

# YOUTH & POLICY

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Youth work in a changing policy landscape: the view from England

'I just love youth work!' Emotional labour, passion and resistance

Youth Work, 'Protest' and a Common Language:  
Towards a Framework for Reasoned Debate

Protecting Child Employees: Why the system doesn't work

**THINKING SPACE:** It's business as usual:  
Newcastle, commissioning and cuts

Reviews

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*Youth & Policy* Journal was founded in 1982 to offer a critical space for the discussion of youth policy and youth work theory and practice.

The editorial group have subsequently expanded activities to include the organisation of related conferences, research and book publication. Regular activities include the bi-annual 'History of Community and Youth Work' and the 'Thinking Seriously' conferences.

The *Youth & Policy* editorial group works in partnership with a range of local and national voluntary and statutory organisations who have complementary purposes. These have included UK Youth, YMCA, Muslim Youth Council and Durham University.

All members of the *Youth & Policy* editorial group are involved in education, professional practice and research in the field of informal education, community work and youth work.

The journal is run on a not-for-profit basis. Editors and Associate Editors all work in a voluntary and unpaid capacity.

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# Youth work in a changing policy landscape: the view from England<sup>1</sup>

Bernard Davies

## Abstract

*Since the Coalition came to power in 2010, a stream of influential policy initiatives focused on young people and 'services for young people' has left democratic and emancipatory forms of youth work practice increasingly vulnerable. In the process, the institutional and funding landscape within which this practice has been delivered for at least seventy years has, at best, been radically reshaped and, at worst, wholly erased. In tracing these developments, this article offers an analysis of the key underlying assumptions of the policy documents through which they have been implemented. Though focused only on England, hopefully this will also have some relevance for youth work and youth policy in the other UK nations.*

**Key words:** Youth policy; Neo-liberalism; In Defence of Youth Work campaign; Public service cuts

IN ATTEMPTING its analysis of the Coalition government's youth policies, this article looks critically at two areas in particular:

*At the macro level*, it examines the government's overriding ideological assumption, now widely and unquestioningly taken as a given by key public bodies and many major voluntary organisations, that the state needs to be removed from public service provision as comprehensively and as quickly as possible, to be replaced by a 'market' in which the voluntary as well as the for-profit sector will compete. These 'providers', it is then further assumed, will be supported and supplemented by 21st century versions of philanthropic noblesse oblige catering for the deserving poor; by a 'big society' pool of previously untapped volunteers; and by newly 'resilient', up-by-their-bootstraps 'individuals, families and communities'.

*At the level of practice*, the article then examines the increasingly dominant presumption that youth work in England no longer requires dedicated statutory youth service provision and support. Instead, it is assumed, whatever contribution its trained and qualified practitioners are capable of making will be harnessed through generic forms of 'work with young people', shaped by state-prioritised 'targets', focused on the 'at risk' and the 'risky' and located in multi-disciplinary teams within 'integrated' services for young people.

Following discussion of these two areas, the article addresses the question: *how, within these new policy and practice conditions in England, can the key features of youth work be protected and preserved?*

The starting point for the analysis will be the definition of youth work as a distinctive way of working with young people offered in 2009 by the In Defence of Youth Work campaign (IDYW) at a time when, as we shall see below, New Labour policies were already putting this distinctiveness at serious risk. The IDYW definition assumed as a minimum that young people would choose to be involved in open-access facilities and settings which would:

- offer informal educational opportunities starting from their concerns and interests;
- work with and through their peer networks and wider shared identities;
- give value and attention to their here-and-now as well as to their ‘transitions’; and
- be rooted in mutually respectful and trusting personal relationships amongst young people and between young person and adult (IDYW, 2009).

## Reshaping the youth policy landscape

### *The New Labour legacy*

As in other areas of policy, New Labour set some very firm foundations for the Coalition’s children and youth policies with, in the English context, some of the core features of its *Every Child Matters* (ECM) reforms having substantial carry-over effects (HM Treasury, 2003). Indeed, six months before the Coalition government came to power, the then shadow and future children’s minister, Tim Loughton, told the annual convention of the Confederation of Heads of Young People’s Services (CHYPS), ‘The last thing that we want to see is yet another major overhaul of the system and structural changes just for the sake of it’ (Hillier, 2009).

This commitment did not stop the Coalition instantly eradicating from its policy discourses both the overall ECM ‘branding’ and its constantly regurgitated mantra of ‘the five outcomes’. Though versions of ‘being healthy’ did continue to get official nods, references to ‘enjoying and achieving’ and ‘economic well-being’ simply disappeared – judged perhaps as too provocative for (or undeliverable in) a new age of austerity. Meanwhile, ‘making a positive contribution’, relabelled ‘youth voice’ (see for example HM Government, 2011: *Ministerial Foreword*), reverted to its former largely rhetorical status once the new government stopped ring-fencing the money allocated to New Labour’s *Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds* (HM Treasury, 2010: paras 1.4 – 1.5).

What Coalition policies did do, however, was to sustain and indeed reinforce the institutional

structures introduced by New Labour and the ‘staying safe’ ‘outcome’ as their dominant rationale. As the Jimmy Saville scandal was to demonstrate all too starkly (and darkly), the latter clearly justified continued dedicated high-priority attention. However, within New Labour’s broadly conceived ‘children and youth’ policy frameworks, the already low standing of youth work as a distinct *educational* practice was – whether intentionally or not – further undermined by its preoccupation with ‘protection’ and ‘safeguarding’. Increasingly this led to its top-down ‘managerialist’ insistence that youth workers focus on ‘prevention’, targeting groups pre-labelled by their deficits, and demonstrate pre-defined ‘impacts’ that could be measured statistically.

Closely linked to these changes was New Labour’s radical institutional restructuring of children’s services. Across the country this led to many specifically designated local authority Youth Services being ‘merged’ into generic children and young people’s departments, with youth workers then being ‘integrated’ into multi-disciplinary teams. (See Davies and Merton, 2010: 28-38). This too left the way clear for Coalition ministers to act on their often radical critiques of youth work and Youth Services, with Loughton for example declaring only weeks before he came into office that ‘... the quality of youth services through local authorities leaves a lot to be desired. There are too many youth services ... (which) are rather set in their ways (Chandiramani, 2010).

Finally, without consultation, New Labour shepherded organisations previously known as ‘voluntary’ into a sector rebadged ‘third’, in the process propelling them into often uneasy ‘partnerships’ with the state and the for-profit sector. (Davies and Merton, 2010: 32-3; 39-44). In doing this it embedded at the heart of the funding of youth provision neo-liberal notions of competitive contracting which the Coalition was to embrace even more single-mindedly after 2010. Here too, while still shadow minister, Loughton unashamedly flagged up the policy overlaps between government and opposition when, rhetorically, he asked, ‘Why would the world fall in if a local authority contracted out the youth services department?’ and when he argued that charities were far better placed to recruit what he called ‘homegrown’ youth workers (Chandiramani, 2010).

The ground was thus well laid, not just for the forms of provision for young people which the Coalition adopted, but also for the ideological rationale and motivations driving these policies and the practice priorities these imposed.

### ***The Coalition’s youth policy paper trail***

The most high profile of the Coalition’s youth policies was set out in *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011) – increasingly and routinely referred to by ‘stakeholder’ organisations as the revealed truth on what needs to be said about and done for and with young people. Within months of its appearance, however, the realities behind its official rhetoric became clearer when the Department for Education (DfE) released its revised *Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*



(DfE, 2012). Intended to refocus councils on ‘services and activities to improve young people’s well-being’, this was quickly dismissed as ‘too vague’ even by relatively government-friendly organisations like CHYPS and the National Youth Agency (NYA) (See Puffett, 2012a). Yet what these reservations did not acknowledge was that the vagueness, far from being accidental, was integral to one of the document’s prime purposes: to play down, if not actually write out, the state’s direct role in providing or even funding these services.

The House of Commons Education Select Committee report *Services for young people* offered some searching criticisms of these, then still emerging, official policies – particularly, while standing by as local Youth Services were demolished, the government’s choice to invest heavily in a National Citizen Service (NCS) (House of Commons, 2011a: para 131). Some of these and other strictures were in due course repeated and expanded when the Committee took the unusual step of publishing a riposte to the government’s anodyne comments on its original report (House of Commons, 2011b).

Other heavyweight initiatives, however, explicitly or implicitly, endorsed many of the Coalition’s underpinning policy messages. One was the publication by the Young Foundation (‘brings together insight, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs’) of *A framework of outcomes for young people* (McNeil et al, 2012). This was produced in collaboration with Social Enterprise UK (‘creating a fertile policy environment where social enterprise can thrive’), the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS – ‘the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector’) and NYA. Both the Young Foundation and Social Enterprise UK were also partners in a second significant initiative – the ‘Catalyst consortium’s’ proposal for an Institute for Youth Work (IYW). (By then NCVYS had also struck up an alliance with the libertarian think tank Respublica – ‘changing the terms of the debate’ – to launch a ‘commission’ on ‘youth engagement’). Finally in May 2012 the first interim evaluation of the National Citizen Service (NCS) was published, part-authored by New Philanthropy Capital (‘dedicated to helping funders and charities to achieve a greater impact’) (NatCen, 2012). These organisations were thus prime movers in a burgeoning web of ‘voluntary sector’, ‘social enterprise’ and ‘market’ relationships which, though claiming to be independent, were all to varying degrees steeped in the Coalition’s anti-state assumptions about who should run public services and how they should be funded.

The contributions made to these debates by more ostensibly left-leaning bodies were also, at best, ambiguous. A Compass Youth policy statement, *Plan B for Youth* (Nandy, 2012), while taking a critical stand on some key past New Labour policy positions, nonetheless came out strongly in favour of a ‘national service’ for young people. Though labelled ‘modern’ this seemed destined to be indistinguishable from Cameron’s NCS while also further diverting resources from local open access youth provision. Meanwhile, in order to be ‘doing more with less’, the most original idea for youth work emerging from the Labour Party’s own policy review ‘Services for Young People’

was to locate it in the very institutions – schools – which left many of the young people using youth work facilities feeling, at best, grudgingly compliant or, at worst, deeply alienated. (Labour Party, 2012). The Party, still apparently trapped in the consumerist/ commodification approach to provision which led to its failed attempt in government to introduce a Connexions ‘reward card’ for young people, also suggested that it would, ‘... examine schemes which offer young people points, in return for participation, which they can then exchange for services or activities’ (Labour Party, 2012: 7).

### ***Breaking the youth contract: blaming the survivors***

The starting point for any analysis of these policies has to be ‘the condition of youth’ and in particular the one million 16-24 year olds (over 20% of the age group) who were unemployed throughout 2012 and into 2013 largely as a result of the post-2008 financial crises. As well as the serious damage this was doing in the present to so many young people, their families and their communities, the long-term effects of prolonged unemployment were certain also to leave painful individual scars well into the future.

However, the unemployment statistics could be read as evidence of something with much wider and no less damaging implications: a breakdown in the post-1945 social democratic consensus and its explicit promise of no return to pre-war mass unemployment. For young people in particular, this breakdown meant, amongst many other things, a major rupture in the contract between the generations. At least since secondary education was opened up to all by the 1944 Education Act, young people had been told by their elders, often in as many words: work hard at school, stay compliant and uncomplaining, delay gratification and get the right pieces of paper. In return, the promise had been, you’ll get a job of some sort, the wage or salary that goes with it, some degree of security and even perhaps prospects of ‘moving up in the world’ and owning your own home. For many, especially as the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s left behind a pool of ‘excluded’ young people (crudely re-badged as ‘neets’), the reality of that promise, where it wasn’t actually illusory, was often barely within grasp. By the end of 2012, however, that one million-plus young people, including many graduates who had stuck to their side of the bargain into their early twenties, knew through hard experience that their society had reneged on its side of the bargain, leaving even those with jobs or a university place doubting (at best) whether it could be delivered.

Unsurprisingly, government policy statements never properly addressed or even acknowledged these deep structural origins of the ‘lost generation crisis’ – least of all its embedded inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity and the poverty, injustices and discrimination which these generate and which social democratic policy-making had never addressed. *Positive for Youth* labelled as ‘the current financial difficulties’ (HM Government, 2011: *Ministerial Foreword*) what was in reality a fundamental crisis of a capitalist system repeatedly failing one of its ultimate tests: facilitating

lending and borrowing in trustworthy and reliable ways. Comments that young people contributed to the *Positive for Youth* consultations on the resultant growing divide between the rich and the rest ('the 1 per cent' and 'the 99 per cent') were similarly glossed merely as concerns 'about those who are materially well off and those who aren't' (Para 2.14).

Moreover when it moved from analysis to prescription, *Positive for Youth* never confronted or even referred in any substantive way to what was at bottom a failure of the economy to generate enough jobs. As governments have at least since the recession of the late 1970s, it instead treated the problem of youth unemployment as at root an educational one on the premise that the huge gaps in the labour market could be magicked away by getting young people to 'achieve' at school or college (Paras 4.28 – 4.55). By comparison, and as a clear signal of how concentrated the government was on individualistic rather than political responses to young people's condition, this major state paper seemed far more concerned with how the adolescent brain develops, devoting the whole of one of its consultation papers to the subject (DfE, 2011a) and three paragraphs in *Positive for Youth* itself (Paras 2.19 – 2.21).

At this point the official 'blaming the survivors' principle kicked in – particularly vividly and crudely illustrated by the evaluation of National Citizen Service's first year programmes. One of the measures used to assess the *positive* impact of the Scheme on participants was the statement: 'If someone is not a success in their own life it's their own fault' (NatCen, 2012: 37). In her penetrating critique of the evaluation, Tania da St Croix noted in its finding that '... the proportion of young people agreeing with the statement ... increased by a few percentage points after they had taken part in NCS (an increase seen by the evaluators as 'encouraging') (de St Croix, 2012: 2). From this she drew the conclusion that being 'successful' according to the NCS rubric not only required more young people to blame others for their own failures. It also apparently was achievable only through '... individualistic choice-making supported by a 'compassionate' market and unaffected by political, social and economic inequalities' (de St Croix, 2012: 4).

This position was further reinforced by *Positive for Youth*'s constant rebalancing of responsibility for dealing with the problems facing young people away from government and the state and to parents, families and their 'communities'.

### ***The neo-liberal obsession continued: markets, competition, contracts***

Responses such as these to what was a fundamental shift in the life chances of the current generation of young people demonstrated the Coalition's continuing commitment to the very policies which had brought about the economic traumas of the previous five years. New Labour's damaging commitment to these policies was at least acknowledged in Compass's *Plan B for Youth* which accepted that, 'This generation of young people have grown up witnessing social democratic

parties subscribe to flexible labour markets, financialisation and austerity ... which (have) led to greater inequality of wealth' (Nandy, 2012: 7).

The 'steely' 'inner ideologically core' (Toynbee and Walker, 2012) of the government's neo-liberal obsession continued to assert that the state simply could not deliver and so must be taken out of the provision of public services to an extent and at a speed which were unprecedented. Figures from the International Monetary Fund published in October 2012, for example, showed that on existing plans UK government spending would fall from 45 per cent of GDP in 2012 to 39 per cent in 2017. This would be the largest reduction for any developed country other than Greece and Ireland. It would also move the UK from fifteenth in the IMF list in 2000 to twenty-fifth by 2017 – the biggest drop of any major economy (*Guardian Datablog*, 2012).

The corollary of this dogma was that value-for-money effectiveness for public services could only be achieved through 'the market', through competition, through commissioning-out services to 'any qualified provider' – volunteer, philanthropic or profit-making. How taken-for-granted this assumption had become in government circles was illustrated by the consultations on which *Positive for Youth* drew. Though great play was made with how wide these had been, including with young people, at no point did they allow for any debate on key, bottom-line ideological position. Rather, consultation papers simply stated as fact the need, for example, for '... a greater sense of responsibility in communities, including business communities, for ... the sustainability of local provision' and '... a more contestable market for publicly funded services, with a greater role for the voluntary and community sector' (DfE, 2011b: Para 59).

The papers talked too of 'a significant supporting role' for 'business, philanthropists and social investors' (DfE, 2011c: para 30) and, to drive home these immovable parameters, devoted single consultation papers to *Growing the Role of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations*, *Business brokerage with the Youth Sector* and *Commissioning Services for Young People*.

Again unsurprisingly, these remained as absolutes within the *Positive for Youth* document itself. Even beyond families and communities, everyone but the government, it was clear, was now expected to take responsibility for implementing the policy: young people themselves (in the name, of course, of 'youth voice', 'young people driving decisions' and 'youth proofing'); '... volunteers and other adults'; the media and advertisers; 'business leaders, employers and individual professionals'; professionals in education, health and care services and (notwithstanding the massive cuts in their budgets) local authorities (para 3.5 – 3.15). The only roles the government saw itself as taking on were to facilitate, to support, to monitor, to audit – and to 'set direction and promote new and positive (ie. market-driven) ways of thinking and working'. (Para 3.16).

Parallel themes also dominated the DfE's 'statutory guidance' to local authorities which laid down

that they ‘...should take the lead to ... determine which services and facilities can be delivered by third parties so that the local authority delivers directly only what it is clearly best placed to do so’ and ‘...plan how to best support and grow the role of voluntary, community and faith organisations including through a transparent commissioning process’ (DfE, 2012, para 4).

In its evidence to the Select Committee on youth services, the DfE was even more up-front:

*...we want to stimulate a fundamental shift in the role of local authorities in services for young people to enable a radical re-engineering of provision so more is delivered by voluntary and community organisations, greater private sector involvement leads to greater leverage for public funding, and local authorities themselves become strategic commissioners.* (House of Commons, 2011: Para 73).

These expectations also appeared constantly as conventional wisdom in papers from other influential sources. The Young Foundation report on outcomes for example seemed largely to be addressed to ‘funders, commissioners and investors’ (McNeil et al, 2012: 7). In pursuit of ‘doing more with less’, the Labour Party, without debate, conceded that, as good youth work and good youth services could be delivered by a range of providers including the ‘privately funded’ sector, it was ‘interested in how (to) ... maximise the benefit of private and corporate investment....’ (Labour Party, 2012: 3; 7) – while committing itself to put ‘youth services’ on a statutory footing by giving local authorities a legal duty to make a minimum level of provision (Puffett, 2012h). Particularly revealing in this context was the NYA/Local Government Association’s guide to ‘involving young people in commissioning’. Amidst all its practical advice, this never entertained the possibility that crucial to any youth work process might be to encourage young people to ask some critical questions – such as ‘Why commissioning?’ or ‘Is this always the best way to go?’ (NYA/LGA, 2012).

### ***Whatever happened to the ‘independent’ voluntary youth sector?***

In response to this radically new funding landscape, many of youth work’s historic national voluntary youth organisations not only became willing collaborators but in effect stretched its frontiers even wider by establishing ‘partnerships’ with major global corporations. Moreover, this clearly was often done with little if any prior ethical risk assessment. UK Youth for example linked up with Barclays Bank (UK Youth, 2012) whose manipulation of key lending rates in pursuit of bigger profits and bigger employee bonuses subsequently left it and its staff facing international investigations, large fines and possible criminal charges. To run some NCS schemes UK Youth, with the National Youth Agency, also allied with Serco (Puffett, 2012b), one of whose training manuals encouraged its Australian staff to treat refugees in detention centres as children and to apply deliberately painful control techniques (Corporate Watch, 2012).

NCVYS's incorporation into these dominant government agendas was evidence of the much wider, and often willing, colonisation of the voluntary youth sector by the state, its ideology and its policy priorities which posed a serious threat to its much-prized independence (Higgs, 2013). At local level, as authorities made their plans to 'outsource' youth facilities, not only were major often multi-national for-profit companies liable to appear on the scene but empire-building national voluntary organisations such as Barnardos and Catch 22 also hovered expectantly, ready to use their dedicated and sophisticated contracting expertise to win bidding wars in areas where they may have had no previous track record. This risked putting out of business long-established local organisations and projects with limited capacity to bid on their own behalf. The subsequent sub-contracting of some of the work could also have the effect of driving groups with a history of co-operation into damaging forms of competition which further disintegrated services (see Davies and Evans, 2012: 8; nef, 2012: 4; NCIA, 2012; Cox and Schmuecker, 2013).

As the grip of both the central and the local state on the whole commissioning process tightened, the fear of losing funding was increasingly forcing voluntary bodies to 'self-censor' – abandoning their role as even critical friend of government. Nor were their fears misplaced: in December 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued guidance to local authorities on stopping funding what it called 'fake charities' which 'lobby and call for more state regulation and more state funding' (Barings Foundation, 2013: 42).

Whatever their wider consequences, the new contracts were almost always offered on the back of (often severe) cuts in resources, enabling the government to blame others for the loss of services and again providing them and indeed Labour, too, with another excuse for 'doing more with less'. As one survey reported by *Children and Young People Now* (CYPN) indicated, by the summer of 2012 around 19 per cent of local authority provision was being sponsored by voluntary organisations – nearly £1 in every £5 spent. As a result, capacity was being reduced both for reaching more 'difficult' young people and for innovating and responding to change, with questionable consequences (at best) for the quality of provision (Puffett, 2012d).

All this meant, too, that across the country volunteers were increasingly replacing trained and qualified youth workers. The Labour party for example noted, apparently with approval, that on the ground this often meant turning facilities previously staffed by trained and experienced professional youth workers into 'a youth club ... run by trained volunteers from the local community' (Labour Party, 2012: 6). A similar message was given to a CHYPS conference by a senior manager of Clubs for Young People (formerly the National Association of Boys Clubs and now, in tune with the new entrepreneurial spirit of the times, re-renamed 'Ambition'). Because, she reported, 'the financial climate had resulted in a decrease in qualified youth workers and an increase in volunteers helping to maintain clubs', her organisation was 'looking to provide more support and training for them where they are taking the place of qualified youth workers' (Puffett, 2012j).

## ***Negotiating the new landscape***

In its rush to embed these forms of privatisation (see NCIA, 2011), the Coalition clearly could not allow the facts to confuse. A 2012 ‘summer of sport’ delivered largely (and near-faultlessly) by state bodies apparently carried no wider positive messages. Nor, it seems, were there any negative ones to be derived and applied from the starkly contrasting Olympic (non-) performance of a major private company like G4S; or from the failures of A4E to get unemployed people into jobs; or of Southern Cross to care adequately for older people; or, en route to making huge profits, of the ‘dumping’ out-of-borough of children in residential care by private equity companies (Williams, 2012).

Even the marketisers’ value-for-money arguments, it seemed, did not stand up to the scrutiny of actual, long-term implementation. In the USA for example, where outsourcing services had a much longer history, it turned out that more federal government employees were needed to monitor, regulate and inspect contracted firms, while the government ended up paying huge amounts extra to these contractors than it would have done to its own employees. Despite this accumulating evidence and the contracting fiasco of west coast rail, during the writing of this article the Coalition government was proudly reporting negotiations for new tenders valued at £4 billion (Wilby, 2012) – a process which, in miniature, was mirrored locally across the country as youth work facilities were put out to tender.

