of seldom heard young people included seeking language support from the local Vocational Education Committees to address language barriers for Eastern European young people who are interested in attending Comhairle na nÓg. A number of participants also mentioned the role of the School Completion Programme as being particularly instrumental in accessing young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and young people at risk of school drop-out. These young people in particular are unlikely to be put forward by their schools for participation in Comhairlí AGMs.

In general, the adult participants were very enthusiastic with the role that participation initiatives have played in involving seldom heard young people and allowing them to have a voice and engage more with their wider community. Recruitment and retention of seldom heard young people requires support from other organisations working with these groups and many of the adult participants spoke about the positive relations they have with organisations such as local Traveller youth groups and disability support groups. Participation on the Steering Group Committee of Comhairle na nÓg by professionals working with seldom heard young people was viewed as a way to target these groups. The involvement of seldom heard young people appears to be dependent on the availability of networks of interagency support. Accessing young people through existing organisations raises issues concerning who is included or excluded in youth participation; some children and young people risk being 'over-consulted' while other young people are never asked for their views because they are not involved in any participative organisations (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2011). This risks creating a class of children who, in order to participate in decision-making structures, are taken away from the familiar environment of their communities and their peers and placed within pre-existing, centralised structures that may or may not reflect or address the concerns of those they leave behind (Sinclair, 2004: 112; Cairns and Brannen, 2005 cited in Willow, 2010: 52; Lansdown, 2006: 145). Also, there was a concern among some adult participants in this study that seldom heard young people might not want to represent or feel that they can represent all other seldom heard young people.

Increasing representation in local youth councils

A number of strategies could be adopted to increase the diversity of representation in Comhairlí na nÓg and in particular to increase wider peer engagement with children and young people and connect to a wider youth audience. The use of peer research which is already being utilized in some of the Comhairle na nÓg presents positive opportunities to engage with young people outside

of the youth council structures and provides an avenue for their voices to be heard by decision-makers. There is some emerging evidence that differences in participation levels across gender and socio-economic class are less 'pronounced in the case of new forms of participation' (Sloam, 2013) and this raises the possibility of a more egalitarian form of participation and representation occurring outside of structured participatory spaces. Flanagan and Levine (2010) found that there were less differences in educational attainment among young people who participated in digital civic and political forums compared to more traditional forms of engagement. The authors suggest that research needs to consider the role of digital media in encouraging participation, particularly because of the lower barriers of entry to digital participation compared to traditional forms of participation, including spatial barriers, and because of the diverse communities and interest online. The challenge then for political and civic institutions is to merge traditional and new forms of political participation and allow them to work in a complementary manner to support young people's political engagement and participation. The establishment of online voting and digital participation forums by Comhairle na nÓg might help to merge these separate participatory spaces and increase the wider impact of the work of Comhairle na nÓg.

Conclusions

Representation in child and youth participatory initiatives is multi-layered and may be interpreted in different ways according to the social actor involved. Differing attitudes emerge between young people and adults towards the meaning of representation. Many of the adult personnel refer to representativeness in terms of accessing and retaining younger age-groups and 'seldom heard' young people, while the youth participants themselves view the participatory structures they are involved in as highly representative because they feel that they address issues that are both identified by and very relevant to young people in Ireland.

Representation is a difficult issue in children and young people's participation, as the discussion in the literature review has revealed. Children and young people may feel pressured by adults' expectations that they represent their peers, while these expectations may not take account of differences between young people. Assumptions are made that all young people have equal opportunities to participate, but agencies such as schools may adopt a gate-keeping role in determining which children and young people are selected for participation.

Many of the young people in the study were involved in other participation initiatives such as student councils which places them in positions where they have their voice listened to more frequently than other young people who are not directly involved in participation initiatives. They are, in effect, what have been called 'networked young persons' reflecting the multiplier effect of participation which 'grows exponentially once someone becomes connected to one network' (Brodie et al, 2011: 42) and participation activities increase the individuals' wider social network. In Comhairle na nÓg adults do maintain some control over who becomes a member but the

majority of members are voted on by other young people at the AGMS. This adult control is often about including participants who are deemed seldom heard and this attempts to create a more representative balance of children and young people.

Further analysis is required to identify the reasons for the under-representation of young people under 15 and how this issue may be addressed. Participation initiatives need to be more active in engaging children and younger teenagers as currently this group are under-represented and are less likely to participate. The ongoing challenge for Comhairle na nÓg is to balance the recruitment of these young people with others who may have fewer opportunities to participate and may lack the confidence to put themselves forward.

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Notes

1   Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (13th December 2006) U.N.T.S. 44910.

2   'Seldom heard' young people is a term used to describe young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities, from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background, young people in care, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) young people, as well as those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities (McEvoy 2011: 13).

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What, no coaching? Challenging the dominance of mentoring in work with young people

Tina Salter

Abstract

Mentoring seems to be the preferred one-to-one intervention when offering individual support to young people, compared with other professions where coaching prevails. This paper explores the literature in order to determine how mentoring is used, followed by a brief discussion demonstrating that little research has been carried out which explores coaching as a way of supporting young people. It then examines research carried out with mentors of young people in the UK to identify how mentoring approaches are used before comparing these to findings gleaned from interviews carried out with mentors and coaches working mainly with adults in other contexts. Findings reveal how in some coaching and mentoring contexts, the interventions were based on a deficit model; and others tended to draw on an asset-based approach. Mentoring for young people in the UK often has referral criteria which unknowingly places young people in deficit. Drawing on asset-based mentor-coach approaches might help alleviate this, enhancing the support that a young person receives. Further research is needed which will test any mentoring and/or coaching models used that focus on the strengths and assets of young people rather than programmes which highlight where they might be in deficit.

Key words: coaching; mentoring; deficit; asset.

YOUTH WORK has a long history of using mentoring as a tool for working with young people. Unlike other sectors, mentoring has featured as a tool for one-to-one work for a significant period of time. For example, 'Big Brothers Big Sisters' was founded in 1904 (Freknall and Luks, 1992) and still exists today. The teaching profession also uses mentoring widely, as a way of inducting pre-service teachers but this was not formalised in the UK until the 1990s. This suggests that youth work has formally used mentoring far longer than is documented in other professional contexts.

The rate at which mentoring and coaching has grown in recent years has been phenomenal (Lewis-Duarte and Bligh, 2012). However, there is disparity of growth in different professional settings revealing how mentoring is favoured in some professions over coaching and vice versa (Salter, 2014). In the world of business, both can be found – but it is uncertain how these decisions have been made and whether or not choices about the place and use of mentoring versus coaching could be withholding more suitable interventions from the client, purely because both are not always available. This seems unfair – and is something that could be charged at youth work where

mentoring is much more readily available than coaching (aside from sports coaching).

The basis on which mentoring programmes are established for young people is also questionable. Many programmes are based on a deficit model (Philip, 2008), targeting recruitment of young people with 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD) (Evans, 2005) or 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) (Berkeley, 1994) – two key targeted areas of work in the UK. The agenda for these programmes often is to 'normalise' those young people and help them 'get back on track'. Whilst the mentors themselves work professionally and may not even be aware of the underlying deficit model, this can become problematic when a young person perceives the mentoring programme to be a form of punishment or causes them to somehow feel inadequate.

With the landscape of youth work taking unprecedented changes in recent years and the shift focusing to more targeted work, it seems there is scope to revisit older models of practice such as mentoring and consider how these might be enhanced or adapted in an ever-changing context of practice.

There are no universal definitions found within the literature which clearly define mentoring and coaching (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009). One example of how mentoring is defined is as follows:

> *Mentoring relates primarily to the identification and nurturing of potential for the whole person. It can be a long-term relationship, where the goals may change but are always set by the learner.* (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005: 4)

Coaching is perceived to differ slightly as defined by Hamlin et al):

> *Coaching is a helping and facilitative process that enables individuals, groups/teams and organizations to acquire new skills, to improve existing skills, competence and performance, and to enhance their personal effectiveness or personal development or personal growth.* (2009: 18)

These definitions are by no means exhaustive as the ways in which mentoring and coaching are understood are usually informed by the tradition in which the intervention is rooted (Garvey et al, 2009) and even which part of the world the practitioner is located (Clutterbuck, 2014). It is worth noting here that many authors see mentoring and coaching as very similar, suggesting there are overlaps:

> *Although the roots are different, both mentoring and coaching in the modern context selectively draw on a range of the same narratives or, in Bruner's (1990) term, 'folk wisdoms' to describe the activity. However, it seems that coaching and mentoring are essentially similar in nature.* (Garvey et al, 2009: 27)

One of the key rationales for this study was the need to look at mentoring and coaching practice within specific professional contexts (Cox, 2003). The six areas selected do not fully represent the field of coaching and mentoring, which is richly diverse within a landscape that is changing all the time. However, the areas selected represent mentoring and coaching contexts which have been established for several decades and therefore have developed characteristics and styles of practice. The aim of this research was to try and understand practice in context and what that might tell us about the shared and distinctive approaches to mentoring and coaching. In turn, it was hoped that this would help inform and develop practice, drawing on other contexts.

This paper starts by exploring the literature associated with mentoring for young people to try and ascertain the beliefs which mentors have about their role and the approaches they use. Although limited, attention will be given to any examples found in the literature where coaching is used specifically for young people. This will lead into and outline the methodology used for empirical data collection and analysis before presenting findings and concluding thoughts about the place and use of coaching for young people.

Mentoring for young people

Mentoring offered to young people as a way of providing them with individualised tailor-made support tends to be associated with programmes that place negative labels on young people – certainly within the UK. This deficit model as outlined by Philip (2008) suggests that the cycle is then perpetuated as the need for mentoring is reinforced. This can be difficult, particularly when the young person has not yet positioned themselves for change.

One of the challenges that mentors face when referred adolescents who are hard-to-reach, is engaging the young person from the outset so that they buy into the relationship. This takes great skill on behalf of the mentor and can be hugely daunting, especially if the mentor is volunteering their time to do this. This type of mentoring can be complex and requires the mentor to be extremely flexible (Beattie and Holden, 1994; Berkeley, 1994). The complexities are associated with the mentee experiencing significant personal difficulties whilst simultaneously going through a key life transition from childhood to adulthood. Existing research and literature has shown that mentors of young people need to:

- Prioritise developing the relationship itself (Philip, 2008) by using interpersonal skills to build trust and rapport (King, 2012);
- Set clear boundaries from the start which make explicit the parameters of the relationship (Jamieson, 2008);
- Know when to give direct advice and guidance and when to step back (Berkeley, 1994; King, 2012);
- Recognise these challenges and be open to learning themselves from the relationship

(Evans, 2005; Michael, 2008);

- Possess good self-awareness and self-knowledge of values, beliefs and prejudices as these are likely to be confronted (Berkeley, 1994);
- Depending on the mentee's needs, it may be appropriate to focus the mentoring on building up their self-esteem and confidence (Gray and Seddon, 2005; Jamieson, 2008; Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2010; Philip, 2008);
- Show commitment and reliability by being available to meet regularly, over a significant period of time (Gray and Seddon, 2005; King, 2012; Meyer and Bouchey, 2010; Philip, 2008; Stead, 1997).

These findings from the literature help demonstrate that the approach of mentoring for young people can be seen as highly relational and bespoke to the mentee's needs. However, this kind of programme is often aimed at young people who are exhibiting extreme behaviours – from risky or challenging behaviour at one end of the spectrum, to withdrawn and disengaged at the other end. It is not clear from the literature whether these approaches might be suitable to a wider group of young people, regardless of any labelling that has been attributed to behaviour viewed by adults as unacceptable.

Coaching for young people

Theoretical constructs which address coaching for young people are underrepresented in the literature. This could be due to focus being placed on disadvantaged young people or those not complying with social norms. A few studies have been found and these will be explored below. It is worth noting here that the coaching referred to still seems to resonate with a deficit model – and this foundational basis needs challenging.

Coaching has been cited as an intervention to use when specifically looking to help young people make changes to their behaviour, which echoes the emphasis in the literature placed on coaching used to help enhance performance. Spence's (2003) study suggests that young people with particularly complex needs would benefit from multi-method approaches in order for change to be on-going – therefore the coaching would be less effective if offered in isolation but could complement a range of interventions. This could help make the case for combining mentoring and coaching (amongst other support mechanisms) as a more effective way of supporting young people with complex needs.

One such research paper, which used coaching as a way of modifying behaviour, is depicted by Gorczynski et al (2008) who carried out an experiment with six 12 to 14 years olds to see whether or not co-active coaching sessions might provide the catalyst for adolescents to engage with physical activity – the participants were not involved in any sport or exercise. However, the outcome was not good: only one participant showed signs of increased activity and the conclusion

questioned the use of coaching with this age group although the small sample size may have contributed to this.

One interesting article by Wang and Millward (2014) explored the potential use of mentoring for adolescents in informal settings and designating coaching to formal contexts. Using an action research approach, they developed a model which integrated coaching and mentoring for the learning and development of adolescents – focusing specifically on their psychological development. The research was carried out with learning mentors in schools who were trained to use mentoring when supporting students in informal settings within the school and teachers who were trained by external coaches to coach students in the formal classroom setting. This study researched the mentoring and coaching separately and the integrated model combined the findings from both sets of participants. This is worth bearing in mind as the model was not tried and tested in an integrated way; although the model suggested that there were similarities found in both settings. One refreshing element was how the model proposed a relational approach which facilitated the learning of the student – and moved away from traditional underlying deficit frameworks. The onus was placed on the student to determine how they would like to be developed.

A paper by Leach et al (2011) explored the links between youth work values and positive psychology, culminating in coaching providing a useful bridge which complements both areas of work. The authors acknowledged the lack of coaching available within youth services and suggested that an opportunity is being missed. The paper was theoretical and therefore did not research actual practice. However, the authors posited that young people might benefit from developing in areas such as well-being, resilience and hope.

The common thread in these papers is the emphasis on psychological development that coaching can offer to young people. This could be somewhat limiting as coaching has the potential to offer other kinds of developmental opportunities – all dependent on the needs of the individual engaging in the process. Before this paper sets out potential ways forward for youth work practitioners, the next section will introduce the empirical research carried out as part of this study.

Methodology

Taking a social constructivist approach, this research used a comparative case study framework to interview three experienced practitioners located in each of the following mentoring/coaching contexts: mentors of young people; mentors of leaders; mentors of pre-service teachers; sports coaches; executive coaches and coaching psychologists. In-depth interviews were carried out and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Using semi-structured interviews, 18 participants were asked to identify: why they mentor or coach? What their experiences of mentoring or coaching others had been like? How the beliefs about their work influenced their practice? What did their mentoring or coaching look like? These questions enabled the researcher to get a sense of the practitioners'

world, 'especially through sharing their experiences… via the medium of language' (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 58).

Strict ethical guidelines provided by the overseeing university were adhered to, including seeking permission from participants and taking care to accurately represent the views of those being interviewed. A pilot interview was carried out and feedback obtained to help refine the research questions used as a guide for the semi-structured interviews. Anonymity was guaranteed to each participant and they were sent copies of the transcript for verification before analysis was carried out.

Thematic analysis was used to ascertain any unique elements of each of the six areas of practice; and also to help identify where the overlaps in approaches could be found. Something which was unplanned by the researcher were the previous experiences of participants. Some who were currently mentoring had previously operated as a coach, or vice versa. This added richly to the data as those participants (7/18) were able to articulate where and how they saw mentoring and coaching to be similar or different.

Results

Below an overview is provided of the key characteristics that three experienced mentors of young people attribute to this mentoring context. The other five contexts will be presented in order to compare where overlaps and differences were found in relation to underlying deficit or asset-based approaches. Proposed recommendations of how one-to-one support can be further developed in order to broaden the offer to young people will then be presented.

Youth workers' perceptions of their mentoring approaches

Each of the three participants worked separately and had no connection with one another. This was intentional as the researcher wanted to see if there were any strong narratives which point towards the approaches used for mentoring young people. It is important to note that the sample size is very small and therefore care is given not to generalise broadly. These experiences do however offer an interesting perspective on mentoring provision amongst youth workers in the UK. Two of the participants coordinated mentoring schemes; therefore their knowledge was based on their own mentoring practice as well as their responsibilities of recruiting and training volunteers to help deliver their mentoring programmes. One scheme received referrals from schools and focused on young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The other scheme targeted young people with disabilities and learning difficulties. The third participant worked full time as an inclusion manager within a secondary school. She was responsible for all the mentoring opportunities for young people within the school.

The youth workers were in agreement that their approach needed to be relational and therefore they needed to possess good interpersonal skills and know how to connect and build rapport, specifically with adolescents:

> *They need to be approachable, they need to be able to have a decent conversation with kids and they need to have some sort of rapport with the young people.* (Mentor of young people)

The underlying deficit model was evident in all three practice-based settings due to the nature of the referral criteria in each place. Given the challenges associated with engaging young people who have challenging needs, attempting to build some kind of meaningful relationship is paramount. The participants acknowledged how the particular aims of their own mentoring programmes and interventions might be clear to the organisation; but in terms of achieving those outcomes with young people, the process required a lot more subtlety. Therefore, instead of explicitly saying to a young person that the aim of the mentoring would be to help curtail their behaviour, for example, the focus would be on the relationship and the outcomes would stem from that:

> *The objective is the relationship and the product of the relationship is growth, maturity hopefully, greater ability to contain emotions, greater ability to empathise with people.* (Mentor of young people)

This left the contents of the mentoring sessions fairly open and flexible, but required the mentor to be able to work with moving agendas and changeable areas to focus on. This kind of approach combats a deficit model as the worker is finding creative ways to work flexibly within a rigid set of criteria. There was plenty of evidence to show how adaptable the mentors were able to be:

> *I have got a mentor who goes for a walk with her mentee, she's really shy and doesn't like sitting there having to make eye contact and things. We've got another guy, they go and play pool together and I think that just breaks the ice and makes them feel comfortable.* (Mentor of young people)

The key component of mentoring young people that did not appear in the other five contexts featured in this study, was the need for mentors to fully understand safeguarding issues and deal competently with a child protection disclosure. This requires the mentor to discuss confidentiality and boundaries at the start of the mentoring so that the young person is fully aware that their mentor would not be allowed to keep any secrets if the young person or someone they know might be in danger:

> *With child protection and safeguarding there are limits to what can be kept back.* (Mentor of young people)

Very little evidence was found regarding specific tools or models of working, as the sessions tended to be organic and dialogical in approach. However, the understanding of building and developing the relationship was central to the mentoring process, based on meaningful sessions spanning a significant amount of time.

Deficit vs. asset-based approach

The underlying deficit model was found to be present in the mentors of young people, pre-service teachers and sports coaches; whereas an asset-based model was more evident in mentors of leaders, executive coaches and coaching psychologists. This again was connected to the referral criteria used at the entry point of the sessions but also reflected the values and beliefs which the mentors and coaches held about whether or not their role was to offer direct advice and guidance, or if their approach was much more facilitative and client-led. Garvey et al (2009) describe how the mentor's or coach's mind-set will change depending on whether they are working towards a pre-determined set of goals, or alternatively start from the premise that they are skilled in helping the mentee or coachee find ways of developing themselves. The deficit model stemmed from the belief that the mentee or coachee needed direct help and guidance in areas that they wanted to improve in, whether that was life skills for young people (Philip, 2008), professional skills for pre-service teachers (Hudson and Hudson, 2010) or sporting skills for athletes (Cushion et al, 2007).

One example that illustrates this was when one mentor of pre-service teachers who described how the mentor might look to operate:

> [The mentor is] helping that person to come to recognise what the areas of weaknesses are and explore the possible solutions to development issues; but the mentor would actually be able to suggest ways of improving in a very targeted way. (Mentor of pre-service teachers)

Similarly, sports coaches – particularly those working alongside elite athletes – would also use direct approaches in order to achieve pre-determined outcomes:

> Coaching is more to do with repetition, feedback and working with a player to see where it is going right, where it is going wrong. (Sports coach)

This contrasted with underlying asset-based models which are less concerned with pre-determined outcomes because the focus shifts to the mentee or coachee and what they would like to work on:

> A coach works with the persons' existing knowledge and experience and helps them come to their own conclusions and find their own answers. (Executive coach)

There are multiple reasons why mentoring and coaching may be established, based either on a

deficit or asset-based model. Based on the research carried out, some are related to the purpose of the mentoring of coaching and whether or not the mentor or coach is there to offer their own expertise or guidance or possess skills which enable others to determine their own growth and development. The reasons for establishing youth mentoring programmes are usually positive and motivated by the desire to see young people do well. However, there is also the potential to introduce coaching as another way of helping young people to take the lead in developing themselves. More importantly, any mentor or coach programmes aimed at young people need to be built on foundations which utilises asset-based approaches.

Developing models of coaching for young people

Looking at the approaches commonly used by mentors of young people, there are potential areas for growth and development which could be learned from other professional settings. The table below summarises key findings from this study which highlight aspects of shared and distinctive philosophical and practice-based positioning depending on the type of mentoring or coaching the practitioner is located in:

Table 1: Summary of shared and distinctive philosophical and practice-based approaches found in six mentoring and coaching contexts

	Mentors of young people	Mentors of Leaders	Mentors of pre-service teachers	Executive coaches	Coaching psychologists	Sports coaches
Philosophy	Relate well to others and use interpersonal skills to help support mentee/coachee transition					
	Focus on supporting development			Focus on improving performance		
	Underpinned by a deficit model	Underpinned by an asset model	Underpinned by a deficit model	Underpinned by an asset modell		Underpinned by a deficit model
	Informed by youth work theorieas	Informed by business and management theories	Informed by educational theories	Informed by business and management theories	Informed by therapeutic theories	Informed by physiological theories
					Informed by psychological theories	
Practice	High level of interpersonal skills needed, including: warmth, empathy, active listening, reflective conversation, challenging questioning, holistic and confidential					
	Help build self-esteem and confidence. Conversational but also activity-based where appropriate	Career focussed		May use diagnostic or assessment tools to help diagnose areas to work on		
		offering advice and instruction, use observation and feedback to help develop mentee		Conversational drawing on business models	Conversational drawing on psychotherapeutic framework/models	offering advice and instruction, use observation and feedback
	Follow child protection and safeguarding policies and set boundaries	Confidential relationship with negotiated boundaries	Confidentiality maintained; some information sharing with sponsoring organisation/agency			For elite athletes, information shared those helping raise performance levels
	Advocate	*Guru*	*Role-model*	*Facilitator*	*Analyst*	*Instructor*

Space does not permit an in-depth exploration of all of the differentials outlined in Table 1. The key commonalities which feature in all contexts is the relationships itself, borne out of a time of change for the mentee or coachee, either from adolescence transitioning into adulthood or the start of a new career or level of responsibility (Garvey et al, 2009). These changes require the practitioner to possess high levels of interpersonal skills (Delaney, 2012) in order to offer helpful and constructive support at a time of uncertainty or at the start of a new challenge.

The main area of difference which separates out mentoring from coaching is the aspect of performance – supporting the enhancement of specific skills (Whitmore, 2005). At the time of writing, youth unemployment in the UK is significantly high as a result of austerity measures. This means that many young people are finding it hard to consider career options when there are fewer jobs available to them (Ainley and Allen, 2010). Coaching could help them specifically analyse their skills, talents and interests in order to best determine how to get onto the right career ladder. However, this would still need practitioners who have a good understanding of youth work theories to engage young people (Philip, 2008), rather than assume that any experienced coach could automatically engage effectively with teenagers.

Young people are often referred to mentoring because they are finding it difficult to relate effectively with their peers or members of their family (Evans, 2005). Again, coaching techniques which enable clients to reflect on their ability to cope effectively with emotional responses (Augustijnen et al, 2011) might go some way to supporting young people develop in this area. It is not uncommon for youth workers to study therapeutic models as a way of informing how they might relate to young people – whilst carefully distinguishing themselves from qualified counsellors or psychotherapists. This study found that some executive coaches make a similar distinction: they are aware of certain therapeutic models, but locate their professional identity in coaching. Therefore, they are able to hold conversations which tentatively explore emotional health and wellbeing whilst also possessing self-awareness to know their limitations and appropriately refer someone on for professional therapeutic help, if that is what is needed.

All contexts would benefit from a shift away from any underlying deficit models in favour of a healthier asset-based foundation (Coetzee et al, 2009). This would ensure that the practitioner is starting from a position where they do not view mentees or coachees as falling short in some way – but bringing something of value to the mentoring or coaching sessions from the outset. The approach is therefore much more facilitative, driven by the mentee or coachee and less dependent upon any expert advice or guidance from the mentor or coach. Ideally, mentors and coaches should be guided by the needs of the mentee or coachee and therefore need to possess a broad spectrum of techniques and skills in order to match their approach with the specific needs of each client – and be prepared to change and adapt as and when new issues or themes are discussed.

Towards a theory of coaching young people

To coach a young person rather than mentor them would be to make use of skills where appropriate which encourage self-directed learning (Knowles and Knowles, 1955). This is collaborative in approach and encourages the young person to identify what it is they would like to work on (rather than the agenda of the referrer) and support them to take responsibility for any change or new ways of thinking and self-management. This requires the coach to be self-aware, avoiding use of directive questions and separating out any bias which may influence the young person in the decision-making processes. There may be times when direct advice and guidance are needed – and requested by the young person. However, a good coach would be able to be explicit about these distinctive approaches and enable the young person to understand how mentoring and coaching approaches are being used interchangeably.

Figure 1 below demonstrates how a mentor-coach might develop a relationship which allows for directional advice and guidance at times, but is much more facilitative, emphasising coaching techniques.

Figure 1: Model for coaching young people
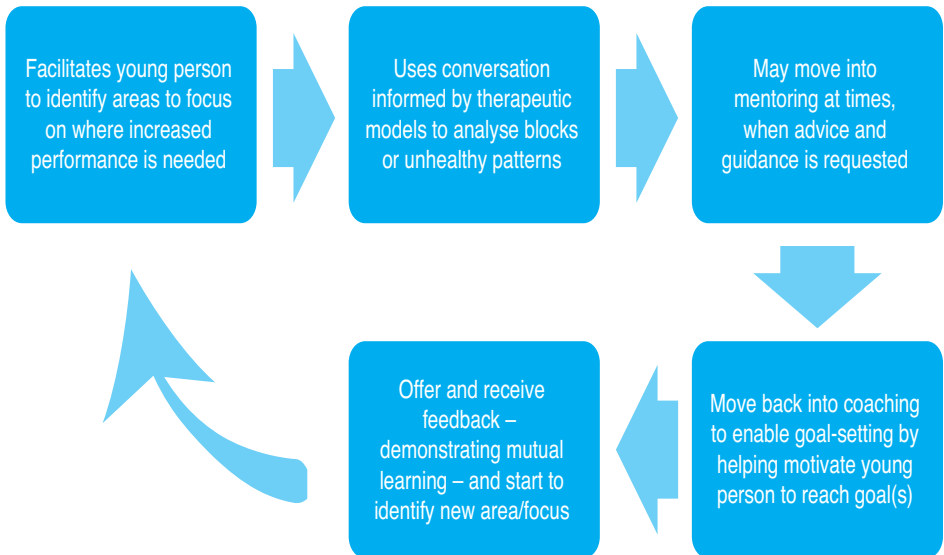
This model encourages the young person to identify what they would like to change, what has held them back and how they might get to where they want to be. By encouraging the young person to reflect on their learning and by offering feedback to the coach, mutuality is encouraged, helping prevent any deficit models influencing the relationship.

