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Special Issue: Youth Work and Research

Proving Our Worth? Youth Work,
'Race' and Evidence

Mentoring: A qualitative evaluation
of what works and what does not

Reconnecting With Evaluation: The
benefits of using a participatory
approach to assess impact

On Measuring Youth Work in
the United States: The Role of
Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Riotous Assemblies

Thinking Space: What's Positive
for Youth? A critical look at the
Government's emerging 'youth
policy'

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About *Youth & Policy*

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

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

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

All members of the *Youth & Policy* editorial group are involved in education, professional practice and research in the field of informal education, community work and youth work. The journal is run on a not-for-profit basis. Editors and Associate Editors all work in a voluntary and unpaid capacity.

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Contributors

Susan Cooper is a Senior Lecturer in Community and Youth Studies at the University College Plymouth St. Mark and St. John.

Michael J. Crawford is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Kansas.

Bernard Davies is an independent trainer and consultant. He is a Visiting Professor at De Montfort University.

Daz Greenop is Senior Lecturer/Research Fellow at Liverpool John Moores University Centre for Social Work.

David Hansen is an Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas where he teaches graduate students in the School of Education.

John Pitts is Vauxhall Professor of Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Bedfordshire.

Jean Spence has recently retired as a lecturer in Community and Youth work at Durham University. She is a member of the *Youth & Policy* editorial group.

Paul Thomas is a Reader in Youth and Education at the University of Huddersfield and Course Leader for their graduate-entry JNC course.

Jason Wood is a Principal Lecturer in Youth and Community Development at De Montfort University. He is currently seconded to the DMU Square Mile community engagement initiative as its Research Director.

YOUTH WORK AND RESEARCH: EDITORIAL

Jean Spence and Jason Wood

DEBATES ABOUT the interplay between youth work research, policy and practice have gained particular prominence in the past twelve months. The announcement of an Education Select Committee *Inquiry into Services for Young People* in late 2010 together with its ensuing sessions and published evidence (House of Commons, 2011) has put the issue of youth services, and the question of proof of their impact on young people, into the parliamentary domain. Protests from workers and young people, political organisation by the CYWU, the *In Defence of Youth Work* campaign have been important counterblasts to the cuts agenda, but the threat to youth services is fundamental. It presages not only the absolute demise of statutory youth work, but also a tightening of central government control over the priorities of the voluntary sector. In the context of diminishing resources and the seeming ease with which cuts have been levelled at youth services, it is inevitable that questions of value, process and impact have been on people's minds. Recent online debates amongst members of the Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (The Training Agencies Group) about the forthcoming National Occupational Standards for Youth and Community Work, focusing on the question of values, have also challenged contributors to think about the purpose and value of youth.

Alongside these pressing issues, the last two decades have been witness to an absolute growth of academic interest in young people and the youth professions. This has been accompanied by a shift from the dominant 'cultural studies' interest of the 1970s and 1980s towards research which tends to focus upon the 'condition' of young people often with 'persistent bias' towards research into negative aspects of adolescence (Ayman-Nolley and Taira, 2000). Changing interests have been stimulated by the changing economic, and institutional circumstances of 'youth', by the funding environment for research, and related to this, by the focus of government upon youth related issues and problems and the role of policy and professional practice in addressing those problems. The growing obsession with evidence-based policy and practice has been one feature of the decline of universalism in welfare practices, holding the apparent promise that accurate and detailed data can offset claims of ideological bias in policy-making and at the same time help to facilitate the more efficient and effective targeting of funding and practice priorities towards specific social problems.

In a climate of encouragement some efforts to broaden social science research have undoubtedly helped develop understanding of the complexity and subjectivity of young people's experiences (see Hine, 2009 for a review) but the way in which such evidence is interpreted and used is context

specific. As detailed evidence has been forthcoming particularly about the impact upon young people of other structural inequalities which in turn problematises the whole concept of youth as a universal social category (Jeffs and Smith, 1999), so the political desire to further refine and target social and welfare services has been reinforced. The universalism inscribed within the traditions, particularly of statutory youth work, has been seriously challenged in this environment, destabilising received wisdom and provoking debate and discussion within policy and the professions about the purpose of and value of work with young people. As policy decisions have moved the work increasingly towards targeted and individualised approaches (Kemshall, 2009), youth professionals concerned with collective and informal educational approaches have been provoked to defend their practices, not only through campaigns but also through efforts to provide 'evidence' of the effectiveness of their approach (albeit in a context which prioritises different concerns). The drive to conduct research about 'what works' regarding interventions with young people has been further stimulated by the research environment within universities and the extent to which resources and status in that environment have become dependent upon successful research practice through the Research Assessment Exercise and now, the Research Excellence Framework.

Not surprisingly therefore, in recent times, the youth work literature base has expanded significantly with new writers offering insights into diverse areas of research and practice theory, but mostly this is written for the student market. There has been relatively little success amongst academics involved in youth work education in accessing large grants for independent research into their areas of interest. Reasons for this include the small size and resource base of community and youth work within universities and the intense competition for funding from the Research Councils which makes it problematic to commit scarce resources 'up front' to make a funding bid which has a low chance of succeeding. Moreover, the culture of community and youth work education emphasises the importance of professional practice outside the university, and this practice field harbours a lingering anti-intellectualism, which has contributed to an associated absence of a tradition of systematic sociological research practice within the training programmes and perhaps a widespread lack of ambition in seeking funding for research. Youth work academics have had rather more involvement in contributing to evaluations of policy or organisational initiatives which can draw on their practice understanding, but in this capacity, their independence as researchers is explicitly circumscribed by policy concerns.

Given this context, discussion about the relationship between the research, policy and practices of youth work is both timely and crucial. *Youth & Policy* has since its inception been concerned to publish articles which use research data to support critical discussion as well as discussing the political implications of research practice (Catan, 2002; 2002/3; Issitt and Spence, 2005). The last issue of the journal (106), included a number of articles which specifically addressed the question of evidence (Jeffs, 2011; Davies, 2011; Mckee, 2011). Issue 107 continues the explicit research theme. In this opening paper we consider aspects of the youth work/research dynamic by exploring the problems

of what counts as ‘evidence’ and the political context in which it is generated and used. In doing so, we raise questions about the relations of power between the practices of research, policy-making and youth work itself. We conclude our contribution with something of a call to arms. Research is an intensely political act and we should not shy away from it. Youth work practice can be enhanced by a better understanding of the lives of young people and the approaches that are used to engage them, but such knowledge and understanding depends upon critical engagement with the possibilities and limitations of research practices as much as upon the data or ‘evidence’ generated by research.

Youth work and ‘evidence’

Although the history of youth work is peppered with publications about its practices which offer descriptions of its processes and insights into its positive influence upon young people, questions about how to objectively account for its impact continue to vex. Often, practitioners will talk of the young person they chance upon a decade or so after first meeting them in a youth club. The individual will share stories of how they have changed into a ‘responsible adult’ and attribute some of their valued experience and knowledge to the youth worker’s involvement. For example, at a recent reunion to mark the thirtieth anniversary of a local youth project, attended by one of the authors of this Introduction, participants who were now in their forties made statements such as ‘the project showed us that there was a world outside’ and ‘when you were a youth worker you introduced me to new and different food’. Similarly, in an interview about his participation in a Boys’ Club in the 1930s, a man in his 70s was able to produce the actual reference that had been given to him by the Club Leader which helped him access his first job and he said that the club had taught him that he could strive to ‘be somebody’ and hope to do well in life – a message he had encountered nowhere else. The work which Bernard Davies has been doing with the In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) campaign to collect ‘stories from practice’ (Davies, 2011; IDYW, 2011) uses educational and narrative research methods, and suggests that there is a wealth of similar narrative material available which might be similarly systematised perhaps. The research methods of oral history are also useful in this regard. At present, mostly such evidence remains in the realm of the anecdotal and in contrast to their liveliness in describing these encounters, practitioners will also often share some frustrations at not being able to raise such rich description of what they do to the status of ‘evidence’. This conundrum was recognised by the select committee who noted on the one hand that: ‘we received a huge amount of persuasive anecdotal and personal evidence about the value that services can have for young people’ (House of Commons 2011: 18) but:

Despite the weight of individual testimonies, we experienced great difficulty in finding objective evidence of the impact of services, whether in the guise of thematic research studies by academics and independent bodies, or of evaluations of individual services. This problem plagued our investigations and was recognised by many in the youth sector itself as a historic and continuing problem.

It is odd that the collective weight of ‘individual testimonies’ does not count as ‘objective evidence’, and to some extent this is indicative of a lack of trust in the truth claims of practitioners. Yet even if it is acknowledged that there is an element of subjective interest in the telling of particular stories, testimonies, like any evidence in a court of law, can be contextualised and subjected to rigorous evaluation and judgement to offer what might be claimed to be a reasonably accurate picture of the benefits of practice. However, the pursuit of ‘evidence of impact’ or ‘outcomes’ is not centrally concerned with the question of ‘truth’. Rather it is related directly to the desire to undertake cost-benefit analysis of services, and to control and reshape practice according to current political agendas. As such it invites the criticism that it is narrowly focused and essentially time limited in outlook. For example, the very simple question, ‘At what point does an outcome manifest itself?’ raises serious questions in terms of life trajectories which are particularly pertinent given the discussion above about the retrospective understanding of adults regarding the impact of youth work upon them. Approaches which purport to measure impact therefore inevitably fail to fully encapsulate the potential contribution (or not) of youth work to young people’s lives. They only make sense in terms of policy context which anticipates particular outcomes from particular interventions within a given time-frame. This is a segmented view which deconstructs practice into discrete elements and denies the universal, informal educational traditions of youth work practice. Moreover, as Howard Williamson stated in giving evidence to the select committee:

It’s like looking for the Holy Grail to be searching for impact measures from what is sometimes a brief encounter with youth work, sometimes a leisure-based encounter over a period of time and sometimes a serious encounter over a longer period (House of Commons, 2011: 24).

Behind the specifics, there are some well rehearsed general problems about evidence and youth work which lie in the general methodological dominance of quantification in social policy. Concepts such as ‘measurement’ hold weight in the debate about supposed ‘objective’ evaluation and sit within the ‘positivist’ paradigm of social research. The heavy emphasis on quantification in science has led to less quantifiable methods within the social sciences being labelled as ‘soft’ (Guba and Lincoln, 2004). Politicians may find themselves more at ease with statistical patterns about young people over the complexities of individual, in-depth stories with reference to their need to make generalized decisions about political positions and policy development. This in turn can lead to selectivity in terms of which research data to use as evidence in terms of the fit with overall policy frameworks. Thus, notoriously, work by Feinstein et al (2004) was quickly seized upon by government ministers as evidence that attending unstructured youth clubs may in fact compound the social exclusion of disadvantaged young people. There was little doubt that this evidence carried weight because of its reliance on proven statistical approaches (regressive analysis) to examining British Cohort Study data, but it was also appropriate to government intentions at the time to direct resources away from open informal educational youth work towards a more structured welfare-educational approach related to youth problems.

Because of their link with the natural sciences, patterns, measurement and quantification hold a 'powerful illusion' of certainty (Fraser and Robinson, 2004: 75). As Maximillian Cohen asserts in the film *Pi*:

1. Mathematics is the language of nature. 2. Everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers. 3. If you graph these numbers, patterns emerge. Therefore: There are patterns everywhere in nature.

The counterargument against positivism is strongest in academic and practice literature and weakest in policy and political arenas. Compelling criticisms stem from those who challenge notions that positivist research could be divorced from the political and social context in which knowledge is generated (see for example the overview of feminist critiques, Sprague and Zimmerman 2004: 40-44). As such, questions asked during research, the design itself and consequent interpretation of results invariably reflect a specific worldview and an often taken for granted one at that. Whilst there is no doubt that positivist approaches to research do inform knowledge, this is only one possible view and there are questions about whether the type of knowledge generated within it is sufficient to fully understand meaning and value in human relationships. In a profession where the interpersonal is integral to the method, then it is hardly surprising that the scientism of positivism is problematic, and that qualitative approaches are more likely to be favoured by those sensitive to practice processes. The youth worker Berger Hammerschlag claimed in 1955 that, 'little can be achieved by scientific methods in the humane field, as science at best can only be a subordinated tool' (p.11). However, in the current arrangement between research and practice, dependent upon political favour, it is practice which has become the subordinated tool.

France's (2008) review of early intervention and risk prevention social policy paradigms offers important critiques of positivist research in relation to youth policy. A central problem is that of attempting to categorise human behaviour, the life course and other aspects of personal and social development through a 'neo-positivist' approach to science. Essentially, all facets are reduced to risk factors ('social facts') that become 'objective and measurable' (France 2008: 4). One serious problem with such an approach is that behaviour becomes 'dichotomous, being one thing or the other' (ibid). As Hine notes, despite the apparent complexity of young people's lives:

Policy tends to categorise young people into boxes and deals with them within those categories... These boxes tend to be dualistic and separate young people in ways that do not match the real world, for example they are an offender or they are not an offender, they are a truant or they are not, they are in need of protection or not, they are troubled and vulnerable or they are troublesome and a threat. In reality these categories are never as simple as this, nor are they necessarily mutually exclusive. These views of young people are based on Western middle class norms of a linear path to adulthood, a path which does not acknowledge gender, ethnicity or

disability, nor the reality of young people's lives (Hine, 2009: 38-39).

Moreover, as analysis of the relevant policy documents has demonstrated, fundamental concepts such as 'risk' which seem to be absolute in terms of their meaning, turn out to be highly volatile and 'liquid' in practice, slipping in meaning according to the context in which they are adopted (Turnbull and Spence, 2011).

The continual favouring of positivist or neo-positivist research has contributed to a body of work that consistently frames young people as individual sites of concern. This is in some ways self-perpetuating. As governments wish to solve the problems which are identified in the body politic as efficiently as possible, so they will support research and pay attention to evidence which is problem orientated. It is therefore in the interests of researchers to design research projects which investigate youth 'problems'. Whether in health research (the number of teenage conceptions; risky sexual behaviour; misuse of substances), in criminal justice (re-offending rates) or in education (rates of attrition from GCSE to A-Level), a unifying theme is one of research that attempts to explain problems through wide-scale analysis of how young people live their lives today.

It is unsurprising that research and evaluation designed to investigate youth work or similar practice seeks to 'mirror' this problem orientation, asking questions such as, 'How did we impact upon re-offending rates?', 'How many young people did not become pregnant?', and so on. As such, even that research which is not situated squarely within a positivist approach, and which offers the more detailed and nuanced insights which can be achieved through developmental and detailed humanistic methods, nevertheless is affected by the agenda of identifying problems and measuring the impact of interventions on problems.

The pursuit of the Holy Grail

A policy culture of surrender to the power of the positivist discourse has been more acutely felt as a consequence of the increased managerialism of public services from 1997 onwards. Particular approaches to research and evidence must be assessed as one tool in the state's efforts to centralise control of resources and to discipline the workforce to 'deliver' policy intentions. New Labour came to power when the post-war welfare consensus was effectively over (Newman, 2001) and on the back of over two decades of gradual mistrust and attempts to dismantle state-welfare. Public services underwent seemingly perpetual reform in continuation of the New Right's agenda of widespread restructuring and repositioning of the welfare system which led to a distinction between old and new ways of managing public services. According to Flynn, 'in all cases, the "old" is presented as bad and the "new" as good' (1997: 3). To focus public service reform, 'New Labour emphasized ever firmer targets and standards' (Tyler, 2009: 237) designed to increase accountability and measure inputs, outputs, value and to some degree 'impact' (Banks, 2004). Technocratic and standardized

forms of ‘capturing’ practice reflected increasingly functional approaches to intervention, designed to circumvent professional ambiguity and supposedly informed by ‘evidence’. The imposition of such processes was not confined to youth work which in fact was fairly late in the reform agenda (Davies, 2009). As Davies notes:

[Youth workers] can often fail to notice that, as always, powerful political imperatives are driving social policy agendas – that ‘they’, far from just picking on ‘us’, have other services in their sights too; that ‘we’ are in fact simply being caught up in a much bigger strategy (Davies, 2009: 188).

For many in public services, the target-culture failed to acknowledge anything like the complexities of practice and the lives of those who were affected (Hine, 2009). But of course, engaging with complexity is problematic for centralised decision-making and it was not the main purpose of the exercise. Rather the motivation was to impose central control on ‘risky’ and volatile young people and the professional practices which engaged with them. In the emergent new welfare culture, the processes of research have value mainly insofar as they contribute to organizational effectiveness and efficiency – however that is politically defined. Although efforts were made to implement a ‘magic triangle’ of research, policy and practice that allocated equal roles to each interest group, (eg. Catan, 2002/3), practitioners (and inevitably, young people) have not had an equal voice in the process. Part of the managerial exercise of reshaping public services involves a loss of autonomy in face to face work, a growth of accountability away from the field and towards the organisation, and a shift in power towards the centre. Instead of exercising critical understanding and agency in their relationships with young people, ceding some responsibility and power to young people themselves, youth workers and other people professionals have been increasingly constrained to ‘deliver’ government and organisational policy initiatives. The process of disciplining the ‘professional’ workforce, of ensuring accountability, involves the mobilization of research as evaluation.

Evaluations of practice are presented mainly in terms of the objective aspirations of research methods to identify ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t work’ with reference to pre-determined aims and objectives. In this context, dependence upon quantitative methods is abandoned because qualitative methods are understood to be particularly appropriate as the means of researchers gaining acceptance in the field and gleaning opinions from the subjective experiences and understanding of a range of ‘stakeholders’. What is particularly important here in terms of the role of research in the practice environment, is who is setting the terms for the evaluation, who identifies the aims and purposes against which the evidence is being measured, how far the questions asked in the research process are relevant to the work on the ground, and who decides what the priorities are in interpreting the meaning of the data collected. Whilst there are obviously issues relating to the validity of method in producing appropriate data to inform objective knowledge, there are also serious and important questions about the relations of power which frame the whole approach.

Evaluations do not necessarily discipline workers, but in a managerial culture, they are most likely to be deployed to this effect. It is perhaps no wonder that practitioners are often wary of research.

Those who commission research-based evaluations often hold a vested political interest in determining particular outcomes. At the very least they are inclined to exercise 'caution' in the ways in which they 'phrase recommendations based on the research they support' as Liza Catan noted in relation to the ESRC Youth Research Programme of 1997-2002 (Catan, 2002).

Both the editors of this volume have encountered challenges in undertaking evaluative work for paymasters who do not wish to tamper with 'evidence' but who nevertheless seek particular results. In one case, a potential impact evaluation of a pilot scheme was reduced to a tighter focus on 'processes'. Despite the premise that the pilot evaluation would inform whether national roll-out of the scheme would go ahead, a decision in favour had been reached and the associated planning commenced long before the evaluation was completed. In another case, research-based decisions about the nature of the sample were overturned in favour of pragmatic choices relating to what might yield particular types of evidence, and then further amended in the course of the evaluation with regard to concerns entirely outside research methods. In a similar vein, emphases and priorities in reporting the meaning of the evidence were shaped according to the demands of political expediency and control. Decision-making around research and evaluation is clearly related to the power relations between different interests in a research team as well as between the research team and the organization and individuals who are the subjects/objects of study. This is as true of a local situation involving small organizations funded by charities and employing independent consultants to produce evaluation reports assessing how the money has been spent, as it is of national evaluations involving ministers, civil servants, and commissioned research bodies.

It is clear that Government's use of research as a ...mixed and patchy story, ranging from earnest and honest use of research findings in decision making and policy development, through to selective quotation to back decisions reached by other means, and, upon occasion, distortion and even suppression of research findings which run counter to decisions taken for entirely other reasons. The assumptions about what it is to commission research at the Centre are echoed at the periphery, in Local Authorities, Health Authorities and the larger voluntary organizations (Catan, 2002:2)

The quality and meaning of evidence cannot be divorced from, and needs to be critically understood with reference to the political context in which it is generated and used or indeed, ignored. The relationship between political interest and research is often most acutely felt in criminal justice where claims of an evidence-base to policy and practice do not hold in the face of political populism. For example, despite evidence that the effectiveness of prison is questionable at best, the

political emphasis on using prison as a populist response to public concern about crime continues unabated (Tonry, 2003). Hine neatly sums up the obvious tension in this conundrum:

Crime and law and order are highly politicised issues and the symbolic impact of responses to it can be more important than their actual effectiveness (Hine, 2008: 25).

Symbols are important counter-arguments to evidence because they provide a more vivid expression of genuinely felt fears than the complexities of variable 'evidence'. And the use of symbols is intimately linked to power. As Pitts points out in his discussion about the recent riots in this volume, the definition of wrong-doing is related to who does it; it is hardly 'objective'. Problem definitions of the 2011 summer riots, and the government and judicial responses, reflect entrenched social class divisions. In a similar way, definitions of key social policy terms such as 'disadvantage' or 'risk' are symbolically associated with particular groups who thereby become the object of research in these terms. Unless we adopt a critical approach to such underlying categories, then research data is likely to simply add to the partiality and inequity.

Towards 'enlightenment'

Over-concern with the 'gold-standard' of large scale positivist research, or the diversion of energy into narrow evaluations of policy 'outcomes' and the pursuit of impact, can deflect us from valuing and asking some of the real questions that independent research can address. Although it would be foolish to claim that any research is entirely value-free or disinterested (indeed, value-driven research is vital), it is possible to suggest that fundamentally research is best when it concerns 'enlightenment' (Young et al, 2002): sufficiently divorced from commissioners and pre-defined, narrow parameters to enable exploration and understanding of social science topics (in this case, young people and youth work). Such research begins with a sympathy towards and awareness of what 'is' rather than with abstracted reference to 'what ought to be'. It develops as an open ended process of questioning and discovery, deploying methods which are responsive to the situation as well as to the need to gather data systematically. The work can be small or large scale. It can include quantification and it can demonstrate its rigour through reflecting the best traditions and innovative developments in qualitative research. It can deal with 'big data' and with the everyday conversations that young people have with their peers.

