

Reviews

Graham Brotherton and Mark Cronin (Editors)

Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families

Routledge 2013

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pp. 191

Emilia Ohberg

IN *WORKING WITH Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families* the editors, Graham Brotherton and Mark Cronin have collected a number of texts by various authors that deal with different aspects of vulnerability. Their central argument is that ‘vulnerability is created by a complex interconnection of social circumstances and should not be seen as arising from mistaken or misplaced individual behaviour, decisions or fecklessness’ (p.10). In other words, the book attempts to refocus the debate away from the deficit model of issues like poverty, crime and disability and instead focus on the structural inequalities that, they argue, are the root causes of vulnerability and risk.

The book is a collection of 10 essays that deal with varying aspects of vulnerability and highlights some groups that may be vulnerable for one reason or another. It begins with a chapter outlining the historically differing views of vulnerability and risk before exploring the psychological aspects of being in a vulnerable position as well as an overview of the current legal and policy context (up to the first few years of the coalition government). It then goes on to discuss children with special educational needs and disabilities, homelessness, care leavers, children of prisoners, young people who have sexually harmed others, violence in personal relationships and digital media. Though the book clearly covers a varied number of topics and vulnerable groups it can hardly be said to be comprehensive, which is not, according to the authors, what they have set out to be. Nevertheless, I am missing sections on, for example, the particular vulnerabilities of young women as well as refugees and migrants and their children.

The book makes a convincing argument for the traditionally leftist view of vulnerability as a result of inequalities and structural oppression. However, it does present a fairly reductionist and dichotomised view of vulnerability. Apart from a brief mention at the very end of the conclusion, the authors do not seem to recognise individual agency and empowerment as having any bearing at all on either an individual’s level of vulnerability or their ability to act as active partners in trying to better their circumstances (p.186). To assume that people are just passive victims of intersectionality is disempowering and paternalistic. To deny that people have their own agency

and instead argue that all vulnerabilities are the result of structural oppression fails to recognise that to make any sort of lasting change in an individual's life, the individual must themselves be empowered to enact positive changes. This dichotomised attitude is, therefore, counterproductive.

That is not to say that structural inequalities are not the root cause of many issues that make people more or less vulnerable. On the contrary, the book clearly and persuasively recognises the various inequalities that can put individuals or groups in vulnerable or risky positions. I was pleased to see the arguments made for a move away from top-down measures towards placing 'a premium on flexible, negotiated strategies rather than seeking to impose pre-set models' (p.182). I was also gratified to find in the chapter on special educational needs and disabilities a much more empowering language than is often the case. It places a clear focus on disability as a set of barriers to physical environments or prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes as opposed to the medical model which focuses solely on what a person can or cannot do.

Despite the fact that the authors do not seem to recognise individual agency in relation to vulnerability, the book sometimes puts an inordinate focus on individuals. The idea of vulnerability, however, can arguably be more usefully applied to groups rather than individuals as otherwise one may run the risk of victimisation. In this way the idea of vulnerability can be the focus of policy initiatives whilst still recognising individuals as capable beings who can be empowered to make positive changes and reduce risky behaviour in their own lives.

The conclusion raises a number of points that would have been interesting to see further explored within the book. This includes the idea of povertyism, 'by which the poor or vulnerable are "othered" and subsequently labelled as "inferior or of lesser value" and constructed "as a source of moral contamination, a threat, an undeserving economic burden"' (p.185). In addition the conclusion raises questions regarding the nature of the relationship between practitioners and vulnerable individuals and groups, especially in terms of power. It does not, however, even briefly explore how these power differentials may impact on the individuals or groups in question.

Despite these criticisms, I would recommend this book for students and practitioners who are beginning to explore the idea of vulnerability and risk. It provides a useful exploration of the traditional left – and right-wing views of vulnerability and many of the chapters make interesting and valid points about how the structure of our society contributes to the creation of vulnerability as well as arguing for more reflexive practice. It also includes suggestions for how we, as practitioners, may help to influence policy developments in ways that are more empowering and conducive to a less 'deficit model' view of people in vulnerable situations.