Conclusion

In terms of using mentor and coach approaches interchangeably with young people, it is not known how much mentors of young people integrate coaching approaches. However, what seems to be apparent is that, in general terms, mentoring interventions used with young people are based on a deficit model and coaching interventions aimed at gifted and talented students seem to focus on young people deemed to be more academic or successful than their mentee counterparts. For the field of mentoring and coaching to develop further, young people and practitioners alike would benefit from the development of a greater range of mentor and coach approaches. Working with vulnerable young people, it soon becomes apparent that they have often developed greater capacities of resilience than those young people who have not had to face adverse and challenging situations. Therefore, some learning opportunities which arise in the mentoring relationship may warrant a coach approach where good questioning can be used to identify areas where the young person has proven the ability to navigate their way through a past difficulty, which in turn can help them reapply their learning when faced with a new challenge. Young people may benefit more from an integrated mentor-coach approach, rather than separate out mentoring for young people who have somehow fallen short and retain coaching for those categorised as 'normal' or 'successful'.

Further research is needed which explores the effectiveness of coaching techniques used with young people and whether or not the current bias towards mentoring needs protecting or challenging. The study which informs this paper has several limitations which need to be addressed in future research projects. Firstly, many other mentoring and coaching contexts were not featured in this study and other mentoring and coaching 'types' need to be considered in order to get a true representation of the diverse ways in which these interventions are used. Importantly, the views and experiences of mentees and coachees were not incorporated into the research design and a better understanding of those on the receiving end would also help inform any models developed which inform coaching for young people.

This paper has sought to question the dominant use of mentoring for young people and question the status quo. Through exploring different types of coaching interventions, questions have been raised about the potential of using coaching approaches as a way of supporting young people which could broaden out the one-to-one offer and provide young people with the space to help them increase specific skills related to performance. Regardless of a preference for mentoring or coaching, any underlying deficit models informing practice need to be exposed and replaced by asset-based approaches, ensuring that young people are equipped to take control of their lives and learn how to self-manage and develop themselves.

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Effective gang policy and practice: how research with 'Black male youth' problematizes the official definition of the UK gang

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Abstract

This article examines the policy and practice implications of the current official approach to 'the gang', primarily in relation to the challenging or 'problematic behaviour' displayed in a school context that often culminates in exclusion. It draws on findings from eighteen months of ethnographic-based participative action research to contrast community and statutory approaches, giving special focus to Black male youth from a deprived inner city area. The research found significant disparities between community and statutory understandings of problematic behaviour, its contribution to gang involvement and service approaches to prevent it. Moreover, it suggests the current official definition of the 'gang' over-relies on identifiable group characteristics and this distorts the focus of interventions and promotes an understanding of everyday behaviour that does little to permanently avert young people from the real causes of violence. Findings also suggest that to be effective, interventions must, firstly, give greater account of how cultural norms and social processes impact on young people's friendships and the local neighbourhood-based relationships of their social networks. Secondly, schools must address the unintended consequences of institutional bias.

Key words: gang; youth; inner-city; urban; violence; youth crime.

IN RECENT decades, the 'gang' has emerged as a populist term which, in policy, has gained almost unquestioned credibility as a means for referencing a range of anti-social, problematic, deviant behaviours or criminality connected to young people, as well as a principal means for expressing concerns about crime and serious youth violence. A number of high-profile youth homicides since the mid-1990s have helped galvanise political, press and public concerns.[1] However, after more than a decade of mainstream action for tackling the UK gang,[2] far from going away, it has emerged as part of a modern urban zeitgeist. Its ability to explain rule breaking by groups of youth is perhaps exemplified in the former Prime Minister's gang 'fight back' speech following the 2011 riots.[3] The power of the gang in providing convenient, common-sense causative explanations has now become something approaching uncontested orthodoxy that carries far reaching implications for schools and disproportionate consequences for Black male urban youth.

Over this time period, protracted academic and practice-based debates, in failing to reach a definitional consensus and common policy framework, have fostered uncertainties that undermine service quality to vulnerable young people. The Government has taken a firm position for the first time and provided in 2011 a single, clear, authoritative definition[4] intended to disambiguate definitional difficulties and provide guiding principles for ending gangs[5].

This official position builds extensively on findings from a review by a political think tank (see Centre for Social Justice, 2009), which proffered a definition that has been adopted not only in education (Department for Children, School and Families, 2010; NASUWT, 2008) but has also been 'taken up by the police service, Home Office, Youth Justice Board and HM Prison service' (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2007: 22). Most significantly perhaps, it has exerted influence over a cross-department Government paper that has shaped the Home Office's 'Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Strategy' and related work of local gang action teams.

The official position has had mixed consequences. It has, on the one hand, helped create consistency across disparate policy and service areas, for example allowing alignment between London Councils (Hallsworth and Duffy, 2010), and synergy in the responsibilities of Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime through the London Crime Reduction Board's Anti-Gangs Strategy Strategic Ambitions[6], the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) calculations for the number of gangs in London[7] and the justifications for its Shield[8] operation. Gang members also attract the most intensive supervision in safeguarding procedures for community based high-risk violent offenders, within both the integrated offender management framework and the multi-agency public protection arrangements. It also provides concomitance with legal provision through the Policing and Crime Act 2011[9], making possible the tightened definitional criterial for gangs in 2014[10] and allows concordance with joint enterprise law.

The official position has, on the other hand, assisted in constructing an ontological existence of the gang that is highly disputed (Aldridge et al, 2008; Smithson et al, 2012). This fundamentally questions its usefulness in public policy (Peterson, 2004; McGloin and Decker, 2010). The difficulties in establishing a consensual definition have led some experts to conclude not only that the gang is 'essentially an American product' (Klein, 1971: 3) but a criminological construct (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs, 2004).

Furthermore, those advocating for the gang's objective reality draw from a positivist criminology that has not only been vigorously contested by the British academy since the 1960s (see Taylor et al, 1973; Young, 2011; Young, 2007) but fails also to reflect the range of opinion within UK gang discourse. Although support is found for a clear definition of the UK gang (Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Communities that Care, 2002; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Pitts, 2008; Hallsworth and Young, 2006; Densley, 2013; Harding, 2014), this is subject to regional variation (Patrick, 1973; Bradshaw, 2005), and needs to take account of it being considered by some as a rare

phenomenon (Sharp et al, 2006). By others, its existence has been questioned or even rejected altogether (Downes, 1966; Campbell and Muncer, 1989; Aldridge et al, 2008; Marshall et al, 2005; Alexander, 2008; Mares, 2001).

Nonetheless, the UK gang is attributed an objective reality through identifiable, distinct group characteristics and defined as a 'relatively durable … discernible group for whom crime and violence is intrinsic to their identity and practice' (Hallsworth and Young, 2006: 68). Acceptance of the proposed UK academic definition in official policy and practice aligns with a narrow range of academic opinion that not only makes limited reference to broad sociological theory,[11] but fails to take account of a substantial body of relevant research, applied studies and evaluations in crime prevention, community safety and policing.

Applying a 'one size fits all' approach to defining the gang through the use of group characteristics causes long-recognised problems. It is resisted, not least, by those with practice-based experience (Toy, 2009) for its use of detrimental labelling (see Becker, 1963) and, as such, produces profound professional dilemmas. In avoiding stigmatisation or the possibility of inappropriate punitive consequences, many alternative terms are used to describe collective behaviour that is 'gang-like' (see Curry et al, 1992), including problematic or violent peer groups and urban street groups among others.

The group characteristics definition provides criteria for a framework and model of youth behaviour that prescribe three types of collective. Each is attributed a level of risk according to greater or lesser structure and criminality, that in being positioned on a continuum is bounded by a polemic that at one end contains the lowest risk 'peer groups' and the other 'organised criminal groups'. The gang is located between these (see Hallsworth and Young, 2006). A corresponding three-tier group typology and pyramid of risk model (see Hallsworth and Young, 2006) has been enthusiastically embraced by public sector agencies and become the cornerstone for operationalising a range of policing tactics, gang crime control and scaled youth justice interventions: the enthusiasm evidently coming from the utility of discernible group characteristics to objectively define and identify the gang and attach to it a level of risk.

Importantly, this conceptualisation provides a previously missing link that allows youth offending management to ingratiate gang policy with the tried and tested 'risk factor prevention paradigm' (Farringdon, 2000: 7). Herein, identifiable group characteristics and the pyramid of risk model result in a reductionism – which despite their ubiquitous use – adhere to the logic of risk factor methodology that remains highly contested (see Case and Haines, 2009; Kemshall et al, 2007; Armstrong, 2004; Bessant et al, 2003).

The official approach therefore builds on a logic that has its roots primarily in positivist criminology. The taken for granted checklist of group characteristics, in providing objective criteria, disturbingly

narrows both the nature and causal explanation of gang involvement. Moreover, when used to support risk-based youth justice, it has direct implications for effective prevention sought through early years intervention, troubled family support and safeguarding procedures (see the suggestions of the Home Office, 2008) but also how school policy and practice is seen as a protective factor against gang involvement (see Catalano and Hawkins, 1996; Communities that Care, 2002).

Despite limited UK research on gangs in school, existing reports suggest it is a growing concern (NASUWT, 2008). Research from the US shows, however, that although gang violence in schools is uncommon, its influence both within and near school is significant (Spergel, 1990) and its prevalence is commonly downplayed by officials (Stover, 1987). Additionally, Black pupils generally and males in particular are found to face disadvantage and perform less well than pupils from other ethnic groups (Strand, 2007). Education policy of the post-war period (Tomblinson, 2000), has attempted therefore to address ethnic and racial disadvantage, giving rise to special interventions (Mincy, 1994) aimed at tackling the disengagement and underachievement that are evidenced for example through school exclusion rates (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996).

In addition to the general social context, schooling is seen to position Black males between contrasting masculinities (Sewell, 1997), esteeming their athletic prowess and seeing them as standard-bearers of popular youth culture on the one hand while simultaneously demonising them in the classroom on the other. Observed differential school treatment (Sewell, 1997; Foster, 1995; Blair and Bourne, 1998; Irvine, 1990) is variously explained. Cultural dissonance (Driver, 1979) with teachers and school norms more generally, leads to Black males being seen as a threat (Steele, 1997) that in turn induces them to develop coping strategies (Majors and Billson, 1993).

Hence, the colour blind or 'racelessness' policy approach that often accompanies multi-culturalism is widely rejected (see Troyna and Carrington, 2011). Nevertheless, much of the existing theory on Black male youth school attainment is seen as not fully satisfactory (Steele, 1997) through a failure to move beyond cultural, ethnic and race-based generalisations. However, despite differing cultural ecologies (Ogbu,1997) a fundamental social and political positionality creates a common marginality in Black male opportunity, not simply in the US (Noguera, 1997) but in the transatlantic Black diaspora (Gilroy, 1995) that has clear implications for the UK.

Progressive ideas point to the intersecting nature of social oppression (Dei, 1999) and multifarious, shifting constructions that conflate in maladaptive behaviours (Sewell and Majors, 2001). Although race and ethnicity is a recurring theme for explaining the observed educational disadvantage of Black male youth (GiIlborn, 1995; Wright, 1985), it is argued that it is in fact more complex (Mac an Ghaill, 1988) or even a distraction from more significant social and institutional practices (Dei, 1999). Indeed, the stigmatisation of Black male pupils in UK school practice shares much with criminal justice and social welfare programmes of recent decades in giving disproportionate emphasis to punitive measures (Solomos, 1988).

Further, the official approach in UK academic discourse has allowed the rationalisation of a populist narrative about youth behaviour, race and crime. The dominant perception of the gang remains stubbornly aligned to a narrow preoccupation that under-theorises race (Joseph and Gunter, 2011) and therein constructs Black male urban youth (Alexander, 2008; Sveinsson, 2008) as the 'criminal other' (see Keith, 1993).

In failing to adequately deconstruct the orthodoxy that underpins the official approach, the gang is now rendered a reification, more reflective of the panic of a moral consensus (Cyr, 2003) than reflective of the real problem of youth violence (Sullivan, 2005). The current official position has hence imputed a definitional determinism that variously increases the likelihood of criminalising former nuisance behaviour (see Squires, 2008), and feeds a new youth justice (Goldson, 2000; Pitts, 2003) that adds momentum to a 'punitive turn' (Muncie, 2008) and a shift away from preventative welfare support to penal modernism (see Knepper, 2007; Garland, 2002).

Despite the obvious advantages in providing a definitional checklist, objective criteria and prescriptive risk factors, the discernible gang characteristics of the official approach go too far by inappropriately narrowing the reality of collective youth activity. However, seeing the gang as a social construct (Decker and Kempf-Leonard, 1991) ameliorates the simplifications, generalisations and essentialism that characterises the current official position, and provides opportunity for alternate accounts that acknowledge the impact of culture, interpreted realities and social processes. Such alternative views instead, for example, see gangs as essentially dynamic, short-lived, disorganised hybrid entities (Starbuck et al, 2001): the characteristics of which are fragmented, lack lasting structure or formal leadership and 'hanging out', not crime, is the primary activity (see Klein, 1971; Hagedorn, 1988).

The benefits of the current official approach therefore are outweighed by its legitimising of misplaced generalisations, essentialist assumptions and simplification of individual circumstances. The resulting definitional absolutism corroborates a conservative authoritarianism that promotes taken for granted policy and practice and encourages simplistic interpretations; the real life complexities of which, such as differences between deviant and compliant behaviour, the criminal and legal, are keenly contested (see Matza, 1964). Moreover, in correctly seeking to establish objective criteria for scaled interventions, a misaligned positivist focus on group characteristics, attempts a scientific validity that has only encouraged policy to go in a direction which ultimately elevates the gang's ontology to a pernicious stereotyped 'master status' (see Hughes, 1945) capable of doing very little to tackle the root causes of the real issues.

Methodology and research procedure

The limitations to the current official gang definition presented a methodological challenge. A mixed method approach therefore gave emphasis to developing in-depth qualitative insight that could

account for situational context, culture, subjectivity and agency through the use of both grounded investigation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and naturalistic methods (Lincon and Gluba, 1985).

The fieldwork involved participatory action research whilst working in a community organisation over an eighteen-month period. Located in a deprived borough of East London, the post involved direct support to young Black males who were at risk of or had been excluded from full-time mainstream education. Many were perceived to be involved in gangs. The approach necessarily involved shifting the study away from the knowledge, language, ideas and interests of the 'expert' researcher (Stringer, 1999) in order to develop insider understanding. Immersion was achieved through carrying out general office duties and providing direct classroom and learning and behavioural support in and out of school.

The mixed method approach included a content analysis of the organisation's pupil casefiles alongside detailed case studies, participant observations and personal interviews. Casefiles contained biographic and service information pertaining to pupil academic achievement and school behaviour compiled from two sources. Firstly, documents shared formally between service agencies as part of the case referral process, typically comprised of correspondence, official assessments and general reports exchanged between statutory agencies mostly: schools, social/housing services, behavioural support, educational psychologists and the police. Secondly, the community organisation also collated its own pupil admission, safeguarding, monitoring and management information. This was recorded in a series of standard forms from formal structured interviews with pupils, parents/guardians and representatives from other service organisations. It was used in establishing performance baselines as well as monitoring pupil progress against targets in 'Personal Development Plans'. Appraisals by the organisation's counsellor were confidential and so excluded from the research.

Content analysis on 104 case files was carried out in two stages. Firstly, an initial scoping exercise ascertained the general features of problematic behaviour and generated early research themes/questions. This was followed by an in-depth examination of 26 sample cases, selected to represent: race/ethnicity (contrasting those from a Caribbean, African or mixed heritage backgrounds[12]), age, family/personal background, type/range/seriousness of problematic behaviour, peer group influence, previous interventions, academic attainment, reason for exclusion and involvement with youth justice agencies.

A total of 92 formal semi-structured interviews were completed as part of organisational procedure that included: pupils, friends, the organisation's staff, family members, teachers and other professionals (primarily the police and youth offending officers). An additional 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted exclusively for research purposes. Three mentoring relationships, each lasting twelve months, provided detailed case studies. Participant observations in a range of formal and informal settings were used reflectively to generate and test emerging themes.

Findings on the nature and features of problematic behaviour's link to gangs

The terms 'challenging' and 'problematic' behaviour were used pervasively throughout official records and when speaking to professionals, as a pejorative description for a wide range of individual or collective troublesome and truculent conduct. These terms were used interchangeably to represent an array of misbehaviour ranging from a single act, to a composite activity that might vary in type, frequency, persistence and seriousness. It normally indicated non-compliance that was less serious than petty crime or anti-social behaviour and primarily used in a school context to represent disruptive classroom behaviour.

Compliance with statutory requirements meant all schools visited had clear policies, procedures and specialist behavioural staff. As the specific details of behaviour management policy were determined by individual schools, there was no single, shared definition or common procedure and although each had Black male pupils with behavioural difficulties, none had specific formal guidance or procedures making clear how their cultural needs should be addressed.

An analysis of casefile records identified twenty-nine different types of problematic behaviour associated with our sample through thematically grouping the number of times similar types of incident were mentioned. The number of pupils involved with each type were then ranked to reveal significant differences in levels of prevalence (see Appendix A). Single or very occasional incidents were not considered typical and so excluded from the results.

Notably, a small group of five behaviours was not only common to all 26 in the sample, but was ubiquitous, being carried out by a cross-section of pupils in all the lessons observed. These furtive signal actions, were intended to go undetected by teachers and were normally an indication for other pupils to start a sequence of low-level disruptions. When teachers failed to detect or successfully stop these with a verbal warning, these small infringements would invariably escalate into more sustained and serious misbehaviour.

The most frequently observed type of low-level disruption was a subtle noise/action that caught the attention of another pupil. As an instrumental attention-seeking signal, this took two main forms. When directed toward another individual, who was normally seated close-by, it would include anything from tapping a pen on the desk to throwing a small object. Alternatively this kind of action was performance to a whole group, most frequently seated on the same table, but it could also be to a whole class and include anything from a pupil shouting out answers or talking loudly (12 from sample) or leaving their seat without permission (total of 14). Records also showed this as frequently linked to behaviour described as being unsettled, not concentrating, being easily distracted, 'messing/clowning about' and disrupting others.

When low-level disruption was allowed to escalate, it seemingly followed a distinguishable pattern that almost invariably cumulated in explicit pupil defiance. Pupils would no longer respond to reasonable requests, fail to settle down to work and become generally uncooperative. Casefiles frequently mentioned it in relation to being lazy and/or not completing classwork (21 from sample), answering back/rudeness and refusing to follow teachers' instructions. This defiance was not exclusive to school but was also found at home, in other service contexts and even with the police. It was characterised mainly by direct verbal or even physical conflict with an adult authority figure, but was sometimes expressed through indirect means, such as embarrassing a teacher and getting others to laugh.

Action taken to manage low level disruption was usually informal and depended largely on its seriousness/persistence. It might typically involve no more than a verbal reprimand but could result in a phone call home, a lesson exclusion or going to see a senior manager. Some low-level problematic behaviour was expressive in nature and connected to a learning difficulty. Fourteen of the cases examined had been assessed as near or above the threshold of ADHD[13] or other learning disability (frequently dyslexia or dyspraxia). Teachers, with the support of specialist staff, were generally aware of any additional needs. A statement from a formal assessment illustrates how behavioural problems might link to a wider social, emotional or learning need:

He [Black male pupil] has said that he gets bored in class, and it's when this happens he starts playing with his pencil by tapping on the table, does not listen and then distracts other children.

Young people's explanations of their own behaviour could differ considerably from official assessments, with many not viewing even extreme behaviour in exclusively negative terms. Much was rationalised as an everyday necessity for 'surviving in life', or shielding from the taunts or aggressive consequences of being seen as 'a pussy'. Many were found to purposefully adapt their behaviour to context and expectations. For example, when in a group and as a response to the dares/taunts of peers, an individual pupil was observed to 'go hard' causing his general behaviour to deteriorate. The same individual could be well behaved at home but not at school, or work hard and respond positively to some teachers/adults but not others. Even those with the most chronic problems could be exemplary in some lessons, with a particular teacher, when working one-to-one, or in the presence of a parent/guardian or other adult authority figure such as a Head Teacher. The following illustrates a young person's rationale for modulating their behaviour:

It's easier [behaving well in a lesson] for some [teachers], ye. You don't mind ye, because some don't go on with them bait rules and like they're a G running things like they're on road, like them man and them who come with husslins[14], so you deal in the same way. (15 year old excluded pupil)

Failing to adjust behaviour, or an ability to 'code-switch' between the variable norms and expectations of differing formal and informal settings, was observed to be a major contributor to what was often seen as problematic behaviour. These adjustment failures were most poignant in the transition between break-times and classroom lessons and when reconciling norms that operate inside and outside school. Most pupils recognised when transition is necessary and achieved the required adjustments, but a small number consistently did not. An example was a pupil that regularly got into trouble in lessons immediately after a break-time through frequently failing to tone down boisterous behaviour and settle down to work.

Unfair treatment was frequently seen by pupils as a reason for not following teacher/adult instructions, with the resulting recalcitrance becoming an attempt to highlight or redress a perceived wrong. When describing the incidents leading to his exclusion, one pupil described how 'the teacher was always picking on me but did nothing when others made noise and didn't do their work'. Several claimed that although they were often not the cause of a problem, they were more frequently than others blamed and attempting to explain the facts would result in conflict with a teacher.

Although official records contained several allegations of racial discrimination of varying degrees of seriousness, none had been objectively proven. Despite this, several pupils, parents and even some staff expressed the view that in disproportionate numbers, Black male pupils received inordinately serious sanctions. It was claimed that existing school procedures, although capable of responding to most types of incident, complex needs or multiple vulnerabilities (an example given was looked after pupils in local authority care), would frequently stretch capacity or staff expertise in relation to issues of race/culture. A teacher commented that 'the thorny issue of race and gangs is often the elephant in the room that fails to be addressed directly and so only adds to their [Black males] disengagement and underachievement'. They went on to say that, as a result, many teachers either largely ignored behaviour that did not cause too much disruption or too readily reverted to punitive sanctions.

Casefiles described all pupils in the sample as having a negative attitude but this was not fully in concord with the assessment of behaviour. Only two pupils were considered to have 'chronic' behavioural problems, with pupils and parents claiming that this results from schools and teachers' poor understanding of what was described by one respondent as 'how Black people behave because of their culture'. Further, attitude or behaviour was not observed as problematic at all times and in all circumstances but conformed to distinguishable patterns. Most problematic behaviour was episodic, happening in short bursts, lasting either no more than a few minutes or, less intensely, as stubborn brooding over a few hours. These would almost without exception be triggered by a particular lesson, teacher or pupil. Problematic behaviour could, alternatively, simmer for a few days, often accompanying periods of personal crisis or chaotic adverse circumstance. This was found to commonly relate to family breakdown/disruption (22 pupils), poor living conditions

(13 pupils), bereavement (5 serious instances were mentioned in relation to friends that were the victims of knife crime) or other personal loss (for one pupil this included the emigration of a grandparent).

All of the violent incidents examined were regarded by the school as serious and attracted an immediate response. These were the most frequent cause of a temporary or permanent exclusion (see Table 1). Moreover, thirteen of the fifteen cases involving fighting, pupil attack or possessing a weapon were mentioned as being either 'gang related', part of ongoing 'postcode violence' or related to 'other groups'. However, more detailed analysis showed the nature, features and cause of violent incidents to be more nuanced.

Table 1 Main reasons for permanent or temporary exclusion

Type of Behaviour	Number of Pupils (total = 26)
Fighting	8
Deliberate unprovoked attack on pupil	6
Violent or abusive to staff	4
Possessing a weapon	3
Possessing alcohol or drugs	2
Use of weapon	2
Selling drugs	1

For the majority of those observed, jocular play-fighting was integral to their everyday mundane behaviour. Much involved little more than slapping, punching (mostly to the arms, legs and stomach) and wrestling. It was almost exclusively not premeditated (an exception was what was described as an 'ambush' in the playground) nor ongoing and clearly not aimed at causing any lasting injury. However, for seven of the eight pupils excluded for fighting, this was recorded as part of the justification for exclusion, even though this type of horseplay was generally overlooked by teacher/adult supervisors in most instances, prompting nothing more than a verbal instruction to stop.

A second type of violence however resulted from actual disagreements that mostly included abusive verbal exchanges, aggressive pushing, grappling, injurious punching and kicking that might result in bruising or minor bleeding (such as from a swollen lip). Usually a one-off, these incidents were most often satisfactorily resolved by peers, often before escalating to actual fighting, or ended through adult intervention. When this did not happen, the conflict and threats can build over several hours and culminate in an altercation – a pattern typical in six of the eight records examined.

Friendships and other relationships inside and outside school were found to have a major influence

on the cause and escalation of the violence that was recorded as being related to gangs. Twelve of the nineteen incidents listed in Appendix A related directly to friendship breakdowns, two of which had continued for over a year. Additionally, five of the six incidents of deliberate unprovoked attacks in the above table were linked to a previous altercation involving what was described as gang involvement. Several of these contained some evidence of being tit-for-tat recriminations, forming cycles of retaliatory violence, that as part of the breakdown and formation of new friendships, become part of young people's everyday social processes and that include bullying and being bullied.

Weapons also alarmingly formed an integral part of a *mutually protective violent culture*, where all three individuals caught with a weapon were carrying a knife. All three claimed it was for protection and had recently been in fights with others (and were seen as involved in an ongoing gang conflict). They were also all recorded as involved with bullying or being bullied. Links, however, between carrying and using a weapon are tenuous with neither of the two incidents recorded where a weapon was actually used involving a knife; one was a chair, the other a pair of compasses.

