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SERVICES FOR SUICIDAL YOUNG PEOPLE:
Qualitative research on lay and professional perspectives

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In 2002, 14% of the 201,000 deaths reported to coroners in England and Wales received the verdict 'death by suicide'. Of these suicides, 2,490 were men and 752 were women (Home Office, 2003). World Health Organisation statistics show that the global profile of suicides has become increasingly younger and more gendered since 1950 (WHO, 2003). In the industrialised West the biggest rise in suicide rates over time has been in the suicide of young men (Gunnell et al, 2003). In the UK suicide has become the second most common cause of death among young people aged 15-24 (Kerfoot, 2000) and in England it is now the most common cause of death for adult males under 35 (Department of Health, 2002). Alongside these trends is the growing recognition that a significant proportion of these individuals are known to services prior to suicide (Department of Health, 2001). This raises the question of why those who are considering suicide do not seek help from these services before actually killing themselves.

There are clearly several different potential target audiences for suicide prevention strategies. Amongst these potential groups are people who present to services. It is important to note that half of all people who kill themselves have previously made failed attempts (Gunnell, 2000). Failed suicide attempts are very likely to result in some kind of contact with crisis services, and hospitals in particular. As an example of the contact that services have with suicidal people, Higgitt (2000) notes that one in four people who kill themselves and are not known to mental health teams, have attended an Accident and Emergency Department within the previous year. Higgitt further notes that around half of those who attend A&E departments following an episode of deliberate self-harm are discharged without having been subject to a psychosocial assessment. There are also of course people who kill themselves on the first attempt who have made some contact with services whilst in distress.

In this paper we present some findings from qualitative research that shed some light on young people's use of services, both from the testimonies of young people themselves, and also from the perspectives of staff working in services which encounter young people in distress. For those who do ask for help from professionals, the interaction between service provider and service user is of crucial importance. The attitudes of professionals and young people in crisis towards each other are an important element of this interaction. The paper therefore begins with a summary

of some of the existing research on the attitudes of professionals towards suicidal behaviour and the views of young people on services and help from adults, before presenting our own findings from focus groups and interview data with service providers and lay people.

Professional Perspectives on Suicidal Behaviour

The attitudes of professionals to young people who present at services with suicidal or self-harming behaviour will to some extent determine how these individuals are dealt with by those professionals. Prior experience, as well as the nature of the interaction between the young person and the help provider, will serve to shape the actions and reactions of both participants (service provider and help seeker). For young people presenting at a General Practitioner consultation, voluntary help group or an Accident and Emergency Department, this interaction may well be the first time that both participants have met. Thus, the initial meeting is crucial in determining not only how the young person is treated (Anderson, 1997), but also whether the young person will engage in treatment programmes and/or whether they will ask for help again.

Some interesting findings emerge from the literature on service providers' attitudes towards suicide attempters. Negative attitudes in staff members may lead to suicidal patients not being properly assessed or managed appropriately. In one study (Herron et al, 2001), it was found that Accident and Emergency staff believed those considering suicide would not disclose these feelings. This study also highlighted the discomfort experienced by nurses when assessing suicide risk and their belief that poverty and unemployment were the main causes of such behaviour. Taken together, these results suggest that the A&E nurses sampled felt there was little they could do to intervene. Conversely, community psychiatric nurses within the same study reported much more positive attitudes towards suicidal patients, and expressed the belief that working with them was rewarding. The notion of non-fatal self-harm as merely a bid for attention appears widespread amongst general practitioners (Herron et al, 2001), doctors and nurses (Anderson et al, 2000), and younger mental health staff (Huband and Tantam, 2000). In Anderson et al's (2000) interviews with doctors and nurses, they found that the term 'attention seeking' was a means of viewing patients negatively, perceiving them as 'time-wasters' or 'irritating'. Interviews with both doctors and nurses revealed a tendency to view non-fatal self-harm as more prevalent in young people, and particularly those who had been in adolescent units or care.

It is not only the attitudes of health professionals that may influence suicide prevention. Teachers can potentially notice changes in children's behaviour and can be in a

position to talk to the child. In a study by King et al, (1999), only 9% of health teachers, who saw their primary role as preventing suicide, felt able to recognise at-risk students. Wastell and Shaw (1999) found that trainee teachers in their sample deemed suicide to be a 'cry for help' with manipulation being the primary communicative intent.

Young People's Views of Services and Help From Adults

Research on young people's views of the services available to them in times of distress shows a general lack of knowledge both in terms of what services are available and how to access them. In one qualitative study (Fuller et al, 2000), a sample of 13-14 year olds perceived services to have highly specific roles, serving as a disincentive for approaching them about other problems. In a similar way, Coggan et al, (1997) found that young people in their focus groups thought health professionals placed an emphasis upon 'diagnosis' and immediate symptoms rather than exploring underlying emotional problems. In Jacobson et al's study (2001), most young people were uncertain about the availability of counselling in primary care. This same research also highlights many of the difficulties that young people experience when accessing services. Negotiating appointments and being confined to set consultation periods can be daunting for a young person: 'you got to put on such an act and you're only in there five minutes' (teenager in Jacobson et al, 2001). Long waiting lists can serve to exacerbate these difficulties, making young people feel like just another statistic (Coggan et al, 1997), or that they are disturbing or bothering busy professionals (Jacobson et al, 2001).

For young people, the confidentiality and trust inherent within the particular service is of the utmost importance. Generally, informal networks such as friends and family are deemed more confidential than more formalised networks such as general practitioners and teachers (Fuller et al, 2000). Indeed, formal services are distrusted as young people fear that service providers will divulge personal details to their parents. For example, even though young people understand that the general practitioner consultation is confidential, they are still anxious about the general practitioner informing their parents (Jacobson et al, 2001). This concern of young people that their personal problems and discussions will be divulged to others is a major factor which can prevent them from talking about their issues with strangers (Fuller et al, 2000).

Young people report that adults may either over-dramatise problems or trivialise them, seeing young people's problems and concerns as less serious than their own. Young people talk about a lack of understanding and a gulf between what young people deem to be important and what adults believe to be important (Fuller et al, 2000). Adults can over-react to problems that young people merely

want to discuss: for example where parents might rush to school to talk to teachers when the young person merely wanted to discuss the problem.

According to Fuller et al, young people deem adults to be a valuable resource when active problem-solving strategies are necessary. Whilst friends listen and empathise, adults are able to devise ways in which problems can be solved and can provide alternate courses of action. The risk for young people is that adults will 'take over' and prevent young people from maintaining control. This can be particularly pertinent in formal settings where young people may feel dis-empowered by professional service providers. Jacobson et al, report teenagers feeling intimidated when talking to their general practitioner. Young people can feel that they are not taken seriously and can lack the confidence to express themselves. The research literature suggests that young people differentiate between the nature of the problem and which, if any, service to access (albeit within a limited scope of their knowledge as to what services are available).

Much of the existing research in this area has either focused solely on young people or on one particular group of professionals. Our study was small-scale but wide-ranging insofar as we spoke to both professionals and lay people, and targeted a diverse purposive sample of both groups. Before presenting findings, however, we explain our research design in the section that follows.

Research Methods
The qualitative research presented in this paper is part of a larger mixed method study on gendered help-seeking in young people that is funded by the Wales Office of Research and Development in Health and Social Care (see the project web site at http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/smalleyn). We conducted semi-structured interviews with a range of professionals who are likely to encounter young people in distress, and focus groups with a range of lay people. Most focus groups were with young people in population groups that epidemiological research has shown to be at increased risk of suicide and as such, agencies that targeted these populations were invited to participate. The one exception was a group of bereaved parents. Focus group composition varied between two and eight members. The interviews and focus groups featured discussion of gender, emotional distress, and suicidal behaviour. The specific aspect of the research findings that is presented in this paper is the views of both lay and professional people on services for suicidal young people, though the discussion inevitably refers to emotional and mental distress more generally. The table below lists the research participants.

Table One: Participants in interviews and focus groups

Interviews	Focus groups
1 Adult helpline manager	1 Bereaved parents
2 Adult psychiatrist	2 Care leavers
3 Child and adolescent mental health social worker	3 Former drug users
4 Child care social work manager	4 Further education college (2 groups)
5 Child helpline worker	5 Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth group
6 Child psychiatrist	6 Mental health service users
7 Detached youth worker	7 Peer-led youth group
8 Drugs worker	
9 Further education college teacher	
10 General Practitioner	
11 Head of Sixth Form	
12 Lesbian/gay/bisexual helpline (group interview) manager and two volunteers	
13 Mental health liaison police officer	
14 Representative of bereaved parents' organisation	
15 Youth centre worker	

Interviewees were selected to represent a range of professional organisations and orientations: services with varying degrees of formality from health, education, and social care sectors. The common ground between interviewees was that they all have some kind of interest in helping young people in distress. In all the focus groups we conducted, the participants were already known to each other because access was negotiated via a gate-keeping organisation. Although recruitment was facilitated by social welfare organisations, all participants were self-selected. It should be acknowledged that our focus group participants were not just any lay people. We would not expect opinion expressed there to be straightforwardly representative of a wider population of young people. These were patients, clients of social workers and youth workers, and some were trainee social care workers. Their expressed opinions therefore reflect both lay and professional formulations. Many of these young people were in fact actively negotiating the boundaries of lay and professional discourse, moving in and out of both domains. In two groups, the young people we spoke to were both recent 'clients' and were also now in some kind of staff role. The distinction between lay and professional knowledge is far from straightforward, insofar as knowledge spirals in and out of expert systems (what Giddens' [1993] calls the 'double hermeneutic of knowledge').

All the focus groups with young people were conducted by the project researcher (Nina Smalley). The bereaved parents' focus group was conducted by another member of the research team (Jonathan Scourfield). The same format was used for each session. It included the use of two case vignettes of suicidal young people (reproduced in

figure one below). Both interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded and tapes were fully transcribed by the researcher. Data were analysed according to the principles of 'grounded theory' (Strauss, 1987): after reading a few randomly selected interviews, two members of the project team worked independently in order to identify, develop, and apply codes to the data (table two). The research team agreed a coding frame and coding was then facilitated by computer software (QSR N-Vivo).

Having briefly explained our methods of data collection, the next section will present our findings from the qualitative research in relation to participants' views on services for suicidal young people. All names used for participants are pseudonyms.

Figure One: Vignettes of suicidal young people

Vignette one

Aaron is 17 years old. He lives with his mother and step-father. He has been bullied throughout comprehensive school because other children say he is gay. He is often called names, especially by younger children, and in the past he has been beaten up by other boys. He has coped with the worst of this bullying because of the support of a couple of friends, whose way of dealing with it is to re-assure Aaron that it's OK because he is 'normal' really. He has in fact wondered for some time if he might be bisexual, and is frightened of how his family and friends might react if they knew. He thinks there is no-one he can talk to and he has thought about killing himself.

Vignette two

Cerys is 18 and lives in a flat by herself. She used to have a job in a shoe shop but has recently been laid off. Her relationship with her mother has been poor for some time and now Cerys says that every time they meet they argue. She thinks her mother has never had a good word to say about her. She has recently split up with a boyfriend. She is very depressed, and has started using heroin, which is easily available on the estate where she lives, to help her cope with these feelings. She regularly thinks about 'ending it all' by killing herself, and has been admitted to hospital several times after over-dosing.

Table Two: The coding frame – main themes

Coding Frame Themes

1 Definitions
2 Sources of emotional problems
3 Symptoms of emotional problems
4 Sources of help
5 Helping/coping activities
6 Gender issues
7 Case studies

Findings

Services are discussed in two separate sections. They are grouped primarily according to their immediacy for young people. The first section concerns youth workers, teachers, counsellors, and helplines. These are either services/professionals that young people encounter in everyday life or are considered by them to be accessible and useable. The second group is GPs, social workers, psychiatric services, and the police. These professionals are seen as less accessible to young people in distress and some on this list are of course secondary services that require referral.

Youth workers, teachers, counsellors and helplines
For the first group of services six main themes are identified. The first two themes are positive reasons for using these networks: the professional nature of service providers and the empowerment that they gave the young person. Two sets of negative factors are then discussed: the characteristics of the service provider and the possibility that confidentiality would be breached. The final two themes are the positive and negative aspects of using helplines.

The benefits of being able to talk to someone away from the family environment were discussed in some of the focus groups. One young man in the mental health service users group said he would receive a more professional and non-judgemental service from a youth worker. He felt that his youth worker would not relate his current problems to his past actions and behaviour and would not judge him accordingly. The drugs worker expressed the view that youth workers served an 'intermediary' role by providing young people with a safe environment to work through problems before approaching others:

> *Getting experienced youth workers in there to say 'what works, what doesn't, what they have tried, what they haven't tried?' And get an approach which is completely directed at a young person. It is so serious for these young people at the time, and I think that it is just about going in and saying yes, I think that what you are going through is your own little nemesis, how can we work on that? You don't want to go to your parents. How about maybe chatting to a teacher? You don't need to tell them who it is or anything like that, and for them to keep an eye on you. How about telling your parents that you are not very happy in school and then leaving it at that and then maybe going back in a couple of weeks when you are feeling a bit stronger and telling them the reason why? Work at their level so that they are achieving things at their pace, not pressurising it.*
> (Interview with drugs worker)

A young man in the peer-led youth group demonstrated the practical ways in which his youth worker helped him to gain access to social services after he was admitted to a psychiatric ward for taking an overdose. This group felt that merely having a youth worker with them served to give them confidence when dealing with professionals. For example, one respondent said, 'personally I don't think anything would have come of it if Alex *[Youth Worker]* hadn't been there, you know to help me. To have someone even sitting next to you, not saying a word'.

Voluntary sector counselling was described (by the adult psychiatrist) as a 'nice gentle way, if you like, of being able to deal with your problems' without the

stigma of everyone within the community knowing that the young person was seeking this form of help. Counselling was generally viewed as a good source of help, although the care leavers' group criticised the formality of these services:

Paul: *Yeah, and you've got to try and find it, if you don't know where it is. Then you've got to sit and listen, in reception.*

Chris: *Feels like everyone knows that you're here for, like.*

Laura: *Yeah.*

(Care leavers' focus group)

The youth centre worker commented that admitting a need for counselling was very difficult for young people, and was not helped by long waiting lists to see someone. The issue of talking to a stranger was brought up in the focus groups, with many feeling that this would make them uncomfortable. Paul in the care leavers' group seemed to resolve this by actively assessing his counsellor before deciding whether to stay:

Laura: *Are you happy speaking to a stranger though?*

Paul: *No, I'm not. I'll get to know the stranger*

Laura: *Because I think that if you're strong enough to go and speak to someone, but not all people are gonna be are they?*

Paul: *I'm not, d'ya know what I mean? I'll have to suss this person out first before I start to talk about problems. Because I've been to see one counsellor already who asked me how many fags I smoked a day so I just got up and walked out.*

Nina *(researcher): Why?*

Paul: *I found that irrelevant, totally irrelevant. It's my personal business that. She shouldn't need to know. Not even a friend asks how many fags you smoke a day, d'ya know what I mean, that's just taking the piss in my eyes.*

(Care leavers' focus group)

In keeping with the findings of Offer *et al.* (1991), the characteristics of the service provider were a significant factor for young people seeking help. In the peer-led youth group they valued the 'positive' approach of this particular style of youth organisation, in comparison with what they assume would be the 'air' of a group run by a police officer.

Rob: *When I got involved with this organisation I was 16. I was into drugs, I was into crime, anything. And the only reason why I got out*

was because the whole environment and the friendship group that emerged in my life around that time was this pro-active way of living rather than living from one day to the other. Looking to the future and saying 'right okay this is a bad thing, this is a good thing', having a bit of this, having a bit of that. It was all positive stuff, like Jane [Youth Worker], now if she was a police lady who run this project and had that air about her she wouldn't get the same feedback for starters.

Michelle: *We wouldn't be here!*

(Peer-led youth group)

Teachers are potentially an important source of help, as young people in school will encounter teachers more than any other professional. Mixed views emerged as to whether the young people deemed teachers a good source of help. For the professionals we interviewed, teachers were thought to be the 'next line of call' for young people after friends, as they were able to notice changes in their pupils' behaviour:

Form tutors are excellent. Form tutors are the first alarm bell system. Because they know these kids and some of them have had them since they were 11 in their forms. So they will suddenly say 'there's something wrong with so and so. I don't know what it is. I'll have a chat to them'. So they're very, very good with them and very often then they'll refer things on to me.

(Interview with Head of Sixth Form)

Whilst this middle manager suggests that teachers are able to help pupils by discussing their concerns with each other, this appears to be at odds with the value that some of the young people in the focus groups place upon confidentiality. The mental health service users' group reported their perception that the teachers within their school only talked to them so that they could laugh at them and ignored requests for confidentiality so that they could openly discuss them in the staff room. A member of the care leavers' group also noted how teachers within his school failed to display compassion, with some even stigmatising him because he did not attempt to hide the fact that he was a victim of domestic abuse.

There was a general consensus that teachers needed training in how to approach and deal with young people and their personal and emotional problems. When discussing pupils concerns, the GP we interviewed also expressed concern as to how equipped teachers were in diagnosing problems:

If a school phones up and says we're worried about such and such, I don't expect them to know about medicine in the same way that I don't know about

teaching. But nonetheless it might be that I'm hearing their interpretation of something and, it sounds terribly patronising, but it's often wrong (laughs). (Interview with GP)

As well as the need for increased training, both the professionals and focus groups suggested that there was a need for counsellors to be placed within the school environment. This was seen to be an excellent way of providing all pupils with emotional and confidential support. It was also thought that this measure would benefit teachers. The FE college tutor noted the difficulty in supporting young people whilst still maintaining her authority as a teacher. The first focus group vignette introduced sexuality to the discussion, and the observation was made that teachers are reluctant or unable, due to section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 (for England and Wales), to discuss issues concerning sexuality. This statute has since changed of course.

Some research participants saw the anonymity and non-judgemental nature of helplines as a crucial strength. Even though these services were thought to be very accessible to young people (especially in light of the prevalence of mobile phones), actually making the call was seen as a big step for the young person to make. The focus groups of young people demonstrated a clear division between those who would use (and in some instances had) used these services and those who were strongly against it. Some focus group participants saw the anonymity as an incentive and others felt it would serve to deter them from using such a service. Armstrong et al, (2000) similarly found some young people in their focus groups to be concerned about talking to an unseen stranger about their personal problems. Some excerpts from our focus groups on helplines are presented below.

Extract A

Talk about it over the phone I do because, like, I can go off on tangents over the phone ... because you don't know who you're talking to, you're getting problems off your chest and they don't know you.

(Peer-led youth group)

Extract B

You can say your problems in a hypothetical way so they can't even think about it being you and you won't see that person walking down the street afterwards with those problems. Like talking to some stranger, that stranger don't know me and I don't know them. It's off your mind, for a short period. I admit, yeah, it will come back, but for a short period of time it gives you that bit of mind clearance, even if it's just an hour or two half the time.

(Care leavers' focus group)

Extract C

Hannah:	*I wouldn't feel comfortable ringing them*
Nina:	*Why?*
Hannah:	*I don't know, over the phone sort of thing*
Tom:	*You can't see their face, face to face*
Hannah:	*And you don't know if they're interested. 'Oh come on, get off the phone' sort of thing. I wouldn't, I've never tried it but I don't think, even now, I wouldn't, I wouldn't never ring 'em.*

(Further education college focus group)

GPs, social workers, psychiatric services and police

The young people generally thought that doctors were unable to devote enough time to patients with emotional problems or sufficient attention to the causes of such distress. A young woman in one of the further education college focus groups thought that her doctor would make her feel uncomfortable if she began talking about her personal problems because he would think that she was wasting his time (see also Jacobson et al, 2001). The adult psychiatrist saw a distinction between doctors who are psychologically minded and those who are not and thought that for those patients visiting a doctor with no psychological interest there was the danger of being given the 'brush off'. The representative of the bereaved parents' organisation saw GPs as the obvious first point of contact, although she recognised that the response would vary.

> *Now that isn't to say that the GP will respond appropriately, because we know that some GPs are absolutely on the ball with this and other GPs haven't got a clue. But the first port of call really should be the GP.*
> (Interview with representative of bereaved parents' organisation)

Some doctors were thought to be too keen on offering palliatives (see also Coggan et al, 1997 and Sharpe et al, 2001), with young people in the peer-led youth and care leavers groups wary of taking prescribed medication for emotional problems. It was deemed to be a way of 'turning something that might be an emotional problem, might just need support, into a medical thing' (youth centre worker). Yet the care leavers' group suggested that some young people also 'make up' problems purely to obtain prescribed medication. Distinguishing between genuine need and false presentations was thought to be tremendously difficult for doctors. In cases of overdose, doctors were thought to be unsympathetic and uninterested in why the young person had acted in this manner. Michelle in the peer-led youth group said 'I had a row, I did, off my doctor when I overdosed. He was really nasty with me he was'.