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Ian Fyfe and Stuart Moir

**Standing At The Crossroads: What Future For Youth Work? A Concept Journal
Youth Work Reader**

Concept 2013

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Paula Connaughton

CONCEPT'S YOUTH work reader consists of published work over the past decade that reflects challenges, concerns, and new thinking on the directions for practice. The authors suggest youth work is at a metaphorical crossroads and want readers to see the chapters as a reappraisal of the changing directions of youth work, and look at possible future directions. Contributions mainly discuss Scotland's policy directives, but the editors' main ideas and choice of chapters seem to reflect Tony Jeffs' characteristic voice and ability to draw the reader into a critical discussion on the state of contemporary youth work in the UK (Chapter 2). In the chapters that follow Jeffs, there is consensus on the distinctive phase of neoliberalism that has resulted in a shift from the democratic process and principles of youth work to market-driven accountability structures. For students, practitioners and academics, this reader provides an account of the battle for continued existence as a distinct practice, and direction for future thought and action. The reader is therefore an enriching contribution to debate on critical youth work.

The reader consists of twelve chapters with the first an introduction that outlines two principle aims. One aim consists of the debate on neoliberalism and the contours of work with young people that has shifted from voluntary and informal approaches to formal and targeted work. As documented by a number of academics, the youth work sector is complicit in the shaping of a resource-driven intervention, locked in the language and funding of targeting 'NEETs' and 'risk-taking' behaviour (eg. Davies, 2008). The second aim is a reminder that tradition demonstrates youth workers' ability to be innovative and creative in finding spaces and places to practice and challenge the status quo.

In chapter 2, Jeffs offers a detailed account of governments' neoliberal restructuring of society with the drive for a market economy that individualises all areas of people's lives. In the process of restructuring, successive governments have undermined distinctive features of social democracy based on collective bargaining and universal social rights. An abiding concern of many people on the left of politics is the push for privatisation and the stripping of power from local authorities that have helped shift the terms of political debate and curtailed radicalism in youth work. In posing the question 'Whatever happened to radical youth work?', Jeffs engages the reader with historical antecedents of contemporary youth work practice, and suggests that what constitutes radical youth work is not compatible with neoliberalism. He argues that emancipatory practice, consisting of core features of collective formation, struggles to survive in conditions of managerialism that prioritises individualised casework over group work, informal education, and fellowship. By doing

so, he makes the point that youth workers should remind themselves that they are first and foremost ‘democratic educators’, ‘committed not merely to working with young people, but working with them in order to create a better society’. Thus, youth workers need to re-imagine youth work as democratic struggle.

This links well into Chapter 4 by Tony Taylor, which draws radical youth work to a wider radical project. Taylor offers a detailed discussion on what it means to be radical, which goes beyond Jeffs’ notion of (re)invigorating influences of tradition. He suggests that building alliances with similar professions and social movements is important, reclaiming emancipatory praxis with the struggle for direct democracy and class-based political action. Both Jeffs and Taylor agree that youth work itself is a democratic social movement, and the fight for youth work is synonymous with a fight for democracy.

An interesting observation is Dod Forrest’s (chapter 5) assertion that the Coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ ‘empowerment’ agenda underpins recent social policy and austerity cuts. As Forrest illustrates, families have been left to manage ‘their own’ consequences of poverty and inequality with fewer resources and more responsibility for looking after young people facing rising unemployment, and increased incidences of suicide, depression and eating disorders. This ideology of blame, Forrest argues, is a rationale for shifting responsibility of social ills onto the most vulnerable in society. This chapter adds to the consistent reminder that the role of the youth and community worker is essentially that of an educationalist bound by professional values and dialogical approaches to working with young people.

Ian Fyfe’s (chapter 6) contribution to the reader adds more depth to this debate as he reminds us of the tradition of social action in youth work. Fyfe suggests that the language of social action has been co-opted into mainstream youth work, resulting in legitimising volunteering as the ‘new’ policy context of social inclusion, lifelong learning, and citizenship at the expense of its radical meaning.