Enlightenment research is not merely challenged by the dominant policy discourses described above, it is also challenged by the diminishing resources available to researchers to explore open questions, free of the interference that can negate efforts. However, an enlightened approach is not impossible. Indeed it could be argued that it is the responsibility of all academics and practitioners involved in working with young people to incorporate research into their everyday practices in these terms. In this sense, research does not exist as a process separate from everyday academic or

professional practice, but is integral to it as a means of increasing understanding and knowledge in terms which are appropriate to the values of the work.

As the pages of this journal have demonstrated over the years, important research has been and is undertaken that helps us to better understand the lives of young people. In particular, the body of work that places primacy on how young people interpret their lived experiences is methodologically and philosophically important, not least in response to those issues outlined in this introductory chapter. Relevant research approaches in these terms are not only undertaken within sociology but are also found in a number of disciplines with which youth workers would find interesting alignment. A great deal of work has been undertaken within sociology with reference to the conceptual framework of youth transitions. Questions of structural inequality, and the issues which are seen as relevant in the real lives of young people have all been addressed within such research (eg. MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). That, and other sociological research has dealt with policy and practice issues as well as making a concerted effort to reflect the views and opinions of young people themselves (eg. Henderson et al, 2006). There is also a growing body of work in political and social geography around children's geographies, that has provided insight into how young people use and claim space and their inclusion or exclusion from certain spaces (eg. Weller, 2007). This is significant research in the context of the increased policy regulation of young people's behaviour in communities. International and larger scale work by Ungar (2004; 2007) has provided important counter-arguments to dominant perspectives on young people and risk, by challenging external problem definitions and inviting more culturally competent assessments of 'resilience'. Such work challenges us to think about the sometimes disjointed relationship between policy objectives and the 'real world'. Rather than understanding young people in dichotomous categories or broad labels, we accept that young people's lives are inherently more complex: their subjective experience of the everyday worlds they occupy may not always lend itself to easy, external classification. Actions, behaviours or experiences that may, to outsiders, be seen as irrational or ill-considered may in fact be subjectively rational to the young people (Ungar 2004; 2007). For practice to appreciate the nuances and gradients of the experience of young people, it needs to take account of research that considers their perspectives on their experiences and to take account of the different disciplinary contexts in which such work is undertaken.

Connected to this point is the question of how we can better understand the lives of young people through an engagement with young people's localised worlds, something that the growing body of critical and political geography is helping us to grasp, and which has also been a strong feature of some contributions to *Youth & Policy* (eg. Scott, 2000; Brent, 2001; Moore, 2003/4). In a discussion about subjectivity in youth studies research, France argues that an understanding of the everyday, real worlds of young people can help us to understand their interaction with global, national and social policy influences, for:

Locality...remains an important site in shaping a young sense of place in the world. If we are to grasp the complexity of young people's lives and the choices they make we therefore need to understand the influence and interplay between the local and the global
(France 2007: 157-158).

Such debates appeal to those in academia who acknowledge the significance of the practices of youth and community work and who subscribe to certain personal, political and professional values and beliefs about the place of young people in the world. Particular importance in associated research practices is placed on developing disciplined dialogue with young people 'about values and moral principles, and the practice of virtue, through their own action, reflection and learning' (Young, 1999: 121). Put simply, to understand how to best work with young people, one must listen to them and engage with them in an analysis of how they experience and interpret the worlds they occupy. This implies the necessity of deploying research methodologies which enable such listening and engagement to emerge. Work that emphasises trans-disciplinary approaches not only broadens the range of research questions and insights from which we can draw, but can also usefully remind us of the significance of practice methodologies for research methods, and the importance of unimpeded collaborative approaches between research and practice.

The focus on young people is one important strand of independent contemporary research, but there is also a necessity to focus on practitioners and their understanding of practice in research processes which are not caught up in the closed circle of outcome-led evaluation. In prescriptive policy contexts it can be easy to reduce understanding of practice realities precisely because of the often narrow scope of evaluation described above. In contrast, open research with practitioners which hears 'voices from practice' (Spence and Devanney, 2006) can provide important insights into the collective values, methods and contexts of practice which can enable practitioners to evaluate the quality of their work independently of policy imperatives. Workers do not passively 'receive and deliver' policy. Nor do they necessarily accept as given the terms of reference inscribed within policy discourses. Rather, workers are active agents with their working environment. For example, research around risk has shown that far from accepting technocratic and restrictive labels, practitioners work as 'firewalls' to mediate policy impacts (Kemshall 2009). The little research which has focused upon the practitioner experience of recent years suggests that there are common professional practice processes, experiences and understanding which are integral to the work but which have been decentered and silenced in the current policy environment. Appropriate research can make a contribution towards reinstalling the concerns of practitioners into mainstream debate. Investigative work can also identify how practitioners respond to shifting policy contexts as the recent inquiries by Bernard Davies and Bryan Merton have illustrated. These reflections on practice enable us to locate our own work in a broader context of experience which, in turn, helps us better understand the interplay of values and methods in youth work and offers a basis for mutuality, trust and collective organisation.

The term enlightenment is therefore most appropriate for the type of research we would wish to promote. There are good reasons to be suspicious of evaluations and the evidence trail but to retreat from arguing the case for research altogether inevitably fuels the more powerful discourses. Open questions, prompting processes of open-ended enquiry and discovery and utilising research methods which are relevant to both the requirements of research rigour and the sensitivities of the practice field are needed so that our understandings and critiques of the people, policy and practice of youth work can flourish. We cannot wait for, nor expect sponsorship for such approaches from external bodies whose interests and priorities are not aligned with those of our field of concern. Instead, we must seek to remain informed of that research which can make a contribution to practice in relevant terms, and also, importantly, integrate critical research into our practice as academics and fieldworkers to the point where we can use the evidence it produces self-confidently and without fear of its insights.

This issue

As noted above, *Youth & Policy* continues to offer an important avenue through which the intersection of youth work research, policy and practice is subjected to critique and development. A special issue on research might therefore seem a bit of an odd choice. Nonetheless, it seems necessary to draw attention to the fact that there is research evidence available for the use of politicians, policy-makers and practitioners and the articles in this issue do speak specifically to the relationship between the three critical interest groups.

The recent House of Commons inquiry which prompted the decision to produce this special issue suggested that the evidence-base for the effectiveness of youth work is limited. Thomas takes issue with this and draws attention to a field of academic literature which has used the practice environment of youth work to gather knowledge-producing evidence in the field of race, racism and ethnic identity. In this sense, Thomas moves the debate beyond the immediate question of evidence produced about the impact of a specific service in its own bounded arena, to thinking more widely about how researchers gain access to information and knowledge and the context in which we come to 'know'. The fact that youth work has offered a rich environment for research, since its earliest days, is often forgotten or ignored – consider, for instance how the early club workers used girls' clubs in particular, to gather evidence about conditions of work and infringements of the factory acts, and how the experience of working in clubs and settlements contributed to the interests and knowledge base of politicians such as Clement Attlee. Thomas also alludes to the fact that there is a broad range of pre-existing research which does go some way towards directly demonstrating the value of youth work practice, but this has not been mobilised effectively in their own interest by practitioners or academics in the field. The Select Committee has recommended that a meta-analysis of studies relating to the impact and effectiveness of youth services should be undertaken. This is welcomed by Thomas in his article. Had such an enterprise been undertaken early in the

evolution of the Positive for Youth proposals, might the policies reflect a broader understanding of young people and youth work? Thomas further argues that publicly funded youth work can have an impact but that we need to move beyond the limited and mechanistic understandings of what impact is. As he argues succinctly: 'Drawing on [wider] knowledge can help to avoid very expensive and counter-productive social policy mistakes'.

It may be that the promotion of any particular contemporary set of practices might at some point be assessed as 'expensive mistakes'. Mentoring has been a vogue activity in recent years, responding perhaps to the trend towards the individualisation and problem-orientation of policy initiatives. In exploring an evaluation of mentoring services, Greenop is concerned with the relationship between sponsorship of such work and the value of the evidence supporting this particular approach to working with young people identified as 'at risk'. He notes that the over-emphasis upon measuring 'outcomes' in the context of a 'contract' culture, has distorted the evidence-base for effectiveness. A lack of theoretical coherence in practice is related to an absence of a context-sensitive and systematic approach to research and evaluation. Mentoring, and similar forms of work with individuals, has seen significant growth over the past decade but as the author acknowledges, evaluation of its value has largely been located in the 'grey literature' reflecting the concerns of the House of Commons debate referred to in this Introduction. In using qualitative and creative multi-methods, Greenop demonstrates something of the range of possible research approaches which can be mobilised and different types of data which might be available for interpretation by the critical and analytical researcher/practitioner. The article sets out to examine the impact of the mentoring relationship through the eyes of mentees and others involved. Interestingly, the article suggests that the impact of successful mentoring increases over time, thus supporting the contention that the time-limits on research studies have an important impact upon the value of the evidence produced. The results of the evaluation reported by Greenop reveal the importance of trust and a willingness to address the multi-faceted nature of young people's lives. These views correspond with the findings from the Evaluation of the Impact of Connexions on Young People at Risk, (Yates, 2009) thus contributing to a body of evidence which offers a counterpoint to the dominance of 'narrow' prescriptive outcomes in such services.

Within a field that is contested and sometimes working successfully in spite of, not because of policy imperatives, we have suggested that it is important that the voices of practitioners are articulated in order that they can develop a confidence about the key issues of their practice and at the same time develop their work according to their own terms of reference. One way of ensuring the voices of practitioners (and for that matter, young people) are included in research is to engage them as active participants in the research process. There has been a great deal written in the human services about the possibilities of participative research, particularly with reference to the quality of service delivery in social work. Cooper's article moves the focus somewhat towards thinking about the participation of youth workers in processes that can facilitate development which is relevant to

their own circumstances. Cooper demonstrates that evaluation need not necessarily be externally driven. Her article shows how engaging youth workers in utilising a new model of evaluation (the Most Significant Change approach) promoted evaluation as a purposeful activity that resulted in practice learning and development. Such an approach connects directly with the ‘ethos and values’ of youth work.

Perhaps because of the difficulties experienced in the policy-research-practice relationship, the practice field has sometimes resisted, sometimes reified and sometimes simply uncritically conformed to insistent demands for data from practice. Hansen and Crawford’s article accepts that measurement is necessary in the contemporary environment and asks how research processes can be mobilised in support of youth work. In the context of the USA, the authors are concerned with ‘how youth work makes its contribution so that we can support the youth work profession’. Their work is an apt reminder that there is nothing inherently unsympathetic towards a youth work approach in the use of quantification and that qualitative methods can make a contribution to measurement. All methods might have value in assessing the value of particular interventions into the lives of young people but the authors argue against an over-reliance on quantitative approaches and for the significance of qualitative research methods in the context of the complexity of youth work. Admitting at the outset that they are positively inclined towards youth work is important in drawing attention to the fact that the inclinations of researchers tend to be reflected in their research questions and methods, but that these are not usually transparent in research reports. This article concludes with some lessons that the authors have learnt from their engagement with research that hold particular resonance with our contemporary debates about ascribing value to youth work.

Two of the contributions to this issue, including that introducing the new ‘Thinking Space’ section of the journal, were prompted by contemporary events rather than specifically the research debate.

Pitts explores the socio-political context of the recent riots. His article reminds us of the importance of critical analysis as a contribution to knowledge, and indeed as a particularly dynamic approach to sociological research. Empirical research and the generation of data is but one approach to evidence and knowledge. Through an analysis of responses to the riots, Pitts shows the partiality of popular interpretations. Once again young people’s circumstances are mediated through the experience of social class. Here the ‘nuanced reality’ of the riots outweighs polar explanations from both idealists and conservatives. Meanwhile failure to grapple with evidence, including the voice of those involved in the riots, abound.

For Davies, the recent responses to the riots and the emerging Positive for Youth social policy agenda show a continuation of a theme of government misunderstanding of young people’s lives and the services that seek to engage with them. The emphasis in the policy, he argues, is a reliance on one strand of evidence: individual/biological perspectives of adolescence are favoured over

social explanations. These perspectives do little to move youth policy away from addressing individual 'deficits' and will continue to contribute to the dichotomous labelling identified in the work of France and Hine (discussed above). Once again, it is apparent that far from promoting effective and constructive practice, research evidence which is partial and skewed is mobilised to promote a particular perspective on, and set of practices for engagement with young people.

Taken together, the articles in this issue sketch some of the landscape of the complex relationship between youth work and evidence. It is clear that there is much potential, and indeed much to celebrate in the relationship between research and practice. This could in its broadest sense make a positive contribution towards policy-making, but as long as the relationships of power between politics, research and practice are distorted this will remain uneven. Questioning these relations of power is therefore a legitimate question in debates about the value of research. The integration of research methods and techniques into practice can go some way towards helping to shift the balance of power. At the very least, research practice enables the collection of evidence to argue a case whilst at the same time providing a basis for reflection and development of practice. Research exists already which demonstrates that youth workers can make a clear contribution to young people's lives. This is best understood when documented using research techniques that are sensitive to the values of the profession. Nevertheless, at present, the engagement of the youth work field is under-developed. It is only through a continuous and ongoing conversation and critical debate with the knowledge, insights and nuances of research that practitioners will be able to make full use of its potential. We hope that this issue of *Youth & Policy* can make a contribution to that process.

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Proving Our Worth? Youth Work, 'Race' and Evidence

Paul Thomas

Abstract

The Education Select Committee Inquiry into Services for Young People has raised challenging issues around the impact and benefit of publicly-funded youth work, explicitly suggesting that the evidence base for the positive impact of such work is limited. This article suggests that such an assertion is misplaced, and contributes to the assembly of data around the positive impact of youth work by drawing on existing academic evidence to examine impact in relation to issues of 'race', racism and ethnic identity. In doing so, it suggests that any discussion of 'impact' should not simply accept limited and mechanistic understandings of impact in relation to what youth workers do with young people, but should also consider what youth work enables policy-makers to know and understand about the experiences and perspectives of young people, what it tells us about society when youth work provision is not available, and how key public policies are actually understood, operationalised and experienced at ground level. In this way, the article also argues for more youth work-based research that examines youth work's engagement with policy initiatives and important social problems.

Key words: Race; Cohesion; Youth Work; Evidence; Extremism

THE RECENT House of Commons Education Select Committee Inquiry into, and resulting report on Services to Young People (2011) has raised challenging issues for all those committed to youth work, whether they are practitioners, managers or academics. Whilst the Select Committee Inquiry process put a helpful spotlight on current cuts to provision and the need for greater resources, it also posed hard questions about what government gets for its investment from youth work, and what evidence there is for any positive impact from that investment: 'We experienced great difficulty in finding objective evidence of the impact of services, whether in the guise of thematic research studies by academics and independent bodies, or of evaluations of individual Services' (House of Commons, 2011:Para.30).

This is not a new challenge, as it has been there throughout the post-war history of the maintained youth service (Davies, 1999), and has certainly been growing over the past twenty years as part of a much wider scrutiny of what public spending achieves. Nevertheless, the combination of significant public spending cuts by the Coalition government, and the overt, ideologically-driven quest for a smaller and leaner state that arguably underpins them, means that all concerned with the

future of publicly-funded youth work need to rise to this challenge for meaningful evidence around impact and benefit. As both a Youth and Community Work lecturer, and an active researcher who has researched and published material drawn from studying youth work practice over the past ten years, I would agree with those who suggested to the Select Committee that youth work already has strong and meaningful evidence of its positive impact and worth. However, I would also accept that we have not been as good as we could have been at either publicising and utilising the research material we do have, or making the most of the possibilities of gathering impact data of interest and value beyond the profession itself. For that reason, the Select Committee's recommendation that government should commission, 'a meta analysis of studies relating to the impact and effectiveness of youth services' (Para.36) is welcomed, and a challenge that we all need to engage with.

On that basis, this article offers some first thoughts and, hopefully, helpful perspectives, on the positive impact of youth work methods and content, not just on young people, but also on wider communities, and on governmental attempts to tackle social problems and implement effective policy responses. The article focuses on issues of 'race', racism and ethnicity in society, drawing on my experience of researching around anti-racism, community cohesion, ethnic identity and preventing violent extremism. This focus may sound like what the Select Committee termed a 'thematic research study', but my research involvement leads me to suggest that, around this area of research, we have evidence not only of what youth work can achieve in work with young people, but of what it tells us about young people's experiences in society, of what happens when youth work isn't there for young people, and how major governmental policy initiatives impact on, and are understood and utilised by, youth work and young people. Two personal examples of this are my utilising youth work-based research evidence to give oral evidence testimony in December 2009 to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee into the *Preventing Violent Extremism* policy initiative (House of Commons, 2010), and drawing on youth-work based evidence in discussing progress towards ethnic cohesion in Oldham on BBC 2's *Newsnight* programme in May 2011. In this way, the article aims to not only contribute ideas for the evidence/impact audit of youth work practice, but to argue for a wider and more holistic understanding of what sorts of impact evidence youth work can and does offer government and society.

What we know about young people

In the rush to produce evidence about what youth work does to young people, there is the danger of ignoring the valuable insights as to what it enables us to *know* and *understand* about young people, and their lives, experiences and perspectives. Such knowledge and understanding is not just academic, in both senses of the word, because it can and should enable policy-makers to understand better the objects of their focus, young people and their communities, and so refine and improve policy approaches, rather than getting them wrong. Getting policy and its implementation wrong

can be costly for everyone involved, with one example being the periodic bouts of urban rioting, largely involving ethnic minority young people, that have taken place in Britain between the 1970s and the summer of 2011. The 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, of which we have just marked the tenth anniversary, were highly-damaging, with the most serious rioting in Bradford in early July 2001 leading to 326 Police officers and 14 members of the public injured, and damage estimated at £7.5-10 million (Denham, 2001). Such events, and the on-going problems of gang violence in many British inner-city areas, show how important it is to know and understand better the lives of young people and why they sometimes react as they do. Two of the most important British sociological studies of the last couple of decades around young people, ethnicity and 'race' have been carried out in youth work settings, in both cases by people who were not long-term professional youth workers, but who chose to take on paid youth work roles whilst carrying out their ethnographical doctoral research into young people's lives and experiences. Les Back's 1996 book *New Ethnicities and Urban Cultures*, which explored the complex and contingent attitudes of young people towards racial difference, remains a highly important work. Carrying out his research in youth projects in Bermondsey, south London, Back highlighted how white young people treated African-Caribbean people with (some) respect in certain, specific situations, whilst being virulently racist towards the area's south-east Asian community. This study provided real evidence to support emerging academic debates about new ethnicities, 'racisms' and the increasingly cultural basis of racial hatred. Claire Alexander's 2000 book, *The Asian Gang*, was also researched whilst the Bengali-origin author was working with Bangladeshi young men at a youth project in east London. The book provided a fascinating portrayal of young people's peer group loyalties and operations, as well as how the young men negotiated relationships with parents and older people in the community and with, in their eyes, often racist white society. This evidence helped Alexander to suggest, before the events of 9/11 and the 2001 riots, that society was developing an increasing 'moral panic' about Asian young men.

The fact that both these important books, which provided real insights into Britain's increasingly diverse but also increasingly racially-tense society, were researched through youth work settings was no coincidence. What we know about youth work is that its voluntary basis and informal education approach enables a depth and quality of relationship between youth workers and young people regularly using the provision that is increasingly hard to replicate in any other form of state-funded educational provision (Smith, 1982). Such relationships of honesty and trust between workers and young people enable the gaining of important insights, and of research data, if gathered systematically and carefully. That insight prompted my colleague Pete Sanderson and me to launch the Youth Identity Project in Oldham and Rochdale, Greater Manchester between 2007 and 2009. My on-going research in the same geographical area around community cohesion, which is discussed further below, had suggested a need for greater understanding of how young people understood the 'identity' of themselves and 'others', and what their experiences were of ethnic segregation. It was that which led to the Youth Identity Project, funded by the Rochdale Pride

Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership, which was utilising Prevent funding) and our own University of Huddersfield's Research Committee. Our view as researchers was that young people would be much more honest about highly-sensitive and controversial issues, such as ethnic identity and racial tensions, if they felt confident and fully trusted the researchers concerned. That led us to work collaboratively with the local authority youth services in both areas and a range of local third sector youth organisations, with the youth workers actually carrying out the research with young people with whom they worked. That was preceded by a series of training sessions and a process of collaboratively devising and refining a range of research methods, including interviews, questionnaires, word and sentence completion exercises, and an 'Identity ranking' exercise. The result was research data of depth and complexity (Thomas and Sanderson, 2009), much of which is in the process of being analysed and academically published (Thomas, forthcoming a; Thomas and Sanderson, forthcoming). However, more importantly, this data led to a presentation to the Rochdale Pride Partnership and has helped Rochdale shape future priorities for cohesion and education policy work in relation to young people. Another presentation of the Project's findings drew an audience from local authorities across the region, whilst the evidence from the Prevent-funded Youth Identity Project formed a key part of my evidence submission to the CLG Select Committee in December 2009 on how Prevent could and should be implemented more effectively.

What happens when youth work isn't there?

The discussion above outlined how simply having youth work provision available enables the gathering of real knowledge and understanding of young people and their experiences in society. What do we know about situations when youth work provision is not available? Again, the focus of 'race' and ethnicity provides concrete evidence, evidence often supplied by government itself, as to why not having youth provision is dangerous and damaging for wider society. The 2001 riots mentioned above provoked significant government analysis and re-thinking of policy approaches. The resulting new policy priority of community cohesion is discussed below, but the reports which analysed the context of the 2001 riots highlighted some very important issues about the availability and quality of youth work provision in the riot areas. Both the local and national reports produced in the wake of the 2001 disturbances highlighted the centrality of youth work's contribution to the situations leading directly to the disturbances, and on youth work's possible contribution to future progress. Ted Cantle, who led the government's Community Cohesion Review Team investigation into the disturbances, noted that: 'Facilities for young people, including those provided under the youth service are in a parlous state in many areas' (Cantle, 2001:31).