Being treated unsympathetically by doctors was also thought to compound the problems that young people were experiencing. Dean from the peer-led youth group noted that his doctor treated him like a child and made him feel 'dis-empowered'. Chris from the care leavers' group suggested that some young people assess their doctor's attitude by presenting with a physical ailment before deciding whether to approach them about emotional issues:

> *A lot of people, they go to the doctor and just like what Paul was saying, you would test them out first. So it's, like, 'yeah I got foot ache'. And then you see what you say about my foot ache, if you advise me and how you communicate with me for my foot, then I might really show you the proper issues.*
> (Chris from the care leavers' focus group)

It is not uncommon for people to present physical symptoms in place of emotional ones. Indeed they do not always recognise symptoms of emotional disorder: even when they do recognise them, they may not consider such symptoms to be medical (Prior et al, 2003). The bereaved parents' representative suggests that most young people simply do not visit their GPs except for a few very specific issues (Jacobson et al., 2001 note that young people are infrequent users of GPs):

Nina: *Why do you think that so many young people don't seek help?*

Cath: *Well, young people don't go to the doctors. They don't go for anything. They only go, young people go to the doctors because of acne (laughs) and contraceptive advice. That's it, you know. I've got several friends who are GPs who tell me this. I mean they just don't go. The problem is much wider than saying why do young people not go to GPs when they're feeling suicidal. They don't go to GPs anyway.*

(Interview with representative of bereaved parents' organisation)

Social services were generally mentioned within the interviews and focus groups as an intermediary service, enabling young people to gain access to other services such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The majority of comments about social workers were of a very general nature. There was perhaps not a great deal of knowledge of the role of social workers, perhaps because state social workers serve a limited section of the population and there is generally less known about what they do. One of the participants in the peer-led youth group noted that gaining access to social services helped to 'pull him out' of a history of paracetamol overdosing.

The child care social work manager we interviewed thought that some social workers were better able to relate to adolescents than many other professionals. She also believed that the key to working with this age group was to work with them as opposed to merely attempting to tell them what to do. This comment matched the peer-led youth group's conviction that working with young people should be about empowering them to make their own decisions.

> *So it depends really on what type of person the social worker is. I mean you've got some that work better with young, young, young people* [hand gesture to indicate small child] *and some who work better with the older sort of young person... but when you've got an adolescent, if you don't work with them, they'll just tell you to on your bike and so, you know, it's a different way of working really. It's about engaging with them, you know, and negotiating a lot, and a lot of it really is expectations as well, isn't it? What are the expectations? What do you want? Definitely this is how I work, this is what I would do, and I would try and help. You know, I can't perform miracles but we'll work on it together and if you don't like it we'll discuss it and I'll tell you my reasoning behind it. It's about you know treating them with the respect ...*
> (Interview with child care social work manager)

For young people who were referred to CAMHS, the first stage of the process involved the completion of an in-depth assessment, which often included both the young people and their parents:

> *Generally we have got a standard letter. We invite the young person, the parent and any other family members. We do a family assessment. Then, depending on our assessment, if we want to get any other information from the school, from the employer or social services we get the young person's parents' consent and then we can contact them. Then having got all of the information we complete an assessment and then we discuss with the young person of the family this is what we think the difficulty is.*
> (Interview with child psychiatrist)

The concern was expressed by some research participants that adolescents tend to fall between CAMHS and adult psychiatry, resulting in different young people experiencing different approaches, insofar as child and adolescent services were thought to be more psychological, and adult psychiatry more pharmacological. This difference in approach was said to be a shock for young people more used to the child and adolescent system and the adult psychiatrist said there was a drop out at this stage. Alex from the lesbian/gay/bisexual group told us that his referral

to a psychiatric ward had put him off this kind of service and that he would not go there again:

Alex: *Last time I committed suicide, I didn't speak to no-one so when I was admitted, I was seen by a psychiatrist. I went into the psychiatric ward and, that put me off. I won't go there again.*

Nina: *Why?*

Alex: *Because within that psychiatric ward they're highly medicated. But saying that, there are times this year when I have thought about it and, I've been thinking to myself if I'm going to do it I'm not going back to the psychiatric ward.*

(Lesbian/gay/bisexual youth group)

The experience of Rob from the peer-led youth group was of difficulty in getting a referral to a psychiatric service:

Well, I've had a recent experience and the only way I could get to see the crisis team in the mental health services in the unit up by me was by going to the GP and crying. Otherwise they won't give you a look in.
(Rob in the peer-led youth group)

The adult psychiatrist thought that whereas current child and adolescent mental health services operate on a referral system, there could be potential benefits in an open door system where people could just turn up and be seen.

The police liaison officer saw the community mental health teams as struggling with heavy caseloads and 'just about managing what they've got'. He saw this as leading to long waiting lists, and similarly the Head of Sixth Form noted that there was a 'huge gap' between the time where they noticed that a young person was having problems and when they would be seen by someone. 'Paul' in the care leavers group also commented upon the waiting list:

Paul: *I had one meeting with someone. I was really, really ill then. I just tried it and I had nothing else after that.*

Nina: *They just didn't follow it up?*

Paul: *Didn't follow at all. I had one meeting in hospital just to see if I was assessment or not and they stopped after that. They didn't contact me again so I tried again. Basically it has taken 8 weeks before I could get another assessment.*

(Care leavers' group)

The majority of the young people in the focus groups did not mention CAMHS. Most of the young people we spoke to would not have been expected to have any direct experience of such a service. Therefore, the main comments received with regard to CAMHS were from professionals who work alongside this service.

In a similar way, the majority of young people had no experience or comments to make about the police force. We would not have expected the police to figure strongly as a helping agency, given their criminal justice role, although the child helpline said the police provided them with valuable support when dealing with callers who had attempted suicide. Two young men within the focus groups had had experience of the police, one negative and one positive. Their mental health liaison officer told us the police tend to become involved with young people under sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act, which enables the police to remove people from their homes to take them to a place of safety, and to remove people from public places if they appear to be suffering from a mental health problem. The police officer observed that young people were afraid of being arrested and convicted, and found incarceration in adult prisons to be a stressful experience. Again, the need for training emerged as the police officer noted that they could only deal with what they could see:

> *People have taken their own lives in custody - young people - and we can't make excuses for ourselves, but we can only deal with what we can see. And we're not professional, as far as identifying mental illness is concerned. So I suppose that there is a need to have a little bit more information for us, for no other specific use other than when a person's in our custody, when the person is at their most vulnerable, the person's on their own in the cell, that we know that we should be keeping a really close eye because of the information we got.*
> (Interview with police officer)

Conclusion

The research presented is based on a small and highly selected purposive sample of professional and lay people: any conclusions therefore have to be tentative. Our lay respondents were well connected to mainstream youth work and so do not necessarily reflect the views of a wider population of young people. Nonetheless, these were professionals and lay people with particular expertise in relation to emotional distress in young people. Qualitative work allows respondents to report in their own terms the issues and events that they see as being relevant to the matters at hand. We allowed our participants to talk at some length and some interesting views emerged. As noted earlier, the data presented do not just relate to suicide but often to emotional distress in general. Suicide was a stated interest of ours, but

inevitably the discussions ranged more widely. There were some differences between lay and professional views (which we have mentioned above) but these were not as striking in relation to services as the areas of agreement.

To summarise, when asked about actual help-seeking experience, examples of negative experiences far outweighed positive ones. Being treated disrespectfully by service providers was given as a negative experience by some of the young people, with bad experiences of specific services seen as deterring young people from asking for help again. Some of the research participants noted that young people tend to approach services in the 'wrong' ways at the 'wrong' times. The overall picture is one which probably fits with the experience of many youth workers and others who engage with young people, namely that young people say the kind of approach they value is an informal one which does not dictate, but takes their own views seriously. There was a perception in both sets of people we spoke to (young people and professionals) that young people tend to be wary of the more formal services. There were some negative accounts of doctors, for example. There were more positive accounts of young people's use of more immediately available and less formal services, which contrasted with more formally structured services (especially those that require a referral). The data lend some support to the provision of informal community-based services and in particular open access services where young people can turn up when they want, spontaneously, rather than having to meet specified appointments.

Figure two represents a summary of young people's hierarchy of sources of help, as described both by professionals and by young people themselves. It includes the finding which we have not dwelt on in this paper (the paper's focus being services), but that is strongly supported by our quantitative data (Greenland et al., 2003) that young people are much more likely to go to friends and family for help than to formal services.

Figure Two – a hierarchy of sources of help
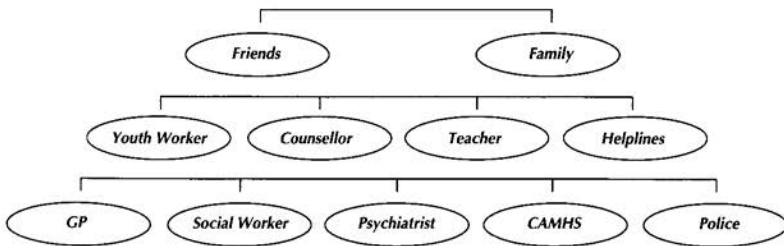
Caution is advised of course in responding to any research on people's views of services. It is relatively easy for any of us as consumers to criticise existing services and list the characteristics of what we might consider an ideal service. This process does not ensure that a service that was created according to these ideal characteristics would be used any more than a traditional service. To a degree, this expression of views about services is speculation and it tends to be divorced from any concern about practicalities. As the GP we interviewed, who had himself conducted research on what young people say they want out of services, 'if you listen to what young people want [...] they'll ask for absolutely everything and some of that may or may not be possible'. Qualitative research on the views of lay and professional people about services is only one part of a large jigsaw. The development of services for suicidal young people should proceed on the basis of a variety of evidence, but we would certainly see the results of qualitative research on the views of stakeholders to be an important part of this evidence base.

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HOW CONNEXIONS CAME TO TERMS WITH YOUTH WORK

TOM WYLIE

Most youth workers in England had a spring in their steps in early May 1997. A new Labour government had just taken office with some apparent commitment to the needs of young people, especially the young unemployed. In opposition the Labour Party had used a task force to study youth issues in preparation for being in government and the Party's spokesman, Peter Kilfoyle, had not only taken a close interest in the Youth Service but was himself a former youth worker. Surely the sun was about to shine on youth work after long years in the shadows?

Regrettably not. The New Deal on employment was launched in 1998 and work was set in hand to reform the youth justice system on the back of the Audit Commission's report *Misspent Youth* (1996). However, Labour never published its internal task force paper on youth issues and Kilfoyle was not given the youth brief in government but was despatched to other ministerial duties. The youth (in Education) post was taken instead by Kim Howells, MP for Pontypridd, and a man with no discernible knowledge of current youth issues. Howells also appeared to regard causing offence as a perk of office (and so would go on later to denounce Britain's 'charcoal-shirted' arts community; the Turner prize - 'cold, mechanical, conceptual bullshit'; British film-makers - 'a very small miserable bunch of chattering classes'). The Youth Service soon faced his scorn; 'I've never met such down-at-heart, "can't do" representatives as I've met of Youth Services in Britain' (Cited in Davies, 1999).

It was evident that any political impetus to strengthen youth work had leached from New Labour's immediate agenda. Happily, the few civil servants immediately concerned, notably Graham Holley, had had some thoughts of their own. One of these was to map current Youth Service provision in English local authorities. This was eventually published in September 1998 as *England's Youth Service: the 1998 Audit* (NYA, 1998). It achieved a 100% return from local authorities and could be described as a 'Doomsday Book' of the scale of provision in this part of the youth sector. Its commentary, written by Mary Marken, underlined the longstanding wide variations on provision across the land, reflecting the different funding and other commitments of local authorities. It showed that the very fabric of the Youth Services was so weak in many areas that it found it hard to sustain either innovation or its continuing work.

The publication of this first Youth Service Audit was inherited by a new Minister, George Mudie, a street-savvy Scot with a trade union background representing

a disadvantaged constituency in Leeds. Mudie was personally sympathetic to youth work and wanted to improve matters. But he was thwarted by two factors. First he became pre-occupied by the task of reshaping the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC)and existing Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) into national/local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Second, a key policy adviser, Tom Bentley (on secondment to the secretary of state from Demos), had a particular interest in reconstructing the support services for young people along the lines he set out in his book *Destination Unknown* (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999)

The intervention of the Social Exclusion Unit

Meanwhile, a new player in the machinery of government was making its presence felt. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) had been created to deal with those 'wicked issues' which often spanned Whitehall departments and were not sufficiently central to the policy concerns of any one. It was skilfully led by Moira Wallace, a high flier from HM Treasury, and its direct reporting line to the Prime Minister gave it authority to knock heads together. A stream of influential studies and reports followed, ranging across teenage pregnancy, truancy and neighbourhood renewal (SEU, 1998).

At this point disjunctures occurred in the policy-making process. The Department for Education and Skills was pursuing an educational reform agenda, including for 14-19 education. It had produced a White Paper *Learning to Succeed* and it needed legislative time to dismantle the TECs and FEFC and to create the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The SEU had studied the position of those 16–18 year olds not in education, training or employment ('the NEETS') and had produced *Bridging the Gap* which sketched how a solution might be constructed (SEU, 1999). We can leave aside the weaknesses in the data used as its basis and the rather selective way in which it deployed the evidence, including an OECD study of comparable arrangements, particularly in Scandinavia, which recognised a vital role for the local authority.

A more serious flaw was the time lag between publishing the *Bridging the Gap* report and that of the separate SEU analysis of the position of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods carried out by its Policy Action Team 12. The latter study was both broader and richer in its analysis than *Bridging the Gap* and had much more pertinent proposals on how to construct effective local and national arrangements to co-ordinate services and funding for the young (SEU, 2000). But it arrived too late. The DfES had already seized on *Bridging the Gap* with its narrower emphasis on education and training matters. Moreover, the parliamentary timetable was already running and thus any proposals needed to be incorporated into the Bill which parliamentary counsel were developing.

In this process little consideration was given to the needs and potential of the Youth Service although there were a few references in various reports and a particular commendation of the role of detached and outreach work. George Mudie had despaired of getting a properly focussed paper on the Youth Service from his officials or advisers and turned to The NYA (and this author) to draft a possible 'green paper'. But Mudie was not able to get this past the policy guardians in other parts of the DfES and in No 10: it was kicked into the long grass, from where it would eventually be retrieved.

The arrival of Connexions

An explanation for Mudie's inability to act on specific Youth Service business lay in the publication of the strategy document (DfES, 2000) which announced the proposed creation of Connexions with its own national unit (CSNU), 47 regional partnerships co-terminus with the LSC, and a new service built on the model outlined by Bentley of a 'youth broker', now to be called a personal adviser . The broad-ranging *Strategy*, including attention to 14-19 curriculum issues, became a Service with more limited functions. Professor Michael Barber, the then head of the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit, characterised the place of this new service briefly and succinctly as an element in overall 14-19 education reform. It would be, he said, 'a universal advice service for all students aged 13-19' (Barber, 2001). On this basis the government enacted the Learning and Skills Act (2000), giving the Secretary of State for Education in England the power to set up a youth support service (the Act gave similar powers – not duties - to the Welsh Assembly, where they would be deployed rather differently, largely due to the influence of Alun Michael, at that point the Secretary of State for Wales but a former youth worker.) This Act further muddied the waters of the legal basis of youth work in England and Wales and added to the already vague permissiveness by which local authorities made arrangement for youth services. The NYA – seemingly alone – used youth service allies in parliament to try to clarify, even strengthen, the duty but this was not accepted by Ministers – by now Malcolm Wicks had the youth portfolio – who were hell-bent on the creation of Connexions. (For an analysis of this aspect of the Learning and Skills Act, see Wylie, 2001).

The Connexions Strategy can be seen as the apotheosis in youth policy of the two complementary mantra that dominated the discourse on policy-making for most of the previous six years – 'joined-up government' and 'partnership working'. The first expressed the need to break down the departmental silos in central and local government; the second the desirability of drawing together a range of organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve common goals.

Both concepts have an obvious resonance for youth policy – even if their power has rather diminished with excessive use. Young people do not organise their lives to fit the tidy boundaries of governmental departments or service providers. The recognition of cross-cutting issues was woven into a continuing concern about the substantial – and seemingly intractable – numbers of young people not in education, employment or training after age 16.

From the outset, few dissented from the goals sought for Connexions. Where some found difficulty was in the operational detail. Three elements posed particular problems for those in youth work. First, the early Connexions design represented a form of producer capture both in the scope of its functions and in its local construction. Having shed the concept of a *Strategy* it quickly became a service in which too much reliance was placed on the anticipated benefits of using individual guidance as the key methodology and on the careers service as the principal organisational machinery. The latter was chosen because, for contracting reasons, it was most readily available to the DfES which had, by then, lost a Whitehall battle to bring in other services e.g. Youth Offending Teams, or take over Local Authority Youth Services. It also fitted the Department's relatively narrow focus on advice to students on their educational and training choices.

Many in the field had accepted that there needed to be a radical re-configuration of local services with and for the young for which the Social Exclusion Unit's PAT 12 report had provided such a compelling case. But they saw limits to the capacity of information and advice to produce changes in individuals, never mind in their peer groups and communities; they argued that it needed the full range of youth work – including detached work and work with small groups – to be deployed. They also raised concerns about the scope of Connexions (NYA, 2001).

Various official documents spoke of the Connexions Service as universal and comprehensive. But it was not clear if sufficient resource was being put in to make it so and to ensure the availability of the wider range of services, which would be needed to support young people's transitions and personal development – from promoting their creativity through the arts to ensuring their rehabilitation from drug misuse. Moreover, some key conceptual questions were unresolved:

- Was Connexions to be a service which would be provided for every young person within the age range as a universal entitlement? Or a universal requirement – that is a service with which every young person was obliged to engage?
- Would it be a service open and available to any young person who wanted it through offering open-access as well as specified referral routes?

- Or was it to be a targeted service which nevertheless would be non-stigmatising – and if so, how would that be achieved?

A broadly scoped service which was also offered on the basis of universal entitlement would demand adequate resourcing. The delivery of even a narrow information and guidance service to those most in need had major resource implications. The complex problems of particular priority groups required a significant level of professional input. Young people often transit across various categories of need, and it would be difficult and unhelpful to draw tight distinctions in what may be a disjointed period of transition to adult life.

The second major doubt was the impression that Connexions was based on only one big idea – the role of the Personal Adviser (PA). Mentoring had become fashionable across several government policy areas, from the New Deal advisers to learning mentors in schools. Associated with this idea was heady talk about the creation of 'a new profession' – that of Connexions PA – which was later amended to the more realistic 'a new professional role'. The particular version of the Connexions PA was imported into official Connexions literature from a voluntary sector body, *Include*, whose Chief Executive was on secondment to DfES.

Many features of the recruitment and training of such personnel were unclear and it was not immediately evident how any new training would build on existing professional foundations, reflect national occupational standards, be located within the country's arrangements for National Training Organisations and qualifications, and have a clear commitment to a codified set of principles for ethical conduct, not least in the interests of young people's personal safety and human rights. The responsibility for the design and implementation of new training arrangements for PAs was contracted by DfES to CfBT (an independent organisation providing training and education services), which by now had taken over *Include*.

The PA role itself required careful analysis. A full-time post with an exclusive focus on the 10 per cent of young people considered most vulnerable, could create a major imbalance in work. Individual staff who had an exclusive focus on those most at need would need to deal with the implications for accessing and maintaining contact with them, let alone the achievement of successful outcomes. This would often require a methodology – and working hours and conditions – which were not common in Careers Services. On the other hand, the use of a range of other professionals – or volunteers – as personal advisers for a proportion of their time would require careful attention to training and supervision. Young people would also expect a measure of choice as to their personal advisers. If they were given this choice, rather than having the traditional school careers officer role, they were

likely to seek someone able to offer support on a range of issues, and an advocate who could also enable access to other services. They were not likely to wish to have someone who simply offered 'guidance', however well-informed. Indeed, there were – and arguably still are – fundamental questions about the very nature of the PA role. In an attempt to characterise and explain it, some advocates compared it to a 'broker' or, from the health service, 'triage'. But such terms suggested that the PA role was not to engage in the direct delivery of a service but to facilitate access and, quite apart from other issues of referral and information-sharing, this also prompted questions about the very availability of those other services on which a Connexions PA might expect to draw to support the young, especially the more vulnerable.

What place for youth work?