In returning to Jeffs’ point that youth workers are essentially ‘democratic educators’, other chapters focus on rights, participation, and political democracy. The bitterest pill for many young people is that they feel that they do not have a representative voice; a persistent feeling of powerlessness supported by austerity cuts that have affected them the most, whilst they are socialised into the ‘voting-as-civic-duty’ idea that participation will make the ‘youth’ voice heard. Tammi in Chapter 7 supports Jeffs’ argument that ‘educating’ a young person about the vote is a pointless exercise, as democracy is a lived experience. She argues that youth councils merely legitimise the status quo because of the imbalance of power embedded in consultation processes. Moreover, policy concern about a democratic deficit has managed to shift the concept of ‘citizenship’ as a right, to one that young people have to earn.

For Taylor in Chapter 3, the answer is the struggle for direct democracy in the workplace and the development of critical praxis, contributing to the wider political struggles. However, Tammi's focus on participation advocates social change led by and with young people through critical democratic action, which moves young people from passive actors to 'engaged' activists. Tammi's account has much in common with Brooks' (2009) analysis of European elections that looks at 18-25 voter turnouts. Young people are 'far from being politically apathetic', Brooks (2009:1) argues, they are engaged in a wide range of 'political activities', motivated by a sense of individual purpose and common concern, rather than duty to government.

To an extent, these arguments expose Moir's chapter 'The Democracy Challenge: Young People and Voter Registration' as lacking in critical analysis, as he pays little attention to the fact that representation is the weakest form of democracy. Anybody who is mildly interested in politics would agree that only 'the width of a Rizla paper' separates the main political parties because of the consensus on social rather than economic policy to deal with such matters as the unemployment and underemployment of young people. As Asher and French (2014) comment, corporate media influence and corporate power are central to governance. This analysis leaves Moir's chapter on lowering the age of franchise to 16 years open to comment that it would only act to divert young people from developing innovative new forms of political engagement.

Moving on, Bells' contribution to the reader is his evaluation of the national youth work strategy, which links nicely to Waiton's question on whether youth work has a future. As Waiton investigates the influence of media representations he makes the case that the stigmatised behaviour of 'youth' has become a political issue at a local and national level. The point made by Waiton is that policies such as anti-social behaviour orders have created a 'fear of youth' in wider society. Bell's position is that this has culminated in a conceptual tension between government policy directives and the traditions, methods and approaches of youth work. Hill's and Mackie's chapters (11 and 12) further outline the dangers of allying the purpose of youth work to the economy. Together these chapters support Jeffs' earlier point that youth work sectors are increasingly preparing young people as consumers and producers, obliged to advance economic interests over the importance of association, mutuality, love and care.

In drawing this review to a conclusion, if you are interested in the political economy of youth work this reader is definitely a necessary read, as it contributes to debates on purpose and distinctiveness of youth work, challenges, and contradictions. The uniqueness of this reader is precisely the way that the editors of the Concept Journal have managed to knit themes together to provide a snapshot of policy agendas and current tensions in the field. Most importantly, each paper reminds us that there is an alternative to 'normative' approaches to youth work practice.

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Kieron Hatton

Social Pedagogy in the UK

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pp. 115

Lesley Buckland

THIS BOOK is an assimilation of theories and practices both in the UK and across Europe that relies heavily on the research of others. It comprises five clearly defined sections and in chapters two to four, specifically considers the theory of social pedagogy, the practice of social pedagogy and the implications for social pedagogy here in the UK, primarily for social work.

In his introduction Hatton suggests that social pedagogy is an approach consisting of three main elements ‘A focus on the importance of relationship...practice which promotes “risk” taking... [and] a focus on the person as a whole’ in the context of both their personal and social environment (p.v). This varies from the view of many of his contemporaries including Cameron and Moss (2011), Petrie (2006) and Smith (2012) who suggest other elements such as reflection, pedagogy and well-being for example, ‘thus making it difficult to find one definition that would encapsulate social pedagogy in its complexity without trivialising it’ (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011: 177).