This reconstructed neo-liberal landscape of provision prompts two sets of unashamedly moral questions which in the present climate have rarely been allowed articulation, even within organisations which still claim for themselves ethically-driven caring and humane ‘missions’. One is:

*Is a drive for profit, even when, via a social enterprise, that profit is intended to be re-invested in the organisation, really compatible with providing a human service; or are there intrinsic incompatibilities in this relationship which simply make it too risky or even unworkable?*

The second is:

*Where now are responses to human need which, rather than simply being driven by individualised and competitive motives, are collective and collaborative, based on an ethic of shared responsibility for each other and expressed in part at least through state and/or civic society action?*

## **Youth work practice: changing structures, shifting priorities**

### ***The ‘official’ view of young people: rhetoric and reality***

In his introduction to *Positive for Youth*, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, talked

enthusiastically about young people giving ‘enormous hope for the future’. Tim Loughton, too, as the then minister for children and young people, insisted that ‘young people matter’ and that the government was ‘passionate about creating a society that is positive for youth’ so that ‘all young people enjoy their teenage years and realise their potential’. Supported by a promise that youth policies would be subject to ‘youth proofing’ by young people themselves, the future focus, the paper declared, would be ‘on helping young people succeed, not just on preventing them from failing’ (HM Government, 2011).

Beyond the rhetoric, however, another view lurked, to emerge immediately things got difficult. As Graeme Tiffany pointed out (Tiffany, 2011: 1), even as *Positive for Youth* was being promoted the government was revealing itself as one of the worst offenders in demonising young people by choosing – repeatedly – to explain the August 2011 riots as entirely the work of a ‘feral, thieving underclass’.

Such knee-jerk reactions were underpinned by more deeply embedded ways of understanding young people and their lives which seriously narrowed the kinds of practice which policy-makers were prepared to endorse. They assumed for example that, once young people had been appropriately skilled and their confidence boosted, ‘personal qualities’ such as ‘resilience’ and ‘determination’ would enable each individual to triumph over all obstacles, including historic economic and political inequalities. ‘Formal institutions’ such as schools and ‘peer networks, families and neighbourhoods’ might sometimes impede this ‘navigation’ to ‘positive life outcomes’. In the end however ‘personal agency’ would win out, regardless of how unequal individuals’ starting points were or how uneven the terrain over which they had to travel (See McNeil et al, 2012: 6, 14, and the balance of evidence summarised in Annex 1).

Alongside this dominant view of ‘youth-as-individuals’ sat another somewhat contradictory one: ‘youth-as-transition’. Here the primary focus was on shaping young people into ‘active’, ‘pro-social’ and ‘integrated’ citizens, ‘responsible’ parents and ‘productive’ workers (see for example HM Government, 2011: paras 2.16, 4.34, 4.55, 5.4; NatCen, 2012: 7-8; DfE, 2012: para 2c). In this scenario, who the individuals actually were, as individuals now, seemed of little significance. For policy-makers, what mattered was how they would eventually fit into their handed-down definition of adulthood. Not only would this highly de-personalising, future-orientated definition of self have been unacceptable to older age groups but it also failed to validate and embrace the energy of a section of the population which, still relatively untainted by many of our society’s entrenched attitudes, was capable of injecting fresh and critical thinking into its institutions and activities.

Running through both these perspectives was a third: ‘youth-as-an-indivisible-entity’. Here apparently was a population category which, largely because those involved were going through the physical, mental and hormonal changes of adolescence (HM Government, 2011: para 2.16),



could be dealt with by policy-makers as if they comprised a single monolithic group. Such corralling into this relatively safe pen allowed the effects of other differentiating features of young people's lives and situation to be ignored or denied – their class position, their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability. Moreover, as well as being deeply felt personally and in the here-and-now by young people, these structural differences could result in far from positive longer-term 'life outcomes' – a possibility which, tellingly, got no attention within the 'youth-as transition' discourse.

Some of the contributions to the post-2010 policy debates did seek to break out of these analytical constraints. Compass's *Plan B for Youth* (Nandy, 2012) recognised the importance of young people's ethnic and gender (though significantly not their class) identities. It also kept its eye firmly on what were for them major here-and-now concerns such as poverty, jobs and housing. The Young Foundation's outcomes framework, explicitly eschewing 'a targeted model that only applied to certain groups of young people', strongly endorsed broad notions of 'personal and social development'. (McNeil et al, 2012: 19). Indeed the paper quoted evidence (some from past youth work projects) to demonstrate that approaches which have this as their aim '...can have greater impact than those that focus on directly seeking to reduce the 'symptoms' of poor outcomes for young people' (6-7). (This was a view supported by other research – see for example Robson and Feinstein, 2006: 21).

With these very much the exception, however, across the party political spectrum youth policy documents of the early Coalition period restated and reinforced many of the previous government's deficit-driven positions. Despite the ministers' initial rhetorical flourishes, *Positive for Youth* repeatedly returned to concerns about 'risky behaviours', 'under 18 conception rates' and 'the number entering the criminal justice system for the first time' (HM Government, 2011: para 5.37). The DfE indirectly confirmed these preoccupations when it refocused its statutory guidance to local authorities on young people's 'well-being' – a concept which, despite its comforting overtones, carries strong mental health associations which could be taken to imply that those services need to be offering more problem-focused, psychologically-based practices (DfE, 2012).

For its part, the Labour Party, in its own youth policy review paper and in subsequent statements, continued to highlight 'the long-term cost to the public purse of youth crime and anti-social behaviour' and so to suggest that youth work provision was needed to 'prevent (young people) falling into criminality' (Labour Party, 2012: 2; 3; Puffett, 2013). The Young Foundation's paper, notwithstanding its wider personal and social educational commitments, also ultimately drifted in these policy directions, with two of its four detailed case studies describing work targeted at bullied and 'at risk' young people and a third, though implemented through open access provision, assuming that, in advance, the practice would focus on a series of health 'issues' (McNeil et al, 2012: 41-52).

***Cuts, the shift to 'early intervention' and work with 'troubled families'***

Emanating from an overall 27 per cent cut in their spending over the four years from 2011-15, local authorities were subject to much more material pressures to move their youth services in the direction of what *Positive for Youth* called 'targeted' and 'intensive' approaches (HM Government, 2011: paras 4.14 – 4.27). By mid-2011 the average budget cut to their education-based youth services reported by the Select Committee was 28 per cent, with some authorities cutting by 70, 80 and even 100 per cent (House of Commons, 2011: paras 62-3). The DfE's own figures published in September 2012 (Puffett, 2012c) revealed a 2011 fall in spending on 'universal services' of nearly 18 per cent while, according to a CYPN survey, on average 9.6 local authority youth service posts had been lost during 2011-12 and a further 6.8 posts in the first half of 2012-13. (Puffett, 2012d).

The on-the-ground consequences of these cuts were stark. Not only were youth workers being made redundant and often expensive youth club buildings being underused or even boarded up (see for example Chandwani, 2012; Lepper, 2012), but also the local authority youth facilities which remained, widely relabelled 'youth hubs', were being given non-negotiable briefs to concentrate on 'at risk' groups, with staff trained and experienced as youth workers being reinvented as 'early intervention' or 'troubled families' workers (See Puffett, 2012e).

In its enthusiasm for some version of a 'national citizens' scheme, the Compass Youth *Plan B for Youth* largely ignored the potential of local round-the-year youth provision for achieving the social and political education it was keen to encourage (Nandy, 2012). With its advocacy of school-based youth clubs as cover, the Labour Party, too, gave such open access facilities only qualified support, hiding the realities of what was happening behind its 'doing more with less' mantra and, like the government, resorting to evasive platitudes like '... deliver(ing) good services while saving money' (Labour Party, 2012: 3, 5; Puffett, 2013).

For both government and opposition, one of the main ways for achieving these contradictory goals turned out to be 'early intervention'. Through a DfE Early Intervention Grant Fund for 2011-12 this highly ambitious form of social engineering was initially allocated £2,223 million. This was to be used to encourage local authorities in England to target children in their first three years of life with the aim of breaking the cycle of problematic behaviour purportedly handed down from one generation to the next. Clearly this was an attractive policy option for a government which saw individual and family failure as a prime cause of what the Prime Minister had repeatedly labelled our 'sick' and 'broken' society. However, government enthusiasm for it seemed to cool during late 2012 and into 2013 when first it announced it was to top-slice £150m from the fund and then that for 2013-15 it was to be cut by a further £49m (Jozwiak, 2013).

Nonetheless, the overall approach was reinforced in 2012 by a DCLG 'troubled families' programme. Using figures which researchers condemned as deeply flawed and out of date (see

Crampton, 2012), and based on payment-by-results, this aimed by 2015 at ‘turning around’ 120,000 families characterised by the Department as ‘troubled’ because they ‘are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour, have children not in school, have an adult on out of work benefits and cause high costs to the public purse’ (DCLG, 2012). According to research carried out by NYA, youth workers had ‘a valuable role to play’ in this programme and indeed were ‘already making a difference by working with young people from troubled families’ (NYA, 2012).

Notwithstanding their stigmatising consequences, Labour, too, was keen on such approaches. For example, it supported a broadened version of early intervention, seeing it as a concept ‘not exclusive to the early years, but ... (as) an approach designed to support the early identification of problems’ (Karen Buck, quoted in Labour Party, 2012: 4; see also Puffett, 2013). Indeed, in January 2011 it was a Labour MP Graham Allen who produced an ‘independent’ report to government aimed at stimulating and shaping the policy (Allen, 2011). His constituency may have been displaying some of the clearest evidence of structural inequality in the country such as low levels of young people entering higher education. It may also, because of the cuts, have (in his own words) ‘shed projects and people who have done a great job’. Nonetheless, as he made clear when his report appeared, one of his main priorities remained saving money: “‘After ten years we will tot up the savings”, he says cheerfully, although he concedes swiftly that he is “not there yet” in assessing “how you monetise the savings over those years”.’ (Gentleman, 2011). (In this latter judgement he was at least more cautious than the writers of the first NCS evaluation report who treated such long-term ‘monetising’ forecasts as entirely problem-free (NatCen, 2012: 9-10). Allen also gave strong support to ‘outcome-based commissioning and payment-by-results’ (Puffett, 2011).

### ***Targeted support, targets and measurable outcomes***

Though as we have seen the trend here too had begun under New Labour, these emphases on failing individuals and families led the Coalition to substantially sharpen its focus on ‘targeted support’ for ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ young people. Given, too, its commitment to paying on the basis of results demonstrably achieved, this was accompanied by an increased demand for evidence of ‘impact’ and ‘outcomes’. The Select Committee report on youth services for example was highly critical of the wooliness of some of its witnesses, declaring itself ‘... frustrated in our efforts to uncover a robust outcome measurement framework, in particular those that would allow services to be compared in order to assess their relative impact’ (House of Commons, 2011a: Para 39).

This was followed within months by the Young Foundation’s 60-page ‘outcomes’ framework offering, amongst other things, a matrix of ‘tools that can be used to measure the development of the clusters of social and emotional capabilities’. Though seen as ‘foundational to other outcomes for young people’, these were acknowledged to be ‘the outcomes that providers, commissioners and funders have found most difficult to quantify’ (McNeil et al, 2012: 22).

Some significant qualifications were sometimes placed round these aspirations. As we have seen the Young Foundation paper saw ‘personal and social development’, broadly defined, as the core purpose. It was also one of the few contributions to the targets and outcomes debate which accepted that ‘... measuring and isolating the impact of a particular service on the development of young people’s social and emotional capabilities is not straightforward’, not least because of ‘the sheer variety of (possible) outcomes’. It also recognised the effects on what it called ‘intrinsic personal outcomes’ of ‘... longer-term extrinsic outcomes such as employment, good health or avoidance of offending behaviour’ and ‘the huge variety of influences on young people’s lives, including school, youth projects, family, friends, possibly mentors or specialist professionals and the wider community (McNeil et al, 2012: 7).

The Select Committee, too, after expressing ‘little doubt that good youth services can have a transformational effect on young people’s lives’, accepted that ‘the outcomes of individual youth work relationships can be hard to quantify’. It also recognised that ‘the impact of encounters with young people may take time to become clear and be complex’ so that using ‘social impact bonds’ which would realise a profit for ‘investors’ once they had met their targets would be particularly problematic for ‘preventative and open access services’ (House of Commons, 2011a: Paras 39, 40, 83).

Nonetheless, often as a basis for introducing regimes of payment by results, the pressure intensified on all public services to demonstrate credible outcomes. Though often not acknowledged, this was a problem for all those working with the highly unpredictable ‘raw material’ of human beings – social work clients, school students, offenders, patients. For youth workers however it was particularly challenging given their commitment to starting their educational endeavours not just from where young people in general were starting but from the starting points (of attitudes, interests, concerns, problems) of the actual young people they were meeting now, in this situation, in their groups as well as individually. Without denying the need to be accountable, above all to these very young people, youth workers thus experienced the imposition of an ultimately highly instrumental ‘matrix’ like that propounded by the Young Foundation as sucking out much of the human content of their work, leaving only what was ‘measureable’ in statistical and indeed monetary terms as acceptable to managers and funders.

### ***From Youth Services to services for young people***

In the first years of the Coalition government, these approaches to practice and its evaluation together with the demand for budget cuts helped generate major extensions of the organisational changes which, as we saw earlier, had been initiated by New Labour. In particular they brought a further and decisive shift from ‘youth services’ – that is, local authority provision explicitly mandated to provide and support education-based youth work – to integrated ‘young people’s

services' based on multi-disciplinary teams briefed to undertake neo-Victorian forms of 'child saving'. Within these, youth workers more and more found themselves carrying caseloads of 'problem' individuals, with open access youth work, where it was not abandoned altogether, increasingly struggling for survival (See for example HM Government, 2011: 5; Puffett, 2012d; 2012e; Gratton, 2012; NCVYS, 2012a).

How deeply entrenched this mind-set had become was confirmed in October 2012 by the then ex-minister for children and young people, Tim Loughton, when he commented, 'A lot of youth workers in my area are being rebadged and put in other departments. It's happening all over the place. (But) it's not the department that staff are in or their job title, it's whether they are doing effective, quality youth work at the appropriate time' (Puffett, 2012e).

Some new organisational forms had begun to emerge – for example government-funded 'youth innovation' schemes in four local authorities. However, six months into their development the jury was still out on whether the models being piloted were in fact identifying effective new ways of organising services for young people and on whether anyway they were replicable in other areas (Puffett, 2012f). At about the same time the new children and youth minister, Edward Timpson was needing to fend off early and on-going criticisms, including from his predecessor, that 'youth services have been viewed as a "soft cut" in the (Education) department, or that he might allow youth issues to play second fiddle to the rest of his (substantial) ministerial responsibilities' (Higgs, 2012a, 2012B; Jowit, 2013).

Nonetheless, enthusiastically and uncritically key organisations whose historical role had been to advance and represent youth work bought into the now dominant conventional wisdom of 'integrated' and 'targeted' children's services. NYA moved early on this when in September 2010, ahead of his first comprehensive spending review, it advised the new Chancellor that '... current financial constraints mean funding for universal services may not be a priority, and that in turn communities are well placed to support a universal offer for their young people. However, targeted services which include a youth work offer are essential' (NYA, 2010: 4). Two years later it found itself expressing regret that a 'smoothie approach' to staffing youth services was moving workers (including youth workers) 'towards having generic staff roles' (Puffett, 2012e). Nonetheless, it seemed to take as given that open access youth work could be safeguarded – indeed, that it could survive – within the generic 'services for young people' preoccupied with early intervention then being created across the country.

By the time NYA was issuing its 'smoothie' warning, NCVYS was even more firmly and uncritically in the government's 'integrated' camp. Echoing a phrase first used by Margaret Hodge when she was Labour's youth minister (Donovan, 2004), its starting point was that '... to focus on the uniqueness of youth work alone is to risk working in silos'. To justify this position

NCVYS simply conflated youth work as a specifically *educational* practice with ‘... a greater use of youth work methodologies’ in ‘other areas of young people services’ (NCVYS, 2012b). Such ‘interventionist approaches’ by youth workers into non-youth work settings may well have been having some valuable pay-offs for the young people involved. What was less clear, however, was what in practice such hived-off, stand-alone ‘methodologies’ looked like. And even more opaque was what made them ‘youth work’ when young people were obliged to attend, when the precise outcomes required were pre-set, and when, with the practice focusing on their presumed defects and failures, the goals were overwhelmingly ‘welfare’ and ‘rehabilitative’.

## The struggle for youth work

### *Challenging the dominant discourses*

Clearly, in the political climate created by the Coalition government, prescriptions for protecting a practice such as youth work could not come easily. However, for those prescriptions to offer any hopeful ways forward, the thinking and analysis shaping them had to be liberated from the discourses in which they had been trapped since the 2007-8 economic crisis broke – and indeed before. Such a struggle was of course taking place well beyond the puny field of UK youth work, attracting comment from some of the world’s leading economists, political commentators and social philosophers. (See for example Sandel, 2009; Krugman and Wells, 2010; Hall, 2011). What, crudely, such thinkers were asking was:

- Do the economic arguments for cutting the public debt really stand up? Is this really so urgent, such a priority? Or are these arguments mainly (perhaps merely) a cover for an ideology of: ‘state bad, market good’?
- Is therefore the current radical ‘austerity programme’ really necessary?
- Are ‘market’ solutions anyway the only – even the main – ones available? In fact, haven’t they been – aren’t they still – more part of the problem? And, as was suggested earlier, might they not be seriously corrupting some of the humane and cooperative values which, historically, have been said to underpin our society and its public services?
- Indeed, if we really are ‘all in this together’, why is most of the ‘austerity’ burden falling on the poorest families, on the poorest (especially black and Asian) communities, on women – and on young people – and organisations which cater for them? (Cox and Schmucker, 2013; Barings, 2013).

None of these starting points were going instantly to provide an answer to that classic question: so what do I do on Monday morning? They were a reminder, however, that a struggle for youth work’s survival had little chance of success (or even of occasional successes) unless it was cast within wider analyses – and wider struggles. These were being well represented by the Occupy

movement, UK Uncut, 38 Degrees and other internet and local anti-cuts campaigns and campaigns for specific services – some of which, heavily-against-the-odds, could have significant impacts (see for example Stroud Against the Cuts, 2012).

### *A top-down response*

Top-down, perhaps the most consistent and coherent attempt to place some protections specifically around youth work came through the initiative to establish an Institute for Youth Work (IYW). As we saw earlier, this was led initially by a consortium which included NYA and NCVYS from within the youth work field as well as by organisations which had no specialist youth work background but which were clearly valued for their strong ‘market’ orientations. Following a series of consultative events and surveys, by late 2012 responsibility for ‘exploring the Institute’s feasibility’ had passed to NYA’s Education and Training Standards Committee (ETS), with NYA itself announcing in October 2012 that ‘if it is necessary (and) what the sector wants’ it would consider funding it (Puffett, 2012g).

By that stage the evidence from the consultations was that, of 233 respondents, 92 per cent judged such a development as a ‘positive thing’ and 61 per cent said they would join. Eighty per cent saw its primary function, led by youth workers themselves, as providing a voice for youth work and influencing policy (Puffett, 2012h).

However, beyond this broad in-principle support and the no less tricky logistical questions of how it would be financed and governed, deep differences on an Institute’s roles and functioning remained, some of which were equally principled. Of those consulted, for example, some saw it as a framework which, through co-ordination and advocacy, could help safeguard and even strengthen structures which had been central to youth work’s development for half a century or more but which were looking increasingly fragile in an ‘austerity’ era. Paramount amongst these were, for many, its qualifying training routes and the critical and self-reflective education these offered; and a salaries negotiating machinery and structure specifically designed with youth work’s often unconventional employment and working patterns in mind.

Such a body, it was argued, would be able to ‘hold’ the meaning of youth work as a distinctive practice, not least against government pressures to re-interpret it – though, as we have seen, as influential a player as NCVYS used the debate to argue for just such a make-over. Somewhat contradictorily, too, while claiming to be in favour of drawing in workers (paid and voluntary) with different levels of qualification and experience, some of the proposal’s supporters seemed to be envisaging something akin to professional association with the responsibility and indeed the power to register (and de-register) those with the professional qualification, to have a role in overseeing a

probationary year and even perhaps to issue a ‘licence to practice’.

However, such ideas were not supported by the majority of respondents, with the notion of a licence to practice attracting only 40 per cent approval (Puffett, 2012h). Indeed concerns existed that the Institute might end up as a take-over by the ‘professional’ wing of the youth work sector, thereby at best devaluing and at worst excluding part-timers and volunteers – still by far the majority doing face-to-face youth work. Here, both as an extension of its ‘anti-silo’ position outlined earlier but also because of the diversity of the organisations affiliated to it, NCVYS was blunt in its view that, ‘Membership should be open to anyone working with young people, regardless of qualification, experience or their particular learning or career pathway... (with) categories of membership based on services received’. It then went on to declare itself ‘wary of a membership system based on categories of youth work practitioner’, partly because this would make it ‘too difficult to build consensus’ and partly because it ‘would ... construct artificial notions of quality and professionalism within the workforce’ (NCVYS, 2012b: para 8). This was a position likely to be backed by many in the faith sector which, though claiming now to be the largest employer of paid youth workers, also drew many volunteers into its work with young people.

In a climate unsympathetic to youth work, the Institute proposal certainly represented, and indeed by many was being presented as, a concerted effort to protect and even to develop key elements of its institutional framework. As such, it seemed to be gathering broad support from key organisations as well as individuals, with ETS agreeing in late 2012 that there was sufficient interest to take the project to the next level of development. At the same time it was recognised that some issues needed further consultation, consideration, and debate: whether the body should have a regulatory role; whether membership categories should be introduced; what definition of youth work and youth worker should be adopted; and how the body could be made sustainable over the long term. With ‘critical questions’ such as these still on the table, an IYW ‘development day’ for ‘stakeholder groups/organisations’ was called in February 2013 to consider ‘governance, membership, a framework for ethical practice and continuing professional development’ (NYA, 2013).

### *Challenging from below*

With often, at best ambiguous and reluctant support from these same organisations, significant bottom-up efforts were also made to defend youth work and its facilities. Some of these saw young people picketing the Prime Minister’s constituency office in Oxfordshire, speaking passionately in the council chamber in Haringey and helping to get 160,000 signatures for a petition in Derbyshire. Campaigns also generated a legal challenge in North Somerset, a youth workers’ strike in Oxfordshire and a ‘ChooseYouth’ campaign initiated by Unite/CYWU whose rallies and Parliamentary lobby gave young people platforms for expressing, powerfully and movingly, why



the distinctive ways in which youth workers worked were important to them. Set up originally to confront the undermining effects on youth work of New Labour's managerialist imposition of targets and targeting, the In Defence of Youth Work campaign supported these efforts, wherever possible working in alliance with other campaigning groups such as the Social Work Action Network, the National Coalition for Independent Action and the Federation for Detached Youth Work.

Occasionally there were important successes – the Derbyshire campaign for example forced the council into a u-turn on youth club closures (Puffett, 2012I) and the youth council was reported as having done the same in Redbridge (Clayton, 2013). However, faced with the Coalition's demand for huge cuts in local authority expenditure, most were not. One consequence seemed to be a loss of energy amongst young people who, having tested our democratic structures, found them unyielding and even dismissive. Another was low morale amongst the staff who survived and who had often been levered into jobs for which they had not been trained and which had little connection with their reasons for coming into youth work in the first place.