Compounding this was a good deal of reckless talk of the Youth Service being 'subsumed' in the new arrangements, regardless of the doubts of those in either the local authority or voluntary sectors. None of these characteristics was likely to win the hearts and minds of an existing form of professional practice – youth work – which was concerned with the development of young people as well as their guidance; which valued work in groups as much as work with individuals; and had a longstanding system of professional training with robust independent validation of its higher education providers. No doubt, a certain measure of professional defensiveness and organisational protectionism was also present in a service which could trace its origins at least to the formation of the YMCA in the mid-nineteenth century.

'The woven figure cannot undo its thread' nor does the youth work sector roll over at every successive initiative, especially if these were drawn up by those newly arriving from think-tanks or the voluntary sector into government, clutching their own models for professional roles and associated training. But the arrival of Connexions more than other policy initiative such as Youth Offending Teams, presented the Youth Service, especially in local authorities, with some difficult choices. It also presented some difficulties for The NYA since Connexions was becoming a flagship of government youth policy. Had The NYA still been a quango with virtually a single stream of government funding via DfES it probably could not have articulated as sharply and consistently as it sought to do, the flaws as it saw them in the design of Connexions and its early operational construction and practice.

The NYA asserted that 'The key decisions about the delivery of services to address the complex needs of young people must be made locally'. 'Youth Services' it said, 'have a critical role in ensuring that Connexions' Local Management Committees understand and respond to local situations and needs' (NYA, 2001). It also urged

that 'whatever decisions are taken on the structural shape of a Connexions Partnership and its local management, questions remain about the delivery of locally accessible youth provision of the type consistently identified as desirable by young people in consultation exercises - *'Somewhere to keep warm and safe'*; *'where we can mix with others and make new friends'*; *'our own space'*. The Connexions Strategy needed to consider how it could secure this element of local youth provision on its own terms – as informal leisure and recreation but shaped by an explicit concern for the personal and social development of those participating. Would a Connexions Service pay regard to such needs?

Some local authority Youth Services engaged closely with these new developments. The more diverse voluntary youth sector also made a series of very local decisions. As Mary Marken, drawing on her extensive experience both in local government and through the Youth Service Audit identified, 'those Youth Services which are currently well-positioned and have sufficient infrastructure to deal with the development, research and training needs generated by Connexions are likely to be able to respond effectively and to seize new opportunities. By contrast, those lacking position and capacity will struggle and are likely to be further marginalised' (NYA, 2001)

In any event, after several years in the doldrums, the Youth Service itself had re-emerged into the policy spotlight. This was partly prompted by the growing recognition that Connexions would need all the friends and support it could get if it was to deliver. It was greatly helped by the arrival of new DfES officials, notably Jane Haywood and Kevin Brady. They were open to The NYA's arguments that an effective Connexions strategy required a wider infrastructure of youth support and development. They now sought field help to develop the Youth Service in its own right and as a partner to Connexions as it began to take local operational shape. After early flurries of discontent threatened to derail the entire approach of partnership within Connexions, wiser counsels prevailed especially inside the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) led by Anne Weinstock, an experienced, feisty and determined chief executive from the voluntary sector, who got a grip both on the careless policy talk and on the operational planning. The strengths and competences of different partners began to be given their proper place, though some major structural (notably on universality) and financial issues (notably over VAT) were not satisfactorily resolved.

After some battling, especially by The NYA and the Local Government Association, a careful paper from CSNU outlined clearer structural relationships between the Connexions Service and local authority Youth Services. It also dealt with matters of scope, widening Connexions to embrace personal development; with its governance; and, not least, with senior staff appointments. Where these new patterns were

implemented locally, and a warmer tone adopted, most Connexions partnerships found themselves strengthened by Youth Services being better involved in their governance and by contracting them to supply particular services, such as detached work. Indeed, the contracting model emerged as the overwhelming favourite structural approach, thus allowing youth services, local authority and voluntary, to continue to offer services to young people and young adults outside the Connexions realm as well as contributing to its activities.

Transforming Youth Work?

Meanwhile youth work itself benefited from a whole set of governmental interventions designed to build its capacity, reform its organisational arrangements and specify standards for local provision. Government began to advance its *Transforming Youth Work* agenda as a consultative paper in March 2001 (DfES, 2001). In due course, additional developmental funding, proper planning and a policy document – *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* emerged by December 2002 (DfES, 2002). While these began with propositions about youth work contributing to the achievement of Connexions' agenda, as the process unfolded it increasingly took on a momentum and focus of its own.

To reach this point there was an important confluence between three key elements: the whole-hearted political commitment of the relevant Minister, now Ivan Lewis; the skilled drafting and dedication of DfES officials; and the ready availability of policy and operational material created by The NYA, notably the expression of a proposed Youth Pledge (NYA, 1999) and detailed draft standards which set out what would constitute a sufficient Youth Service. These latter elements had been set out in *Quality Develops* published by The NYA in May 2001; by December 2002 they were government policy.

The suite of policy developments branded as *Transforming Youth Work* now provided a clear specification of the range of Youth Service provision which should be secured by local authorities: a common planning system, targets and performance indicators; a pattern of management training; and an ambitious set of proposals for workforce development. Not least, there was additional ring-fenced funding and an indicative budget figure for every local authority. Ofsted would step up its inspections and the Secretary of State had taken stronger intervention powers for use when local authorities failed to deliver. All this represented a bold new architecture for youth work with a national framework establishing the basis for local co-ordination and delivery. It also provided the possibility of more realistic partnership working particularly alongside others within Connexions. If such partnerships were to succeed, they needed to be based on mutual respect – for the values, methods and professionalism of the respective elements. They also needed to focus on those

activities, themes or settings where a partnership approach is both required and likely to be effective: 'partnership' as a general concept lacks usefulness. Not least, there needed to be a shared vision.

What youth work brings to any partnership table is a wide range of practice, stretching from open access youth centres through counselling services, special projects targeted on particular issues such as health, to detached and outreach work. It brings an explicit set of values and a defined statement of ethical conduct for its workers. Its workforce combines a well-trained professional cadre with hundreds of thousands of volunteers – and hence offers young people an array of role models and potential mentors. Of course youth work is far from perfect: its very diversity can result in patchy geographical provision. Those who have immense skills in working with the least biddable young are not often the best at form-filling, tracking, or toeing a party line. If they were good at paperwork, they would work in an office or for the civil service. Youth work, overall, has not been good at researching and analysing its own practice, still less at the hype seemingly necessary to win funding battles.

And, of course, it inclines to debate and disputation. This was even evident on the publication of *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* which was almost wholly a good news story. By contrast, some in Connexions incline to be thin-skinned on findings from external research or inspection. One sometimes has the impression that research and evaluation is something to be annexed if it supports the case, denounced immediately if it does not.

Policy-making benefits from engagement, from having candid friends. It is thus no surprise that some should have found criticisms to make of aspects of the government's new policies for resourcing youth work, notably any concern for targets and the accreditation of learning. This seemed a little perverse since a focus on the benefits to young people of their engagement in youth work is surely a useful emphasis as expressing it this way puts the learner at the centre. In a youth population of 10,000 it is surely not unreasonable to expect that 450 might hope to get some form of accredited outcome? What does seem rather naïve is the proposition that youth work can get by on the basis of its ability to have convivial conversations with the young. In his splendid *History of the Youth Service*, Bernard Davies drew attention to a memorandum from the DES official responsible for youth service in 1978, Barnie Baker. Baker wrote then: *'with so many competing claims on public expenditure, an increased emphasis or justification* [of the Youth Service] *in terms of social objectives must be expected'* (Cited in Davies, 1999). We may disagree about what social objectives are desirable, but twenty-five years on this still seems to be an inescapable principle for anyone who seeks external funding for youth

work. Youth work needs to have the confidence in its own methodology of professional practice and its value base – indeed, its very history – to engage and persuade funders and policy-makers of the enduring value of its approach.

New challenges

In the emerging world of Children's Trusts, the challenges for Connexions are perhaps even sharper. Although research suggests that young people who have used Connexions Services are generally fairly positive about it, by focussing so directly – and understandably – on the NEETs target, can it escape the criticism that it typifies excessive concern for a narrow agenda? A recent study suggested:

> The underlying philosophy of Connexions is to provide a rounded service that fully addresses young people's needs but in its early days of implementation it has not achieved this. There is some local variation in the delivery of Connexions but the dominant story is undoubtedly about education, training and work. Support and intervention to help with social and emotional needs gets a smaller billing. The service is in its infancy and deserves time to fully develop. However, early evaluations show that the workload of Connexions personal advisers and young people's perceptions of their role is focused on careers, training and education advice
> (Edwards and Hatch, 2003).

In the recently published first phase 'Customer satisfaction survey' less than 12 per cent of young people surveyed had talked to a Connexions personal adviser to discuss stress, alcohol and drugs, housing or bullying for example. Onward referrals by Connexions were usually to work or education-related organisations such as the Job Centre or local college. (Joyce et al, October 2003). A recent report by the National Audit Office, however, praised the Connexions Service for being on track to meet its NEET targets and clearly the employability agenda remains an important imperative for the current government (NAO, 2004). As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his budget speech in March 2004: 'The best option for young people is to spend the years between childhood and adulthood continuing to acquire skills to equip them for a lifetime in the labour market'.

There will be renewed structural challenges from the emergence and configuration of Children's Trusts based on local authority boundaries and by the possible re-shaping of financial support services for 16–19 year olds through possible co-location of some Connexions with Job Centre activity. We shall also see what the government's unexpected review of careers guidance brings: pressure from careers specialists and formal education has evidently impacted on the new Connexions machine. Connexions was beginning to move away from the narrow approach, the limited scope and restrictive staff appointments, which characterised its early months. If

major youth policy goals are to be achieved, Connexions and the new trusts must offer more than guidance to the young: they must also encourage their personal and social development and sense of agency. They must seek to work with others to develop the potential capacities of young people as the basis on which they can lead fulfilling and purposeful lives. It is around this vision that those concerned with young people are more likely to rally. Any structure for partnership working which is simply a set of representational interests who attend because they fear what others may do in their absence or because a national specification gives them a seat, will emerge as only an 'artificial or accidental sovereignty'. The best example of this is the Austro-Hungarian empire of the nineteenth century. No one knew what it stood for so, in the end, no one would stand by it.

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INSIDE CONNEXIONS

JOHN HOLMES

This article arose from a wider research interest in the extent and ways in which the government's 'employability' agenda is changing youth work. To pursue this interest I volunteered as part of my University of Birmingham lecturer's role (in Community, Play and Youth Studies) to take on the role of tutor of a Diploma for Personal Advisers (PAs) running in the Black Country in 2003. My aim was to find out the inside story from PAs, (including hopefully some from youth work backgrounds) about the PA role and the operation of Connexions locally. In the following discussion, I attempt to represent the views of the 22 PAs who attended this course, although the responsibility for views expressed is entirely mine. I approached the course with a critical perspective deriving from my youth work background and similar to other thinkers (eg. Smith, 2000) and this remains, although my position has been considerably influenced by my experiences.

Connexions and the PA role are analysed by comparing and contrasting the aims and expectations of Connexions with what has emerged so far (at the end of 2003). The aims and expectations relate both to the stated government aims in 2000 and to those of the PAs when they chose to pursue this job role. The analysis of the current position is limited to my understanding of this particular group of PAs and this raises the issue of how representative are the findings. In that there are 47 Connexions partnerships throughout England with different models of partnership, it is in one sense difficult to generalise at all although there is considerable central direction (from Connexions Service National Unit – CSNU – in Sheffield) in some areas of policy. The mixture of central control combined with local autonomy that characterises many New Labour initiatives does not make it easy to generalise. In addition of the few Connexions partnerships currently to have had Ofsted reports published, it is true that Black Country Connexions has probably had the most damning review. The early retirement of the Chief Executive does not appear entirely unrelated. So, it cannot be said that the findings below are generalisable to other Connexions situations. Rather they are intended to raise issues and questions that may well be relevant elsewhere. However it is significant that a recent survey of young people about Connexions raises similar issues (Joyce et. al., 2003). It is also critically important for government objectives that Connexions succeeds in areas such as the Black Country because of the close links to social exclusion in the four Black country local authorities (Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall). Particularly Sandwell has some of the highest indices of social exclusion

in England as measured by low educational achievement, unemployment, teenage pregnancies, children in care, youth crime as well as a high proportion of minority ethnic young people (Ofsted, 2003).

Ethical Issues/First Impressions

When agreeing to take on a tutor role with Connexions (co-tutoring with an experienced person from a Careers Advice background) I had some concerns of both a practical and ethical nature. I wondered if I was an appropriate person to tutor students for a role that I perceived to have considerable differences from the youth work role (which I had tutored for over 20 years), especially if I was critical of this new role. Whatever my views, it seemed unethical to attempt to undermine recently appointed PAs in what they had chosen to do, even though it was entirely appropriate for students to develop critical analytical awareness in a course which had been validated as a higher education course (80 credits at level 2). I was quite open with Connexions managers about my research interest and decided for myself to be mindful not to cross a boundary from critical analysis into personal criticism.

My concerns were largely unfounded in that the course I was asked to deliver (the 'old' Diploma course) required a different role from one I was used to playing as a university tutor. The curriculum was pre-programmed in such a detailed way that the role of the tutor became more like that of a technician, presenting material prepared by others. There was little space for tutor interpretation of the packed curriculum, the problem was rather trying to understand what had been in the mind of the writer of the numerous overheads and accompanying tutor notes. This did not mean that there was no space for open discussion of the PA role. The students were clearly looking for dialogue with tutors and in assignments students were asked to make links to their experience as PAs (although no assessment is directly made of their practice within their diploma). By some adjustment of the detailed timetable and in particular in the action learning sets it was possible to develop reflection of practice. It is mainly from this and from written assignments (that followed the action learning sets) that I gained some understanding of PAs perspectives.

One other area of first impressions is worth a mention. The building in Wednesbury in which the training normally took place is the head office of Black County Connexions. As with many other Connexions offices it has a prominent position on the High Street and had been totally refurbished since its previous life as a shop/offices. Clearly no expense had been spared, not only in the refurbishment but also in the furniture, fittings and IT equipment. The latest technology was available for training. Yet the modern technology, masses of glossy training materials, the

ubiquitous purple and orange branding, the promotional materials (including Connexions rock) did make me wonder how young people perceive Connexions. The impact of the culture of Connexions is clearly different from the impact of youth work, although the Youth Information shops come closest in recent years. It could be argued that Connexions tries to emphasise that young people deserve more than poorly funded and sometimes rundown provision and as with other 'modernised' public services, are trying to cross the public/private divide to become more like a business corporation. But does this make young people feel this is a service they have ownership of? The aim is to do just this and taking account of the views of young people is one of the eight principles of Connexions. But I find that using modern technology in training often seems to promote passive consumerism and often a break in programmed materials is required to promote real dialogue. Is it possible that the aura created by Connexions will not create involvement? Unfortunately the early days of this new building promoted the wrong sort of interest by some people, leading to a number of break-ins and computers and other IT equipment stolen. The resulting heightened security makes the building less than welcoming.

Near the start of the course, I was asked by the PAs about my views from a youth work perspective. For most PAs 'youth work' was held in high standing, even though very few had youth work experience. This was primarily because youth work was seen as a valuable addition to their role, particularly in building better relationships with 'disaffected' young people than Careers Advisers had been able to do in the past. Only 1 of the 22 in the cohort came from a youth worker background, the largest group previously being careers advisors (9), followed by a range of social workers (5), learning mentors (2), and people from youth offending, colleges, NVQ assessment, training providers, youth advocacy work. In response to questions about youth work I suggested that maybe youth work could not necessarily be 'added-on' but this depended on what the role of PA was and the nature of partnership. These two points proved central and will be discussed below.

Open to criticism or lack of clarity?

In some ways the Connexions diploma was surprisingly open to the alternative perspectives in what was clearly planned as a vocational training course. The set assignments often used case studies (or the choice of students' own example but students normally chose case-studies) and as might be expected considerable detail was supplied on how to answer those in terms of sections, word lengths, learning outcomes and assessment criteria for banding of passes and fails. Yet this still gave considerable opportunity for students to critique the Connexions tools,

strategies and previous actions taken by professionals in the case studies. Some students chose to critique to such an extent that whilst marking them up for critical analysis I was left concerned that this stance must leave them with little commitment to their role. Fortunately I was not asked to assess this and the impact on their practice was left unassessed in the Diploma course. However, when levels of criticism turned to expressions of fatalism and cynicism (as they sometimes do in any group of students) and in particular that any evaluation of Connexions they made would not lead to any change then this had to be challenged. I challenged students to persevere in finding ways to change the Connexions system, and to acknowledge that if they believed this was impossible then to ask how could they expect to work successfully with young people who often believed the wider system was so stacked against them that there was no point in trying.

Billie Oliver (2002) has also observed the frustrations felt by PAs in their diploma training, seeing their involvement in decision-making about Connexions as tokenistic. For Oliver this is related to the PAs expectation that they would be involved in shaping their new role and the new service within which they will operate (2002 :34). For the PAs I worked with these frustrations also existed. However, they were as much influenced by their concerns about inappropriate targets in a target driven service as a concern that they were not being listened to in the feedback that they regularly gave to both CSNU and the local Black Country Connexions management. In 2003 the problem was perceived to be more a lack of clarity about management targets and 'moving goal posts', rather than not having a say in shaping these targets. The detailed prescription of how to deliver the Diploma combined with openness about outcomes in assignments would seem to be mirrored in Connexions delivery. There is much emphasis on procedures to be followed (code of practice) and instruments to be used (Assessment, Planning Implementation and Review – APIR) but lack of clarity about expected outcomes. This would seem to reflect a confusion about the very role of the PA. This seems to be rooted in the politics that set up Connexions, and appears yet to be resolved.

Origins of Connexions and compromises

Here is not the place to go in to detail about the origin of Connexions, and the response of the Youth Service and youth work commentators. This has been dealt with fully elsewhere in the original documentation (DfEE, 2000; SEU, 1999; SEU, 2000) and in responses (Smith, 2000; Jeffs and Smith,2001; Davies, 2000). However in terms of the central argument here that the role expected of PAs is unclear it is important to note the significant differences between the origin of the policy for a Youth Support Service in *Bridging the Gap* (1999) and what was eventually

proposed in Connexions (2000). The former concentrated on what were defined as the 'NEET' group of 16-18 year olds (i.e. those not in education, employment and training despite their normal ineligibility for benefits) as the key group of socially excluded young people. It stressed by research evidence the strong link between 'being NEET' and a wide range of social concerns (e.g. lack of educational training qualifications, poor health and housing, involvement in crime and illegal drugs, single parenthood). The statistical evidence for these links are clear, less clear was how to develop an effective service to reduce what were seen as expensive (to both individuals and society) social problems. Should the priority be to target these 9% of 16-18 year olds and try to ensure they became re-connected to education and/or training and so become employable? Or were the causes of these difficulties rooted in the past, and maybe also outside education/training/employment (e.g. poverty; inequality; family background; breaking down of communities; discrimination by race, gender, disability, sexuality)? Should any attempt at improvement be services targeted at those 'most at risk' or would more effective 'universal' services be more successful?

The answer to these questions partly reflected the New Labour emphasis on employability as the central basis for reducing social exclusion. As Ruth Levitas (1998) has argued, the social inclusion discourse has come to dominate an earlier Labour emphasis on redistribution and also the moral underclass discourse. Yet it is clear that the policy was contested even with the Social Exclusion Unit. The PAT 12 report on young people (SEU, 2000) whilst also stressing the problems of the 16-18 year old 'NEETs' widened the causes to factors in earlier life including child poverty, poor family life, racism as well as criticising the inadequacy of public services such as schooling and children services. Whilst Careers and Youth Services were seen as part of the poor response from public services it is possible that the shift to a universal Connexions service for all 13-19 year olds was partly a response to calls for universalism rather than targeting. Both Careers and Youth Services preferred voluntary participation by young people. Yet both services were also criticised for not responding to those at most risk of exclusion, so compromises had to be reached.

The first compromise was to combine a universal service for all 13-19 year olds, with tiered targeting with those with 'multiple problems' (those most likely to end up in the 'NEET' group) prioritised with greatest resources. The second compromise was to keep the emphasis on employability that derived from *Bridging the Gap* but to stress the 'holistic' nature of the new service meeting *all* the needs of young people. The third compromise was to keep the voluntary relationship, albeit

redefined in terms of self-referral, but combine this with targeting and referral from other agencies. It was thus hoped to have an open, supportive service and considerably develop monitoring and record keeping (using IT) and so stop those most 'at risk' from falling through the net of public services.

It is the contention of this paper that these three compromises have led to a lack of clarity about the role of both the PA and of Connexions, and that this has contributed to a rapid loss of morale and increasing frustration with their role by PAs.