Chapter one looks at the development of social pedagogy in the UK with particular reference to higher education and introduces different elements that appear on a social pedagogy curriculum in higher education institutions in the UK, Netherlands, Norway and Ireland. Hatton notes that although there is a ‘confessed pessimism about the ability of social pedagogy to maintain a professional profile’ in Stockholm (p.1) he does not believe the same can be said about developments in the UK and he goes on to reference a number of institutions in the UK that have made social pedagogy an intrinsic part of their programmes that are valued by the participants.

Chapter two looks at the emergence of social pedagogy theory. It becomes evident to the reader at this point that the intended audience for this book is primarily social workers and that the research considered is narrow in its focus (primarily children and young people in care). Hatton explores the notion of a ‘commitment of attitude, mind set and ethos translated from the German ‘Haltung’ (p.15) which, he indicates, the Social Pedagogy Network Development would see as encompassing elements such as acceptance, playfulness, love, equality and empathy. Hatton particularly notes the use of the word ‘love’ and suggests that this ‘may also present challenges to UK practitioners’ but suggests it should be ‘seen as an example of Roger’s use of “unconditional positive regard”’ (p.15). This resonates with Erich Fromm’s (1995: 36) ideas around love as an art which, as all arts, we need to practice in order to develop; ‘love is an attitude, an orientation of character’.

Hatton begins to introduce us to how the theory looks in practice within various pilot projects involving looked after children here in the UK (this theme is returned to later in the book). The evaluation of the projects provided ‘mixed’ views on the benefits of social pedagogy in practice to children and young people (Berridge et al, 2011: 5). He doesn’t go quite as far as saying what value social pedagogy might have outside of these particular participants, in the field of education or indeed in Children’s Services. This is a bit of a shame as Derbyshire County Council have had some success in terms of improving outcomes for looked after children which they have identified as being intrinsically linked with using social pedagogic practices (Thomas, 2014).

In chapter three, Hatton attempts to provide a summary of ideas of some of the key thinkers often associated with social pedagogy. This is possibly one of the least convincing sections of the book as one is left with the distinct feeling that Hatton has purely summarised other people’s views on certain thinkers, often taking ideas out of context. For example Swile on Dewey was afforded a paragraph (p.27) which did little to encapsulate Dewey’s thinking on education or indeed how this has influenced ideas around social pedagogy.

Although the contents offer us a chapter on Social pedagogy and Youth Work, this comprises only a couple of pages which summarise the report from the Regional Youth Work Unit North East and the University of Sunderland (2010) entitled, ‘A study on the understanding of social pedagogy and its potential implications for youth work practice and training’. This research was prompted by the emergence of social pedagogy across the UK, particularly in residential children’s homes, following the Children’s Workforce Strategy 2005. What emerges from this report is that youth work practitioners and managers are quite familiar with the ideas and concepts of social pedagogy:

Social pedagogy underpins good quality youth work and social work practice, so it is already happening here - we just haven’t called it social pedagogy. The key benefit for children and young people is to be regarded as competent individuals who are treated with respect and supported / enabled to learn and develop as they grow into adults. (RYWUNE/UoS, 2010: 33)

According to an integrated services manager:

Good youth workers have always put the young person at the centre of their work...They have the young people helping in terms of planning. They give them choices. They try not to bring their own prejudices into their work... Good youth work is based on social pedagogy. (ibid: 56).

Hatton cites The Commission for Social Care Inspection (2006): ‘to reach their potential an individual must be allowed – and supported – to take risks, have new experiences and make mistakes’ (p.16). ‘How then’, he asks, ‘can we align youth work with an approach which can integrate social pedagogy in a positive way?’ (p.69). This comes across as a little patronising and reveals a value base that is more akin to social work than youth work, which sees young people as deficit and is far more risk adverse than youth work which has always offered opportunities for personal growth and development through ‘risk assessed’ rather than ‘risk free’ activities.