More menacing interactions were found between groups of friends that for reasons of mutual safety, developed a protective culture described as 'back up'. This culture did not primarily produce isolated conflicts between individuals, but cycles of intimidation, threats and bullying that became a backdrop to an oppressive tension that pervaded everyday routine activity. Within this environment, an ordinary disagreement between individuals could quickly escalate into cycles of recrimination and retaliatory violence and rapidly involve friends (which was then regarded by schools and others as gang related) and/or family members (normally an older sibling). From Table A above, six of the eight exclusions for fighting were connected to previous incidents seemingly of this kind (three involved one other friend and two more than three).

Although none of the schools visited had a formal gang policy, several staff said they were aware of a problem, had first-hand experience or had previously taken steps to address a pupil's gang involvement. No evidence from the study, however, showed the behaviour of any pupil in the sample accorded with the current official gang definition. Nonetheless, virtually all the young people, parents/guardians and professionals interviewed saw gang activity as a widespread, serious problem. The following was typical of how problem behaviour, crime and gangs were linked:

> *Behaviour in this lesson is typical of the problems he [the pupil with problematic behaviour] causes around school, like bullying, acting tough, threatening others. He's rumoured to be involved in a lot of the local disturbances and crime, causing violence and even selling drugs... the gang he belongs to is well known for it locally.* (Secondary school teacher)

The community organisation, at times, differed considerably when compared to statutory assessments of problematic behaviour and gang activity. From the sample, it assessed 17 pupils

as being generally well-behaved, showing little of the persistent, disruptive behaviour described by the schools and only 1 pupil was thought to have gang involvement. Similarly, in only 3 of the 26 cases was there broad agreement and unqualified support of schools' behavioural plans and there was no unqualified agreement with assessments of gang involvement. Observed differences most often stemmed from the extent to which consideration was given to a pupil's culture, the context of individual incidents and personal circumstance. In addition, service interventions gave greater emphasis to addressing the perceived low school expectations, cultivating parent/guardian involvement and linking interventions to out of school activity.

Conclusions and issues for discussion

School records showed the term 'problematic' was used to describe a wide range of non-compliant, deviant or challenging behaviours. No single definition or procedures was found for tackling it and none of the schools visited had specific measures for addressing the particular learning needs or behaviours of Black male pupils. Significantly, records showed that low-level disruptions, not only in our sample but among all pupils observed, were without exception a precursor to more serious misbehaviour. When inadequately dealt with, these disruptions escalated, becoming more serious and persistent misconduct.

Many of those studied, however, did not see their behaviour exclusively in negative terms, were aware of their misbehaviour and could provide sophisticated justifications for it. Although unfair treatment and discrimination were frequently given as reasons for disengagement or defiance, some behaviour was clearly calculated. Used instrumentally, some patterns of misbehaviour provided a form of social capital (see Deuchar 2009), similar in nature to what is described as 'cool pose' by Majors and Billson (1993).

Even those presenting the most challenging attitudes and behaviour were not problematic at all times or in all circumstances and could be exemplary in some situations. A behavioural strategy enabled many of the young people to exercise agency and empower themselves to gain a level of control. Purposeful adaptations of problematic and compliant behaviours, in accordance to context and expectations, were predicated on sophisticated cost-benefit calculations. However, unlike other forms of social capital, access to problematic behaviour is unrestricted; an immediately available means of achieving what is attainable in dealing with the oftentimes complex social uncertainties experienced.

Despite the limitations of a small-scale study, evidence from official records provided no indubitable link between problematic behaviour and gang involvement. Most of the problem behaviour studied was rather a series of overlapping episodes, most pronounced during periods of personal crisis. The urban classroom was, therefore, a complex, dynamic, and layered backdrop to wider cultural life-worlds.

A perceived need for safety and protection alarmingly valorised differing types and levels of violence in ways that obscure the boundary between right and wrong, between bullying and being bullied as well as justifying carrying a weapon. Semi-formal or unsupervised daily routines inside and outside school, can incubate the production of behaviour and values that juxtapose the expected norms of school and wider mainstream society. The playground during break-times, events along the corridor between classes, the journey to/from school, as mostly adult-absent times/space, provide interactive opportunities that become the catalyst for problematic behaviour particularly for those reluctant or slow in switching between informal and formal settings.

Interventions that adhered rigidly to official guidance took little account of nuanced individual need and personal circumstance, rendering the schools in particular incapable of moving beyond the use of increasingly punitive measures. These measures, without exception, failed to produce consistent improvements in behaviour. The present gang policy framework therefore had the effect of oversimplifying pupil behaviour to adhere to a definition of gang that failed in taking account of the complex needs of the most vulnerable. Instead this framework, used practically, inappropriately conflates a wide range of non-compliant and anti-social behaviours into a 'one size fits all' service approach.

The community-based service studied contrasted sharply with the interventions of schools and other statutory providers in important ways. With much designed to directly complement mainstream provision, focus was given to helping Black male pupils understand and overcome the disproportionate negative consequences of their race and culture. Its service ethos challenged negative assumptions and low pupil aspirations and instead focussed on establishing high standards and expectations. Crucially, emphasis was given to building relationship and trust between staff, pupils and their families that in turn allowed it to organise services in ways that were adaptive and highly responsive to changing individual need. A reluctance to rigidly adhere to the prescriptions of the official approach profoundly enhanced its ability to respond appropriately to complex pupil need in specific, relevant ways.

The criminological basis of the official gang definition was hence found to encourage a reductionist response to an array of dynamic culture forces and social relations that govern how an individual pupil's behaviour changes when part of a group as well as over time and according to context. Further, the vast majority of youth behaviour encountered was neither criminal nor inordinately problematic, with the evidence clearly showing much of their everyday behaviour as essentially different in nature and purpose to the characteristics prescribed by the current official gang definition. Even the most extreme, persistent behaviour encountered was only indirectly connected to (through a relative, friend or acquaintance), and at best on the margins of, the serious organised criminal activity of gangs.

The current official position therefore exposes current policy and practice to the dangers of 'group

hazard' (Erickson, 1971), where although a group or individuals within it might show behaviour that can be associated with gangs, it is neither evidence of direct involvement nor a prerequisite to it (see Morash, 1983). The evidence suggests, nonetheless, that some extreme behaviour brought the young people into contact with individuals (often older recidivist offenders) or social situations that increased exposure and vulnerability to serious crime and gang-related activity.

Close friendships can have a critical role in increasing exposure to gang activity (Joseph 2010), with wider social relationships determining proximity to local networks of serious crime or 'gang' activity. These relationships might increase the likelihood of direct contact with the illegitimate economy. For the young people in the study, the cultural landscapes of their everyday urban lifeworlds might provide windows into the profit-driven, organised criminal market economy that 'real gangs' exploit.

Findings therefore affirm a need for official policy to take greater account of the cultural and social processes that young people are part of. In contrast to the static and inflexible group characteristics used in the official definition of the gang, consideration needs to be given to the social processes and cultural contexts (see Sawyer, 2005; McGloin et al, 2011; Byrne and Callaghan, 2013) that drive everyday youth activity, and where both problematic behaviour and gang activity might emerge (Sullivan et al, 2011). The study's findings therefore point to a series of practical implications for a more potentially useful approach to the UK gang that has at least two direct implications for education and school behaviour. Firstly, for some, youth subcultures provide the social capital not available through academic success. Secondly, much formal education and intervention is experienced as both irrelevant to overcoming immediate life-world concerns and as likely to lead to future real-life social exclusion. The current official definition of the gang, in failing to adequately account for the complex, dynamic nuances of everyday social processes and subcultures that dictate behaviour, poses a real danger of inappropriately defining gang involvement and wrongly targeting interventions.

Moving away from prescriptive group characteristics as the sole means of defining the gang and accurately differentiating types of relational positionality is therefore crucial to effective prevention. Youth behaviour not sustained by financial profit, and only indirectly connected to the benefits of the illegitimate economy, can only be regarded as marginal gang-like behaviour. By contrast, gang-related activity is associated with persistent, serious, organised crime that normally only involves adults. Gang-like behaviour for the young people in the urban context studied, did not appear to directly correlate to gang involvement. As such, defining the 'gang' via the characteristics and activity of the group will only lead to misplaced assumptions and interventions.

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Appendix A

Number and rank of pupils involved in types of problematic behaviour

Type of behaviour	Numbers of pupils involved	Rank
Disruptive noise/action	26	1
Not concentrate/easily distracted/ unsettled/ not stay on task	26	1
Messing/ clowning around	26	1
Not obey instructions/ no respond to requests/ uncooperative	26	1
Answering back/rudeness	26	1
Gang involvement/ peer pressure	24	6
Lazy, not doing class or homework	21	7
Bullying/ being bullied	19	8
Use alcohol or drugs	15	9
Get out of seat/ leave class	14	10
Loud or unauthorised talk/ shout out answers	12	11
Electronic device during class	11	12
Swearing, verbal abuse at pupils	11	12
Fighting (including play fighting)	10	14
Late for class/ school	9	15
Abuse/ swear at staff	9	15
Damage school property/ vandalism	8	17
Chewing/ eating/ drinking	8	17
Aggression/ threats/ intimidate staff	8	17
Truant	7	20
Improper dress	7	20
Possess weapon/ life threatening object	6	22
Use of weapon	5	23
Violent attack on pupil	4	24
Violent to staff	3	25
Smoke or possess cigarettes	3	25
Possess drug accessories	3	25
Possess alcohol or drugs	2	25
Sell drugs	1	29

Sample = 26 pupils

Notes

1   The Evening Standard's "Frontline London" campaign that followed a special investigation on 25th September 2014 on the gangs of London provides a recent example.

2   The first government "gang summit" was held on 10th January 2003 following the tragic deaths of Latisha Shakespeare and Carlene Ellis and examined concerns about deaths from increasing violent youth crime

3   Speech on "the fight-back" was made after the 2011 riots. And can be viewed from http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2011/08/societyfight-work-rights

4   A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who; see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. See HM Government (2011).

5   Summarised as the fives P's: 1. Providing support 2. Prevention 3. Pathways Out. 4. Punishment and Enforcement 5. Partnership Working.

6   See Mayor of London (2014) Strategic Ambitions for London: gangs and serious youth violence at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Ambitions%20for%20London_%20Gangs%20and%20SYV%202014.pdf.

7   Figures presented at the Greater London Authority Policing Global Cities: Gangs Summit on 2 June 2014 showed London contained 3,495 members belonging to 224 gangs with 70% between 17 and 23 years old. Figures also quoted at: https://www.london.gov.uk/media/mayor-press-releases/2014/06/mayor-hosts-international-summit-as-london-turns-a-corner-on

8   A trial initiative lunched on 22.1.2015 by London's Mayor with a £200,000 budget seeks to bring tough new measures in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Westminster and Haringey for tackling gangs.

9   The Act defines gang-related violence as groups that: a) consist of at least three people; b) use a name emblem or colour or has any other characteristic that enables its members to be identified by others as a group; and c) is associated with a particular area.

10 Courts now only have to prove only one person and not a whole group displays conduct that is characteristic of gang behaviour http://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/courts-get-extra-powers-to-control-london-gangs-9499817.html

11 Notable exceptions include Harding's (2014) game theory and Hallsworth's (2013) interpretation of arboreal and rhizomatic structures.

12 Giving special consideration to the educational needs of mixed heritage pupils (Tickly et al 2004)

13 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

14 Husslin was a term used in describing criminal activity and other similar endeavours for the purpose of financial gain that take place in an unstructured and unregulated street environment.

Social work with children in the Youth Justice system – messages from practice

Jane Pye and Ian Paylor

Abstract

This article is about policy and practice within the youth justice system in England and Wales. The article argues that actively engaging and using emotions, both in terms of the practitioner and service user, enables a deeper social work approach to take place and enables the forming of relationships. Such relationships can then be used as the tool themselves to bring about positive changes for children and families who are receiving intervention from youth justice social workers. Social workers working within the youth justice system know through their experience what is most likely to be effective in meeting the aims of the system – that is prevention of offending. To achieve this means real questions need to be asked about the effectiveness of the technical-rational risk focused approach of the current youth justice system in favour of a system which adopts the principles of Munro (2011) and empowers social workers to actively use critically reflective and reflexive practice and supports the use of self to build powerful social work relationships with the vulnerable children they work with.

Key words: Youth justice; social work; reflexive practice; relationships.

OUR REASONS for writing and submitting this article about policy and practice within the England and Wales youth justice system are twofold. The first is to remedy the surprising lack of any discussion regarding the work of social workers within the youth justice system. The second is to emphasise social work's role in restricting the harmful consequences of offending behaviour and protecting young people within a climate of neo-liberal ideology, responsibilisation and risk management (Goldson, 2007; Armstrong, 2004; Muncie, 2011; Rogowski, 2012). Contemporary discussions of social welfare have increasingly been concerned with the concept of 'risk' (Webb, 2006). 'Risk' has been considered an important factor within the field of criminal justice for decades. How 'risky' a person is both prior to and after offending is a major consideration that the various agencies of criminal justice have to undertake. Risk is one of the factors used by criminal justice agencies, particularly Probation and Youth Offending Teams (YOT), to determine how to sentence, punish and ultimately rehabilitate offenders. Increasingly, risk refers to the governing of crime through techniques known as 'risk management'. No one group has been subjected to a risk-crazed governance more than young people (Carlen, 2008).

Whither social work within our youth justice system?

Social work is an influential activity concerned with working alongside individuals and families who are experiencing some kind of social difficulty. Social work can be easily explained on one level as a process of assessment and then intervention to support, help, challenge and empower users of social work services to make changes to their own lives in order to improve their situation in some way. However, this positivist vision of assessment and then intervention is an over-simplistic view of social work and fails to acknowledge the deeper psychological factors that should be involved in social work practice. In order to support permanent and long term change in a service user, a social work practitioner has to engage with the complexities of people to gain a real understanding of the service user, their motivations, thoughts and feelings. Working with users of social work services then, is far more than a simplistic approach of managing the risk that they are assessed to present to either themselves or others. Real engagement with the individual service user is no simple matter despite many theories and models available to help develop understanding. The processes that take place between practitioner and service user to allow and support this engagement are multifaceted and arguably 'hidden' from non-social work practitioners because it is difficult to find forms of words to articulate what is actually taking place between a social worker and a service user when such working relationships are forming.

Social work is concerned with (or should be) the internal and intrinsic injuries a person may be experiencing as a result of a life event. Very often with children in the youth justice system this will be some kind of emotional trauma caused by abuse and/or neglect. The criminal and anti-social behaviour by children who become involved in the youth justice system is the manifestation of the emotional trauma they have suffered. Social workers will try to address the reasons for this trauma by 'fixing' the external factors causing it but will also aim to try to 'fix' the internal emotional trauma of a service user. This work is therefore heavily tied up with emotional health which is not a visible facet of a person, unlike for example a broken leg. Therefore, when social workers deploy techniques to work with service users to promote emotional healing and growth as a way to change their behaviour and attitudes, it is very difficult to explain exactly what is going on in this 'hidden' world.

Social work is important and distinctive because it is steeped in this hidden world of managing and exploring emotions with the aim of helping the service user to feel better, have more understanding and feel empowered to manage their life situation in a positive way. There are many people in local communities all over the UK who have a real and genuine desire to help and support the positive development of others, but this desire alone is not enough to carry out the complexities of social work. Social work practice requires practitioners to operate with a high level of self-awareness and consciousness because it is so intrinsically linked with the hidden world of emotions. Without the ability to work with emotional intelligence (Morrison, 2007), it is questionable whether a real working relationship can be established between a social worker and service user (Ruch, 2005).

The evidence of the need for a working relationship between service user and social worker to enable effective work to take place and provide a space for the acknowledgement and exploration of emotions is overwhelming (for example Munro, 2011; McLeod, 2010; Barry, 2000; Winter, 2009). There is evidence to demonstrate that children who are looked after by their local authority or are involved in the child protection system achieve better outcomes if they experience a positive relationship with their social worker (McLeod, 2010; Dearden, 2004). This draws attention to a potential emerging evidence base about the importance of relationships resulting in better overall outcomes for children who experience statutory social work (see Wilson et al, 2011, for a general overview and Welbourne, 2012, for a specific focus on this issue).

The challenge for social workers who practice in statutory systems such as the youth justice system is in finding a way to manage the requirements of the statutory systems with their risk management focus without allowing it to 'get in the way' of true relationship based social work practice. If we believe that social work requires the use of self-awareness and emotional intelligence, it is easy to see why the 'rational-technical' approach (Tilbury, 2004; Horwath, 2007; Dixon, 2013) which promotes filling in forms and ticking boxes does not feel relevant or useful for social workers in the youth justice system who are dedicated to working with children with multiple and profound vulnerabilities. Practising social workers know through their experience that this 'rational-technical' approach does nothing to support engagement and relationship building with children and families which is necessary to provide the space and opportunity to work with hidden feelings and emotions as a way of beginning to support the service user to make changes to their own behaviour. In fact, it could be argued that the managerial and rational-technical approach is the very approach which reduces the chance for high quality social work interactions to take place with statutory systems as practitioners are forced to pay more attention to the procedures than to social work practice (Howe, 2010; Munro, 2011). The challenge for practising and experienced social workers is that organisations are not always ready to accept challenge to the processes and systems they have in place, or to accept that knowledge gained through critical reflection and experience is legitimate enough to challenge the current focus on procedural (Fook and Askerland, 2007) and risk focused social work.

Process

The youth justice system has created a process driven environment in which practitioners aim to carry out social work. Aiming to carry out 'real' or 'true' social work which is based on relationships, works with emotions and is critically reflective and reflexive is therefore difficult. If we think about the realities of what happens to a young person who has offended the youth justice system is a living example of a system that is procedural in its treatment of children and as a consequence challenging for social work practitioners. There is a basic sequence of events that take place once a young person is alleged to have offended, first they are arrested and held in the police station. Here they will be questioned in the presence of a supportive adult and legal

representative (hopefully). Once a decision is made by the police about the next step the young person is likely to be bailed to the next youth court where they will again need the advice of a solicitor to offer advice about plea. If a guilty plea is entered, the young person's case is likely to be adjourned for the preparation of a report by the local Youth Offending Team (YOT). The YOT is currently the organisation through which social work activities are carried out with children within the youth justice system. The purpose of the report is to advise the magistrates what the most effective sentence to prevent re-offending for that young person will be. For the YOT to prepare such a report a thorough assessment must be completed. This assessment requires information gathering from other agencies and professional skills in engaging with the young person and their family to gain an insight into their situation. This information is formulated into an assessment and recorded on the Core Asset which is 26 pages long. This Asset document also screens the young person's risk of serious harm to others and vulnerability. However the main role of the Core Asset is to assess a young person's risk of re-offending defined by a process of scoring 12 sections covering the young person's life and situation. Young people therefore become defined in terms of their risk of re-offending by their Asset score in a positivist method of predicting re-offending. This assessment is risk led not needs led. A further assessment is completed if the young person is assessed to present a serious risk of harm to others. From this assessment process potentially, and very often, three different types of intervention plan will then be formulated.

This is a rigorous process for a young person to be subjected to and because it is so procedural there are inherent dangers that it could become an habitual activity for some youth justice social workers resulting in a lack of critical reflection and analysis of a young person's risks and vulnerabilities. Once the assessment is done, the court report will be written ready for the sentencing hearing. The young person then returns to court and is sentenced. Once the young person is sentenced, the assessment process is usually re-done because National Standards for Youth Justice (YJB, 2010) require assessments to be reviewed if there is any change in the young person's circumstances. IT systems in the youth justice system interpret the sentencing outcome as a change for the young person and therefore triggers the re-assessment process.

It is important to pause here to reflect on this process. For a child between the ages of 10 and 17 this is a confusing and potentially disengaging process. Despite efforts of youth courts and YOT practitioners to be more receptive to the needs of children to promote their engagement in the court process the fact is courts remain a very adult orientated environment and children have little understanding of what is going on despite the very best efforts of those involved. For example, the language used within the process is not designed to enable children to follow their own sentencing process. Sentence names such as Detention and Training Order and Youth Rehabilitation Order are not familiar terms to children. It is perhaps useful to consider this adult orientated process as a barrier to in-depth social work as once the child is sentenced to supervision by the YOT the social work practitioner has to undo some of the damage done by the disengaging and marginalisation experienced by children going through this formal process before any meaningful direct work can begin.

Task of social workers in the YJS/Asset/Intervention Plan

The task of social workers working within this system is twofold. Of course, social workers have to work within the legal rules that form the framework of the youth justice system but within this find a way to avoid the procedures becoming a permanent barrier to engagement. As well as the youth justice system up to the point of sentence being procedural, the youth justice process beyond the point of sentence could also be seen this way with youth justice social workers being required to plan the intervention with the child they are supervising and their family through the use of standardised forms and work within time-scales. Adherence to these time-scales is closely monitored by youth justice managers thus reflecting the manageralist culture that exists in social work (Ruch, 2012). So, again the child is put through a process although at least at this stage, there is an opportunity for the social worker to begin to use social work skills and approaches to minimise the impact of such a process driven system.

Tasks of social work practitioners working within the youth justice system can be split into four – assessment, intervention, referrals and advocacy. We are continually led to understand that assessment is the cornerstone to all effective work with young people who offend (Baker, 2008; Baker et al, 2011) and whilst the writers would not seek to argue against this view, care needs to be taken when considering the link between really understanding a young person and the ability to translate this into a written format. It is a concern that if we continue to believe that the most perfectly written assessment will equate to an excellent experience and outcome for a young person working with a social worker in the youth justice system, we will encourage social workers to spend their already limited time on writing assessments rather than actually carrying out direct social work with children. Added to this, if organisations adopt the stance that well written assessments are the same as good interventions, then managers will also be forced to spend time reviewing assessments rather than supporting the development of direct work skills and critically reflective practice. As Munro (2011) points out, inspection regimes have a huge influence on what organisations spend their time developing as 'good practice'.

Social workers are required to demonstrate intervention skills throughout their social work career in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework (TCSW, 2012). However, there are questions about what constitutes intervention and how social workers can record interactions with service users in a way that meets organisation requirements. Intervention skills and activities will be returned to later as it is through interactions with service users that enable change to take place. Good social work intervention should not be tied up with the writing of Intervention Plans – similarly to assessments, a well-written plan will not equate to well delivered social work. As Munro (2011) discusses, the current approach in social work has focused practitioners on processes rather than direct work with children meaning practitioners have been given a message that the quality of written assessments and intervention plans are what is important, not the actual social work with children with complex needs.

Referrals to other agencies are common within the youth justice system with its case management approach to working with children. Whilst is cannot be denied that multi agency collaborative working can be very positive (Burnett and Appleton, 2004) when coordinated and sequenced appropriately, care must be taken in relation to involving so many practitioners that this hinders the forming of the key relationship with the case manager (Munro, 2011). Relationships in youth justice and other areas of social work are the cornerstone of effective and successful work with service users so effort must be put into the development of these relationships. However, in reality the system creates challenges with this as organisations adopt an approach that intervention sequencing is dictated to by Asset scores rather than the understanding that a relationship must first be formed between the practitioner and child. It could perhaps be argued that this practice is driven by fear in organisations who gain a sense of false protection by a simplistic approach of following a procedure rather than allowing a social worker to use their professional judgement about where the work needs to start with the particular service user (Munro, 2011). So, for example, if a child is assessed to have substance use issues which are assessed to be a significant contributing factor towards a risk of re-offending (note – not welfare need), there is an expectation that a referral to a specialist substance use agency will be made regardless of whether the case manager assesses the young person is ready for that area of work to be undertaken. This process driven way of working can be explained by the anxiety held by organisations of a child coming to harm, in this case through substance use, and the belief that criticism will be cast on the organisation for not addressing this need in the young person. This risk adverse practice is steeped in the belief that individuals are straight forward and predictable and can be managed using a positivist cause and effect approach (Ruch, 2005).

Advocacy is not a term often used in youth justice circles although there is some anecdotal evidence that advocacy as an activity is taking place all the time by practitioners within the youth justice system. Advocacy serves two purposes in social work in the youth justice system. Firstly, there is no doubt that being involved in the youth justice system has a negative labelling impact on young people (Goldson, 2000); consequently, youth justice social workers must have skills in presenting a young person's situation so that they do not encounter any further oppression and discrimination than they are likely to have already experienced. Secondly, advocacy is a legitimate social work activity (Maclean and Harrison, 2011) which will enable young people to partake in society, which has the subsequent effect of a young person feeling a sense of worth and engagement in their local community which in turn reduces both their vulnerability and the risk of re-offending. Further to this, a practitioner advocating on behalf of a child is likely to be experienced positively by the child and this will further build the working relationship that the child has with the practitioner. Bringing advocacy into the forefront of social worker's minds through critical reflective and reflexive thinking will support its development and usefulness in the youth justice system. However, launching and promoting advocacy as a formal youth justice activity in the current system has some risks attached to it. Given the state of the current systematic approach to youth justice social work, care needs to be taken that promoting advocacy does not

result in a 'tick-box' approach to advocating for a young person, rather advocacy practice needs to be supported and developed in a way that allows social workers the freedom to use this approach when they judge that it is necessary.

Feelings/emotions and link to relationships

It has been argued that social work is an important business tied up with emotions and feelings but that youth justice social work takes place in a system which is more focused on risk and process than engaging with social work as a practice. Given this, a useful question to ask is how might a child experience involvement in the youth justice system? Drawing on the writers experience, children at the post sentence stage encounter a number of different responses and feelings – relief, confusion, fright and hope to name but a few. These can be distressing and/or overwhelming emotional responses. The importance of practitioners being aware and focusing on these feelings rather than being concerned with getting to the next stage in the process driven system is vital as this awareness provides the opportunity for acknowledgement of emotions and the beginnings of the formation of the social work relationship. However, it is not enough for a practitioner to be only aware of the emotional state of the child they are working with. It could be argued that it is not possible for a social work practitioner in the youth justice system to be able to 'tune in' with how a young person is feeling if they are not aware of their own emotions and how the early stages of the relationship forming is impacting on them. This acceptance that simply being with a young person with a view to trying to comprehend their experience enables empathy and understanding to develop. Being able to empathise is one of the most important skills that youth justice practitioners need to have (Prior and Mason, 2010). So in the early post sentence stage of working with a young person, the social worker must ask themselves how they feel about this situation. Sometimes, in practice, it may be hard to be honest about how it can feel as a practitioner to be faced with working with a child whose life situation is dire. But that's what social work is, the crux of the practice of social work is about getting alongside and 'close' to those who are really in need, working hard to imagine how that child's situation impacts on both their feelings, thoughts and their behaviour. This can be an emotionally uncomfortable place for social workers to be. The easier position is to note the problems the child is having and try to 'mend' them in a task focused way as our bureaucratic social systems appear to support (Fook and Askerland, 2007; Ferguson, 2014). But, if we really want to facilitate change in those in need, social workers within the youth justice system must be supported to reflect with the young person and understand them holistically taking into account unique emotions, feelings, uncertainties and risks. This enables children to be understood as complex beings and dismisses the superficial levels of engagement that a process and risk focused system encourages in favour of a deeper relationship focused approach that will truly engage with the uniqueness of each child and consider their criminal behaviour as a manifestation of their life experiences (Ruch, 2005).