With even bigger cuts in the pipeline for 2013-14 and beyond and with youth work's prospects therefore likely to deteriorate still further, clarifying how to resist became increasingly urgent – and testing. For IDYW, campaigning in the new landscape posed difficult questions which seemed to have some important wider resonances. For example:

- Given the struggle so many workers were having, including many of its own supporters, to find jobs that allowed them to practise youth work as they understood and had experienced it, was IDYW holding in too purist a way to its own definition, including perhaps its emphasis on young people's right to choose to be involved – or not?
- Was it being too dismissive of the pragmatic choices managers were having to make as they strove to preserve some semblance of open access work within services increasingly focused on targeting?
- How should it be responding to the NCS's moves to develop area-based follow-up work with its 'graduates' as if youth work no longer existed – indeed, had never existed – in those localities?
- Given the emphasis in its own definition of youth work on tipping balances of power towards young people, how should it be responding to forms of young people's participation – youth advisors, youth MPs, 'youth-proofing' and indeed young entrepreneurs – which often seemed to be cast far too safely within adult-defined moulds?
- How could it deal with the growing demand for 'outcomes' in ways which accepted that youth work needed to be accountable but which was congruent with an educational process whose goals were derived from the personal and group expectations and interests which young people brought to their face-to-face encounters with youth workers?

With no uplifting blueprints available, for IDYW two broad responses to dilemmas such as these seemed important. One was to go on offering points of identity and support to those who still saw themselves as youth workers; who, with great integrity and – yes – resilience, in often unsympathetic organisations and in unfamiliar roles, continued to struggle to practise as youth workers; and who had not given up hope that youth work as they understood it would again be at the heart of what they did.

A second and more strategic response was to go on asserting that the core distinctive features set out in IDYW's original open letter (IDYW, 2009) offered some crucial bottom lines against which to test the subtle and not-so-subtle manoeuvres to render it indistinguishable from 'work with young people'. This certainly needed to acknowledge that the meaning of youth work had always been contested. It also needed to recognise that 'out there' survival (organisational, professional, personal) was often the unavoidable name of the game. But the case also needed to go on being made for a practice which, through words and deeds, significant numbers of young people had made clear they appreciated and wanted still to have available to them.

Meeting head on charges that this was romantic and unrealistic, the task therefore remained to help commitment to and indeed grass roots experience of this distinctive way of working with young people to survive beyond this historical moment into one when, again, it commanded respect, recognition – and public endorsement.

## Postscript

On 23 January 2013 Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, announced to the Education Select Committee that youth policy was not a government priority. In doing this he confirmed what one of his former junior ministers, Tim Loughton, had been saying for some weeks to anyone prepared to listen, including delegates at the Conservative Party conference and this same Select Committee.

Two things about this spat are striking. First, this was the same Tim Loughton who in 2010, as a minister, had adopted a completely hands-off stance when asked by a previous Select Committee about the government's response to the cuts which were already devastating local authority Youth Services. Not only, it seemed, did he or his Department have no idea how big these were but apparently on the premise that council spending was wholly unaffected by central government policy, he went on to assert that '... funding decisions are not made by us, they are made by local authorities'.

The second striking feature of Gove's announcement was that it apparently took most of the key organisations in the youth work field completely by surprise. Indeed for those who had spent over two years cosying up to the government on the premise that it was persuadable and winnable it may even come as something of a reality test, generating a letter of protest to Gove which immediately attracted the signatures of twenty-six chief executives.

## Note

- 1 This article draws heavily on the work done over the past two-and-a-half years by members of the In Defence of Youth Work campaign in monitoring key policy developments affecting youth work and the Youth Service. Acknowledgement is due particularly to Tony Taylor for his critical comments on earlier drafts.

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# 'I just love youth work!' Emotional labour, passion and resistance

Tania de St Croix

## Abstract

*This article is inspired by findings from a small-scale study in which grassroots street-based youth workers talked about their love and passion for their work and their affection for young people. Emotional engagement could be seen as intrinsic to youth work and necessary for building relationships with young people, but how might we think about workers' emotions as youth work is increasingly governed by market principles? This article explores the relevance of emotional labour, the theory that workers' emotional efforts are controlled and exploited by employers in the pursuit of profit. Such analyses have a renewed relevance as private sector organisations and practices enter youth work, but may not adequately account for the potentially positive political role of emotions. The article concludes by suggesting that passion might play a role in resisting the dehumanisation of youth work.*

**Key words:** Emotional labour, marketisation, passion, resistance, youth work.

PASSION IN THE workplace has become a ubiquitous concept. Every other job advert on the high street requires potential applicants to demonstrate their 'passion for coffee', 'love of fashion' or 'obsession with sandwiches', and the internet is full of blogs with titles such as 'ten ways to inspire passion in the workplace' or 'you too can turn regular employees into passionate workers'. As education and welfare work is increasingly affected by market principles, managers in reconfigured services find inspiration in 'management guru' style literature which emphasises passion and individual expression. Whether they are in the public, private, or third sector, 'organisations now call for employees to love the company, to love the product and to feel motivated through their empowerment in the workplace' (Bolton, 2005: 111). Passion has become commodified, used by companies to bolster profits and by individuals to enhance their promotion prospects.

This article was inspired by in-depth interviews with part-time and volunteer detached youth workers<sup>1</sup>. Detached youth workers work in public places such as street corners, parks and bus shelters, aiming to meet young people on their terms and on their territory. In contrast to outreach work which aims to encourage young people to attend a youth centre or project, detached youth work takes place where young people are already spending time. The interviews were not intended to be about love and passion; they focused more generally on how grassroots youth work is

experienced in the context of policy changes. In common with the rest of youth work, detached work has been affected by managerialism in the form of performance targets and computerised tracking systems which have made it increasingly short-term, individualised and office-based (Crimmens et al 2004; Davies and Merton 2009, 2010; In Defence of Youth Work, 2011; Jeffs and Smith, 2008; Spence and Devanney, 2006; Tiffany, 2007). Since the coalition government came to power in 2010 there have also been disproportionate cuts to services (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Wylie, 2010) as well as a widespread withdrawal of the state from youth work provision (Davies, 2013).

In this context it was almost inevitable that the interviewees talked about some of the struggles and difficulties they faced; more surprisingly, they also expressed their love and passion for youth work. I had not set out to explore youth workers' emotions but it was a strong theme that could not be overlooked. These workers' commitment to young people was clear and went beyond simply 'doing their job'. However, I was uncomfortable with interpreting their passion as a straightforward expression of care, vocation or calling (Jeffs, 2006) without also considering what passionate commitment might mean in an increasingly marketised youth sector. After a brief description of my study's methods I will share my findings in relation to emotional commitment, consider the relevance of theories of emotional labour and emotion management, and end by asking whether passionate commitment might be a source of strength and even resistance in the context of marketisation.

## Methods and research participants

This small-scale study asked how part-time and volunteer detached youth workers are experiencing their role in the context of a changing policy framework. I carried out in-depth interviews in spring and summer 2011 with eight participants recruited through my networks as a practising detached youth worker, including the Federation for Detached Youth Work and the London Detached Forum mailing lists. The interviews were relatively unstructured to encourage themes to emerge from the workers themselves. Five of the interviewees were either not known to me or barely known to me before the study, and were interviewed individually for around an hour each. The other three were interviewed together as a group for over two hours, were colleagues at the time of the interview, and were well known to each other and to me.

The interviewees self-identified as part-time or volunteer detached youth workers and all worked in southern England, but otherwise came from a relatively diverse range of settings and perspectives. They had between three and twelve years of youth work experience and two were studying for youth work degrees while three of the others had taken part in local youth work training courses. Six worked in London boroughs, one in a smaller city and one in a town. Three worked for the

voluntary sector and five for local authorities. One was a volunteer, six were paid and one had recently left her job. Seven were female and one male; four were white and four black. Such a small number of participants cannot represent all perspectives, but the commonalities in the findings suggest that the views and experiences of these workers are likely to be reflected beyond this specific group.

The study and the interviews were intentionally open-ended and improvisational, taking inspiration from youth work practice as well as from feminist, grounded theory and narrative methodologies (Oakley, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Chase, 2005). I used a conversational approach to interviewing (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), beginning by asking participants how they had become youth workers and encouraging them to elaborate on issues they found interesting and meaningful. Interviews were recorded and transcriptions were completed. Names were changed, with pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Quotes may have been edited in minor ways for clarity, leaving out some hesitations or repetitions.

Analysis started with detailed line-by-line coding to enable me to become deeply familiar with each interview, moving towards a more open and instinctive analytical approach to draw out common themes. I wrote up tentative theories as I went along, comparing these ideas within and between interviews, with relevant literature and with my ethnographic youth work practice journal. I had not expected or intended to write about love and passion and only read about emotional labour after analysing the interviews. If I had preconceptions about my findings, it was that these youth workers might be demoralised at a time of increasing control and bureaucracy combined with impending cuts and redundancies. While these aspects of workplace reform were indeed key issues for the interviewees, this made it all the more striking that love, passion and enjoyment also arose as strong themes.

## Love and passion in youth work

*What do I like about youth work? I just love youth work! (Bridget)*

All eight interviewees used the word 'love' in connection with working with young people, as well as talking frequently of other positive emotions such as liking, enjoyment and passion when they shared examples from their practice. This was a consistent theme across interviews, but it is hard to identify what passionate youth work might look like in practice terms because the workers had a variety of methods and approaches. Some focused primarily on building relationships with peer groups, talking with them and engaging them in activities such as quizzes, sports, games and even circus skills, while others worked mainly with individual young people who wanted support. Some did most of their work on the streets, whereas others used mobile youth buses and local community

buildings. Although their approaches differed, they all emphasised the importance and satisfaction of getting to know an area and its people.

*I love getting out there and talking to people, because you don't just talk to young people, you talk to mums, dads, uncles, find out what's going on in the area. (Forde).*

*If we move to a new area we always start our work through reconnaissance [...] through the area, through the community members, through where young people hang around, through the parks and everything and open spaces and slowly build that. (Mahad).*

*One thing I like about youth work is the roots in it, the community aspect. I love the fact we bump into parents, people just come and say, 'what are you up to today?' (Laura).*

The interviewees' positive emotions seemed strong and genuinely held, expressed not only through their choice of words but also through the excitement in their voices and eyes when they talked about the young people they worked with and described projects which were 'brilliant', 'really successful' or 'amazing'. They spoke about young people with a demonstrable and infectious emotional attachment. Interestingly, this was not usually in reference to specific individuals; they talked about love for groups of young people, or working with this age group more generally:

*I love working with teenagers! Love it. That's the age group that I'm most comfortable with. (Rachel).*

*I've known some of them for three years now and the way you see them grow and the way the relationship is and I can be myself and they can be their self. I just think young people are fantastic, they're clever and they're switched on and they're fun. (Lucy).*

When the interviewees talked about their routes into youth work, some had positive emotional associations with detached work even before becoming youth workers themselves:

*I thought it sounded fantastic. It was amazing that you actually have a profession, you actually get paid for walking around on the street, talking to the young people on their terms, on their territory, I just loved the idea of it. And I was like, 'how is it possible that in this society that exists?' It went counter to what I think of this society or this world. And I was, 'wow!' (Laura).*

*I had read about detached but never actually done it, I thought that would be really, really interesting, the hours were great, and then it was local, so that's why I applied. (Rachel).*

The workers' positive emotions were based not only on personal satisfaction but also on synergy

with their values, their desire to make a difference whether for individual young people or on a wider scale. For some, their commitment to youth work was motivated by difficult experiences in their own lives:

*I started doing voluntary work round my local area. What really got me into it was one of my best friends, they got killed. [...] And then it just kind of hit me, you know what? There's too many young people out here that this is happening to. [...] I wanted young people to have the same choices that I had – and more. (Forde).*

*I hated teenage years, and I wish I'd had someone there, or like a club that I went to, and therefore I think teenage years was a really, really hard time that I've ever experienced in my life and I'd really like to be good and support people going through that as well. (Lucy).*

*I went to prison for a spate of time and whilst in prison took a good long look at myself and at my inner self and thought that this is just not for me and I'd like to give something back to the community. On coming out of prison I had a really, really good probation officer. And she noticed the rapport that I had with young people [...] She really encouraged me and pushed me forward, going into mentoring, and done a rites of passage course. Which then spurred me into thinking, wow, maybe I can be a youth worker and a good role model for the community. (Bridget).*

Mahad became involved in youth work after meeting local detached youth workers at a community event his brother and nephew were involved in:

*I just thought, 'let me just get this done and over with, I know they're gonna be blah, blah, blah, and I'll just leave afterwards'. I went there really with that mentality and I just came back with a wow factor because they had the ideas, and the detached youth workers were really supportive, encouraging, they were giving them information on what to do, what not to do, that sort of thing, and they were just listening to them and they were taking their ideas on board. And I thought, wow, that was quite different compared to other services. [...] I gained a lot of motivation, a lot of passion for youth work. Not for any youth work but for detached youth work because I knew there was a lot of youth work services around in the area but I particularly liked the detached youth work, and having that different environment and different agendas every day, it just really made me passionate to take part and maybe become a detached youth worker one day. (Mahad).*

The interviewees had been youth workers for many years, so it was interesting that they remembered their early motivations with vivid enthusiasm. However, this should not suggest that they all enjoyed their work immediately or felt a natural affinity with teenagers. Louise and Lucy's

first volunteering experiences were in youth clubs:

*I was sworn at a lot. And I cried a lot. My mum would always say, 'why do you keep going back there?', and I was like, 'the positive weighs out the negative', and I just loved it. And in the end they go from swearing to actually being really nice to you and it was just the thing that I had to go through. So it was hard but I did love it. (Louise).*

*I was petrified the first time I walked through the door. Mine was at [my local youth club] and it's a bit of a rough area and I thought, 'oh my god, I don't know what I'm doing here'. After the first day I thought, 'I'm not coming back, it's awful, young people are horrible'. Then afterwards I was like, 'no, it's fun'. (Lucy).*

These quotes suggest that the transformation and challenge involved in building positive relationships from unpromising beginnings can bring particular satisfaction and enjoyment. In youth clubs, the first months before the worker is accepted by established groups can be particularly challenging. In detached work, such difficult beginnings might be experienced repeatedly as workers continue to make contact with new groups on the street:

*I have to say I think that is quite difficult a lot of the time. Just approaching random young people that you've never met before. I mean, I love it, but I don't think it's the most natural thing in the world. (Laura).*

*Walking up to a group of young men who are all taller than me and they've all got their hoods up and it can be dark, it can be quite intimidating. As soon as you say what you're there for and what you're doing it's such a change in atmosphere, and they're like, oh, chat, chat, chat. Yeah it's really good. It's really good. (Rachel).*

The process of changing the atmosphere from intimidation to chat, of getting to know young people so they are no longer 'random', demands of street-based workers a constant emotional engagement which can encompass fear, nerves, embarrassment and awkwardness as well as more positive feelings. Workers talked about the length of the process, from getting to know the area and making initial approaches to having short conversations, followed by developing longer projects, organising activities and 'having really deep conversations about something really important to them' (Laura). Because of the long-term nature of this work and its challenges, there may be times where the intrinsic rewards of the work are somewhat limited and where payment can help; as Rachel said, 'in the middle of winter when its minus seven and you're being paid, at least you know you have got to go out and do it'. But money was not the sole motivating factor, especially given the relatively low wages of part-time youth workers. Most of the paid workers I interviewed started as volunteers and continued to do extra unpaid work. Louise was primarily a volunteer

while studying youth work:

*Outsiders think I'm mad. And part of it is because they don't understand why you'd go from earning money to not earning money and money isn't important to me but it is to a lot of my friends, so they don't understand that bit. (Louise).*

*When you've got passion for something you don't continuously look at the time or how much you're getting paid, you just get into it. (Mahad).*

*I come in on my days off. Because that's the only time that that meeting, or meeting that young person, could be done. [...] I can't on any conceivable concept say 'I need money for coming in on my day off'. (Quincie).*

The section above includes a relatively large amount of interview data in order to build up a picture of the passion with which these youth workers discussed and engaged with their work. They saw their positive emotions as demonstrative of their principled and value-based commitment to young people which could perhaps be seen as a 'political ethic of care' (Taggart, 2011: 86). This is not to suggest their emotional experience of youth work was unstintingly positive. They also talked about negative emotions, sometimes associated with challenging situations with young people or forms of youth work they didn't enjoy, but more often with target cultures, spending cuts, surveillance systems and hierarchical management. Overwhelmingly, face-to-face work with young people was experienced as challenging, enjoyable and satisfying.

Such enjoyment despite adversity perhaps relates to the particular position of this group of workers, and might not be experienced in the same way by managers and full-time youth workers. As volunteer and part-timers they are likely to be relatively less experienced and perhaps less jaded. Youth work was an important part of their lives, but as part-timers they have other interests and commitments, so any difficulties could perhaps be more easily tolerated. They were likely to spend a greater proportion of their time directly working with young people than their managers, and therefore spent relatively less time on tedious bureaucratic tasks or stressful managerial work. In addition it could be speculated that detached youth workers tend to have more autonomy than those based in buildings by virtue of operating outdoors away from the gaze of senior management, and sometimes being seen to be doing work that is experimental or edgy.

I am not suggesting that all part-time and volunteer detached youth workers love their work. These interviewees cannot be assumed to be representative, and it is likely that they had a stronger commitment than average; after all, they volunteered to be interviewed about their work for no personal gain. However, they are by no means the only welfare and education professionals who love their work in spite of inherent challenges and encroaching managerialism (see for example

Day, 2004; Taggart, 2011). Towards the end of this article I will ask whether passionate workplace commitment may contribute to workers' ability to cope with or even resist target cultures and hierarchical management practices. First I will reflect on theories of emotional labour and emotional management and their contemporary relevance for youth workers.

## Exploited emotions?

The concept of emotional labour was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild (2003) in her book *The Managed Heart* (originally published in 1983), in which she argues that service sector workers' emotions are often tightly controlled and exploited by employers. Hochschild uses ethnographic and interview material from flight attendants (airline cabin crew) and debt collectors to argue that these workers become alienated from their emotional labour when it is used for company profit, just as factory workers are alienated from their manual labour. The flight attendants in her study, mainly female, were taught to boost future sales by smiling, being friendly and generally creating a positive emotional experience for passengers. Their success was closely monitored through customer feedback and they were trained in staying cheerful when dealing with demanding passengers. Wearing a 'painted on smile' was not enough; customers and therefore managers demanded genuine good humour. In this way, 'seeming to "love the job" becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort' (Hochschild, 2003: 6).

Hochschild argues that emotional work takes place in both personal and work spheres, and can take the form of surface acting or deep acting. Surface acting means feeling one emotion while displaying another: a false 'have a nice day!' at the checkout, or insincere friendliness at a party. Deep acting means trying to call up a real feeling in order to act more convincingly. To use the same examples, this would mean actually wanting the customer to have a nice day, or finding a way to be genuinely friendly at the party. Building on Goffman's (1959) analysis of how people present themselves to maintain social norms, Hochschild contrasts the 'emotion work' we undertake in our personal lives with that which is required in service sector workplaces. Her contention is that emotional work becomes exploitative once it is prescribed and controlled by an employer rather than by the individual themselves:

*Emotion work is no longer a private act, but a public act, bought on the one hand and sold on the other. Those who direct emotion work are no longer the individuals themselves but are instead paid stage managers who select, train and supervise others* (Hochschild, 2003: 118-9).

The concept of emotional labour has been widely developed and adapted, especially in the study of



female-dominated spheres including the caring professions (Gorman, 2000; Gregor, 2010; Smith, 1992, 2012; Taggart, 2011). Whether in private or in public, women's emotional work tends to be seen as 'natural' and is therefore under-valued (Steinberg and Figart, 1999). For example, Smith's (1992, 2012) studies of the emotional labour of student nurses over two decades found that complex caring and emotional skills are not sufficiently recognised in training or in pay structures. Of course, emotional labour does not operate in the same way across different spheres: in contrast to sales and service workers whose emotional work is often rigidly controlled and monitored, professionals' emotions tend to be less tightly prescribed. Nevertheless, the experiences of private and public sector workers are moving more closely together. For example, nurses' care skills have been distilled into a 'compassion index' which monitors their emotional work (Smith, 2012), while flight attendants today negotiate an increasingly complex set of emotional demands, which go beyond a smile to encompass safety responsibilities and care for ill passengers (Bolton and Boyd, 2003).

In an era where bureaucracy and target cultures undermine the importance of human relationships, the concept of emotional labour has renewed relevance as well as increased complexity for caring professionals (Gorman, 2000; Gregor, 2010; Smith, 2012; Taggart, 2011). As business methods and modes of organisation encroach in the public sector, these workplaces are affected by the 'cult of the customer' (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Workers may 'find themselves having to present the calm and caring face of the public sector professional whilst also having to present a smiling face to clients who now behave as demanding customers' (Bolton, 2005: 128).

How far can this analysis be applied to youth work? Most young people presumably want genuine rather than fake emotional engagement from their youth workers, but surely this is a human rather than a consumerist desire. Caring engagement with young people is intrinsic to the youth work role; it would therefore be far-fetched to claim that most youth work managers and employing bodies have a conscious intention to exploit the emotional labour of their employees. And yet, whether conscious or not, youth workers' emotional work almost inevitably is exploited when profit is involved. In recent years, as private companies have entered the field and 'payment by results' has become more common, youth workers' employers are relying on and profiting from their emotional labour. In the quasi-marketised public and voluntary sectors the situation is less clear, and a more complex theoretical framework is useful.

Recognising the complexity of understandings of emotions in diverse work settings, Sharon Bolton (2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003) argues that emotional labour theory is too limited and overly pessimistic to apply to the current context, and that 'something of a one-dimensional portrayal of organisational life is presented with frustrated managers, emotionally exhausted workers and dissatisfied customers' (Bolton, 2005: 53). She argues that emotional labour theory underestimates workers' ability to choose how they feel and act.<sup>2</sup> Despite the potential for exploitation and control,

workers should be understood 'as knowledgeable agents who are able to consent, comply or resist and who also have the potential to collectively alter the balance of power' (Bolton, 2005: 87). Bolton's model is useful in developing a more subtle and complex understanding, based on four overlapping types of emotional management:

- *Pecuniary*: Emotional work that is harnessed for profit (similar to Hochschild's emotional labour).
- *Prescriptive*: Emotional work that is required by organisational or professional norms.
- *Presentational*: Everyday emotional interactions, particularly with colleagues, which tend to follow social norms (building on Goffman's understanding of social interaction).
- *Philanthropic*: Emotional work as a 'gift' to customers, clients or colleagues.

(Summarised from Bolton, 2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003)

This model is useful in emphasising that there are different types of emotional management in the workplace, and philanthropic emotional work, conceived of as a 'gift', seems particularly relevant to a youth work context. The concept of prescriptive emotional management may apply less clearly; in particular it is unclear why organisational and professional norms of emotional behaviour have been conflated when it seems likely that these might come into conflict. For example, a detached youth worker may follow professional norms by prioritising long-term work with a challenging group of young people, while their employer might encourage them to move on to new groups to meet targets and maximise funding. In addition, the label 'prescriptive' seems unfortunate, especially for a model which foregrounds worker agency; rather than being simply prescribed, the emotional rules of organisations and professions could be seen as being continuously enacted and reinvented by workers in practice. However, Bolton's model takes us forward in understanding the complexity of emotions in today's workplaces, particularly in the public sector.