As the author clearly states this is an ‘introductory text’ and one of its key strengths is that it does not claim to be the definitive book on social pedagogy, but it also offers suggestions for further reading. Whilst I was delighted to see a chapter on social pedagogy and youth work (which is so often overlooked) this revealed that the author did not have a sound understanding of youth work in the UK (or indeed community learning and development, as became evident in a later chapter). Instead of which he spent most of the time looking at practice in Europe.

The key thing that was missing for me in this introductory text was an emphasis on the teaching and learning. Although the suggestion of social pedagogy fostering learning opportunities was apparent throughout the text, there was no reference to exploring any of these processes. This is possibly a good ‘wrap around’ text for social workers about to embark on their degree. The exercises at the end of each chapter structure space for reflection, and signposting to other key resources and texts is something that this book does well.

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Margaret Melrose and Jenny Pearce

Critical Perspectives On Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking

Palgrave Macmillan 2013

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£22.99 (pbk)

pp.198

David Palmer

THIS COLLECTION is a fascinating and wide ranging exploration of the multi-faceted nature of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Whether an experienced practitioner or a newcomer to the field, the book opens up perspectives that not only reveal the complex nature of the field but also places the child at the centre of the debate whilst seeking to determine what policy and practice developments are best suited to address a fast moving and emotive subject.

At a time when opinions on CSE and related trafficking are largely constructed in society through headline grabbing cases, the only thing we can be certain of is that we do not know the extent of the problem here in the UK let alone in a more global context. According to the National Crime Agency the number of UK born children identified as being trafficked for sexual exploitation more than doubled in 2013. This book is a timely reminder of the increase in knowledge over the last decade but also of what work there is still to be done.

The book is very well organised and accessible, beginning with an overview of the topics covered and arguments presented in each of the eleven chapters. The sense is that we are all on a journey of discovery together; eschewing an overly didactic approach, the overall style is one the presentation of stimulating and thought provoking ideas that successfully encourage the reader to question their

own assumptions and to deconstruct some of the ideas and opinions that have gained a foothold in the debate.

Central to this is the language around CSE which Margaret Melrose contends has stretched the meaning of the term with resultant inconsistencies in its application. In this first chapter, Melrose challenges the Western-centric nature of the debate with its pervasive definitions of childhood and of female sexuality. She calls into question the construction of young people as always passive victims and argues that the individualising nature of the CSE discourse obscures the wider social and cultural circumstances that governments should be addressing as root causes of CSE and the ‘debilitating processes... such as family discord... and physical abuse’ that may drive young people into a vulnerable position (p.12). She goes on to say that the lack of options for such children may mean they act in an expedient manner in an attempt to gain control; they may just be victims of circumstances.

An intriguing chapter on gangs serves to drive home aspects of this latter point. John Pitts argues, using helpful testimonies, that gang relationships are exploitative and that ‘gangsta’ culture places great emphasis on sexual prowess. As is true with the young men, young women involved in gangs are often prepared to engage in sexually exploitative relationships as a price to pay for a degree of security and a sense of belonging as they emerge from troubling family circumstances. Pitts goes on to contrast this ‘soft determinism’ posited by Matza with the ‘hard determinism’ of Pierre Bourdieu. Pitts leaves us wanting more as he compares normal teenage behaviour with that of gangs concluding that the two are not poles apart.

These ideas are further developed by Carlene Firmin in a chapter looking at peer on peer sexual exploitation using an apposite case study to illustrate her point that the behaviour described can be interpreted in different ways and each of these may trigger a different policy and operational response. Firmin proposes a new working definition of CSE to help address the ‘multiple levels of exploitation at play’ in peer on peer abuse and sexual exploitation (p.51).

The centrality of consent as a concept is a common but largely invisible thread in much of the foregoing work. Jenny Pearce argues that too often young people feel they are blamed by society for their abuse and that part of that culpability revolves around the fuzziness of the term ‘consent’. A ‘young person’s capacity for consent can be abused, exploited and manipulated’ (p.53) and Pearce goes on to propose four categories of abused consent which increase the vulnerability of a young person, then proposes a social model to help practitioners begin to contextualise consent.