There is evidence to indicate that social work practice as a whole has become more concerned

with meeting targets which are deemed to then manage risk than forming the foundations of a relationship that will actually support and facilitate change and growth in a child and their family (Munro, 2011). However, it is important to remember that it is the structural and organisational aspects of the youth justice system that is the potential barrier to relationship forming (Winter, 2009). Youth justice success is measured by outcomes such as whether the young person re-offended, rather than the process that the child will have experienced whilst working with a youth justice practitioner. The reasons why children engage in criminal behaviour are complex and there is no 'quick fix' to preventing re-offending. However in the manageralist culture of the youth justice system there is no clear way of measuring the holistic positive development of a child which will take place through the social work relationship so the system reduces measurements of success to the question of whether the young person has re-offended.

Relationships in social work

Within the practice arena defining and articulating what a good social work relationship looks like is difficult. It may be easier to ask those involved what a social work relationship feels like but it is questionable whether organisations are comfortable with the acknowledgement and understanding that feelings and emotions are legitimate social work concepts to pay very close attention to (Taylor et al, 2008). The writers would advocate for the real engagement with feelings of both the practitioner and service user – and to do so with genuine consciousness and involvement of the child in transparent and open conversations. It is working at this deep level of honesty which enables a working relationship to grow and also provides the social worker with an opportunity to model a way of exploring emotions and managing emotions that a child within the youth justice system is unlikely to have been exposed to before. There are a number of activities that anyone can do to form a working relationship with someone – basic things such as being on time for appointments, communicating what you mean, working hard for the person in question, listening, taking someone seriously and generally supporting problem solving. Whilst all of these have a place in forming a relationship, we believe there are steps that can be taken to form a deeper working relationship and it is the ability of social workers to do this that makes social work important. But this requires engagement at the feelings level.

It is useful to consider the work of Carl Rogers (1957) here. Rogers talked about using the relationship itself as a tool to facilitate change in his clients. Rogers was a psychotherapist but his principles are still relevant to social work today. He worked on the premise that if the relationship between the practitioner and client was based on congruence, unconditional warmth and positive regard and empathy the relationship which formed on these foundations would create the metaphorical space for change to take place within. These three principles are simple enough to understand and work towards as a social worker – many social workers will be using such approaches unconsciously all the time in their practice. These principles fit with requirements of social work practice and encourage the honesty, positivity and understanding needed between a

practitioner and a user of social work services. However, for relationships to be formed on this basis, social workers must be comfortable with the process of using self in social work practice.

Actively using self in the forming of social work relationships requires a high level of self-awareness and skill in reflexivity. This is because operating at a high level of self-awareness will naturally lead one to recognise and work with emotions and feelings, those difficult and messy elements of working with the human person. As stated above, social work is not a 'surface level' activity, to really support and empower someone to take control of their life when it is in chaos is not just about following processes and referring to other agencies, it is about engaging with and helping the person internally heal as well as 'fixing' all the external problems in their lives. This is difficult work but the need to be able to work with both one's own emotions and others is essential if true and honest engagement is to take place (Morrison, 2007). For example, a young person experiencing housing problems is a fairly common occurrence within the youth justice system. There are several steps that can be taken to 'fix' the external problem of a young person having nowhere to live. Theoretically, the housing situation will be assessed and the young person's Intervention Plan will be reviewed and re-written to state what actions are going to be taken as a result of their housing problem. Depending on the age and circumstance of that young person, this will mean referrals into other agencies and hopefully, accommodation found for the young person. So in terms of outcomes in a procedural system such as the youth justice system, targets are met and a box can be neatly ticked. However what about how that young person experienced this process? Outcomes are not the only important aspect of social work. There is possible ongoing emotional trauma linked to why the child came to have housing problems such as family rejection or loss and or bereavement. The experience of 'fighting' for the young person to be placed somewhere safe is also emotionally draining for the social worker carrying out this activity so the work and learning experience does not stop once the young person has somewhere to live. In this kind of scenario, social workers must act with conscious awareness of what is going on for both the young person but also for themselves at an emotional level. In doing so the working relationship can develop but also be used to work through and make sense together of the emotional impact of addressing such a fundamental need for a child such as housing. A critically reflective practitioner will encounter questions about how, in today's society, is it possible that we still have children with nowhere safe to live, questions which themselves have the potential to cause distress and feelings of anger about the very society in which social work takes place. Working truly alongside a service user enables a social worker and child to explore the feelings, emotional responses and thoughts that develop as a result of working together to solve a problem. This further cements the working relationship and supports the development of skills in the young person to help them make sense of complex emotional responses which are potentially contributing factors to the criminal and challenging behaviours that have lead the child to be involved with the formal youth justice system.

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent re-offending and it is argued it is only by engaging with children and young people at this deep level that this can be achieved. Young people have

to have the opportunity to understand how their life experiences may be impacting on their behaviours to have a chance of changing their own behaviour. This deep level social work practice is difficult and challenging because it can feel unchartered and risky and often has not had either the understanding or support of social work agencies and organisations. Added to this, because it does not fit neatly into the systems and processes of the youth justice system, whilst social workers know through their understanding, experience and tacit knowledge that this is the correct work to avoid the 'sticking plaster' approach, organisations don't always know how to name it and where it should sit. The expectation that social workers in the youth justice system work in line with the so called principles of effective practice which do not acknowledge the need for social work relationships, raises the uncomfortable question about whether for some there is a role for social work in the youth justice system at all.

Delivering the plan of work

As discussed above, every young person who is supervised by a practitioner in the youth justice system will have a plan of work which they are aiming to complete with their allocated practitioner who will also be their case manager. This plan will be drawn from the assessment process and should aim to address the risk factors assessed to be linked to the likelihood of that young person re-offending. Whilst working with a child on this plan practitioners in the youth justice system are asked to work within principles of 'effective practice' which are risk classification, dosage, programme integrity, intervention modality, community base, responsivity and addressing criminogenic need (YJB, 2008). Whilst it is fair to say that these principles are based on research findings, it is also important to remain aware of their limitations when considering what research evidence would lead practitioners to believe what will be effective with children and families (Munro, 2011). The children who are serving sentences in the youth justice system, whether community or custodial, are in large part damaged and vulnerable as a result of their life experience, this is not stated to excuse their criminal behaviour for some children do terrible things to other people. But unless we actually engage with the reasons why this behaviour takes place and understand the context of the behaviour we stand little chance of changing it. The life experience of these children is often chaotic. In practice this means children not having a stable address, not having an adult who provides a caring or parental role, not attending school and not having access to what most of us would consider the basics of human needs such as clean clothes and food. As a result these children have not had the opportunity to develop as children and have a confused sense of identity, no self-worth (despite how they might present), lack of empathy and emotional health difficulties. Added to these, a feature of many of the young people in the youth justice system is some form of neurodisability (Hughes et al, 2012) meaning that many children have limited abilities to make sense of what they are experiencing. It could be argued that the principles of effective practice simply do not fully take the realities of the children involved in the youth justice system into consideration. For example, the principle of programme modality informs that a cognitive behavioural approach is taken to working within the youth justice system.

However, as mentioned, the reality is that many of the children simply to not have the skills to think adequately to be able to reflect or consider their behaviour and its consequences for them and for others. Further programme modality requires that a programme of work is agreed and delivered from beginning to end with a child. The chances of this happening are limited when working with children in such chaos – whilst practitioners may not want to practice in a reactive way, this is often an approach needed so that children's presenting needs can be met. It requires social workers in the youth justice system to be critically reflective and flexible to adapt to what the child in question needs. Following the plan of work agreed at the beginning of the working relationship would be entirely inappropriate and ineffective if there are other more pressing and presenting needs.

A focus on sound social work skills rather than the principles of effective practice would be a much more effective approach to working with children who face such serious challenges in their lives. There are numerous theories and models of social work practice that can be drawn on to inform work which can help social workers understand and plan direct work. Use of social work theories and models in the youth justice system would also have the added benefit of giving social workers a language to use to articulate what they are doing and why they are doing it. As referred to earlier, one of the challenges of social work is that it is hidden and intangible. Social work practitioners can practice with confidence if they have forms of words provided by social work theory to validate the work they are doing. This includes the justification of energies being focused on actively building relationships through use of self which in itself is developed through critically reflective and reflexive practice. If practitioners are given the space and permission to form working relationships and engage with children at this deeper psychological level, interactions between social worker and child will be more meaningful creating both a better experience for the child and a better outcome for the child. As Thompson (2013) has recently stated, one way of supporting the notoriously difficult link between theory and practice to be formed is for social workers to reflect on social work interactions after they have taken place and to use theories and models to explain what happened.

Returning to the point that was made originally, social work is a complex intangible and largely hidden activity that can be difficult to explain. In the youth justice system, there is an expectation that structured direct work will take place with young people who have offended and it is through such work that social workers have an opportunity to develop working relationships through use of self and reflective practice as long as the overall system enables this. Completing lifelines, story-boards and consequence work can be used as frameworks to engage with children on deeper psychological levels that may not initially be apparent when planning the delivery of what at first glance could seem like superficial and surface level work. Similarly, work around victim empathy and the possible involvement of victims in work with young people who offend, when completed at the right time for the child can be extremely powerful in supporting a young person's personal emotional healing and growth. But, social workers must be allowed to use this direct work as a framework for relationship forming – direct work sessions are not the end result in themselves.

Organisations must support social workers in naming what they are doing so social workers have a way of recording and explaining their work. Recently, the Solihull Approach (Douglas and Ginty, 2001) has become very popular with its use of terms such as 'containment' (Milford et al, 2006), a term used to describe the process of allowing a distressed person to 'offload' their feelings to a practitioner to allow the process of making sense of them takes place. This is very welcome as it gives a name to what many youth justice social workers have been doing for years and have always found difficult to justify and validate. Social workers have to be empowered to use such language within practice to enable them to do what they know works, that is use of self to build working relationships. This will remain a challenge in the current climate of efficiency savings in the youth justice system as when social work organisations are feeling under pressure they resort to process driven practice (Howe, 2010) in the misguided belief that this will result in high quality social work.

Conclusion

Social work is a messy, unpredictable, complex and intangible activity. This is because it is tied up with human emotions and emotions are very difficult to explain, quantify, objectify or fit into neat boxes. Actively engaging and using the emotions involved, both in terms of the practitioner and service user, enables a deeper social work approach to take place and enables the forming of relationships. Such relationships can then be used as the tool to bring about positive changes for children and families who are receiving intervention from youth justice social workers. Social workers working within the youth justice system know through their experience what is most likely to be effective in meeting the aims of the system – that is prevention of offending. To achieve this means real questions need to be asked about the effectiveness of the technical-rational risk focused approach of the current youth justice system in favour of a system which adopts the principles of Munro (2011) and empowers social workers to actively use critically reflective and reflexive practice and supports the use of self to build powerful social work relationships with the vulnerable children they work with.

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Organised Crime, Street Gangs and County Lines

John Pitts

Abstract

This article describes the changing nature of organised crime and, in particular, the changes that have occurred in the organisation of the illicit drugs trade in the past decade. It points to a convergence and overlap between organised crime groups and street gangs and the rapid expansion of drug dealing territories. It considers the involvement of vulnerable children and young people in this illicit trade, the risks they run and the implications of the multi-agency intervention planned by the National Crime Agency for workers with young people.

Key words: Gang; organised crime; criminal career; county lines; exploitation.

BOTH YOUTH and adult crime are changing and in the illicit drugs business the lines between the two are becoming blurred. As drug markets expand and street gangs transmogrify into organised crime groups, the focus for intervention shifts from the local to the regional (Disley and Liddle, 2015). Moreover, as we learn more about this world it becomes clear that many of those who run the greatest risks are children and young people.

Organised crime

'Organised crime' is a term applied variously to Mexican drug cartels, fraudulent city banks and the street level drugs business, and this makes precise definition difficult. In its *Local to Global: Reducing the Risk from Organised Crime report*, H.M. Government (2013) defines UK organised crime as a product of:

> *Individuals, normally working with others, with the capacity and capability to commit serious crime on a continuing basis, which includes elements of planning, control and coordination, and benefits those involved.* (2013: 5)

This somewhat bland statement has echoes of the criminologist Donald Cressey's observation that:

> *The organised criminal, by definition, occupies a position in a social system, an 'organisation' which has been rationally designed to maximise profits by performing illegal services and providing legally forbidden products demanded by the broader society in which he lives.* (1969: 9)

These definitions present what the police refer to as Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) as a mirror image of the conventional corporation. While this might be true of banking fraud and some cybercrime, local organised crime, which still constitutes the bulk, remains essentially familial, based as much upon emotional ties and ethnicity as rational calculation (Ianni and Ianni, 1972; Hope et al, forthcoming). Moreover, the focus upon the individual in these definitions sidelines the issue of organised crime as a collective endeavour operating in a volatile world of rumour, suspicion and threat.

Organised crime and criminal careers

Criminological research identifies three main career 'pathways'; 'adolescent time-limited' which characterises the bulk of offenders, 'lifecourse-persistent' which characterises a minority (Farrington, 2012) and 'late-onset' offending which is relatively rare. However, as research undertaken in the Netherlands and the UK indicates, a disproportionate number of people involved in the upper echelons of organised crime fall within this category (Kleemans and de Poot, 2008; Kleemans and van de Bunt, 2008; Francis et al, 2013). Kleemans and de Poot (2008) found that, on average, offenders involved in organised crime were aged 27 when they first became involved with the judicial system.

Similarly, in their study of over 4000 offenders involved in offences which suggested some involvement in organised crime in the UK, primarily drug trafficking, Francis et al (2013) found that offenders who followed the more conventional pattern of offending, peaking in the late teenage years before rapidly declining, made up less than one in five (18%) of their sample. The criminality of this group was relatively unsophisticated. The offences committed by the other OCG members by contrast required some specialist skill, significant resources, reliable contacts and organisational acumen. For these offenders, violence tended to be a tactic of last resort.

Local heroes

While late-onset offenders tended to predominate in trans-national and trans-regional organised crime, at a local level Kleemans and de Poot (2008) found a group of 'lifecourse-persistent' offenders whom they describe as 'local heroes'. These people had strong local roots and social contacts which enabled them to become involved in a wide range of illegal activities in and around their area. However, they tended not to extend their operations beyond this, often lacking the skills or expertise that would make them attractive to OCGs from other regions or countries. This said, from time to time, local heroes, like the Kray brothers, may come to assume national and sometimes international notoriety. For 'local heroes' violence tended to be a way of life; evident in both the crimes they committed and in their personal lives (Hope et al, forthcoming).

OCGs led by local heroes tend to be concentrated in particular geographical areas in which certain

notorious local families foster successive generations of new recruits who sustain these criminal networks. These kinds of familial networks are embedded in communities characterised by limited legitimate opportunity, alternative economies, and 'unorthodox' values (Kleemans and de Poot, 2008).

Spot the difference

However, it is not the case that everybody involved in crime in these areas is a member of an OCG. In their recent study, Hope et al (forthcoming), drawing upon data held by Greater Manchester Police, employed a 'case-control' study in which 50 OCG members in one such neighbourhood were matched with 50 non-OCG offenders from amongst the local population. In this way it was possible to establish the key differences between the criminal careers of OCG members who were similar in most other respects to their local non-OCG criminal peers.

The 50 OCG members, were aged up to 55 and 92% of them were white, which could suggest that ethnicity was a determinant of involvement. Their offences included murder, attempted murder, manslaughter and conspiracy to murder. 86% of this group were first convicted as juveniles and might therefore be regarded as 'lifecourse-persistent'. They were particularly prolific offenders as juveniles, being over three times more likely to be convicted of a 'violent' offence (including murder) than their non-OCG counterparts. They were also significantly more likely to be convicted for robbery, theft, dishonestly handling and fraud.

From their mid to late 20s, what the police describe as OCG 'nominals' (people whom the police know, or believe to be, involved in organised crime) appeared to offend somewhat less frequently but they were still twice as likely to be convicted for robbery and over three times as likely to be convicted for 'very serious violent crime'. In their 30s, they tended to fall out of the criminal statistics but continued to feature in police intelligence reports. For some, the lower profile they assumed at this point correlated with higher status and greater power within the OCG. Others, however, were by this time serving lengthy prison sentences, usually for violent offences.

Goodbye Mister Big

The Manchester OCG family that exemplifies the 'local hero' lifestyle is, of course, the infamous Noonans, headed up by Desmond Noonan who, with his younger brother Dominic, was suspected of at least 25 unsolved murders over a 20-year period.

By the late 1980s, Desmond and his family were believed to control 80% of the 'security' in Manchester's night time economy and during this time the family forged links with gangs in Cheetham Hill and Salford and later in London, Newcastle, Liverpool and beyond. Locally, Desmond played the role of benefactor, protecting some local people from victimisation and putting a stop to forms of anti-social behaviour of which he disapproved (Walklate, 2001).

Largely because of his local reputation for extreme violence, Desmond along with Paul Massey, and others, assumed the role of peacemakers in the short-lived truce in the Moss Side 'gang wars' of the 1990s. This was at least ironic, because it was almost certainly the Noonans who were supplying the firearms that fuelled the protracted killing spree which led to the deaths of many young African-Caribbean men (Bullock and Tilley, 2003).

When Desmond Noonan was eventually stabbed to death by a rival in 2005, hundreds of local residents turned out for his funeral. Men from the Noonan's family firm, *D. J. Noonan Security*, wearing black jackets with the words "We serve to protect" on the back, were followed by an Irish pipe band and drummers. Behind them came a horse-drawn carriage topped with white flowers bearing Desmond's coffin, and twelve black Daimlers filled with floral tributes. A 'local hero' indeed.

Upon Desmond's death, Paul Massey assumed the mantle of Manchester's 'Mr. Big'. In 2012, claiming to be a reformed character, Massey fought a losing campaign to become the elected mayor of Salford, claiming that he would encourage family stability, improve rehabilitation programmes for the young and rid the streets of drugs. He was shot dead in July 2015 by rivals who claimed he was a police informer. His death followed a spate of violent attacks between current and former members of a group of younger Salford gangsters who styled themselves the 'A Team'. Over an 18-month period there were 20 shootings and a grenade attack, culminating in October 2015, with the shooting in the legs at close range of Jayne Hickey and her seven-year-old son, whose father had once been associated with Massey.

The threat to the partners and children of the men caught up in this dangerous world is ever-present. In September 2012, Dale Cregan murdered PCs Fiona Bone and Nicola Hughes while on remand for the killing of Mark Short and, his father, David Short. These latter murders were connected with a long-standing feud between two rival East Manchester families. During the ensuing police operation, Greater Manchester Police identified 105 families in which there was a *Threat to Life* because of a family member's involvement in an OCG. Many of those subject to such threats were children, over 100 of whom were deemed to be at risk. In several instances, it was necessary to re-house the entire family outside the area in order to protect them (Pitts, 2013). Two of the respondents in the recent research conducted by Hope et al (forthcoming) had had their children removed from their care because of the danger posed to them by their OCG involvement.

Street gangs, drugs and organised crime

In the past, academics have tended to draw a clear distinction between OCGs and 'street gangs' (Pitts, 2008), as does the Government's Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (Home Office, 2013). Yet, it appears that the boundary between them is becoming blurred. Recent research suggests that, differences in the scale and sophistication of these groupings notwithstanding, most

OCGs and street gangs are involved, in one way or another, in the cultivation, importation and/or distribution of illicit drugs. This is because, the rise of cyber crime, people trafficking and banking fraud notwithstanding, the drug business remains one of the most accessible and lucrative forms of organised crime (Francis et al, 2013; Hope et al, forthcoming). So where does 'organised crime' end and the 'street gang' begin?

For several years UK academics have been debating the involvement of street gangs in the drugs business. Some have maintained that 'gangs', in as much as they can be shown to exist, are transient, fluid and 'messy' with only a passing involvement with the illicit drugs trade. (Aldridge et al, 2008; Hallsworth and Young, 2008; May and Bhardwa, 2015). Others have found gangs to be more structured, with a broader age range, and clearer role differentiation (Pitts, 2008; Harding, 2014; Disley and Liddle, 2015). It is also becoming clear that the sale and distribution of illicit drugs is the *raison d'être* of some street gangs and a major source of income for many others (Andell and Pitts, 2013; Sturrock and Holmes, 2015; Windle and Briggs, 2015; Andell, 2016).

Paul Andell (2016) notes that, in the UK, the illicit drugs business is segmented, with international trafficking at the top and local retailing by gang members at the bottom (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). In between is the 'middle market' which links the two. His research reveals that some young street dealers have vertical connections, not infrequently via family members, into the middle market, and hence to the international drugs trade. Similarly, in his study of gangs in central Lambeth, Simon Harding (2014) observed that gang 'youngers' with the necessary predisposition and skill may rise through the ranks to become 'elders' who orchestrate the gang's involvement in drug markets. Harding shows that between 10 and 20% of 'gang members' remain gang-involved into adulthood. Indeed, over half the gang-involved 'nominals' identified by police in Lambeth, where Harding did his research, are aged 21 and over, with some in their 30s and 40s.

These older affiliates will liaise with organised crime groups to ensure the quality and consistency of the drugs. As Pearson and Hobbs (2001) point out, the chain between importation and retail level distribution can sometimes be surprisingly short and here the roles of supplier and buyer may be interchangeable.

One of the main differences between street gangs and OCGs has been that while most OCGs were drug wholesalers, trafficking large quantities of illicit drugs, street gangs were essentially retailers, dealing relatively small amounts 'on the street'. However, respondents interviewed in a recent independent evaluation of the government's *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* (EGYV) programme suggest that there is a growing overlap between these roles (Disley and Liddle, 2015).

In Greenwich, for example, the *Woolwich Boys*; originally a small group of young Somali 'secondary migrants' from Holland on one housing estate, now control a substantial part of the illicit drug trade in South East London and towns along the south coast and up into East Anglia.

In recent years, the *Woolwich Boys* have grown rapidly by recruiting younger affiliates from other local street gangs as 'foot soldiers' who maintain their 'street presence', safeguard their various properties and defend their markets in London and beyond. Disley and Liddle also note that in Barking and Dagenham all the local street gangs appear to have evolved into drug dealing OCGs, while in Birmingham, a reduction in gang related territorial violence has been paralleled by a marked increase in organised drug dealing. Their research also suggests that drug dealing territories have expanded as a result of affiliations made in prisons and Young Offender Institutions. As a result, 'post-code wars' are giving way to drug dealing alliances which increase the geographical scope, organisational complexity and profitability of their drug dealing.

County lines

A recent intelligence assessment by the National Crime Agency, entitled *County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding* (2015) describes how street gangs, exploiting vulnerable younger adolescents, are able to distribute narcotics across wide swathes of the country.

A County Line is a telephone line set up by a gang in a city to sell Class A drugs, normally heroin and crack cocaine, to users in out-of-town locations. The police describe the groups doing this variously as 'Urban Street Gangs', 'Organised Crime Groups' or 'Dangerous Dealer Networks' thus blurring the street gang/OCG divide.

County Lines are set up because local, urban, drug markets are 'saturated' (Windle and Briggs, 2015), because the competition with other local gangs is too brisk or because the dealers are too well known to the local police. Dealers tend to select towns where they expect little resistance from local dealers. When drug related violence occurs in these towns, it is usually a result of two groups of outsiders fighting for control of the same market as was the case in Bournemouth in 2012:

> *The man killed in the Roumelia Lane* [Bournemouth] *shooting appeared in a music video with X Factor judge Tulisa Contostavlos. Police believe Reece G, or Stylie, was the victim a "pre-planned and targeted" attack and the flat in which his body was discovered had been associated with Somali drug dealers in recent months. Reece, 21, has been linked to the Church Road Soldiers – a gang known to operate out of the Church End Estate in Harlesden. He had been filmed earlier this month alongside N-Dubz star Tulisa in a video for rapper Nines on the notorious estate.* (The Bournemouth Echo, 25th July 2012)

The towns chosen usually have either relatively high levels of social deprivation like Blackpool, Hastings or Margate, or they are prosperous towns or cities like Cheltenham, Bath or Brighton, suggesting that County Lines may be feeding demand from two different segments of the drugs market.

The gangs normally have at least two premises in an area; one from which they deal and others that house their 'runners' and their stock. Having several flats or houses also means they can move quickly if the police discover one of their addresses. Premises are often acquired by exploiting local drug users, by paying them in drugs for the use of their homes; building up their drug debt, or using threats or violence. This is known as 'cuckooing'. In some cases, gang members may form relationships with vulnerable young women in the locality and use their homes as a base.

Most of the 'runners', who deliver the drugs to the end users are younger adolescents, typically aged between 14 and 17, although local drug users whose houses have been 'cuckooed' may also play this role. The children and young people involved, usually boys but sometimes girls, are often known to Children's Services but because their absences from home and school are usually fairly brief, they are seldom reported to Safeguarding professionals or the Police (Sturrock and Holmes, 2015). The gangs use children and younger adolescents because they are easier to control and, being young and having few, or no, previous convictions, they are less likely to be known to the police. At the outset they may be given relatively small amounts of money or presents; 'phones or expensive trainers, for doing this 'high risk' work. Initially they may be told that they have been specially chosen to play an important role in the gang but they are then informed that they are in debt and must repay the debt by working for the gang (Sturrock and Holmes, 2015). In a further twist, gang members will sometimes arrange for these youngsters to be robbed of the drugs they are carrying so that they become indebted to them. If they protest, they are told that unless they keep working to pay off the debt both they and their families will be subject to violent retribution.

Once established, the groups 'market' the telephone number by distributing business cards, scraps of paper with the line's name and number on it, or by exchanging drugs for the phone contact lists of drug users, on the assumption that they associate with other drug users. The dealers then send a text message to everyone on the list. Initially they may offer drugs at very low prices or launch 'buy one get one free' promotions in order to grab market share.

The actual 'line' is usually located at the gang's urban headquarters and a relay, or telephone exchange system is operated so that locally based runners can be directed to the customers as soon as the call is received. Established lines can receive more than 10,000 incoming calls a month and a gang may run multiple lines in different areas. Each line will therefore require a substantial workforce at both the headquarters and on the ground where the end product is sold. However, the rewards are great and some lines are estimated to generate up to £3,000 per day (circa £85,000 per month) (National Crime Agency, 2015).