John Denham (2001), the then Home Office Minister, and someone with a personal background in youth work through his previous employment at the British Youth Council, also highlighted the state of youth work provision, commenting in the government's response to Cantle that local post-riot reports had pinpointed the importance of good youth work provision: 'Both Ouseley

and Ritchie make direct links between the lack of youth facilities and involvement particularly of young men in anti-social behaviour' (Denham, 2001:15).

Denham went on to acknowledge the centrality of young people to a more positive future in ethnically-segregated towns and cities, and Section 3 of his report, 'Government's response: action taken and proposals for further action', had a whole section on 'Youth Services'. Within this, Denham highlighted government commitment to re-building youth work provision through the *Transforming Youth Work* agenda of the time, and using it to encourage cross-ethnic interaction and understanding. Whilst echoing the national calls for better-resourced youth work in Oldham, Ritchie (2001), in the local Oldham investigation, broke ranks with the national community cohesion reports in making an overt criticism of the pre-2001 youth work provision within Oldham. Here, the configuration and approach of Oldham Youth Service prior to 2001 was seen as a direct contributor to the disturbances, and to the extreme ethnic polarization that underlay them (Ritchie, 2001:47), in that the youth work provision available in Oldham prior to the 2001 disturbances had not done enough to divert young people away from boredom and trouble on the streets because of the only very limited availability of open access provision, and the total lack of ethnically-integrated provision.

In Ritchie's analysis, there had been a clear shift in the style and priorities of Local Authority Youth Service provided – youth work from the early 1980s onwards, both through generic changes to professional priorities and specifically, due to the interpretations of 'anti-racist' policy developments. These local changes could be traced back to the often-justified criticisms highlighted in the 'Thompson Report' (DES, 1982) of the 'traditional', open access, leisure-based youth club provision. In the wake of those criticisms that highlighted white male-dominated youth clubs with little educational content, local authority Youth Services throughout England and Wales gradually moved away from a reliance on open access provision towards provision focussed on education-based group work processes with smaller numbers of 'targeted' young people. Ritchie clearly saw this as a mistake, at least in the Oldham context, as he discussed the previous style of youth work:

This was done in a way which the young people felt comfortable with. Now the emphasis in youth clubs is on social education. The informal element has been reduced and youth workers act more as teachers giving formal lessons on serious subjects. Young people are expected to be organized and become involved in 'projects', an alienating experience for many after a full day at school. Fewer youngsters therefore are involved in clubs (Ritchie, 2001:47).

That perspective saw youth work provision primarily as a leisure-based, diversionary activity that keeps young men 'off the streets'. Whilst the lack of such provision may have contributed to the short-term build up to the 2001 disturbances, and have felt necessary in the immediate aftermath, the history of the Youth Service nationally highlights how such open access provision

failed historically because it could not keep the interest, let alone meet the educational needs, of increasingly sophisticated young consumers with greater leisure options than their parents' generation (Davies, 1999), whilst recent calls to 'reclaim the youth club' acknowledge criticisms (DES, 1982) of old style Albemarle clubs as failing to engage with pressing social and political realities. Above all, youth clubs too often seemed to be all about leisure and only intermittently about informal education that raised young people's horizons and which challenged their existing assumptions about society.

Nevertheless, Ritchie (2001) saw more youth clubs (possibly provided through the controversial PFI mechanism) in Oldham as a way forward, with the hope that they could be used by young people of all backgrounds. Ritchie concluded that: 'Sad to say we heard little but criticism of the Youth Service in Oldham' (2001:47). This criticism was not just about the youth work approach, with the local authority Youth Service characterised as over-stretched and as a low priority for the local authority, with harsh words for the physical state and opening hours of the Youth Service's clubs, and what was seen as a too-rapid move towards detached work methods without adequate planning and back-up (Ritchie, 2001:48). In 2001, Oldham's spending on youth work per head of the Youth population made it a mid-range Authority within the Greater Manchester conurbation, but half of the Youth Service's budget came from external sources – a pertinent issue as Youth Services nationally now face significant cuts to their base budgets. However, the fact that the 'Mahdlo centre', a new state of the art youth facility that is externally-funded through the 'Myplace' initiative, open all year around, and located centrally in what is still a town of significant ethnic segregation, will open in Oldham in January 2012 could mark a significant step forward for youth work's contribution to promoting community cohesion in Oldham.

This suggestion that poor youth facilities, or even their lack of availability, can directly lead to racial tension or even violent disorder is not a new one. The 1958 'race riots' (in the real sense of this much-misused term, as these riots did involve white and Black people fighting each other) in Nottingham and Notting Hill, west London were the first visible sign of a racist backlash to post-war non-white immigration, and inspired the Notting Hill Carnival as a community-building response. An investigation into youth offending written just three years later, and displaying much of the thoughtless racist language which was the norm at the time, highlighted the link between youth work availability and the group of young white men whose racist actions were seen as sparking the confrontations that ran for three days:

nine very ordinary working-class boys, six of them only seventeen, with previously blameless records. Yet upon hearing of previous race riots in Nottingham, the nine armed themselves with coshes... and savagely attacked any coloured pedestrians they met (Fyvel, 1961:62).

The author went on to interview the Youth Leader of a local youth club that several of the nine

convicted had attended regularly, who commented that:

It all happened on a night the club wasn't open. Not knowing what to do with themselves, the idea came to them to have a go at the spades. Yet if they hadn't been at a loose end that night, they may never have started. At the club you might have said they were the sort of boys who wouldn't say boo to a goose, but once the excitement started, they were swept away by it (cited in Fyvel, 1961:63).

It would be over-stating the case to say that the scenes of violent disorder and looting in a number of English towns and cities in the summer of 2011 were directly due to significant reductions in funding for statutory and voluntary sector youth work, both because such a causal link is always hard to prove, and because many of those cuts have not yet been fully-enacted. Nevertheless, a number of the media accounts of inner-London areas affected by rioting and looting highlighted the recent reduction in opening hours, or even closure, of local youth projects that offer both diversion and stability for young people who often have chaotic home lives. Hackney in east London, scene of some of the most serious disorder, has experienced a 75% cut to youth project funding in 2011, with eight of the borough's 13 youth centres closing (McVeigh, 2011).

In the twenty-five years that followed the 1958 riots, youth work and controversial issues of 'race' became increasingly inter-twined. Successive reports highlighted how the supposedly open access youth service of the post-Albemarle youth clubs did little to enable the participation of Black young people (in the accepted term of the era for ethnic minority people). The Community Relations Commission (the forerunner of the Commission for Racial Equality, now itself subsumed within the Equality and Human Rights Commission) published *Seen but not served* in 1976, which detailed the ethnic minority marginalisation from publicly-funded youth work, and the community response of self-help youth provision. This was re-iterated in the 1980 CRE publication, *The Fire next Time: Youth in a multi-racial society*, which extended that analysis of marginalisation and racist exclusion across society and accurately predicted the inner-city riots of the early 1980s that represented youth frustration with that racism combining with economic marginalisation. At that time, youth clubs were often the only places that urban Black and Asian youth were safe from racist white youth and blatantly racist police attention, with the result that youth clubs were often harassed by the police and represented a key site of community organisation and resistance (Gilroy, 2002). A response across the public sector to this exposure of systematic racist exclusion was a strengthening of multiculturalist approaches into anti-racist and equal opportunities policies, with the Youth Service going through often fraught but necessary internal and external battles to move forward towards more equal staffing and provision for young people, as an important study of the country's then-biggest youth service, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) Youth Service illustrated (Williams, 1988).

Learning from Conflicts

A vital part of the moves towards more substantial anti-racist and equal opportunities policies and procedures right across the public sector was anti-racist education, itself a critique of previous, well-meaning multiculturalist educational approaches that had neither addressed the real needs of marginalised Black young people, nor confronted the often taken for granted racist prejudices of many white young people (Chauhan, 1990). Such anti-racist educational policies were needed, and have continued to have a substantial and positive effect on many young people, but were also highly problematic in the interaction, and often the lack of it, between anti-racism and other forces and realities in society. Whilst this new phase of race relations policy known as anti-racism (Solomos, 2003) was embraced and developed enthusiastically by many youth work professionals post-1981 (Popple, 1997; Davies, 1999), the concept and its implementation with young people can be seen as highly problematic (Cohen, 1988; Hewitt, 1996; CRE, 1999; Bhavnani, 2001). Concerns over anti-racism fundamentally focus on its essentialising and privileging of ethnicity that, ironically, mirrors the failings of multiculturalism (Bhavnani, 2001). Alongside this was the, at times, clumsy and draconian implementation of policies by some public bodies, highlighted most graphically by the 'Burnage Report' (Macdonald, 1989) into the murder of Bangladeshi-origin, Manchester school student Ahmed Ullah, by a white fellow pupil. Here, what was viewed popularly as a 'racist' murder occurred within the context of well-meaning but clumsy attempts to operationalise anti-racism within the school. The Inquiry Panel, largely made up of experienced, non-white, anti-racist activists, found that the draconian approaches to such policies had polarised staff, and alienated significant numbers of white pupils and parents, taking little account of their views or of their wider experiences. It also highlighted the simplicity of the 'racist/anti-racist' dichotomy at the heart of anti-racism by focussing on the complex reality of the murderer Darren Colbourne, a troubled young man who had exhibited both racist and anti-racist behaviour at different points (McDonald, 1989).

Similarly, we have clear and important evidence around how anti-racist educational approaches within youth work and schools, whilst well-intentioned, arguably contained fundamental flaws, such as the undialectical understanding of race, class and gender, built on an implicitly deficit understanding of the white working class (Cohen, 1988: 86). Here, apparent white resistance to anti-racism can, in fact, be sometimes seen as part of a wider class resistance to the authoritarian and class-bound nature of compulsory schooling, or of youth work that seems to be adopting more formal educational styles and content. This suggests that 'compulsory' anti-racist education can, in fact, be counter-productive. The evidence around youth work's operationalisation of anti-racist educational strategies suggests that all too often it has reproduced the formal, didactic and draconian style of school-based approaches, leading to a 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 2005), and low levels of youth worker self-confidence and clarity around the purpose of this youth work practice (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002).

Whilst acknowledging that 'white backlashes' can be identified throughout the history of social policy attempts to address racism (Law, 1996), anti-racist educational approaches, especially those aimed at white working class young people, seem to have often not worked as hoped or intended. Indeed, some of the strongest evidence here was commissioned by Greenwich Youth Service in south-east London in recognition that existing policy and practice approaches to anti-racism had not been effective with many white young people (Hewitt, 2005). Greenwich saw three high profile racist murders of ethnic minority young men by groups of white young men in the early 1990s, including that of Stephen Lawrence, and the resulting research amongst white young people, including those participating in youth activities, found a chronic sense of 'unfairness', the feeling that white young people were the real victims of anti-racist policies that privileged ethnic minority young people and their cultures. Whilst such sentiments are clearly not borne out by statistics on experiences of discrimination and racially motivated crime, they are driven by real, lived experiences which seem, in the eyes of these often socially marginalised white young people, to prioritise non-Christian festivals and traditions in schools, and to be disdainful of the cultures and attitudes of white working class communities. This perspective echoes the lack of confidence in white English/British identities, with many white young people feeling that they do not have an ethnic identity, and being much less likely than Black or dual heritage young people to feel proud of their ethnicity/colour (Nayak, 1999). Within this feeling of unfairness, some white young people feel schools and youth clubs view an assault by a white young person on a non-white person as a 'racist incident', regardless of the motivation, and, hence, more serious than the reverse.

Research with youth workers working with white young people across West Yorkshire in the late 1990s (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002) identified that anti-racist approaches were often in tension with the perceived base values and approaches of youth work and informal education. Youth workers understood anti-racism as meaning that they should disapprove of, 'close down', or even ban, 'racist' views and actions, even though the core ethos of youth work is about open dialogue and exploration, and of keeping lines of communication open with young people, no matter what their disposition or background (Smith, 1982). White workers in particular also understood anti-racism to be the responsibility of someone else, of (ethnic minority) 'experts'. This lack of youth worker confidence and responsibility can be seen partly as fall-out of the discredited 'Race Awareness Training' approach (Bhavnani, 2001). Such critiques of anti-racist youth work practice have led to professional re-thinks in some areas, and to the emergence of what can be identified as 'cultural/political' educational approaches (Pople, 1997), which in the 1990s showed some tentative echoes of what is now understood as community cohesion.

In such cases, youth work strategies have attempted to learn from the previous shortcomings and limitations of anti-racist strategies, and engage constructively with young people apparently holding 'racist' views, trying to take account of 'white' ethnicities and self-perceptions, as well as the interplay of gender, class, sexuality, and economic experience (Bonnett, 2000; Bhavnani,

2001). The best example, and also a very powerful piece of evidence, came from the Bede House Anti-Racist Detached Youth Work project, an example captured in Stella Dadzie's *Blood, Sweat and Tears* (1997). Based in Bermondsey, south London, the Bede House project was funded by the NYA's Youth Work Development Grants, which were targeted at innovative youth work projects. It enabled the Bede House team to actually focus on and build positive relationships with local white young people with strongly racist views, some of whom were involved in racist violence, or even on the fringes of organised racist groups. Rather than taking the anti-racist 'condemn and ensure conformity' approach, the project was able to make progress through what might be seen as 'traditional' youth work approaches of seeing the young people and their potential as distinct from their currently negative attitudes and behaviour, and also building links with, and understanding of, the local community and its concerns. That then provided a platform where attitudes about 'race' and difference could be openly and robustly examined without any of the young people being judged or sanctioned.

Youth Work and policy implementation

The discussion of the 2001 riots above highlighted evidence from government itself about the negative consequences for community safety and peace of there being an absence of youth work provision, or of that provision being inadequately resourced or configured. That evidence also specifically called for greater national and local investment in youth work in the future, to both avoid further flashpoints, and to build the new policy priorities of community cohesion and integration. The umbrella Local Government Association (2002) offered an explicit and proactive vision of how youth work can and should engage in the new community cohesion agenda: The Youth Service, in accordance with the Government's Transforming Youth Work agenda, can provide the corporate lead for the engagement of young people across the community (LGA, 2002:24).

The LGA went on to offer specific advice to local authority Youth Services on community cohesion, including the suggestion that Youth Services should develop multi-racial staff teams. Such positive LGA encouragement for a strong and high-profile youth work presence within community cohesion strategies was taking the lead from the reports produced in the wake of the 2001 riots. The government's official report said that 'Government must ensure that youth service provision encourages mutual understanding and interaction between children from different communities' (Denham, 2001:28), echoing the call from the Cattle report that 'a well-resourced programme of engaging young people in the decision-making process affecting their communities should be established... We believe that some aspects of youth provision should be considered for a clear statutory role, to a given national standard' (2001:32).

In the years following 2001, community cohesion became a major priority for the Labour government, right across the range of public sector functions, and embedded within the

government's over-arching Race Equality strategy (Home Office, 2005). This prioritisation of 'cohesion', at the same time as government seemed to stop using terms like 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' and when even senior equality figures blamed multiculturalism for ethnic segregation (Phillips, 2005), was understandably controversial, with some critics suggesting that community cohesion represented a lurch back towards non-negotiable assimilationism (Back et al, 2002). Elements of the government's discourse around the introduction of this cohesion strategy gave real grounds for such fears, but in the following years there has been remarkably little independent empirical research from anywhere across the public sector about how community cohesion has actually been understood and operationalized nationally. This remains a problematic reality, but the research material that does exist is largely from youth work. Early empirical evidence on this issue (Green and Pinto, 2005) was limited and negative, based on research carried out within the Youth Service of an unidentified local authority in South East England, characterised as facing significant tension around 'race' and territory. Much of the material is actually a generalized and unevicenced critique of community cohesion, but it does highlight some important issues, including limited and vague understandings of community cohesion held by the youth workers surveyed (Green and Pinto, 2005).

No formal training on community cohesion had been given at that point to youth workers, and staff wanted guidance on it. There was an acknowledgement by the area's elected members that existing, ethnically separate provision had a down side of fragmenting the wider community, with youth workers claiming that such fragmentation could be minimized through linking or twinning arrangements between Youth Work provision in different areas. Youth workers also reported that such possibilities were limited by weak and problematic relationships between the Youth Service and voluntary Youth Work agencies (Green and Pinto, 2005). Generic professional concerns around inadequate resources, short-term funding and lack of professional status (Moore, 2005) were also identified as barriers, with the new priority of community cohesion seen as an additional burden for over-stretched and disjointed staff teams. Here, the long-term under-investment in Youth Work capacity can be seen as a serious limitation on its ability to respond to a pressing political priority. Above all, Green and Pinto commented that: 'There is a crucial need to address the lack of empirical research within the practical application of Community Cohesion policies' (Green and Pinto, 2005:58).

From shortly after the 2001 riots, the author has attempted to answer that evidential deficit through youth work-based research around young people's experiences of ethnicity and segregation, as discussed above, and how youth workers and their agencies have responded to the policy challenge of community cohesion. The aim of that research has not just been to provide valuable lessons and insights for youth work practitioners, for instance through the number of dissemination and training events that have been carried out around the research findings with youth organisations, but also to provide insights that can be offered to the wider public sector around what community

cohesion actually looks and feels like on the ground when seriously considered and applied. Much of that detailed learning has previously been chronicled in *Youth & Policy*, with an early, pilot piece of research with young people in two different youth projects, each monocultural, charting the extent of the physical ethnic divide in Oldham as young people saw it (Thomas, 2003). This was followed by a much larger piece of doctoral research that involved in-depth interviews with 32 youth work practitioners from both the statutory and voluntary sectors in Oldham around how they had understood and responded to community cohesion, and what they perceived the results to be. The initial, and very positive, key findings of that research were reported both here (Thomas, 2006) and subsequently to wider academic audiences (Thomas, 2007; 2011). Therefore, it is not my intention to reproduce that detail here, but simply to suggest that this research data highlighted a number of issues. One was that community cohesion practice in Oldham was far from being assimilationism, or the 'death of multiculturalism'. Instead, it was respecting and working with separate identities, and the ethnically or geographically-specific provision that supported those identities. This community cohesion practice was seeking to augment such identities with stronger common identities through focusing on common interests, desires and needs, and through young people getting to know diverse 'others' as individuals. More importantly, in relation to the focus of this article, the research showed youth work organisations at the forefront of driving community cohesion forward, developing it through creative and innovative practice. Innovative, yes, but the youth work approach was actually 'traditional', association and experiential-based work that enabled the creation of safe space whereby young people could not just build dialogue across the ethnic divide, but also enjoy new challenges and opportunities on an individual level. Here, youth work was providing strong evidence of its ability to lead on a major governmental policy priority, and to do so through its traditional approach of open-access, voluntary based associational work, rather than as 'helpers' to formal education or social work.

That positive evidence about the impact of community cohesion-based work with young people was juxtaposed with the more problematic evidence, much of it again from youth work, stemming from the implementation of the government's *Prevent* anti-violent extremism initiative from 2006 onwards, in the evidence submission to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry (House of Commons, 2010) highlighted above, and in the associated academic commentary on it (Thomas, 2009; 2012, forthcoming b). That empirical evidence, and that of others (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010), around the operationalization of *Prevent*, did highlight some positive impact factors stemming from the initiative, and much of it was around youth services using the funding to build stronger relationships with Muslim young people and to initiate positive activities. However, that work, as the national policy direction dictated, was almost entirely monocultural, and so in flat contradiction to the other government priority of community cohesion, as well as showing little focus on the actual drivers of violent extremism. Possibly the most serious criticism of *Prevent* has been the allegation that it is a large-scale surveillance approach to British Muslim communities. The research process and report from Arun Kundnani (2009) of the Institute of Race Relations that

focused public attention on this issue drew very significantly on youth work practitioners who were actually implementing Prevent and who were prepared to speak on the basis of anonymity. The subsequent Select Committee Inquiry report (House of Commons, 2010) stressed the need both to focus more on cohesion-based approaches and to reduce the role in Prevent of the Police and Security Services, recommendations apparently accepted by the Coalition government's review of Prevent in June 2011 (HMG, 2011).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to provide evidence around youth work's interaction with issues of 'race', racism and ethnic identity to make broader points about the proven impact and benefit of publicly-funded youth work. It has drawn on a significant body of youth work-based research by the author and other academic colleagues to suggest that we already have very significant and positive evidence of youth work's impact in this area alone, something that is replicated by examination of other facets of youth work's past and present engagement with young people and their communities. It has argued in particular, that discussion of impact should not just focus on limited and somewhat mechanistic understandings of impact around what youth workers do with young people and what the immediate and tangible benefit is. That is important, but so is wider discussion of what professional youth work involvements in communities enable policy-makers and other practitioners to know and understand about young people, their lives, and feelings. Drawing on such knowledge can help to avoid very expensive and counter-productive social policy mistakes on both the macro and micro level. Similarly, we have clear evidence, much of it from government itself, of the negative impacts of youth work provision not being present at all, or at least not being adequately configured or resourced for pressing local needs. Similarly, youth work has often been at the sharp end of both community conflicts and marginalisation, being a refuge for marginalised young people, and at the forefront of the implementation of important government policy priorities aimed at young people. That latter experience means that youth work has been the source for nationally-important evidence around key policies such as anti-racist educational initiatives, community cohesion and attempts to prevent violent extremism. Such a holistic and 'joined-up' approach (exactly the sort of perspective that policy-makers have urged youth workers to adopt) to how 'impact' should be understood and considered would therefore recognise the substantial evidence already existing of youth work's positive benefit and, therefore, the grave dangers for long-term social policy of reducing public funding support for such youth work.

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Mentoring: A qualitative evaluation of what works and what does not

Daz Greenop

Abstract

Mentoring has become an important intervention for working with excluded young people but evidence is mixed and inconclusive. This paper draws on the recent qualitative evaluation of a mentor project in one of the most deprived communities in the UK. A mixed method of focus groups, interviews and creative activities was used to explore what works, what does not work and how the project could be improved. Findings highlight some of the tensions involved in developing a 'professional friendship' and barriers to success. Some theoretical insights and practical tips are finally suggested which may go some way to reconciling these difficulties – both demonstrating the real value of mentoring and providing encouragement to all who engage in it.