Concepts of emotional labour and emotional management can help us to think about youth workers' emotions from different angles. Firstly, these theories point out that emotion work, despite the complexity and sheer effort involved, is too often seen as something that comes naturally (to women in particular). Emotion work is difficult and demanding, can be improved through practice, reflection and learning, and should not be taken for granted. In the following quote, one of the youth workers I interviewed expresses some of the intense effort and deep reflection involved in working with her emotions:

*I'm such a massive character, such a massive personality, sometimes even within youth work it's overbearing, it's overcrowding, it's too much, it's too inviting, it's too open, it's, oh my goodness! [...] You have to self reflect, everything that is required of you in terms of your work with young people you have to first be able to do it yourself, be completely honest with yourself [...] You have to honestly ask yourself, 'if that happens, how would I react, and if this*

*happens?’ And then depending on what you get back will determine the kind of work or how far you engross yourself within your role. [...] Youth work throws a lot up about yourself, you know? (Quincie).*

Aware that she can be ‘too much’, Quincie reflects on how she might be perceived and what she might do in different situations. There is an element here of being ‘honest’ with herself while also reflecting on how to use her ‘natural’ personality most effectively. This is a complex and skilled way of using her personality and emotions which goes beyond an instinctive use of self and makes use of deep reflection. Quincie was not the only interviewee to express the emotional intensity and challenge of youth work:

*In the last few months round here there’s been like three stabbings, on one estate. And that’s just on their doorstep, where they live, and so it is – it’s difficult [...] It’s always hard not to get too stressful with them and bring your personal feelings into things. (Forde).*

*A lot of the time I struggle that I can’t live their life for them. So I have to accept that they might do something that I would love them not to do. (Laura).*

A second way in which theory can be useful is in helping us understand that emotional work is affected by multiple and changing influences, including personal, organisational and professional norms (Bolton, 2005). Some of the emotional demands on youth workers are well established. Half a century ago, youth workers were said to need to possess a ‘burning love of humanity’ (Brew 1957: 112; see also Orpin, 2011). Emotional commitment continues to be seen as almost mandatory: one key youth work text argues that anybody who doesn’t enjoy the work ‘should find another job’ (Robertson, 2005: 47). And yet, increased priorities placed on risk assessment require youth workers to construct boundaries and distance between themselves and young people (Jeffs, 2006; Batsleer, 2008), and some of the interviewees found that newer cultures of accountability and monitoring clouded their enjoyment and infected their relationships with young people:

*There’s a lot of politics involved, it’s always those kinds of things. Lots of obstacles involved in terms of information sharing and all those bureaucracy and politics that’s involved, sometimes it is emotionally draining and that’s the downside to it to be honest. Cos one minute you can be really great and emotionally, you know, on a positive, and the next minute you can be really negative. (Mahad).*

*At the back of all our minds was always these targets. As much as we tried to do really good youth work for what young people wanted, at the back of our minds it was always there [...] And the young people even feel that. (Laura).*

Finally, Hochschild’s (2003) work is of renewed relevance as youth work policy is increasingly

based on the principles of the market (Davies, 2013) and the idea of enterprise (de St Croix, 2012). As well as private sector encroachments into youth work (Puffett, 2012), most organisations in the public and voluntary sectors are also run on business lines with those at the top receiving proportionately much higher salaries than those at the grassroots. Whether it is named as profit, surplus or reserves, the income of youth organisations is partially reliant on the continuing emotional work of low-paid and low-status workers such as those in my study. Young people benefit from their emotional labour, but so do directors and senior managers.

The similarities between youth work and more commercial sectors should not be overstated, however. Organisational requirements such as monitoring and targets clearly influence youth workers' emotions, but this cannot (yet) be equated with airline companies micro-managing the feeling displays of their workers. Thankfully, youth workers and young people are not usually told exactly when and how to smile. We might wonder, however, whether this is so far-fetched, with the encroachment of happiness indicators and well-being indexes, as well as programmes such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming which claims to train workers to enhance rapport and change behaviour using techniques such as mirroring body language.

It is a good thing if young people have youth workers who are emotionally committed. Clearly, young people are more likely to benefit when their youth workers like them, and workers benefit from enjoying their work. And yet, we should not obscure the potential for organisations to exploit and profit from the emotional labour of frontline youth workers. So what should workers do if they are passionate about youth work and young people but oppose the increasingly marketised and target oriented nature of their work?

## Passion and resistance

It is important to mention here that emotional commitment was not the only significant theme arising from this research. Most of the interviewees discussed at length the things they felt were wrong with youth work today, and many spoke passionately against the direction that youth work is going in. All were thoughtful and critical about systems that did not seem to prioritise the needs of the young people they worked with. In particular they discussed intrusive monitoring procedures, the centralisation of services, hierarchical management, increasing time pressures, funding cuts, redundancies and inappropriate performance targets (de St Croix, 2011). Such concerns are reflected in other studies of youth work (Davies and Merton, 2009, 2010; Gratton, 2012; Spence and Devanney, 2006; Tiffany, 2007) and of other welfare and education fields (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2008a; Fraser, 2008; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall and Cribb, 2009; Mooney and Law, 2007). It is notable that the youth workers in my study contrasted their negative emotions around these issues with their continuing enjoyment of face-to-face work. For Rachel, who had recently left her youth

work job, negative management experiences contributed to this decision even though she had always enjoyed face-to-face work.

*I didn't ever not enjoy working with young people. Even when they were being difficult, I've never found I didn't enjoy that, because that is challenging, but it's still interesting, it's still working out how you're gonna work with them and overcome things. [Pause]. Towards the end I really stopped enjoying a lot of the things with my managers. That was really difficult.* (Rachel).

*You just have to kind of just let it go and think, stuff it, I don't care, I don't care about targets. I'll get what I can done, and I just care about stressing about activities for young people. I'd rather put my stress into, 'oh I need to plan this trip because they really want it and I don't want to let them down'. Rather than, 'I've got to write this report'.* (Lucy).

These workers acknowledged that working with young people can be intrinsically challenging but differentiated this from the stress caused by extrinsic pressures such as targets or overly hierarchical management. They suggested that certain policies and requirements came into conflict with their understandings of themselves as youth workers, understandings which prioritised respect for young people over bureaucratic and money orientated objectives.

*You've got to know what it is that you're asking of young people. Be respectful of them. So if they do turn round and say no, for me it's not a tick box exercise. There's boxes to be ticked but I'm not going to tick a box unnecessarily or unjustified. I have to be justified when I tick that box. And that, for me, it gives credence to what I'm doing as opposed to 'ok I just need to do this so I can get paid at the end of the month.' If that's the case, I think jobs like retail would more suffice.* (Quincie).

*We said to young people, 'look, we do have a target where police would come to the project'. And they said 'no'. They wouldn't move on that at all. And that's fine and we really respected that. [...] So in the end we didn't do it. And we just said to our managers, 'there's no way we can do that and expect young people to come to the project.' [...] The targets we had to meet I don't think were relevant for our group.* (Lucy).

Each worker spoke of occasions when they had challenged management policies, whether by speaking up for young people's choices and freedoms, refusing to prioritise the filling in of forms, or taking part in anti-cuts demonstrations (de St Croix, 2011). Their words and actions might be seen as enactments of personal and professional ethical integrity (Banks, 2009; Batsleer, 2008; Cribb, 2011), or as acts of resistance or rebellion (Collinson, 2005; Thomas and Davis, 2005). In future writing I intend to explore in more detail what constitutes resistance amongst part-time and

volunteer youth workers, but I raise it here because there is a question to be asked about whether emotionally committed youth workers are perhaps more likely to resist the dehumanising nature of reforms, and whether emotions are part of this resistance.

There has been limited writing on the relationship between emotional labour and workplace resistance, but one exception is Tolich's (1993) study of supermarket checkout workers. Tolich (1993) acknowledged that workers' emotions are often regulated, but argued that they can also undertake autonomous emotional action which 'serves to liberate them from management's control of their emotions and thereby alleviates some of their sense of estrangement' (Tolich, 1993: 362). For the supermarket workers, autonomous emotional actions included a subversive use of play and humour as well as expressions of pride. Although supermarket work is different from detached youth work, this conception of emotions as exploited or liberatory is useful, although perhaps they can be both at the same time; if being warm towards favoured customers might feel 'liberatory' for the checkout worker, it is also likely to increase sales and consequently company profits.

Whether employed by a supermarket or a youth service, the passionate worker is likely to bring financial resources to their employer:

*When all of us are talking about our work, we're passionate about it and we're very genuine. And at the end of the day they [employer] need people who do a good job. Because if they don't they won't get the funding.* (Lucy).

Passion has become somewhat ubiquitous in the modern workplace and ambitious individuals are required to demonstrate passion, even if this passion is somewhat performed or even fabricated (Ball, 2003, 2008b). However, as Bolton (2005) points out, emotions are complex and can serve different purposes at the same time. While youth work employers may benefit financially from a passionate workforce, these workers' genuine commitment to young people could make them less willing to comply with management directives. The interviewees did not make a direct link between their love for some aspects of youth work and their resistance to other elements, but this does not mean the link is not there. A deep concern for human relationships 'mitigates against treating people as cases, consumers or numbers' (Banks, 2011: 16). As youth work becomes more regulated, there is a sense that even expressions of affection for young people can feel like resistance:

*You know what I like? Somewhere in [employer's] protocol is that you mustn't be physical with young people. You know what I love? Young people come and they're like, 'Bridget!' and I get big hugs!* (Bridget).

What I am aiming to illustrate here is that the complex relationship between resistance and positive workplace emotions should not be neglected, and that expressions of love, play and creativity

can be subversive. Emotional commitment can never be entirely autonomous, particularly in hierarchically controlled workplaces, and passionate youth work is by no means an unproblematic expression of liberation. Love and passion alone will not defend youth work from the clutches of the market. And yet, loving and passionate youth workers are surely more likely to speak out and take a stand, particularly when there is a collective element to their resistance:

*We deal with it as a team. There's no individuals. You can never achieve a goal by yourself. So if there's policies, if there's a change, we always meet up as a team and plan and discuss and raise good practice, raise issues, raise what's good, what's bad, and that sort of thing.* (Mahad).

Shifts in capitalism have led simultaneously to the homogenisation of work processes and, paradoxically, to a growing emphasis on emotional capacities (Gill and Pratt, 2008). These dual processes go some way to explaining how emotional commitment can contribute to exploitation (where emotional commitment is profitable and therefore demanded and controlled) and also to resistance (where love and passion directly challenges work which has become somewhat dehumanised by systems built around form-filling and number-crunching). Whatever the complex consequences for exploitation and resistance, it must also be emphasised that these youth workers' love for their work was important, satisfying and enriching in its own right. Interviewed at a time of serious threat to both the nature and funding of their work, they nevertheless feel that youth work brings its own rewards for themselves and for young people:

*They loved all the quizzes, loved the fact that we would start a relationship by asking, 'what do you like about your area, what kind of things do you enjoy?' We could chat about trips we were doing, and we came from it from such a different perspective.* (Rachel).

*One day I'm a counsellor, then I'm a nurse, then I'm a teacher, then I'm a mother, then I'm an auntie, you know, it's amazing, the amount of different hats you have to wear doing [the project]. I love it.* (Bridget).

*I would love to continue to do youth work because I want to give back something to the community and to the young people and hopefully continue till the day that I haven't got the passion.* (Mahad).

## Conclusion

As welfare and education settings are infused with market principles and managerial practices, there is a growing potential for employers to exploit the emotional commitments of workers in the pursuit of profit. Emotional labour theory explains how this might alienate workers from their

emotions and complicate their feelings of love and passion for their work. By itself, however, this theory gives an inadequate understanding of the emotional commitment of workers in welfare and education settings, and does not help such workers decide what to do in practice. Young people need adults who genuinely care about them, and most employees want work which is fulfilling and enjoyable. Not feeling passionate is entirely understandable in these stressful times, but deliberately suppressing one's passion would be neither politically nor personally satisfactory.

The workers in this study express an authentic love of youth work which calls into question or at least complicates the arguments of those who worry that there is little space for care and commitment in the current policy context (e.g. Jeffs 2006; Ball 2003; 2008b). Love and passion might help youth workers to work in authentic ways despite having to deal with systems which treat people as commodities. For some of us, this might necessitate a tricky balancing act as we attempt to retain passion for our work and our principles while keeping our employers or funders at a more cynical distance. Perhaps it has never been more important to be on the side of the people we work with rather than the organisations we work for, especially if and when those organisations are financially motivated. Passion alone is not enough, but if we can combine it with resistance, a love of youth work could be liberating for ourselves and for young people.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is based on the first round of interviews from an ongoing ESRC-funded project on the occupational identities of grassroots youth workers in a changing policy context. I thank my supervisors Sharon Gewirtz and Alan Cribb as well as peer reviewers for very helpful comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 I do not agree with Bolton (2005) that Hochschild's (2003) rich account is one-dimensional or neglects agency but I will not pursue this point here; see Brook (2009) and Bolton (2009) for a detailed debate.

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# Youth Work, 'Protest' and a Common Language: Towards a Framework for Reasoned Debate

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## Abstract

*Late 2011 saw the online publication of 'An education for the 21st century: a narrative for youth work today'. The 'narrative' was specifically commissioned 'to set out a shared vision for the role of youth work', and 'to develop a common language'. The resulting narrative offered not so much an overarching account, but yet another variation. This paper is an attempt to set out a framework for how one might move towards a 'common language' to enable reasoned debate about what youth work is and how these variations can be understood. Drawing upon Wittgenstein in relation to family resemblance, MacIntyre's historical philosophy and Rawls/Archard's distinction between concepts and conceptions, I firstly justify the claim that any account of a common language must begin with an analysis of the central concept 'youth work', and secondly defend a particular account of the concept and a framework of conceptions.*

**Key Words:** Positive for Youth, Narrative, Philosophy, Common Language, Youth Work

LATE 2011 SAW the online publication, for consultation, of *An education for the 21st century: a narrative for youth work today* (DfE, 2011a). Commissioned by the UK Department for Education (DfE) and developed by the Catalyst consortium, it was one of the background papers for the *Positive for Youth* policy consultation. The 'narrative' was specifically commissioned 'to set out a shared vision for the role of youth work', to help 'policy makers and local commissioners to better understand the impact of youth work', and 'to develop a common language to describe [youth work providers'] role and impact' (Loughton, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, given the broader context of significant reductions in public sector funding to youth work projects, the narrative had a variable reception and limited discussion within the sector as a whole. Nevertheless in the *Positive for Youth* policy document (DfE, 2011b: para5.21) the government welcomed the narrative and 'hopes that it will help...form a common view of the role and potential...of youth work'. It is worth noting that the aspiration of a 'common language' has morphed into a hope of a 'common view'. The shift reflects an underlying conception of youth work as a technical activity, which, if we can agree on the language, we can debate, and reach agreement on what ought to happen. As I shall consider later, such a conception of youth work fits well with a Weberian account of the 'bureaucratic form' (Weber, 1970). However, such a conception

does not take seriously the historically rich 'phenomenology of disagreement' that exists between reasonable people engaged in youth work. Any development of a 'common language' must not simply be another conception of youth work, but offer an account of the various conceptions that constitute our experience of, and discourse about, youth work. What is more it ought, ideally, to offer an account of how such reasonable persons *should* engage in reasoned debate.

At a general level, discourses about youth work have the characteristics of what MacIntyre (1985:71) describes as 'protest'. In 'protest' groups shout their beliefs and opinions at other groups with whom they disagree. They do so in the certain knowledge that they cannot persuade the other of the rightness of their position, and in the confidence that others cannot undermine their beliefs. In such cases rational debate is impossible, and the discourse descends into a matter of political squabbling. I do not want to claim in this paper to offer a value neutral position, but that the move to reasoned debate on a specific public issue (in this case youth work) is preferable to either 'political muscle' or the 'tyranny of the majority', that is either power or numbers.

This paper then is an attempt to set out a framework for how one might move towards a 'common language' to enable reasoned debate about youth work. In doing so I want to illustrate the framework with some account of youth work, but recognise this as a first step in a longer conversation. Most significantly, in relation to the recent narrative, I want to hold that a common language does not necessarily lead to a common view. In doing so, I draw upon methodological contributions by: Wittgenstein in relation to family resemblance; MacIntyre's historical philosophy and Rawls/Archard's distinction between concepts and conceptions. The paper is structured to: (a) justify the claim that any account of a common language must begin with an analysis of the central concept 'youth work', and (b) defend a particular account of the concept and a framework of conceptions.

## In defence of 'youth work' as a starting point

I have tacitly assumed in the introduction that a good place to start in developing a common language is a consideration of the concept 'youth work'. There are two potential criticisms of this assumption. The first is that youth work has no substantive aims, but describes a particular type of educational experience. On this reading 'youth work' is synonymous with 'informal education' and a consideration of the concepts 'education' and 'informal' offer a more appropriate starting point. I have some sympathy with this position, but want to reject it on the grounds that whilst 'youth work' may have no unique aims, neither are its aims sufficiently captured by the aims of 'education'. I hope my position will become clearer shortly.

The second criticism reflects a concern as to what is basic: 'youth work' as a particular practice or activity, or 'youth worker' as a particular role within a number of practices. Again I have some

sympathy with this criticism, having argued elsewhere (Davies, 2003) that teaching and education are not social practices, consistency would imply that the same must be true of youth work. However, there are two ways in which the move to focus on 'role' can be misleading. The first is that we start to see what youth workers do as necessarily 'youth work'; this is clearly not the case because youth workers do a range of things some of which may be youth work. The definition of youth work precedes the role ascription. The second is that the context within which the work takes place becomes less important. The 2011 narrative talks of 'youth work methods' or 'youth work skills' that are utilized in certain contexts, the implication being that there are certain contexts within which acting 'like a youth worker' is not in fact youth work. Hence I want to hold that there are *prima facie* reasons to start with 'youth work' over 'youth worker'.

However, a second question arises of identifying the discourse within which the concept 'youth work' is to be primarily understood. In this case there are at least two discourses. The first discourse is the discourse of policy, politics and the state. The state discourse framed the initial commissioning letter from Loughton and is historically reflected in the activity of the 'Youth Service' (and its successors) in supporting young people. The second discourse is the discourse of 'upbringing' (or *paideia*), one which reflects the family and local communities' concern with raising their children into adulthood. If the first discourse reflects the discourse of the state, the second discourse reflects that of voluntary organisations, especially small-scale local and regional groups.

One can make a claim that the discourse of 'the family' is temporally prior to that of the state. It is an historical fact that regardless of how you define the state, youth work emerged from the concerns of families and local communities for their children. However, there is a further claim to priority in the present era of 'localism' (or big, connected and associative society)<sup>1</sup>. Part of the claim of localism is that the social ought to have priority over the political and the economic, and it follows that the discourses grounded in the social and local ought similarly to have priority. I want to claim therefore that there are good policy reasons for prioritizing the discourse of the family and local community and to generate our starting point from within that discourse.

Stripped on the concerns of policy, the common language reduces to a clear concern with its central activity 'youth work' as an aspect of 'upbringing'. This paper is premised on this as a suitable place to start.

## Handling a concept like 'youth work'

There are broadly three ways in which we come to a definition of a concept. We can stipulate its definition, we can point to instances of that activity and generalize, or we can look at the 'logical geography' of the word; that is how it is ideally used. When considering common terms which

are used regularly in practice, we usually consider both the instances and the logical geography in tandem. This of course can give rise to apparent disagreements between the two approaches, and there seems no reason to suspect that this is any different with 'youth work'. In this section I want to address four methodological questions about handling the concept 'youth work'. In doing so I am seeking to develop an approach for my initial illustration of the framework in the following section.

Firstly, there is an obvious question to ask in relation to the phenomenology of disagreement in relation to the term 'youth work': is it one concept or several concepts using the same term? Carr (1996) in relation to 'spirituality' argues, I think convincingly, that disagreement over the meaning of 'spirituality' results from the fact that it is used for different concepts. I am suspicious of such a move early on in the analysis of 'youth work' for two reasons. The first is that, in Carr's example, part of the claim is that the term is directed towards different objects, and this does not seem likely in the case of 'youth work'. The second is that philosophical work on the concept 'spirituality' has a much longer history compared to work on the concept 'youth work'. On balance I am inclined to assume that 'youth work' in its various applications refers to the same concept, whilst also being open to the possibility that an account of such multiple concepts might be the best explanation of our disagreements.

Secondly, there is the question as to what level of specificity we might expect in identifying the criteria for application of the term 'youth work'. Is 'youth work' analogous to 'soccer', 'sports' or 'game'? Recent history in debates in youth work have distinguished between three different concepts: 'youth work', 'work with young people' and 'youth work methods'. The broader term 'work with young people' in its common sense form might be expected to reflect all intentional work by adults directed at, with and for young people, where 'work with' here is intended to exclude those, such as nightclub owners and life guards who 'provide a service' rather than 'work with'. The 'directed at young people' is intended to exclude those such as librarians who have a broader age remit. Such a use of the term would include, for example school teaching, youth work, learning support assistants. However, the term has also in recent debates taken on a semi-technical meaning as a 'catch all' concept for those types of work that do not have their own distinctive professional identity. Thus, the political claim is that to be part of the concept of 'work with young people' is to lose professional identity and status. In one, common sense view, the concept 'youth work' lies within the concept 'work with young people' in the same way that 'soccer' or 'sports' lie within the concept 'game'. However, this account needs to be treated with care given the semi-technical use of the term. The issue is further complicated by the extension of methods, forged in youth work, to a wide range of actors within the wider field of 'work with young people'. What is clear is that using youth work methods is not sufficient for an activity to be 'youth work', but this does confuse the identification of instances of 'youth work' and criteria for the application of the term.

Let us consider, with a Wittgensteinian lens (I am thinking of Wittgenstein, 1963 pp 66ff), the concept hierarchy: games, sports, soccer. I hope that it is clear that these three are related to each other with soccer a practice, sports an umbrella term for a range of practices that share a large number of common features which are significant for the practices (competition, high energy use), but which differ in some respects (team vs. individual sports), and games. The concept 'game' is more difficult to apply, as Wittgenstein noted, rather than sharing specific characteristics 'games' share a 'family resemblance':

*And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail* (Wittgenstein, 1963: 66).

Wittgenstein goes on to articulate this:

*I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family* (Wittgenstein, 1963: 67).

In its common sense use 'working with young people' happily reflects the level of 'game', indicating as it does a number of activities and practices which have a family resemblance. What is not clear is whether 'youth work' can be seen as similar to 'sport' or 'soccer' on this analogy, that is whether it is a single activity, or a collection of closely related activities. On the semi-technical use of 'working with young people', the concept 'youth work' must sit at the same level (which ever level that is). I remain agnostic on whether one should see 'youth work' as analogous to 'sport' or 'soccer' much will depend on the specifics. The analogy with soccer might, here, be misleading, although there are Spanish, English and Brazilian styles of play nevertheless soccer is defined by fairly strong constitutive rules. You expect instances of soccer to look the same. However, let us consider another game 'nine-man-morris', a game with significant regional variation. The broad form of the game is the same in the sense of the board looks the same and it is played with the same pieces, but the rules are variable. There are enough characteristics to see it as an example of the same game, but significant differences in what it looks like (both to play and watch). The judgment (and it is judgment not technical competence) is whether the phenomenon of difference with respect to youth work is best described as similar in form, but with significant variation (as in 'nine men morris') or as a collection of games with similarities (as the concept 'sports'). Given my opening remarks about the 'phenomenon of disagreement' between reasonable persons, I will assume that the better account of 'youth work' is a collection of games with similarities (as in sport or nine-man-morris). This restricts what will count as 'youth work', but allows a level of difference between instances.