Expectations of Connexions from PAs.
Coming from a youth work background I know that some youth workers were resistant to Connexions even though the higher salary levels were attractive. I was unaware that Connexions created an even greater problem for many Careers Advisers. The privatised Careers Advice companies had contracts with government which paradoxically gave central government greater control to change their role than it did over the Youth Services (based in local authorities in partnership with voluntary organisations). The transfer of Careers Advice for 13-19year olds lock, stock and barrel into Connexions meant a loss of professional identity for some Careers Advisers, particularly those who had been in the work a number of years. In the Black Country the Connexions partnership was set up by sub-contracting much work to Prospects, the local Careers Advice Company. Half of £12million in 2002-3 was allocated to Prospects (Ofsted, 2003). The decision by Connexions not to allow the title 'Careers Adviser' to be used, even in brackets after Personal Adviser, was a focus for some discontent from the PAs on the Diploma course, as was the confusion over management structures, with PAs accountable in some cases to Connexions, Prospects, and the schools if they were based in one.

However it should not be assumed that most PAs entered their new role with negative expectations. For all of this cohort it would seem that, despite some reservations about the job titles, there were high hopes about their new role and in early sessions which looked at the aims and principles of Connexions (DfEE, 2000) there was considerable agreement that not only were these appropriate but they represented a movement forward from previous provision. In particular there was approval for a service which professed to be universal and comprehensive, taking account of the views of young people, built on partnership with a range of services and requiring community involvement. For many with a Careers/training/learning mentor background it represented the opportunity both to be more holistic, responding to the stated needs of young people and to reach those failing in the educational system for whom it was recognised that previous services had failed to remove the barriers they faced. It was in these contexts that the involvement of other services, in particular youth work, alongside Careers were welcomed.

Ambitious but achievable?

The PAs on this Diploma course recognised the ambitious nature of the new Connexions Service and welcomed this, but sought re-assurance that they would be both prepared and properly supported to undertake their demanding new role. Unfortunately the Diploma course was ill-equipped to provide such re-assurances. Being a centrally designed course, it could not deal properly with issues about the practical implementation of Connexions at a local level. Although students were asked to provide their own practice examples, to reflect on their practice, to feedback on current issues, the tutor input was not sufficiently geared to discuss the implications of translating theory into practice. It was accidental if tutors had knowledge about the local scenario, and even if they did there was very little time to develop these perspectives. For a service ambitiously expecting to provide a comprehensive, holistic service for young people, an 80 credit Diploma course, which was squeezed into 13 and a half training days raises serious issues about viability. It can be argued that this was primarily a 'top-up' course building on PAs previous professional qualifications, but this was not always the case and even when it was, the variety of professional backgrounds meant that it was difficult to assume prior knowledge. Of course students were expected to undertake individual learning outside the 13 and a half training days. Clearly this did occur, particularly in preparation of the five assignments, and students were generously provided for in prescribed reading material (but almost discouraged from wider reading). However the infrequent use of the web site and chat rooms would suggest that the pressure of jobs and personal lives made it difficult to spend much time over and above the preparation of assignments. What became increasingly clear was the gap over further thinking about their roles that PAs required to quieten growing anxieties.

Although refection on practice by workers/students is essential it needs to take place in the context of good evidence. A key Connexions principle is 'evidence-based practice' yet the training could not provide evidence that needed to come from CSNU and/or Black Country Connexions management. Central to this was evidence about caseloads and workloads. It was clear that PAs were increasingly concerned about this area but was this justified? Only by tutors going outside the prescribed training materials was it possible to suggest that the PAs concerns were well grounded. The original target in 2000 had been for 15,000-20,000 PAs by 2003, (Smith,2000), an ambitious target given that there were under 3,000 full-time youth workers and only 7,000 Careers Advisers, but a necessary one if *all* young people were to have access to a PA. The targeting of those firstly with 'multiple problems' and secondly those 'with problems' meant that PAs workload was not to be evenly spread but caseloads were to vary significantly.

Table 1: Figure 1

Problem	Caseload		Type of Support
Multiple	10:1	10:1	Integrated/Specialist
Some	250:1	250:1	In depth
None specified	800:1	800:1	General

Apart from the difficulties of deciding which of the three categories any young person was in, particularly at the start of interventions when resource planning is required, it has been argued (Watts, 2001) that these caseloads undermine the basis for a universal service.

Whilst this is debatable what is now clear is that the original national targets have not been met with only 7,300 PAs in post in September, 2003 and the numbers expected to peak at 8,500 (Phone conversation with CSNU, December 2003). It should be noted that these figures do not include roles other than PAs in Connexions, which may influence ratios. In the Black Country it is acknowledged that 'the partnership has experienced considerable difficulty in attracting and recruiting PAs' (Ofsted, 2003) with 183 full-time equivalent (fte) PAs out of a total of 368 staff. Caseloads are high compared to the national averages (795:1 compared to 732:1) (Ofsted, 2003) but a proper debate about realistic expectations does not appear to have happened between PAs and management. The response to the critical Ofsted report appears to have been to increase caseloads from what PAs saw as the expected 30:1 for those with 'multiple problems' (already higher than the original intention) and to target this group more. This clearly raises doubts about whether Connexions really is or even can be a universal service or even be able to develop a 'holistic' service built on good relationships with young people as well as with those with 'multiple problems' (see Watts, 2001). There is a danger of Connexions falling between competing targets of a universal service and 'reducing NEETs'.

One way of avoiding this dilemma is of course to focus on one or the other, and/or to stage the expectations from Connexions until the numbers of PAs reach realistic levels to do one (or both). But despite budgets being held to existing levels without inflation allowances (phone conversation with CSNU, Dec. 2003) it does not appear this is occurring. Rather short-term targets are being imposed on Connexions with the Treasury judging the effectiveness of Connexions by whether the proportion of 'NEETs' has been reduced by 10% by 2004 (Popham, 2003). Early indications are that the number of 'NEETs' may well increase as Connexions discover young people previously unrecorded. It may be that only the attraction of the extension of Education Maintenance Allowances will allow this Connexions target to be reached.

It could be argued that discussions about caseloads and priorities should be held within supervision, team meetings and wider staff development meetings rather than in Diploma training sessions. Given the competing demands of trying to ensure some consistency between the role of PAs across the partnerships, maybe the linking of theory to evidence about local practice had to be sacrificed. Even then it would have been preferable to build on a link between training and these other meetings but unfortunately it does not appear that there was any real discussion of these issues in the meetings and supervision that did occur in 2003. Maybe one reason for this is that although PAs are required to undertake the Diploma training there has been little systematic training of managers about Connexions generally, or the role of PAs specifically. It would appear that in the rush to get a 'qualified' workforce the need to get management talking the same language has been overlooked.

Relationships between PAs, young people and other professionals

It has already been noted that a central debate in the setting up of Connexions was the extent to which young people would voluntarily enter into a relationship with PAs, or whether they would be referred on by other professionals, because of the problems they were perceived to have. For some Pas, Connexions was attractive because of the voluntary relationship in comparison to their previous roles in social work, custodial work, etc. It would seem that the move to a universal service was partly an attempt to avoid a label of Connexions as a service for 'problem' young people. Yet it needs to be realised that despite PAs wanting to build relationships with young people, and the advantage of avoiding the 'problem' label, self-referral also has problems in terms of workload. Some PAs early on expressed concerns about how this could increase their workload and make it difficult to plan ahead effectively. However, in practice as the pressure has been to shift towards those with 'multiple problems' and as many PAs are school based, the balance appears to have shifted from self-referral to referral.

Underlying the issue about voluntary relationships is that of the degree of trust and respect felt by young people towards PAs, and therefore the extent to which they will openly share issues with PAs. Related to this is record keeping and sharing information with other professionals. Partly because of the 'holistic' aim of Connexions and partly because of the belief that having full, accurate records will result in better action plans and less risk of young people falling 'between the gaps' PAs are required to collect and interpret a lot of information about young people. The 18 factored APIR (Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review) 'wheel', which is a diagrammatic representation of strengths and problematic issues, is intended to provide the basis for developing action plans, sharing information and reviewing

progress. The PAs showed some resistance to this process feeling it could frustrate their efforts to build relationships with young people, especially if they were recording around issues other than those presented by the young people and especially if these issues were seen as intrusive (e.g. family relationships). The use of the APIR wheel which is required by CSNU from April 2004 the PAs largely seem to accept but they still could not see the point of a requirement of producing two a month (seemingly regardless of the number of new referrals).

There were similar concerns about sharing information between professionals. At first the PAs were particularly concerned that other professionals would not share with them, or not fully, as their credibility had yet to be established. For me this situation could have been exacerbated in that Connexions documentation often placed PAs in the co-ordinating, monitoring role in multi-agency working, even though more specialist professionals were often better placed to do most of the work. This raised the perennial issue of who ends up taking the credit and blame in partnerships and whether PAs could be seen by other professionals as taking the credit for work done by others. There was less evidence of this specific problem than of a more general resistance to pass on sufficient information and in the appropriate form. A number of PAs required referrers to provide proper information before accepting referrals.

This raises the issue of what information is 'proper'? One PA commented during the course 'If only they had told me he was a psychopath...' when complaining about the attitudes of other professionals. This led to a discussion about labelling and the ethics of sharing information. Other PAs had equivalent dilemmas in passing on information which they felt might not be in the interests of the young person. For example, one PA, whose role was specifically to work with a drug agency, struggled with recording 'drug problems' for all her clients because of the negative power of the label. In addition to the difficulties of deciding what information was recorded and passed onto others, there was the difficulty of recording justifications for action plans, when those action plans might lay open their thinking to criticism by others. There was some concern that it was not possible to fully justify any course of action. In one sense the Connexions requirement for transparency, and that young people are involved in both drawing up and agreeing action plans, becomes a defence against alternative interpretations and plans of actions. However PAs were concerned that the APIR wheel agreed by young people could be very different from their own assessment, or the assessment by other professionals. This would not be surprising in that although the techniques were prescribed the theories to understand young people's behaviour were very open

(from behaviourist, social learning, medical through to humanist) but with precious little time to understand let alone analyse these theories. Just as important as what interpretation is made by PAs is what information young people choose to share with their PA. This brings the discussion back to whether young people will be open and honest, even excluding the more difficult area of repression. There was hardly any recognition in the Connexions documentation that this could be a real problem beyond the need for PAs to get agreement from young people to share information. There seemed no recognition that young people might be 'using' the PA process for their own ends, sharing in an instrumental fashion just what they want PAs to hear and hiding other information. Although I have no evidence this is occurring, the very fact that so much personal information is expected to be recorded and that PAs have the power to stamp forms (ES9s) to enable young people to claim benefit would suggest this could be a useful line of enquiry.

The emphasis on paperwork and recording/sharing information raises the issue of the extent to which PAs are case managers rather than case workers. Mark Smith (2000) has argued that the orientation of the PA role is essentially in this direction. The evidence from these PAs would suggest he is right, and that this was a source of frustration for some PAs. These PAs could see the importance of recording and sharing information, and of evidencing their practice but needed to be re-assured that the records were actually used and influenced future interventions. The time consuming nature of these activities meant that the number of young people and the time with them was inevitably reduced and this was at a time when increased caseloads were occurring. For some PAs the position had been reached whereby they saw their role primarily in terms of meetings, training, reading briefings, recording information, and linking to other professionals and families. For them their intervention with young people was accepted as secondary.

The PA Role and Conclusions

It has been argued (Smith,2002) that the PA role is essentially drawing on traditions most closely associated with social work. There is evidence from both Connexions materials and from these Black Country PAs to justify this conclusion. The emphasis on casework and case management, the problem based nature of interventions, and trying to keep a balance between a holistic response to a young person's definition of their needs and at the same time reduce the risk that young people are to themselves and others is common to both social work and Connexions.

Yet it has also been argued, and resisted by Connexions spokespeople, that Connexions is really a re-badged Careers Service re directed to improving the employability of young people, and with increased targeting to reduce NEETs.

There is also evidence from Connexions documentation and from these Black Country PAs that this is the case. Not only are they the professional perspectives that PAs predominantly bring to Connexions from Careers and training but the overarching target by which Connexions will be judged will be to reduce 'NEETs' by 10% by 2004 (Connexions, 2003).

The major finding from my involvement with Connexions in 2003 is that the role of the PA is *both* about social work and about employability, and out of this comes role confusion and increased anxiety and frustration for PAs. The Connexions view is that these two roles should be integrated, with employability only requiring a short term Careers type information and advice intervention role for the majority of young people, but more in depth integrated and specialist support for those at risk of becoming or already are 'NEET'. The latter would require dealing with personal issues in a more social work orientated manner in order to ensure employability and social inclusion. However this integration is not proving easy to achieve. PAs are feeling pulled between working in a person centred way, trying to build relationships and respond to young people's stated needs and increasing pressure over a whole range of targets, in particular to reduce 'NEETs'. Some recent research (Joyce et.al., 2003) suggests that young people have a lack of clarity about the role and purpose of Connexions, seeing it in terms of employability (i.e. education, training and employment) rather than as a provider of help with more personal issues. Some of the Black Country PAs noted the reverse, that young people wanted help with other issues and not employment, and for many PAs their most memorable experiences were certainly around personal issues. The major issue remains around role confusion.

The PAs in the Black Country primarily perceive the reasons for this role confusion as the fault of managers setting and shifting targets which takes them away from what they are trying to achieve, and suspect under resourcing and poor management. Whilst there clearly is a tendency towards over prescribing the work programme of PAs, as there was with the curriculum of the PA Diploma, the problem may be structural as well as a management that is not listening. The over prescription of means with a lack of clarity about ends suggests a more deep-seated problem. For me it was the realisation that applying the APIR wheel as expected would probably result in 'significant' issues being thrown up for most young people, despite the fact that most of these young people would 'succeed' in conventional terms and get jobs (in the current job market). It was the further realisation that most adults who are in work would also have 'significant' issues, some of these issues actually *caused* by being in employment, that made me think the model is fundamentally

flawed. Clearly more research is needed to justify the argument that 'employability' and 'holistic' approaches represent different types of discourse and that there are structural as well as practical implementation problems in Connexions. However, it appears that Connexions need to respond with some urgency because, quite apart from questions about the appropriateness of a social work approach for the major service for young people (apart from schooling) (see Smith, 2000), it would seem that PAs are not surprisingly increasingly frustrated in their well intentioned attempts to implement such a strategy. The result is falling morale and some PAs already looking to move on.

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THE YOUTH WORK CURRICULUM

and the 'Transforming Youth Work Agenda'

JON ORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The [curriculum] *guidelines should:*

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

(NYA, 1995:3)

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

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

Curriculum Theory

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

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

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

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

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

'The curriculum in practice' 1989-2003

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *Youth work has a pedagogy which is based on learning by doing, often in small groups; people tackling real life problems and finding real life situations, planned, done and reflected on; lessons learned and applied elsewhere. It is essentially educational groupwork.*
> (Merton and Wylie 2002:10)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Youth work is educational and therefore following Dewey, it is not an activity for inculcating rigid patterns of socially acceptable behaviour. It is not a static yard stick but a set of processes which must be reassessed to meet the needs of individual, situations and circumstances.
> (Young, 1999:79)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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RISK TECHNOLOGIES AND YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

JUDITH BESSANT

For centuries the idea of risk was associated with gambling and games of courage. From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, actuaries linked to the insurance industry, and then more recently emergency services have made the concept of 'risk' central to their professional calculations or interventions. Contemporary talk about risk has been rendered a normal part of common sense in social science disciplines including social-welfare work, sociology, the health sciences, psychology and criminology. (It has also entered into the upper reaches of social theory: see e.g. Beck 1992; Kelly 1998; Lupton 1999). Talk of risk has also well and truly infiltrated the practice of human service professionals working directly with individuals, families and communities. In these institutions and agencies constant reference is made to 'risk indicators', 'risk reduction' and 'risk management'. Indeed, one would find it difficult these days to find a government institution/agency or community sector organization working in 'human services' where the idea of risk does not influence their daily practices.

In this paper I ask whether risk based practice makes for good youth work. To answer this, consideration is given to risk based knowledge that informs practice. It is argued that practice informed by 'the science of risk' draws on an interest in management, establishes an excessively instrumentalist cognitive approach and undermines good youth work practice. Moreover, dependence on risk technologies works against a practice dependent on professional judgement, and on a capacity to develop relationships with young people in which respect and trust are central ethical qualities.

The current preoccupation with risk permeates most areas of government, most Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, and weakens the capacity of youth workers to secure young people's well-being. Too often it produces contradictions for youth workers by exacerbating tensions between what are frequently incompatible objectives - of securing the well being of young people and 'managing risk'.

This is not to suggest that the new risk discourses alone are responsible for the current problems that beset the youth sector and our capacity to support and secure the development of young people, the context in which this takes place is also critical. In particular I refer to the influence of economic liberalism on social and particularly youth policies. The 'discovery' of risk in conjunction with the renaissance of economic liberalism, has been a powerful influence on youth work

practice. It is also not to suggest that we ought to throw the baby out with the bath water by completely ignoring the idea of risk as a way of identifying young people who need some kind of assistance. Such concepts can serve workers well when they become a part of a professional repertoire of experiences and knowledge which can be called on for making judgement. It is when 'risk' completely captures and dominates practice, in the ways risk technologies currently do, that there is need for caution.

To establish how well risk-based research and practice 'aligns' with effective youth work practice and official commitments to secure the well being of young people, I ask the following: why is there so much risk talk today, and what are some of the problems with risk knowledge and risk-based practice?

I argue that the current preoccupation with risk in most western countries is part of a governmental project that has been closely historically reliant on the evolution of a certain style of 'scientific' research in bio-medical and health disciplines as well as in social sciences like criminology and sociology. To generalize, this research style is the conventional empiricist and broad-church positivist social science research, which typically combines with no-less conventional understandings of policy-making processes. The new discourse of risk spurred on by popular anxieties, offers governments in general, and the apparatus of specific administrations, opportunities to revitalise older practices of managing problem populations which took advantage of the resurgence of economic liberalism and individualism to promote new styles of policy. As mentioned earlier I consider the idea of 'governmentality' (see also Hacking 2002) to explore whether the prevailing pre-occupation reflects an interest in management or governance.

Risk and Governmentality

In the late 1970s certain ideas of Michel Foucault (1991) began influencing the new ways of understanding the discovery of social problems, and in this instance, 'those at risk' and the subsequent development of public policy. Rather than assuming such categories or problems had a self-evident quality, Foucault argued that if we are interested in understanding such developments then consideration needs to be given to the constructive schemes of experts that were being used to regulate the activities of certain groups of people.

Many social science commentators agree that we have a long history of attempts to regulate significant sections of the population. The idea of 'government' and the 'mentality' that makes such activities possible involves far more than what states do. As Dean and Hindess (1998) point out, 'government' refers both to the activities of the governments while it also addresses a full range of other attempts to regulate

the conduct of people. In this sense government refers to the ways individuals, groups, or organizations manage their own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others. In this case we can begin to see how the idea of 'risk' might begin to work.

Much government concerns the every-day work of experts like doctors, teachers, social workers, parents, youth workers, religious professionals, journalists. Government can refer to interventions designed to regulate as law and order, health or a declining economy. Much of the regulatory activity relates to books, journals, newspapers, professional advice on what standards, and rules can be used to guide conduct in being healthy, safe and a good citizen, finding employment, or to be law abiding. In other words, governmentality involves the use of knowledge, and habits of thought to facilitate and authorise some people to govern others (themselves).

Governmentality typically entails an amalgam of objectives which can have benign or even positive outcomes. Regulating the feeding of infants, or securing the capacity of children to read or to play an instrument involves a good. It can also involve less benign interventions which typically target specific groups like 'the poor,' 'criminals' and 'youth' deemed to be a problem. In the case of those 'at risk', techniques of social investigation (ie., empirical social scientific surveys) and an array of policies, institutions, and practices focus on the lives of peoples 'need for' care, control and improvements.

Risk supplants older sociologies of deviance

Risk has supplanted older categories like 'delinquency', 'social pathology', 'the indigent' the 'criminal personality' or 'maladjustment', ideas that were foundational to the social sciences and particularly the sociology of deviance. Equally we can say that the assumptions and politics of governance inherent in the older project of government remains the same as that which characterises the new risk based approach.

While acknowledging this legacy it is important to note that there is one new and distinctive feature of the risk discourses. Like the older sociology of deviance, the 'core business' of the sociology of risk involves what Foucault called 'dividing practices' that distinguish those who are at risk from certain 'problems' and those who are not. While most 'at risk' research gives the impression of distinguishing between 'those at risk' and 'the rest', *the 'at risk' categories are different to older categories in terms of their capacity to incorporate the extensive sections of populations.* As a cursory survey of the risk literature demonstrates, the 'risk indicators' or 'risk factors' are almost unlimited. The reach of risk categories can be very extensive[1].