Key words: at risk, children, youth, young people, evaluation.

Setting the scene

WELSH TOWN¹ is one of the largest housing estates in the UK and according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2008) it is also one of the most deprived. One local report identified high unemployment, low educational achievement, low wages, poor environmental quality, significant gaps in service provision and high levels of crime as particular concerns in the area. It is, of course, often children and young people who suffer most under such conditions and the same report observed that there is 'a major issue of low aspirations, lack of role models and insufficient organised activities for young people'. Mentoring programmes provide role models who can offer advice, support and structured activities to empower young people (Newburn et al, 2005) and Welsh Town, it seems, is in urgent need of such.

Mentoring programmes have traditionally focused on marginalised young people whose behaviour has come to the attention of the authorities (Keller, 2007). The four mentees participating in this evaluation are from the margins of an already marginalised community and, whether due to the experience of poverty, racism, family breakdown or crime, were all well known to the authorities of Welsh Town. The scheme may not address these structural issues directly but, it is widely believed, mentoring can at least help develop the resilience required to withstand them (DuBois and Rhodes, 2006). The objectives of the Junior Mentor Project (provided by a local Youth Centre)

therefore vary from relationship to relationship and address wide ranging issues such as anti-social behaviour, low self-esteem, poor diet and nutrition and truancy, but all aim to develop the knowledge, skills and competence required to eventually become productive members of the local community.

Background: the evidence for and against mentoring

Whether based on natural, peer or professional relationships, mentoring has become an increasingly common form of preventative intervention for ‘at risk’ children and young people (De Anda, 2001; Keller, 2007). According to Rhodes and Dubois (2008) an estimated three million young people in the United States are in formal one-to-one relationships. In the UK too there has been exponential growth in the provision of mentoring schemes particularly for excluded school pupils and young offenders. While these are most often voluntary arrangements, the service at Welsh Town Youth Centre is provided by paid workers. However it may still be described as ‘classic’ mentoring, as these experienced adults support, advise and challenge mentees through structured activities (Philip and Hendry, 1996). This is typically achieved by developing shared interests and hobbies and acting as a role model who can offer an alternative to the ‘normal chaos’ the young people experience – providing, as one mentor and focus group participant observed, ‘someone they can rely on, someone who’s a constant’.

According to a survey commissioned by The Children’s Society’s National Mentoring Initiative, only 20% of adults in the UK believe that children have appropriate role models to emulate.² This is thought to have many potential personal, social and economic consequences. A Prince’s Trust report (2008), for example, found that without a positive role model young people are significantly more likely to join gangs and fail at school; 22% of their respondents said they thought people joined gangs to find someone to look up to and 55% said they were more influenced by their peers than by their parents while two thirds of them do not see their parents as role models. This growth in public concern along with advances in applied social science has led to the emergence of a multitude of structured mentoring programmes designed to engage with ‘at risk’ young people and help fix ‘broken’ communities (Philip et al, 2004; DuBois and Rhodes, 2006; Keller, 2007). But can big brothers and big sisters succeed where big governments have failed?

While there is huge popular support for mentoring, the evidence is in fact mixed and benefits are modest. According to an evaluation of 10 Mentoring Plus programmes, for example, while there was an improvement in relation to education, training and work there was no clear evidence of the programme having an impact in relation to offending, family relationships, substance use and self-esteem (Shiner et al, 2004). Similarly, while St James-Roberts and Samlal Singh (2001) noted improvements in academic performance, attendance and exclusion, equivalent improvements were found in a comparison group of non-mentored children. A meta-analysis of 55 studies of mentor

schemes found no overall effect on behaviour when looking at administrative records and only a small positive effect from mentoring on young people's problem behaviour, measured by self-report (DuBois et al, 2002). Indeed, the first ever systematic evaluation of youth mentoring in the UK (St James-Roberts et al, 2005) questioned whether it makes any lasting difference at all while, perhaps most worryingly of all, some studies even warn that when poorly managed, mentoring vulnerable young people may make matters worse for them – particularly when relationships break down (Liabo and Lucas, 2006).

Other research has shown that mentoring has quite profound outcomes but, as Miller (2002) points out, much of this comes from self-reported 'grey literature' in which outcomes are subject to bias and funding issues. According to Home Office statistics in the UK, for example, one programme for young offenders resulted in a 45% reduction in re-offending 'which is unparalleled by other offending behaviour initiatives' (Select Committee on Education and Skills Seventh Report Appendix 3.8). Even more sensational results have been widely reported in the British press³ but Jolliffe and Farrington's (2007) review suggests a more modest reduction in re-offending of 4-11%. According to publicity from the Children's Society,⁴ research shows many other positive benefits for mentees, including significant reductions in truancy, self-harm and substance misuse along with improved confidence, skills and inter-personal relationships. However, it also benefits mentors providing them with satisfaction whilst generating greater community cohesion for all (see also Philip et al, 2004).

Few authors have attempted to explain the variability of outcomes but evidence suggests that successful mentoring requires a balance between prescriptive 'vertical' and developmental 'horizontal' activities. In their recent review of the small but growing qualitative literature Keller and Pryce (2010: 45) for example observe, 'The relationships reported most rewarding by participants and judged most successful by researchers were those in which the mentor balanced youth-oriented efforts to build an engaging and enjoyable relationship with adult-oriented efforts to promote development-promoting structure'. This hybrid model of a 'mutual but unequal' relationship resonates with the findings of this current qualitative evaluation and provides a helpful explanatory framework in which power and permanence must be carefully negotiated to ensure lasting success. Indeed, even where benefits of a 'professional friendship' (Philip et al, 2004) appear to be small, according to one review, these increase significantly over time with the use of programme practices likely to support relationship development (Rhodes and DuBois, 2008). Examining data from the national Big Brothers Big Sisters study, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) also observed that relationships that ended within the first three months led to significantly larger drops in feelings of self-worth and educational achievement than control subjects, while those lasting more than 12 months led to significantly higher levels (cited in Dubois and Rhodes, 2006).

Method: a qualitative multi-method approach

The purpose of the evaluation in Welsh Town was to explore the evidential basis of a local project within a local organisation. Given its unique circumstances, small-scale and the subsequent lack of comparative data, it was decided that a qualitative action oriented approach would best capture the essence and impact the Junior Mentor Project. The evaluation was therefore primarily concerned with generating dialogical data and undertaken *with* participants rather than *on* them (Heron and Reason, 2001). While the emphasis was on the experiences of the mentees, however, mentoring relationships are inherently dyadic so it is important to collect data from multiple sources (Butts et al, 2007). Other people's views were therefore also incorporated in to the evaluation.

After some initial discussions with the director, key stakeholders were identified as being the carers/parents, mentors and, of course, mentees. Arrangements were then made to visit the site, talk informally with stakeholders and collect documentary evidence. On the basis of these preliminary findings, two focus group discussions with mentors were undertaken which revolved around three key questions: What works well? What does not work well? What could be done differently to improve the Junior Mentor Project? Further advice was then taken regarding the appropriate sample and spread of mentees to be included in the evaluation. Utilising visual methods (drawing and modelling), this part of the evaluation used 'the power of form to inform' (Finley, 2008). These can be more effective than simply eliciting verbal descriptions, particularly those lacking confidence, as they provide access to unconscious emotional processes (Diem-Wille, 2001). For others however, creative activities can also generate additional and often unintentional dialogue.

The metaphor of 'transport' was used for the creative activity as it could represent a mentee's 'journey'. After a discussion of different modes of transportation, mentees were therefore asked to make a drawing or model of a vehicle that best represents the Junior Mentor Project for them. These were discussed individually while participants were drawing/modelling and together as a group (by comparing artefacts) at the end of the session. Additionally, more in-depth case studies of individual mentees provide exemplars of engagement. The advantage of this eclectic approach is that it can incorporate a variety of sources of data so while a large sample was not practicable for this evaluation (due mainly to time and resource restraints) social and biographical histories could be augmented with personal stories which may be elicited from parents through narrative interviewing. In addition to background information, therefore, additional data comes from a single open ended question to parents/carers: 'could you tell me about [Caleb's] involvement with the Project?' and followed up with appropriate prompts. All the collected data was digitally recorded, anonymised and transcribed with consent. The value of the resulting analysis is that successful and unsuccessful mentees' accounts could then not only be compared and contrasted with each other but also can be compared and contrasted with more privileged professional and institutional discourses and therefore opens up new possibilities for dialogue. The accumulation of evidence

from documentation, focus groups visual representations and case studies was finally triangulated, collated and presented thematically here, describing the activities that are being undertaken, successes experienced and barriers to success. Before considering the evidence, however, participants will be given brief introductions.

Introducing the Mentees

Caleb



Caleb has been on the Junior Mentor Project for over two and a half years. As his picture suggests, he is very bright. He was originally referred because of behavioural issues including anger and aggression. Caleb has done extremely well in managing this despite his chaotic circumstances. Caleb and his mentor have a 'lovely' relationship commented the Project Manager and while there is little engagement with the family the mentor does have some contact with his dad. In the past, work has focussed on anger management but support is now more generic and premised on consistency. This is clear in Caleb's picture (above) but importantly for him it is also 'fun'.

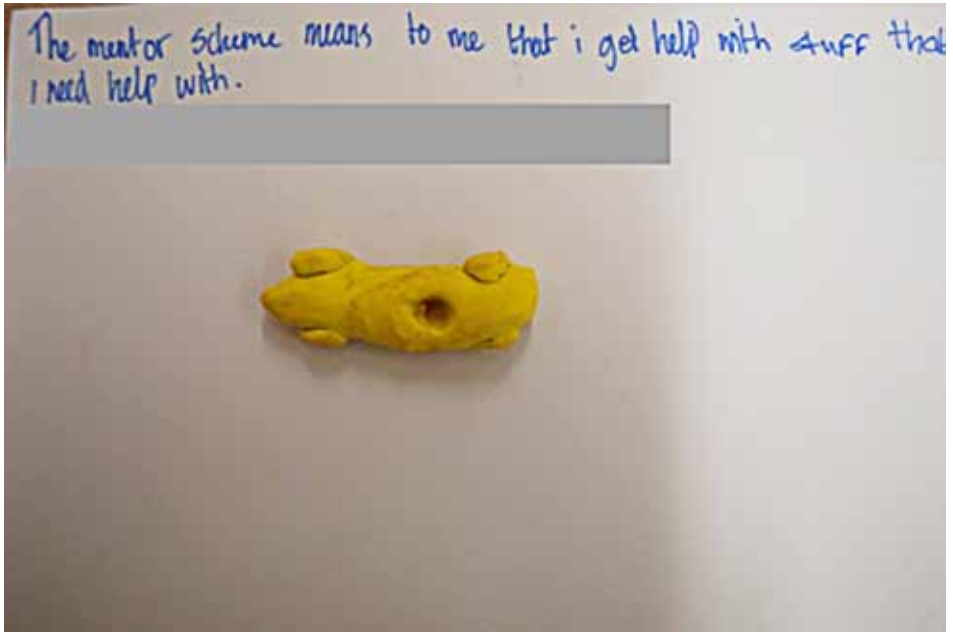
Joe

This is the only surviving picture of several different attempts by Joe. Like his picture, he is playful and impulsive. Joe has been on the Junior Mentor Project for over two and half years. He was referred because of behavioural concerns including anger, lack of concentration and repeatedly getting into trouble. Joe's mentor has regular contact with his carers. Joe is very difficult to engage for any length of time and is currently on medication for ADHD but the mentor is patient and Joe responds well to this. Joe said that being on the Project has helped him to calm down and without it, he added, 'I'd be on the streets getting into trouble with the police'. For Joe the Project is like a motorbike because it is 'fun' and, he added, 'it keeps me off the streets'.

Tanya



Tanya is extremely shy and has been on the Junior Mentor Project for 9 months. She was referred because of self-esteem concerns and a lack of social integration with her peers. Tanya is also doing work on behaviour at home. Tanya's mentor has a very good relationship with her mum. Tanya and her mentor get on very well and she enjoys the individual attention that she gets from her. She has 'come on leaps and bounds' with her confidence since starting mentoring and this can be seen through her play with peers. She is now chatty and confident enough to speak in a crowd. Mum has commented that her behaviour has improved at home as well. Tanya's mentor thinks she is improving each week and feels that she would benefit from support with her education, which is going to be worked into their six week plan. Tanya chose to represent the Project as a car because 'they take you somewhere'. She clearly has high hopes as Tanya also made a spaceship.

Karen

Karen has been on the Junior Mentor Project for 9 months. She was referred because of anger issues and family support. Karen really struggled to control her anger at school and was getting in to trouble even though she had only just started year seven. She felt that her relationship with her mother was not good and that she would like it to be better but did not see how this could happen. Karen's mentor also has a high level of engagement with mum. Karen and her mentor get on very well and have an honest and open relationship. They have worked on her anger and reasons why she felt that it happened. By talking about these things Karen is now able to understand how she gets angry and why things start to break down. Improvements are not, however, obvious to mum who feels that the Project has done little to change Karen's behaviour at home. She did however note that 'Karen looks up to [mentor]' and has started doing homework with her, 'so that is a benefit making sure she does her homework. Coz she doesn't listen to me'. Indeed while Karen admits that she still has outbursts at school, they now happen less often and she has even been taken off the report card which she is really proud of. School issues are now the focus of Karen's mentorship which, like the car she made from clay, is 'helpful'.

What works well?

A key assumption of mentoring is that one positive relationship can affect other relationships – but even if true this is seldom straightforward. According to Attachment Theory, for example, children construct cognitive representations regarding the reliability of carers that can be quite resistant to change even into adulthood (Rhodes et al, 2006). Young people who have experienced care-givers as unreliable therefore often find it difficult to trust others, particularly authority figures, in times of distress. Although these cognitive representations have a tendency to become fixed in the minds of some, they can be challenged and modified over time and with appropriate support. Indeed, the willingness of mentees in this evaluation to trust their adult mentors, particularly during times of difficulty, is perhaps the greatest testimony to the success of this particular programme.

Building Trust and Being Reliable

From a relational perspective, the first task of a mentor is to foster ‘a trusting, emotionally close connection that makes the youth feel understood, valued and respected’ (Keller, 2007: 32). Only then will challenge be properly received and only then is real change possible, however small (Rhodes et al, 2006). As another mentor observed: ‘It’s hard for them to build up trust because they are younger but it’s nice when they tell you something that they wouldn’t have told you six months ago’. This trusting relationship is equally important for parents and carers as one participant echoed:

If my kids have got this trust in you, you’re brilliant. I’ll like you. You sort my kids out, you’ll know everything about my life, I’ll take you in to my life, my house, you’ll know everything about us. That’s it. If I’ve got that trust in you I’ll accept you...Like [Mentor] has helped me quite a lot coz [Mentee’s] not long come out of care because of her behaviour. She’s a ‘runner’ and [Mentor] has been involved in all this, the welfare services and everything with me. She’s stayed by me all the way. It’s not her role but...she’s only the mentor but she’s come from the mentor into the situation. I could phone [Mentor] now if I wanted to speak to her about something. And she’s there, she’ll spend hours talking. [Other daughter’s Mentor] is the same, I’ll come down here and tell her the problem and, ‘Can you do this with [mentee]? Will you sort this out and that out for me? And find out this information and that information?’ We’ve got the trust in them people to tell them everything.

Given the trust placed on mentors, expectations can be high so it is imperative that their level of commitment is reciprocated. A broken promise can potentially destroy months and even years of hard work. ‘Sticking with it is possibly the biggest thing’, one mentor said, adding, ‘and if it is to go well then I think you have to...it’s a long-term commitment’. So while building trust is the key to establishing a relationship, reliability is the key to maintaining it. Reliability is also greatly valued by mentees as the following brief dialogue illustrates:

I: *What have you done Caleb?*

Caleb: *I've drawn a Smart Car*

I: *Why?*

Caleb: *It's very fast and like the mentor scheme it's helpful and reliable.*

I: *Reliable? What do you mean?*

Karen: *You can count on it.*

Joe: *It's used a lot and it's often not...broken.*

I: *I think 'reliable' is a great word.*

The importance of reliability becomes even more significant when set against a background of poor attachments, broken promises and being let down by adults, as one mentor stated, 'I think it's a big thing to have somebody who's consistent and somebody who's not going to let them down. Especially the family that I work with, she's a single parent and, dad's appeared at the moment, coz she's said to us he's not very consistent and I have seen a bit of a change with the girls behaviour-wise'. The reliability of mentors does not simply have a positive influence on mentees but can also impact on entire families, as another mentor recalled:

It makes a difference with the family as well. I know I've got a good relationship with the mum because she's called me before now when [mentee] can't make it. Apparently that's unheard of and which I didn't know about so I think it makes quite a difference to the family as well. I know her little sister as well and as soon as I walk down the path they're all over me. I think it's a big thing to have somebody who's consistent and somebody who's not going to let them down.

Caring, Sharing and Self-regulation

As already noted, it is only when a secure base has been successfully established and maintained that real progress can be made (Rhodes et al, 2006). Along with better communication (as illustrated above), perhaps the clearest demonstration of progress was mentees' self-regulation by, for example, recognising behavioural triggers and acknowledging responsibility for actions. Most importantly, however, they demonstrated understanding of others' actions which might otherwise become problematic, as the following brief dialogue illustrates:

I: *Sometimes transport doesn't work properly. Not everything works perfectly. What about the mentor scheme?*

Caleb: *Sometimes it goes off track.*

Karen: *Say like they have to go somewhere else and you have to miss a session and you're like 'Oh I'm going to be bored at my Nanna's or my house'.*

I: *So sometimes it doesn't work because it's cancelled.*

Caleb: *But they always make up for it, you can't blame them.*

Mentoring is a process and mentors must therefore work with mentees, rather than just passing on knowledge and expertise to them – which is secondary. In fact successful mentoring is a mutual two-way process that will empower both parties (Larkin et al, 2005; Newburn et al, 2005; Keller and Pryce, 2010). Moreover, this is not simply through acts of enlightened self-interest, but results from a caring desire for the betterment of the other (Newman et al, 1999). Caleb illustrates this (above) by not only understanding why things do not always work out but also insisting that it is not his mentor's fault. He cares. Caring and sharing was indeed evident in much of the mentoring that takes place at the Centre, as one mentor stated:

I think just giving them time they don't normally have, maybe at home or maybe down at the playground. Giving them that one-to-one time, when it's just about them, that's why it works. Whether it's just for an hour or two they know that they've got somebody. It might be just baking a cake, going for a walk but we all like special time we all like some attention. And maybe they don't always get the greatest of attention. I think they like that knowing that they have got someone that they can go to.

Being given these opportunities to share their problems means that, in time, the difficulties mentees may be experiencing at home, school or elsewhere can be addressed. As one mentee stated, 'say you've got a problem and say you tell your mentor, they'll not tell anyone else. And, like, they'll just sort it out'. Communication can however be difficult for many children and young people, particularly when things go wrong. Yet, in several reported instances, mentees came to their mentors before anybody else, saying, 'I wanted to tell you first because I didn't want you to hear it from somebody else'. Parents and carers concurred:

What they won't tell me they've got the trust in the mentor. They're telling them, so I'm getting to find out, things I don't really know they're getting to know before me. I know I'm the mum but they'll know before me.

Interestingly, this was not something parents and carers resented as one parent stated:

I can talk to [Mentor], I can tell her everything. You know, she's naughty in school or done this in school, I tell [Mentor], I say 'you deal with it from that side for me' or 'get me this information' ...There's two sides to it, she takes care of it as well as me.

Carers, mentees and mentors participating in this evaluation all shared responsibilities for successful mentorship but, it was also noticeable, that while mentors found it difficult to evidence success, parents and mentees were much more clear about positive outcomes. For mentees these included changed behaviour, improved concentration, a better attitude at school, getting help with homework, learning new things, alleviating boredom, preventing anti-social behaviour, being able

to do different things and being able to talk with somebody. Parents and carers similarly noted improved confidence, calming down, providing structure, healthier relationships and help with practical problems and perhaps most importantly for them the opportunity for much needed respite. With good reason, the following parent was particularly satisfied:

Before she had [a mentor] she wouldn't go out because of the name calling, she wouldn't play out she wouldn't mix. Even though she still has problems, it's always going to be a problem... [deleted] ..but she deals with it better. She's top of the class in school. So, yeah, you wouldn't think that that one little bit with somebody who hasn't got family connections could make such a difference. Before she used to hit out but I think she deals with it a lot better now.

One positive relationship can, it seems, have a profound effect on other relationships. Indeed the ability of mentees in the Project both to trust others and be trusted by them (whether at home, school or elsewhere) perhaps gives the clearest demonstration of its success – but this takes high levels of professionalism and permanence. As Rhodes et al (2006: 693) also observe:

Mentors who are sensitive and consistent in their relationships with these youth may help them feel worthy of care and effective in attaining it. In turn these youth may become more open to, and likely to, solicit emotional support...when the child knows the mentor is a dependable source of protection and support if something should go wrong, the sense of security that results may allow productive exploration of the environment that leads to the development of knowledge, skills and competence.

Barriers to success

According to Miller (2002) successful mentoring relationships typically pass through three developmental stages: Forming and Storming includes initial meetings, building trust and making agreements. Norming and Performing includes the majority of contacts through which goals are negotiated and reviewed and successful relationships are formed. *Closing* occurs when targets have been achieved. While barriers must inevitably be negotiated at each of these stages, they were in fact also difficult to evidence in this evaluation. It should be noted, for example, that several mentees and carers were quite open about not wishing to jeopardise future funding so their unqualified praise must be treated with caution. The barriers to success outlined below therefore come primarily from the two focus groups with mentors, documentation and anecdotal evidence.