Thirdly, Archard (1993) in seeking to define 'childhood' turns to a distinction he draws from Rawls (1972). The distinction is between 'concepts' and 'conceptions':

*In his A Theory of Justice Rawls employs with respect to 'justice' a distinction between 'concept' and 'conception'. His purpose in making the distinction is to render consistent the claim that 'justice' has an uncontroversial and common agreed sense with a recognition that different and perhaps incompatible principles of justice are defended ...*

*Something similar can be said of 'childhood'. The concept of childhood requires that children be distinguishable from adults in respect of some unspecified set of attributes. A conception of childhood is a specification of those attributes (Archard, 1995:21-22).*

This helps with the difficulties expressed above. Soccer and youth work are clearly very different. Soccer has, as noted, a clear set of universally agreed rules, standards of play, etc. whereas youth work is not so tightly bound. Nevertheless the Archard/Rawls distinction is helpful in holding on to a claim that it is a single concept on which we can agree with multiple conceptions which are contentious.

Fourth, and finally in terms of initial methodological considerations, I want to draw on MacIntyre's historical process (see also Ree, 1999). For MacIntyre concepts can only be understood through a consideration of their trajectory through time as each generation adapts the use of their predecessors. It is through such an analysis that one is able to identify criteria for the application of the concept and hence identify real instances of that concept. The way forward with 'youth work' is to identify some of the key stages in the development of youth work as a human activity, and from such an analysis, identify key criteria in the application of the concept. To be clear, I am not arguing here about the meaning of the words 'youth work': this is not primarily an etymological enquiry, but an anthropological or historical one. I am concerned with unpicking the key features of a history of human activity which is bound up with a range of present day activities that occur under that heading. In so doing one is able to identify true contemporary expressions of that history from simulacra.

Having set out the basic methodology, I want to work through a brief account of the framework for clarifying a discourse of, and about, youth work. I intend to sketch out an account of the concept, and then some principles that shape differing conceptions. In working through such a framework I hope to be able to give some account of the various conceptions of youth work and their relationships.

## The concept 'youth work'

The account of 'youth work' I want to give, in broad terms, is: communities/extended families

sought to support their children; in doing so they recognized the need for more than just an ad hoc, if dedicated, approach to childrearing. The result was a concern with educational activity that enhanced both the community's and their children's lives. This educational activity reflected both what was deemed to be worth knowing and what were the relative responsibilities of the community and its young. In particular, youth work became concerned with education beyond that delivered by the school. Finally, youth work emerged with a particular relationship to young people's leisure activities. Whilst I hold that this is a reasonable account, its purpose in this paper is *to give an illustration of the type of debate that needs to occur* rather than a final statement on the matter.

I want to claim that youth work moves through five historical stages which give it, as a human activity, the meaning it has today. The first of these stages is perhaps best thought of as pre-historic grounded in the very nature of human persons and the following four focus specifically on the emergence and development of 'youth work'.

Firstly, youth work emerges as part of our collective engagement with other people, that is other people beyond parents and siblings. It is necessarily communal in form and function in two ways. Firstly, it is undertaken by and on behalf of the community as a whole, and secondly it is a communal experience for those involved.

Secondly, we see the rise of collective educational endeavors, specifically in the UK concerned with the abilities needed to read the scriptures, and also with the emergence of religiously minded industrialists (for example, Joseph Lancashire, Robert Owen) with a concern that all people ought to have a basic understanding of God's *world* as well as God's *Word*.

The development of a formal, if rudimentary schooling system, gives rise to a third shift; the concern of youth work as being beyond the school. Most clearly this shows itself as a concern with those who have already left school. However, as the school leaving age rises what is meant by this changes. What emerges historically as a concern with a particular age range (from the end of school until marriage – perhaps 14 to early 20s) is modified. It retains a concern with the same age range, but shifts from an articulation as 'for those too old for school' to a concern with 'educational content areas not covered in school'.

Fourthly, youth work becomes more clearly concerned with ethical questions – how one should live life and how one ought to behave rather than 'education' more generally construed. Again this is in part a response to the emerging role of the school as the site of education into formal subjects and the '3Rs'. In more contemporary language youth work becomes primarily concerned with 'personal and social education' and 'citizenship'.

Fifthly, with the changing social structures of the mid-20th century, youth work becomes more clearly defined as a leisure time pursuit in which young people chose (or did not choose) to engage.

The concept 'youth work' is defined therefore as a communal<sup>2</sup> activity, emerging from schooling, family and other educational contexts, concerned with education relating to ethical questions, which is pursued as part of young people's leisure time.

It is worth noting several caveats about this account. The first is that I do not want to be seen to claim that these characteristics simply emerge at one point in time. For example, moral education has clearly been an element in youth work educational practice given its foundations in religious practices. Similarly, the focus on leisure time activity is not to claim that youth work 'moved' into this social space in 1950, rather that leisure time becomes a more intelligible concept for young people at this time and youth work responds to these changing cultural expectations. The claim is rather that youth work self-consciously comes to see itself in these terms over time. Further, what emerges as a historical artifact, for example, the focus on life after school when there is a relatively lower school leaving age, needs to be re-formulated as activities beyond school when the school leaving age is raised. Finally, I reiterate points made earlier. This definition does not mean that there are no other valuable communal and educative activities, just that these are not youth work, and the definition of youth work does not preclude youth work methods from being used in other activities.

The most obvious omission in the above, given other accounts (see for example Batsleer and Davies, 2010) is the political. There would seem to be at least three readings of this claim of youth work as necessarily political. The first is that youth is a site of necessary political conflict between different communities, namely the young and adults. The second is that all ethical activity is a site of political contestation because of the nature of ethics. The third is that youth work is particularly sensitive to political struggles and hence becomes a site for political ideologies in general to confront each other. The third I take as a true claim about the world, but also see as morally objectionable – young people being used as a 'means' to other political actors 'ends', and not part of the concept 'youth work', but public governance. The first I will want to claim is a particular conception of youth work, more of which will be discussed later. The second I accept, but argue is well reflected in the use of the term 'ethical'. The ethical is in part political and the political ethical. Maintaining the term 'ethical' leaves open the use of the term 'political' in particular conceptions of youth work.

## Conceptions of youth work

Given the methodological distinction between 'concept' and 'conception' and the phenomenology

of reasonable difference; there are different accounts of youth work that are compatible with the definition. What would be useful is if, as Archard does with childhood, it is possible to develop a framework to help us understand the relationships between such conceptions and the origins of their differences. It is not the aim to seek a framework which enables us to evaluate differing conceptions of youth work against each other, though having identified the origins of the differences we might find some conceptions more convincing on other, non-youth work, grounds. Again I note that what follows is intended to be illustrative of the process, rather than a final statement of its content.

The attempt in this section is to give a plausible account as to why such conceptions do exist based on some critical distinctions in the practice of youth work. I want to focus on three aspects of practice that significantly influence the ways in which we read key terms in the definition of 'youth work': organisation, perception, and nature of the task. In focusing on these aspects I am claiming that these represent different ways in which youth work is organised, and that these differing ways of organising youth work impact on our conception of what it is.

I begin by supporting my choice of three elements of practice. Firstly, whilst there may be other activities which have a broader range of organisational structures supporting its practice<sup>3</sup>, it is true that youth work is delivered by and within a wider range of type and size of organisation ranging from national social enterprises focused on specific areas (eg. first aid, faith, sport), local government youth services (with both universal and targeted provision), local charities, and collectives of parents. These activities are managed and run by a wide variety of individuals, paid employees, volunteers, consultants or social enterprises on limited contracts and those on 'payment by results' contracts. The organisational spaces of the providers are therefore diverse and conceptions of youth work differ. Here I will focus on two aspects: bureaucratic vs. federal structure, and overall size. Secondly, I use the term 'perception' to indicate the cognitive lenses that individuals use to make sense of youth work and young people, I begin with a consideration of the different lenses of academic disciplines before considering other examples. Finally, and linked to perspectives, is the articulation of the precise task-at-hand which I argue is related to the underlying ethical purpose of youth work (and of course there is reasonable disagreement about such purposes).

## Some thoughts on the three characterising principles

### *The organisation*

There are a number of ways in which one could explore the impact of the organisation on conceptions of youth work, but here I consider only some relating to recent demarcations in youth

work practice: the distinction between statutory and third sector organisations and between large and smaller organisations.

Larger organisations tend to be more bureaucratic, especially in the UK public sector where federal structures with subsidiarity are uncommon. I simply note here five characteristics of the bureaucratic form drawn from reflections on Weber:

- Formal hierarchical system of accountability
- Procedural regularity
- Organisation by functional speciality
- Purposely impersonal
- Employment based on technical qualifications

(see, for example, Weber, 1970).

The metaphor is one of mechanised delivery with standardisation and commensurability of input and output alongside role differentiation. Youth work is no different to other areas of such organisations' activities, although there are differences between an organisation 'delivering' youth work and one delivering pizza. There is a focus on qualifications and the relationship between qualification and role responsibility, as well as projecting that relationship as rational and justified. There are further foci on policies and following 'correct' policies that seek to reduce risk, but at the cost of relatively little flexibility to particular context. This is emphasised through value commitments such as 'equality', which prize general principled claims over local adaptability. Interestingly one of the policy developments in recent years is the state's attempt to overcome functional speciality through the policy response of 'a team around the child'. For the bureaucratic organisation 'youth work' is defined in terms of the work done by professionally qualified youth workers and is structured to realise central aims and goals in standardised ways (the standardised training of professional qualification linking the aims with actions). For a bureaucratic conception of youth work central are: the qualifications, the policies, and the rights and responsibilities of managers to set the objectives for the service. This conception is not only found in public sector and unionised models of youth work but can also be seen in texts not overtly 'bureaucratic in focus'. For example, Sercombe's (2010) concern with 'dual relationships' speaks to a background of concern with 'functional specialization', the problem being that where relationships reflect more than one type of relationship specialisation (and bureaucratic conceptions of youth work) they become problematic for practice.

The alternative model I offer for discussion is 'British Youth for Christ' (BYfC), a national organisation, which is federated in its structure. Individual local centres are funded and part managed by local churches with BYfC offering support for both the work and the worker. There are, of course, policy and resources which shape local youth work, but authority is distributed and numerous and,

as Bauman (2000) reminds us authority that is numerous is not authority at all. Furthermore, given that funding is located locally there is subsidiarity and partnership in the relationship between the different agents involved. In these types of structures, with a strong organisational focus on the local, youth work can, and is 'imaged' differently and as a result differing conceptions of youth work emerge which are at odds with those from bureaucratic models of youth work provision. From the bureaucratic perspective they appear to be a rather second rate attempt, often conveyed in the term 'not professional' (or volunteer-led). Such organisations are free to reject the bureaucratic force of specialist qualifications, recipe led outcome assessment, etc. What matters is whether service users (young people, parents and other local stakeholders) remain positive about the work being done, and if not, it is they, and not state funded managers, who act to address the issues.

### ***Perceptions***

We are free to perceive young people (and ourselves) and make them (and us) intelligible within different frameworks. The most obvious example of this in recent debates has been what might be termed the 'psychological turn' in youth work. By this I mean a move from sociology to psychology (especially positive psychology) in considering young people and the role of youth work. For example, the 2011 narrative focuses on 'mental resilience' whereas the IDYW campaign focuses on sociological concepts (see IDYW, 2011). Such shifts are not matters of 'best evidence' since these different perspectives give different evidence about different objects, the discourses, as Foucault (1972) reminds us, '...systematically form the objects of which they speak'. Our view of personhood, identity and agency reflect our consideration of what is salient. These are ideological decisions about the focus on individuals rather than groups, on cognition not collective engagement, etc. However, the rise and fall in the popularity of particular academic disciplines is not the only lens, there are debates as to the applicability of the social sciences themselves. Some lenses offer a common sense perception, by which academic 'evidence' is marginal to the more significant 'categories of direct experience', for example, a focus on having a rapport with young people and 'understanding' them, interpreted as an intuitive ability not one grounded in formal investigation. At best, from such a perspective, academic evidence supports and offers heuristic insight into what experienced practitioners already 'know'. Further, different ideological or normative accounts of society give particular understanding to concepts such as 'communal' and emphasise particular goods to be prioritised in youth work. The Marxist conceptions of person, salvation and eschatology (to follow Hicks', 1989, use of religious terms to such comprehensive doctrines) ought to radically inform the perception of, and about, the agents involved.

### ***The task-at-hand***

The task is related to the perceptions we have of the agents: their wants, needs, etc. There are two significant influences here. The first, and dominant, relates to the ethical focus of youth work; it

is concerned with enabling young people to 'live life well', and is thus sensitive to conceptions of the good and 'how life ought to be lived'. The second is whether the task is seen as essentially conducted in public or private space, that is in broad terms whether it falls under the restrictions and concerns of the state or the family and local community. This is often seen as changing the possibilities for ethical education, but also the language within which such education is pursued.

I have claimed elsewhere (Davies, 2003) that it is possible to develop a 'metaphysical sociology' and thus that there are contingent moral objects in the world, but that this still offers up an infinite number of conceptions of a good life. However, we need to add to this neo-Aristotelian account a range of other generally accepted ethical standpoints (most notably in the pantheon: deontic, utilitarian and nihilistic accounts). There are two attempted ways out of taking a substantive position on this matter. The first is, following Sercombe (2010), to pull all these conceptions together as a unitary theory of ethical life. The second is to place the emphasis on value clarification and leave the young person 'free' to choose. The difficulty with both avenues is that they are a-rational and hence already embed a particular conception of ethics and ethical life, namely a form of naïve relativism. Sercombe's account is largely intuitionist and hopes that where accounts disagree we will somehow know what account to follow. The second abandons young people to a deliberative vacuum. MacIntyre's (1985, chapter 8) arguments offer a critique of such a-rational ethical thinking as misguided and an expression of the failure of the enlightenment project. The freedom of young people to choose their own conceptions is illusory rather than real. So both accounts carry the ethical beliefs of the worker rather than being ethically neutral and as such these beliefs shape the task-at-hand.

Given my original arguments about the temporal and, in recent years, the political priority of the family and the community over the state, the private space has increasing significance here. The state rightly limits the conceptions of the good life that it can promote. These are concerned with citizenship rights, developing commitments to representative mass democracy, self-sufficiency, and support for the national economy through maximising employment. Thus, agnosticism on conceptions of the good life may well follow for agents of the state, that is, those employed by Youth Services. This transforms the nature of the task to one of preparation and exploration of citizenship and tasks which are not directly related to questions about how one ought to live one's life<sup>4</sup>. The more community and voluntary approaches to youth work offer particular substantive conceptions of the good, I think here of faith, sports and uniformed organisations, it is perhaps not surprising given that Feinstein et al (see Feinstein, Bynner, and Duckworth, 2005) identify these as the types of youth work activities with good outcomes for young people.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have not tried to set out a narrative for youth work, but to set out a framework for rational debate about what kinds of activities youth work can embrace and how we might talk

about those activities at the margins. Although I have my own views, and I hope these have filtered through the paper, nevertheless I have been seeking to set out the issues rather than their resolution.

It is within such a shared discourse about practice that reasons can be given and heard and the precise nature of our disagreements understood (as well as the often shocking areas of agreement, shocking that is, in that we suddenly come upon them with different arguments and yet find ourselves in the same place). The task begins with setting out what kind of concept youth work is and how we can come to agreement about the concept itself, before moving on to consider different conceptions and how they relate to instances of that concept. It is probably at this point that casuistry comes into its own, with the need to work through particular examples, core examples to begin with and moving onto more contentious ones. In doing so we can consider how these examples fit with, adapt and transform the initial framework. I have provided a more comprehensive account of the kind of narratives that express youth work. Such a set of narratives ought to give the resources to engage with and rationally critique different political and social contexts. It will also enable those within youth work to communicate effectively with politicians, funders and other stakeholders in a clear and productive way, which was after all the government's aspiration of the 2011 narrative.

## Notes

- 1 I take this to be a claim about a re-description of the normative relationship between the state and civic society
- 2 Here educational activity is not to be confused with the education of schooling, but a much broader conception more closely aligned with Biesta (2006).
- 3 And few spring immediate to mind in either the public or private sector except perhaps shop keeping if one includes both sole traders and multinational supermarkets.
- 4 In many respects my analysis of the power of naïve relativism in youth work relates to this tension between what state agents ought to do and what young people actually need in order to pursue good lives.

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# Protecting Child Employees: Why the system doesn't work

*Jim McKechnie, Sandy Hobbs, Amanda Simpson, Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple*

## Abstract

*This article is the first systematic attempt to examine the implementation of child employment legislation by English local authorities. A representative sample of 51 authorities were surveyed, five of them being subsequently investigated in greater depth. It is estimated that approximately one in ten students of school age who have jobs have the necessary approval of a local authority which means that local authorities therefore cannot monitor whether conditions laid down in legislation are being respected. Authorities are aware that they are failing to register most working children but resources allocated to this area are limited with staff generally having responsibilities for other areas as well. Other problems identified include outdated legislation and lack of awareness of the law. The research raises fundamental questions about the protection of child employees and the need for policy change.*

**Key words:** child employment, work permits, registration, school, work.

IN THE 1990S A plethora of research turned a spotlight on the issue of child employment in Britain (eg. Pond and Searle, 1991; Lavalette et al, 1991; Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; Howieson, 1990). Among other issues raised by this research was the efficacy of the legislation in place to protect young workers (Hamilton and Watt, 2004; McKechnie et al, 2007). In this article we seek to explore the potential problems with the current regulatory processes for young workers in England.

Before considering the regulatory framework it is important that we establish the extent of child employment in Britain. In a systematic review of the existing research, Hobbs and McKechnie (1997), concluded that the evidence suggested that around two thirds of children will have some experience of paid employment by the time they reach the current school leaving age. In the following decade (2000s) research findings generally supported this conclusion. A national study in Scotland based on a ten percent sample of S3 (Year 10) – S6 (Year 13) school students found that 34% of the Year 11 students (15 – 16 years of age) were working and 57% reported having had a paid job at some time (Howieson et al, 2006). This compares with Hobbs and McKechnie's (1997) figure of 35% and 66%, respectively.

There is little reason to believe that employment patterns in England differ from those found in the

national study in Scotland. A number of localised studies in England demonstrate similar levels of employment to those found in Scotland (eg. McKechnie et al, 2005). Reporting the findings of a MORI survey of 11-16 year olds in England and Wales, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) noted that employment was common (TUC, 2001). Similarly, Penrose Brown and Blandford (2002) conducted a survey of school children (in school years 7 to 11) in an English town and reported that 46% of Year 9 to 11 students were currently working and a further 22% had worked in the past.

The evidence on the extent of child employment suggests that having an effective regulatory system is important. However, researchers in this area throughout two decades have highlighted failings in the regulatory system (eg. Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997, TUC, 2001). Since the 1930s, local authorities have been responsible for regulating child employment. This duty is laid out in the Children and Young Persons Act (1933) for England and Wales. This Act has been amended over the years but the key features have remained the same. The legislation allows young people to undertake employment in certain types of work and specifies the minimum age for employment, the maximum hours that can be worked and the earliest start and latest finishing times. There are also restrictions on the number of hours that can be worked on any given day and this varies for term time and holiday employment.

The legislation requires that a child must be given permission to work and this is administered by the local authorities. All previous studies have suggested that authorities generally do this by using a work permit system (McKechnie et al, 2007). This system appears straightforward and is designed to offer a level of protection to the individual child. However, the efficacy of the system has been called into question. A central concern has been the relatively small number of work permits that are issued compared to the numbers of child employees. In one study in England, researchers found that only 15% of child employees had the necessary work permit (McKechnie et al, 2005). In the national study in Scotland the comparable figure was 14% (Howieson et al, 2006).

Other commentators (for example Cornwell et al, 1999; Whitney, 1999; Hamilton and Watt, 2004) raise concerns about the principles under-pinning the legislation, its efficacy and its suitability for contemporary childhood. The Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF, 2004) drew attention to the fact that domestic legislation and codes of practice on the employment of children are in fact found in a number of distinct and separate pieces of legislation. For some critics this in itself complicates the regulation of child employment (TUC, 2002).

A further complication lies in the fact that local authorities may introduce their own byelaws. Reviews of these byelaws in England (TUC, 2002; Hamilton, 2002; TUC/NSPCC, 2004) raised concerns that local byelaws do not reflect changes made to the central legislation, that there are confusing variations between the byelaws of different local authorities and that many of these byelaws fail to adequately distinguish the ages at which a child can work. This research also argued

that authorities are failing to provide adequate information to children, parents and employers about child employment laws.

The concerns regarding child employment legislation and regulation have, at various times, resulted in the issue making it onto the policy agenda. In 1998 Chris Pond, then a backbench MP, introduced a Private Member's Bill to tackle the identified problems. The then New Labour Government responded by persuading Pond to withdraw his Bill as the Government promised to introduce new guidelines for local authorities and to set up an interdepartmental enquiry (Hansard, 12 February, 1998). However, little came of these initiatives; the interdepartmental enquiry report was to all intents buried (Hobbs et al, 2009).

In 2004 the issue of child employment was once again on the policy agenda, this time as the result of a report from the BRTF. After reviewing the legislation and research evidence, the BRTF made a number of recommendations. A key proposal was to change the system of registration, moving away from registration of the individual child employee to one of employer registration. Initially the New Labour Government was supportive of these recommendations (Children and Young People Now, 2004). However there was little sign of action being taken and over time this support waned. By 2006, the Government indicated that it would not be acting on the BRTF proposals (Hansard, 22 June, 2006).

In 2010 child employment, along with child entertainment regulations became a focus of attention. The Department for Children, Schools and Families initiated research to consider the effectiveness of the regulation of child employees in England. The outcome of the General Election meant that this latest initiative could have ended at that point. However, the new Coalition government's Department for Education confirmed that they would proceed with this research. At the time of writing, the issue of child employment is therefore still on the policy agenda.

From the policy makers' perspective a key question that they need to consider is what is problematic about the current policy. A supplementary question is why so few permits are issued. McKechnie et al (2007) addressed these questions in the context of Scotland, highlighting failings in the work permit system and weaknesses in the way that local authorities managed their responsibilities in this area. We cannot simply generalise these findings to England as the local authority structure in Scotland and England differs. For example, there is some evidence that authorities in England may have been giving child employment a higher priority than their Scottish counterparts. In England, a number of authorities have specific staff who are identified as Child Employment and Entertainment Officers. As their title implies, they are responsible for implementing policy on child employment including child performers. Such positions were not found to exist in Scotland and these posts could impact on the effectiveness of the implementation of policy.

A limitation of the Scottish study was that it did not capture the views of local authority staff who implement this policy. By not doing that the study may be losing valuable insights regarding the potential strengths and weaknesses of the policy in this area.

This article addresses these issues by investigating local authorities' implementation of child employment policy in England. Using a range of methods, the article considers the views of those responsible for implementing policy. By adopting this approach we are able to address questions relating to the efficacy of the current system, an issue that is central to the policy debate in this area.

## The study

This article draws on the data from a large study into the effectiveness of child employment regulations in England (McKechnie et al, 2011). The study consisted of a number of inter-related elements. Here we focus on the findings from a survey of local authorities and from case studies based on interviews with local authority staff.

### The Survey

A sample of approximately one third of the responsible local authorities (n=51) in England were surveyed. The sample of authorities was selected to reflect the variations in the type of authority (Shire, Unitary, Metropolitan and London Borough), geographical location and socio-economic indicators. Table 1 provides a summary of the type and location of the authorities that participated.