County lines may run for years. They may be sold on or hired out to other gangs. And this could suggest that, once established, they will become a stable fixture in the world of organised crime. However, as was the case in Salford, the gangs that run County Lines, are plagued by suspicion and ambition and, when disputes over drug dealing territory erupt they are almost always settled

violently (Pitts, 2008; Beckett et al, 2013) and then it is the runners, the boys, the girls and the cuckooed addicts who are in the front line.

In January 2016 the government published *Ending Gang Violence & Exploitation* which sets out the six priorities for future EYGV interventions. Tackling 'county lines' and the exploitation of vulnerable children and young people used as couriers and 'runners' was the first. The nation-wide assault on County Lines, *Operation Engaged*, will be headed up by the *National Crime Agency* and the *National Policing Lead on Gangs*. This marks a recognition by government that the 'gang problem' is neither simply a youth problem, nor a problem brought about by young people. However, the success or otherwise of *Operation Engaged* will, as the report notes, rely on accurate mapping of the problem at local level, and more effective collaboration and information sharing, not only between police authorities, but between the police and the relevant statutory and voluntary sector agencies in the affected areas.

However, the children and young people involved in County Lines, like those subject to sexual exploitation by gangs (another EYGV 2016 priority) are likely to actively avoid identification by the 'authorities' (Beckett et al, 2013) and this will mean that the people most likely to know about their involvement will be those engaged in some form of outreach youth work. For some workers, this will require a serious re-think of the relationship they wish to maintain with the police, the information they are prepared to share and the conditions under which they will share it.

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The American news media and youth: distortion, defamation, demographic fear

Mike Males

Abstract

The American mainstream media are an implacable enemy of reasoned discourse on young people. An ongoing survey of news media reports on youth by YouthFacts.org finds US press articles routinely violate professed journalism ethics and basic standards of fairness and factuality by misrepresenting young people as singularly violent, disturbed, menacing, and gripped by dangerous subcultures. Representative examples of the media's negative stereotypings, 'problem inflation,' creation of 'fake trends,' and outright fabrications stigmatizing youth are presented. The American press's distortions relate to larger fears toward the racial/ethnic diversification of the youth population and pandering to its predominantly older, White constituency's anxieties and hostility toward sociodemographic change. Fortunately, younger people are rejecting traditional news media in favour of more diverse, decentralised forms of personal and online information acquisition and communication better adapted to emerging multicultures.

Key words: Youth; media; violence; sexuality; diversity.

THE AMERICAN press is an implacable enemy of reasoned discourse on young people. YouthFacts' quarter century of fact-checking of hundreds of media reports on adolescents and young adults reveals 'a cesspool of anti-youth misinformation,' replete with negative clichés and stereotypes characteristic of herd-journalism.[1] With few exceptions, the US news media in an aging society deeply fearful of demographic and technological change treat young people as a stigmatized minority deserving low standards of factuality and fairness. Context is rare and corrections non-existent. Even the most sensational speculation or quip is treated as 'expert' truth. It is acceptable simply to make things up, especially when a frightening, widespread yet strangely hidden teenage subculture is postulated.

The traditional role of the American news media is to collaborate with politicians and interest groups across the political spectrum to circulate alarmist claims demonizing feared populations. This recurring collaboration deploys apocalyptic tones and imagery to depict the feared outgroup as radically different from mainstream Americans, the source of virtually all social problems, threatening society's fabric and future (Gould, 1996). These official-media crusades, from the vilifications of the Chinese and opium dens in the 1800s, Negro cocaine 'fiends'' of the early 1900s, and crack cocaine 'animals' in the 1980s to 'violent young black men' today fuel fear and lasting damage to entire populations. In each case, media reporters have exploited older-generation

fears of menaces hidden in new cultural manifestations and technologies, from jazz and dime novels to Facebook and cell phones.

Even the most regrettable past mistakes do not deter the American news media from embarking on further crusades of demographic demonization, the most constant of which target youth. In fact, the same demographic fears – specifically, that half of American youth are now Latino, Black, Asian, Native, and of mixed race while three-fourths of those over age 50 are non-Latino White – underlie the larger, unspoken animosity. Many press stereotypes of youth (violent, promiscuous, lazy, cognitively and culturally primitive, etc.) are simply repurposed racial and gender stereotypes.

Consider how thoroughly false several of the most celebrated herd-journalism splashes on teenagers turned out to be:

- The famous Gloucester, Massachusetts, 'teen pregnancy pact' of 2008 never happened. There was no 'spike' in high school pregnancies there, no 'pact' among girls to get pregnant *en masse*; simply a botched stratagem of local school interests seeking to promote themselves with the aid of a news media ever-eager to spread sensationalism about teenagers (YouthFacts, 2008). Likewise, the mythical inner-city Memphis high school where one-fourth of girls were pregnant was a phantasm of local and national interests grabbing headlines (YouthFacts, 2011).
- The 'knockout game,' in which mobs of black youth supposedly 'score points' by assaulting strangers at random, is a recurring media legend (for example Long, 2013), replete with conspiratorial alarms and anti-teen invective even though no cases of this 'game' distinct from other assaults have been documented.
- News reporters' coverage of student Phoebe Prince's 2010 suicide collaborated with prosecutors to sell the image of a girl 'bullied to death for being different,' a crusade so prejudicial that a fair trial of the alleged bullies became impossible (see Bazelon, 2013). In fact, the bullying was vastly exaggerated and reciprocal; Prince suffered from severe mental illness.
- Later investigations of media narratives such as those surrounding the Columbine school shooting of 1999 (see Cullen, 2009) inevitably find reporters imposed a predetermined, boilerplate narrative of mass bullying, modern degeneracy, and secret, subcultural savageries. All evidence to the contrary – such as the individual psychopathology of the lead shooter and lack of evidence of bullying or subcultural manifestations – was dismissed in the press stampede.

Reporters and documentarists seem oblivious both to normal perspective and the large reservoir of hatred and violence against youth their context-free, image-filled reporting can incite. The video of a few Pennsylvania youth verbally insulting a school bus monitor was followed by hundreds of online threats to beat, maim, castrate, and even kill the seventh-grade perpetrators (Carbola and

Hill, 2012). Yet, from NBC's Today Show throughout media, no one suggested that hundreds of violent maiming and death threats might be more alarming than a couple of youths' rude tauntings. Repeated studies warning that inflammatory press reports are leading the public to vastly exaggerate violence by youths, to fear personal victimization by teenagers, and to demand harsh punishments (for example Dorfman and Schiraldi, 2001) have brought no evident newsroom soul-searching.

Geriatric media

What accounts for reporters, editors, and commentators' extraordinary animus toward young people? The American press is a distinctly geriatric entity serving a dwindling elder constituency. The average consumer of print and broadcast news outlets is well over age 45; for many talk-shows and conservative networks, over 60 (Pew Research Centre, 2012). A disturbing German study needing replication in the United States, where elder resentment of the young is equally or more evident, found elders actively sought media that provide bad news about young people, which 'bolstered older recipients' self-esteem' (Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall, 2010: 515). In contrast, younger news consumers sought positive information about their age group but not negative information about elders, which may in part explain the large drop-off in younger consumers of mainstream media.

The press duly delivers what its greying constituency wants and upholds older-generation interests. Young people are infrequent mainstream media consumers and (beyond a few who serve as junior advocates for established interests) excluded from positions of media influence. While Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, network and local news, newspapers, and news magazines scored poorly among the young (one-twentieth to one-fifth of consumers are under age 30), the only major show with a distinctly young audience, the former Colbert Report, was also the only one that regularly debunks anti-youth scare stories.

While press coverage of the young remains mired in endless ideological squabbles and culture-war panics, genuinely vital interests of young people in escaping poverty, gaining education and good jobs, being safe from abusive families, and participating in larger society without stigma or exploitation are routinely ignored. Many crucial issues involving youth that are distinct from and challenge adults are dismissed. For example:

- While domestic violence against women is regularly (and rightly) featured in the mainstream-liberal media, an equally victimized group – children and teenagers who suffer hundreds of thousands of substantiated violent, sexual, and psychological abuses every year (Finkelhor, 2015), nearly all inflicted by parents' and parents partners – remains a taboo topic unless a famous athlete or celebrity is involved. Worse, media discussions of youth and domestic violence quickly lapse into deploring 'teenage dating violence' depicting the abused young solely as victims of their peers.

- Media outlets reflexively decry 'underage drinking,' but none mention that half of all teens killed in alcohol-related crashes are victims of drunken, over-21 adult, not teen, drivers (Males, 2009).

- Skyrocketing middle-aged drug abuse, suicide, and crime deeply affect young people in families and communities (Males, 2000: 2010), but the media pretence is that only young people perpetrate these crises.

- Advocates for an increased minimum wage explicitly disowned teenaged workers at every opportunity, depicting adolescents – the country's second poorest age group (behind preteen children), one-third of whom live in low-income and abjectly poor households – as frivolously hoarding cash for clothes, gadgets, and 'a nice car' (Shanklin, 2014).

- Health-care reformers meticulously dissected the effects of health care reform on the old but seldom mentioned the huge costs the Affordable Care Act's premium caps for the aged transferred to younger insurees. An *ABC News* (2013) analysis was a rare exception to the politician-media barrage demeaning young people as irresponsible 'invincibles' and 'knuckleheads' (Earle, 2014).

There is no discernible recognition in the US media of a youth interest that is independent of its instrumental value to promoting adult interests' agendas. The merging of news media with official self-popularizing crusades singles out young people for social scourges such as school and urban gun killings, rape, drug abuse, bullying, dating violence, and obesity. President Barack Obama's repeated call for parents, teachers, law enforcement, professionals, clergy, and other adults to unite to straighten out 'our young people' is mirrored uncritically in press reports. Even in pursuit of worthwhile goals, the 'teen suicide' card is irresponsibly played. For example, Native American activists dodged major causes of youths' depression such as poverty, domestic abuse, parents' alcoholism, unemployment, isolation etc., to claim, without evidence, that 'our teens' commit suicide because of racist sports teams' names (for example YouthFacts, 2014; Waldron, 2014).

No ethical framework for covering youth

Thousands of journalists, editors, and news professionals purport to subscribe to the Society of Professional Journalists' (2014) Code of Ethics. Several codes relevant to covering young people specify that 'journalists should…':

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

- Give voice to the voiceless.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.
- Treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
- Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.

However lofty on paper, children, teenagers, and young adults are written out of ethical codes. American journalists covering young people do not accept any obligation to be factual, fair, sensitive, objective, or respectful or to seek out voiceless, diverse sources that contradict the story's predetermined theme. Rather than an ethical framework, virtually all American news and commentary media observe two unspoken rules:

- Young people must always be depicted as bad and getting worse.
- The corollary exception: Young people can be depicted as improving only when a favoured interest is poised to grab credit, preferably by 'getting tough.'

Stories on youth issues nearly always feature direct advocacy by the reporter in alliance with favoured interests. Journalists routinely pander to lurid curiosity regarding 'teenage sex' and sensational topics, fanning prurience with patently incredible statements from dubious sources. Our repeated complaints and those of 'numerous readers' brought a promise by the *New York Times* Public Editor to scrutinize stories perpetrating 'fake trends' among youth that lacked substantiation (YouthFacts, 2011), but fake-trend stories continue. *The New York Times Magazine* remains a serial offender.

Each story below is chosen to represent a larger, malevolent genre revealing the single-celled journalistic mind-set toward youth.

The 'rising violence' fiction

In a series of 2007 reports on gun violence involving Chicago's school-age youth (the only form of violence the media cover, despite police reports indicating that fewer than 10% of the city's homicides involve youth either as victims or perpetrators), CNN's Anderson Cooper and colleagues manufactured a distorted, inflammatory image filled with dire assertions of a 'growing culture of violence, especially among young people … happening not just in Chicago, but all around the country' perpetrated by 'a generation that does not value life' and 'a general lack of respect for authority that is worse than it used to be,' driven by 'violent video game and media culture.' CNN correspondent and Chicago native Gary Tuchman declared that when he was growing up, he could walk in Chicago and feel safe. 'How this city has changed,' he said.

Virtually nothing in Cooper's report was accurate. Trends easily obtainable from police, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and vital statistics reports showed Chicago, like the rest of the country, was experiencing record low levels of violence and shootings, especially among youth. The average number of Chicago youths murdered per month in 2006-07 (3.2), was well below the averages for the early 2000s (3.7), 1990s (9.0), 1980s (5.5), 1970s (5.5), and 1960s (5.0) (FBI, 2013). That is, every older commentator contributing fearsome comments about today's youth came from generations with considerably higher murder rates. Certainly, media reporters and commentators can lament violence (which affects Chicagoans of all ages in outsized numbers) without demonizing young people – but they choose to demonize.

Similarly, the CNN Newsdesk editor's 2014 story alleging the 'growing frequency of school shootings' by 'pre-teens' and resurrecting the recurring press fiction that 'gunfire is now occurring in America's earlier grades' was untrue on its face. The network's own tabulation clearly showed shootings by those 12 and younger were both vanishingly rare (fewer than one per year over the past 30 years) and declining (only five in the previous decade, amid 156,000 total gun murders). Nowhere did CNN cite any real trends, such as the Centres for Disease Control's finding that 'school associated violent deaths are rare… of all youth homicides, less than 2% occur at school, and this percentage has been stable for the past decade.' Instead, the story was filled with clichés from two 'experts' the reporter anointed ('middle-schoolers are impulsive and they can't think of the consequences of their actions' or engage 'empathy,' are incited by 'violent video games,' etc.)

'Sex Offenders Get Younger, More Violent,' the Associated Press (2007) clarioned in a much-publicized feature that employed statistical fraud to advance its claim that 'the number of children under 18 accused of forcible rape, violent and nonviolent sex offenses rose from 24,100 in 1985 to 33,800 in 2004' while 'rape and sexual assaults by adults decreased more than 56% from 1993 to 2004.' The report first compared more complete court records on juvenile offenders in 2004 with woefully incomplete court records from the mid-1980s to manufacture an 'increase' in youthful cases. Then, instead of using comparable court-record statistics for adults, the AP switched to the National Crime Victimization Survey, which indeed showed a 56% decline in victim-reported sex offenses by adults… and a similarly large drop in sex offenses, especially more violent ones, by youths. The latter fact was not reported by AP, nor was the aging of the sex offender population shown in FBI statistics. Like CNN's report, AP's was flatly deceptive.

The American media (even its most veteran and specialized reporters) seem to have no perspective on how teenagers fit into society or contribute to social problems. Do teenaged youths commit 4% of all violent crimes, or 94%? In a prominent example, USA Today's veteran crime reporter's front-page article declared that 'juveniles will account for 63% of all suspects in violent and property offenses [in Minneapolis], up from 45% in 2002' (Johnson, 2006). These figures were ludicrous. The Minneapolis Police Department's posted statistics (similar to the FBI, 2013, estimate that juveniles then committed around 12% of violent and 18% of property crimes in major cities;

proportions have since dropped further) showed juveniles account for only a small and declining proportion of the city's crime and denied giving the greatly inflated numbers to *USA Today*. The paper ran no correction.

One bad teenager is The Everyteen

A fundamental element the stereotyping and disrespect the journalist's code finds unethical is labelling an entire population because of a rare act. That basic standard is so routinely violated by the press when teenagers are the subject that it constitutes a separate rule mandating assignment of collective youth guilt. For routine examples, an online depiction of a rape at a Steubenville, Ohio, high school party led commentators to quip that the rapists were just enacting 'everyday teenage behaviour,' and, 'those Steubenville kids are not so different from kids across America' (YouthFacts, 2013). In a country where 2,000 felony assaults occur every day, national news stories repeatedly aired a random video of teen girls engaged in a fight commentators pronounced 'animalistic' and 'vicious,' blaming the furore (without irony) on 'publicity seeking teens' (YouthFacts, 2008).

The American media's assignment of collective guilt and negative stereotyping toward youth extends to crude racism, sexism, and ethnic prejudice. The Associated Press fanned xenophobia with a bizarre 'big story' blaming the horrific Boston Marathon bombing on 'teen immigrant angst' (Irvine, 2013). That charged thesis was based on the lone fact that the older bomber had immigrated to the United States as a teenager. The story didn't cite any research or any other case of a teen immigrant later committing mass mayhem, only speculative quotations combining antiquated sturm-und-drang clichés about adolescence with zero-evidence sensationalism ('We're living in a time where alienation of youth is becoming an epidemic'). The AP has proven unwilling to feature genuine facts, such as that violence by youth is at an historical low, but stands ever ready to whip up anti-immigrant and anti-modern hostility so long as the vector is youth.

Psychological malpractice and 'fake trends'

The anti-youth epithet that most mesmerizes the American media is 'narcissistic' – that is, vain, self-aggrandizing, materialistic, callous, delusional, entitled, and reckless (basically, the summation of eons of older-generation contempt for 'kids today'). The foundation of the latest anti-youth name-calling is gross misuse of haphazard, inconsistent narcissism inventory scores over time and across social groups.

Time magazine's May 13, 2013, cover story dubbed Millennials the 'Me Me Me Generation' of 'lazy, entitled narcissists,' presenting senseless asides of the kind hurled at every new generation and particularly misrepresenting young white women (a group with only average narcissism scores) as symbols of ultra-narcissism (Stein, 2013). (In fact, African Americans, particularly men, display narcissism scores staggeringly higher than other groups, with Native Americans second—a

point so embarrassing to the measure's credibility that the press and its experts simply ignore it.) Then, in an equally undocumented reversal (perhaps aimed at re-attracting younger readers they'd just insulted), *Time* speculated that Millennials will be 'the next Greatest Generation' and 'save us all' – a two-decades-old concept borrowed from Strauss and Howe (1992).

The phony 'survey' industry

The eagerness of the press to vilify young people has fostered a proprietary 'survey' industry manufacturing a steady barrage of alarmist numbers to echo throughout news media chambers. Surveys typically combine questions on a genuine crime (i.e., assaulting an intimate partner) with broad, problem-inflation questions (disapproving of the way a partner dresses) to yield vastly outsized numbers. Other problem inflators phony surveyors deploy involve asking whether a student ever heard of a peer doing something bad, adding behaviours by adults in their twenties, and depicting even mild, one-time experimentations as regular youth perils. Interests and reporters then use the biggest numbers these problem-inflators yield to depict 'teenage dating violence,' 'bullying,' 'cyberbullying,' 'sexting,' 'hooking up,' etc., as rampant epidemics.

For one example of hundreds: ''Horrors' Found In Tween, Teen Dating,' CBS News, July 8, 2008, blared, joining other media reports parroting fashion mogul Liz Claiborne's survey of middle-schoolers designed to promote its anti-abuse curriculums, clothing, and jewellery. Compare what Liz Claiborne and its press stenographers reported …

- 'Ten percent of teens had sex by age 14;' '17%…report having 'hooked up' with a partner;' '40% of the youngest 'tweens, those between the ages of 11 and 12, report that their friends are victims of verbal abuse in relationships;' '69% of those sexually active at 14 have experienced abuse from dates'…

… with what the survey actually found:

- 1% of 11-12 year-olds and 7% of 13-14-year-olds said they had gone 'further than kissing or making out,' 2% had ever felt their safety was threatened by a partner, and 2% had experienced any physical violence or sexual violence from a partner.

How did CBS News and other media get from 1% or 2% to 10%, 17%, 40%, and 69%? By deploying 'problem inflators' at every stage. 'Relationship' was expanded to include 'sitting next to each other in school.' 'Having sex' meant ever having 'gone further than kissing or making out.' 'Abuse' included not just physical or sexual violence, threats, and stalking, but ever having 'tried to tell you how to dress,' 'hurt you with words,' or 'made you feel nervous,' even once, regardless of intent or context. Students were asked to speculate whether 'people your age' might suffer abuse by dating partners. The experiences of the tiny, most extreme subsamples (such as the 4% who had

done anything sexual) were depicted as applying to all tweens.

Likewise, the officially inflated definition of 'being bullied' includes not just being attacked, threatened, or relentlessly taunted, but experiencing any 'nasty and unpleasant things' from peers even once in a school year, no matter the context, intent, or reciprocity. This is where the 'one-third of American [students] are bullies or bullied — or both' assertion, cited by the president and countless others, derives. In fact, it is far more illuminating that two-thirds of students say they never experienced 'nasty or unpleasant things' from peers!

'Sexting' also has been expanded far beyond its normal definition of sending nude and sexually explicit pictures and texts by cell phone, email, and cyber-communications to include ever having sent or received a 'suggestive' (undefined) message, a 'semi-nude' or 'nearly nude' (undefined) picture, or 'sexual words' (undefinable). Surveys of 'teenagers' routinely include adults up to their mid-20s (many married or cohabitating) who naturally generate large numbers that are then misapplied to school-age adolescents. A married 24 year-old who sends a text containing a sexy word to his wife, or college students emailing about a Human Sexuality class, are included in the numbers interest-groups' hyperventilating press releases and media stories call 'sexting' by 'your kid.' The reporter then illustrates the 'alarming numbers' with an extremely rare example of the 'grim consequences.'

How rare? *The New York Times*' Jan Hoffman (2011) had to travel 2,500 miles to Washington state to find a newsworthy case of a girl whose nude photos were retweeted, which Hoffman ballooned into a nationwide epidemic. Hoffman's reporting on sexting and cyberbullying employed dire terms ('desperate,' 'chilling,' 'breathtaking,' 'savage,' 'horrified,' and 'shellshocked' – the sort American media quails from using to describe the hundreds of thousands of genuinely violent domestic assaults and rapes victimizing young people annually). Hoffman's sensationalisings were the subject of a detailed complaint from YouthFacts (2010) to the Times' Public Editor, who agreed the story lacked evidence to support its points and postulated a 'fake trend.'

Many reporters go beyond even problem-inflation surveys. *USA Today* (Hampson, 2010) quoted chosen 'experts' to balloon the definition of teenagers' 'new bullying' to include 'a rolled eyeball or long stare.' 'Bullying – relentless, unreasoning, indiscriminate – is likely to remain every family's school-years nightmare,' *USA Today* declared in apocalyptic tones without presenting any evidence: no survey, no research findings (indeed, none seem to exist) that students themselves identify bullying, rolled eyeballs, and stares as relentless new nightmares.

Reporters routinely recite the most sensational, context-free, self-interested claims and even stage fake events. In a typical story, the Associated Press (2013) quoted an 'expert' claiming that 'middle-school kids are horrible to each other, especially girls' and blaming peer cyberbullying for around two dozen youth suicides nationwide in a three-year period. Even if accurate (no evidence

was presented), that would comprise one-half of 1% of all suicides among youths under age 20 during the period. As in the Phoebe Prince case, vital contexts like family abuses, parents' and children's mental health problems, family addiction and violence, and other ills connected to suicide were omitted from discussion. In a particularly mean staging, Dateline NBC (2011) rigged a fake clothes-shopping session in which parents, the reporter, and an expert secretly hid behind a screen and smugly recast teenage girls' distinctly mild comments as 'bullying,' complete with 'bully' labels pointing at girls' identifiable faces.

The American news and alternative media do not suffer consequences for exaggerated and made-up stories; to the contrary, there is considerable reward. Reporters who 'break' a new 'story' confirming popular prejudices against teenagers (even if there is nothing new, or it is concocted) are treated as celebrities, designated as 'experts,' invited on talk shows, and awarded book contracts. The *New York Times'* former deputy science editor Barbara Strauch (2009) became a book author and media 'expert' for reciting debunked clichés about the 'primal' nature of teenagers. Former *Washington Post* reporter Laura Sessions Stepp (1999) became a book author and talk-show fixture for creating sensational foolishness surrounding students 'hooking up' (nonsensically defined as anything from a girl and boy exchanging an email to mass orgies) and the 'new fad' of middle-schoolers' oral sex – both filled with anecdotes and alarmism absent from even marginally researched evidence.

In strikingly rare cases, American reporters actually investigate a youth issue rather than presenting phony statistics and quoting media-chosen 'experts.' Rather than just quoting local officials, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitutions'* PolitiFact Georgia scrutinized the research and reported, 'Limited studies say teen curfews ineffective' (Joyner, 2011). The *Los Angeles Times* (1997) pointed out the unfairness and deficiencies of media coverage of youth, paving the way for reform – unfortunately followed by a quick return to anti-youth reporting, led by exploiting two cases months apart to depict teenagers as violence threats to the elderly.

What can be done?

The most encouraging impetus for reform is the refusal of young Americans as a generation to consume mainstream and alternative media, leading to growing bankruptcy and the potential demise of major newspapers and networks. Will major outlets counter with serious changes to save their bottom lines? Today's media are the product of an aging American public angry and frightened toward racial and technological evolution, as the widespread elder following for candidates peddling xenophobia, racism, and nationalism evidences. Whether generational transition will bring an end to the prevailing anti-youth tone depends on what standards future media consumers demand.

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Note

1   In the interests of space, and because it is undesirable to further publicize false, prejudicial news stories and their authors and outlets, references are to applicable YouthFacts reviews, where full details on authors and sources are provided (see YouthFacts, 2008; Males, 1996, 2000, 2010).

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Finding a better way of protecting young workers

Jim McKechnie, Sandy Hobbs, Emma Littler and Amanda Simpson

Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that the current system for protecting working children in the United Kingdom is ineffective. This paper discusses the possibility of finding a better approach; in particular, the proposal that local authorities no longer issue "work permits" to individual children but instead keep a register of approved employers. Evidence from surveys of employers and local authority staff in England is considered as well as an analysis of an "employer register" system introduced in the Isle of Man. Potential strengths and weaknesses of a new approach are considered, including resource implications and the need for all concerned to be made more aware of their rights and obligations. It is proposed that the government should collaborate with a small number of local authorities to pilot a trial scheme.

Key words: Child and youth employment; work permits; employer registration; child protection; local authority.

LIKE MOST economically developed countries, the United Kingdom has children of school age as part of its labour force. In the early 1990s, when the European Union was drafting a directive for the protection of such workers, the British government sought exemption on the grounds that few children in Britain are employed and those who do were already adequately protected. A partial temporary exemption was agreed, but both of these claims have subsequently been shown to be false (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997). Britain is subject to that Directive (94/33EC) on the protection of young people at work and is also obligated to respect relevant resolutions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and to conform to relevant clauses of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, research has demonstrated that in practice the safeguarding of child workers falls far short of the aims of these international bodies. Although British laws strictly regulate work by these young people, these laws are not enforced (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; McKechnie et al, 2013). That this is not more widely discussed may in part be due to the fact that in this respect, Britain is not different from other developed economies, such as those of North America, Western Europe and Australasia (Hindman, 2009). A recent paper by Australian researchers (Stewart and van der Waarden, 2011) which compared the United Kingdom and Australia with respect to policy for the protection of young workers ended with four proposals for how present deficiencies might be overcome. These in brief were the need for: – (a) a national focus; (b) clear and simple rules and processes; (c) rules to be consistent with general labour laws; and (d) strategies for informing those involved of their entitlements and obligations.