Limited Resources

The barriers highlighted here are not confined to the Junior Mentor Project but may be found in any programme based on developing relationships rather than prescriptive interventions alone. While there was little doubt in the minds of all who participated in this evaluation that the Project works and

works well, barriers to progress could also be discerned at each developmental stage. As already seen, it is common for mentees who have unresolved attachment issues to experience difficulty trusting adults. This may result in mentees testing out the commitment of their mentor through missing appointments or making unreasonable requests (Miller 2002). However, it is not just mentees that may prevent relationships from progressing beyond stage one. Ethan and his mentor, for example, had been through the six week 'getting to know you' programme and he was very excited about going out with his new 'friend'. He turned up early for their first session and waited patiently at the Centre gates. His mentor did not show. Not put off by this Ethan turned up again the following week, this time in the rain, and waited hopefully. Staff implored him to come inside but he would not. Again, his mentor did not show. Ethan came one more time and is now only rarely seen at the Centre.

There is in fact a long waiting list of young people in Welsh Town who have been identified as potential beneficiaries of the Junior Mentor Project but many of these will not even get to stage one. Finding adults who have the necessary time, commitment and personal qualities is therefore difficult and, anecdotally, males in particular who are prepared take on the challenge, are in short supply. Because the majority of mentors are female, the majority of mentees are also female. There are in fact only four male mentees currently on the Project and two of them actually share the same mentor. In addition to this, two mentors have been dismissed due to their unreliability while another two simply stopped turning up without warning. One of these 'Had to give up because of work commitments', a carer recalled, 'Not turning up, bringing [mentee] home late, taking her places I didn't know about. Introducing her to people I didn't know. I'm very funny like that. Sometimes she'd be crying when she didn't turn up coz that's important, isn't it?'

Apart from suitable personnel, time is perhaps the most important resource – particularly as relationships progress through formative stage two. This is not without reason because, as already noted, it is having that 'special time' that makes the Junior Mentor Project work. Time is a most valuable commodity and lack of it severely restricts the effectiveness of mentoring. Mentors and mentees typically meet once a week for two to four hours and, while this is more than many schemes provide, it is often not enough to address the complex needs of mentees, as one frustrated mentor lamented:

Unfortunately, and this is going to sound quite harsh, but they do go home and she's not my child. No matter how much I try and say, 'Look do you think you acted wrongly in this situation?' and 'How would you do it in the future' you think you're getting somewhere and the next thing she'll come along and say 'I had a major outburst in school, I took a chair and I cracked a lad across the head with it'. And you just think we're back to square one. Here we go again and again and you think 'if I could only have a little more time' you could change it for good. But you just have to leave it and think all I can do is my best otherwise it'll just send you round the bend.

Another mentor concurred:

I think the common thing is that no matter what you do in that session, 99.9% of it will be undone within 15, 20 minutes of them getting home. And that's unfortunate but you only get them once a week. If you took them home and they lived with you for six months maybe that would make a difference.

Many of the issues that arise during mentoring are of course simply symptomatic of deeper historical problems. As one mentor stated, 'They've all got their own history and baggage from whatever they come from and you're not just going to click your fingers and change that'. The environment too means that problems are often beyond repair. It is important therefore, for all involved, to recognise the limits of what can be achieved. 'You can only do so much', one mentor stated. 'You can't change the family, or the place or the environment' added another. Some, however, become disheartened stating: 'If the home environment isn't accommodating these issues then all the work you've done is forgotten. You're battling against that every week and feeling that maybe a huge difference isn't made quickly'. While mentors cannot control these deeper structural issues, they were able to manage expectations and even re-define what is realistically possible:

That's part of what we've tried to set up. It's not been successful on all counts but we have tried to set up a parent-child-mentor meeting so everybody knows 'this is what we're trying to do'. Actually if little Johnny goes home and he's back to his normal behaviour, the work we are doing down here is a waste of time. So we need the parents on board and we try to keep that going, again not as much as we'd like to do, because that's the [Youth Centre's] ethos. But the whole idea is you keep the parents informed on a regular basis and then try and set some more plans. I think even if we just touch some of the families who have never done it before, I think that's a success.

Unclear Goals

Although several mentors were able to redefine the meaning of success, the underlying question of what real difference one individual can make in a complex and chaotic situation was never far away. As one participant commented, 'you're battling against that every week and feeling that maybe a huge difference isn't made quickly or superficially...I think looking at most of the mentees/mentors over time there is a difference but I think at the time you think this isn't getting anywhere, I'm not making a difference'. Another similarly stated: 'It's really difficult to measure. I can't sit here and say, there's been a massive improvement, I know there has, but then week in week out you feel like there isn't'. Indeed, one of the clearest messages from the evaluation was that while most participants agreed that the Junior Mentor Project is making a difference in their lives, mentors themselves often felt frustrated by the lack of 'evidence' of change. Despite this, especially during difficult periods they remained hopeful that the long-term benefits will one day become apparent:

Sometimes you can't change anything now but maybe seven or eight years time you'll see the difference you make. So it's a long-term thing rather than a short-term thing. Little bits could change that person's life which you don't even realise you're doing yourself.

It is important to reiterate that carers and mentees were considerably more positive about the difference the Junior Mentor Project is having now. Indeed, all but one carer was convinced of this but even she at least acknowledged the benefit of respite for herself. For everybody else it appeared to make a significant difference. It is also important not simply to see what mentors are doing with mentees but also to understand what mentees might be doing without mentors. Whether getting bored, as Karen said, or 'getting into trouble with the police' as Joe said, it is impossible to demonstrate these benefits empirically but they are certainly possible if not likely outcomes if mentoring had not been introduced.

Some of the most important processes involved in successful mentoring are difficult to capture but without clear outcomes, mentors can become disheartened and, as one put it, feel that 'things just roll along indefinitely'. While there was concern among mentors about creating even more paperwork there was widespread agreement that progress must somehow be formally captured. As another stated 'If all the great work that the Mentors do isn't documented then it didn't happen'. Some outcomes can, of course, be evaluated more readily but there was some concern that these may not actually be appropriately defined. That is, they tend to be driven by the organisation rather than (potential) mentees, as one mentor stated:

It feels that as an organisation we're in a situation where we notice children who are perhaps in distress and could benefit so we're the ones calling the shots and it's kind of a reactive thing rather than proactive but maybe the proactive thing could be spread a bit more... through outcomes. Because of what's just been said I wonder if it could be a more dangerous in some ways to compartmentalise individuals and invest in that relationship...And I'm not always sure if it's the young people who say 'well actually, I'd love to stop getting bullied' or 'I'd love this'. But it doesn't come from them it's us saying that we recognise that there's this problem or that problem.

Most experts agree that mentoring is a process of working with mentees, rather than just passing on wisdom or prescribing change. Good mentoring is in fact a two-way process in which mentors and mentees both benefit (Larkin et al, 2005; Newburn et al, 2005; Keller and Pryce, 2010). While some of the most important elements of successful mentorship are difficult to capture, without clear goals mentors can become disheartened and mentees lack direction. Documentation and conversations at the Youth Centre in fact indicate that individual aims and objectives are embedded within practice but these are not always articulated, so expectations are therefore unclear. As one mentor stated, 'it needs to be imposed and made abundantly clear to anyone who does take on one of the kids. Coz

you want to look back in a couple of months and say well I wrote that...It's reflection isn't it?' As it stands, however, paper work is chaotic and incomplete. The Impact of Mentoring questionnaire used at the Centre, for example, covers such diverse issues as behaviour, well-being, family, and health, but because most information collected is irrelevant to what actually takes place, the data gives the impression that little is actually being achieved. To change this, mentees (and in so far as possible their families) not only need to participate in setting and reviewing aims and objectives, but also defining how completion of these may be realistically defined and demonstrated. This may both create a sense of ownership and also inspire responsibility and encouragement to all involved.

Unclear Boundaries

Mentoring is a 'professional friendship' – a two dimensional hybrid relationship based on power and permanence (Philip et al, 2004; Keller and Pryce, 2010). All mentors at the Centre are trained 'professionals' but, as one mentor stated, 'to gain that relationship you've got to become a friend, you've got to gain their trust'. Because of widespread suspicion of authority figures, however, this takes time and can be difficult to evidence and can lead to a blurring of boundaries. According to both focus groups, this confusion is apparent in the wider Youth Centre community too. Anecdotally, even those who do not need a mentor can often be heard at the Centre demanding 'I want a mentor! I want a mentor'. Other carers, by way of contrast, tend to regard the programme as a 'naughty child scheme', while still others think that it is a reward for 'naughtiness'. Either way, these misconceptions not only present a barrier to participation but also risk mislabelling mentees who may be on the Project for a variety of reasons – which include addressing issues such as bullying and confidence building. It is not just mentees and carers who have to deal with diverse and contradictory perceptions of the Project but also mentors themselves often struggled to define their role within the programme. This was expressed in many different ways but can essentially be understood in terms of the opposing impulses of providing a professional friendship. However, mentoring requires a level of involvement that sometimes goes beyond either professionals or friends. The following (pregnant) mentor, for example, sounds like an older sibling:

I worry about the way they speak to me I think she thinks I'm going to be there forever. Like she always says to me, coz she knows I'm getting married, she thinks the next stage is going to be having children and if you have children obviously you're going to be away for a small amount of time. But her take on it is, 'Oh OK when you have a baby I'll be able to come and visit you'. She sees herself as part of this and it's really hard. It's not fair for me to say 'Oh I'll not be seeing you for nine months' but is it overstepping the mark if you do allow her in to that side of things. It's just impossible, isn't it? It's always a worry about what the future holds for them. How are they going to deal with it if things do come up?

Several other mentors felt like anxious parents struggling with disappointment and worry, as the following makes clear:

I think one of the barriers for me is the ability to switch off from it. I see my young person once a week and it could be a nightmare during that time, it can be really good. Sometimes having to switch off until the next week, sometimes you can't. I've got another job and I'm a mum, stuff like that. Sometimes I've spent more time over the weekend worrying about that young person than what I have about my own family. And you think 'Hang on a minute'. You might only see them for four hours in a week but it's not just four hours. It's a lot more and those are the sort of things you can't measure. The stress you go through as a mentor and, like some people have said, we're not their parents and you think, 'Hang on am I stepping over that line? Is it getting a bit fuzzy?' I'm telling her off as if she's my daughter. And you think hang on a minute I've got to take a step back. You can only do so much.

Again, this level of intimacy is not something that appears to be problematic for carers who, rather, welcomed it. As one parent disclosed:

[Mentor] is brilliant. It's like another daughter for [mentor]. She comes in the car she comes to my house and everything. She knows everything about my business, my life and everything. We're open so we just talk about it. There's nothing to hide.

There can also be inter-professional confusion for mentors who also work at the Centre in other capacities so that colleagues automatically assume they are responsible for addressing issues 'outside' the mentor-mentee relationship. This, as one mentor reported, can have a negative impact on relationships with mentees:

When you're working on the playground it's quite difficult because if these kids kick off everyone looks to you to sort it out instead of somebody who just comes in from the outside and can maintain that relationship, I've had numerous relationship breakdowns with [mentees] because of something they've done over there. If I wasn't working here it's not something I would have to address and I've had to suffer for that for the next few weeks. I've banned them or said something they don't want to hear and got upset about it.

Mentoring is a diverse activity that is undertaken in a variety of formal and informal contexts so it is uncertain how far these problems can be meaningfully compared to other programmes. What is clear, from both here and elsewhere, is that good intentions are not enough. That is, mentors need to balance professionalism with friendship. Non-professional volunteer schemes in particular have been widely criticized (eg. St James-Roberts and Samlal Singh, 2001) but while there seems to be little justification for developing these on a stand-alone basis, a professional friendship that is linked to a range of interventions and services within local communities could make a real difference to those who are most at risk of exclusion (see also St James-Roberts and Samlal Singh, 2001; Philip et al, 2004; Liabo and Lucas, 2006; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Providing mentors for the marginalised young people of Welsh Town may be criticised for ignoring or perhaps diverting attention from its profound social need. The issues facing mentees were indeed often symptomatic of deeper historical, environmental and cultural problems so mentors needed to be mindful of their limits and realistic in setting goals. When delivered carelessly mentoring programmes are likely to create false hope and make matters worse but when delivered well they can become an integral part of the complex systems of support required by mentees and carers alike. The following points should, however, be remembered:

- Mentoring is a hybrid relationship providing ‘professional friendship’. There is however a tension between ‘formal’ and in ‘informal’ support, so explicit negotiation of boundaries and goals is required.
- Trust and reliability should be carefully managed and maintained. When expectations cannot be satisfied, clearly communicating this (preferably in advance) can prevent feelings of rejection and failure.
- While mentoring appears to contribute to better behavioural outcomes, these can be difficult to evidence. Short-term outcomes should therefore be realistically defined and regularly reviewed with mentees.
- How relationships begin and end can have long-term consequences, entrance and exit strategies must therefore be agreed and carefully planned.

This qualitative evaluation adds to existent research which suggests that mentoring has a positive but modest effect which increases over time. Interestingly, parents and mentees were most clear about its benefits which for the latter included changed behaviour, improved concentration, a better attitude at school, getting help with homework, learning new things, alleviating boredom, preventing anti-social behaviour, being able to do different things and being able to talk with somebody. Parents and carers noted improved confidence, calming down, providing structure, healthier relationships and help with practical problems and perhaps most importantly for them the opportunity for much needed respite. It is important to recognise, however, that these positive outcomes tell just part of the story as they are only possible because of the strong attachments that have been forged in adversity and, often, against all expectations.

Few interventions have generated as much interest, investment and popular support as mentoring in recent years but the development of a contract culture has led to an over emphasis on the quantitative measurement of outcomes as the best way of demonstrating that funds invested in mentoring have been spent appropriately. This has not only led to unreliable and contradictory ‘grey literature’ but the lack of robust peer-reviewed studies also means that mentoring remains under-theorised. This is a great pity as without a coherent theoretical framework (or frameworks)

valuable evidence will either be misunderstood or overlooked. One of the few frameworks applied to mentoring is Attachment Theory and by drawing on this, it has been possible to see not only 'what works' in this particular project but also how it works: by building trusting relationships. The ability of mentees to empathise and self-regulate has also been highlighted in this evaluation and this too is increasingly seen as an outgrowth of strong attachments (Rhodes et al, 2006) making their progress all the more remarkable.

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Notes

- 1 The names of all places, local reports and people have been anonymised to avoid identification
- 2 'Four out of five children don't have good role models' Children's Society Press release, 16 September 2009. Available at: <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-views/press-release/four-out-five-children-dont-have-good-role-models>. Accessed 08.09.11
- 3 'The difficult child, his mentor and a new life free from crime' By Maxine Frith in *The Independent* Monday, 7 June 2004. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-difficult-child-his-mentor-and-a-new-life-free-from-crime-731399.html>. Accessed: 08.09.11
- 4 'A friend in need' Children's Society Press Release, 08 April 2008. Available at <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-views/press-release/friend-need>. Accessed 08.09.11.

Reconnecting With Evaluation: The benefits of using a participatory approach to assess impact

Susan Cooper

Abstract

This article draws on the findings of a research project conducted in a third sector youth organisation in the south west of England between March 2010 and April 2011. The research examined the experiences of professional youth workers using the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique to evaluate the impact of their work. The technique had not been used in a youth work context in the UK previously. I argue that using this technique enabled the youth workers to re-engage with the process of evaluation in a meaningful way. Key themes include raising workers' confidence, developing their ability to assess the impact of their work and the benefits of collective reflective dialogue. I argue that the MSC technique is not only congruent with youth work practice but has significant potential to enhance it. It is timely that youth workers and youth work managers explore alternative approaches to evaluation given the challenges of difficult financial times ahead and the opportunities that the Government's proposed decentralisation offer.

Key words: Evaluation, Participatory Evaluation, MSC, Youth work,

THIS ARTICLE presents the early findings of my doctoral research study. The aim of the research was to explore the ways in which youth workers experienced an alternative approach to evaluation and to develop some insight into what these experiences can tell us about the relationship between processes of evaluation and youth workers' understanding of self and practice. I used an interpretive approach as interpretive research aims to understand the meaning behind something, to explore perspectives and shared meaning and to develop insights into situations (Wellington, 2000). The fieldwork took place over a period of eleven months and involved the training and support of a group of youth workers to use the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique in their settings. Data was gathered primarily via in-depth interviews and group discussions with the youth workers. My analysis of the data was informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al, 2009). Substantial verbatim extracts from interview transcripts have been used in this article to provide 'a grounding in examples' to allow the reader to make their own assessment of my interpretations (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

This study was limited to the voices of eight youth workers working in a single organisation and

makes no claim to be representative of the experiences of youth workers elsewhere. I aim for credibility, not validity, with success related to whether or not my research adds to the understanding of the relationship between processes of evaluation and youth workers' sense of self and practice. Greenwood and Levin (2005: 54) suggest 'co-generated contextual knowledge is deemed valid if it generates action'. Siraj-Blatchford (1994) supports the notion of catalytic validity, suggesting also that the responsibility for assessing the validity of interpretive research lies with the reader; in other words narratives should resonate with the reader (Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000). Christians (2005: 152) asserts that interpretive research is authentically sufficient when it fulfils three conditions: it represents multiple voices, enhances moral discernment, and promotes social transformation. Taking an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to analysis I did not set to find one single answer or truth, but rather a coherent and legitimate account that is attentive to the words of the participants.

This article begins by setting out the context and rationale for the research, in terms of identifying the changing discourse of evaluation brought about by managerialism. This is followed by an exploration of youth workers' feelings of alienation from the process of evaluation. I then provide an overview of the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique before exploring the key themes emerging from my research: raising workers' confidence, supporting and enabling practitioners to assess the impact of their work, and the benefits of collective reflective dialogue. I finish with a meta-evaluation of the MSC technique in which I discuss the changes that the practitioners identified in their practice that they attributed to their participation in the evaluation project. These changes can be understood in terms of the way the youth workers relate to reflective practice and the practice of evaluation.

Changing discourse

Interest in evaluation has surged (Patton, 2008) but the focus of evaluation has shifted. Evaluation has three purposes: 'accountability', which responds to the demands of funders and stakeholders to meet contractual agreements, 'programme development', which focuses on improving the quality of the programme, and lastly 'generating knowledge', which aims to develop understanding about what forms of practice are successful (Chelminsky, 1997). For evaluation to be an effective process, these three evaluative purposes need equal focus. However, our understanding of the concept of evaluation has been corrupted by an exclusive focus on accountability, losing its ability to support programme development or generate knowledge and conversely this has had a detrimental effect on practice (Issitt and Spence, 2005). The dominance of the accountability model of evaluation has been driven by the neoliberal agenda that prioritises economy, effectiveness and quality (Rose, 2010).

The principles of managerialism: accountability, cost-effectiveness and external monitoring, are

evident in the Transforming Youth Work agenda which saw the introduction of externally imposed targets (DfES, 2002). This shift towards seeing evaluation and indeed quality in terms of quantifiable targets favoured a positivist approach that works on the basis that there are measurable inputs, outputs and outcomes, assumes causality, and asserts that a measurement of this will indicate the economy, effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation (Ford et al, 2005). What this approach to evaluation has achieved however is more a measure of whether service providers adhered to government directives and whether service providers have been successful in doing the paperwork well rather than any assessment of whether they made a difference to the lives of those engaged with the service (Patton, 2008). The inappropriateness of this form of evaluation in youth work is striking. Setting measurable outcomes is quite straightforward when the ‘product’ is tangible, for example, an ASDAN award or a BCU One Star Certificate. However, youth work is a qualitative process; it is concerned with personal and social development and as such, it is not always possible to identify tangible outcomes that lend themselves to measurement.

Disengaging from the evaluation process

The changing nature of evaluation was identified by all the youth workers engaged in the research project. All talked about evaluation in terms of paperwork, form filling, data-inputting and measurement against externally set targets and it was evident from the transcripts that they experienced this negatively in terms of the impact on their day-to-day practice as the following quotations show:

paperwork, paperwork, paperwork [...] a necessary evil now everything's, it's just the way it's changing, funding is getting tighter, funders are getting more strict with what they want, unfortunately nowadays you have to follow what they say so it is an absolute pain to get it all done and then get the data inputted (D1).

I have the numbers drilled into my head but then that's another thing I have an issue with – it's that whole issue about being target-driven because I really don't agree with it [...] it's becoming harder and harder to be able to do positive work with young people when you're spending so much time justifying why you're doing it (C1).

I feel that if the project is young people led then young people should set the targets, but our targets are things like getting young people through accreditation which is great because it recognises their achievements but it's because that's the only way we can show funders what we have been doing ... and it's about how many young people we engage with and about new young people – I think we just did 140 in the last quarter, and I think we've got to keep doing that and that's difficult because that's about working with young people, it's in the back of your mind – I need to move on to new young people to meet those targets (A1).

The use of targets to measure quality has been seen to re-focus practice on the indicators used which in many cases are not meaningful (Smart, 2007) and Elliott and Kushner (2007: 326) note ‘the negative side-effects of target-driven action—both in programme performance and evaluation practice’. It has been documented elsewhere that practitioners feel alienated from evaluation as a result of the incompatibility of the positivist approach to the context of their practice (Everitt and Hardiker, 1996, Issitt and Spence, 2005, Beresford and Branfield, 2006) and the research informing this article adds further support to this. The research report *Developing Monitoring and Evaluation in the Third Sector* (Ellis, 2008) confirms that practitioners predominantly believe that evaluation is done mainly for the benefit of funders and regulators, and the assertion is made that externally driven targets and performance indicators reinforce this perception.

Youth workers’ disengagement with the process of evaluation is of real concern as it runs the risk of allowing practice knowledge and practice improvement to be overshadowed by issues of external accountability. Evans and Hardy (2010: 154) argue that ‘evaluating in practice [...] is aimed primarily at strengthening practitioner knowledge’ but when evaluation is perceived and practised within the narrow frame of accountability, this is clearly not the outcome. The challenge is to ensure youth workers remain engaged with the process of evaluation. However, in order to do this they must be able to see a value in evaluation for both themselves, and for their practice. A pluralist approach to evaluation provides the best opportunity for ensuring that evaluation remains the process for accountability, programme development and generating professional knowledge. The research informing this article supports the premise that a participatory approach can re-engage youth workers with the concept and practice of evaluation while also producing ‘evidence’ of impact.