In Chapter 5, Helen Beckett uses research data from Northern Ireland to focus on a specific group that are disproportionately represented in statistics on CSE – looked after children. She is at pains to point out that while there are systemic changes that will help protect children, the true blame lies with those who would seek to harm children. Beckett looks at some of the factors, and the

reciprocity between them, that predispose children to the possibility of abuse (a theme taken up in the following chapter in which Isabelle Brodie looks at CSE policy development in Scotland). Beckett skilfully gets under the skin of statistics and policy to establish the centrality of the individual child and the importance of their voice in any intervention. An excellent chapter by Lucie Shuker further pursues these themes, arguing that a holistic approach to a child's security is needed if concern for their physical safety leads to them being denied relational and psychological security. She proposes a model of safety for young people in care affected by sexual exploitation.

The wide ranging nature of this volume is further exemplified through Nicola Sharp's chapter probing the position of black and minority ethnic women within the discourse. She argues that the particular lived experiences of these groups are less well understood given the uncertain nature of statistics around forced marriage, young runaways and children that 'go missing', circumstances that lead to a heightened risk of CSE.

Recent discourse around vulnerable children has explored the nature of young people's agency when decisions are being taken about their future well-being. Camille Warrington's chapter makes an appeal for agency for a group of people whose lives have been defined by 'limited choices and abuse of power' (p.111). She highlights the astounding fact that within the context of CSE, 'there is currently no literature or research focussing on young people's experiences of receiving support'. Using personal and insightful testimonies from young people, Warrington challenges current practice.

The final two chapters offer interesting perspectives on CSE and trafficking. Lorena Arocha is particularly adept at illustrating how governments address the symptoms of a wider malaise (global social problems) by treating them as single policy goals thus avoiding the policy decisions that might address CSE and trafficking at source. Patricia Hynes examines the role of organisations embedded within ethnic minority communities in helping to understand the more nuanced conditions within which CSE can develop. Interesting quotes and case studies assist our understanding, with a reference to the Victoria Climbié case when interventions in a neglect case did not occur due to the misunderstanding of cultural issues.

This book cleverly offers multi-disciplinary appeal while maintaining a freshness that is both stimulating and challenging.

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Peter Kraftl, John Horton and Faith Tucker (eds.)

Critical Geographies of Childhood and Youth: Contemporary Policy and Practice

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pp. 296

Graeme Tiffany

THE INTRODUCTORY statement, ‘that researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working with children and young people should be aware of how spaces are important in/for their work’, is identified as one of the key challenges emerging from children’s geographies. This book takes on this challenge passionately and effectively. On reading, those who work with children and young people will undoubtedly conclude geography matters. It matters because, as is convincingly argued, this work is better understood when it considers the spaces and places in which it takes place, and, especially, how, and by whom, these spaces are controlled. Other concepts, such as scale, networks and mobilities, also feature. All can have a profound significance in the lives of young people. But there’s complexity also, which is why geography has engendered so many sub-disciplines: from the human, to the social and the cultural, and beyond. A strength of the book is in showing that these geographies act as windows to other understandings, from how time works, to politics and economics too. This means the reader does not need to be a geographer to value its findings. But its greatest contribution is in bearing witness to the realities of childhood and youth in society, and how these lives are affected by policy and practice.

Several chapters expose worrying effects; others are testament of the good. As might be anticipated, the former outweigh the latter. Notwithstanding, they enlighten us, which is important when the drip, drip, drip of policy affects practice in ways we may not have recognised. Most startling is the impact of neoliberalising trends across the education and welfare landscapes. Neoliberalism is, without understatement, extraordinarily difficult to pin down and has some immunity to criticism because of this. But, as Gus John (2006) persuasively argues, it is by analysing examples of what actually happens in practice that the workings of power and hegemony can be revealed.