The factors that allegedly constitute 'at risk' extends from indicators of specific disadvantage (like gender, Aboriginality or physical disability) to indicators that appear to be common to most of us. Casting a net far enough to include significant

sections of the population makes corrective responses not just a 'necessity', but a responsible solution. In other words, it sanctions any interventions as long as that response is justified in terms of 'reducing' the risk factors. In this way risk discourses also perpetuate well established ideas about crime being for example the kind of behaviour which characterises 'the poor', 'the unemployed and 'the underclass'. Many social scientists now work in this domain, and although risk-based discourses have become popular among politicians and policy makers in recent years, the assumptions, ideas, methodologies and politics underpinning them are far from new. Assumptions underpinning the modern risk discourses originate from some of the earliest attempts by conventional social scientists to identify and measure the 'causes' of a range of social problems such as 'dysfunctional families', 'illicit' drug use, crime.

In short, risk-based approaches are part of 'new' kinds of governmental policies involving renewed attempts to control and regulate sections of the population, especially of those who are seen to be 'at risk' of contributing to a range of social problems.

This is one reason why risk based practice is a problem for youth work practice and more generally the well being of young people subject to it.

'At risk of unemployment': an Australian case study

One problem concerning risk discourses relates to the research that produces risk based knowledge and technologies. To indicate *some* of these, I refer to the work of two Australian econometricians, Anh Le and Paul Miller (1999) who produced a methodologically sophisticated report for the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) designed to identify an index of risk factors associated with unemployment. The kinds of problems inherent in this research can be found in similar projects that attempt to scientifically discover risk (see, Rutter, Giller, and Hagill, 1998; Hawkins and Weis, 1985, pp. 73–97; Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, and Harachi, 1998, pp. 106–146).

Le and Miller locate themselves in a body of empirical work that attempts to quantify causal links between personal attributes or factors like age, education attainment, language skills, birthplace, or region in which they live and their causal links to unemployment outcomes. These two researchers are not alone in their endeavour. In 1987 for example, Miller and Volker also produced a risk index to assess the probability of unemployment. In their project the population was categorised into two groups: those at risk of unemployment and those not at risk. People with a personal history of unemployment, those with family members and early school leavers were said to be at risk. This research also had policy implications; it meant that it could be used to target those specific groups (Miller and Volker 1987; see also Seth-Purdie, 2001).

As Le and Miller (1999) note, the research in this area, most of it undertaken by labour market economists working in the neo-classical framework, focuses either on variables that affect labour market productivity outcomes, on factors that affect employment/unemployment outcomes, and/or on the role of previous labour market experience that affects unemployment. Their intention is to categorise people according to their risk of unemployment as a prelude to informing policy. Their task is to determine the level of risk across four levels (ie., 'very high risk', 'high risk', 'medium risk ' and 'low risk')[2]. Le and Miller produce a new set of estimates of the 'determinants' that give the probability that someone will be unemployed. The data is used to produce sets of cross tabulations that are used for an examination of the relationships between labour market outcomes and a number of key characteristics (eg. age).

The authors argue that the model of probability of unemployment shows that age, educational attainment, English proficiency, disability and marital status are important determinants of the probability of being unemployed. Each of these identity markers are given a rating on a scale of employability. With education for example, those with a tertiary or late exit secondary school qualification are said to have an employment rate of between 6 and 10 percent points less than those without such attributes. The age factor on the probability scale is said to be 'relatively weak (Le and Miller 1999: ix)[3]. Their findings show that those at highest risk of unemployment are the low skilled, those with minimal English proficiency, disabilities and the young. 'Causal factors' are identified and linked to 'predicted errors' to improve the forecasting capability of their model The 'possible causal factors' include labour market history, family background, mobility status, socio-economic status. They also 'find' that a person is more likely to be without work if their family members are jobless. This 'revised model' is said to show a 'positive relationship' between the number of days a person looked for work in the year prior to the survey and their unemployment status.

Their model also includes wider sets of determinants of unemployment, and they argue it is able to predict accurately the labour market performance of individuals. They claim that people at greatest risk of unemployment include the low skilled, those who have limited English proficiency, disabilities and people who are young They also claim following a series of statistical tests that the 'risk index approach' to unemployment assessment is viable. This means that disadvantaged workers can be identified with a high degree of success which, from a policy point of view, means as they say that the 'targeting of skill enhancement assistance can be carried out if this is considered desirable'.

Although there are many causes for concern about the methodologies and assumptions made in this research, the limited space available in this paper prohibits a detailed response (for a critique see Kelly 1998; Bessant, Hil and Watts 2003). It is however important to note one important and obvious feature of this approach. I refer to the over use of econometric language and mathematical metaphors that make such analysis almost unintelligible even to the well informed reader. This is problematic amongst other things, because it restricts challenges to the assumptions or methods used. A democratic culture depends on the ability of researchers who produce knowledge and readers or consumers to communicate and debate. Such conversation depends on there being some common language. Le and Miller made this difficult by covering some variously dubious techniques and 'findings' in hard to understand mathematical representations.

While acknowledging there are a number epistemological and methodological problems with such research, the critique offered here needs to be confined to the question of practice. My response is therefore limited to questions like whether it is possible to move from the collection and statistical analysis of large-scale data about the characteristics of populations to identify and ascribe risk factors at the individual level to an actual young person. It is no more possible to use data representing characteristics found at a collective group level to make claims about a particular young person than it is to attempt the opposite - that is, to generalize from the particular. There is also a problem with Le and Millers' model apparent in the fact that many graduates with Ph.Ds who are white, middle class, live in leafy suburbs and are in their late twenties ie., all the markers of very low risk of unemployment, have been found every year since the mid-1990s in Graduate survey data to be unaccountably unemployed and in considerable numbers.

The assumption that unemployment is an individual problem that is best identified in terms of individual risk factors -and not something arising for example from the supply of certain jobs- is embedded in Le and Miller's report. The implication is that unemployment is a consequence of what happens when individuals enter as job-seekers into labour markets bearing a range of skills or human capital and other attributes like age or good looks or accidents of birth like the country you are born in which they anticipate make them attractive or unattractive to employers. Missing is consideration of the impact of decisions and judgements made by employers and corporate entities (or firms) about their need for labour as a determinant of how many jobs will be made available to job seekers in a given period of time.

'At risk of Anti-Social Behaviour': the English experience
Juvenile justice is another major area where the risk paradigm has been used. Indeed Britain like Australia and the United States made the category of risk central

to discourses underpinning the control and regulation of crime (Muncie 1999). This is evident in attempts to prevent and reduce youth crime. Public concern over 'youth crime' led to the introduction of a number of governmental 'solutions' aimed largely at minimising the apparent threat posed by 'the growing ranks' of 'marginalised', 'disaffected' and 'excluded' young people. Inner city 'riots' and 'anti-social behaviours', have heightened popular concerns over the perceived threat posed by certain sections of the youth population. Indeed there is now a well established belief that youth crime is reaching 'epidemic' proportions (http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/youth).

Measures 'targeting' the most 'troublesome' or 'vulnerable youth' are directed towards regulating and controlling behaviours and ensuring their compliance with legal codes and moral strictures. In England as elsewhere, what tells these new interventions apart from 'welfarism' is the emphasis on the category of 'risk'. This concept was applied most systematically in relation to young people regarded as a threat to the social order.

The Blair Labour government gave its blessing to the ascendancy of risk-based crime prevention in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which was directed towards stepping-up the processes of juvenile justice, encouraging a greater responsibility among offenders, integrating the idea of reparation into the criminal justice system and heightening parental responsibility.

The category of risk was pivotal to many of these measures designed to streamline the processing of youth offenders through the criminal justice system, and establishing a new interdepartmental and central approach to 'targeted' intervention. Generally Blair's system of juvenile justice promotes a 'tough on youth crime' image, achieved by holding offenders directly responsible for their actions. The Act ushered in a range of measures designed to better manage the conduct of young people which included longer sentences for certain categories of crime, more community supervision orders, curfews, and electronic tagging for those aged ten years and over (Pitts, 2001). More recently plans have been afoot to extend the failed Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO).

These interventions were informed by a relative consensus about the supposed 'causes of crime', evident in the interventions such as: *Crime and the Family*, developed by New Labour policy advisers at the Social Policy Research Institute (Utting, Bright and Hendrickson 1994), the Home Office's consultative document, *Tackling the Causes of Crime* (1996), *Misspent Youth: Young People and Crime* by the Audit Commission (1996), and New Labour's White Paper, *No More Excuses* (1997). All these pointed to the same conclusion, that juvenile crime could be both identified in terms of risk and largely attributed to the family.

The Audit Commission's report, *Misspent Youth* (1996), reiterated these causes and informed Labour's approach to youth crime prevention. 'Disproportionate' numbers of young people from 'deprived areas' were involved in crime and the cost of dealing with the problem was too high. Other 'anti-social' behaviours were highlighted further exciting public concern, and which saw 'nuisance' behaviours like 'shouting and swearing', 'hanging about and fooling around in groups, sometimes outside of other people's homes...' as signs of anti-social behaviour (Audit Commission, 1996: 13). The report also pointed to the problem of young people 'at risk' of engaging in crime, and identified key groups of offenders: 'persistent offenders', young offenders 'who have yet to develop an entrenched pattern of offending', 'first time offenders' and, finally, 'youth at risk' who 'must be discouraged from getting involved in offending in the first place' (Audit Commission 1999: 13).

In this way risk was identified in a concerted attempt to reduce offending among those already in the criminal justice system, and as a way of preventing others at risk of becoming criminals from entering this system[4].

In the eyes of the Blair government and readers of the tabloid press, the Audit Commission and the Youth Justice Task Force provided the basis for a long-awaited overhaul of the juvenile justice system in Britain. The result was the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which provided for the creation of a Youth Justice Board designed to advise the Home Secretary on the progress of the youth justice system, to monitor the performance of the system and to advise the Home Secretary on national standards. These standards were to help shape the work of newly-created multi-disciplinary Youth Justice Teams and to ensure the evaluation of programmes and the enhancement of 'good practice'. Critical to all this were risk based knowledge and technologies.

The new system of justice set out in the 1998 Act established a range of new penalties aimed at young offenders and their parents. Parent Orders for example provided for programs designed to enhance parenting skills. Anti Social Behaviour Orders, Child Safety Orders and provisions for local curfews were established as 'pre-emptive' crime control measures. Final warnings and Reprimands constituted the basis of pre-court, 'last-ditch' interventions, while a range of non-custodial penalties and semi-indeterminate Detention and Training Orders helped reshape the new schedule of court administered penalties. Provisions contained in the Act also allowed for the mixing of sentencing rationalities such as retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation – all of which were aimed at the primary goal of preventing and/or reducing offending among 'at risk' youth (Bessant, Hil and Watts 2003).

Risk and youth work practice

Risk discourses set in place a series of changes that can undermine the welfare of young people, families, institutions and communities. Why is this so? One reason is that too often contradictions exists between the dominant technical and economic objectives of risk management and the conditions necessary for young people to live well.

As mentioned above, there are important conceptual and methodological questions to be asked about the various ways 'risk' is now deployed. There are also political and ethical questions to be asked: for example, is the claim that there are individual young people and population groups, 'youth at risk', a straightforward empirical claim? Can we understand 'youth at risk' as a consequence of empirical discoveries made by social scientists trained in 'objective' scientific methodology? Are risk-based approaches, for example with youth policy or crime prevention, best viewed as progressive or conservative interventions? (Rees and Rodley, 1995) What has received less attention, and what I am interested in exploring in this paper, is how risk discourses impact on the professional practice of youth work, whether risk discourses are transforming practice, and if so what are the implications for our capacity to secure the well being of young people?

To explore the interests that inform the production of risk technologies and their implementation I draw on the work of Jurgen Habermas (1971) and in particular his 'three types of human interest' that he claims informs our actions. I also use the work of Donald Schön (1987) and his account of 'the reflective practitioner'. Like Habermas (1971) and Schon (1987: 3-4) I argue that we need to acknowledge the difference between the way those wedded to technical rationality imagine practice, as opposed to the approach of those who recognise practice as an indeterminate activity characterised by ethical conflict, uncertainty and unique problems.

From the perspective of those inclined towards technical rationality, the long-standing idea is that professional practitioners are specialised technical problem-solvers who select the means and the theoretical preferred scientific knowledge best suited to particular purposes. For sceptics of technical rationality, there is a recognition that much practice, especially in the human services, is inherently unstable, uncertain and not amenable to technical responses.

I am critical of the current pre-occupation with risk knowledge and how it is shaping practice, and argue that risk-informed practice is excessively oriented to control and domination and deploys an overly instrumentalist cognitive approach. Consequently, risk-informed practice operates against a practice characterised by professional judgement, and the building and sustaining relationships with 'clients' in which respect and trust are central ethical qualities that define the relationship.

The dominant mode of risk-based praxis currently operating has damaging effects on practice which produces negative outcomes for 'clients', the community and our claim to be a civil society. Indeed a paradox can be observed where practice informed by risk based research increases chances of outcomes that are harmful to 'clients', the community and practitioners. I argue the case for an alternate practice that entails *reflection-in-action*. This I suggest *is critical for good and ethical practice.*

The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1971) offered an analytic model for understanding the various kinds of human activities people engage in and the associated 'knowledge' that inform them.

Habermas' Knowledge Constitutive Interests

Types of Human Interest	Kinds of Knowledge	Research methodologies
Technical > calculative predictions	Instrumental > causality	Positivism, empirical methodology
Practical > interpreting and understanding	Practical understanding	Hermeneutic methods
Emancipatory > critique and liberation	Emancipation > reflective	Critical social theory/science

Habermas criticised traditional positivism, and pointed out that due to the prohibitions positivists impose when pursuing 'credible knowledge', the knowledge produced by them cannot provide very deep insights into the conditions that make knowledge possible, nor can positivists reveal what *'interests'* operate and how power is exercised in knowledge making. According to Habermas, positivism and empirical methodology, which is the approach used to produce risk based knowledge, is not reflective or critical enough. He argues for greater acknowledgement of the ways human interests and interactions connect with the different knowledge forms or cognitive systems (Habermas 1971:316-7), thus developing his theory of knowledge and interests.

This framework is helpful for inquiring into the impact of risk-based instruments/ knowledge on youth work practice. In identifying the 'human interests' that inform knowledge Habermas asks us to consider *what we are trying to achieve when we act.* Is our action oriented towards domination and control, or a practical understanding, or certain ethical outcomes and values? Or, is it directed towards achieving some form of freedom or emancipation?

Habermas asks if there are connections between the different traditions of knowledge-making (ie., the scientistic, positivist and technical tradition, the hermeneutic tradition and critical tradition) and the kinds of orientations or interests people have towards each other or to the world. He argues that there are, claiming three kinds of fundamental orientations or interests, that in turn become 'knowledge constitutive'.

One is a *technical interest* where people treat the world and nature as objects to be dominated and controlled. (Without this attitude we could not achieve self-preservation - we would not eat, drink or build. Building for example requires attention to physical facts and typically depends on exact, technically precise measurement and natural scientific knowledge). According to Habermas this interest drives a body of cognitive attempts to develop knowledge that helps realise technical achievement.

The second kind of interest, the *'practical interest'* Habermas considers critical for being human and social. With this orientation or interest, people attempt to construct a shared life-world that is reliant on practical (ie., ethical) ideas about why we live and why we act in particular ways. This interest produces a consciousness of individual/self and community by using language and by deploying power. The outcomes of this interest are our various social organizations; the development of language, religion, ritual and ethical ideas. In these ways we give effect to our practical life, a life lived in through norms and ideas of what is good. To achieve these things we draw on a body of interpretative or symbolic forms of knowledge.

The final interest Habermas refers to is the *'emancipatory interest'*. It is a concern about freeing ourselves and others from myths, deception and delusion that inhibit liberty. An emancipatory interest identifies delusion and deception through critical reflection. It is not surprising given this, that Habermas praises as 'liberatory' or 'critical' knowledge which helps identify that which is concealed or forgotten. Engaging in modes of critical inquiry that reveal aspects of a situation that powerful interests may prefer remain concealed, are central to an interest in reflection[5].

Habermas' threefold analytic model is important because it poses a basic question important to all youth workers: when we intervene, is our interest in control and domination, or do we give expression to a hermeneutic interest in understanding and practical consensus, or are we wanting to engage in some kind of emancipatory practice?

Having considered the relationships between interest, type of knowledge and action (professional practice) I now turn to the issue of 'the science of risk' and the impact of that knowledge on youth work practice.

Risk-based youth work practice?
Practices reliant on risk instruments, techniques and procedures are problematic. The knowledge inherent in those practices informs a technical rationality and imagines the practitioner primarily as a perfunctory instrumental problem solver whose primary role is to select and apply, from a specified range of technical methods, the most suitable for the particular case.

The assumptions and politics central to risk based practices correspond with Habermas' 'technical interest' in prediction and domination. This revolves around a construction of the problem that requires workers to pay particular attention to certain facts and make sense of the things they notice according to their instruments and 'guidelines for professional judgement'. Moreover, it entails a particular framing of the problem that precludes debates that involve conflicting problem-setting activities.

Habermas identifies two features in his first category of interests and knowledge types that are valuable for understanding risk-based practice. The first is that the empirical-positivism approach to research which used to produce knowledge about 'youth at risk' is typically informed by an interest in management. Not surprisingly this interest is important for governments and professionals whose officially declared objective is to govern.

Secondly risk based knowledge relies on a model of empiricist 'science' that pre-supposes ethical neutrality. This is significant because it permits, if not promotes a duplicity where under the guise of science, an epistemology operates, informed by values and prejudices about specific populations, groups and issues, but which presents itself as scientific and value-free.

Risk based practice also appeals to many youth work agencies and governments because it promises a degree of certainty. It achieves this by offering the illusion of objectivity, implemented via unambiguous, precise 'tools' for diagnosis. They are presented as value free and can be 'applied' in standardised[6] and systematic ways to produce rational, mathematically calculated and 'accurate' readings. This 'relieves' practitioners from what can be experienced as the burden of responsibility that sometimes comes with exercising professional judgement. Practice informed by 'the science of risk' also sits comfortably with those whose *'interest'* is oriented towards management or control and who prefer a sense of certainty.

For practitioners and policy-makers oriented toward Habermas' first 'human interest' (namely technical calculative predictions), the prospect of 'administering' 'risk-instruments' promises to make their job easier and reduce workloads. After all, risk technologies entail an uncomplicated process of questions, answers and a little arithmetic. Raw scores can be determined, subject to special 'weightings' and 'adjustments' to achieve an overall score. From this, practitioners can identify both the types and degree of risk their young 'client' faces, which in turn registers the response or kind of intervention required.

Typically an initial step in securing objectivity (or measurement) involves assigning a particular risk factor, a numerical weight so the degree of risk can be 'accurately

determined'. Such an approach can be found for example in the work of two Australian researchers who developed instruments to identify 'youth at risk' of homelessness.

Confidence in the capacity of risk instruments to deliver accurate assessments, plus the promise of greater 'efficiency' are very attractive in workplace contexts characterised by funding shortfalls, chronic staff turnovers, high caseloads, and long waiting lists. Risk instruments mean workers can diagnose the degree and type of risk without even having to meet 'the client'. Indeed it can establish quite alarming trends in areas like when child protection system workers perform risk assessment of children *by telephone only* (Age, 25 August 2003: 1, my emphasis).

Practice informed by the 'science of risk' produces work-places dominated by 'requirements' to act in accordance to the set rules and procedures. This promotes a rule-obedient work culture, and undermines the confidence of many practitioners to use their own knowledge, skill base and judgements that are informed by the peculiarities of the case.

Effective professional practice entails an ability to recognise evidence, and make assessments. The dominant risk-practice with its reliance on instrumentalism and rationality also deters practitioners from asking the question Habermas poses: what 'type of human interest' informs their action? Is it concerned with identifying predictors and causal explanations 'interested' in management and control? If it is, does it also allow for any other kinds of interests?

I suggest that the dominance of risk-based practice inhibits and prevents alternate practices. More specifically it hinders the development of more hermeneutic and reflective modes of practice. This is because risk assessment technologies require youth workers to simply follow procedures that draw on the thoughts, assessment and judgements made in times and places far removed from the immediate reality in which workers finds themselves. Practice informed by 'the science of risk' actively encourages youth workers not to think too seriously about the interests they are attempting to realise nor the actions they are engaged in, but rather to read and assess problems courtesy of a securely placed emperico-positivist lens. Above all else this is problematic because the perspectives offered typically have little if any bearing upon the lived experiences of 'clients' and the situation the practitioners finds themselves in (Bessant, Hil and Watts, 2003).