In this article we shall explore some of the implications of the above suggestions. We propose that the last of these suggestions is the most significant. We shall take into account two previously published studies of the practicalities of protecting child workers and report on two more recent studies which focus on a proposed alternative to the current methods.

As part of a larger study of the regulation of child employment, McKechnie et al (2007) examined local authority practices. They found that only a small proportion of working children had obtained the legally required permission from a local authority. These authorities had byelaws which failed to meet EU requirements, part of the explanation for which appears to have been the Scottish government's late implementation of EU standards. This along with the apparently random variations between the byelaws drawn up in different counties is evidence of a need to implement Stewart and van der Waarden's first proposal, namely a national focus. Hamilton and Watt (2004) have argued that in England variations in local byelaws are a source of confusion.

McKechnie et al (2009) undertook an intervention study in an English county aimed at increasing compliance with the laws protecting child workers. This was in an area with a two tier local authority structure and it involved cooperation between Child Employment and Entertainment Officers employed by the county council and Environmental Health Officers employed by the district council. Despite this administrative complexity, substantial increases in compliance were achieved. However, the researchers point out that there would be considerable resource implications in relation to any attempt to replicate their methods more widely.

Given the widely acknowledged failings of the present system of regulation and the potential cost of effectively implementing it, it is not surprising that proposals for a distinctively different approach have emerged. In England and Wales the central legislation that deals with the employment of children is the Children and Young Person Acts 1933. In Scotland the comparable legislation was introduced in 1937. The most recent change to this legislation were the Children (Protection at Work) Regulations 1998 and 2000, which as a result of European Directives introduced new minimum age restrictions and hours of work. The legislation in this area seeks to protect young people, who are under 16 years of age and still by law in full-time education, by restricting the types of work that can be done and the hours that can be worked (Stewart and van der Waarden, 2011). The implicit strategy in the legislation is that protection will be in two forms. First, the legislation proscribes certain types and conditions of work and gives local authorities the opportunity to impose stricter limitations. These are applicable to all child workers. Second, individuals are to be protected by a review of their proposed employment before they begin work. The local authority giving permission to work is expected to have made appropriate consultations before doing so.

In 1997 the New Labour Government set up an interdepartmental review involving the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry. This was in part a response to a private member's bill introduced by Chris Pond MP. The interdepartmental review while acknowledging

the nature of the problem failed to result in any action. The most recent government review of the regulatory framework was undertaken for the Department for Education (DfE) (McKechnie et al, 2011). This particular review marked a sea change in government approaches to this issue. Previously governments had questioned the findings from child employment studies (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997). In commissioning this review of regulatory practices there was an acceptance that previous research had established that it is common for young people under 16 years of age to have experience of paid employment (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; Howieson et al, 2006).

Alternative regulatory frameworks have been discussed before (Whitney, 1999) and in recent years the idea of an employer registration system has gained some currency. The Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF) (2004) after reviewing child employment regulation recommended that rather than the individual child being required to obtain a work permit, businesses should register as employers of young people. The BRTF proposed that the introduction of an employer registration system would be part of the solution to the problems they had identified. The present work permit system requires an employee to have a permit that allows them to work in a specified job. An employer registration system would not require this, thereby relieving local authorities of the administration of work permits. In contrast the BRTF envisaged that employers who wish to employ young workers would be required to 'register' with their local authorities and keep records of their employees. The local authorities would be responsible for inspecting businesses to ensure that they are complying with the legislation in terms of the types of work being done and hours worked. The BRTF proposal was initially met with a positive response from the government. However, over time the view changed indicating a declining enthusiasm for it. The final outcome was that the proposal was rejected on the basis of 'introducing more red tape' for business (Hobbs et al, 2007). The idea of an employer registration system did not disappear and the DfE project re-focused attention on this approach. However, we might ask what are the merits of moving from a system that is failing to an untested alternative? The proposals to establish an employer registration system arise entirely from the perceived weakness of the current system. We would argue that some evaluation of alternative approaches should be required before changes are considered.

To address this question we set out to evaluate the potential advantages and disadvantages in adopting an employer registration system. We do this by drawing on two evidence sources. First we consider findings from a local authority survey. The survey provides information on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of an employer registration system. In addition to gathering the views of the local authority this study also included interviews with a sample of employers regarding their opinions of an employer registration system. Second we consider the findings from a case study where a form of employer registration is currently in use. This provides an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an employer registration system in practice.

The studies

The first study involved the investigation of child employment regulations in England. This was based on a one-third (n=51) representative sample of English local authorities (McKechnie et al, 2011). The study consisted of a number of inter-related elements including a survey of local authorities exploring their policy and practices regarding child employment. It also asked respondents about their views on an 'employer registration system' as an alternative system. In this article we focus on the views of respondents to the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with such an approach. In addition to local authority respondents we interviewed a small number of employers to explore their views on an employer registration system. Our interviewees were currently employing, or had employed, young people covered by this legislation. The second study is a case study of child employment regulation in the Isle of Man (McKechnie et al, 2013). As a Crown Dependency the Isle of Man has its own parliament but maintains close economic and cultural links with Britain. In 2005 the Manx government moved away from a 'work permit' system and replaced this with an 'employer registration' system. However in many other respects the island's child employment legislation is similar to Britain. The key legislation is the Employment of Children Regulations (2005), which places restrictions on the type of work, the hours that may be worked and the age at which children can work. There are some differences between Britain and the Isle of Man's legislation in this area. For example young people on the island may work for more hours per week than in Britain. However, the major difference is now to be found in the regulatory system which is centralised and regulates employment through an employer registration system.

Findings

Study One: England
### A: Local authorities

As part of the survey of English local authorities we invited respondents to consider the potential strengths and weaknesses of an 'employer registration' system. The model for such a system was drawn from the BRTF in that it would require an employer to register, they would keep records of their child employment and local authorities would use an inspection system to monitor compliance. It should be noted that those responding to the survey worked in the area of child employment on a day-to-day basis and were familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the existing work permit system.

We adopted two approaches to solicit views from our respondents. First we asked them to indicate their agreement/disagreement with a series of statements. These statements covered a range of topics regarding the principles underpinning a regulatory framework e.g. ease of comprehension (employers and parents); difficulty in administering and effectiveness in protecting young employees. Participants were asked to indicate their views for each statement on a four point

scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Figure One provides an overview of the responses from our sample.

Figure One: Employers Registration: statement responses (per cent)
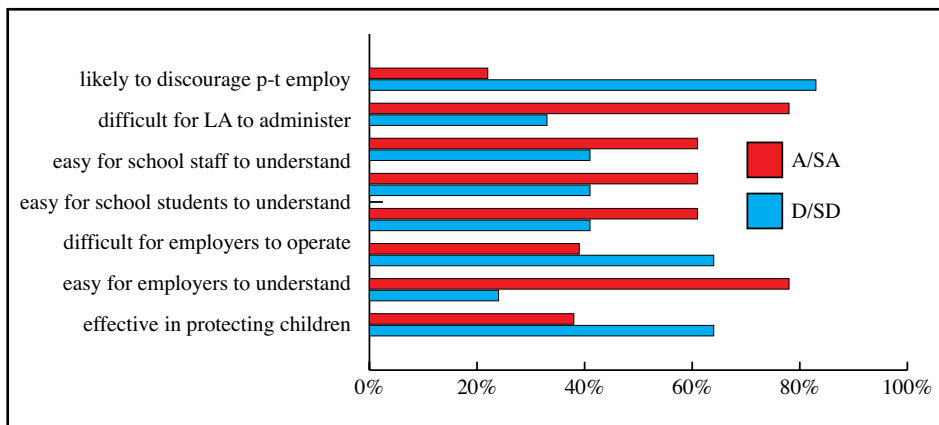
Key: A/SA = agree or strongly agree; D/SD= disagree or strongly disagree

The above responses suggest that the majority of respondents believe that this type of approach would be easily understood by employers, parents, school students and school staff. It is also clear from Figure 1 that the majority of respondents indicated that this type of system would not be difficult for employers to operate and that it was unlikely to discourage part-time employment. The latter issue concerns those who would argue that such employment could provide opportunities for young people (Howieson et al, 2012; McKechnie et al, 2014). However, the responses also suggest that there are areas of concern. These relate to the ability of local authorities to administer this type of system and the ability of an employer registration scheme to protect working children.

We gain a more detailed insight into the nature of these concerns when we consider the responses to open-ended questions. In considering the potential advantages a number of respondents (n=9) indicated that they did not believe that such a system had any advantages. The thematic analysis of the remaining respondents resulted in the identification of three dominant issues. The first of these was 'responsibility'. Participants were of the view that an employer registration system would clarify the issues of responsibility and under this system place the responsibility for child employees on the employer. Under the work permit system the emphasis is on the child requesting a work permit, even though it is illegal for an employer to employ a young person without a permit. The second theme was that of 'resources'. Comments within this theme suggested that an employer registration system had the potential to save local authority resources. In effect it was suggested that this system would be less demanding to administer and would require lower

administration costs as the authority is no longer issuing individual 'work permits'. The third theme to emerge was 'inspection' and participants were of the view that a clear advantage of an employer registration system is that it would allow for inspection and vetting of employers:

> *If employers were registered this would allow Councils to carry out background checks on the employer as to their suitability to work with young people. It would allow an inspection of the premises as to their suitability and for health and safety of the student employee.*

The analysis of participants' responses to the potential disadvantages of this system identified four main themes. 'Employer engagement' was one of the themes to emerge and comments from respondents indicated that they were of the view that employers would not engage with this type of system. An employer registration system would require a more proactive approach from employers and our respondents thought it likely that employers would simply not engage with the system and would not register. It is worth noting that under the current work permit system employers are required to notify local authorities if they employ a young person. All of the existing evidence regarding the levels of illegal child employment in Britain suggests this is ineffective in that employers do not currently notify local authorities if they employ young workers (McKechnie et al, 2013).

The second theme to emerge under disadvantages was 'safeguarding young employees'. Respondents indicated that in their view a major disadvantage of an employer registration system would be that it would fail to protect young employees. Two explanations were offered to support this view. First if employers fail to register with an authority then no one would be aware of the child employee and their circumstances. Second, the removal of the 'work permit' moves the focus away from the individual child and their needs. As one respondent stated:

> *At present a copy of the permit is sent to employer, parent/guardian of the student and the school stating the type of and place of the work and the hours allowed. By only registering the employer this may not include all this information and students could be working long hours in dangerous conditions, in effect less protection for the student.*

The final two themes to emerge are related to the concerns outlined above and these were concerns about 'inspection systems' and 'resources'. Local authority participants were of the view that an employer registration system would be dependent on an effective inspection system. Responses suggested that there was a high degree of scepticism that local authorities, given their track record in this area, would develop or support effective inspection systems. This concern was in part linked to the final 'disadvantage' theme, 'resources'. Throughout the comments from respondents the recurring theme of inadequate resources was linked to the expected efficacy of any inspection system. One respondent stated:

Presumably an employer would need to be approved and the work he offers checked as being legal. This would… require huge inspection input before an employer could be classed as 'approved'… once an employer had registered …. it then follows that there would need to be regular inspections to ensure he/she remains approved, as well as respond to new applications for registration [from new employers].'

This response focuses on the process of inspecting employers who engage with the system. In addition it should be acknowledged that any inspection system would also have to be capable of identifying employers who are outside of the system. As we noted earlier if employers fail to engage it would fall to the inspection system to identify these cases.

The themes that emerged from the request to identify the advantages and disadvantages of an employer registration system share a common issue, namely they identify the importance of the employer role in such a system.

B. Employers' perspective

Few studies in the area of child employment provide opportunities for the voice of employers to be heard. Engaging with employers is challenging. In part this is a reflection of the type of businesses that employ young people. They tend to be small enterprises which means employers rarely have time to participate in research (see Howieson et al, 2006). Previous research has shown that the dominant employment sectors for child employees are delivery, retail and catering (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; Howieson et al, 2006). In this study we contacted 57 employers and 25 agreed to be interviewed. The representation across employment sectors was catering (9); delivery (9); retail (6); and hairdressing (1).

Semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with all employers who agreed to participate. The interviews covered a range of issues including the extent of their employment of child employees, views on current regulations, views on regulation and their opinion of alternative registration systems and the implications of these for business. For this article we focus on their views on the employer registration system.

The proposal for an employer registration system was viewed positively. Across all employment sectors the majority of our interviewees were of the view that this system would be better (n=14) or no worse (n=5) than the present system of work permits. While comments were positive they came with caveats notably:

'sounds great in theory, but would there be a lot of paperwork…'
'good idea as long as no fee'.

There was some variation between sectors in employer responses. For example, the employers in the delivery category, while generally positive about an employer registration system, indicated that they were largely satisfied with the current work permit system. One employer raised concerns about the needs of the individual child that resonated with those raised by the local authority respondents:

'*I like the work permit system it's useful if the child has a school problem. I'd be a bit worried about this change there would be no check on the individual child and possible problems.*'

In contrast some of our employers were opposed to an employer registration system. This tended to reflect a general opposition to the principle of regulation. For some of these employers their anti-regulation position was linked to their view that parents and employers should be left to make "sensible" decisions about child employment without government interference. Others who had concerns about this alternative system raised practical issues, for example noting that:

'*… part-time workers keep changing so it's unlikely the records would match up.*'

This argument may reflect small businesses' general distaste for regulation. We should not interpret it as an indication that employers would not comply with legislation if it were introduced. However, it may indicate the extent of the task one would face in convincing businesses that such changes were needed or justified. We also asked employers if the introduction of an employer registration system would impact on their business. The majority (n=14) thought it would have no effect and some (n=3) thought that it may have a positive impact. Amongst the remaining employers the main concern was increased administrative costs:

'*There would be no impact unless I had to pay to register*'.

Employers were also asked if they thought that the introduction of an employer registration system would impact on their employment practices, for instance would it make them less likely to employ this age group. The majority of employers did not think this would influence their decision to employ young people. Amongst the other employers some (n=3) indicated that the introduction of this system would have a positive effect on their employment of young people. For others (n=7) the outcome was not so positive and they indicated that they would be less likely to consider child employees under this system. Such responses reflected the employer's perception of the consequences of engaging with this type of system. In some cases it was viewed as simplifying the process but for others it would be an increased burden.

The premise underpinning Study One was based upon exploring views on an employer registration system based upon a 'what if' assumption – what 'if' such a system were introduced. Study Two offers the opportunity to move the discussion forward by exploring the realities of an employer registration system in practice.

Study Two: Isle of Man Employer Registration

It is not our intention in this article to discuss in detail the nature and extent of child employment on the Isle of Man. However, it is important to note that patterns of employment amongst young people were comparable to those found in the UK (McKechnie et al, 2013). By Year 11 the majority (53 per cent) of school students were either currently working or had past experience of paid part-time employment. The comparable figure for Year 10 school students was 44 per cent. The most recent systematic study of child employment in the UK (Howieson et al, 2006) found that amongst a Scottish school sample of S4 (Year 11) and S3 (Year 10) students, 56 per cent and 48 per cent of pupils had experience of paid part-time employment during term time.

In 2005 the Manx government changed its regulatory procedures, moving from a work permit to an employer registration system. The present regulations require employers to keep registers of all young people that are above the minimum age for employment and still within the period of compulsory education. This register should record the age of the young person, information on the job they do and provide a record of the hours they work. Employers are required to complete this record on a weekly basis. At the time that this study was carried out employers were not required to notify the relevant government department – Department for Education and Children (DEC) – that they were employing a young person. We will return to this issue later in the article.

The DEC's Education Liaison Officers are responsible for monitoring this system and they have the right to access and inspect business premises and request to see an employer's register. For employers a failure to comply with these regulations can result in substantial fines of up to £5,000. There is no evidence that these penalties have ever been used. Based on the data that we gathered we identified 260 employers who were currently or had recently employed young people. We sought to interview a ten per cent sample of employers reflecting the range of job sectors that young people commonly worked in. We secured the cooperation of 25 employers who agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured and covered a range of issues including their knowledge of the legislation, their register keeping practices and their views on the regulations in this area.

Of the 25 employers we interviewed, 21 informed us that they did not keep the required register. The remaining four employers indicated that they did keep 'registers' but on closer questioning it was established that these were only a 'record' and did not comply with the regulations because they did not provide the necessary information. The majority of employers in our sample of interviewees (n=14) were unaware that they were expected to keep a register if they employed a young person. On this basis it was clear that none of the 25 employers complied with the legislation. Of the four employers who were maintaining some form of 'record' there was unanimity in that none of them found the 'record keeping' to be onerous. The remaining employers, when the system was explained to them, concurred that what was required was not demanding. However, some raised concerns:

'… the only part that sounds demanding would be government visits that could be demanding for my time if I'm busy.'

This latter comment refers to the inspection system outlined in the island's regulatory framework. Amongst our interviewees it was evident that the majority were unaware of this inspection system and from our interview sample only three employers indicated that they had ever received an inspection visit. It is notable that even though these employers had received an inspection visit they were still not complying with the legislation.

The employer interviews explored a number of issues including whether they had been informed about the legislation and their responsibilities. The majority of the employers (n=20) were aware that there was legislation concerning the work that school aged children could undertake. However, knowledge of the details of this legislation was at best limited. Some employers explained that in their view they had not been sufficiently informed:

I think I don't know enough about what I should be doing and I think that it's not all my fault for that .... whoever is supposed to be keeping track of these registers is not doing their job, and if they were I would have been spoken to long before now.

It was also evident from our interviews that not all employers were supportive of government policy:

…young people I like to employ, but the regulations and rules that you're talking about, I don't agree with …we don't do registers and I wouldn't …

If it protects children then that's good but I will not use it, I know the parents personally and that is more important …

When we asked employers about their suggestions for improving the system the dominant theme was to raise awareness by providing better information. Others commented on the need to have more regular inspection. In contrast to these comments, we should note that a number of employers believed that government should step back from this area and leave the responsibility with the employer and parents. Some employers in Study One expressed a similar view.

In addition to employer interviews we also had the opportunity to discuss child employment policy and practice with civil servants and to review departmental records. From this material two issues emerged. First it was apparent that the number of inspections that were carried out is limited and as a consequence the information that the department has about employers on the island is incomplete. Based on the employer evidence from the survey data it would appear that the Department was aware of approximately 10 per cent of child employers. When we explored the inspection strategy

it was evident that a reactive approach was adopted. Inspections typically only took place when an issue was reported to the Department or there were suspicions that a child was being employed. This was in part due to the failure of the Department to understand the level of child employment that existed on the island. However, it could be argued that there were resource issues as well in that child employment was only part of one employee's duties. The second issue that emerged was that while some inspections did take place they were 'light touch' in their approach and as such did not reinforce the correct approach for employers. A 'light touch' approach may be useful in the early stages of introducing a new policy but over time this could lead to the belief that the government is not really serious about its own policy. Based on the evidence from this case study child employment is a common part of young people's lives on the Isle of Man. In that sense it is comparable to the UK. However, the evidence from this case study supports the view that the majority of child employees are not being 'protected' by the regulatory framework. In these circumstances it would be difficult to argue that this form of 'employer registration' is adequately safeguarding young workers.

Discussion

In our introduction we noted the proposals made by Stewart and Van der Waarden (2011) for improvements in the protection of child employees, national focus, clear and simple rules, compatibility with general labour laws and strategies for increasing awareness. The studies we have reported relate to these proposals to varying degrees. As a small country the Isle of Man unsurprisingly has a unified national system, whereas the United Kingdom allows local variations through byelaws. The limited effectiveness of the Isle of Man's system suggests that a standard national focus is not in itself a guarantee of success.

The call for clear and simple rules may appear to be a statement of the obvious. However in the United Kingdom the existence of varying byelaws is an example of a failure to achieve such a goal. The need to allow variations in rules depending on local circumstances appears not to have been argued since the present laws were initiated in the 1930s. The abolition of byelaws would be an aid to clarity. It would also contribute to a reduction in the problem of limited resources available to local authorities, since revising byelaws and having them approved is a time consuming process.

The issue of compatibility with general labour laws is not one which emerged explicitly in either of the studies we undertook. However, we suggest that there is reason to believe that there is a need for those concerned with the formulation and implementation of general labour laws to be more aware of the existence of a substantial labour force under the age of sixteen. The difficulty of retrieving information about accidents to these young workers has been noted (Hobbs et al, 2009). We suggest that it would be reasonable for those concerned with health and safety inspection of the workplace to pay particular attention to the needs of younger workers, given their relative lack of experience. Similarly, it is difficult to see what justification there is for minimum wage regulation to exclude younger workers (Hobbs et al, 2016).

Stewart and van der Waarden's fourth proposal seems to us to be particularly valuable and its significance is supported by the findings from our studies. Failure to take adequate steps to ensure awareness of changes in the law seem to be a major factor in the lack of success of the Isle of Man's employer registration system. Lack of awareness of rights and obligations could be said to be a characteristic of the situation in the United Kingdom too. This may be seen not only in the limited awareness of employers in Study One but more generally from the fact that so few child workers in Britain are operating within the law. Discussion of the relative merits of work permits and registers of approved employers needs to take account of the fact that over eighty per cent of child workers are simply unknown to those supposedly responsible for ensuring their protection, i.e. the local authorities. Previous research has shown that inadequate resourcing is part of the reason for the failure of the work permit system in Britain (McKechnie et al, 2009). Changing from one registration model to another will not address the fundamental issue of adequate resources.

Failings in the Isle of Man's employer registration system may be due to more fundamental issues. Inspection of the legislation identifies an inherent weakness. Employers are not required to notify the authorities that they employ a young person. It could be argued that this should be a central pillar of any employer registration system. If this had been included in the legislation at the time of its introduction it could have heightened employer awareness, provided the department with employer information and drawn attention to the extent of child employment. Omitting this requirement from the legislation weakens the basic policy.

We would argue that the evidence from the present studies indicates that the move to an employer registration system in the United Kingdom would not, by itself, improve the regulation of child employment. However consideration of such a change could, and should, raise wider questions regarding legislation in this area. For example who should be at the heart of the legislation? The focus for an employer registration and work permit system clearly differs. In the case of the work permit system the individual child employee is placed at the heart of the system. The permit focuses on assessing the impact of employment for the individual child. As such the local authority attends not just to the type of job and hours worked but must view this in the context of the development of the individual child. Under an employer registration system the focus shifts to the employer and whether they are complying with the regulations. If they are following the regulations they can employ young people. This would effectively abolish the second of the two types of control mentioned in our introduction, namely the scrutiny of the individual child's circumstances prior to taking up employment. In Study One this concern was raised by local authority participants and by one of our employers. To abandon the work permit system might be to increase the risks faced by child workers. Research in the United States suggests that young workers with permits have a greater knowledge of child labour laws (Dal Santo and Bowling, 2009). It has also been found that possession of a work permit is associated with less involvement in illegal tasks (Dal Santo et al, 2010). If such relationships hold in the United Kingdom too, then it would need to be expected that an employer registration would have a similar impact. The key issue would appear to be child,

employer and parental awareness of their responsibilities. Such issues were not raised as part of the BRTF's (2004) proposal when they advocated moving to an employer registration system. However, we would argue that they are fundamental issues given that it goes to the heart of the question of protecting a potentially vulnerable group of employees.

The fact that the legal basis for the control of child employment in Britain is over 80 years old might be thought to be a reason for a complete overhaul of the law. However, we suggest that any major change in the law would be difficult to justify without a stronger evidence base than exists at present. That the present system fails is self-evident. It is harder to make an evidence-based claim for any alternative. The present stress on the issue of work permits as a local authority activity is based on the law's requirement that the authority gives "permission" for a child to undertake employment (McKechnie et al, 2009). The law also requires employers to inform the local authority when taking on a child of school age. However, it appears that local authorities in practice do little to enforce this requirement.

We could start to tackle the current situation by focusing on a reinterpretation of local authorities current legal responsibilities. The government could, working with a small group of local authorities, instigate a pilot study where greater stress is placed on the employers' obligation to report the recruitment of younger members of their work force. The first time an employer makes such a report would lead to inspection by the local authority and consultation about responsibilities, compliance and register keeping. Once the authority is satisfied that the employer is satisfactory, application for individual permits for that employer will be considered no longer necessary. When a child is taken on by an approved employer, normally "permission" will be granted by the local authority. The testing out of this approach would require monitoring of the resource implications. The fact that less time would be spent issuing individual permits would be balanced by the need for more checks on workplaces and working practices. If such an "experiment" were successful it would start to address the failure of the current approach to protect young workers. However, in order to develop a system that protects child employees in the twenty-first century the central legislation needs to be reviewed and the case for the byelaw system challenged.

Acknowledgements

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Margaret Mead and the 'Unknown Children'

Mike Males

Abstract

This theoretical piece addresses the question 'What does Margaret Mead have to say about youth work?'. It forms part of a range of such papers on theorists and their lessons for youth work that Youth and Policy have commissioned over the years. In this paper, Males links Mead's work from the 1970s to the current context in which right-wing movements fuel fear of the young and their authority, technology and diversity.

Key words: Margaret Mead; youth work; 'unknown children'.

UPON HEARING of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in August, 1945, Margaret Mead ripped up a half-completed book manuscript. 'Not a single sentence would ring true in the new atomic age' she declared (Mead, 1970: 97). Classical anthropology's fragmented study of isolated cultures had been rendered forever obsolete by this new world of globally shared communication, technology, and atomic and environmental destruction. Displaying the unique flexibility of mind crucial to analysing today's rapidly changing, migratory societies, Mead was one of the few who realized how suddenly and radically traditional relationships between generations were being transformed.

Mead's *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (1970, updated 1978) crowned her dynamic half-century career. The slim volume throbs with sobering warnings and excited optimism: 'We are now entering a period, new in history, in which the young are taking on new authority as agents of change appropriate to a changing modern world' (p. 1). In the isolated tribes that dominated human evolution for hundreds of thousands of years, the parent, the ancestor, could see in themselves what the child would become. But in today's interconnected societies, jolted by social and demographic change, the child (particularly, the immigrant child) symbolizes an unknown future quite different from the society their parents found comfortingly familiar—'a situation that has never occurred before in human history,' Mead exclaimed (p. 61). Indeed, the only certainty is that the modern child 'must develop appropriate styles of behaviour for which there are no parental models' (p. 46).