Reconnecting with evaluation: Taking a participatory approach.

A re-balancing of Chelminsky’s (1997) threefold purposes of evaluation requires us to adopt approaches to evaluation that equally favour both ‘professional’ and ‘project’ development, rather than an exclusive focus on accountability. Dahlberg et al (2007) argue that taking an interpretivist approach, with its emphasis on the importance of ‘meaning making’ will enable us to do this. Participatory forms of evaluation can offer resistance to the dominant discourse of evaluation as a technology of power (Everitt and Hardiker, 1996). Fetterman and Wandersman (2004) state that participatory evaluation is underpinned by facilitation, advocacy, illumination and liberation (ibid: 4). The commitment to local control and capacity building means that participatory evaluation has the potential to enable practitioners to generate their own learning and support reflective practice (Hall and Hall, 2004). The principles of participatory evaluation are in tune with the principles of youth work as the participatory evaluation process is one that:

- *Supports and extends participatory models of practice;*

- *Values the knowledge and experience of participants;*
- *Uses learning and education to promote reflection and critical analysis by both project participants and practitioners;*
- *Serves the purpose of improving the program and the organisation in the interests of the users;*
- *Uses participatory methods of obtaining data and generating knowledge, employing a wide range of predominantly qualitative methods, sometimes in combination with quantitative methods; and*
- *Is participatory and collective and that creates better, more in-depth, and more accurate knowledge of the performance and impacts of a practice intervention. (Jackson and Kassam, 1998).*

These principles demonstrate the huge gulf between the participatory paradigm and the positivist paradigm of evaluation discussed earlier. There is not space here to explore the range of participatory approaches; there is a plethora of literature for those wishing to gain an in-depth insight. I have provided a brief overview elsewhere (see Cooper, 2011).

For the purposes of this article, it is however necessary to recognise that participatory approaches to evaluation are not without their critics. Much of the criticism of participatory evaluation, and indeed, participatory research more generally, focuses on the nature of participation and the issue of power. Power is a central concern of participatory research (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006). The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique enabled the youth workers to raise their voices and the voices of young people through the generation, analysis and selection of significant change stories; however the hierarchical nature of the process had the potential to undermine this. Cornwall and Jewkes' (1995) conceptualisation of participation in research as a continuum, with degrees of control over the process and outcomes of research is useful. The common practice in evaluation is for fieldworkers to present information to managers who then do the analysis; the MSC techniques changes that and hence challenges the power dynamic. It was important to ensure both the youth workers' group and the trustees' and managers' group were committed to power-sharing and the learning potential of the technique. Issues of power within the youth workers' group also needed to be considered during the process. Prilleltensky (2005: 80) argues that power 'is ubiquitous; it exists in all practice settings, and it pervades the way we think about and treat the people we work with'. It was important to raise the issue of power within the group as they engaged in the selection and analysis stage of the process to try to maximise participation.

What is the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique?

This technique was developed by Dr Rick Davies in 1994 through his evaluation of development work in Bangladesh (Davies, 1996). As far as I am aware this technique has not been used previously

in a youth work context in the UK. The technique was developed as a response to the inadequacies of conventional evaluation processes in capturing programme impacts that are difficult to quantify and where evaluation is about learning, not just accountability (Willets and Crawford, 2007). It was this aspect that was most attractive in terms of applying the technique to a youth work setting as it is well suited to monitoring and evaluating programmes that focus on learning and social change. Of particular interest was its potential to identify unexpected impacts and to identify the values that prevail in an organisation. The technique encourages analysis as well as data collection and thus has the potential for capacity-building in data analysis and conceptualising impact and to deliver rich data in contrast to the over-simplification that quantitative approaches offer (Davies and Dart, 2005). The MSC technique is a qualitative approach and should not be judged against validity criteria associated with positivist or quantitative research. Davies and Dart (2005) assert that validity is ensured through a range of mechanisms: thick description, the systematic process of story selection, transparency, verification, participation and member checking. Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that there are two forms of rigour; rigour of application of method and rigour of interpretation; the MSC technique enables both of these to be scrutinised through the participatory process of generating and interpreting the stories.

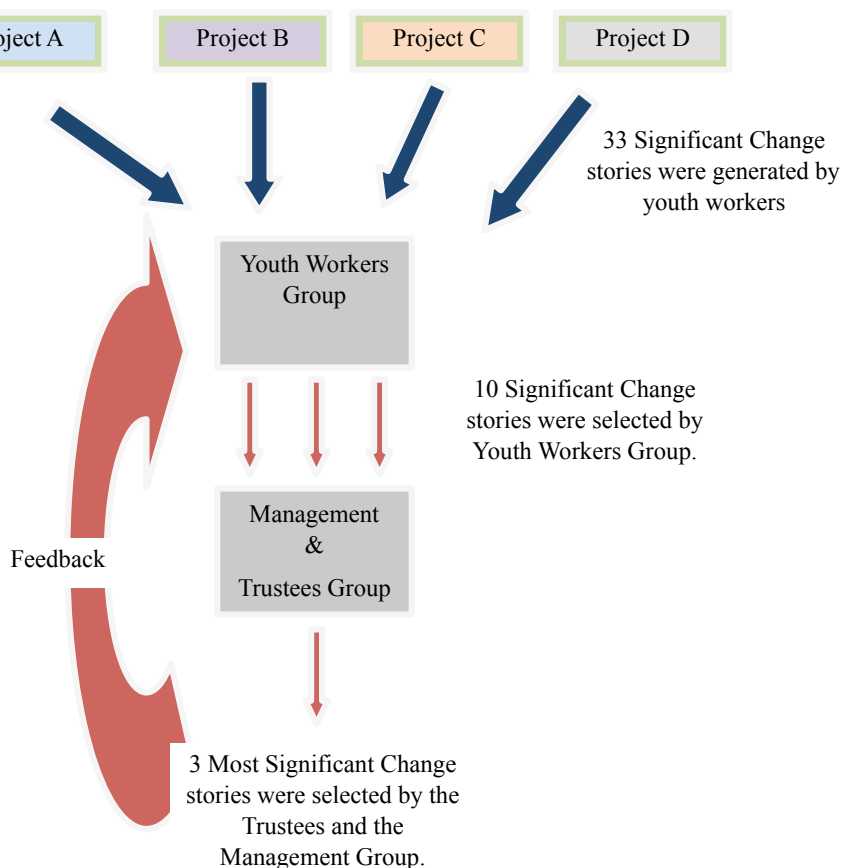
Essentially the technique involves the generation of a number of Significant Change stories and the systematic, collective analysis and selection of the Most Significant Change story for any given period. A Significant Change story is the response given by a beneficiary to the open question, 'Looking back over the last month, what do you think was the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of coming here?' The story-teller is prompted to explain why this change was significant to them. I adapted the technique to include space for youth workers to add a context section to the generated story. This was in response to a need to not only raise the voice of young people but also to allow youth workers' voices to be heard, as Beresford and Branfield (2006: 443) state 'service users are not the only group that faces particular risks of exclusion. This also seems to be experienced by face-to-face practitioners and unpaid carers – at least in the United Kingdom.'

Overview of process

A group of lead youth workers were trained and supported to use the MSC technique. Three rounds of the technique were conducted over a period of eleven months. Each round involved the youth workers generating up to four significant change stories from young people engaged in their projects. These stories were brought to a group session for analysis and selection. The analysis involved assigning stories to domains; in other words, the stories were grouped according to content or impact similarities. The youth workers read their stories to the group and added context and additional information as appropriate. The group then selected one significant change story for each domain. The selected stories were expanded to include the youth worker's context section and the group's reason for selection as the most significant for that domain. These were forwarded

to the Managers and Trustees Group for them to select the Most Significant Change story for that particular round. The Trustees and Managers group reported back to the youth workers group their selection and the reasons behind it. (See diagram 1 for overview of process).

Diagram 1: An overview of the MSC technique



Early Findings

Analysis of interviews conducted with the youth workers at the beginning and after the evaluation project provided qualitative evidence of capacity building on an individual and organisational level. A number of themes emerged. In this article I intend to explore those themes particularly related to practitioner engagement, namely raising workers' confidence, supporting and enabling youth workers to assess the impact of their work and the benefits of collective reflective dialogue.

Raising Workers' Confidence

All the youth workers, in response to a question relating to the benefits of implementing the MSC technique, commented on how it had encouraged and supported them and confirmed their sense of professional self.

I think what we might get from it might be [...] a bit of a pat on the back because these things are happening for young people; it will give us ammunition to justify the work that we do. When you're told from above that you can't do something anymore, you'll be able to turn around and say it might not be hitting those targets but this is what its generating – I think it's really good.'(A1).

The fact is you've got something there that you can actually look at and say 'wow, we've made a difference'. So it actually reinforces your work, makes the workforce a lot happier, we're doing the right thing and it gives us confidence in what we're doing'. (D1).

This boost in morale was an expected outcome and stems from the influence of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva,1987) on the technique. Appreciative Inquiry is a strength-based approach that takes a positive stance in an effort to counterbalance the deficit discourse of problem-solving; in other words if we look for problems we will find problems. However, if we seek out the positive, what has worked well, this can boost morale and generate creative energy to envisage how we can do more of it. Whilst the MSC technique does not require that stories are positive, the evidence from other MSC projects (see Davies and Dar, 2005) suggest that, in the main, stories do tend to be ones which illustrate positive change. Woven through the youth workers' words are indications of emerging confidence and perhaps a belief in the possibility of a level of professional autonomy. At times of such radical change, and the accompanying challenges to professionalism and professional identity, a process that enables youth workers to feel positive about themselves and about the work they do is beneficial for young people, the youth workers themselves and the organisation overall. This is in stark contrast to the emotions expressed by the youth workers when talking about their experiences of accountability evaluation, where terms such as 'pain', 'a nightmare' and 'feeling squashed' were frequently used.

Supporting and enabling youth workers to assess the impact of their work

The MSC technique supported the youth workers to improve their ability to capture and analyse the impact of their work. The generation of stories was a challenging stage for some for a number of reasons. Concerns were raised about validity of the process, of leading or manipulating young people and issues of sampling. These issues were discussed throughout as the youth workers

developed their skills, understanding and approach. The strength of feeling expressed in relation to the 'unscientific nature' of the sampling process was unexpected and perhaps demonstrates the depth to which the dominant discourse has impacted on the youth workers' perception of evaluation as needing to be scientific and objective. The use of purposive sampling was questioned in terms of reliability, and this created a level of unease for some. Clarification was given that whereas purposive sampling can be seen as a weakness in the positivist paradigm, it is seen as strength in interpretivist study. It is entirely appropriate to select 'excellent informants' (Spradley, 1979) as these people are the ones who can tell us the most about the question we seek to understand. Selecting young people based on prior knowledge that they have experienced a change as a result of being involved with the organisation was purposefully 'biased', not to make the organisation look good but in order to learn from those cases of good practice (Patton, 2002).

A further anxiety expressed in the training sessions was that of the role of the youth worker at the story generation stage. Many of the concerns were positivist-based anxieties in relation to 'researcher contamination'. During a training workshop the notion of 'generating' rather than 'collecting' stories was explored to make transparent the 'researcher involvement' in interpretivist research. Interestingly, what also came out of the discussions regarding the role of the youth worker in story generation was the realisation that in fact these conversations could easily be seen as part of the youth worker's role, to support young people to reflect on their experiences and learn from them.

...feels a bit manipulative; those stories should come from the young people but you're eeking it out of them, but something has happened and as youth workers we're going to recognise the change in that young person possibly before they do, and actually you're helping them to realise it and perhaps, if you hadn't approached them would they have realised it? As long as it's valuable to the young person and you're not just taking it away from them... (A1).

I think they're [the stories] definitely a good way of recording and getting young people to recognise their own changes and actually that's good for young people as well because that can boost their self-esteem. (B1).

...encouraging young people to reflect on themselves, that something we've missed out on doing so yeah I'm all up for it. (C1).

This recognition that using the MSC technique is akin to doing youth work offers a real opportunity to re-unite youth workers with the concept of evaluation. Youth workers found the generation of stories was compatible with their everyday practice and further, that perhaps it offers the opportunity to enhance it as this quotation shows:

It's definitely a good way of doing things, [...] because you're asking them questions that are difficult rather than just offhand comments about things, you create a bit more of a relationship, you develop a relationship with people a bit more.' (E1).

The benefits of collective reflective dialogue

Time is a finite resource and all the youth workers welcomed the necessity to spend time either in dialogue with young people or in dialogue with their peers. The need to generate stories meant that they had to prioritise spending time with young people in conversation – it legitimised and validated what should be considered as central to the youth worker's role (Smith, 2010).

It was a real chance to sit down one on one with that young person [...] you knew you had to do it and I think if we didn't have to do it, that wouldn't have happened. (B2).

... nice to have an opportunity to sit down and ask young people about it cos again you don't get a chance to... (F2).

Youth workers identified a range of benefits from engaging with young people in this way. These included enabling young people to develop their reflective skills, challenging their own assumptions, and building relationships.

Stuff came up that I wasn't expecting to come up... (D1).

Actually what came out was almost completely different to what was in your head. (B2).

...brought up a lot of interesting discussions cos they were like 'why are you interested?' and we were saying, 'well, actually we are interested, we don't just [...] open the doors, you come in and then off you go, we do actually care...' (C2).

The youth workers were able to identify a number of reasons why, in their everyday practice, finding time to engage in meaningful dialogue with young people was challenging. These included resource issues, for example, staff: young people ratios; organisational change issues, for example a lack of consistency created by moving staff around the various projects; and behaviour management issues taking priority.

When you might only have two workers in a session and you've got 30 young people, you know, it can actually be really hard to do that, to sit down and even have just that 10 minutes with one young person, [...] you don't want to be distracted from that because I think it's a really important thing that you're sitting down and talking to that young person about, it

feels that you want to pick your moment and not, two minutes in, have to get up and tell other young people that they shouldn't be doing something [...] the process gets broken and that doesn't work. (B2).

You want to be able to give the young person real time to talk cos its their story [...] It's really hard to get that space where someone feels they can be really honest with you, without you having to run off half way through, and go 'hang on a minute, I've got to go and sort that out'. (C2).

If you've got two of you working and its hectic, finding the space to sit down and talk to young people is difficult. (F2).

This raises some questions about the impact of externally set targets, for example the need to engage in 'new' areas, the need to engage with 'new' contacts, and the short-term nature of funding on the ability to deliver quality youth work that depends on building and maintaining effective relationships.

Meta-evaluation: Reconnecting with reflective practice and evaluation

All the youth workers involved in using the MSC technique were able to identify changes in their practice which they attributed to their participation in the evaluation project. These changes can be understood in terms of the way the youth workers relate to reflective practice and the practice of evaluation. The following extracts show how they felt the process enabled them, collectively, to reflect on some of the fundamental questions in youth work and in the evaluation of youth work.

It's been really interesting to work as a group and actually take the time out to think about all those stories [...] having the time to explore was really nice and a lot more came out of it than what I probably anticipated – I thought we'd all just look at them and go 'yeah, that one, that one, that one, – done', but there was so much more to it and it was far more complex. (F2).

Best bit, I think probably was discussing why a story should go through and why it shouldn't and finding out what everyone thought, either individually or as a group as to what is distance travelled and what is an achievement for a young person. (E2).

These findings support those identified by Dart (2000) in terms of participants developing a better understanding of impact and a more fully shared vision. The process appears to have countered some of the pressure to be constantly looking forward, reminding us that we should be looking back in equal measure as the following extract indicates:

It makes you realise you look forward all the time, next project, next month's session, looking for funding, starting things up [...] It made me stop and think when you stop having to be reflective – when you stop doing your degree basically, that part of you shuts down a little bit. (A2).

Sometimes you just slog on and don't really think about what you're doing, or all the stuff you've done [...] that kind of gets forgotten. It was a really good way of saying 'look at what we've done'. (B2).

I think it can only improve practice cos it makes you reflective doesn't it and we should be doing that all the time. (F2).

The collective nature of the technique enabled the sharing of practice. This and the support of collective dialogue combated a sense of isolation for some youth workers.

To see all the projects as a whole [...] sometimes you're quite in the zone with your own [...] nice for everyone to come together to do something like that, we don't always get the opportunity to do that as a group. (B2).

Nice to be able to prioritise having the time to meet up and you knew you were going to have a good couple of hours to speak with your colleagues, [...] we do [have group time] but increasingly we're having less and less time to do those kinds of things. (A1).

You forget about other projects. Sometimes so it was quite nice listening to their stories [...] It gives you a wider awareness cos I think sometimes cos the work is so intense you can be very inward looking about your own work [...] sparked a lot of conversations and thinking a little bit more outwardly rather than quite so inward. (C2).

We all work in such different places, I think it's really important to know what's going on, and being able to support your colleagues, you can offer advice cos we all have different skills. (E2).

Finally, using the technique does appear to have enabled the youth workers to reconsider their practice. It is evident from both sets of interviews that evaluation had become associated with 'paperwork', the collection of statistics and quantification of issues far too complex to be quantifiable. This technique offered an alternative and the youth workers readily engaged with the process despite their concerns with time pressures.

I came away from that first meeting thinking I actually quite like this – it's the first evaluation

that I'm actually going to enjoy and that's got more of a point to it. (D1).

...getting real quality feedback from young people, because that's what it is really, it's good feedback from young people. (C2).

They valued the technique for its reflective and collective nature, and for its ability to better capture the complex nature of youth work:

Paperwork, we do it, it gets us funding, and we all know it and we all hate it but we understand the importance of it so we're happy to do it but it misses out all of that other really rich detail doesn't it, that you can only get through sitting down and having a conversation. (F2).

Quite often it seemed to be what the young people picked out was that fluffy stuff – just coming to a session, rather than the sort of target driven stuff that we get made to pick out [...] the stuff that seems really hard to prove the worth of. (B2).

It puts something meaningful, rather than figures, on the table, stuff that's actually meaningful. (D2).

In summary, analysis of the final interview transcripts indicated that engaging in the evaluation project impacted on how the youth workers view their practice, both individually and as a collective. It enabled them to re-engage with the processes of reflective practice and evaluation in ways that were seen as meaningful to them. The appreciative inquiry nature of the technique has provided a counter to the 'squashing and squeezing' nature of performativity (Ball, 2008). In fact, the youth workers felt bolstered by the 'real' feedback from young people.

Conclusions

There are a number of promising signs that adopting a participatory approach may support youth workers to engage in purposeful evaluation. Most importantly, the Most Significant Change technique offers an evaluative process that is aligned to the ethos and values of youth work. The centrality of the relationship was seen as important, as one youth worker stated, 'I don't think there is any perfect way of measuring youth work unless you know the young person'. Using the technique was challenging; it required a great deal more resource than ticking boxes on a nightly recording sheet. It required a commitment from the youth workers to engage in critical dialogue with young people, with each other and with other stakeholders. The crucial element has been the issue of time. As with all participatory evaluation methods, this technique is time-consuming. Time is a finite resource and prioritising this process when there are so many other competing demands

presented a real challenge. The question to be answered is whether or not the benefits of using the technique outweigh this and thereby enable youth workers and youth work managers to prioritise it.

It is timely to seriously look at the way in which youth work practitioners engage with evaluative practice. There is talk of removing centralised targets and of the possibility of the public sector undergoing a fundamental shift from traditional command-and-control styles of management to a high performance model based on autonomy and trust. This may provide a window of opportunity for change. In his foreword to the document, *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: An essential guide*, Nick Clegg (2010:1) states, ‘Radical decentralisation means stripping away much of the top-down bureaucracy that previous governments have put in the way of frontline public services.’ In the same document the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister of State for Decentralisation states ‘that bureaucratic micromanagement of our public services is not only inefficient, but also undemocratic’ (2010:2). If we are to take full advantage of this opportunity for change then we must ensure that youth work practitioners engage fully with the concept of evaluation for the purpose of generating professional knowledge, for improving service delivery and for accountability purposes. I argue that this can be achieved through adopting a pluralistic approach, and through using involving participatory evaluation methodologies. I finish by sharing Fetterman’s (2001: 381) vision of evaluation in the 21st century:

The future of evaluation will be characterised by critical and collaborative relationships. Evaluation will be a collaboration. Citizens will come to the table with a basic knowledge of evaluation as part of their democratic literacy skills. Funders, program staff members and participants will acquire the capacity to monitor and assess critical aspects of their own performance.

And leave you with the question: are we ready yet?

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On Measuring Youth Work in the United States: The Role of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

David M. Hansen and Michael J. Crawford

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to situate issues around the measurement of youth work in the United States within our ongoing research program in order to highlight the role that qualitative and quantitative research methodologies can have in supporting and understanding youth work. In an age where ‘data’ (information) is currency, we propose that, in the United States, the field of youth work should engage researchers to more fully understand, not simply what youth work is, but why and how it impacts the lives of youth. Research findings on youth work, we suggest, have direct relevance for engaging youth in other settings. We also share important ‘lessons learned’ from our research experience to emphasize the potentials and pitfalls of measuring youth work.

Key words: youth work, grounded-theory, quantitative, qualitative, methodology

IN AN EVER increasing information age and economy, ‘data’ (information) has become the standard currency. The acquisition of such data often relies on some form of measurement, from the most informal, such as asking someone for directions, to the highly precise, such as DNA testing. Measuring anything is not a neutral activity; people measure – or don’t measure – things for a reason: to search for principles to be applied elsewhere, to generate ideas for improving a process or outcome, or to make informed decisions in complex settings, to name a few. For some, measuring youth work and its impact is a distasteful topic to be avoided. For others, measuring youth work is a methodological process that can help inform practice. And for a few, measuring youth work is part of high-stakes decision-making. Hence, the goal of this paper is to situate issues related to the measurement of youth work within our ongoing research program in hopes of shedding light on issues surrounding the measurement of youth work – the youth work phenomenon is inherently adaptive, unscripted, or in the words of Tony Taylor, ‘improvisatory’.¹

Why commit to such an endeavor? It is not because of our love of measurement. Rather, our experience convinces us that youth work, at its best, makes a profound contribution to the lives of young people in ways other professions or institutions (eg. schools) presently do not.² Our broader aim is to understand how youth work makes its contribution so we can support the youth work profession and also to apply what we learn to other professions that intersect the lives of youth.