From the 'client's perspective' risk-based practice is often experienced as frustrating, disturbing and 'computer driven' (Ziguras, Dufty, and Considine, 2003: 23). Practice informed by 'the science of risk' produces cultures adverse to developing professional-client relationships that connect to emotions, and which draw on the

practitioner's repertoire of insights, models and capacities that make up their frame of reference and inform how they 'reflect-in-action' and make judgements (Schön 1987).

An alternative: Schön and the reflective practitioner

Risk-based practice discourages what Donald Schön has called 'reflective practice' involving 'reflection-in-action' or recognition of the professional's own 'interests' as well as thinking about what they're doing while intervening. This involves the youth workers making judgements in the context of peculiar cases, that are shaped by the practitioner's relationship with the 'client', as well as their individual conscience, professional knowledge and skills base. A risk based practice reliant on static instruments is also limited because it can only give thin and not necessarily accurate descriptions of the deep and richly textured life worlds of the young people they work with that also constantly change.

Schön's notion of reflection-in-action highlights how 'science of risk' informed praxis precludes workers from interpreting the world and drawing on their own values, and knowledge of the specific situation. The idea of the 'reflective practitioner' or reflection-in action helps reveal how risk-practice prevents youth workers from framing problems themselves, and inhibits a reliance on their own repertoire of experiences and professional knowledge.

The professional's engagement in problem setting activities is significant because how the situation is framed or how an individual or groups are identified prescribes the response. In other words, if the 'tools' or technologies specify a particular framing of the problem by using the language and metaphors of risk, then remedial or corrective action will also be prescribed – in terms of risk management. In this way the practitioner's ability to exercise judgement and discretion at problem setting or 'diagnostic' stages is restricted to decisions about the extent to which 'the client' fits specified categories or the degree to which they are 'at risk' or constitute a risk to others. In respect to 'youth at risk', the technologies also draw on ideas about the 'developmental phases of adolescence' and categories that are highly dubious. 'Early, middle and late adolescence' are said to be 'stages' that are recognisable by distinguishing features that practitioners can simply observe and record for determining types and levels of risk. The category 'middle adolescence' for example is said to be identifiable by characteristics like 'self serving relationships', a 'lack of consideration of others', and the tendency to 'cast parents as villains' (Human services, Specialist assessment guidelines, 2000: 6).

The time-honoured work of pioneer developmental psychologists such as David Elkind, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erickson and Piaget who 'described' the intellectual and emotional development of young people play an important role in the Australian state of Victoria's child protection 'Risk Assessment Framework' (Human Services

Victoria, 1999). This is an example of how an older method of identifying what was once called 'the maladjusted child' or 'deviant adolescent' has been amalgamated with newer risk technologies in a re-discovery of 'normal' psychological, moral and physical and cognitive development. It is against those developmental 'benchmarks' that risk is identifiable and measurable by reference to the degree to which the child's growth departs from the models (Human Services Victoria, Specialist assessment guidelines, 2000, 8-14).

Schön's account of the 'reflective practitioner' is a reminder of the value of thinking deliberately about what we do while we act, the value of reflection and being able to continually adjust or correct ourselves in the light of our experiences. This is not to suggest that practice be devoid of guidelines and regulations, but simply that there be a greater awareness of the interests that inform practice and the value of worker-client relationships.

I suggest here that Schon's account of the reflective practitioner offers an alternative model to the current risk-based approach. This combined with consideration of how Habermas' knowledge constitutive interests raises questions about the value of an epistemology of practice informed by the science of risk. Realising reflective practice requires reform of human service cultures and practice. Amongst other things this entails an 'interest' in treating 'clients' with respect and as well as an interest in understanding who they are. If this 'type of human interest' is to be pursued to promote a more hermeneutic epistemology of practice, then a more interpretative and less instrumental approach is needed. As mentioned earlier, this does not mean completely ignoring the fact that some young people can be a risk to themselves and/or a danger to others. Indeed such an obvious insight is an important component of professional judgement.

This is critical for developing trust and relationships that are the basis of good professional practice. Good practice in the human service 'industry' requires understanding the subjectivity of 'clients', rather than an overriding will to classify, categorise and measure conduct according to risk factors for the purpose of management.

A relationship with 'clients' and an 'interest' in having dialogue rests on a view that the young people we work with are not 'customers' as they are now officially named, but are citizens and fellow human-beings who can and ought to be participants or partners in relationships where trust and the ability to talk, *listen* and negotiate is seen as critically important. This point about listening is particularly important for young people who have historically been ignored. Their voices are typically muted. Listening to what 'clients' say and 'giving' effect to their voice is central

to reflective professional practice oriented towards understanding and achieving 'outcomes' that are in the interest of young people and the community.

Conclusion.

Two brief case studies have been offered to illustrate some of the ways research that produces contemporary risk discourses and technologies is problematic. Habermas was drawn on to indicate how action (practice) is informed by certain knowledge forms and interests. It was noted how 'the science of risk' conforms to what Habermas described as overly technocratic and concern with control and management, rather than a hermeneutic interest or concern with liberation. I have argued that risk based practice is problematic because the knowledge inherent in these practices informs a technical rationality and conceives the practitioner as an instrumental actor whose main role is simply to apply the technology.

The interest central to risk practice sits well with those concerned with 'the need' to manage or control and who prefer a sense of certainty. This approach also involves the youth worker accepting a specific construction of the problem. Typically this involves identifying aspects of personal behaviour or lifestyle, an immediate environmental exposure, or an innate or inherited characteristic 'known' to be associated with social or health related conditions considered important to prevent. This tends to draw the attention of workers to certain facts and encourages them to see things through the lens of risk technology.

It has been argued here that despite claims that empiricist 'science' is neutral, a duplicity operates where under the guise of science, an epistemology operates that is informed by certain long standing values and biases about population groups and issues. Risk technologies promise objective tools that identify various aspects of risk and which help determine the response required. The promise of 'efficiency' is also deceptive if we factor in the longer term damage caused by risk based technologies (ie, failure to identify 'the issues' in ways that trigger responses which address the reasons for the problem (eg. poverty). Despite the initial appearance of labour saving benefits, risk technologies encourage youth work practice that can inadequately support young people and have a quite devastating impact on young people and the community.

Risk based practice encourages a rule-obedient work culture, while eroding the confidence and capacity of practitioners to rely on their own knowledge, skills and judgements that are informed by the peculiarities of the case, including the worker's relationship with the person concerned. Finally it has been argued that practice informed by 'the science of risk' encourages youth workers not to think too much about the interests that motivate the actions, while encouraging emperico-positivist readings of 'the problem'.

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Notes

1   To illustrate the point, we need only observe the most referred to indicators of risk in respect to one category - young people. To make the point I refer to just a few 'indicators' or predictors of risk which include: under achievement, over achievement, low literacy skills, low socio-economic status, 'being gifted', minimal parental education levels, geographic status (rural equals high risk), ethnicity, NESB and Aboriginality, low self esteem, high-self esteem, 'unruly' behaviour and behavioural problems (ie, disruptive, attention seeking, temper tantrums, use of offensive language, inability to accept criticisms, refusal to take responsibility for one's own behaviour), lack of motivation, isolation, sexuality, ill-health and disability, teacher dominated teaching, gender based harassment, restrictive curriculum choices, menstruation, pregnancy, gender, passivity, truancy, withdrawal, stress, tattoos, drug use, developmental difficulties, family structure ('reconstituted', 'fragmented' family structures), family conflict/tensions, cultural conflict, abuse/neglect, unsupervised recreation, mobility, poor role models, alcohol use by parents and the culture of the schooling system (ie, rigidity of rules, uniform, punctuality, disciplinary policy, authoritarianism of many teachers).

2   To do this they drew on a longitudinal research project (the Survey of Employment and Unemployment Patterns or SEUP) which collected data in two waves over three years (1995-97) from samples of people aged 15-59 put together from three groups (ie., Jobseekers (N= 5488), Labour Market Program recipients (N=1019) and a Population Reference group (N=2311) producing a total sample population of 8,818 persons.

3   Estimates from the model of unemployment are used to categorise individuals according to their risk ('very high', 'high risk', 'medium risk' and 'low risk'). This categorisation is based on two types of risk index. The first predicts the risk of unemployment using all the coefficients from the logit model. The second is an approximation of the first. Points are then given to 'individual characteristics in the same way the immigration system works (ibid: ix).

4   Central to the project outlined in the Report is a specific interpretation of the 'causes of crime'. Drawing on David Farrington's work, the report concluded that 'high risk factors' include: '...gender, with boys more likely to offend than girls; inadequate parenting, aggressive and hyperactive behaviour in early childhood; truancy and exclusion from school; peer group pressure to offend, unstable living conditions; lack of training and employment; and drug and alcohol abuse'. (Audit Commission 1996: 58). This list of 'causal factors' relies heavily on Farrington's longitudinal study of over 400 'traditional' working class boys. Beginning in 1961, the study traversed every conceivable aspect of the boys' social and personal lives: from family circumstances, income, family size, employment and child rearing practices, to school performance, truancy and interpersonal behaviour (Farrington 1994).

5   There are a number of problems with Habermas' work which his critics have pointed to (Thompson & Held 1982; Best & Kellner 1991: 233-255). There are for example good reasons for caution in reading Habermas in a structuralist fashion (ie., that interest A, determines knowledge form B, which determines research method C). We cannot assume that in bureaucratically organized workplaces only instrumental rational practices exist. It is conceivable for example that in welfare agencies where workers and 'clients' face competing imperatives all three interests operate and making their claims on people within that one setting.

6   The promise of uniformity and a unvarying system has considerable appeal in large bureaucratic organisations like government departments.

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Tess Ridge
Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a child's perspective
The Policy Press 2003
ISBN 1 86134 362 0
£17.99 (pbk)
pp 178

Torild Hammer (Ed)
Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion in Europe:
A comparative perspective
The Policy Press 2003
ISBN 1 86134 368 X
£35.00 (pbk)
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CHARLIE COOPER

On 9th August 2002, this writer became a father for the first time. One thing the experience of fatherhood has done for me is to bring into focus just how much people in England hate children. There have been many occasions where my partner and I have entered a restaurant, hotel or bar with our small daughter, only to receive looks of disapproval or the outright refusal of service. We rightly outlaw such treatment based on gender and ethnicity, yet seem to accept it against the very young. The disdain English society has for children and young people is also evident in its social policies. Young people in Britain face increasing uncertainty in a society where family structure, the education system and youth employment markets are facing greater exposure to risk, and where transitions to adulthood have become increasingly fragmented and individualised. In response to such conditions, governments since the 1980s have chosen to withdraw welfare entitlements, and introduce measures aimed at widening the techniques of surveillance and control over young people. Instead of caring for our young, the moral guardians of society choose to discipline and criminalise them - reflecting our politicians' concern to be seen to be 'tough' in dealing with media-induced 'folk devils' and 'moral panics' (Cohen 2002, Muncie 2002). Given this context, these two new titles from Policy Press are important and timely contributions. Both explore the experience of poverty and social exclusion from the perspective of children and young people themselves, thereby continuing a welcome

recent trend in social policy research - to give 'voice' to those previously not listened to.

Ridge's account explores the concerns and issues of children living in poverty in Britain. It is structured into three sections. Section one offers an historical overview of childhood poverty. The second considers the findings from a qualitative study based on interviews with children and young people living in families in receipt of Income Support, as well as from interviews with parents. Section three sets out the findings from a qualitative study of children's experiences and perceptions of school using data from the British Household Panel Youth Survey. The main lesson from Ridge's account is the need for politicians and policy makers to look beyond media-induced moral panics that stereotype poor children as victim or villain, and to develop a more insightful understanding of the everyday challenges faced by children who are poor. In particular, Ridge draws attention to how many poor children develop effective strategies for surviving difficult circumstances - for instance, gaining paid employment to support themselves and, in some cases, to support their mothers. This shows that children are not always the passive victims of poverty, but active agents engaged with their circumstances as best they can (albeit in a restrictive structural context). It also highlights the desire of children to protect their own families. Children also emphasised the importance of friendships and peer groups for their survival - yet these networks were often threatened by the lack of financial resources to socialise and reciprocate, and the lack of access to affordable transport. Clothes were also found to be an important factor for children - not only for their own self-identity, but also for allaying the fear of bullying. Poor children also suffer from poor living environments, lack of opportunity to go on holidays or trips with their family and not fully participating in school activities (not only trips and outings, but also not having the resources for GCSE projects).

What comes across from listening to the voices of poor children is how modest their expectations are - enough space to live in; better health for a parent or sibling; to spend more time with friends; to participate in social activities in and outside of school; to feel safe and secure. In 1999, Tony Blair pledged to end child poverty within 20 years and, in pursuance of this, New Labour have introduced measures aimed at 'supporting' children and their parents (Sure Start, Connexions, national childcare strategy, etc.), and raising incomes through changes to the tax and benefit system (with higher rates of support for working families, the Childcare

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Tax Credit, etc.). From 2003, a single system of child support - the Child Tax Credit - will be paid regardless of parental work status, and includes the child components of Jobseekers Allowance/ Income Support with the Children's Tax Credit and the child component of the Working Families Tax Credit. Ridge is interested in the implications of these reforms for poor children and whether they are really addressing poor children's concerns.

There is a tendency within New Labour's welfare discourse to explain social exclusion as either exclusion from paid work (in which case, inclusion comes from re-engaging with paid work) or the result of behavioural factors (in which case, inclusion comes from changing one's behaviour). The former explanation assumes, however, the availability of reliably paid employment, while the latter shifts the blame for poverty on to the social pathology of the poor and, consequently, permits punitive social policy responses (e.g. parenting orders, truancy sweeps, curfews, electronic tagging, ASBOs, etc.). In view of the government's apparent failure to meet its targets on child poverty, especially for children in lone-parent families or families with illnesses/disabilities and those on Income Support, Ridge calls for more adequate levels of benefit provision which will require a different political position on taxation and wealth redistribution. She also calls for more financial help with the cost of school uniforms, school social trips, materials for assessed projects at school and school meals, and for social activities outside of school (including help with clothing costs). In other words, there needs to be a different societal position on the way we promote the well-being of children and young people.

One way policy makers can attempt to establish more effective policies is through cross-national comparative research. Cross-national comparative research is the study of how, why and to what effect different countries pursue particular courses of action or inaction. Such studies, if carefully organised, offer an opportunity to improve policy making and practice in one country by identifying examples of success that are transferable from another. Hammer's edited book draws together EU-funded work by a team of 'Europe's leading youth researchers' comparing youth unemployment in ten European countries and the risk this carries for social exclusion. Throughout Europe, youth unemployment has increased since the early 1990s and today young people face higher rates of unemployment than adults. Representative samples of unemployed young people were interviewed in Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden. Different countries have responded in different ways

to youth unemployment and one of the main aims of the study is to report on the ways young people describe their experiences with different work activation measures and welfare policies. One of the main findings of this study was that although few young unemployed people were socially excluded, some unemployed young people in particular areas did face a higher risk of marginalisation - in Scotland and Finland - and this was due largely to the persistence of their unemployment, lack of parental support and low levels of benefit (factors which caused feelings of low self-esteem amongst these young unemployed people). In contrast, unemployed youth in Denmark experienced benefit levels which permitted them to live independently, with concomitant feelings of higher levels of well-being and better mental health. An important lesson here is that policies which rely on benefit reforms (cuts!) to incentivise work commitments appear to be flawed. Scottish and Finnish youth displayed less work commitment than young people in Sweden, where benefits are more generous, and Spain, where parental support is more evident. Hammer concludes, however, by acknowledging the difficulty of transferring a successful policy solution in one country to another with a welfare regime built around different cultural and ideological values. British welfare since the 1980s has been based on a neo-liberal model in favour of a flexible labour market and minimal social protection. Swedish welfare, on the other hand, retains elements of social democratic solidarity and, consequently, more generous social protection. Having said this, Hammer does identify some important dilemmas that politicians must acknowledge from this study and for future policy developments. In particular, the research findings here highlight the problems young people in difficult financial circumstances face that can inhibit effective job search and, consequently, the probability of employment. 'This is particularly so in Britain, where unemployment is more concentrated within households and benefits have been withdrawn for anyone under the age of 18. The current policy recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is to reduce benefits. It seems that at a certain level, and given certain national labour market conditions, such a policy could actually reduce employment opportunities' (p 210). Hammer concludes that policies pursued in the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark - offering young people a guarantee of an offer of either education or employment - were more effective in re-engaging young people with paid and sustainable work and, consequently, should be implemented more widely in Europe. However, the emphasis here on re-engagement with paid work or education - whilst important elements

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of inclusion - does perhaps limit the focus of children's and young people's concerns too narrowly. As Ridge shows, young people are also concerned about decent housing and safe neighbourhoods, affordable public transport, decent health care and so forth. Moreover, while Ridge acknowledges that there is no one universal childhood but many childhoods, and young people's lives and experiences will be 'mediated through a diverse range of other factors' (p.136), scant attention is given in either book to the impact of ethnicity, disability and sexuality on young people's experiences.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from these two studies is the value to be gained by involving children and young people in social research. However, how children's and young people's involvement can become more effectively embedded in policy making and practice is not addressed by either study. In Britain at present, despite our country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) - which confers on children rights to participation (to have an opinion, involvement in decision making and freedom of expression) - children and young people have little genuine involvement in those decision-making processes which directly impact on their everyday lives - e.g. housing policies, health policies, education policies, social protection policies, neighbourhood renewal policies, transport policies, and so forth. Is it any wonder, then, that people in Britain, including the majority of young people, feel disillusioned with the political system? At the 2001 General Election, the national turnout fell from 71 per cent in 1997 to 59.4 per cent - the lowest figure since universal suffrage. In a bid to engage young people in the political system, Tony Blair is considering whether to lower the voting age to 16. Yet according to the most recent British Social Attitudes survey, only 16 per cent (compared to 29 per cent in 1998) trust British governments to place the needs of the country above their own party interests. In addition, a study by the BBC in 2002 found that two-thirds of the population feels unrepresented by the political process and powerless to make a difference (Addley 2003). The one area where young people have been collectively engaged in political activism in Britain - in the area of critical youth work practice - is currently under threat from New Labour's Connexions approach to youth work, which emphasises individual surveillance and control (Jeffs and Smith 2001). Moreover, when young people have engaged politically Tony Blair has not liked what he saw - for example, young people campaigning against student fees or schoolchildren campaigning against an illegal and immoral

war in Iraq. Consequently, Tony Blair's recent bid to engage the young in politics or to hold a 'Big Conversation' on his next manifesto looks somewhat insincere - perhaps reflecting, rather, his own attempt at concealing the threat to his own political legitimacy.

Overall, then, these two books do offer some interesting insights into the experiences of poor children and young people. By involving these children and young people in the research process, the two studies provide us with a useful insight into the challenges they face and the ingenuity of the strategies they sometimes deploy to survive. At the same time, much more needs to be done to promote children's and young people's well-being - certainly in British society - and not just through wealth redistribution and greater public investment in affordable transport, safe and decent housing environments, comprehensive health care and inclusive schooling. But also through fully including children and young people, with the support of advocacy where appropriate, in all decision-making processes having an impact on their lives, experiences and opportunities.

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ISBN 1 903855 20 9
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Policy Press, 2003
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Heather Smith

Over the past few years there has been an alarming increase in the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) within children and a rise in the use of prescription drugs to control this. As a practitioner I have spent time working with young men with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD), some of whom had been prescribed Ritalin in an attempt to calm them down and make their behaviour more manageable. Yet it has always troubled me that a strictly controlled drug should be prescribed to children because they display behaviour that is difficult to manage.

Stein has written this Action Guide, as an accompaniment to his previous book *Ritalin Is Not the Answer*. He proposes that by using the 'comprehensive behavorial programme' he presents, parents/carers will be able to change the behavioural patterns that children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD display.

In his introduction, Stein takes time to explain his view concerning the use of prescription drugs to modify behaviour. He, rather refreshingly, acknowledges that drugs are a quick and easy fix for problematic behaviour, but in actual fact end up robbing the individual of their humanity (p. ix), simply masking the problem, which once the drugs stop, will remain. He also points out that there is no diagnostic test for ADD/ADHD and the prescription of Ritalin is based on the presence of particular behaviour traits, challenging the notion that there is a neurological imbalance in children with ADD/ADHD (p 29–31).

Stein argues that psychological techniques can be used to solve behavioural problems but highlights that this requires dedication, self-discipline and hard work. However he also acknowledges that in more recent trends, psychotropic drugs are being used as the basis for any psychological treatment. This is something that is evident in everyday life; how many people visit their GP because they feel slightly depressed and are prescribed anti-depressants before or instead of counselling?