Practically alone, Mead grasped the profound implications of this new, unsettling adult obsolescence, both in its potential for dynamic new child raising and for cataclysmic intergenerational breakdown. 'We must recognize that we have no descendants, as our children have no forbears,' she declared. As bizarrely irrational fears and hostility against young people sweep the United States and the

United Kingdom—manifest most starkly in xenophobic, nationalist electoral movements fanning older-ages' anger at the racial diversity and globalism evident in younger generations—Mead provides a perspective at once calming and ominous.

Mead studied the past and present but profoundly respected the future and the 'unknown children' who would forge it. In modern cultures of diversity and change, it is the young who 'are at home in this time' and define the culture, yet 'the alienation of the young is emphasized, while the alienation of their elders may be entirely overlooked' (p. 62). Elders, rendered 'immigrants in time' in ever-renewing societies, see their traditions discredited and authority crumbling. 'There is the fear that the young are being transformed into strangers before our eyes, that teenagers gathered at a street corner are to be feared like the advance guard of an invading army,' Mead wrote (p. 49). Adults who restrain their harshness against children who are 'comforting replications of themselves, feel no such restraint when all the young, including their own children, have turned into strangers' (p. 126).

Still, in *Culture and Commitment*'s 1970 edition, Mead pronounced the old fully capable of this new adaptive challenge: 'We can change into a prefigurative culture, consciously, delightedly, and industriously rearing unknown children for an unknown world' (p. 75). In the 1978 update, as she saw Sixties youth drifting into yuppie complacency and new repressions of the post-1980 period looming, Mead was less sanguine. As early as the 1970s, Mead saw even 'counterculture' Baby Boomers ageing into adults recapitulating their parents' worst reactions against change (including resenting and rejecting their own children), portending even harsher repression of the young. 'I did not reckon heavily enough on the inevitable hostility that would accompany the parents' alienation,' she rued. 'Hope is much harder to come by today than it was ten years ago' (p. 112).

Mead would not have been surprised by the disgraceful reaction gripping today's ageing American Baby Boomers against their own youth, fleeing ignominiously behind gated enclaves, rightist politicians, repressive policing, phony 'developmental science,' obsession with 'culture war' trivialities, and self-righteous fundamentalisms masking greed. But the idealistic anthropologist would have been disappointed at the ageing Boomer generation in whose 1960s origins she saw 'such a unique opportunity to face change in a new way' by innovating 'new forms of communication between young and old which would become models for future generations' (p. 102).

'Fettered to the past'

Mead's remarkable humility and flexibility produced a vision that speaks profoundly to a post-2000 youth research, policy, and work field dominated by theories decades out of date. Her concepts of cultural organization provide a critically needed explanation as to why the most rigid, youth-repressing theories and practices are re-emerging in supposedly modern societies at the very time simplistic anachronisms from the past are most destructive.

In the space of a few decades, humans have evolved from 'postfigurative' tribal societies in which the ancestor symbolized the unchanging future to cultures she termed 'cofigurative' (centred in peers) and 'prefigurative' (centred in children), in which the youth symbolizes what is to come. The traditional, postfigurative expectation is that the young will hold the same values as their parents, grounded in aeons of cultural evolution, Mead points out: 'A postfigurative culture is one in which change is so slow and imperceptible that grandparents, holding new-born grandchildren in their arms, cannot conceive of any other future for their children than their own past lives' (p. 1). Adults, particularly aged ones, hold high status as the symbols of the culture, serene in their position as the most knowledgeable about the unchanging values and tasks the young must learn.

But in modern cofigurative cultures shaped by global migration, children of immigrants must forge new adaptations by learning from peers. 'Children of newcomers, the first natives in the new environment, must develop appropriate styles of behaviour for which there are no parental models,' Mead wrote (p. 46). '...In time, the experience of the children of immigrants became the experience of all American children, who now were the representatives of a new culture living in a new age' (p. 44). Thus, the dual transitions of the USA—singularly rapid demographic change produced by immigration compounding rapid social changes produced by technological advancement—have become intermixed in the American mind, so that traditional adults link unwanted racial and ethnic changes with fearsome social evolution.

This double whammy has provoked the most fear in the USA, the world's only wealthy, diverse nation (35% of whose citizens are of minority races, compared to approximately 15% in Canada, 13% in the UK, 10% in Australia, and less than 10% in Germany, France, Scandinavia, and Japan). In bitter irony, the USA's progressive provision for citizen diversity has promoted dangerously primitive social science (or non-science) and policy. American politicians, institutions, and academics have been able to avail the blaming of unpopular demographic groups for social problems rather than facing larger systemic flaws, as less diverse Western nations with more cohesive populations have had to do.

Youth have always been the centre of America's scapegoating, either as burgeoning minorities ('too many of the wrong kinds of children,' as Mead put it [p. 128]) or as vulnerable white youth whose corruption by loose urban-teen values loomed scarier still. Today's ageing America is keenly aware that youth generations are more diverse than their parents'. As recently as 1970, even in multiracial states such as California, the younger generation of children and teens was overwhelmingly White. Today, however, 73% of California's children and teen-agers are Black, Latino, Asian, or mixed race while 60% of those over age 55 are White. These pyramiding transitions lead dominant American adults to see 'kids today' as dangerously different, not just in degree, but in kind. Today's is 'no ordinary battle between disapproving parents and dissident children;' it encompasses 'all relationships between all the young and all their elders,' Mead observed (p. 126).

The repressive anti-youth drama enacted in the USA and emerging in the UK is precisely the reaction Mead predicted that alienated, time-lagged grownups would impose in societies of complex citizenries and views to force 'the reestablishment of postfigurative elements... far more rigid and intractable than in the past' (p. 65). This reaction jeopardizes the future of even the most powerful nations. The UK is sliding from the exasperation to the fear stage against its young; the USA (among the most free, wealthiest Western societies for middle-aged grownups and the poorest, most despotic 'democratic' country for youth) is well into the fear-hostility stage and moving toward active disownment. 'Many people in the United States, far from concentrating on the well-being of their children, have turned against their children,' Mead lamented. 'The adult world, the world of middle age and power, is like a world of childless property owners who resent the school taxes because they have no children of their own' (1978: 112, 127). This has proven a literal prophecy, with US young people suffering defunded public schools and skyrocketing university tuition and student debt now estimated at more than $1 trillion.

Meanwhile, young people 'can see that their elders are groping, that they are managing clumsily and often unsuccessfully the tasks imposed on them by the new conditions' (p. 59). The inevitable failure of antiquated ideas (even those framed in the most progressive jargons) to interpret youth cultures produces exasperation, fear, rage, and finally disownment toward the younger generations reflecting social and demographic changes older generations fear simply because they are new. Likewise, old myths are clung to simply because they represent familiarities; 'the adult imagination, acting alone, remains fettered to the past,' Mead warned (p. 73). Consider the dismal degeneration of the USA's youth-issue debate. We are mired in the same sex education squabble that began in 1910; the same crime and drug-war ideologies already old in 1890; the same social welfare debates recycled from the 1930s and re-recycled from the 1950s; the resurrection of long-debunked 'biodeterminist' models of behaviour; a gun culture driven by demographic fear more wide-open in conservative states than in the 1800s frontier West; and rigid education-standards dogma more primitive than the status quo 1950s reformers challenged. The mental inertia of older generations—repeating identical 'youth crisis' arguments decade after decade until they become institutional convention—results, Mead worried, from adults' obsolete, postfigurative mindset.

In the USA most alarmingly, popular 'experts' have exploited the weaknesses of easily manipulated, subjectively interpretable tools—self-reporting surveys, laboratory studies, brain scannings via functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)—to manufacture an artificial image of 'adolescent development' that has nothing to do with the real worlds which teen-agers inhabit. The National Research Council (2006), once the gold standard for scientific rigour, illustrates the new escapism masquerading as science. Its disgraceful report, 'Emerging Issues in the Science of Adolescence,' features leading authorities announcing 'new findings' that 'teenage risk' is simply the product of 'the tinderbox in the teenage brain:' that is, 'the impulsiveness and stimulation-seeking characteristic of teenagers' and 'emotional volatility' in a pop 'culture that is replete with enticing portrayals of risky behaviour and other sources of risk for young people.' 'Reform'

movements propose to reclassify 18-24 year-olds as 'children,' based on old prejudices combined with supposedly 'new brain science' driven by now-debunked fMRI. This retreat by America's interest-affiliated scientists into reality-mangling, 1900-era primitivisms of adolescent 'storm and stress'—and denial of the massive risks solid vital and health outcome measures firmly link to poverty, family abuses, and other adult-imposed ills—represents exactly the postfigurative atavism Mead deplored.

Youth-fearing righteousness: The USA's state religion

American left, centre, and right have united in the 'organized hostility of the reactive adult world' against younger generations (p. 109). As Mead predicted, that hostility is taking 'bizarre forms.' Claims of alarming new threats to and by the young are so incessant it is difficult to imagine a news article, an institutional report, a politician's statement on any youth issue (crime, guns, sex, drugs, drinking, suicide, mental illness, schooling, bullying, moral values, obesity, anything at all) that doesn't ring with hosannas to the halcyon past and fears of apocalyptic degeneration at our door (see Males, 2010). James Alan Fox, the media-quotable all-purpose crime expert, brands teenagers 'ruthless,' 'sociopaths,' and 'superpredators' bringing a 'bloodbath.' Five hundred thousand teenaged boys are set to commit mass gun slaughter in public schools, a top research institute declares. Malls and urban centres are rushing to banish youths from public space as adult customers express growing fear. Pop-scholar's books, footnoting each other's groundless hyperbole and selectively outdated or made-up statistics, insist in rising panic that girls, boys, children, and college students are increasingly violent, rapist, demented, narcissist, and mean. Often there seems no limit to the lunacy of panics over this or that social-media, cyber-space, popular-culture threat connected to this or that hidden youthful subculture (so hidden, in fact, as never proven to actually exist)—this in a country indifferent to whether hundreds of thousands of homeless children have roofs over their heads.

Unfortunately, many of the worst fears were perpetrated by the ostensibly 'change' oriented White House of President Barack Obama, who singularly blamed 'young people' for crime, drugs, rape, violence, bullying, obesity, and even terrorism. This was not harmless curmudgeonry. The solution-of-the-month to imagined degeneration has taken the form of harsh new laws and remedial policies—youth-targeted curfews, drug testing, drinking and tobacco crackdowns (fines of thousands of dollars are now being proposed for under-21 smoking), sexual abstinence and 'behaviour-education' programs, standardized testing regimes, punishment and conformity centred in juvenile justice doctrines, censorship of expression and media, 'rites of passage' and 'character education,' and public shaming for presumed prodigals. As different as these left-to-right remedies seem, they amount to one solution: imposition of the doctrine that our past upbringings (misremembered as morally controlled and virtuous) are the models for raising today's children, in turn stemming from the long-standing privilege of adults to raise the young in our own image to preserve social stability and continuity.

'Immigrants in time'

The gut-level doctrine of grownup infallibility and the right to impose continuity – that most defining feature of postfigurative adulthood, the identification of a culture with its traditions – is one Mead challenges most vociferously: 'Even very recently, the elders could say: 'You know, I have been young and you have never been old. But today's young people can reply: "You have never been young in the world I am young in"' (p. 49). So rapid has the pace of social and racial change within modern societies become that elders have been cast into a state of generational cluelessness. 'In the past, there were always some elders who knew more than any children in terms of their experience of having grown up within a cultural system. Today, there are none. It is not only that parents are no longer guides, but that there are no guides' (p. 61).

Yet, the basic assumption that the old always know what is best for the young, that perpetuation of elder values is the transmission of culture itself, remain the bedrock of Western youth policy. The ridiculers of what were called (but never really were) 'child centred' ethos of the 1960s and '70s have expanded from conservatives to liberals. In the USA, once-progressive marijuana legalization lobbies now propose continuing to arrest, even imprison, teenagers who smoke a single joint. Criminal justice 'reform' lobbies continue to peddle the most irrational fears of young-age crime (even as the real-world adolescent crime rate has plummeted below that of middle-agers) and juvenilization schemes; liberals, led by supposedly liberal Democratic presidents and campaign strategists, have pushed the most repressive curfew, abstinence, drug-testing, and other regimes against a younger generation they depict as menacing society as never before. These youth-fearing policies are defended by angry rhetoric so inflammatory and distortions so outrageous they would be called hate speech if applied to any other group.

Far from casting off or modifying postfigurative explanations and expectations as social change renders them pointless, adults invoke them ever more stridently. 'The mere admission that the values of the young generation, or of some group within it, may be different in kind from those of their elders is treated as a threat to whatever moral, patriotic, and religious values their parents uphold with postfigurative, unquestioning zeal or with recent, postfiguratively established, defensive loyalty,' Mead wrote (p. 47). The extremes of fear and irrationality among Americans of all political shadings toward the young buttresses Mead's belief that they stem from evolutionary forces, not temporary political jockeying.

That anti-youth bigotry has spiralled to ever-unreasoning heights has been enabled by the wholesale capitulation of American liberal-leftism to reactionary dogmas: 'the behaviours of the young and poor causes their poverty; the future represents a degeneration from the past; the young are increasingly dissolute; attitude adjustments should be demanded of the young wherever their values differ from their elders'. These are more than just a political cycle. In other areas, such as environmental policy, women's rights, and social insurance for the old, American liberals retain

many of their leftist ideals. An emerging politics, led by socialist Bernie Sanders, even had the temerity to call for concrete actions to end youth poverty and bring young people to the forefront of political action, as have vote-at-16 movements in areas like San Francisco (already partly realised in Scotland). But on youth policy, most progressives still adhere with conservatives and centrists to haywire notions. Continuing their three-decade march to self-destruction, American liberals and leftists have remained mindlessly stigmatizing toward today's multicultural young people, with the Obama administration (though thoroughly dependent on young-age votes for its very existence) the most vocally negative presidency on young people ever. Conservatives racialise (or 'minoritise') social and moral problems ('welfare queens,' 'black on black violence,' 'radical Islamic terrorists'); liberals 'juvenilise' them ('teenage mothers,' 'youth violence,' 'teenage jihadists'); both are voicing the same coded demographic fears to their respective constituencies.

Indeed, the paradoxical insight derived from study of Mead is that beneficent liberalism (that is, state commitment to social welfare and redistribution of resources) functions only in homogenous societies, where citizens identify with each other and their children as extensions of themselves. However, as diversity rises, the dominant race's fear founded in evolutionary atavism, support for repressive leaders, and hoarding of resources mounts. 'Take-America-Back' Trumpism and UK leave-Europe sentiment are only today's largest manifestations of grey-hair reaction amid more to come. 'Can we create, on a world scale, the conditions which make our historic capacity for defending and maintaining our own group available to the whole planet?' Mead asked (1978 :142). Progressives' answer has been discouraging. In rapid decline wherever immigration has become a volatile controversy, liberals react by pandering to increasing public fear of minority influence. This is nowhere better reflected than in the liberal London press's relentless inflaming of public fear against gun violence by black teenagers—even as it buries solid crime data showing gun crime by blacks, teens, and everyone else is down dramatically. As for the American press's demographic fear-mongering, see my other paper, also published in this issue.

Bizarrely, America's progressive sell-out comes at the very time the best information affirms its most basic tenets. In California, whose youth transitioned from three-fourths White to three-fourths non-white in an abrupt 50 years, crime, drug abuse, pregnancy, suicide, and violent death plummeted to record lows. Never (and no thanks to their elders) have California teens been less likely to kill themselves or others, commit felonies, rape, die from drugs or alcohol, or be arrested and imprisoned than they are today. In 1980, persons under age 25 comprised two-thirds of California's felons, half of those imprisoned, and most drug-abuse and firearms decedents; today, under-25 ages comprise just 29 percent of felons, 14 percent of new prisoners, 19 percent of gun deaths, and 7 percent of drug deaths. National statistics reflect similar trends, even as middle-aged drug, crime, and disarray continue to explode. Progressives should be vociferous cheerleaders for young people, who have demonstrated that a multicultural society can be safe and sane, and adamant critics of the bad behaviours and politics of the dominant White elders.

Indeed, a stunning example of what Mead called the 'dynamic possibilities' of cofiguration and prefiguration, 'in which the past is instrumental rather than coercive,' millions of immigrant-rights demonstrators flooded the streets of America's cities and even small towns. Sparked and often led by Latino high school students drawing from the lessons of their parents' 1960s Chicano-rights 'blowouts,' the 2006 marches featured excited students leading news reporters to interview beaming parents, translating the press's questions and their elders' responses in a culture-straddling only the young in changing societies could pull off. The scenes were so appealing even America's youth-phobic media portrayed them positively. Evidence of growing younger-generation activism to counter aging America's xenophobia and isolation evident in the 2016 campaigns for Sanders and reduced voting ages.

Mead's 1970s anticipation of today's global menaces of diminishing community responsibility submerged in rising 'religious' and 'free market' fundamentalisms is little short of astonishing. Ageing, maladapted citizenries will increasingly 'resort to absolutism,' with a rise in 'religious sects and minor political groups, the principal appeal of which is their dogmatism with regard to right and wrong' (1970: 65). 'Self-interest, greed, selfish disregard of other people, relentless pursuit of individual gain, (and) lack of conscience in public places' will multiply, led by 'the evils of misplaced patriotism' and 'multinational corporations...constrained by no immediacy of need or responsibility' (1978: 136, 143). 'We (cannot) build a viable polity by trade-offs among interest groups, sometimes called 'the decisions of the market place' – trade-offs among those seeking privilege, power, and national prestige' (1978: 154). A better summation of the US Republican Party's religious/market absolutism would be hard to find four decades later.

Amid widening generational divisions, America's youth policy has degenerated into the private property of interest groups and politicians. Youth-policy interests are openly advertised in commercial terms grounded in saleable flattery of powerful constituencies and tapping of hot-button public anxieties. This approach renders youth as a commodity whose image becomes whatever the public and decision makers will buy. Peddling after-school programs? Run ads showing blurred mobs of neighbourhood-marauding schoolchildren. Selling gun control? Slap up posters of squinty-eyed pubescents staring down gun barrels at YOU. Sex education or abstinence preaching? Concoct a 'middle school sexual revolution' no one can show even exists. Escalate or reform the war on drugs? Proclaim another suburban-teen hard-drug crisis, the mysterious kind that flourish without overdoses, crime, dropout, or any other manifestation of what we normally think drug abuse causes. Rape, sexual violence, and bullying? Blame these entirely on high school and college students, using heinous but rare video sensations while ignoring the damning larger statistics of hundreds of thousands of substantiated sexual, violent, and psychological abuses victimizing children and teenagers in domestic violence inflicted by household adults every year.

Next: The 'unknown children'

If Mead's predictions are right – and so far, they're uncannily on target – what happens next will be worse: intergenerational disownment. Disownment is already advancing in California, the world's most diverse state, whose urban cores are coming to represent the racial proportions of the world. In the last 30 years, California's public school system has slipped from fifth to 35th in per-pupil funding, university tuition costs have skyrocketed 600% in real dollars as classes overcrowd, and tens of billions of public debt is being shovelled onto future taxpayers by a state whose voters and leaders prioritize protecting the wealthiest older generation in history (itself heavily subsidized in its youth) from paying taxes to support today's young.

As ugly as America's anti-youth vitriol has become, the most wrenching changes may only be beginning. To postfigurative elders, the most fearsome development is prefigurative cultures founded in intensifying social and demographic changes only now emerging and facilitated by 'the development of new forms of technology in which the old are not expert' (Mead, 1970: 26). Yet, Mead insisted, it is not youth attitudes, but elders' that must be altered to 'give up postfigurative upbringing' centred in families and schools and 'discover prefigurative ways of teaching and learning that will keep the future open' (p. 72). In Mead's cooperative ideal, elders would shift to 'the creation of open systems that focus on the future' in which young people's "experiential knowledge" occupies a respected place alongside traditional wisdoms, and 'the young, free to act on their own initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown' (pp. 72-73).

It's not happening so far. Instead, we see wide-ranging efforts to suppress precocity (or, in Mead's words, 'a deep unwillingness to have children go too far into the future', p. 73). These take the form of reflexive panics over teenage driving, mall gatherings, internet and cell communications, and any other refuge in which the young can establish spaces and voices independent of the old. Influential institutions such as the Packard Foundation propose that adolescents be supervised by adults 24 hours a day to regulate peer interactions; restrictive teen driving laws seek to banish teens from traveling together without chaperoning by adults 25 and older; 'experts' insist that teens' computers be moved to central rooms where parents can monitor their children and serve as brainless adolescents' 'cerebral cortexes'; writers in liberal intellectual journals propose mandatory supervision of all teenage internet use, a return to college women's dormitory curfews, the abolition of high schools as dens of adolescent savagery, and ever more severe controls on 'those terrible teens.' These new repressions exploit the 'anger and bitterness' of parents who, as Mead observed, 'feel the "others" – their children's age mates – are moving in ways that are unsafe for their own children to emulate and who find that they do not understand what their children figure out for themselves' (p. 71).

Efforts to re-homogenize a diverse society increasingly focus on shoving youth into narrower conformities, defined by rising diagnoses of adolescent 'disorders' and medication to smooth

them, 'zero tolerance' school policies, official calls for elite students to report alienated peers to authorities in the name of 'school violence prevention,' mandated uniformity for youth fashions and expression to abolish the teenage 'niches' that vex authorities and marketers, and regularized testing. 'The search for uniformity, for styles of behaviour for young and old... for students who are ranked on a single intelligence test, as inevitably produces competitiveness on single scales of acquisition or achievement as competitiveness itself is standardizing,' Mead declared.

American adults' fire-alarm freak-out should not be confused with genuine concern for the health, safety, care, and feeding of young people (Males, 2010). Americans are notorious for not caring about OPK ('other people's kids'). In practical reality, the difference between teen and adult drivers is minimal (teens suffer one fatal crash per 15 million miles driven, on average, about one more than a middle-aged driver would cause in 5,000 round trips from Los Angeles to Boston), and drunken adults kill many hundreds of children and youths every year without outcry for tougher regulation of adult drinking. Poverty is clearly the biggest killer of adolescents, underlying homicide, firearms, traffic, accidents, AIDS, and disease death rates among the poorest teens many times higher than among the richest, yet no prominent liberals (Sanders being the exception) pushes serious plans to reduce America's staggering rates of youth poverty. Every day, on average, three American children and teens are murdered by parents or caretakers – a 'Columbine' every week – without hint of the moral indignation Americans reserve for Grand Theft Auto, social-media offences, and supposedly corrupting peer subcultures.

Even the pretence of concern for the young is diminishing. Three-quarters of American senior citizens told a Third Millennium survey they don't care whether their generation's fiscal demands cause 'a major financial crisis' for their grandchildren. No interest in the 'war on drugs' acknowledges the damage skyrocketing middle-aged drug abuse, crime, and self-destructive behaviour causes the young in families and communities. The American Automobile Association's latest junk study, wildly trumpeted in the media, angrily charged teen drivers with killing adults. That American adults kill twice as many teens on the road, and murder six times more youths, than the other way around is yet another reality taboo to raise in public forums.

Nor should repressive measures be credited with improving youth behaviour, as some otherwise insightful generationalists postulate (for example Howe and Strauss, 2000). Virtually every careful study finds curfews, school uniforms, zero tolerance policies, school drug testing, anti-drug education and campaigns, and repressive laws ineffective or counterproductive; long-term studies find even the strategies lauded as most effective, such as raised drinking ages and teen-driving laws, merely manage to transfer a few fatalities from teen to young-adult age groups, with no increase in safety. The biggest improvements in teen behaviours long predate the last decade's draconian crackdowns, and they are the most impressive among youth populations with the least exposure to remediations and repressions.

If elder attacks and schemes to monitor and isolate the young continue to intensify toward outright disownment, dire scenarios loom. One, outlined by University of California demographers (Hayes-Bautista et al, 1988) and fictionalized by author Octavia Butler (author of *Parable of the Sower*, etc.) is a feudal, garrison state of wealthy elder enclaves surrounded by vast, violent barrios in perpetual revolt. A more benign forecast is that the young will separate from the old in more bounded fashion. In fact, younger generations do display distinctly different voting and political trends. Were it up to Americans under age 25, for example, liberal candidates would win the presidency in a landslide and rule Congress by wide margins. Differences of 25% to 40% have opened up between over-30 and under-30 voters even in conservative states such as Mississippi, North Carolina, and Georgia. In California, younger voters have been instrumental in defeating reactionary ballot issues. With under-30 voters projected to grow by one million, 70% of whom will be people of colour, and older Whites continuing to exit, California's elections of 2016 promised to produce very different results than those of the last 40 years.

How does Mead inform youth work?

Mead's foremost lesson: it is dangerous and self-defeating in today's climate of anti-youth fear for progressive advocates to demonize young people, even in the noble service of securing resources for youth work. The temptation to create the image of a 'youth crisis' is strong for underfunded groups competing in today's chilling fiscal arena, especially given how sadly easy it is to win fawning press and political attention for even the craziest fear-mongering. But in the long run, manufacturing fears of rising teenage gun violence, binge drinking, heroin abuse, promiscuity, meanness, and other phony 'epidemics' that are not new (and actually are diminishing), or exist in equal or worse measure among grownups, reinforces elders' hostile motivations to repress and disown the young.

In presenting youth problems, groups should strive to provide calming contexts, link youth and adult behaviours, and cease pretending that the present represents a horrifying degeneration from an idyllic past. The links between youth and adult behaviours (i.e., most violent youths come from violent families and communities) should be stressed. Tacit taboos against publicly contrasting youths favourably with adults and the diversifying present favourably with the mono-cultural past should be abolished. Youth should be presented as valued members of society deserving resources (as the best information warrants), not as problems to be contained and solved. Both the UK and USA, by the best measures, appear safer from violence and major crime today than 30 years ago, and hard-drug abuse problems are centred in older, not younger, generations: facts that desperately need publicity to counter ephebiphobic panics. Where problems are evident, context (external environment, opportunity, adult influences, policy) is vital, as opposed to presenting youth as some kind of generic, internally-driven menace.

Second, recognise that it is vital to society's evolution for youth to reject many parental values

(the norms adults live, not the pious values adults claim) and promote settings where old and new interact with equal standing. Mead retained faith that changing cultures and new childhoods would create new adulthoods out of necessity, founded in the routinely-promoted exposure of young and old to unfamiliar ideas and environments. Anyone who has seen the upside-down societies (nerd first, jock last) created by adolescents exposed to new settings — such as through the USA's wonderful, now budget-cut, Youth Conservation Corps programmes recruiting urban teens to work in national parks' wildernesses — will understand what Mead had in mind. 'Pioneering situations can be regularized, so that age grading, youth rebellion, intergenerational conflict, and the expectation that the children will regularly depart from the parental models are built into the culture,' she wrote (p. 46). In a particularly intriguing suggestion, she recommended that 'societies... make deliberate use of the possibilities of cofiguration by inducting adolescents or adults into groups in which they are not reared or trained' to become 'highly flexible in making new adaptations' (p. 45). In short, societies should institutionalise shaking things up.