This book offers examples aplenty. Contributing geographers show how the abandonment of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was synchronous with the promotion of Free Schools (in effect, a deliberate strategy to liberate the state from spending on new educational spaces). Free Schools’ use of existing buildings might seem like a virtuous take on austerity, but what happened to the rationale that classrooms can be profoundly important in shaping the lives of individual children and young people? Then, evidence of how policy increasingly moves youth work into school. Isabel Cartwright illustrates a consequence: ‘informal education may be constrained by the policies embedded in formal education settings’. (If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck...) Yet more examples demonstrate policy’s preference for a future-oriented conception of childhood. Based on constructions of the child as in deficit, as an incomplete adult, in need of development, a person not yet realised as human capital, the rationale is created for the ever more stringent control of children and young people’s education, invariably through the governance of the spaces they inhabit. Even the linguistic turn in policy from ‘enabling aspirations’ to ‘raising aspirations’ is,

when subjected to geographical analysis, revealed to have these behaviour management tendencies.

The book also takes us further afield: to the externally influenced youth policy environment of Malawi, to policy on HIV/AIDS affecting children in South Africa, and to young offender institutions in America. Nowhere escapes these neoliberalising trends. Closer to home, consider the euphemistically labelled school ‘stay-on-site’ policies: are they a defensible response to the ‘junk food mothers’ who incurred our opprobrium as they, seemingly, put two fingers up to Jamie’s School Dinners in passing food through the school fence? Or, as often happens when the threads of detail emerge, was this a desperate response to the lack of participative geographies in ‘institutions characterised by hierarchical, disciplinary and ritualised relations in enclosed sites’ (p.31)? (In this case, parents were excluded from the space of the ‘School Nutrition Action Group’).

What is not better informed by the geographical concepts of space, place, territory and mobility? And yet it’s the identification of ‘spatial injustices’ that is most disturbing. Talk of social mobility clearly masks social immobility: what does it say about efforts to widen participation in our universities when less than a fifth of entrants come from disadvantaged areas and fully sixty percent come from the most advantaged? Conversely, youth homelessness policies insist the vulnerable move from their localities, with the effect that support networks are fractured and the stigma of problematic outsider is cast upon them. Stigmatisation is compounded by place; many ‘locals’ distance themselves from consultation regimes, and retreat into the private sphere (Slater, 2013). How authentic then is the claimed commitment to regeneration and community development, especially when neoliberalism’s subliminal narrative, that you ‘have to get out to get on’, works its magic?

We see how school choice policies influence the leap-frogging of local provision; walking to school becomes a thing of the past as the car becomes needed to get there. Fear and authority conspire to constrain children’s freedom to play outside, the youth’s mere presence in public space now a problem. How ironic then that the ‘macro spatial effects’ of these restrictive policy geographies are likely to contribute to, rather than prevent, the obesity time bomb, inhibit the development of street literacy, and exacerbate other social ills? We can conclude: social exclusion is a geographical concept. Which makes it all the more worrying when we realise that, whilst policy has a centrist, national, spin, the scale of operation of youth participation is invariably the local. Have we been seduced, has our capacity for influence been diminished, by localism?

Thankfully, we are treated to examples that remind us that ‘local engagement is never just local’. There is some solace in that. But are these examples too few in this book? Might it be a little ambivalent? Certainly it offers hope. But this appears, somewhat ironically, to be limited by an apparently self-imposed geography of ambition: in its concluding remarks the book asks if we can find and create new spaces but also opportunities within existing policy frameworks that enable progressive values to flourish and ‘find moments of joyfulness or compassion within them’.

Therein the frustration, might we have to settle for only moments and the occasional space within all of this to act in a progressive way? A greater play of the conclusion that policy is, at best, inefficient and, at worst, detrimental to young people could have laid the foundation for where we go now. But perhaps it is there in this important book. In exploring the many geographical wrongs (and some rights) the signal exists to make geography public, social, participative and democratic. Thus, the citizenship education of (and that is) informal education comes out peculiarly well-placed to inform a more hopeful future. It has the potential to resist, challenge and reclaim the policy spaces in which participation has been reduced to mere taking part in an economic project judged inviolable by its adherents. Informal education can, and does, work through the local, by encouraging and enabling mobilities and an ‘outward-looking education’. And it can, and does, inform and affect that beyond. A concluding, if perhaps odd, injunction is made: ‘in whatever form might be appropriate in whatever contexts’. This seems to invoke the spirit of both radical geography and informal education, that nothing is definitive and that the world is all the better for that.