The book has been written with parents/carers at the forefront of the author's mind. This text is designed to be accessible to them, telling them

the facts about the drugs that a doctor wishes to prescribe their child, and a comprehensive way in which this can be avoided. Yet this is not masked by pharmaceutical jargon, the facts about Ritalin are clear and concise. For example how many parents/carers really know that their child is being prescribed a drug that is included in Schedule II of the Controlled Substance Act 1970 (p 19/20), meaning that there is high potential for addiction to and abuse of the drug. Are practitioners aware that the pharmacological effect of the drug they are administering to children and young people in their care is almost identical to that of cocaine (p 22)?

It is the frank discussion that Stein engages in that equips the reader with a more informed approach towards the use of Ritalin. This puts both parents/carers and practitioners at an advantage; Ritalin no longer becomes a wonder drug but rather a substance that simply makes children and young people easier to control. Rather than merely pointing out the dangers of Ritalin, Stein offers a way in which parents/carers can enable children and young people to take control of their behaviour and emotions.

The Caregivers Skill's Program (CSP) is based on the idea that there is nothing wrong with the child, and that they are able to control their behaviour (p 53). This is opposed to current behavioural methods that are based on the philosophy that a child with ADD/ADHD requires constant help and is permanently handicapped (p 50). Stein acknowledges that social and familial factors are usually the reasons behind behavioural problems and offers the CSP as a way to re-establish parents/carers as the boss in the capacity of a loving authority. Yet in order to do this, parents/carers first need to be frank and honest about their child's behaviour and not put unacceptable behaviour down to wilfulness.

A holistic approach to parenting is presented, both highlighting and empathising with the fact that parents/carers may need to overhaul their style of parenting. Non-humiliation of the child is at the centre of this. If parents/carers require their children to be in control of their behaviours then parents/carers must be in control of their own. Stein is clear about the commitment needed in order to make changes; he doesn't pretend that it will be an easy ride or that things will change over night. Instead he makes it clear that in order for the programme to be effective parents/carers need to apply immediacy and consistency when using both discipline and reinforcement for good behaviour.

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Stein has written a comprehensive text that explores all sides of behavioural problems ranging from the origin or cause, the lack of diagnostic testing, right through to examples of successful parenting that have produced happy children and young people who have been enabled, through the CSP, to take control of their behaviour and emotions. He writes in a way that is accessible and encourages parents/carers to re-read sections until they are clear in their own mind about how to move on to the next stage.

An attractive quality of the programme that Stein has designed is that 'the CSP relies almost completely on natural, social, parent-child reinforcing techniques instead of on the payment of bribes, material reinforcers, and rewards' (p 75). Stein is offering a programme that will help teach children and young people good behaviour for good behaviours sake, rather than good behaviour because of what they are going to get. Stein acknowledges that parenting is sometimes difficult but throughout the text highlights that if parents/carers are committed and work hard, they can lay the foundations of good behaviour within their home from which the whole family will benefit.

This text has both confirmed and challenged the ways in which I work with difficult and anti-social behaviour. It raises awareness of the commitment needed from both parents/carers and practitioners if young people are to be enabled to take control of their behaviour, and that using prescription drugs is often the easy option. Much can be learned from reading Stein's book. Even if the children and young people in your care are not diagnosed as ADD/ADHD, it offers both the theoretical and practical skills that will benefit anyone caring for children and young people.

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Judith Summers
**Schools are for Adults Too: Schools, adults and communities
in the learning age. A policy discussion paper**
NIACE Leicester, 2002
ISBN 1 86201 154 0
pp 42

Stuart Moir

Summers offers a clearly written, comprehensive and thoughtful policy paper relating to the participation of adults in education within the

school setting, as well as the wider role that schools can play in supporting communities to regenerate and develop.

The paper comprises three chapters. The first reviews the emerging policy context, which it is argued, is beginning to redefine the role of schools and their relationship with adult learners and communities. The second maps out the diverse ways in which adults are currently engaging with learning in schools. The third entitled 'Creating Success' reviews examples of current practice in which adults are successfully engaging with school beyond the traditional adult class programme.

During the course of these chapters the paper reflects a deep knowledge and understanding of the field, and in a forensic way, goes straight to the heart of the issues concerning the relationship between schooling and adult education. Summers highlights a numbers of key issues. For example the paper identifies a number of recent Government reports and policy developments, such as the Fryer Report, its associated Green paper, the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and the Policy Action Teams, that can be seen as creating opportunities for schools to take on a much wider role. These opportunities include the creation of community based learning centres, funding for out of school study support, financial support for sports facilities in schools for wider community use and Sure Start for under 5s.

Summers argues these ideas '...*provide a rationale and opportunity for schools to make a serious contribution to lifelong learning – and one that encourages them to take a long view'.* However the lack of a consistent policy approach to schools and adult learning is criticised and it is argued that this policy diversity '...*stops short of what seems to be an obvious conclusion. It does not synthesise the key ideas into a programme for transforming schools into a resource and site for learning for the whole community'.*

As well as a lack of consistency in policy, the paper also highlights a key tension at its heart. The current policy context and government thinking is focused on widening access to education by opening up schools to adults and communities in a bid to tackle social exclusion and to build capacity in communities. However on the other hand one of the Government's key priorities for schools is raising attainment for children. Therefore, Summers argues, given the pressure exerted on schools by the National Curriculum, literacy & numeracy strategies, an oppressive inspection framework and restrictions on the use of funding, there are real disincentives for schools to engage with adult learners.

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I agree with Summers when she argues against the result of these restrictions on schools, which can often mean that adult participation in learning in schools happens in an instrumental way, focused only on supporting pupil attainment.

There is a real danger that the interpretation and implementation of these policy ideas can lead to a deficiency-economistic model. By this I mean that education, and adults involvement in schools, is just about targeting the deficient parents of failing or disruptive pupils, and lifelong learning is seen as a narrow process only designed to equip or re-equip adults with the skills to participate in the labour market.

Whilst we need a highly skilled work force, and employment is a key to inclusion, the paper argues strongly that schools also have a much wider social purpose. A strong theme developed in the paper was to see the relationship between schools, adults and communities in the context of redefining schools as local ' learning centres' to support learning communities. Schools should be working to develop partnerships between communities, and the adults and young people within, to help identify and serve their needs and aspirations.

Supporting this theme a persuasive case is made for the benefits of having adults in schools and for schools to engage more with the communities they serve. As Summers suggests, *'…adult learners in school may start with supporting children but should be encouraged to learn for themselves; that communities have a right to access and that this can be mutually enriching. Schools can then be seen as contributors to building their communities and raising collective aspirations'.*

I feel the paper is realistic in the recommendations it makes to move the debate on and to encourage key stakeholders like schools, LEAs and Government to support schools to engage successfully with the ideas and take up the opportunities presented by the policy context.

Some of the recommendations that caught my eye include; a coherent government strategy for helping schools to become local learning centres; evidence in funding bids, of community involvement in the management of schools and consultation on learning needs; setting up a consultancy service to support developments; small but sustained funding for schools to employ community educators to develop learning opportunities and community links; and a focus on community involvement and adult learning in the inspection criteria for schools.

I would also like to have seen a suggestion that there should be more teaching about community schooling at undergraduate level for teachers and also more joint training at pre and post graduate level between teachers and other professionals in the field.

As a practitioner working in the community school field I found it very useful and I was encouraged that it read like a clarion call for the reassertion of community schooling. I would strongly recommend it to those with an interest in this field. It is a useful resource, which gives an illuminating example of good practice, makes clear the difficulties and barriers in the way of development, and in its recommendations, presents a practical guide to what needs to be done to move things on. This is a very worthwhile paper, which will help to bolster practitioners and supporters in sustaining the wider vision of social purpose community schooling in those moments of darkness and confusion.

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Tony Newman
Children of Disabled Parents: New Thinking About Families Affected By Disability and Illness.
Russell House Publishing, 2003
ISBN 1 903855 20 9
£14.95 (pbk)

Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker
Children Caring for Parents with Mental Illness:
Perspectives of Young Carers, Parents and Professionals
Policy Press, 2003
ISBN: 1 86134399 X
£19.99 (pbk)

John M Davis

Newman's book *Children of Disabled Parents: New Thinking About Families Affected By Disability and Illness* investigates the construction of the concept of 'young carers'. In six accessible chapters and less than 140 pages, he: reviews the literature on parental disability and children, relates the construction of the concept of 'young carers' to health and

welfare discourses that construct children as problems, identifies an alternative discourse to that to be found in child welfare and promotes the idea that effective social care services should identify and promote children's strengths.

By discussing discourses of risk, disability, welfare, and health the early chapters explain the present day context that has increased our awareness of 'young carers'. This leads to a critique of the tendency for social and medical research to create stereo types as a bi-product of their need to publicise issues of concern. Whilst recognising why interested parties need to highlight issues of social concern (e.g. to generate funding for services) Newman suggests that it is not always clear that children benefit from such processes. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the flimsy nature of some of the research on this topic and the lack of clear research that demonstrates the long-term negative effects for children of being carers.

Newman does not down play the role that children play in disabled parents lives and the distress that this can cause. He suggests that we cannot deny that there is a 'high contemporary level of childcare giving'. However, rather than reproducing discourses of vulnerability, risk and concern he questions the legitimacy of present construction of 'young carers'. In chapter three this enables him to conclude that the service provision available to parents and children is not designed to build on their skills and competencies.

Chapter four discusses parental disability and its effects on children in relation to issues such as mental health, alcoholism, Aids, and a variety of other impairments. This chapter would have been better named Parents, Illness, Impairment, Psychology and Disability, because Newman attempts to explain a number of social, psychological, biological and medical issues that effect parents, some of which are static in nature and others that surface at different times in different forms. On the positive side, this chapter clearly demonstrates how various service systems and theories of parenting are stacked against the interests of disabled parents and that family discord is more likely to harm children than issues of illness or impairment. This chapter recognises the rights of children and promotes the idea that children's views on caring should be recognised by service providers. However, the chapter gets bogged down in the psychology of children's illness, disability, resilience, trauma and remembrance and might have benefited from being cut in size. The length of the chapter prevents the reader from easily getting to its main points which are

that: a range of factors relating to parental impairment, family structure and socio-economic circumstances can impact on children and family relationships and that we should resist the temptation to make simple conclusions about how parental incapacity effects children.

The following chapter draws from two large studies of children to discuss the effects of parental illness and disability on the health and well being of children. It concludes that it is easy to assume that there are causal relationships between, 'past experiences, current dispositions, children's domestic roles and future life trajectories' but that this is not useful in the child welfare context because it may result in us lowering our expectations of children involved in caring. Again Newman recognises the distress that 'young carers' can experience, however he wants to guide us away from reducing our view of young carers to that of 'fragile victim'.

The final chapter illustrates the strength of the book - Newman's ability to relate a variety of sources of research to the practical situation of 'young carers'. This chapter summarises how children and families can be effectively supported to concentrate on their strengths rather than their deficits. It highlights the importance of demystifying and de-stigmatising impairment for children.

By challenging the notion that parental impairment is always a source of risk or suffering for children Newman is able to build on post-structural traditions within disability and childhood studies that involve writers/researchers deconstructing stereotypes about disability and childhood. Importantly he demonstrates the utility of such an approach when promoting the belief that disability is a *'normal and essentially unremarkable aspect of the human condition'*. Therefore, that the single best way to guarantee the welfare of children and parents is to recognise the strengths of parents and children and support parents in their parental duties.

Aldridge and Becker's *Children Caring for Parents With Mental Illness* covers very similar ground to that of Newman. Though the title suggests the writers are only concerned with one group of 'young carers', we find that many parents who experience mental illness also experience another impairment. The book opens with a review of the medical and social literature on 'young carers'. Like Newman the writers conclude that the apparently 'damaging associations between children's experiences and the presence in families of parental mental illness' lack credible empirical proof and that the issues that effect the well being of children in families are multifaceted and complex. It suggests that negative stereo

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types are perpetuated by deterministic medical research, the media and health/social care organisations (the potential for the authors' own work to contribute to these processes could have been reflected upon a bit more).

Chapter two presents parents perspectives. It is overly concerned with medical, genetic and biological cause and effect. For example a great deal of time is spent unpacking the various non-social factors that may 'cause' mental ill health prior to the conclusion that these factors are far from straight forward and can not be separated from social factors such as unemployment and housing. Its strength lies in its ability to move beyond medical determinism but its weakness lies in the writer's inability to do anything more than revise dogma.

The next chapter illustrates the perspectives of children suggesting that there can be both positive and negative issue within the role of 'young carer'. It also explodes a number of myths regarding the 'learned behaviour' of 'young carers' arguing that there is no evidence to suggest that these children develop disorders as a result of the effects of their parents mental illnesses.

Chapter four examines the role of professionals and different types of service provision concluding that researchers and professionals (in both the statutory and voluntary sector) place too much emphasis on the negative effects on 'young carers', are pressured by various factors into too readily resorting to child protection procedures and prevented from effectively intervening by divisions between service sectors.

These chapters include a number of important findings that complement the perspective of Newman. By demonstrating a link between medical dogma and professional practice Aldridge and Becker demonstrate the need for a change in service planning and provision. However, two unresolved issues stand out in this chapter. Firstly, it is presumed that adults will rectify this situation. That is, it is assumed that solutions can be achieved by tinkering with the practices of adult service providers. This presumption overlooks Newman's suggestion that some of these families may not require professional intervention. Secondly, the ability of children to resolve their own life issues is under explored. Reading this chapter from a disability or childhood studies perspective I am left asking the question: could the authors or their respondents have recommended more radical changes to the status quo? For example, could they have built more on the notion of independent living that comes from disability studies or the idea of children participating in the planning and running of their own services/projects that is to be found in childhood studies?

Chapter five promotes the need for professionals to consider the individual and the interdependent needs of children and parents. It recommends a model of good practice for professionals and touches on issues of self-help and alternative support networks. Their model is valuable because it could have important consequences for professionals who work in this field and may encourage them to pay more time and attention to recognising the wishes of parents and children. However, its limitation lies in the fact that it appears to be a model created by the authors rather than one generated by the research participants.

A lot is made of the fact that this is the first ever study to investigate the perspectives of children, parents and the professionals they work with. Indeed, this book is a valuable resource. However, from personal experience I, like Newman, am sceptical of writers who feel the need to reify their subject. Indeed, a close examination of the appendices reveals that the authors encountered severe recruitment problems with only 28 families following the project through to its end. The authors aspired to carry out the first 'national study' of its kind, yet we are not told where the 40 families that began the project came from. This is an important issue as service provision varies across different local authority settings. A final criticism is that though this study gives voice to some 'young carers' and will be a valuable resource for professionals it falls well short of participatory and emancipatory ideals in both childhood and disability studies that argue for research to: enable participants to control the planning, development and process of the project, allow participants to have control over the findings of research and for them to be included in processes of dissemination.

Overall Aldridge and Becker's book leaves the reader asking the question (hinted at also by Newman): was this research carried out for the benefit of 'young carers' or is it another case of academics making their careers out of a disability issue? This question enables the reader to make a clear distinction between this and Newman's book. The latter is deeply reflexive, he thinks the unthinkable and relishes the opportunity to question orthodoxy. Aldridge and Becker are revisionist rather than revolutionary, happy to take a pop at the usual easy targets such as 1970s medical writing, lack of inter-agency working and 'the media' but more hesitant when it comes to taking on contemporary writing. This leaves them open to a criticism that can be thrown at all of us who work in this field: that they may be more interested in building their careers with short term research projects rather than actually working to contribute to the circumstances where disabled

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people and their children experience self-empowerment by taking control of their own service provision.

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Joy Dryfoos and Sue Maguire
Inside Full Service Community Schools
Corwin Press, 2002
ISBN 0 7619 4511 3
pp 233

Stuart Moir

The American 'Full Service Community School' was a key influence behind the introduction, in 1999, of the New Community Schools initiative in Scotland. A key operating principle of Full Service Schools and New Community Schools (NCS) is that they should bring together schools and other agencies to tackle social exclusion and raise educational attainment.

However in creating NCS in Scotland the government made no reference to the many years of experience in this field of education to be found across the UK. Various models of community schooling have been around in the UK for a long time. Certainly from the Plowden Report of the 1960s, back at least to Henry Morris and the Village Colleges first opened in 1929, and beyond these to the radical educators of the nineteenth century concerned with the idea of 'really useful knowledge'.

As someone working within the NCS programme I was inevitably interested in a book on Full Service Schooling. However, I must confess to having approached this book in a slightly conceited way. For given the British tradition, and my own experience in the field, I suspected it wouldn't offer me much that was new. Nevertheless I found parts of the book worthwhile and the structure helpful. Each chapter, whatever the topic, is divided into two parts. The first, written by Dryfoos, focuses on the national picture. Academic in style it presents a broad-brush description of the vast range of schools and models operating in the United States. The second, written by Maguire, a Principal of a Full Service School, concentrates upon what has occurred in her own school and is far more anecdotal in tone.

The book claims to be a step-by-step practitioner guide to creating a full service school. The chapter titles reflect this intention being devoted to topics such as - what are full service schools?; how to get started; what services do they provide?; how parents are involved; how to develop partnerships; what are the barriers to developing the potential of such schools; and how to overcome these barriers.

What is a Full Service School? The authors make the point, also made in the UK literature, that it is difficult to offer a definitive description for there are so many types of community school. The term at best describes a heterogeneous range of institutions and models. However they identify a number of key characteristics that help describe a Full Service Community School (FSCS). These include a building open beyond the normal school day providing a base for a range of other services such as health and social services, as well as adult education and youth work. An FSCS will also actively seek to create links with the communities they serve, make curricular changes to match the needs of those communities and be committed to community development. Services would be integrated and overseen by a school Principal and a support services co-ordinator.

I felt the authors set out their argument well in the first couple of chapters. They presented a clear description of how the multi-dimensional nature of poverty impacts on communities and families and subsequently on a child's personal, social and educational development. Via the presentation of a lengthy list of examples of services, programmes and initiatives they convey how the FSCS can make a difference.

It was heartening to detect a theme, running through the book, that recognised that an FSCS cannot just be about academic achievement and preparing the child for participation in the labour market. They argue that as the problems of exclusion and low attainment are multi-faceted and inter-connected there has to be a balance between the pursuit of academic achievement and a wider social purpose embodied in personal development support for families and community improvement.

Although I found the first few chapters useful this wasn't sustained. For the chapters became repetitive, long on description and short on analysis and background - particularly in the sections on the national perspectives written by Dryfoos. Not knowing the US education system was a disadvantage. Indeed for those unfamiliar with it following the descriptions of the structure and funding arrangements of Federal and State programmes is likely to

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become difficult as a bewildering array of school models and organisational structures, with apparently little to differentiate one from the other, are unfurled. Surely the space would have been better employed focusing on a few contrasting schools and putting them in context and analysing them in detail.

In chapters that considered such questions a 'What are the staff considerations?' or 'How are effective partnerships developed?' the content did not move much beyond descriptive accounts gathered from across the country. The chapters looking at evaluation, assessment and the barriers to creating a FSCS were particularly disappointing. In my experience the significant barriers are those related to different interpretations of the purpose and goals of community schooling. Differences that can separate the schools from other agencies and which reflect contradictory professional philosophies and practices amongst those involved. The book did not deal with this issue adequately, opting instead to focus on more concrete impediments such as lack of space, the problems of distance travelled by students and the maintenance of facilities.

The chapter on evaluation was far too short and like others covered examples from across the United States without the context being adequately set. As a result the impact of any success claimed was lost as one was presented with nothing more than bare statistics on increased literacy rates and test scores.

Finally I put the book down feeling a little frustrated and dissatisfied. It was too descriptive. Dryfoos in particular never fully developed any of the themes. For example there are numerous references to schools adopting changes to the curriculum but the nature and impact of these changes are never explained or analysed. If you are a practitioner or policy maker familiar with the concept of community schooling there is nothing in this book that you will find new or likely to advance your thinking. However I did find it a useful reflective exercise to compare my experiences and knowledge with that of the authors. If you are unfamiliar with the basics of community schooling you will find this book of some use as an introduction.

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Becky Francis and Christine Skelton (Eds)
Investigating Gender: Contemporary perspectives in education
Open University Press, 2002
ISBN 0 335 20787 1 (pbk)
ISBN 0 335 20788 X (hbk)
pp 222

Jean Spence

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As the editors and most contributors indicate, the achievement and underachievement of young men and women within formal education is a complex matter. Examination of choices and performance relating to subjects demonstrates an unevenness of outcome that requires subtle analysis regarding how gender shapes choice and awards value to different subjects. Whilst understanding gender with reference to inequalities and differences exposes the dangers of mechanistic explanations of the evidence, there are statistics that suggest a trend towards the underachievement of boys post 1988. This has evoked a response that has legitimated a shift from traditional feminist concerns with the inequality endured by young women within education. This trend runs as a sub-theme throughout this book which seeks to demonstrate theoretically and practically that neither the feminist complaint about female underachievement, nor the contemporary furore about boys takes adequate cognisance of the range of issues which statistical facts mask.