Third, lower the voting age and incorporate youth into real positions of authority (not the 'empowerment' many groups speak of, which just means youths supporting their agendas). 'Prefiguration itself is new,' Mead noted, 'and we have hardly begun to know how to include the young within the decisions of their elders' (pp. 148-49). The old 'do not know what to teach these children who are so different from what they themselves once were, and most children are unable to learn from parents and elders they will never resemble' (p. 66) – that is, the old no longer form the exclusive centre of power and culture – but that does not mean the values and experiences of grownups have become useless. Indeed, Mead invoked her own upbringing 'as a record of how children could be brought up, conscious of the changes which their forebears had undergone, treated as persons with immediate contributions to make, rather than merely as learners not yet deserving of notice' (p. 103). The new challenges of integrating young and old within a society are more complex than simply imposing 'traditional values' suited to a bygone past, but they provide crucial modelling for harmony in a diverse, interconnected world.

Finally, postfigurative cultures require flexibility. Learning and teaching are congruent between youth worker and youth. Mead may stand accused (justly or unjustly) of earlier works idealising favoured subjects, beginning with Samoans, but *Culture and Commitment* stands as a ringing affirmation from an elder of the ultimate adaptive powers of humans, young and old, to unprecedented changes. The growing ineptness of American leaders, the appalling inability of government to address basic challenges from global conflicts to storm-destroyed cities to prudent budgeting, suggests Mead's message of institutional renewal and shared intergenerational power is an urgent one. 'A prefigurative society is by definition a society with an unknown future,' she concluded, 'and an unknown future is inevitably disconcerting, if not downright frightening' (p. 135). We can handle it. Every day, the unknown children and their future seem less disconcerting and frightening than the well-known adults and our present.

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Reviews

Mark K. Smith, Naomi Stanton and Tom Wylie (Editors)
Youth Work and Faith: Debates, Delights and Dilemmas
Russell House Publishing 2015
ISBN: 978-1-905541-86-7
£14.95 (pbk)
pp. 165

Rachel Burton

Youth Work and Faith: Debates, Delights and Dilemmas is a collection of discussions that 'aims to address some of the underlying tensions within faith-based work and to embrace the contribution made by the faith-based sector to the youth work field' (p.2). The text comprises of twelve contributions that the editors suggest fall into four sections: specific faith traditions (Jewish, Christian, Muslim); cross cutting issues (civil society, sex and sexuality, indoctrination); interfaith integration (training of youth workers and the youth work setting); personal and practice approaches (faith and spirituality, doubt, spiritual self, death). The editors also suggest that the common themes of the text are dialogue, reflection, agendas, participation, spirituality.

The text is not exhaustive, but it is provocative, prompting reflection and discussion about the similarities and differences between faith based and non faith based youth work. As expected, various authors consider the austerity drive of the UK government and the cutbacks being felt in all existing youth provision. They consider the opportunities that arise for the faith based youth work sector to fill the gap, as well as the implications for the faith based sector of chasing this funding. Nigel Pimlott in Chapter 5 considers the implications for organisations considering doing this; which tune will they then be expected to dance to? 'The decision in 2012 to remove spirituality as a separate National Occupational Standard for youth work' (p.104) and instead group it with religion, politics, philosophy and ideology is also examined. Bardy et al emphasise that 'a sense of spiritual self must precede (these) choices' (p.104).

Various authors suggest that safe spaces need to be created for exploration of faith and spirituality. In Chapter 2 Shelley Marsh considers the history of Jewish youth work in the UK and highlights its original intent of 'creating spaces for Jewish young people to meet and socialise with their peers' (p.8). Though there is now a strong Jewish formal education system it is unable to replicate the 'transformative experience' Jewish young people received from the Jewish youth movements, 'fostering spaces for young people to think through their lives' (p.11). In Chapter 3, Jon Jolly focuses on Christian youth work and cites Stanton's 'three domain model of faith based youth work' (p.32) where safe places of exploration can be given to both young people with and without Christian faith backgrounds. Suhra Ahmed explores identity, belonging and citizenship of British Muslim young people in Chapter 4 through research with young British Muslim focus groups and

youth workers from Muslim, Christian and Jewish settings. Even though young British Muslims are aware and engaged with political and global issues, 'the mainstream democratic system…can be unwilling or unable to listen to their views of 'dissent' (p.41). The author suggests frank and open discussions are needed and that youth work is well placed to provide this.

Youth workers are ideally placed to be able to support young people to explore their faith and spirituality. 'Mutually transformative conversations' (p.17) are facilitated by Jewish informal educators and the 'with it' mosque Imam from Cardiff creates 'an inclusive and relaxed atmosphere' (p.47), supporting young people to explore issues around faith and life as second generation British Muslims. In Chapter 9 Phil Henry reviews the work of the Derby Interfaith Youth Forum (DIFY) that supported the interaction between young people of faith and no faith. Youth workers facilitated 'the smooth passage of the interaction' (p.122) through discussion and role play that examined the norms of other faith practices. Maxine Green in Chapter 11 says that a youth worker can provide a 'connected, caring relationship…', accompanying a young person and helping to 'create a powerful "listening space" where young people can explore issues and concerns for themselves' (p.142). The concerns young people face surrounding death and dying are detailed in the final chapter by Jess Bishop where she notes the isolation of young people who are not told they are dying and so are unable to access support or contribute to their own care plans. She explores how youth workers could play a unique and essential role in the palliative care team. Sarah-Jane Page in Chapter 6 questions where discussions about sex and sexuality can take place for religious young people and that 'youth workers and religious leaders can foster debate with young people; creating spaces where opinions can be freely shared, questions raised' (p.83).

The training of youth workers to equip them to support young people's exploration of faith and spirituality is also considered. Bardy et al in chapter 8 consider the place for Christian and Muslim youth work training pathways in youth work qualifying routes (p.99). Students need to 'unearth' their values in training to 'promote understanding and challenge stereotypes' in youth workers – just as we do with young people (p.106-7). Pete Harris in Chapter 7 suggests that faith in youth work is often not explored due to the concern about indoctrination of young people from organised religion. Youth work training could create a 'space for the development and critical appraisal of the socialised self' to better understand what they believe and so why others believe what they do (p.96).

The fear of the unknown and unanswered is often a deterrent to questions about faith and spiritual exploration in individuals and in youth provisions. Yet Bernard Davies says that youth workers are familiar with 'a practice which works in the intrinsic unpredictability of young people' and where risk taking is the norm (p.136). He suggests that values and beliefs should be explored through the lens of doubt as this is 'the fuel that drives personal growth and societal renewal' (p.133). This collection dares to face some doubts in youth work and to 'open up dialogue' between faith and non-faith youth work (p.4). The editors assert that 'as a field we are stronger together than we are

fragmented' (p.4). Perhaps the debates, delights and dilemmas considered will prepare the ground for dynamic discussions and forward looking decisions that consider the holistic development of young people and youth work provision.

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Ayaan Hirsi Ali
Heretic, Why Islam Needs Reformation Now
Harper Collins, 2015
ISBN: 978-0062333933
£9.99 (pbk)
pp. 288

John Pitts

In the aftermath of the Brussels bombings many Muslim commentators denounced the bombers for claiming that their actions were mandated by the Qur'an. In newspapers, on TV and in radio phone-ins, moderate Muslims were at pains to dissociate themselves from the actions and the beliefs of the bombers, maintaining that Islam was a religion of peace.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the author of *Heretic* disagrees. She is a writer, a teacher, a political activist, a feminist and an atheist. Born in Somalia, she later moved to Holland where she became a member of the Dutch parliament speaking repeatedly about the superiority of secular Western democracy over Islamism. Following threats to her life, she moved to the USA but she is still accompanied by a bodyguard when she appears in public. In *Heretic* she writes:

> *My argument is that it is foolish to insist, as our leaders habitually do, that the violent acts of radical Islamists can be divorced from the religious ideals that inspire them. Instead we must acknowledge that they are driven by a political ideology, an ideology embedded in Islam itself, in the holy book of the Qur'an as well as the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad contained in the hadith.*

She rejects arguments that claim that Islamist terrorism is ultimately rooted in social, economic or political conditions or theological error: 'Let me make my point in the simplest possible terms', she writes, 'Islam is not a religion of peace'.

This being the case, she contends, it is necessary for Islam to undergo a 'Reformation' akin to that of Christianity in 16th Century Europe. These views have caused her to be branded an 'apostate'

and 'heretic' by some Muslims and accused of 'hate speech' by some Western liberals who also claim that she is a 'racist' and an 'Islamophobe'.

Hirsi Ali's argument is based upon her analysis of the Qur'an which points to a profound disjunction in the teachings of the prophet between the benign version of Islam he propagated during his time in Mecca, wherein unbelievers were simply invited to join Islam if they wished, and what he advocated following his move to Medina in 622. In Medina Muhammad was a military leader and here he penned Qur'anic verses enjoining Muslims, those who have been expelled from their homes, to fight and kill their persecutors. What Hirsi Ali calls 'Medina Muslims' came to regard the forcible imposition of sharia law as their religious duty, with unbelievers commanded to convert on pain of death.

Clearly, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and their derivatives can be regarded as Medina Muslims and although Hirsi Ali cites estimates that only 3% of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims subscribe to this version of Islam, she notes that this is still 48 million people. However she also cites survey data on attitudes to sharia in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iraq which suggest that the actual figure is probably much higher.

Percentage of Muslims who ...	**Pakistan**	**Bangladesh**	**Iraq**
Favour the death penalty for leaving Islam	75	43	41
Say honour killings are justified when a female commits an offence	45	34	22
Say suicide bombing is defence of Islam is often or sometimes justified	13	26	7

She concludes that:

> ... *religious doctrines matter and are in need of reform. ... Hard as it may be for many Western academics to believe, when people commit violent acts in the name of religion, they are not trying somehow to dignify their underlying socioeconomic or political grievances.*

Her answer? To recognise the five elements in Islam that are 'inherently harmful' and to 'repudiate and nullify' them. These elements are:

1. Muhammad's infallible status and the belief that the Qur'an is the literal word of God as revealed to him.
2. The inordinate investment by Muslims in life after death rather than life before death.
3. The unquestioned authority of sharia; the body of legislation derived from the Qur'an, the hadith, and the rest of Islamic jurisprudence.
4. The practice of empowering individuals through the imposition of a fatwa to enforce Islamic law.
5. The imperative to wage jihad or holy war.

Recognising the enormity of the task she outlines, Hirsi Ali nonetheless observes that:

> *Other religions have undergone a process of reform, modifying core beliefs and adopting more tolerant and flexible attitudes compatible with modern pluralistic societies.*

And she points to a constituency for change within Islam; a growing group of vociferous would-be reformers. But she also notes that sometimes, Western liberals constitute a formidable barrier to the changes they seek:

> *We must reject the notions that only Muslims can speak about Islam, and that any critical examination of Islam is inherently 'racist'. Instead of contorting Western intellectual traditions so as not to offend our Muslim fellow citizens, we need to defend the Muslim dissidents who are risking their lives to promote the human rights we take for granted; equality for women tolerance of all religions and orientations, our hard won freedoms of speech and thought.*

She goes on:

> *We support the women of Saudi Arabia who wish to drive, the women of Egypt who are protesting against sexual assault, the homosexuals in Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, the young Muslim men who want not martyrdom but the freedom to leave their faith. But our support would be more effective if we acknowledged the theological bases of their oppression.*

Heretic is in part a rallying cry for Muslim dissidents but it is mainly directed at the West. Hirsi Ali's critique has been dismissed by many on the political left in Europe and the USA because of her association with American Neo-Conservatives and her celebration of Western democracy, secularism and Enlightenment values. What's more, her rejection of the idea that the social and economic circumstances of some young Muslims, and the 'collateral damage' inflicted on Muslims in the Middle East as a result of Anglo-American foreign policy, have made a form of violent Islam more attractive to some young Muslims, appears politically naïve. Yet, the issues and dilemmas she presents will be all too familiar to the types of people who read *Youth & Policy* because they encounter them every day.

Heretic should give us pause for thought, about what we say and do, what we could say and could do and what we should say and should do in our professional lives. But it also asks us, as politically engaged citizens, to decide whether the ways we currently deal with questions of cultural and religious difference are part of the solution or part of the problem.

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Jenny Slater
Youth And Disability. A Challenge To Mr Reasonable
Ashgate Publishing Limited 2015
ISBN: 978-1-4724-2851-6
£60 (hbk)
pp. 166

Tanya Bownds

As you open Slater's book, you are immediately met by, and introduced to 'Mr Reasonable'; the personification of all that is 'normal' and, of course, 'reasonable'. Slater uses this character throughout her book as a tool to engage her readers, but also to demonstrate how the rhetoric of reason is pervasive in Western society. Unfortunately for Mr Reasonable, Slater proceeds through her book to adeptly challenge his liberal and neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency, independence and tolerance (which by definition are characteristics of adulthood as the Western world views it) in light of youth and disability. The arguments that Slater makes will resonate with many researchers within the youth work field as they apply more widely than just to young people with disabilities. One might argue that they apply to all those young people who do not comply with the expectations of neoliberal society; those whose 'market-value' is not immediately obvious.

There are some key assumptions inherent in global north societies that Slater discusses and challenges, those of ableism, adultism, independence and autonomy. These are addressed through seven chapters that expose and unpack the complexities of being a young disabled person in the Western world. They explore the oppression experienced by disabled people and the challenge and resilience of being respectively trapped by this and yet finding ways to subvert it. While many of Slater's arguments are not new (see Goodley, Hughes and Davis, 2012 for example), her approach and explanation enables them to be presented in an accessible and yet powerful way, placing them in context through the use of case studies.

This book takes a critical disability studies approach to challenging the 'official textbook of disability' as Slater describes it. What this means is that Slater unpacks the rhetoric of 'sameness' that is prevalent in disability literature: the idea that disabled young people are moving towards adulthood and independence (towards becoming Mr Reasonable) and therefore are the same as able-bodied young people. Slater raises a number of objections to the notion of 'sameness' based on her research of youth and disability. One example is the paradox that disabled young people have to appear reasonable, objective and logical in order to exercise their subjectivity, choice and desires in a way that their non-disabled peers do not.

Another issue with the rhetoric of 'sameness' that Slater raises is that it is in fact built upon exclusion rather than inclusion. Slater draws on queer theory, feminist theory and futurist theory to illuminate this. She argues that the rhetoric of 'sameness' builds into Mr Reasonable's framework by reasonably

excluding those who are not able to become independent. This 'othering of people' comes up repeatedly in Slater's book as she argues that by grouping ourselves in a way that excludes others, we appear reasonable (and thus valid/valuable) but by doing this, we deem others unreasonable and therefore disposable.

Slater uses an auto/ethnographic method for her research and, consequently, within her writing. Recognising that as a researcher her 'stories are intertwined with those of [her] participants', Slater integrates her 'self' into the book. This makes it an enjoyable read but may put off readers who are less convinced by this research method. However, Slater is unapologetic about this as one of her aims is to explore stories through the book, which is exactly what she proceeds to do.

Everything that Slater seeks to achieve through writing this book could perhaps be summed up in the following from the final paragraph of the book, 'The point is, however, to think more critically about what is implicitly considered reasonable, and to whom this reasonable rhetoric is doing harm' (p.123)

Her humility in recognising that everyone falls back on reasonable rhetoric at times, including herself, allows this book to be read as a series of questions and challenges, a chance to examine oneself, rather than as a judgement or criticism of others.

This book certainly considers the conceptualisation of young disabled people within a Western / Global North context and must be read as such. It adds to a growing body of literature that challenges 'adultism' or 'Mr Reasonable', as Slater refers to it. Could this growing body of literature that seeks the perspective of children and young people become the new feminism? For people interested in understanding this critical approach and how it interplays with disability, this book is a good place to start.

This is a well-written book and an enjoyable read; I would certainly recommend it. For those starting out in youth and/or disability studies this would be a provocative yet accessible first read. The way it challenges many of the assumptions that underpin Western society, and therefore the place for young people and those with disabilities within that, could lead to more critical engagement with these topics from the beginning of their academic lives.

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Tanya Bownds, recent graduate in MA International Child Studies, King's College London

Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl (Editors)
Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices
Palgrave Macmillan
ISBN: 978-1-137-02772-6
£68.00 (hbk)
pp.295

Emilia Ohberg

Informal Education, Childhood and Youth is a collection of essays that, according to the editors, is attempting to examine the importance of geographies as well as histories to the study and practice of informal education. It also aims to provide a resource 'for critical reflection on practices of informal education for students, academics and practitioners' (p.2). It is intended to enhance the understanding of informal learning and the various environments in which it may take place through theories of social and cultural geography.

The book consists of seventeen chapters written by various authors as well as an introduction and a concluding chapter written by the editors. The essays are organised into four sections entitled Nature Spaces, Negotiating In/formal Education Spaces, Youth Work Spaces and Youth-Led Spaces. The different sections draw on both contemporary and historical examples of informal education from a British as well as an international context. The introduction provides a valuable foundation to the main debates and the conclusion helpfully proposes several possible future directions for both academic research and informal educational practice.

The first section, Nature Spaces, broadly discusses the use of outdoor spaces as sites where informal education can occur. In those contexts the space itself, the authors argue, becomes an integral part of learning. This is the part of the book, I feel, where the idea of geographies of informal education is the most obvious as several of the chapters discuss specifically how different spaces are used and transformed by children and young people for the purposes of informal learning. In the following sections, the idea of geography sometimes becomes a little bit more diffuse and is sometimes lacking completely from some chapters. Equally, the idea of history is very clear in some chapters but lacking from others. The editors argue that this false divide between space and time is necessary for clarity and that '…many chapters in this book have woven together geography and history' (p. 285). I think, however, that their relationship is sometimes less than clear.

In the section entitled Negotiating In/formal Education Spaces, the authors explore sites where formal and informal learning intersect. This section draws on several examples from an international context and argues that informal learning may sometimes take place in a more formal settings and '… is often a mobile practice, which travels and may seek to transgress boundaries as much as constitute them' (p.13). This section also usefully introduces the online world as a site of informal education. I believe that there are some issues in this section, however, with what exactly constitutes informal

education. It is a concept that is notoriously difficult to define and there exists no clear consensus as to its definition, as the editors themselves highlight in their introduction. I would argue that not only is it '…learning that occurs in and through everyday life' (p3.) but it is also learning that children and young people enter into voluntarily. As such, its application in more formal spaces is sometimes problematic and I am not sure that all the examples used in this section necessarily fit into the concept of informal education.

Youth Work Spaces, on the other hand, explores what some might call more traditional sites of informal learning: those led or facilitated by youth workers. The second chapter in this section, 'Managing the Spaces of Freedom: Mid-twentieth-Century Youth Work', provides an especially interesting argument in relation to the professionalisation of youth work in the post-Second World War period and the way in which young people's bodies have themselves been constructed as mediums for informal education in several more or less problematic ways. Equally, the history of feminist youth work provided by Jean Spence in this section is also useful and enlightening. Again, however, this section seems to mix examples of informal education with formal and non-formal education in a way that only serves to blur the concepts.

Finally, in Youth-Led Spaces, the authors provide several examples of participatory youth work in different international contexts. I found the chapter by Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina especially interesting. It provides a very good example of a participatory youth work project which is neither tokenistic nor top-down. My concern, however, is the fact that problems of representation are not discussed within the chapter and it is unclear how much input the young people themselves had in the writing of the essay or in approving how they individually or as a group were portrayed within it. This is in contrast to the final chapter in this section which clearly sets out the extent of the young people's involvement not just in the research project itself, but also in the academic paper.

There is no doubt that this book makes for an interesting read and that its attempt to highlight the importance of both geographies and histories to informal education and its focus on cross-disciplinary approaches is both useful and timely. I feel, however, that the sequence of the book is unclear and I am not certain I understand the rationale behind the structure and the inclusion of certain chapters in the various sections or in the book as a whole. I feel that rather than contributing to a clarification of the idea of informal education, several of the chapters only serve to blur the concept further – though the editors do recognise the sometimes problematic way informal education has been historically constructed in both their introduction and in their conclusion. I feel further that perhaps the book is trying to do too much and instead of providing an in-depth examination it is perhaps better seen as a general introduction to the idea of geographies and histories as integral to the study and practice of informal education.

I believe where the book makes the most interesting contribution to the debate is in the conclusion, which provides some very interesting reflections on the future directions of informal education in

both an academic and a practical context. The focus on technologies in this section is especially interesting as it has so far, I believe, not been adequately explored as a site for informal education neither in academia nor in practice. In addition, the editors' suggestion that more focus should be put on participatory approaches as a way to engage children and young people in their own informal learning is interesting and satisfying to see.

In conclusion, despite some criticisms, I would recommend this book to students, academics and practitioners of informal education and learning as I believe it provides some important insights and can serve as a foundation for further research. I believe it is, as the editors intended, a useful resource for critical reflection on the study and practice of informal education.

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Andrew Burn and Chris Richards (Editors)
Children's Games in the New Media Age – Childlore, Media and the Playground
Ashgate 2014
ISBN: 9781 409450245
pp. 224

David Palmer

How often have teachers and other carers smiled benignly as they have walked across a game of grandmother's footsteps or winced at the high pitched songs that accompany the latest clapping game craze? This timely collection of essays illuminates how incredibly nuanced these seemingly quite chaotic games can be, how the smallest of hand moves, facial expressions, twists, turns and postures all contribute to a complex dynamic, cultural and social mix, a mix in which the children are utterly absorbed and from which the bewildered outside adult observer is excluded. If you are someone who has looked upon playground games as an essentially mundane expression of childishness that punctuates the 'important' parts of the school day, then this is a book set to convert you.

The book essentially tracks a two year research project founded upon seminal research undertaken by Iona and Peter Opie over fifty years ago. For those readers who feel the world spinning out of control as all the previous certainties of the school day fade against the relentless march of technology, take heart from this introductory quote from the Opies in 1959; 'the generally held opinion was that children had lost the power of entertaining themselves…..the cinema, TV and wireless had become their focus of attention' (p.1). The eight chapters cover a wide range of topics but maintain a coherence that, having established the theoretical bases of the research, goes on to look in close detail at children's playground games and the changing face of childhood in the digital era. Far from encouraging breast beating over a disappearing childhood, this book shows us that play is an

integral, timeless part of being a child and whatever forces may be at large to threaten it, the resilience of childhood is standing firm as tradition is internalised as an example of Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. Regular reference to the work of the Opies informs and guides the reader through the connections between on the one hand their early work and the ebb and flow between tradition, and on the other, the virtual worlds of the digital age in the playgrounds of today as tradition is preserved but within a modern cultural context.

The first chapter rewards those prepared to indulge themselves with a second read as it takes us through the authors' multi-disciplinary project combining varied research methodologies. We are introduced to three key concepts; ludic bricolage (the adaption of games systems under the influence of digital play), cultural rehearsal (which looks at the relationship between layers of cultural expression and innovation), and heterotopian games (play in virtual worlds as they relate to physical play). There are five strands to the research, the digitisation and analysis of sound recordings made by the Opies, a two year ethnographic study of play in a London and a Sheffield school, a website of children's games that draws heavily on the agency of the children involved and which was produced with the assistance of The British Library, an innovative motion tracking research tool and a documentary film. The centrality of the Opies' work acts as a guiding light as their findings enable comparative studies and are re-examined in a modern context uncovering in the process some fascinating historical linkages as well as bringing a fresh eye to bear on some wonderfully rich data as relevant today as it was fifty years ago. The book as a whole offers a broad, and deep, range of perspectives that will appeal to many research areas and as such is an invaluable reference for those engaged in childhood studies research as well as those looking for a more detailed account of children's play in the modern era.

The second chapter hangs a good many examples of the Opies' work on the theoretical framework and probes new areas of enquiry around the sound recordings. The interface between online play and children's playground games is lent particular poignancy through the charting of one clapping game over time; the impact of You Tube as a cultural resource on the development and transmission of games is of particular interest and relevance. The quotes from children really illuminate this quite detailed analysis as discrete, and almost invisible, power relationships fluctuate within the group as they seek to gain ascendancy and prestige.

Chris Richard's chapter (4) on play fighting draws on the author's own experiences around cowboys and Indians and on the experiences of Paul Gilroy whose rough play featured fighting Nazis. There is much in this chapter to prompt further discussion not least when looking at the playground as a free yet highly supervised area where adult interpretation of events is often at odds with what is really occurring. Interviews with children at one of the study's schools will elicit the odd smile not least when gender tensions are examined.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and relevant chapters in this excellent collection is Jackie Marsh's examination in chapter five of the continuities and discontinuities between children's on line and off

line play as studied in the Sheffield school. She exposes some very blurred boundaries and examines amongst other things the 'stickiness' of games sites (where for example you need to return regularly to nurture a pet by purchasing 'food'), as she looks at the connection between commercialism and childrens' socialisation. Marsh engages the reader with the use of sociograms to interrogate the links between friends that are on line and those off line with some intriguing findings including that children had many more friends of the opposite sex online than offline. The accompanying transcriptions add an affective layer to the discussion that will resonate with practitioners. In this thought provoking chapter Marsh highlights suggestions for future research such as whether children who cannot develop trust in relationships offline also struggle online.

Rebekah Willett's chapter (6) elucidates the benefits of ethnography specifically when studying children's play in the context of the impact of media referents. The use of clear salient examples serves to elucidate Bishop et al's (2006) four quite discrete yet slippery categories of media referenced playground practice with examples including how 'The Man from UNCLE' and Jeremy Kyle are recontextualised in the playground. The penultimate chapter is worth waiting for. It is a fascinating account of the Game Catcher aspect of the research project, whose two aims are to create a motion tracking tool that creates a 3D analysis of playground games, and to create a computer game that draws on the agency of children as cultural actors in refashioning the game through the feedback loop from playground to game and vice versa. The concluding chapter relates to the website created by collaboration between some of the children and The British Library. Although sadly no longer available on the Library's main pages, this chapter brings the children's' ability to think about their role in the digital age very much to the fore.

This is an important book with some chapters more accessible to a general audience than others but all highly valuable in their exploration of a topic which in many ways opens doors onto some fascinating avenues of discovery. This reviewer found it helpful to read the postscript first as it considers 'ways of knowing' – how researchers can make sense of the kaleidoscopic, frenetic world of the playground. It is clear that an investment of emotion and intersubjectivity are vital and equally clear that these same qualities were harnessed in constructing this book.

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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.

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