**Table 1: Type and location of Local Authorities**

	Shire	Unitary	Metropolitan	London Borough
London				8
South East	5	3		
Yorkshire & Humberside		2	4	
North West	1	3	4	
North East		3	2	
East	3	2		
East Midlands	2	1		
West Midlands		1	3	
South West	1	3		
Total	12	18	13	8

The survey explored a range of issues regarding the regulation of child employment including:

number of staff involved in meeting this statutory duty; resources; current practices; the number of child employees currently registered to work; and the monitoring systems used by the authority. Respondents were also asked to indicate their views on the current registration system and to identify its main advantages and disadvantages.

### ***The case studies***

Following the survey five local authorities were asked to participate as case studies. In recruiting authorities we sought to reflect the variations between authorities identified in their survey responses. Table 2 summarises the case study sample.

**Table 2: Case study sample**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Rural/Non-Rural</b>	<b>Work permit level*</b>
A	South	Medium	Non-Rural	Very Low
B	W.Midlands	Medium	Non-Rural	Medium
C	North West	Large	Rural	Medium
D	North East	Small	Non-Rural	Low
E	East	Large	Rural	Very High

\*the use of the terms low, medium and high permit levels are relative terms since all authorities could be considered to have 'low' levels of work permits.

Local authorities participating in the case studies were asked to identify interviewees who were responsible for their authority's policy, practice and resources in this area. Authorities were asked to nominate up to three interviewees. Local authorities varied in the number of interviewees they put forward. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a total of eleven people. All interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to explore the data.

## **Findings**

### ***The survey***

In the following we focus on three aspects of the survey findings. These are: resources, monitoring child employment, and participants' views on the current registration system.

As noted above, previous research has shown that local authorities rely upon a 'work permit' system to licence young people who wish to work (McKechnie et al, 2007; Howieson et al, 2006;

Hamilton, 2002). The findings from this study confirm that the work permit system is the norm. All 51 authorities indicated that they use this type of system to meet their statutory duties in this area. However, the fact that all authorities use a work permit system does not mean that they support or implement it in the same way.

## Resources

Local authorities were asked to provide information on two aspects of the resources they assign to this area: staffing levels and activities they carry out. Authorities varied in the staffing levels they assigned to child employment. A minority of authorities (36%) indicated that staff dealing with this issue had it as their sole responsibility. In some of these cases, where child employment was the sole duty, the member of staff was employed on a part-time basis. A small number of authorities (14%) have more than one member of staff solely dedicated to this responsibility. It is notable that for the majority of authorities (64%) the staff responsible for managing child employment did this alongside other duties.

All of the authorities committed resources to providing information on child employment. This takes the form of leaflets, information packs or web based material. The material produced is meant to meet the needs of a range of potential end users (see Table 3). This material can be accessed by end users through web sites or by requesting copies of the material from the authority.

**Table 3 : Information for end users on child employment (%)**

Information provided for:	Yes	No	Number of local authorities
Parents/carers	92%	8%	51
Schools	73%	27%	51
Employers	94%	6%	51
School students	96%	4%	51

We asked authorities about the proactive approaches they adopted to inform and regulate child employment practices. Although the majority of authorities (n=49) indicated that they had been involved in some form of awareness raising activities to highlight the regulations, the extent and frequency of awareness raising activities is less than this figure might first suggest.

We grouped responses to this question into three categories; school based; employer focused and participation in the NNCEE national employment week. The latter initiative is organised by the National Network of Child Employment and Entertainment, a non-governmental organisation whose members are predominantly local authority employees responsible for child employment and entertainment.

Table 4 shows that while a number of authorities are involved in these activities, the frequency of the activity is more variable. Respondents indicated that a number of activities were 'one off' events while others described activities that had happened a few years ago. Some respondents indicated that they offered activities, such as visits to schools, but that the offer of such presentations was rarely taken up.

**Table 4: Awareness raising activities reported**

	<b>School-based</b>	<b>Employer-focused</b>	<b>Child Employment Week (NNCEE)</b>
No. of authorities	36	31	23

The most systematic activity that was recorded was participation in the NNCEE child employment week. A number of respondents indicated that this event was their main activity on disseminating information on child employment. However, as Table 4 shows, less than half of our authorities participate in this and it is an activity initiated by an NGO rather than the local authority.

### *Monitoring*

In theory, licensing the child employee means that the authority is then able to monitor the form of employment and ensure that it meets the requirements of the regulatory framework. This registration process also allows the authority to consider the appropriateness of employment for the individual child and their circumstances.

To assess the implementation of monitoring by a work permit system we asked authorities to provide us with information on the number of permits they had issued in the academic year 2009-10 and 2008-09. In addition we asked for the total number of permits issues in the period 2005-08.

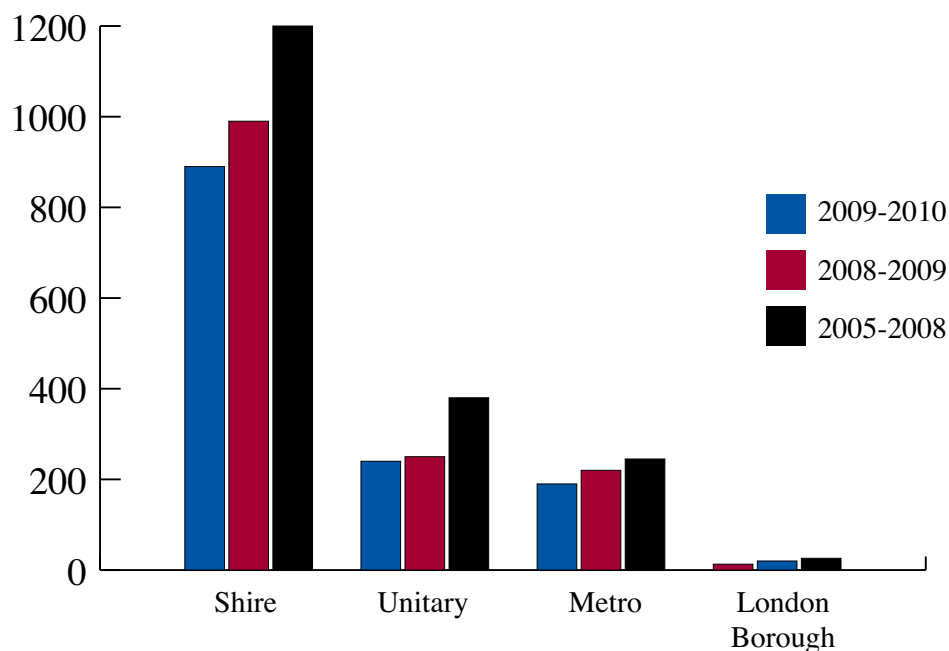
Of the 51 authorities surveyed, 76% (n=39) were able to provide information on the permits issued for the period 2009-10, 73% (n=37) for the period 2008-09 and 61% (n=31) for the period 2005-08. For those authorities which could not provide this information, some were aware that they had issued permits in these periods but did not have information on the numbers issued. In total, only 59% (n=30) of the authorities were able to provide work permit figures for all three time periods. It could be argued that these authorities are demonstrating some consistency in record keeping and we therefore focus on their data when reviewing permit numbers.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the number of permits issued by type of authority. In this figure we use the type of authority as a simple means of grouping the data, as the types of authority are



not directly comparable. For the period 2005-08 we have calculated the mean number of permits issued to ensure comparability with the other two time periods.

**Figure 1: Mean number of permits by type of authority**



The figure shows some variation in the number of permits issued over these time periods. In order to allow us to consider the extent of variability in permit levels within an authority over time we correlated permit levels for 2009-10 with 2008-09 ( $r = .96$ ,  $n=30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2009-10 with the mean number of permits issued in the period 2005-08 ( $r = .93$ ,  $n=30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The strong positive correlation figures indicate that there is a high degree of consistency in the number of permits issued over time by the authorities. Those authorities who issued high numbers of permits in 2009-10 had high levels in the other two time periods. The corollary is also supported by this data; those authorities with low permit levels are consistently low.

To fully assess the efficacy of the work permit system it is necessary to compare the number of permits issued against the number of working children. This approach was adopted by McKechnie et al (2007) in their study of local authorities in Scotland. The present project did not allow for the contemporaneous collection of information on the level of child employment.

However we can achieve some indication of the relationship between permits issued and numbers

working by drawing on evidence from other research and secondary sources, including the relatively recent national study of child employment in Scotland (Howieson et al, 2006). This study indicated that amongst Year 10 and Year 11 school pupils, 31% were currently involved in some form of part-time employment. This figure is consistent with other studies of child employment and there is no evidence in the existing literature that school children in Scotland are more or less likely to have a part-time job than their peers in England (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997). We therefore extrapolated this figure to the authorities in our sample to provide an indication of the relationship between permit levels and child employees. We will consider the limitations of this approach in the discussion.

Table 5 summarises the information on permit levels and estimated numbers of working children. We have used the permit levels from 2009-10 and the relevant school rolls for that year. From our original 30 local authorities that could provide consistent permit data, 29 were able to provide school roll information. The table provides an indication of the substantial gap between the number of permits issued and the estimated number of child employees. It is also evident that there is a degree of variability in the size of this gap between authorities. This means that authorities would vary in terms of the additional resources they would require in order to effectively implement the work permit system.

**Table 5: School roll, working students and work permits issued by local authority (2009-10)**

LA	School roll (13-15 yr olds)	Number working (estimate based on 31% working)	Total work permits (2009-10)	Total work permits (09-10) as percentage of estimated workers*
LA2	5210	1615	154	9%
LA6	36590	11343	313	3%
LA7	4880	1513	234	16%
LA8	10440	3236	81	3%
LA9	16610	5149	456	9%
LA10	17780	5512	969	18%
LA12	10450	3240	328	10%
LA13	17800	5518	714	13%
LA14	16350	5069	300	6%
LA18	1740	539	2	Less than 1%
LA20	4480	1389	3	Less than 1%
LA22	6440	1996	202	10%
<i>Continues on next page</i>				

LA23	8970	2781	195	7%
LA26	6380	1978	525	27%
LA28	31430	9743	1264	13%
LA31	11510	3568	161	5%
LA34	3720	1153	389	34%
LA35	47920	14855	1982	13%
LA37	5420	1680	39	2%
LA40	6030	1869	97	5%
LA41	7800	2418	109	5%
LA42	10690	3314	87	3%
LA43	15600	4836	424	9%
LA44	3440	1066	248	23%
LA45	9910	3072	285	9%
LA47	10760	3336	358	11%
LA48	8970	2781	45	2%
LA50	7820	2424	151	6%
LA51	26310	8156	379	5%

\*rounded to nearest whole percentage

Aggregating the number of potential child employees across all of the authorities and comparing that to the total number of work permits issued we estimate that just under one in ten (9%) of child employees have a work permit and local authorities are therefore unaware of the work undertaken by the majority.

### *Changes in work status and system checks*

The health of any system is likely to be reflected in its ability to effectively check compliance with regulations. In the present study 63% of authorities indicated that they had a system for checking school students' compliance and 78% had a system for employers. The systems in place in a number of instances refer to spot checks or mail shots to employers. We were unable to ascertain the frequency of these activities. In a number of cases the responses indicate that the current systems are reactive in the sense that they respond to issues raised by schools, teachers, parents or members of the public.

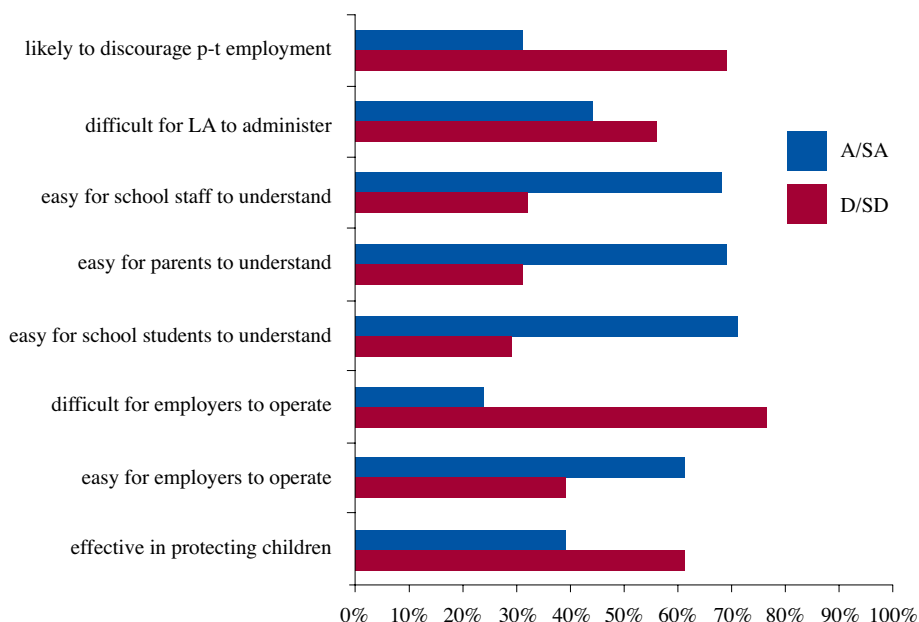
### *Views on the child employment registration system*

We sought to identify the strengths and weakness of the child employment systems within authorities by drawing on the experience of those who have to work with it on a daily basis. We did this in

two ways. Firstly, we asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements regarding the regulation of child employment. The statements covered issues such as ease of comprehension of the system, difficulty in administering, likelihood of discouraging part-time employment opportunities and effectiveness in protecting young employees. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on a four point scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree).

Figure 2 summarises the responses. The findings show that the majority are of the view that the system does not protect child employees. When we look at the use of the system then the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that the system is easy for employers to understand and most respondents are of the view that the system is not difficult for employers to operate.

**Figure 2: Current system: statement responses (%)**



**Key:** A/SA = agree or strongly agree; D/SD= disagree or strongly disagree.

The second approach we adopted to elicit views on the registration system was to ask respondents, in an open ended question, to indicate the advantages and disadvantages of the registration system. When considering the response under the heading of 'advantages' two dominant themes emerged. The first related to the clarity and simplicity of the registration system. Respondents commented on the fact that the system is 'simple and straightforward' and that the process of seeking a work

permit is 'clear for employer and parents' and 'not too demanding for the employer'. However we also have some comments indicating constraints: 'where employers comply the system is easy to administer'. The extent of employer engagement is viewed as a factor which limits the effectiveness of the system.

The second theme under the heading of advantages reflected respondents' views that the system allows for consideration of the individual child. This is demonstrated by one respondent stating that the system is:

*Child focused to the point where we know which individual children are working, what hours and type of work they are doing and where they are employed.*

Other respondents drew attention to the 'child focused' nature of the system by referring to advantages such as 'matches job and individual child' and 'allows for intervention if child's job is detrimental'. For other respondents the emphasis was placed on the protection of the young worker in that the system 'requires risk assessment' and that the 'student is protected and health and safety highlighted'. Also relevant to the focus on the individual child is the belief that the system encourages sharing of information about a child between the school and Education Welfare Departments.

When considering the disadvantages, responses were dominated by one central theme: the lack of resources. Respondents were of the view that local authorities fail to allocate adequate resources to this area and that in some localities 'staffing levels prohibit implementation of the system'. The lack of staff was identified as a factor which limited the capacity to follow up on permits and meant that there was 'no time to carry out checks or visit premises'. One respondent stated that:

*Little budget is ever allocated and we have to scrap for everything we get. Government should ensure that local authorities allocate an operating budget for this work.*

Other demands on staff time were also mentioned. In particular the fact that child employment responsibilities are combined with responsibility for issuing entertainment licences was viewed as problematic. This form of 'employment' is covered by a separate set of regulations and respondents indicated that dealing with child entertainment constrained the time they had for dealing with their general child employment role.

A number of other disadvantages were identified that went beyond the main resource issue. These included the failure of authorities to utilise effective ICT systems to support registration, the reactive rather than proactive nature of the system, the outdated nature of the underlying legislation, poor awareness levels, lack of legal powers to inspect and employers' failure to engage with the system.

The responses to these open ended questions suggest a tension between a system that respondents view as simple and straightforward and one that fails to function effectively due to limitations in resources and a number of issues that constrain the system.

## Case Studies

Adopting a more open-ended interview approach to the five case study authorities allowed us to explore the way that authorities dealt with the issue of child employment. For the purposes of this paper we focus on the authorities' implementation of policy, the goal of registration, resources and policy.

### Variability in implementation of responsibility

Interviewees were asked to outline the way that their authority implements its child employment responsibilities. Although all five employ a work permit system, it is clear that there were variations between the case studies in terms of the prioritisation of child employment.

Two of the authorities had long established child employment officers in post. For one authority two full-time officers were in place, in the second a small team of staff comprising of full-time and part-time staff and administrative support were in place (equivalent to 4 FTEs). In both of these authorities there were well established procedures in place for dealing with child employment issues. One other authority had one full-time child employment officer embedded in a team of Education Welfare Officers.

In contrast the two remaining authorities were less well organised. One had only recently employed a part-time child employment officer. This appointment was only made because the authority was due an inspection:

*I reminded them [we were due an inspection] and it [child employment] was a statutory responsibility, so they said ... 'get that job filled pretty damn quick', so I got it filled within weeks.*

We were told that prior to this all attempts to fill such a post had been refused.

The last authority had recently moved the responsibility for child employment and added it to an existing portfolio of a full-time member of staff. A key problem faced by this interviewee was that their authority had difficulty locating any usable byelaws:

*We had been negotiating with our legal [department] about where...to get somebody to go*

*into the borough archive to actually find them, then when they actually got somebody down to search they... hadn't got them.*

The documentation that they were provided with was so out of date as to be unusable and they had to start the process of constructing new byelaws for their authority. However, it was reported that this process in itself was time-consuming.

### *Goal of registration*

We found consensus on the perceived goal of registration. All of our interviewees made their responses within a framework that emphasised the need to protect young workers:

*It is primarily... well it's safeguarding to make sure that children aren't doing a job that they are not old enough to do or capable of doing from a point of view of being aware of the dangers.*

Another interviewee stated:

*Unless they have a work permit nobody centrally knows where they're working or that they are working... and if we don't know they're working we can't even think about is what they are doing safe? Is the place they're working safe?*

This interviewee went on to emphasise that we need to be aware that these young workers are different from adult employees and this system draws attention to that fact.

For a number of interviewees making sure children were safe in the workplace was viewed as a higher priority than concerns over any impact on their education. For others it was noted that there needs to be a balance between school and part-time work which acknowledges the potential learning aspect of employment.

### *Resources*

It is possible to get an inflated impression of the resources allocated by some authorities to child employment. As we found in the survey data one of the disadvantages of the current system is that staff responsible for child employment have to deal with other responsibilities, particularly child entertainment licences.

Our interviewees demonstrate the nature of the tension between these two roles. When asked about the division of time between these roles one respondent replied '80% entertainment and 20%

employment'. Another interviewee stated that:

*It's seasonal I would say...because of pantomimes and children shows...like toward the end of the year...it's been dominated by the performance...It's normally about 50/50 I would say.*

As is the case with child employment in England there is no national data on the number of children requiring entertainment licences. However, it is evident that dealing with entertainment licences can be a more time consuming process than issuing a work permit.

In addition to the resource demands of the dual roles of entertainment and employment we asked interviewees about the general level of resources available and how this is decided. For those interviewees involved in the implementation of this system it was clear that they were of the view that they are under-resourced:

*I could spend five days a week on this and I still wouldn't be able to do my own job... There's probably enough work to keep somebody occupied three days a week if you did it right and you actually did the promotion and inspection... but I don't think we're ever going to have the resources for that, I'm going to be lucky to get a day a week.*

Other interviewees drew attention to the resource gap they would face if they had to register all of the child employees in their area. In doing so they were acknowledging that they are aware that there are significant numbers of children working unregistered in their area but that it would be difficult for their authority to address this matter.

Across all of the interviews we were unable to identify a resource model that was driven by any evidence of the nature and extent of child employment in an authority. In one case, where an authority did have an evidence base highlighting the gap between current resources and the levels of employment in their area, this was not acted upon.

## Policy

Across our five case studies it emerged that responsibility for child employment was situated in different departments. In some cases they were part of an Independent Safeguarding Unit while other authorities situated this responsibility within Education Welfare Offices. Clearly there is a lack of a coherent approach to the location of this responsibility.

This variability was also evident regarding the establishment of policy on child employment. Policy initiatives tended to be driven from the bottom up. In one case study, the team responsible for child



employment had drafted a policy on child employment that they hoped would be agreed by their authority. For them the issue was one of having systems that were not reliant on an individual's knowledge or experience and that could stand changes in personnel:

*You really need to look at capacity issues about doing these things properly and when [the child employment officer] first comes into post... I mean I felt sorry for [them]... because most things are in my head.*

Another authority was in the final stages of a complete overhaul of the policy and systems. In contrast to the bottom up approach, the decision had been made by a line manager, with the support of their senior managers, to revise the approach to child employment registration. This involved the introduction of an online system to improve efficiency and ease of access. A similar request to introduce an online system in another authority had been turned down as being too costly.

There was agreement across our case studies that, while policy initiatives and resources are important issues, if we wish to improve the efficacy of the system any changes would be constrained by poor awareness levels and the existing legislation.

Limited awareness of this legislation was considered to be a major explanation for the poor compliance levels: 'The big difficulty is most of our employers don't know they even have to do it [get a work permit]'. Other interviewees suggested that improving awareness would have limited impact given the nature of the legislation itself:

*The law is so arcane and it... doesn't work for the employers, it doesn't work for the kids and it doesn't work for us as an authority just to try to manage it... it just doesn't work.*

The key problem identified was that legislation is no longer relevant. In particular, the constraints within the legislation on Sunday working and the watershed hours for the latest finishing times are seen as not having kept pace with contemporary society.

*It's definitely that Sunday one....you know it can't be right that you're still dealing with all the days back in 1933, it cannot be right in this day and age.*

For some interviewees it was clear that employers will not apply for permits because they know they will not get them. If the perceived risk of being caught breaching the child employment rules are small then this would add to the view that they can be ignored. By amending this legislation to reflect contemporary society it could be argued that employers may be more willing to engage with the system.

## Implications

This is the first study of its kind to explore the implementation of child employment policy in England. Previous research has raised questions about the efficacy of policy in this area (eg. Hamilton and Watt, 2004). The present findings provide an evidence base that clearly calls into question the extent to which local authorities are meeting their statutory obligations.

Our data shows that although all of the participating authorities rely upon a work permit system to register child employees, there is considerable variability between authorities in terms of staffing and engagement in proactive activities to disseminate information to key end users. A number of authorities are more readily categorised as being reactive in that they have information on policy available but end users need to seek it out. Few authorities are proactive in that they have regularly scheduled awareness raising activities; many events are 'one off' with the exception of the NNCEE (National Network for Child Employment and Entertainment) yearly event. However, less than half of our authorities have participated in this initiative.

Many of the survey respondents indicated that a particular problem with the current registration system is that there is a lack of awareness. The main constraint on raising awareness would appear to be the resource base. The case studies draw attention to the idea that having child employment specific staff in place is likely to be associated with having established procedures in place. However, being able to implement procedures requires a level of resource not currently made available within the authorities. Only a minority of authorities have staff where this is their sole responsibility and even these staff have to deal with 'entertainment' licensing in addition to employment.