The aim of this paper is to describe our research approach to measuring youth work, particularly using qualitative methodologies, with the intent of spurring ideas (maybe even debate) about the potentials and pitfalls that measurement engenders.

In the interest of helping readers navigate through this exposition, we have divided it into five sections. We begin first by providing a brief overview of the context in which youth work occurs – structured youth programs – in order to familiarize the reader with the peculiarities of youth work in the United States. The second section provides a synopsis of measurement trends in research on youth programs. Section three describes a specific qualitative approach we used to measure youth work for generating grounded-theory of different learning processes. Reflecting the cyclical nature of our research, qualitative to quantitative and back, the fourth section provides a glimpse into our present and future plans. We share lessons learned from our research and measurement in the fifth and final section.

The Context of Youth Work in the United States: Structured Youth Programs

Youth work in the United States primarily occurs in the context of structured youth programs, such as community-oriented programs (eg. Boys and Girls Clubs) or extracurricula programs (eg. sports or arts). Structured youth programs provide organized activities in which youth can participate. The range of activities is wide, including offerings such as team sports, performance and fine arts, agriculture, and civic involvement. In many programs, adults create and facilitate the activities, whereas in other programs, youth and adults collaborate to design and conduct program offerings. The prefix ‘structured’ distinguishes youth programs from youth centers where young people have few, if any, organized activities. Failing to offer intentional, goal-driven, engaging options for youth, youth centers serve as drop-in facilities, where the primary activity for young people there is ‘hanging out.’ Few in the United States, including parents, educators, researchers, and policy makers, need convincing that children’s and adolescents’ participation in structured youth programs is generally supportive of their development and well-being (Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). For example, it is estimated that 6.5 million children are enrolled in structured youth programs in the United States (Afterschool Alliance, 2004), and 76% of Americans think Federal, State, and Local government officials should increase funds for out-of-school programs (Afterschool Alliance and Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates, Inc., 2008).

In the United States, individual citizens have been primarily responsible for creating youth programs, typically in response to a perceived youth need (ie, the need for a safe place for young people to spend time and learn). There is minimal official government policy for youth work in the context of youth programs, particularly when compared to the highly regulated federal and state education context (eg., No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Historically, individuals, businesses,

and non-profit agencies, such as the United Way, have been the most common financial contributors to youth programs (Halpern, 2002). Although private funding is still the primary budget source for most youth programs, local, state, and federal branches of government have begun to commit funds to support select programs, mostly for those that serve disadvantaged or socially-excluded youth (eg. 21st Century Learning Centers). Because most youth programs have limited financial resources, programs hire staff for essential positions and utilize volunteers and part-time workers to help run the activities. Thus, youth workers are a mix of full-time and part-time staff and volunteers.

A Context for the Measurement of Youth Programs and Youth Work

Perhaps reflecting philanthropic roots, there have been minimal external pressures to measure or assess the impact of youth work. Measurement and assessment of youth work and programs in the United States have typically occurred within the confines of social science research, which has generally been less concerned with evaluation (eg. proving it is ‘effective’) and more focused on understanding the benefits of youth programs and work. The measurement environment, then, has been ‘low-stakes,’ and youth programs and workers tend to benefit from participating in research as it can help them not only to learn and improve but also demonstrate to funders the impact of what they do. The research on youth programs and youth work is young and just beginning to emerge from its nascent status, but there have been significant measurement trends that are worth noting. So, before discussing our qualitative and quantitative approaches to youth work, we briefly synthesize measurement trends that have emerged in order to provide a backdrop for understanding our research. (For an extensive review of research in this field, see Eccles and Templeton, 2002, and Feldman and Matjasko, 2005).

Initial scholarship in the field began by comparing two groups that already existed (ie, young people who participated in structured activities and those who did not) on a variety of outcomes. Early research identified significant correlations between participation status and meaningful outcomes, such as individual self-concept (eg. Phillips, 1969), academic achievement (eg. Holland and Andre, 1987), and college attendance (eg. Marsh, 1992). At this simplest level of measurement – ‘yes, participate’ versus ‘no, do not participate’ – research consistently found that those who participated in youth programming tended to have more favorable outcomes (eg. higher educational aspirations, lower absenteeism, improved race relations) than those who did not participate. Because this was a new field of study, research was not yet concerned with how youth programs and youth workers supported development. Rather it focused on describing the basic patterns of associations, which helped solidify youth programs and youth work as a legitimate area for scientific study.

As the research field on youth programs and youth work began to mature, emphasis shifted toward defining the range of learning opportunities youth programs offered. Around this time, two measurement trends emerged. First, an emphasis on the quantitative measurement of non-academic

skills and competencies emerged. In 1991, the United States Department of Labor produced an influential report, outlining the types of skills and competencies the labor market and employers needed at present and in the future (SCANS, 1991). This report drew attention to ‘softer skills’ or ‘21st Century Skills’ (eg. interpersonal competency, initiative, teamwork) that were increasingly becoming a staple of work across a wide range of occupations in the United States (Mahoney, Cairns, and Farmer, 2003; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). Research was pointing to youth programs as a distinct context where these skills could be learned (Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, and Lord, 2005; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). For example, Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) and Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) found that youth programs were a distinct setting, especially compared to academic settings, that provided higher rates of a wide range of learning experiences involving qualities such as initiative. While some quantitative measurement progress has been made (eg. the *Youth Experience Survey 2.0*, Hansen and Larson, 2005), there still remains a dearth of ecologically valid measures of these important skills (ie. measures that predict well-being or success in real-world conditions).

A second measurement trend that has emerged is an emphasis on measuring the ‘environment’ or ‘climate’ of youth programs. One popular trend in this area is the use of observational measures to assess a program’s environment. Often assessing what is referred to as ‘program quality,’ these observational measures tend to focus on youth worker practices, or best practices, around interactions with youth (Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). For example, one observable best practice is the degree to which a youth worker shares control over the direction of and decision-making within the youth program. A range of such practices are observed and then scored using a numeric rubric. The popularity of the concept and measures of youth program quality is evident in a recent research journal that devoted a special issue to this topic (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, and Perente, 2010). Enthusiasm for these observational measures is based on a rational, primarily practitioner-based belief, that these practices support heightened, positive development of youth. At present, however, there is little empirical research that has directly evaluated this tenet (Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Although quantitative research on youth programs has expanded rapidly, it has typically done so in the absence of well-defined theory on how programs and youth workers support youth development and learning, which brings us to our current research efforts.

Understanding Developmental Processes: Qualitative Research on Youth Programs

A main focus of our research is on *developmental processes* (eg. how skills and competencies are learned) in youth programs. Although there are general theories of human development (eg. self-determination/agency), there is little theory that reflects real-world experiences and settings of contemporary adolescence. Thus, we chose grounded-theory as our method of qualitative inquiry (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) in order to generate ‘new’ theory of

salient developmental processes in the youth program setting. Consistent with grounded-theory methodology, we were informed by relevant extant theory, including theory related to ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), strategic planning (Friedman and Scholnick, 1997; Scholnick and Friedman, 1987), and initiative/agency (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Larson, 2000).

Beginning in 2005, Reed Larson, David Hansen, and colleagues launched an intensive qualitative study of 11 high quality youth programs – defined as consistent youth involvement and program reputation – funded by a research grant from the W.T. Grant Foundation. The focus on high quality programs was important because we wanted to generate robust theory about developmental processes, so studying programs with positive reputations (among youth and in the community) gave us the best chance of seeing these processes as they unfolded over time (eg. seeing outstanding youth workers in action). Our measurement approach included repeated interviews with young people (648 interviews with 108 young people) and youth workers (122 interviews, 23 youth workers) and making repeated observations of the interactions and activities of a program (159 observations). The study occurred over a period of two years, although we studied each program for a period of time that represented its ‘natural cycle,’ such as the school year or a project occurring over several months. The youth programs we studied were diverse, including programs in rural and urban regions, and those focused on arts, agricultural, or civic activism. The results from this study—research publications, practitioner articles, and newsletters—are available at <http://www.youthdev.illinois.edu/>.

Reflecting grounded-theory methodology, data collection and analyses proceeded continuously throughout the project. From our interviews with young people and our observations of them in programs, youth at one of the programs we studied – a civic activism program in Chicago named Gen Y (pseudonym) – described experiences and learning that we later called strategic thinking (Larson and Hansen, 2005). Strategic thinking involves learning to think ‘strategically’ about dynamic human-systems (eg. government), setting real-world goals that intersect these systems and extend beyond the short-term (eg. over the course of months), and using pragmatic reasoning, or ‘systems thinking,’ to achieve goals. It is a skill, among others, that has received greater recognition among a wide range of stakeholders as important for adult life in the ‘new,’ global economy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2004; SCANS, 1991).

But how did these young people learn strategic thinking? First, young people identified a meaningful issue they wanted to address: inconsistencies in how their school and the Chicago school board applied its own disciplinary code regarding suspensions. The disciplinary code recommended limited punishments for minor offenses, such as being late to class. The issue was salient to these young people because students were being suspended for arriving late (minutes) to class, frequently due to crowded hallways and too little time between classes to arrive on time. Over the course of four months, 20-25 high school adolescents planned and implemented their

plan to advocate for consistency and leniency in applying the discipline with the school board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Working alongside an adult youth worker – Jason in his early 20s – the young people accomplished many goals, including among other things: conducting a Youth Summit at which 300 young people from across Chicago attended workshops on social issues and educational reform, lobbying the Chicago school board and state legislators, and organizing a rally to protest a new exam the school board introduced. As is commonly experienced in such endeavors, accomplishments were preceded by numerous challenges and occasional failures, from motivating apathetic peers to garnering support from teachers to navigating the layers of bureaucracy needed to reach the school board members and CEO.

As the youth project unfolded over time, the data suggested that learning to think strategically occurred within the context of these challenges and setbacks. For example, a 17-year old male talked about the challenges of reaching the school board CEO:

Usually their secretaries pick up the phone and, ‘Oh um, so and so’s not here’. Or then with Richie Kelly, we had trouble reaching him ‘cause he’s the school CEO. So he was at meetings with the mayor and different political figures, and this and that, so at first it was hard to reach him.

As different types of challenges emerged over the four months, young people appeared to gain insights into real-world dynamics (eg. Murphy’s Law, ‘catch 22s’): expect things to go wrong, plan for the unexpected, allow more time than anticipated, and understand that adults change their minds – a ‘yes’ can become a ‘no.’ We began to see a link between youth engagement with challenges specific to the project (ie, tactical challenges) and their learning to think more strategically about how to accomplish their goals. Young people described learning how to: 1) intentionally seek and use information to create a sufficient base with which to plan, 2) target their communication of information to influence different actors, such as the school board, and 3) use sequential, contingent thinking to order steps and anticipate contingencies that could arise. From the perspective of young people in this program, they were learning skills as they addressed a real-world issue.

What role did the youth worker play supporting youth learning? In the interviews with the young people, they described themselves as the agents of their own development (eg. self-regulated learning) and not passive recipients of knowledge or learning imparted by an ‘expert’. This should not suggest, however, that Jason was irrelevant to the learning process or that he stood aside and let the young people ‘figure it out on their own’. Rather, we observed Jason intentionally supporting the learning process. For example, he organized training sessions for the young people on social activism and change (eg. planning events, action research). But even at these ‘trainings,’ young people reported feeling like they were not being instructed (ie, educated); in fact, some appeared unaware that they were being trained. This youth worker was adept at ‘scaffolding’ youth learning

without them feeling like he was usurping control over the project or process. Specifically, we saw him partner and work alongside young people to accomplish goals while the young people continued to maintain ownership of the process. Jason also modelled and encouraged reflection and evaluation of the work, eg. what worked, what did not. It was clear to us that these young people would have struggled to accomplish this goal without the support that Jason provided; they needed access to the experience that Jason brought to the project. This type of learning stands in stark contrast to traditional education in the United States. Young participants experienced themselves as the agents of their own self-initiated learning and, we argue, they learned these skills more deeply with greater processing, more extensive reasoning, greater strategy usage (see Larson and Rusk, *in press*) than if someone attempted to use traditional educational methods, eg. vicarious learning. Although this brief snippet of our qualitative measurement approach hardly does justice to the rich wealth of findings that have resulted, it does emphasize the need to study youth work and youth in context. It also demonstrates the utility of qualitative methods for generating theory about how youth work supports youth learning. Many would be content to stop here. But...

Present and Future Research on Youth Programs

It would be naïve to think that the qualitative research findings noted above extend to most, if not all, youth programs and youth workers in the United States. We can say from first hand experience that not all programs and youth workers are exemplars of high quality. As noted, we intentionally selected high quality youth programs in an effort to see different developmental processes. Having generated theory, we think it is also important to refine and test the emergent ideas so that they can be utilized to support the development for the full range of youth and youth workers. In the brief space left, we share what has been a natural next research step for us: applying the findings to the wider audience of youth workers and programs.

Presently, we are focused on understanding how to increase learning opportunities for adolescents in youth programs across a moderately sized city, Kansas City, with approximately two million people in the 15 counties that make up its metropolitan region. Although our focus is not exclusively on urban, ‘at-risk’ youth (minority youth living in poverty), a large portion of our efforts include this population. In the first stage of our research, we have focused on better understanding the environment or climate of youth programs. In this work, we utilize observational measures of program quality and adolescents’ reports of learning experiences to understand if our observations correspond to what youth experience, which, perhaps surprisingly, has not been a concern of past research. Preliminary analysis of this quantitative data suggests certain observed youth worker practices show strong relations to different learning experiences. Consistent with our qualitative findings on strategic thinking, for example, more opportunities to partner with an adult youth worker (observation) is strongly related to greater experiences related to setting goals, engaging with challenges, solving problems, and managing time (youth reported). These initial

findings have convinced us that we need to better understand the full ‘ecology’ of a youth program and how it enhances or detracts from learning – this includes the role of parents, neighborhoods, schools, program organizational structure, etc. In our next stage of research, then, we will use both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the ‘health’ of a program: the range of factors youth workers face on a daily basis that impact their work. This next stage of research represents our perpetual cycle of utilizing qualitative methods to guide subsequent quantitative work, always with the aim of understanding development within its ecological context.

Lessons Learned

We wrap up our thoughts on measuring youth work by sharing some lessons we have learned. We keep these comments very brief, although they could easily occupy their own volume.

Lesson 1. Social decisions that affect youth programs and youth work must not solely rely on quantitative measures. There is a strong propensity among societies and individuals to give excessive homage to a quantitative indicator as an objective representation of complex phenomena, such as the learning processes that occur in the youth work context. Relying solely on quantitative indicators as the basis for decisions that impact a field (eg. education or youth programs), however, can distort the very processes the indicators intend to measure:

I come to the following pessimistic laws (at least for the U.S. scene): The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor (Campbell, 1976, p. 49).

Campbell’s Law, as it has come to be known, acknowledges that individuals and institutions adapt behaviors in order to meet quantitative performance standards, particularly when such performance is tied to funding (eg. high-stakes decision making). In essence, the behaviors become divorced from the learning processes. In the United States, there have been well-intentioned attempts, typically across larger cities, to create quality rating systems for youth programs that would require programs to report scores on observational measures, which as we previously noted tend to concentrate on youth worker practices. Because such scores and systems can serve to degrade the very processes they were intended to capture, according to Campbell’s Law, we oppose the use of measurement for this purpose. We much prefer measurement be tied to youth workers’ professional development and that it becomes a regular tool used for self-improvement.

Lesson 2. We need theory about processes in programs that is grounded in the youth work, not imported or adopted from other adolescent settings. Research has suggested that youth programs are a unique context for learning, and a thorough understanding of the processes underlying youth

work is critical. As we have already outlined, one specific qualitative research method has been the primary means we have used to generate theory. Such theory should then be used to guide quantitative testing of subsequent hypotheses.

Lesson 3. Exercise caution when ascribing outcomes or the climate of a youth program to the youth worker. Human learning and development is the result of a complex set of interactions, not a single or one-time interaction. Youth, communities, policies, etc., also impact upon a program and a youth worker, so we must be aware of how they affect the learning process. We suggest an ecological understanding of human development and learning to guide individuals' thinking about youth work (eg. Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

By way of final comment, we hope to have encouraged youth workers to see the potential benefits of measuring what they do, as well as understanding the pitfalls. We also hope those who make social decisions affecting youth work will look to qualitative research, in addition to quantitative research, to inform decisions. A scientific understanding of youth work, we suggest, will pay dividends beyond the work itself, as principles learned about how to engage young people in their own learning can be applied to other settings (eg. the educational setting).

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Notes

- 1 From personal communication at the 1st European Youth Work Conference, Ghent, Belgium, 2010.
- 2 Before the first author entered academia he was a youth worker in a non-profit agency in a large city for approximately nine years.

Riotous Assemblies

John Pitts

Abstract

Conservatives have explained the August riots of 2011 in terms of a 'moral breakdown', wherein 'broken families', with an unjustified 'sense of entitlement' have created a 'broken society'. 'Progressives' have pointed to the way bored, thwarted, consumers, on the social margins, turned their rage upon a consumer society that has rejected them. At present, however, the Conservative explanation is getting a far better press because the 'progressive' account is so obviously an idealisation of a far more nuanced reality, while the Conservatives account articulates with deeply felt, popular, prejudices. However, because riots in the UK are relatively infrequent and the causes cited by both camps are perennial this article endeavours to identify the specific factors which turned a 'drama' into a 'crisis' in August 2011.

Key words: riot, young people, gangs, looting legitimisation

Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged – sometimes even incentivised – by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally de-moralised.

David Cameron, August, 2011

BoJo Revisited

BULLER, BULLER, Buller! Buller, Buller, Buller! We are the famous Bullingdon Club, and we don't give a fuck!

These words, according, to Andrew Gimson, author of *Boris: The Rise of Boris Johnson* (2006), were sung at Bullingdon club meetings by Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, a direct, albeit illegitimate, descendent of George II, George (nee Gideon) Osborne, heir to the Osborne Baronetcy in Ireland and David William Donald Cameron, a descendant of King William IV and hence fifth cousin once removed of the Her Majesty the Queen.

These meetings, lampooned by Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) as the Bollinger Club, were lively affairs as the Bullers smashed their way through restaurant crockery, car windscreens and antique violins. As Gimson, notes:

I don't think an evening would have ended without a restaurant being trashed and being paid for in full, very often in cash. A night in the cells would be regarded as being par for a Buller man and so would debagging anyone who really attracted the irritation of the Buller men.

In recounting an incident in which a Buller man hurled a heavy flowerpot through a restaurant window, Johnson notes that:

The party ended up with a number of us crawling on all fours through the hedges of the botanical gardens, and trying to escape police dogs.

Although he claimed initially to have been amongst those arrested, latterly Johnson would only admit to having hidden in the botanical gardens shrubbery. David Cameron was not always so reticent about his involvement in such juvenile mayhem either, allegedly observing in 1986 that:

Things got out of hand and we'd had a few drinks. We smashed the place up and Boris set fire to the toilets.

As F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925) once observed of the rich:

They were careless people ... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

Cameron has of course subsequently repented publicly for his past indiscretions acknowledging that:

Like many young people, I did things when I was young that I should not have done and that I regret.

A Riotous Assembly?

But were the Bullers rioting? In England, a riot is defined by Section 1 of the Criminal Justice Act (1967). A riot must involve 12 or more people who, together, use or threaten unlawful violence ‘such that a person of reasonable firmness ... has cause to fear for his personal safety’ – something that probably describes the reaction of the recipients of the Bullers’ flying flowerpot fairly

accurately. If these conditions obtain, then the perpetrators are guilty of riot, as are those who aid or abet the offence by ‘counselling or procuring the use of violence, ie. encouraging, planning, directing or coordinating the activities of those involved in violent action’. This being so, the Bullers probably were rioting, not once, but fairly regularly. However, the circumstances in which this behaviour occurs, including whether or not ‘the normal forces of law and order have broken down’ or emergency services are impeded, will determine whether or not defendants are actually charged with rioting rather than a ‘breach of the peace’, ‘affray’ or ‘assault’.

These circumstantial caveats notwithstanding, it is still difficult to distinguish, conceptually, between the antics of that trio of privileged pranksters, BoJo, Osborne and Cameron in Oxford in the 1980s, and those of their less fortunate brethren in Tottenham, Hackney, Lambeth and Croydon in August 2011, leading one to suspect that the difference may be largely one of perception.

Whereas Bullingdon club members are portrayed as acting out of character during these deviant episodes, the rioters are seen to be acting in character. The antics of the Bullers are explained away as ‘youthful high spirits’; an institutionalised, and perhaps necessary, ‘letting off of steam’ for talented young men who will one day occupy high public office and embody our most cherished values. Those of the rioters, by contrast, are seen to reveal their utter contempt for these values. Whereas the behaviour of the Bullers is dismissed as a brief hiatus in an otherwise laudable life, the behaviour of the rioters is portrayed as an example of their inherent and unchanging propensity for wrongdoing.

A Culture of Entitlement

David Cameron has laid the blame for the riots at the door of a ‘culture of entitlement’, which he contrasts with a ‘culture of merit’, wherein advantage and advancement are achieved only through talent and hard work. This canard was originally levelled at MPs who over-claimed expenses (although the Liberal Democrats continue to demand that George Osborne repay parliament the £55,000 he derived from ‘flipping’ his second home); bankers whose greed had nearly brought the country to its knees, yet continued to accept record-breaking, state-subsidised, bonuses (although this practice is assiduously defended by BoJo); and ‘phone-hacking’ tabloid journalists, with attendant Metropolitan Police collusion, (although parliament was eventually recalled to quiz Cameron about his knowledge of his ‘spin doctor’ Andy Coulson’s involvement in ‘phone hacking’ and the conversations he may or may not have had, over the Christmas Crackers at his Oxfordshire home, vis-à-vis Rupert Murdoch’s BSkyB takeover bid with *News of the World* editor Rebecca Brooks). Indeed, for a moment there in July 2011, a casual observer might have gained the impression that those with the authority and the responsibility for maintaining standards of decency in our society had used any means at their disposal to enrich themselves at public expense. However, in the wake of the riots, Cameron’s ire (‘There are pockets of our society that are not just

broken, but frankly sick') was adroitly redirected, away from the malodorous 'toffs' on the gravy train, towards the malevolent 'oiks' torching the Clapham omnibus.