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Kate Sapin

Essential Skills for Youth Work Practice

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Paul Davies

AT A TIME where the future of youth work as a distinct service seems a pipe dream and those who remain with the profession adjust to new ways of working and unexpected changes in careers, it becomes easy to forget that at its root youth work is a unique, exciting and yet simple way of working with and alongside young people. Kate Sapin’s second edition of the *Essential Skills for Youth Work Practice* therefore is a real tonic for the troops.

The main purpose of this text is to provide insight and a reference to students of youth work. This is not a radical text by any means, rather an A to Z of youth work the equivalent of one of those iconic car manuals. It focuses upon the basic skills of youth work from starting a relationship through to managing a youth work project. Perhaps in the hope that the current state of affairs will pass promptly, the writer carefully avoids any reference to the current state of youth work, though it does highlight the difficulties of delivery within the restrictive practice of targeted work and the ever increasing variance between the practice of youth work and the demands of central and local government. The question is, with youth work facing an uncertain future, does this book remain relevant to the modern student?

You will find the usual staples of any good youth work textbook including Maslow, Tuckman, Johari's window et al, sprinkled with contemporary references from Banks, Davies etc. It is very easy to become churlish or cynical, although as an experienced youth worker who has perhaps lost touch with the initial reasons for choosing this profession it is rather comforting to read. Too often youth work seeks to defend itself by proclaiming itself to be something unique, almost magical, and beyond the understanding of mere mortals. In fact as this book confirms it is a fairly straightforward process and when practised at its best can be the most effective method to engage young people.

What Sapin emphasises well is the need for youth work to be set within both an ethical and professional framework. She is clear that all youth work starts where the young person is and is strengthened through building a relationship of mutual trust and respect. At the same time Sapin is clear to point out the need to retain professional boundaries and to create support structures which both protect and challenge the individual youth worker. As youth services are cut and the management of services placed with different professionals, some with no background in working with young people, it is this which probably concerns me most. Sapin constantly reminds us of the need for good supervision even including a chapter entitled 'Using Supervision'.

The book breaks down into three categories, 'Building Relationships', 'Working Together' and 'Sustaining Development', each consisting of four to five chapters. This takes us on a journey from engaging young people, through developing group work through to the skills needed to maintain a project. Its orderly process makes this a straightforward book to follow and easy to dip into thus aiding the busy student to locate the relevant section. Sapin uses numerous diagrams and text boxes to explain or list essential items and also makes good use of practice examples to emphasise her points. I was particularly impressed by the fact that she has included examples of poor practice, such as the worker subconsciously judging young people in their project and another who sought funding even when the outcomes required did not match its project. Being aware that we are all prone to these types of mistakes is warming in a competitive environment when workers are often fearful of expressing their failures.

When I was starting out on my youth work career this book would have been a very useful read. Indeed I would say that it is 'essential' and therefore does achieve the objective of its title. The difficulty is whether there are workers looking to build a career in youth work. As Programme Director for Community and Youth Work Studies at the University of Manchester I suspect that Sapin is better placed to answer that question than I (though maybe the fact that the course has subsequently been dropped by the University is evidence to the point). Personally, whilst I remain passionate about youth work and am saddened to see the devastation that has been heaped upon it over the past few years in the name of austerity, I am uncertain whether I would choose it as a career option at this stage.

Therefore in conclusion I would suggest this is a very enjoyable read for all new youth workers and some old jaded experienced youth workers to use as a barometer against their own practice. Whether it will find a market, only time will tell. Presumably as it is a second edition it has already been a success and maybe future sales will be an indication of whether youth work is still something to study. I hope it does as it deserves it.

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