Our survey responses indicate inadequate resourcing as a constraint on the registration system. The case studies reinforce this view, as we failed to find examples of a resource model that was based on any evidence of employment levels within an authority. In one case study where a strong evidence base did exist to demonstrate the extent of the authority's failings in this area, no action was taken. The prioritisation of this statutory obligation is clearly not high and as we saw in one case study staffing was only addressed when an inspection was due.

In order to provide some context within which to interpret the number of work permits issued by authorities we looked at this in light of the number of potential child employees in an area. We acknowledge that there are issues with extrapolating this data. For example, using a global estimate of employment fails to capture potential regional variations. However, we would argue that there is value in adopting this strategy in that it identifies the potential scale of the gap between permits issued and child employees. We have erred on the conservative side in our extrapolation in that we have used the school roll for 13-15 year olds and not included 15-16 year olds who would

also be covered by this legislation. Concerns over the validity of our extrapolation are assuaged by two findings. First, the extent of the gap between child employees and work permits mirror those found by McKechnie et al (2007) in Scotland where employment status data was collected contemporaneously with work permit information. Second, the nature of the gap identified in this study is comparable to findings from localised studies carried out in England (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; McKechnie et al, 2005).

We should also note that the survey responses and case study interviews indicated that those dealing with the system are aware that they are failing to capture even a majority of child employees and as such are failing to protect this group. The efficacy of the system is also called into question when we consider that only 59% of authorities were able to provide information on the number of permits issued in the specified time periods.

The unique nature of this study also allows us to identify a pattern in the number of permits issued over the time periods. In Shire, Unitary and Metropolitan authorities the general trend suggests a decline in the number of permits issued. This could be explained by a decline in the number of child employees. It has recently been suggested that there has been a decline in 'Saturday jobs' for school students (UKCES, 2012). However, there are problems with this claim. First, it is based on a study of 16 and 17 year olds, who are over the minimum school leaving age and hence are not in the age group regulated by child employment legislation. Secondly, the survey was not designed to take account of the special characteristics of part-time, as opposed to full-time, employment.

An alternative explanation for the decline in work permits is that there has been a decline in the number of legal child employees. This does not mean that child employment levels have fallen. If the system is ineffective then over time employers may see less value in complying as the likelihood of being caught or indeed penalised is very small. As we saw in our survey, participants indicated that a major weakness of the current system is the lack of effective inspection systems. In order to be able to resolve these alternative explanations we would need longitudinal data on child employment levels and that is not currently available in Britain.

The perception (and to a large extent the reality) that one is unlikely to be caught breaching this legislation may explain why some employers fail to comply. However, it is possible that compliance is diminished because users view the system as problematic. One problem could be that the system is onerous. However, our respondents indicated that they view the procedures as easy to understand and administer.

An alternative explanation for low compliance could be that the underlying legislation is perceived as problematic. A number of researchers have raised doubts about this legislation (Hamilton and Watt, 2004; TUC/NSPCC, 2004) and suggest that it needs to be overhauled. The legislation is

regarded as outdated in terms of its restriction on Sunday working, latest finishing times and allowing for byelaw variations. Policy reviews of this area have echoed these concerns (Dept. of Health, 1999; BRTF, 2004). If the regulations are perceived as out of date or not 'fit for purpose' they are unlikely to encourage employers to comply.

The failings in the registration system outlined above raise two questions, 'so what?' and 'what to do?' The first question, 'so what?', we might legitimately restate as 'does this matter?' Our participants clearly believe that there are reasons for concern. For them a key goal of this system is that it 'protects' young workers, many of them experiencing their introduction to the world of work. It was also felt that this registration system was important for employers in that it makes them aware that this group of employees are in some way different from older employees, requiring specific attention. Our findings show that in this sense the registration system is clearly failing the majority of working children. Even where child employees have work permits (a small minority) the lack of inspection means that checks are limited.

We would also argue that other research evidence suggests that this is an issue that does merit attention. There is now a body of evidence in Britain indicating that there is a relationship between working excessive hours and academic engagement and performance (for example McKechnie and Hobbs, 2001; Payne, 2003; Percy, 2010). While research needs still to definitively address the work-education relationship (see for example Bourdillon et al, 2010), the findings at present in Britain support the view that regulation of the number of hours worked is merited. Similarly, when we look at health and safety there are grounds for concern. Research into accidental injury amongst child employees is relatively scarce and faces a number of methodological problems (Hobbs et al, 2009). However, there is evidence that young employees do get injured at their work (for example O'Donnell and White, 1999). In the US, researchers have found that there is a relationship between having a work permit and receiving safety training (Zierold and Anderson, 2006). We need to be cautious in assuming comparability between the US and UK but the findings are of interest given the lack of research evidence from Britain.

Turning attention to the 'what to do?' question, there are a number of options open to policy makers. If the underlying system is robust then it could be argued that providing adequate resources will improve the level of work permits. This hypothesis has been tested and received some support (McKechnie et al, 2009). However, McKechnie et al (2009) also identified the scale of the resource needed in one local authority to improve permit levels. At present the Local Government Association is highlighting severe cuts to their members' core funding (BBC, 2012; Local Government Association, 2012). In this context the currently neglected area of child employment resourcing is unlikely to be prioritised.

An alternative option might be to consider whether a new system would be more effective and,

potentially, less demanding on resources. The BRTF (2004) recommended that an alternative registration system should be considered. This view was initially accepted by the then government but over time fell out of favour. The potential impact of adopting a new system is currently back on the agenda with the current government considering this proposition (McKechnie et al, 2011). We would argue, however, that a focus on an alternative registration system alone does not tackle the underlying problems in this area. Basing any new system on a legislative framework devised in the 1930s is, in our view, not feasible. If there is a desire to change the registration system then it is our contention that it should take place in the context of a wider debate. That debate would provide the opportunity to consider the issue of school pupils' part-time employment in the context of contemporary views of childhood and the changing perceptions of the relationship between work and education.

## Concluding Remarks

The findings from this study demonstrate the failings in the present approach to child employment in England and raises fundamental questions about the protection of child employees. Recent cuts to local authority core funding may simply exacerbate this situation. Now that child employment is once again on the policy agenda the challenge facing policy makers is one of deciding how to react. We will have to wait and see whether changes are made, whether these deal with the fundamental principles underpinning any system of regulation or whether child employment once again falls off the policy agenda.

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# THINKING SPACE



## It's business as usual: Newcastle, commissioning and cuts

*Michael Bell, Lizi Gray and Anne Marron*

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NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL announced in November 2012 that it proposed a £90million budget cut for the next 3 years (2013-2016). In January 2013 another £10 million cut was proposed, including the closure of several public swimming pools, public libraries, many cultural centres across the city and 100% of the arts budget. People stood in disbelief that the council could propose such a plan for the city. The 100% cut of the Youth Service and Play Service budget, and the withdrawal of statutory youth provision could have invisible been because round after round of previous cuts had meant significant numbers of youth workers had already been made redundant, their voices silent. The heart of the service had already been left hanging by a thread.

### The Dismantling of Statutory Youth Provision

Over previous years Newcastle City Council had been chipping away at the Youth Service and the effects of this are clear. The city-wide youth group 'Utter Legends' provides an example of how this had been experienced. The young people who were involved in the group had been targeted by youth services as part of their work with the management of Eldon Square, a central retail area being revamped in 2008. The management group of the shopping centre were concerned about young people meeting up on 'The Green' at the centre of the precinct, and lobbied for projects to be put in place to prevent anti-social behaviour. Initially, four youth workers were allocated to work with the group by the Local authority. Subsequently, this was reduced to two, one of whom has been with the group throughout the five years.

As a prominent city-centre youth group, Utter-Legends was ideally placed to become involved as a consultative group in the new **myplace** initiative in 2009, representing young people across the



city. Under the auspices of **myplace**, a national initiative created by the Labour Government, a new building-based city-centre youth project was planned for Newcastle. The plan was to centralise many of the city's voluntary and statutory youth services in one place, that would be designed by young people for young people and be easy and not intimidating to access.

After two years of planning and development, a change in local government from Liberal Democrat to Labour controlled, and the Central Coalition government announcing austerity measures, it came as a shock to the young people when it was announced that the **myplace** project was to be axed. The Leader of the Council Nick Forbes' answer to questions from the young people was plain and simple, that there was nothing he could do about it; the 'big bad Tories' wanted him to make cuts and this development seemed to be the most 'logical' place to start.

For the young people involved this was disheartening: two years of consultation and hard work were going to waste. But axing the development was just the start. By the end of the month Utter Legends had lost one of their youth workers after she was put onto a 'zero hour' contract and wasn't given any time to work with them. When the next round of cuts came in April 2012, they lost another three workers – meaning the group had lost all of its full-time female staff. Money was also inevitably an issue. The young people had less funding for projects and were looking wherever they could to be able to put on youth events like they had been doing previously. For five years, Utter Legends and youth workers had been meeting in the Connexions office on Percy Street, Newcastle. Then in September 2012, the office was closed. In the face of these changing circumstances, Utter Legends ceased to operate as a cohesive youth group.

The Connexions office closed at a time when so many young people might have needed its services – to respond to high levels of youth unemployment in the North East. Connexions was reduced to two workers working from the city centre library effectively nothing more than a website connection for young people seeking work.

During this time few statutory youth workers seemed to have an overall picture of what was happening in the wider city. They were not party to 'inside' information about decision-making. Meanwhile, redundancies and redeployment processes were fogged in the constant uncertainty of restructuring and efficiency savings, or obscured by the latest Central Government Policy rhetoric. How can you respond and act in a situation where you only catch glimpses of the truth? How can you make informed decisions when managers withhold information and make decisions without consultation? How do you attend to your relationships with young people in communities when you can be working in one area of the city one month only to find yourself 'restructured' into a different community or area at the whim of management next month?

## Commissioning and the move away from community-based services

In 2012 the Early Intervention Grant (EIG), that had been a significant source of funding for delivering positive activities for young people in Newcastle, was put out for tender. In response, nine voluntary sector neighbourhood projects, believing that there was opportunity and strength in numbers, grouped together into a consortium to tender for the delivery of community based youth services. Encouraged by council officers to participate in the commissioning process, their bid was nevertheless unsuccessful. A national voluntary organisation supported by three local non-neighbourhood projects, won the contract to deliver services across the city.

Despite making efforts to discover the reasons for the decision, information has not been forthcoming from Newcastle Council. The commissioning process has not been opaque and its consequences have been destructive of collaborative efforts by workers. The voluntary organisation that won the contract has top-sliced a significant proportion of the greatly reduced youth services budget for its own management costs. It has then proceeded to ask local projects, including those who originally combined in the consortium to compete for the limited funds available to deliver the few services that will be possible. This has undermined the solidarities which hitherto enabled local projects to co-operate for the benefit of young people and indeed for the benefit of greater efficiency in the service. Some members of the original neighbourhood group continue to meet while others have bid for the sub contracts. Those who have agreed to the sub contract will now be expected to deliver in areas where established work already exists. In addition, new sub-contractors are emerging, seeking to further sub contract to some of the remaining neighbourhood projects.

As a consequence, a culture of secrecy and hiding is emerging. Some staff and management committee member have refused to participate, or have resigned rather than add to the fragmentation sub-contracting has caused. They know that the work will last only as long as the contract. Moreover, the process creates winners and losers, and the loss far outweighs the gains. Thankfully those at the greatest risk of further loss are those who are least likely to be aware of what is happening. Yet these are the people who are supposed to benefit from the new allocation of funding and reorganisation of services. Let us not neglect the fact that these 'small' neighbourhood-based projects work with 1000s of young people a year and already have access to and relationships with the targeted NEETs and other groups that are of concern to policy-makers. Work with such groups levers in around £7 for every £1 invested by the local authority or central government. When tendering, the neighbourhood-based projects cited a joint income of 2.8 million (<http://www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/representinginfluencing/our-research>). They were staffed by about 50 people, managed by about 70 voluntary management committee members. Between them they have hundreds of years' experience and countless volunteers. In deciding to award the contract for delivery of services to a non-local organisation, the statutory sector not only undermined

neighbourhood services, but also created competition for already scarce resources. Moreover, this forces their own hand into directing future resources into their chosen ‘winner which will further undermine neighbourhood based work. This has been undertaken with no regard to the opinions or desires of local people.

Local youth workers are yet to hear from anyone who believes that targeted contract approaches are just and responsive to young people in neighbourhoods that require a little more than a laser guided intervention to make the difference. And yet, because of the overall shortage of resources and the desperate straits in which local projects find themselves, workers without exception have returned to their desks and agreed to contracts or to write the contract applications that involve them. They are thereby entering into a professional type of agreement to deliver targeted services without reference to the values of youth work. Their actions reveal this want of principle while the language of justification for participation in such a flawed process simply cloaks the complicity of workers in the building of a society no longer civic but simply contractual. Their work can no longer be based on values that place those using services on an equal footing with those delivering them. There is no longer even a partial acknowledgment that those who are suffering most from the impact of ‘austerity’ are well placed to inform what it is they need. The new contract is deliverable for a short time to a targeted few who are merely objects of the process and have no idea even that the intervention is coming their way.

The current process involves a shift away from a stated a commitment to equality, characterised by interventions which start where people are, usually in local neighbourhoods, to one which is characterised by a notion of ‘fairness’ as set out in *Newcastle’s Report of the Fairness Commission*. The Report seeks to inform decision-making in the current climate of austerity:

*We believe that a more equal society would be a fairer society. But fairness cannot wait on equality. As we work towards eliminating inequality we need to take fair decisions along the way. Indeed, fair choices would seem to be a prerequisite for equality. What should guide us in making these choices? And how can we avoid creating groups of people who feel they are being treated unfairly, excluded and forgotten?* (Newcastle City Council with Newcastle University, 2012:2).

It is possible that the writers may not have intended the replacement of concepts such as social justice or equal opportunities with ‘fairness’, but in practice it can support the removal of any ideas of equal opportunities informing for example, the commissioning of targeted services. The targeted few are as usual male. Sometimes they are black or other specified ethnicity, but yet again usually male and certainly working class and poor – because this is the group thought to create the greatest problem for others, though it might mean targeting the occasional single young female in ‘danger’ of giving birth – presumably to a male.

Concepts of ‘social justice’ are frequently referred to in the drive toward the removal of services from neighbourhoods through the commissioning approach and the emergence of a commissioning culture in social care areas where would-be service providers compete for short term lucrative contracts. Indeed many larger ‘providers’ have both welcomed and recommended themselves as advisors in the creation of such a culture using the rhetoric of ‘fairness’.

It ought not to surprise us that larger providers, including charities are the most likely beneficiaries at least in the short term of the commissioning process, and that they are using the rhetoric of social justice to further their own organisational and financial interests. In a letter to Sajid Javid, economic secretary to the treasury, fourteen ‘leaders from the voluntary sector’ have told the government that the sector ‘stands ready’ to implement government plans to privatise public services, cut benefits and entitlements and encourage volunteering as a substitute for statutory services. ([http://www.independentaction.net/2012/12/26/open\\_letter/](http://www.independentaction.net/2012/12/26/open_letter/)).

In the main, bodies that represent large charities have simply ignored the voluntary sector that exists at neighbourhood level in the hope of capitalising in the current climate. Yet their myopic behaviour will ensure that those better prepared to compete will benefit from their positioning:

*The NHS and charity providers might be shunted aside by large private companies such as Serco and G4S, who are ‘gearing up’ ... and are waiting in the wings (Tom Woodcock, cited in NCVS, 2012).*

So far commissioning seems to be proving a success in two key areas, – one in reducing costs to government and local authorities, and two in enabling the expansion and growth of those agencies geared up to take advantage of the commissioning culture. Such organisations are usually large and remote from neighbourhoods.

The results are that services such as youth work are less, or no longer resourced through grant aid approaches built on the experiences and knowledge of officers and councillors with all their fallibilities, yet accountable through democratic processes. Instead the services are provided via a contract with larger remote providers, with contractual responsibility usually in the form of targets met. Frequently this involves a bureaucratic process of justification, a paper form with boxes and outcomes filled in that does not necessarily equate with the experience on the ground. This approach wouldn’t be too worrisome if the newly re-organised services were an improvement on what had been there before. However, it is difficult to see this as the case in Newcastle. In practice a common emerging theme is that of sub-contracting to other smaller providers at low rates and with fewer resources than were previously available, to deliver something that enables them to at least formally meet the targets of the contract (see Bell, 2012). In this process, local projects, workers and neighbourhood residents find that not only are they forced to compete for

scarce resources rather than co-operate, but they are subjected to terms of reference not of their own making, excluded from decision-making processes, and frequently diverted from practices informed by their own beliefs, professional values, and experiences.

## In Defence of Youth Work and the Save Our Services Campaign

The In Defence of Youth Work North East (IDYWNE) group has been meeting regularly for the past few years and feeding a North East perspective into the national In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) campaign to build the national perspective by organising regional meetings, contributing with young people to the *This Is Youth Work* stories book project and follow up events (IDYW, 2012).

It was apparent throughout these meetings and discussions that a primary concern of the Youth Workers involved was to uphold the values of Youth Work; to ensure the preservation of their discipline and a commitment to the principles underpinning it.

With the announcement of the latest cuts in youth services in Newcastle, IDYWNE gathered swiftly to open up discussion with colleagues about the proposals. There was great concern that the funding allocation from central government was disproportionate to other local authorities in the UK. Although 'austerity' was cited as the cause it was clear, knowing the recent history of the Youth Service in Newcastle, that other factors were influencing the decision. If the cuts to services are agreed many areas of Newcastle will be plunged into further poverty and its consequences including vulnerability and structural disadvantage. With rising youth unemployment, punitive welfare reform with its negative impact on under 25 year olds, and concerns about growing youth homelessness, this is an important time to recognise young people as agents of change rather than as disadvantaged service users, commodities and consumers.

So, from IDYWNE, a campaign involving young people as well as workers, grew with the intention to fight the cuts. The campaign wants Newcastle Council to respond to Central Government with the clear message that the cuts are undeliverable. SOS:SAVE OUR SERVICES was born.

At present the campaign is being pursued by a concerned group of young people, youth workers, academics, vicars, students and local people who have joined together to oppose the proposals and demand that councillors and officers negotiate with constituents in a transparent consultation process to set a budget based on local need rather than private or 'third' sector profit.

SOS: Save our Services is acting in solidarity with the growing lobbies for a range of facilities in Newcastle which are facing devastating cuts, including the libraries, arts and culture, public

swimming pools and play services, but recognises the value in understanding as fully as possible the detail of the separate proposals for each service and facility as well as the likely overall impact and consequences the cuts will have on communities. In taking the campaign forward, as youth workers, we strive to keep youth work practice, values and principles at the heart of what we do.

We are building a creative campaign petitioning and door knocking with children and young people and their families, occupying libraries, play centres and youth clubs with activity days. Our Youth Club installation in December 2012 in the city centre was a focus for petitioning and awareness-raising with the public, drawing crowds and media attention. We were invited by Newcastle Youth Council (young people 11 – 18) to brief them on youth work, the cuts, the historic evolution and current situation regarding the commissioning of youth work in the city and to sit on their Youth Summit panel to represent the alternative views of IDYW, SOS, Youth Work, Youth Services to those promoted in current policy, in a panel debate with the Deputy Leader of the Council and a Lib Dem Councillor. The young people blogged and tweeted questions which were searching and demanding and in so doing, created great opportunity to highlight what we are protecting and demanding for children and young people in Newcastle, and why. Now the campaign is asking the Labour Group to do the same, to organise a full consultation with young people across the city with representation from diverse backgrounds, communities, identities and needs. Everybody is active and the strength of solidarity is growing between the different campaigns.

## Conclusion

It is obvious that Newcastle Council is in the process of handing over entire responsibility for youth services to competitors, to a future dependent on changing market forces and the auctioning off to the highest bidder young people's local social spaces, leisure time activities and places to meet, seek advice and support. In 2013, statutory youth work, youth clubs, youth centres will have all disappeared in Newcastle. The focus on targeting rather than process-based interventions and developments, an obsession with outcomes rather than relationship-building, and an obsession with bidding for tenders as a replacement for grant aiding has prioritised competition rather than caring in our profession. The current cuts are symbolic of the final nail in the coffin of dismantled locally based services, dislocating projects from each other and the local networks that evolved to share knowledge, identify local issues and develop services together with young people and communities with attention to their needs and wishes. As we write Michael Gove has just announced that youth policy should be a priority for local authorities and not one for central government. So as the parties continue to tussle, SOS are clear in their way forward, committed and together leading a campaign in Newcastle that has the principles of democratic decision making at its core, and opportunities for young people now and in the future in its heart.

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# Reviews

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Brian Belton

**Radical Youth Work: Developing Critical Perspectives and Professional Judgement**

Russell House Publishing 2010

ISBN: 978 1 905541 57 7

£16.95 (pbk)

pp. 124

Sue Robertson

IN HER FOREWORD to this book Mary Wolfe explains that *Radical Youth Work* should not be read from cover to cover but rather dipped into so we have time to measure its argument. It is certainly not written as a clear narrative but it does present a series of thought provoking ideas. Wolfe argues it will help us to reconsider our practice. I started dipping myself and so didn't read these comments until later but I agree with her that 'the author's sense of respect – and of affection – for youth work and for youth workers is always worthwhile and always present' (p.vi).

However, I do feel the lack of structure of the book is a problem. Apart from Belton's text it includes an article by Tania de St Croix explaining what she means by radical youth work and a concluding article by Zuber Ahmed. These sections and their relevance are not clearly explained by the author.

Tania de St Croix does provide a definition:

*Radical youth workers work informally with young people and take them seriously. Their daily work is informed by political and moral values; opposition to capitalism and authoritarianism, belief in equality and respect for the environment. They question 'common sense' and reflect critically on their work. They are aware that practising their beliefs will involve debate and struggle, but try to have fun too! (p.69).*

The motivation and enthusiasm for youth work of de St Croix are clear, and she gives examples of her own practice. However, although I assume Brian Belton agrees with this definition as the chapter is included, he states many problems with youth work and youth workers and indeed their training and many fears for the profession. Belton feels the field has become moribund, eroded by state strategies in line with funding requirements based on getting a malleable workforce. This may



be borne out by changes occurring currently. However he does rather blame workers for this, for not being radical enough in asserting their profession, rather than laying the blame where it mainly lies, with government policy.

His method of writing is to pick a concept and talk around it, ranging from Foucault to Lockerbie to Edmund Spenser. It is an entertaining read and in conversation one could argue back, but his argument tends to get lost in the rush of ideas. Belton seems to see youth work as a vocation and a role which requires freedom from employment policies and practices, something many workers would not have. He feels youth workers are politically naïve and youth work texts banal. He uses his own biography to critique the whole notion of places for young people and the colonisation trend of obliging young people to get involved with youth work: 'As a youth the last place I or anyone I knew wanted to be was a place designed for "youth"' (p.3).

He aims to provide motivation for radicals to acquire critical perspectives and assert their professional judgement, but by knocking down the central tenets of youth work he seems to be arguing that youth work is not needed. In Chapter 5 entitled 'We don't need no education' he discusses his childhood in Montevideo and questions the notion of informal education as 'covert indoctrination' which only reaches a minority of the youth population in any case.

Although he states that he does not want to clutter the text with too much citation, more would be helpful on occasion. For example he uses Illich's ideas to extrapolate from medicine into youth work, to argue that professional intervention damages those 'targeted', but do these analogies work for youth work?