In Part One, two authors consider the significance and use of gender as a basis for understanding educational developments. Dillabough offers an overview of theoretical developments within feminist educational thinking, from the undifferentiated concept of patriarchy, through the theorisation of identity to post-structuralist forms of analysis. She provides a useful consideration of diverse and emergent themes, including, for example, 'the sexed identity', 'ethnicity and social exclusion', 'black, post-colonial and standpoint feminisms', 'markets and educational processes'. Dillaborough asserts the necessity of maintaining a political perspective and rejects the exclusivity of post-modernist and modernist approaches. Hammersley follows and provides a different assessment. A protagonist of objectivism and scientific thinking Hammersley is keen to separate the interpretation of 'facts' from 'value judgements'. Indicating that a historical analysis would provide differences in how male and female have been treated in education and that assumptions of sex difference have been used as an organising principle in social life, he proceeds to demonstrate the complexity of reading statistical evidence. For Hammersley, questions raised by statistical

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evidence are separate from those raised by issues of social justice. In relation to the latter, he notes that 'difference' itself is not necessarily inequitable, and that researcher's judgements might be different from those offered by the research subject's. The editors indicate that they are out of sympathy with Hammersley's approach which fails to conform with the majority feminist position offered here. This chapter sits uneasily alongside the rest. Yet Hammersley offers legitimate arguments not to be dismissed lightly. Moreover, he is not an opponent of social justice, but rather equates political positioning with scientific reasoning. Whatever the reader's stance it was unnecessary for the editors to declare they 'do not support Hammersley's interpretation of Measor's work' (p 5).

Part Two aims to explain the theoretical debates that have emerged in recent years within gender theory. Although they relate to the text's educational theme the analysis enables the reader to consider their value across a range of issues. Overall this section grapples with the desire to pursue the insights offered by post-structuralist and post-modernist perspectives, without falling into relativism and without losing feminism's political impetus. Praechter considers the importance of the concept of discourse and Foucauldian views of power to better understand the significance of gender in situated conditions. Cealy Harrison uses Walkerdine's post-structuralism and the work of the *Girls in Mathematics Unit* to move beyond the dichotomous thinking involved in the sex/gender-nature/nurture model previously so influential. Cealy Harrison defies the relativising of 'truth' so problematic within post-modernism for the question of social justice and attempts to 'situate' truth, arguing that what is important is contextualisation. Recognising the danger of pure post-modernism or post-structuralism to the feminist project Francis is concerned with the 'death of the self' perspective which denies agency and coherence to human subjects. She argues that struggles for emancipation are rendered pointless if we have no control over our lives and notes that a recognition of the importance of similarity does not deny the relevance of difference. The final chapter moves the debate on. Raphael Reed does not deny the 'self' but takes it as a starting point for questioning the boundaries of 'acceptable' knowledge. By attempting to break silences without simply resorting to the confessional, she wishes to move beyond the conventional complexities of post-modern thinking towards a mobilisation of the unconscious as a source of power. At the risk of being dismissed as 'New Age', she tries to open up the possibility of mobilising the spiritual and the transcendental in education and research. In doing so she uses the biographical as a possible mode of

resistance enabling the subject to find a meaningful voice which connects with the realities of inequality and power.

These theoretical chapters are not easy to read. Indeed like Raphael Reed I felt: 'intellectually seasick, not at all sure what I've caught in my net, or that I've got on the right boat' (p 83). The debates are fluid and the insights sometimes fleeting. Occasionally, I wondered if it had been necessary to board the boat at all because the conclusions seemed 'Obvious, all too obvious' (Hammersley's chapter title). Yet there is no doubt that communicating intellectual journeys is important. Moreover, insofar as 'theory' maintains its status as the 'Clever Stuff' of academia, and contemporary theoreticism threatens the very foundation and fabric of political organisation and action around ideals of social justice, then it is important that feminist thinkers contribute and communicate their understanding. It was a relief to this largely unreconstructed socialist feminist to reach Part Three.

Part Three considers the structuring of issues of difference and inequality including learning disability, racialisation, ethnicity and 'whiteness', femininity and masculinity and class. These chapters vary in approach and the extent to which they complement earlier offerings. For instance, Riddell, Baron and Wilson consider the post school experiences of 32 Scottish adults with learning disabilities in terms of Putnam's categories of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital. Although interesting it does not sit easily with previous material being a conventional account of research findings. Kehily's chapter on 'Gender and Sexuality in Schools' more clearly employs theoretical perspectives encountered earlier in demonstrating how homophobia acts as a structuring presence in the lives of young men whilst ideas about sexual reputation perform a parallel function in the lives of young women. Kehily applies her thinking to the school setting, offering practical thoughts about pedagogy and the development of relationship education as matters of concern for teachers. This aspect is not wholly satisfactory, signifying the limitations imposed by institutional reality. Apply Kehily's analysis to social institutions beyond the school, with an informal educational brief, and the possibilities for action become broader. Although Kehily does not address this, her analysis suggests the importance of interconnectedness between institutions dealing with both formal and informal education. It also indicates how questions of sexuality are much wider than simply thinking about homosexual and lesbian identities or teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The following two chapters deal with issues of racialisation, ethnicity and identity. Phoenix considers educational inequalities associated with 'race',

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ethnicity and gender. Arguing that the highly influential Rampton and Swann Reports have an essentialist view of 'race' and that discriminatory practices, particularly against boys and black children, continue. Reality of institutional racism suggests that unless the complexity of the issues are understood, schools will not adequately respond to the Race Relations Amendment Act (2001) which requires them to avoid indirect discrimination and promote equality. How difficult this might be is underlined in Nayak's chapter that deconstructs black/white dualism to consider the complexity of white identity. Like Phoenix, the focus is upon evidence from school children but Nayak takes the analysis further. It complements the suggestions of Reed that autobiographical work helps locate the 'authentic' subject, and Nayak advocates family history and biographical work in education to situate and affirm white identity. Both Phoenix and Nayak imply that mechanistic liberalism within schools has been counter-productive to the project of anti-racism.

Failure to address questions of whiteness and white identity within anti-racist approaches resonates with failure to address questions of both feminine and masculine identity within anti-sexist approaches. Reay addresses the performative element of femininity especially in relation to those who achieve academically and occupy leadership positions. She considers the complexity of the subjective feminine positions of women managers and argues that masculine attributes are adopted by them to successfully operationalise these 'bourgeoise rational roles'. In the next chapter Skelton takes further the question of the complexity of masculinity and femininity. Not only does each subject 'perform' aspects of masculine and femininity according to role as suggested by Reay, but this performance is relational. Skelton points out that both are constructed within dualistic discourses of masculinity and femininity and a full understanding of the implications of inhabiting a particular gender position can only be understood with reference to the relationship between each. Skelton's analysis seeks to deal with issues of masculinity in the context of education without displacing the female subject. To focus attention upon masculinity, as all feminists are aware, invites the possibility of anti-feminist thinking gaining prominence in the field as much as it widens the vista for feminist analyses. It leads, Skelton argues, to the dominance of the 'men's rights' approach so influential in the debates about the 'underachievement of boys'. To problematise the *relationship* between masculinity and femininity on the other hand, widens the debates offering opportunities for more useful interventions.

Throughout this book, the question of gender is shadowed by the question of class. It is an ever-present ghost - a 'prototype of obviousness' for Hammersley, a key to understanding the experiences of the adults with learning difficulties, an unexplored 'mediating factor' in the performance of gender described by Reay. Finally, in Chapter 13, class becomes the focus. Here, in a well-grounded chapter, Lucey conveys how difficult educational success is for working class girls. She does not underestimate the difficulties created for middle class girls, for whom excellence is assumed, nevertheless, the hype about the achievement of girls obscures the reality that not all girls succeed, not all match or surpass their male peers. To effectively understand what is happening Lucey suggests this key concept, declared dead by theorists and politicians, needs to re-enter the frame of analysis.

As the editors imply in their 'endnotes', underneath all the thinking in this book is the reality of those statistics implying educational success amongst girls and relative underachievement amongst boys at school. These have led to a public demand for policy changes whilst challenging simplistic feminist approaches to questions of gender inequality in education. In the main, the contributors use the possibilities offered by post-structuralist theories to address these challenges. Whilst recognising that to do so takes feminists into terrain where 'all that is solid melts', the subject can be deconstructed and all power reduced to text and meaning. The ultimate relativism of much post-modern thought is destabilising for any intellectual position that claims a value base and pursues questions of social justice. All the contributors are aware that the realities of gender difference translate into gender inequality. No matter how complex the theoretical understanding, there is a material reality within which relations of power are actually experienced and interpreted. They accept this reality and attempt to address it.

Jean Spence *Centre for Applied Social and Community Studies, University of Durham.*

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Doug Fields
Your First Two Years In Youth Ministry
Zondervan – Youth Specialties, 2002
ISBN 0 310 24045 X
pp 290

Katherine Landon

When I first saw this book, I wondered how a man, who I am aware has been a practitioner for many years, was able to write about his first two years in youth ministry. As I fall into the category of being a new youth worker, I felt sceptical about whether or not Fields would be able to capture the essence of the changes which have taken place since he first started in the profession and the pressures the job currently places on workers. However, my fears were soon allayed as I started the book and saw how the author has used the invaluable experience he has gained, making it relevant for workers starting in the profession, using examples from other practitioners.

Throughout the book, Field follows his themes in a logical fashion, introducing new ideas simply at first and developing them as each chapter progresses. He gives new practitioners ideas for 'getting started' and a checklist for prioritising good working practices to ensure that the new worker is able to maintain pace in the profession rather than burning out after a short time. As the book continues, Fields looks at issues which are, broadly speaking, in the following umbrella categories:

- Starting out in the profession
- Areas of conflict which workers may have to navigate
- Working effectively with different user groups
- Obtaining and maintaining appropriate support structures
- Managing other volunteers
- Evaluating and making changes to a worker's role.

As previously mentioned, the first chapter discusses strategies for setting up good practice methods. The author adopts a fairly informal tone and it appears that Fields is trying to engage in a relationship with the reader, which is at times, I feel, slightly contrived. Particularly as the author is trying to help the worker set in place structures to ensure longevity within the profession, which is a serious issue. In chapter two, Fields shows a clear understanding of the highs and lows of youth work practice and the emotional rollercoaster which can ensue when working with young people,

presenting a list of possible triggers of discouragement and conflict. While, I imagine, much of this list is identifiable to workers, Fields does not move onto chapter three without presenting helpful strategies for dealing with the issues he has addressed.

As chapters four and five progress, Fields addresses how best to work with different groups and looks specifically at good practice for supporting students and working alongside parents. Fields discusses delegation techniques, relating his experience particularly to the subject of sharing responsibility for young people with other staff and volunteers and working in conjunction with parents. Fields emphasises the importance of promoting positive relationships between young people and their parents by 'developing family-friendly habits' (p 107) within practice. This is an interesting viewpoint for the importance of families working together does not now appear to be encouraged as it previously was.

Towards the end of the book, the author discusses support structures, evaluation of practice and how to make appropriate changes to develop work after the first two years of employment. Fields places an understandable and necessary emphasis on the importance of evaluating practice.

As the author develops the aforementioned themes, he links theory and practice whilst drawing from various Christian aspects of youth ministry, which I appreciated as a worker who is based in both a school and church. However, for some practitioners who do not share the belief system held by the author or those who work in a secular environment, the spiritual analogies and parallels may be off-putting. Whilst I believe that the author has targeted an audience who share his belief system and similar working practices, much of what he says allows workers to create a professional distance between their emotions and their work. Something both Christian and secular workers need to do. Fields' writing can be insightful as he shares his adaptations of practice to encompass an holistic approach to youth work and youth ministry practice and can be re-read as a point of reference as workers develop their own working styles.

In conclusion, I feel that Fields has written an encouraging, realistic guide to the first two years in youth ministry. However, I found his anecdotal style slightly off-putting at times and feel that his role as the author of such a book should be to inform rather than entertain his readers. All in all, however, the book provides some fresh insights for new workers as well as those who may have lost their passion and drive for what is a

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challenging yet rewarding profession which many people are fortunate enough to be involved in.

Katherine Landon is both a school and parish based worker in Peterborough.

Aaron Kipnis
Angry Young Men
Jossey Bass
ISBN 0 7879 6043 8
£14.95 (pbk)
pp 277

Huw Blacker

Kipnis examines the lives of young men in the United States who are deemed 'at risk'. It is predominantly a narrative of the author's own experience of adolescence, as he intimately shares his memories of home life, school, foster care, homelessness, incarceration, prostitution, drugs and violence. He also draws upon his experience as a clinical psychologist working with young men.

Our author explores 7 areas from the perspective of being potential 'Pathways to Prison', or, with appropriate interventions, critical junctions where 'boys at risk' can be diverted towards 'community'. He focuses on the areas of Home, School, the Street, Juvenile Institutions, Drugs, Youth Crime and Gangs, and the Criminal Justice System. At the end of each chapter there is a list of 'recommendations' relating to each of these. As Kipnis unfolds his own life history in relation to these areas, he also draws extensively upon other research, statistical information, and the experiences of other young men. It is in this style that he then highlights a number of insights relating to the 'needs of boys at risk', and the failings of various social, educational and corrective institutions in the United States to meet these needs appropriately.

I approach this book as a hostel worker working with young adults, many of whom have been in prison, care, on probation and homeless. From this perspective I found the book useful. It is not written in an academic style, but pitches more towards one offering accessibility to a variety of readers, in particular those who have contact with young offenders.

Whilst the author touches on all manner of issues, highlights policies and their impact, makes suggestions for workers and policy-makers alike, there is not a great deal of depth in respect of these areas. The main strength of the text is in its descriptions of the experiences of some young men, and the exploration of the circumstances in which they were born.

A number of issues come under scrutiny – parenting, child welfare, foster care, education, community services, mental health institutions, public policy, prisons and prison after-care, privatisation of prisons, probation, parole and rehabilitation, youth incarceration, use of medications in schools, school suspensions, criminalisation and the use of violence in various institutions. Kipnis also highlights some gender and race specific disparities in various service provisions. The examples and insights Kipnis provides go some way to producing an effective and informative argument as to why various institutions and strategies may be failing. Further to this, he argues that many approaches used by various institutions create more harm, contribute to the problems of young men, and are more likely to lead to subsequent imprisonment.

It is the depth of reflection on his own experiences that contributes to the reader's understanding of what this 'system' meant for one individual in particular. I found the accounts Kipnis provides from his own life, and the lives of other young men, to be hard-hitting and, at times, emotive to read. He also draws attention to those experiences that led him away from becoming a 'career criminal':- including access to education; job skills acquisition leading to employment above the minimum wage; meditation and spiritual experiences; association with people at work and school; the attention of older male mentors; alcohol and drug recovery programmes; psychological work; the sealing of his juvenile records; and the compassion and support of others.

Kipnis outlines a number of programmes and approaches that are proving to meet with some success in this field. He pays particular attention to 'grassroots' programmes, and outlines various male-mentoring approaches that he advocates. Kipnis flys the flag for programmes that take a wholistic approach, and throughout attempts to outline what is missing in the services provided for so many young men, and hence what should be included.

The language that Kipnis uses did make me cringe a little at times ('Angry Young Men', 'Bad Boys'), and I found myself questioning the validity of some of the claims made. I nevertheless found the book presented several ideas worthy of consideration. The book is grounded in the American

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experinece, and is particularly geared towards highlighting elements that are 'missing' from young men's lives, with ideas as to how these elements could be provided. It also draws attention to the responsibilities of those in appropriate professional positions to address these issues. Primarily a book for workers interested in gaining some insight into the experiences of young men, with some ideas for working with young men that may be of use. Along the way, some useful points for questioning the institutions that are set up to work with 'bad boys', and hence for questioning the effectiveness of the policies and work practices of these institutions, with recommendations worth considering. The recommendations, however, are not explored in any real depth.

Huw Blacker *Romford YMCA.*

Pamela Cox and Heather Shore (Eds)
Becoming Delinquent: British and European Youth, 1650-1950
Ashgate, 2002
ISBN 0 7546 2228 2
£45.00 (hbk)
pp 184

Barry Goldson

Throughout the UK, questions relating to youth crime, social disorder and anti-social behaviour currently command a particularly high profile within professional, political and public discourses. Social policy is awash with initiatives 'targeted' at the 'problematic' young, and the media's pre-occupation with youthful transgression is seemingly unabating. Much of the concern is derived in a 'year zero' and ahistorical mentality. Indeed, on this basis one could be forgiven for thinking that we are witnesses to social phenomena geographically confined to the UK, and peculiarly unique to the 'modern' age.

Many informed commentators from within the academic, policy and practice communities however, have attempted to situate and contextualise all of this by critically examining the periodic emergence of 'moral panics' and the 'demonising' processes that tend to accompany them. They have aimed to trace the spatial and temporal continuities and changes in the

behaviours of young people, and to critically examine the rationales that determine the formal statutory responses to such behaviours. Put at its simplest, comparative historical analysis serves to challenge and unsettle the populist notion that contemporary youth is in crisis and 'things are getting worse'. In this way, *Becoming Delinquent: British and European Youth, 1650-1950*, published within Ashgate's 'Advances in Criminology' series, makes an important and timely contribution to our understanding of youth crime and 'juvenile delinquency'.

Cox and Shore have compiled and edited an engaging collection of nine essays which situate the question of 'delinquency' within comparative context - both in terms of time (the various contributions cover a period of some three hundred years), and space (the essays are written by scholars drawn from a range of European and American universities, who together analyse youth crime and delinquency in Belgium, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain). The collection is extraordinarily ambitious and, with less than 200 pages, certain omissions are inevitable. This said, the combination of careful editing, together with evidence that in writing their individual essays the respective authors also remained mindful of the wider book project, provide an impressive coherence and intellectual integrity to the book.

The familiar questions that exercise contemporary policy-makers (in the UK and beyond) emerge and re-emerge within the historical analysis. Indeed, on reading the essays and making the connections between them, one is struck by the poverty of imagination that besets contemporary debate. Notably:- the urge to classify and label; the apportionment of responsibility between the child, the family, civil society and the state; the relation between welfare/care and justice/punishment; the intrinsic tensions between conceptualisations of individual reform and reclamation on the one hand, and structural arrangements and material contexts on the other; competing 'ways of seeing', 'deprived' and 'depraved', 'deserving' and 'undeserving'; recurring notions of individual/family pathology; constructions and reconstructions of 'childhood', 'youth' and 'family' and the socio-economic and political imperatives that shape them; the social-structural relations of class, 'race' and gender; the dynamics of 'presentism' and 'futurism' in the socialisation of the young - all have long histories, all resonate across national borders and traverse bounded geographical spaces, all emerge and re-emerge in nuanced forms within debates concerning youth crime and juvenile delinquency.

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Paul Griffiths (Chapter 1) reminds us that 'delinquent youth can be found in all centuries' and he traces the complex means by which it is defined, and responded to, at different moments in time. Similarly, and by focusing on the Dutch Republic in the 17th and 18th centuries, Benjamin Roberts (Chapter 2) explores the constructions and reconstructions of youth leisure and socialisation. Valentina Tikoff (Chapter 3), and Cat Nilan (Chapter 4), examine institutionally based reforming effort in 18th and 19th century Spain, and responses to children convicted of grave crimes in 19th century France, respectively. Jenneke Christiaens (Chapter 5), in a fascinating essay, explores children's agency and the practices of resistance in a locked institution in Belgium in the late 1890s and into the 20th century. Chris Leonards (Chapter 6) presents an equally stimulating account of transnational penal congresses which explored the care-control interface with regard to 'criminal children' in the 19th century. The concluding three chapters of the book - Astri Andresen (Chapter 7), Sarah Fishman (Chapter 8) and Pamela Cox (Chapter 9) - address the questions of gender, 'family breakdown' and lone parenting, and 'race' within 20th century Norway, France and Britain respectively; the continuing centrality and significance of such issues within contemporary youth justice discourses confirms the Series Editor's (David Nelken) preface comment that 'modern dilemmas... come with a long history'.

Becoming Delinquent: British and European Youth, 1650-1950 is an excellent collection of well-crafted and carefully edited essays. Ashgate hardbacks are often prohibitively expensive for individual purchase, but the book should be a popular acquisition for history, social policy, sociology, criminology and professional studies libraries. It is a fine research resource in a relatively under-developed, but crucially important tradition in critical historical comparative analysis of youth justice and 'juvenile delinquency'.

Barry Goldson *is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work Studies at the University of Liverpool.*

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