*For instance the prognosis of poor self esteem is made as if the professional was dealing with an endemic condition or disease and that the appropriate treatment is to 'change' the 'infected' person – to bring them into line with acceptable forms of behaviour' (p.26).*

Elsewhere he criticises the Chicago School, 'well known in the world of sociology before it became dominated by ideological fanatics, pointed out that freedom without power, just like power without freedom, is intolerable' (p.55) without explaining who the fanatics were.

There are some interesting challenges to practitioners such as the notion of youth workers as guerrillas. In Chapter 8, Belton explains his own theory under the heading RAC: Regard, Accompaniment and Consideration. He explains what he means by these and the book could usefully have built on these ideas for practice. Zuber Ahmed concludes the book with an interesting discussion which also describes education as colonisation.

Youth work currently needs a coherent defence and I do not feel this text provides this. Although

it is thought provoking it is too discursive and eclectic, and it is difficult to follow any coherent argument. Belton sets out to break down some well known concepts and sets out to tackle the current paucity of critique of current ideas related to youth work, but this left me feeling as though all our clothes have been taken away – what is left? If a youth worker does no more than a post-person (p.xv), what is the point of qualification or of courses such as that on which Belton teaches? Being radical must offer us an alternative, not just knock our sacred cows. Yes, we may have failed to keep youth work as a professional practice, but this book does not explain why that matters.

**Sue Robertson was formerly a youth worker and youth work educator, and is now Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee on Brighton and Hove City Council (as Sue Shanks).**

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*Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson*

**From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery: The Democratic Route**

University of London Press 2011

ISBN: 978 0 85473 917 2

£15.99 (pbk)

pp. 89

Nicolas Dobson

BOB DYLAN famously opined that 'he who is not busy being born is busy dying'. It is not difficult to read this as an exhortation for a life of permanent discovery: a command, perhaps, to shake off 'the dead hand of the past' (quoting another icon of American culture) and seek meaning in the unknown, unimagined and unrealised. Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson, in this compelling but flawed survey of contemporary educational trends, are after something similar, seeking as they do to reinstate discovery and experimentation at the heart of our curriculum. However, unlike Dylan, they make it clear that what is at stake is less individual experience than democracy itself.

Individual enhancement, to be sure, is one of the educational rights they focus on, citing Basil Bernstein: 'the right to be more personally, more intellectually, more socially, more materially' (1996:7). But this is not enough – and, one might add, plays very easily to a view of the world in which consumer choice and material acquisition are seen as the apotheosis of freedom (and in which the alleged triumph of capitalist democracy has settled all questions about the fundamental organisation of society). It also evokes a narcissism and sense of personal entitlement which demean and unmoor demands for equality-based justice. Bernstein's second and third rights, however, the right to be included and the right to participate, bring the crucial social and political dimensions of education into view, and it is with regards to these aspects of education, and their neglect, or deliberate concealment, that the thesis of Coffield and Williamson is primarily concerned.

One of the problems obscuring serious debate on education, argue the authors, is the language in which the debate is currently couched and which helps determine what possibilities we imagine for it. Coffield and Williamson demonstrate how an ideology evincing an irrational faith in the free market as the arbiter of progress has constructed a view of the modern school in which education has become a kind of commodity to be assessed and measured like anything else on the production line. The ‘junk language’ that makes up this ideology ‘corrupts our thinking and dehumanises our relationships’ (p.3). Coffield and Williamson cite as examples of this phrases such as ‘future-proofed’, ‘UK PLC’ and ‘inputs and outputs’, and the substitution of ‘line manager’ for ‘head of department’ and ‘customers’ for ‘students’ (pp.2-3). Such terminology, in their view, helps to sustain a fundamental misconception about what education is, or should be – that is, an incubator for democratic citizenship. Instead of a system run to the logic of business, which all but guarantees the reproduction of social inequities, we need a fundamental overhaul based on the logic of democracy.

Most left-leaning readers will find little to quibble with in Coffield and Williamson’s basic analysis, that highlighting the chronic failures of the education system (in which, for example, between a third and two-thirds of children since 1945 have left compulsory schooling with no apparent achievements, with the implied consequences of low self-esteem and alienation), and should warm to an admirable spirit of outrage and urgency. Conservatives will also sympathise with their complaints about over-centralisation, narrow teaching and the degrading of teachers’ professional autonomy. In recent years both right and left have united over the suspicion that standards have been hollowed out in one way or another, despite rising test scores, and that the system is not working as it should. It is to be hoped, then, that this book can find a large and receptive audience, because if it does one thing successfully it is to argue for a superior quality of debate, one that engages with basic questions around the philosophy of education and imagines alternatives to the neoliberal consensus.

However, it is a rather bleak commentary on the poverty of mainstream discourse around education that their book can claim a radical, rather than reformist status. Coffield and Williamson’s critique is familiar to anyone conversant with educational trends of the last thirty years, and at times seems merely to replace one set of platitudes with another, albeit more palatable to progressive instincts. The invocation in passing of familiar icons of the modern left (Noam Chomsky) or progressive causes (the Arab Spring) adds to the sense of pandering to an established audience, and in a book espousing the virtues of openness and collaborative learning the nod to a thinker as intellectually arrogant – and divisive – as Chomsky is somewhat ironic.

There is, of course, an argument for writing an inclusive book: one that approaches or implies potentially radical solutions without spelling them out, one that does the theoretical and empirical groundwork on which bolder proposals can be advanced. Its length – the text is only 76 pages – suggests that breadth and size of readership was also high up the authors’ agenda. But the style of the book occasionally veers close to a parody of liberal humanism – for example, the proposition

that ‘all educators are learners and all learners are educators’ (p.49) – so it is hard to be sanguine about it reaching beyond an audience already sympathetic to its ideas.

Because of this, it is unfortunate that Coffield and Williamson seem fearful to go where their analysis might take them – for example, in the section dealing with the limitations of fixed, compulsory curricula and other standard features of schooling as an institution. This would seem an obvious place to engage with the arguments of the de-schooling movement and Ivan Illich, or to offer a more detailed vision of how and why compulsory schooling might be retained but reformed in a more democratic fashion. They do emphasise such themes as the importance and success of informal education (including that taking place in the youth work and prison sectors); the function of extra-school resources (eg. travel experiences, books and other forms of cultural capital) in maintaining the advantages of the better-off; and the close relationship between schooling and the perpetuation of social inequities.

Illich is not the only one to be short-changed. John Dewey is passed over with a fairly brief comment, despite the relevance and force of his ideas, and the Liberal Educationalists – and their detailed, and important critique of progressivism – are ignored. To fulfil their aim of raising awareness of alternatives to the neoliberal consensus, Coffield and Williamson might have done better to survey the ways in which education has been conceived in different traditions, and to discuss how the problems of education have been theorised and debated by philosophers. For all their insights into the colossal failures of the current system, and the laudable motivations underpinning this project, *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery* feels a bit slight: worthy but undernourished, and lacking the philosophical backbone or aesthetic cogency to mobilise a broader constituency.

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**Nicolas Dobson is partway through an MA in Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.**

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*Doug Nicholls*

**For Youth Workers and Youth Work: Speaking out for a Better Future**

The Policy Press 2012

ISBN: 9781847428707

£14.99 (pbk)

pp. 274

Charlie Cooper

I KNOW OF Doug Nicholls' excellent work with the trade union CYWU/Unite and have met him a few times. What struck me most of all about him is that, despite the increasingly brutalising context of life in Britain for young people and youth workers, and calls from elements within the youth-work field for us to become more 'pragmatic' in these changing times, he has been unflinching in his belief that youth work remains a potentially powerful transformative force for social equality and justice. It is a belief I ardently share and so it was with great anticipation that I awaited the publication of this book.

As Howard Williamson states in his back cover, this is a passionate, polemical, provocative and partisan defence of critical youth work practice. The book is inspired by the late Shelley Giorgi – youth worker, socialist and trade unionist – and represents a call for youth workers to engage within a broad social movement of resistance to the forces of neoliberalism in pursuit of social change. Youth work here is not confined to providing 'positive activities' as promoted under New Labour and the Conservative-led Coalition but has a political purpose, especially at a time when 'society starts to relinquish responsibility for its citizens, particularly the weakest ones' (p.58).

Over the last three decades, UK Governments, equally wedded to neoliberal orthodoxies, have presided over the incremental dismantling of the post-war social democratic Keynesian welfare 'consensus', overseeing widening social inequality, the erosion of citizenship rights and the stifling of democracy. Young people, particularly those from working class and ethnic minority communities, are among those most disadvantaged by these changes.

Nicholls alludes to Giroux's analysis of the impact of neoliberalism on young people in the US to draw parallels with what is happening to young people in the UK. Social policy under neoliberalism requires a profound shift away from state interventions aimed at maintaining full employment and a democratically-controlled welfare system – measures seen as a burden to market efficiency – towards a new state authoritarianism where the inability of individuals to take responsibility for their own wellbeing under market conditions is redefined in terms of cultural deficit rather than structural failings. As a consequence, the pathologisation and criminalisation of human suffering takes precedence over progressive fiscal or welfare solutions. At the same time under neoliberalism, the irresponsibilities and crimes of the powerful – a profligate banking sector and dissolute corporations; and fraudulent politicians and cabinet war criminals in cahoots with a corrupt media industry – remain beyond scrutiny.

In explaining how such a brutally unjust and inhuman state of affairs is allowed to continue, Nicholls draws from Marx, Freire and Gramsci, and the notion of 'false consciousness that entraps subordinate groups into accepting their reality in passive and fatalistic ways, leaving the power and privilege of the dominant forces and power elites unchallenged' (p.60). Social status is increasingly discovered through what we consume as individuals in the market rather than what we create

collectively in the public realm. And if we fail as consumers there is little or no alternative for us. Those spaces where young people might have once found a sense of ontological security and solidarity with others – apprenticeships; workplaces; working men’s clubs; political associations; youth clubs; on the football terraces; parks and street corners – have largely been destroyed under neoliberalism. There is an urgent need, as Nicholls makes clear, to challenge this growing estrangement and ‘youth work must instil a consciousness about overcoming this fundamental form of social alienation’ (p.223).

So how is this to be done? The answer, for Nicholls, lies in ‘a radical tradition of education with an explicitly socialist dimension’ (p.231). Again here, we see the influence of Giroux in Nicholls’ thesis. Giroux argues the need for education to provide a public space where we can ‘learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to imagine otherwise and develop discourses that are crucial for defending vital social institutions as a public good’ (Giroux 2011:81). For Giroux, the task is to reconstruct the public spheres of civil society ‘where democratic ideals, visions, and social relations can be nurtured and developed as part of a genuinely meaningful education and politics’ (Giroux 2012:8). As Nicholls suggests, we need to reclaim education as a public good ‘committed to teaching young people about how to govern rather than merely be governed’ (Giroux 2012:7). We need to imagine education systems that not only provide the knowledge and skills necessary for the world of work, but also enable engagement in the public sphere as critical, responsible and active citizens.

Nicholls argues that youth workers ‘must know more of their own history and the social history of youth work, and relish in particular the fact that they are inhabiting a tradition that stretches back deep into the Middle Ages’ (p.227). This tradition has been a radical one where the class divide from feudalism to capitalism has been consistently contested. It was precisely because the early education of the working classes challenged the establishment – be it the teachings of the Lollards, Levellers, Diggers, Sunday School movement, trade unionists, socialist groups, Tolpuddle Martyrs or Chartists – that the state established elementary schooling for the working class for the first time in 1870 in an attempt to ‘subvert the radical potential that working-class self-education threatened’ (Jones and Novak, 2000:45). As Nicholls argues, ‘the rich seam of radical education that has been developed in Britain should be mined again, renewed and changed, recognising that education is the key to social transformation and human equality’ (p.234). The challenge for youth work is to bring together the ‘best of past thought, practice and action in a concentrated and determined form to enable more radical questioning of the world around us and therefore the potential for transforming it’ (p.221). Youth work is unapologetically a political process and part of a wider struggle for social change.

There is just one area of disagreement I have with Nicholls’ analysis and that is his assessment on ‘multiculturalism’. Nicholls sees multiculturalism as a licence for individuals to be left alone to do

whatever they like because this is justified by their cultural difference. Such thinking, he argues, 'led to division and the ghettoisation of immigrant communities' (p.195). Such arguments are consistent with those of centre-left anti-multiculturalists such as Trevor Phillips, Kenan Malik and Hugo Young, and the call to assert a core commonality of what we understand by 'Britishness', the corollary being, how do we design social-policy interventions to encourage 'others' to assimilate/integrate with this? Other than the question of why immigrant communities are ghettoised – best explained by examining processes of subjective, structural and institutionalised racism – 'multiculturalism' is a highly problematic and contested concept. However, the idea of multiculturalism as used by such commentators as Bhikhu Parekh is helpful in explaining how societies have many distinct identities, and that there is no single, fixed, homogenous cultural identity that is best. Culture is in a state of constant flux, with different cultures borrowing from each other and transforming themselves in the process.

With this one caveat, *For Youth Workers and Youth Work* is an accessible, essential and timely read for statutory and voluntary sector service managers, youth workers, educationalists, students and policy makers interested in the wellbeing of young people in Britain both now and in the future, and how best to promote youth work. I strongly recommend it.

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**Charlie Cooper, University of Hull.**

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*Christopher Uhl with Dana L. Stuchul*

### **Teaching as if Life Matters: The Promise of a New Education Culture**

John Hopkins University Press 2011

ISBN: 978-1421400396

£13 (pbk.)

pp. 224

Graham Griffiths

WRITTEN WITH passion and concern about the effects of education within the USA, this book offers us an insightful critique of current US educational models and processes. Christopher Uhl,

with the support of Dana Stuchul, asks important questions about the purpose and direction of educational practice and analyses the situation on individual and societal levels. Too many of us have heard children and young people say ‘school or college is boring’ or words to that effect. With the average pupil or student in mind, Uhl searches for explanations and solutions. He argues that a new holistic and transformative approach to education is necessary and believes that a new culture must emerge and be adopted by educators to transform the educational experience for both students and educators.

Despite being based on the experience of living and working in the USA, this book offers the reflective practitioner in the UK the opportunity to draw parallels with their work and explore practical ways forward. Where it may be particularly valuable to UK readers is in the variety of techniques it shares to develop practice. Drawing on his lifetime experience in teaching, Uhl paints a picture where an educator can become disillusioned with the education system and their contribution to it. He argues that restrictions placed on educators by bureaucracy, a central curriculum and inspections have the effect of stifling creativity. In these circumstances an educator can be drained of energy and spirit.

Uhl explores his own philosophy and challenges the reader to understand their own style and approach. The book is underpinned by a call to recognise the needs of individual students and develop a positive relationship with the learner. He argues that the educator must have the courage to move away from a mechanistic approach limited by an imposed curriculum, and replace it with one supporting pupil independence and questioning: echoes here of the philosophy of youth and community work.

What leads this Professor with thirty years of teaching experience to advocate such a radical departure from his previous approach? Writing about how he initially struggled to find a focus for his book, he describes an ‘itch’ which came to be interpreted as uncertainty. He suggests that his own education encouraged him to be obedient, quiet and dependent rather than questioning, and his experiences of school caused dullness and loss of sparkle. In his view these experiences are shared by others who have lost their innocence and been overtaken by submission and melancholy. Uhl suggests that he accumulated a series of school ‘wounds’ during the educational process. His analysis of the consequences of these ‘wounds’ is supplemented by observations drawn from his career as a teacher.

Uhl’s analysis does not simply rely on attitudes to the individual in school. He highlights what he sees as ‘separation’ throughout society. An indication of this ‘separation’ is that the individual is not educated in a holistic way; pupils are simply educated to the planned curriculum outcomes in a mechanical and technocratic way reflecting the needs of a previous age. In an echo of our stance as youth and community workers, this book argues that relationships based on respect should be central to the educational process.



Uhl challenges what he sees as fundamental myths about education which undermine the educational experience. The myths are: that learning best takes place within classrooms and school; that learning is best accomplished through the direct transfer of knowledge from teacher to pupil; that learning is best when carrots and sticks are available to teachers; and finally, that learning should be grounded in objectification. Uhl sees these four myths about education leading to false conditioning and socialisation. To a youth and community worker steeped in the significance of experiential learning this has a strong resonance.

Uhl puts forward a case for adopting three new 'R's' of education: relationships with self; relationships with others; and relationships with the earth. Adopting this approach would counter the current separation between education and feelings and in turn produce a holistic approach to education. He goes on to explore what went wrong, suggesting that modern schooling ignores the body. Uhl argues that we need to know ourselves both inside and outside the classroom. Critically there is a need to question and ask questions rather than simply accept.

Observing and talking to his students at Pennsylvania State University he sees echoes of his own school experiences. Uhl argues that students are stifled by their education. He points out that many pupils are alienated and bored by their school experiences, some two thirds according to the US 2008 National High School Survey of Student Engagement (p.187).

As an ecologist Uhl argues that education is out of touch with the needs of the environment and planet. His central focus about the failings of education is set alongside a concern for the effects of human behaviour on the environment. In addition to this the individual effects of addictive behaviours, eating, rushing or worrying takes a negative toll. In Uhl's view the relationship between the body and earth needs renewing so that the individual can become self-actualising.

For educational commentators in the UK, and particularly for youth and community workers, often called upon to work with disaffected pupils on school sites or within pupil withdrawal units, there will be many resonances with his criticisms about the educational experience of young people, particularly his contention that education favours control and compliance rather than free thinking and critical awareness.

So does Uhl suggest a way forward? He draws examples from work undertaken with students on a short teaching course and focuses on five key areas to develop practice, giving practical examples. His first call is for teachers to understand themselves and to love and through this accept their students for who they are, so that they can teach as if life matters. Secondly he wants students to become more aware of both mind and body through the environment created by teachers. Thirdly he wants questioning to be accepted and fostered as an aid to learning. Next he wants students to see through new eyes and with new perspectives. Finally he wants to encourage what he calls 'classroom kinship'.

I would argue that more analysis is needed about the influence of economic and class backgrounds. Uhl's approach could also be clarified by illuminating the central theorists who influenced his practice. The ultimate value of this book to a youth and community work audience lies in encouraging critical reflection and offering suggestions to deal with specific situations. Though the book may only reach a small readership in the UK it offers a practical and solution focused way forward for those willing to explore their own philosophy and practice.

**Graeme Griffiths, Lecturer, Bradford College.**

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*Michael Wyness*

**Childhood And Society**

Palgrave Macmillan 2012

ISBN: 13-978-0-230-24182-4

£29.99 (Pbk.)

pp. 330

David Palmer

THAT THE FIRST edition of *Childhood and Society* published six years ago should be followed so quickly with this admirable second edition not only pays tribute to its much cited forerunner but also does much to highlight the importance of the burgeoning field of the sociology of childhood. Six years is a huge chunk of time in a child's life and in terms of the challenges they face in a fast moving, increasingly globalised world, challenges mirrored in the theories, policy and practice that impact upon their lives.

The first part of the book focuses on opposing theoretical standpoints around childhood. Some considerable depth and breadth is explored which, whilst perhaps necessitating a re-read for those new to the sociology of childhood, is nonetheless thought provoking and fosters in the reader a willingness to challenge their own assumptions. The early chapters throw the spotlight on the sociological theories of childhood such as social constructionism and take account of historical influences on how children are positioned in society. Influences such as the feminist movement are examined and parallels drawn between how the dominant discourse in the twentieth century was centred around the 'best interests' of children, arguing that this echoes the earlier position of women within a largely patriarchal society.

Cultural imperatives are also explored with some fascinating examples of how the Western approach to childhood bears little resemblance to countries where economic production involves all members of a family. Wyness cites the work of Qvortrup et al (1994) and their attempts to bring children into view, to see them as 'dependent beings' rather than 'dependent becomings' (Lee, 2001). For example, where Western governments have promoted child care to help people back

into work, 'bringing children into view would mean that we would have to... measure the effects of child care on the children themselves' (p.53).

Chapter 3 begins to place theory into a modern context, giving a tantalising overview of how modern children's agency has been enhanced. Here Wyness touches on individualisation, consumerism, the Global Child, the prevalence of mental health issues among children, the drive for academic success and the impulse amongst adults to exercise more control of children as they seemingly adapt more quickly to a fast changing world.

Chapter 4 examines what Prout and James (1997) call the 'dominant framework', a series of broad principles that are common to developmental psychologists' and sociologists' interpretation of the nature of childhood. The author then deals succinctly with the differing approaches of developmentalism and socialisation to the process of growing up, citing, in the former, the influence of Piaget in the measurement of cognitive growth and in the latter, the work of Durkheim and Elkins amongst others. A very topical and stimulating analysis of current ways of thinking about childhood that challenge the dominant framework concludes this key chapter and cleverly sets the scene for Parts 2 and 3 allowing the reader to see current issues that impact on children's lives through a more analytical and discriminating lens.

Part 2 commences with a contemporary look at the age old theme of childhood in crisis and how this crisis cements the accepted wisdom of where children are placed in our society and how this is perpetuated by policy makers. Wyness draws on media demonisation of children and of teenage mothers to exemplify the 'problem of youth' and then widens the discussion into a global context with a look at street children. Excellent case studies on child soldiers and child carers help to bolster Wyness's argument that the child crisis theme 'presupposes a universal and naturalised view of the child' (p.129) and that children in these circumstances show a degree of agency that confronts enduring models of childhood.

The book's key theme of 'agency' runs through Chapter 6's analysis of the political response to the perceived crisis of childhood with particular reference to child abuse and child crime. The chapter goes on to present a series of models of child agency, for example in care proceedings where the wishes and feelings of the child in question are of real importance. The final chapter of Part 2 focuses on how in the West our understanding of childhood is bound to our understanding of schooling which acts as a vehicle for the positioning and regulation of children in society. Comparisons with developing countries are drawn and, aptly, a fascinating account of home schooling serves as a counterweight to the view that education and schooling can be readily conflated.

The third part of the book takes the discourse around children's agency further by examining a range of circumstances within which children can make a difference, where their ideas can be

taken seriously and where the political sphere acknowledge this. Wyness argues for the positive aspects of technology and seeks to mollify the fears of adults, proposing that far from isolating children, technology actually creates myriad new social groups. The author opines that this fact is not lost on advertisers who increasingly target young people as a discrete, sophisticated market. Some strong arguments are made that provide ample food for lively debate. Chapter 9 looks at how research into childhood is increasingly seen by researchers as an opportunity to work with children rather than on children. The chapter is of particular use to those considering a research project as not only does it highlight ethical and methodological considerations of research, it also exemplifies one of the themes of the book, namely that if one can cut through adult expectations one can more easily hear the voice of the young person.

This issue of voice is further explored through the chapter on children's rights and politics. Wyness highlights some of the criticisms of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), particularly the cultural ambiguity it throws up despite its effectiveness in helping establish a social ontology for children. Three excellent case studies of children's agency within the political sphere end this chapter; these actually merit a chapter of their own. The book concludes with a welcome addition to the first edition, a chapter that revisits some of the themes of the rights agenda by analysing child work and labour in a global context and using children's accounts as evidence. The issues raised include some that will be of particular interest to educationalists, for example the comparisons between what is pejoratively termed 'child labour' and the 'over scheduled childhoods' of middle class families in the developed world.

This is a highly accessible, hugely valuable book that undergraduate and postgraduate students across a range of social science disciplines will find by turns fascinating and provocative, stimulating and inspiring.

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