David Cameron's 'culture of entitlement' is, in reality, just a rebadged 1980s, 'underclass thesis' (Murray, 1984), which was itself, a rebadged 'culture of poverty thesis' (Lewis, 1959, Moynihan, 1965), which, in its turn owed much to Victorian common sense notions of the 'deserving and undeserving poor'. In its present manifestation, Cameron's 'entitlement thesis' holds that poverty is the product of an overweening welfare state that rewards fecklessness and undermines individual responsibility, thus discouraging parental propriety and producing a culture of dependency and entitlement wherein sexual profligacy and criminality become the norm. In this version of events the 'broken family' is the progenitor of the 'broken society' with the added twist that now, 'human rights' and 'health and safety' legislation protect the culprits from the consequences of their actions. This leads Cameron to conclude that the nation is in the grip of a moral crisis. However for Cameron this moral crisis is more akin to what some psychologists call a 'conduct disorder', than the ethical, social and cultural, impasse occasioned by what Jock Young (1999) has described as the 'denial of reward' and 'the denial of recognition' to a growing band of young 'urban outcasts' (Wacquant, 2007).

In fact, what unites the Bullers of the 1980s and the rioters of 2011 is not a sense of entitlement but a sense of estrangement because the global economic contortions of the past decade has produced both a new, super-rich, 'overclass', whose primary allegiance is to its money, and a disenfranchised underclass with little or no stake in the contemporary social order (Hutton, 2010) and this serves to free both from the conventional moral bind:

... the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognizes estrangement as its own power and has in it the semblance of a human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. It is, to use an expression of Hegel, in its abasement the indignation at that abasement, an indignation to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human nature and its condition of life, which is the outright, resolute and comprehensive negation of that nature. Within this antithesis the private property-owner is therefore the conservative side, the proletarian the destructive side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it. (Marx and Engels, 1845).

Things have changed

But does such estrangement helps us understand the 2011 riots? We have to explain how these riots differ from the other acts of civil disobedience that have erupted throughout the post-war period

(see fig.1), in what Bea Campbell (1991) describes as the most riotous country in Europe, and when this change occurred.

(fig.1) Riots in England and Wales 1958-2010

1958 - Nottingham race riots,
 1958 - Notting Hill race riots (London)
 1975 - Chapeltown riot (Leeds)
 1976 - Notting Hill carnival riot (London)
 1979 - Southall riot (London)
 1980 - St Pauls riot (Bristol),
 1981 - Brixton riot (London)
 1981 - Toxteth riots (Liverpool)
 1981 - Moss Side riot (Manchester)
 1981 - Chapeltown riot (Leeds)
 1981 - First Handsworth riot (Birmingham)
 1985 - Brixton riot (London)
 1985 - Second Handsworth (Birmingham)
 1985 - Broadwater Farm riot (London)
 1987 - Chapeltown riot (Leeds)
 1989 - Dewsbury riot (Yorkshire)
 1989 - Leeds United riots (Birmingham)
 1989/90 - Poll Tax riots (London)
 1990 - Strangeways Prison riot (Manchester)
 1990 - Salford riot (Manchester)
 1991 - Meadowell riots (Newcastle on Tyne)
 1991 - Blackbird Leys riots (Oxford)
 1991 - Ely riot (Cardiff)
 1995 - Brixton riot (London)
 1995 - Hyde Park riot (Leeds)
 1995 - Manningham riot (Bradford)
 2001 - Oldham riots (Manchester)
 2001 - Harehills riot (Leeds)
 2001 - Bradford Riot (Bradford)
 2004 - Boston football riot (Lincolnshire)
 2005 - Lozells riot (Birmingham)
 2008 - UEFA Cup Final riot (Manchester)
 2009 - Football riot (West Ham/Stoke City) (London)
 2009 - Luton riot (following Muslim protests at homecoming British soldiers)
 2009 - Birmingham riot (far-right activists clash with anti-racist protesters and local members of the Muslim and African-Caribbean community)
 2009 - Football riot West Ham/Millwall (London)
 2010 - Student riots (London)

Campbell writes:

What was new about the Eighties and Nineties was that riot became routine. Its persistent resurgence demands that we ask new questions about community, solidarity, law and disorder amongst men and women living with desperate local economies ... All the neighbourhoods that spontaneously combusted in 1991 are communicating a new kind of crisis, an ordinary state of emergency: which is symbolic of an era. (1991, p.xi).

In his essay *The Fire Next Time*, the American author James Balwin (1963) writes that ‘The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose’. Over the past three decades in the UK, the globalisation of neo-liberal economic regimes, de-industrialisation, financial deregulation, income polarisation and welfare retrenchment have reversed the post-war tendency towards a narrowing of the gap between rich and poor, and created, in certain urban neighbourhoods, what Wacquant (1996, 2007) describes as a state of ‘advanced marginality’:

The differential ‘stitching together’ of color, class, and place on both sides of the Atlantic does not, however, obviate the possibility that the recent transformations in the US ghetto the French Banlieue, and the British and Dutch ‘inner cities’ might herald the crystallisation of a novel, still inchoate, yet distinctive regime of urban marginality, different from both America’s traditional ghetto and the twentieth century European worker’s space. Viewed from this admittedly prospective angle, the ‘return of the repressed’ realities of extreme poverty and social destitution, ethno-racial divisions (linked to colonial history) and public violence, and their accumulation in the same distressed urban areas, suggests that First World cities are now confronted with what we may call advanced marginality. (Wacquant,1996)

Whereas at the beginning of the 1980s the average household income of council house tenants was 73 per cent of the national average, by the early 1990s this had fallen to 48 per cent. By 1995, over 50 per cent of what had been council households had no breadwinner (Power and Tunstall, 1995). By 1997, 25 per cent of the children and young people under 16 in the UK were living in these neighbourhoods (Pitts, 2008).

Whereas until the 1980s, 40 per cent of heads of households in social housing were aged 65 or over, by the 1990s, 75 per cent of newly formed households entering social housing were headed by someone aged between 16 and 29. A high proportion of these new residents were unemployed, not least because they included a heavy concentration of lone parents, the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, ex-psychiatric patients and the addicted. This concentration of disadvantage is highlighted in a recent study, entitled *The Public Value of Social Housing*, in which Feinstein and colleagues (2008) observe that:

As the role of social housing changed for families, so its tenants became increasingly

disadvantaged. When the 1946 cohort were aged four, 11 per cent of the best-off fifth of families were in social housing, compared to 27 per cent of the least well-off. By the time the 2000 cohort were aged five, the tenure gap had grown hugely: just two per cent of the best-off fifth were in social housing while 49 per cent of the least well-off were.

Although the 1980s and 1990s was a period of considerable upward educational and social mobility within Britain's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, this was paralleled by a worsening of the predicament of large numbers of BME people at the other end of the social and economic scale (Robins, 1992; Power and Tunstall, 1995; Pitts, 2003; Palmer and Pitts, 2006). By 1995, 40 per cent of African-Caribbeans and 59 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK were located in the poorest fifth of the population. This contrasts with only 18 per cent of the White population (Power and Tunstall, 1995). In London, by the mid-1990s, up to 70 per cent of the residents on the poorest housing estates were from ethnic minorities (Power and Tunstall, 1997).

The worsening fortunes of those at the bottom end of the social structure were compounded by changes in the UK labour market in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, partly as a result of market de-regulation, Britain lost over 20 per cent of its industrial base. One of the consequences of this contraction was that between 1984 and 1997, the numbers of 16-24 year olds in the labour market shrank by almost 40 per cent. In the poorest neighbourhoods, levels of adult and youth non-employment were amongst the highest in Europe (Pitts, 2003). In 2010, one in five White and one in two Black 16 to 24 year olds was unemployed (IPPR, 2010).

The poorest young people were further disadvantaged in the labour market by educational polarisation in which the growing number of young people achieving five A-C grades at GCSE was paralleled by a steady increase in those with low or no GCSEs. This polarisation was exacerbated by rising rates of school exclusion and truancy (Berridge et al, 2001). Moreover, as a result of the international migration of refugees and asylum seekers, and the internal migration of families deemed to be 'voluntarily homeless' because of failure to pay their rent and other tenancy violations, the inner cities saw growing numbers of 'invisible' children who were uninvolved in, and unknown to, the educational system, sometimes living with friends and family, in private rented accommodation, or illegally occupying hard-to-let council properties.

Writing in 2011 Hutton observed that:

The unbalanced structure of economic growth over the past decade has fed straight through to a disastrous social geography, bypassing the least advantaged and rewarding the wealthy. Throughout the country the poor and disadvantaged live in ever more concentrated wards that are blighted by run-down social housing and over-stretched schools. ... The roll-call of the deprived is bitterly familiar: east London's Hackney and Tower Hamlets, Liverpool's

Knowsley, parts of Manchester, Middlesbrough and Rochdale continue to reel from deprivation, while local authorities like Richmond upon Thames, Kensington and Chelsea and Forest Heath in east Suffolk power on.

The redistribution of crime and victimisation

In the 1980s and 1990s in Britain, those people most vulnerable to criminal victimisation and those most likely to victimise them were progressively thrown together in Britain's poorest neighbourhoods. As a result, although recorded crime has been dropping steadily in the UK since the early 1990s, crime in areas of acute social deprivation has, in many cases, become far more serious (Bullock and Tilley, 2003; Pitts, 2003).

Crime in the poorest neighbourhoods in England has become distinctive in several ways. It is youthful, because the population is a young one and, in consequence, both victims and perpetrators tend to be children and young people (Pitts and Hope, 1997). It is impulsive; likely to be perpetrated by and against local residents. It is repetitive; the same people are victimised again and again (Lea and Young, 1988; Wilson, 1987; Bourgeois, 1995; Palmer and Pitts, 2006; Pitts, 2008; Matthews et al, 2007). It is symmetrical, in that victims and offenders tend to be similar in terms of age, ethnicity and social class. It is also disproportionately violent and this violence tends to be intra – and inter-neighbourhood and largely, intra-racial, tending to take place on the street and in and around schools. More recently it has involved the use of firearms (Pitts, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2009). It is also under-reported; victims and perpetrators in the poorest neighbourhoods tend to know one another and the threat of reprisal or local loyalties often prevents them from reporting victimisation (Young and Matthews, 1992). It is 'embedded'. Youth offending in these neighbourhoods tends to intensify because, being denied many of the usual pathways to adulthood, local adolescents fail to 'grow out of crime' and so adolescent peer groups are more likely to transmogrify into youth 'gangs', the age range of which may well expand, linking pre-teens with offenders in their 20s and 30s (Hagan, 1993; Graham and Bowling, 1995). And from the mid-to late 1980s, many of the more serious manifestation of youth crime in these neighbourhoods were related to the burgeoning markets in class A drugs (Auld et al, 1986; Pearson, 1988; Silverman, 1994; Glenny, 2008; Pitts, 2008).

Over the past 25 years the homicide rate in the poorest 10 per cent of areas in England and Wales rose by 39 per cent while the rate for the wealthiest 20 per cent fell (Shaw et al, 2005). Moreover, while the overall chances of being murdered in Britain have fallen in the past 20 years, homicide rates for poor men aged 20–24 have doubled. Shaw and colleagues (2005) note that:

... in the poorest areas of Britain, for every 100 people we would expect to be murdered, 243 people were killed at the start of the 1980s, rising to 282 at the end of the time period, a rise

of 16 per cent ... The inequality in murder rates between areas also rose steadily over the two decades such that people living in the poorest tenth of Britain were 143 per cent more likely than average to be murdered in 1981–1985, increasing in the successive 5 year periods to 161 per cent, 171 per cent and then 182 per cent above the average SMR of 100 in 1996–2000.

The victims of this gun and knife crime were disproportionately young, male and Black. The 2001 national census indicates that, in England and Wales, 2.8 per cent of the population was Black, 4.7 per cent Asian and 1.2 per cent was Other. However, in 2005, 11 per cent of murder victims were Black, 6 per cent were Asian and 3 per cent were Other. A consideration of how they died reveals a marked variation, with 32 per cent of Black victims being shot, compared with 10 per cent of Asians and 5 per cent of Whites (Pitts, 2003; Povey, 2008).

In London, 75 per cent of all victims of firearm homicides and shootings and 79 per cent of all suspects come from the African/Caribbean community. Moreover, the age at which these young black people, both victims and perpetrators, become involved in fatal shootings is falling. Whereas, in 2003, young people under 20 constituted 16 per cent of victims of the ‘Black-on-Black’ gun crime, investigated by Operation Trident, by 2006 this proportion had risen to 31 per cent. Marion Fitzgerald’s (2009) analysis of youth homicides in London between 1999 and 2005 makes this point with alarming clarity; 63.6 per cent of all male homicide victims aged 10–17 between 1999 and 2005 were Black African Caribbean whereas the White majority furnished only 29.5 per cent.

Operation Trident

It was in response to these ‘black-on-black’ murders in Lambeth and Brent that in 1998 the Metropolitan Police launched Operation Trident. Trident’s role has been to work with local police officers to investigate shootings in the Black community and provide intelligence on suspects, known ‘gunmen’ and firearms suppliers. The unit also works with customs and immigration officials in the UK and Jamaica to identify suspects. Trident has endeavoured to harness public support and increase information flow by establishing an advisory panel, composed largely of key figures from the ‘Black community’, and conducting targeted publicity campaigns. Perhaps inevitably, Trident has divided opinion. While some point to Trident’s achievements in arresting gunmen and drug traffickers, others say that the focus on ‘black-on-black’ crime has stigmatised the Black community and led to more, and more coercive policing of young Black people.

Clearly the legacy of poor relationships between the police and the Black community hampers the work of Trident, but so too does the litany of Black and minority ethnic deaths in police custody (Institute of Race Relations, 2004). Between 1992 and 2008, 102 black and ethnic minority suspects died in police custody. However, the death rate has increased markedly since 2008. Whereas in 2007 there were 15 deaths, in 2010 that figure had risen to 28. Few White Londoners are aware of

the number or frequency of these, often unexplained, deaths, few Black Londoners, including the 300 or so who attended the protest over Mark Duggan's shooting in Tottenham in August 2011, are not.

The Protest

Mark Duggan may not have been the young innocent that friends and family have portrayed. It seems that he was associated with a local gang that had been involved in several murders. But Duggan's guilt or innocence is beside the point because, as we now know, although he did not 'pull a gun' on a police officer, he was killed by, an invariably fatal, dum-dum bullet from a police issue firearm. Duggan's killing inevitably evoked memories of the shooting of Cherry Groce by police who were searching for her son Michael, which triggered the Brixton riots of 1985 and, more particularly, that of Cynthia Jarrett who suffered a stroke and died during a police search of her home on the Broadwater Farm estate in 1985.

Claudia Webbe, chair of the Metropolitan Police's Operation Trident Independent Advisory Group, said the demonstration that preceded the outbreak of violence in Tottenham could have been averted if the Independent Police Complaints Commission had met the family sooner. But the IPCC did not do this, it is said, because their one Black investigator was 'tied up' investigating the circumstances of the death of Smiley Culture during a police raid of his home in March 2011. Clearly there was some confusion about whether it was the responsibility of the IPCC or Trident to contact the Duggan family but it was the contradictory nature of what was being communicated rather than problems of communication per se that gave impetus to the demonstration outside Tottenham police station.

Once there, the police were unable to locate a senior officer who could give the Duggan family and their friends the information they were demanding. The hours ticked by and still nobody came. The crowd became restive. The police called in a riot squad to stand in front of the station. But still no senior officer appeared. Then, an angry sixteen year old girl hurled a brick at the line of police officers in riot gear. The grainy facebook footage, is unclear but throughout, we hear a distressed woman screaming 'she's a girl ... she's a fucking girl' as an officer batters the youngster to the ground with his shield. Then cars were torched and, as the crowd swelled, the police appeared to 'back off'. And the realisation dawned that the police were either unwilling or unable to stop what was unfolding. Meanwhile, in other, similar, neighbourhoods, around the capital and around the country, a receptive audience, with all manner of 'fish to fry', were watching and wondering. As Psychologist Kenneth Eisod (2011) has argued:

Deep-seated resentments, repetitive frustrations and long standing disappointments galvanize people into action. And the mob provides cover, an anonymity that makes it easier to

overcome one's usual reticence or moral scruples. One is immersed, engulfed. And it can become an exuberant experience, a joyful release for long suppressed emotions.

But while, as Shakespeare wrote in Richard the Second, 'His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last, For violent fires soon burn out themselves,' the social, economic and cultural conditions that trigger those riots endure.

Out of sheer rage?

The riots in English inner cities in August 2011 were not a political 'insurrection', as Darcus Howe suggested on the BBC News, but nor were they simply a shopping spree by alternative means. People became involved for a variety of reasons, some unthinkingly, some far more purposefully.

Whereas in Mare Street, Hackney, crowds roamed the streets looking for stores to loot, on the Pembury Estate, (which, the week before had been the main target of a dawn raid by the police, culminating in 23 arrests and the seizure of a large quantity of crack cocaine, a kilo of heroin, 45 mobile phones, 60 SIM cards, about £8,000 in cash and one imitation firearm), the waiting crowd was getting ready to fight the police. Someone shouted 'come and get us, man' as he hurled a bottle at the riot police in the distance. A man with a Jamaican flag across his face sprayed 'Fuck Da Police' in red across the entrance of a tower block. They wanted revenge.

In Salford, the constituency office of Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government between 2007 and 2009, was attacked. Asked whether the attack was political she replied:

I think it's devastating for the decent law abiding citizens of Salford, who are the overwhelming majority. I think we need an increased police presence, and we need to make sure we get prosecutions, convictions and stiffer sentences on the people who are basically criminals. (BBC Website August, 2011).

In so saying she seemed to have forgotten the anger of her constituents that nearly cost her parliamentary seat when it emerged that she had pocketed £13,000, in unpaid capital gains tax on the flats she sold in London while claiming tax relief on the mortgage of her constituency residence in Salford. Hazel Blears subsequently repaid the £13,000 to parliament. This attack was political alright.

It is not difficult to see how, in the midst of a riot, one might rationalise an assault upon H&M or Primark, for is it not popularly understood that their clothes are made by Asian children who earn a pittance for long hours of arduous labour? Indeed, the projected guilt of those who have bought these clothes may even add to the vehemence with which they attack their windows. As

for the other big chains, well ‘everybody knows’ that Sir Philip Green, boss of NEXT, government ‘efficiency czar’ and tax avoidance virtuoso, spent £5m on his 50th birthday party in Cyprus where his wife gave him a solid gold Monopoly set, complete with diamond-studded dice, and that Richard Branson owns a Caribbean island and a season ticket to Spearmint Rhino? So they’re ‘fair game’ as well. This may be the ‘politics of envy’, but it is political.

Elsewhere, a woman walked out of a store with a clotheshorse and a man on his way home from work saw that Lidl had been looted and helped himself to a bottle of water, both were subsequently jailed. That was political too.

Empathy

What is, perhaps, harder to explain is the burning and looting of the homes and corner shops of neighbours. However, we must not underestimate the social and ethnic divisions that are just as marked on the social margins as anywhere else. Here the gulf between the owner of a small convenience store and the workless family living in a hard-to-let flat may seem as great as that between this shopkeeper and Sir Alan Sugar. The notion that the rioters are part of a ‘community’, a term constantly bandied about by politicians and the press in the wake of the riots, doesn’t begin to explain the social consequences of living in these fractious and fragmented neighbourhoods (Pitts, 2008). As Rodger argues:

Where marginality, social exclusion or sectarianism emerges, the sense of empathy for the other and the mutual restraint on behaviour which are built by frequent social interaction are absent. This tendency should be understood as a structural property of social systems where social polarization and inequality are present or deepening and not as a property of pathological individuals. In other words, antisocial behaviour is at its worst where functional democratization is at its weakest. (2008:129).

Rodger’s argument echoes Norbert Elias who believed that what he called the ‘civilising processes’ may co-exist with, or in certain circumstances, be supplanted by, tendencies towards ‘de-civilisation’. This happens when the actual or perceived weakening of the state’s capacity to protect its citizens places pressure upon individuals to assume responsibility for managing the risks and threats previously dealt with by state officials. For those who lack the wherewithal to ensure their personal security, however, the incalculability of the threats they face lead to heightened anxiety coupled with a pressing need to find ways to alleviate it. In these circumstances, Elias maintains, we witness both an erosion of ‘reality congruence’, a process in which potential threats become exaggerated, and the diminution of ‘mutual identification’ and tolerance (Mennell et al, 2011; Garland, 2001).

The steady retrenchment of state welfare, educational and criminal justice institutions in the past three decades means that what Detlef Baum (1996) calls ‘discredited’ neighbourhoods are gradually floating free from the socio-cultural and political mainstream. In consequence, traditional modes of informal social control and informal social support, rooted in common values and an expectation of local solidarity, have become untenable (Wilson, 1987; Steyaert, 2006). The enforced estrangement of these neighbourhoods from the mainstream also calls into question the validity of those who populate them. Baum (1996) writes:

Young people sense this discreditation in their own environment, in school or in the cultural or leisure establishments. Through this they experience stigmatisation of their difference, of their actions, and the perceived incompetence of the people they live among. The options for action are limited and possibilities for gaining status-enhancing resources are made more difficult. At some stage the process becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; young people and adults come to think that there must be ‘something in it’ when their characteristics and ways of behaving are stigmatised, and some become confirmed in this uncertainty.

Like Baum, Pértonnet (1982) sees that living in what she describes as the (sub) proletarian housing projects of the periphery of Paris ‘... creates a muted sentiment of guilt and shame whose unacknowledged weight warps human relations.’ And yet these devalued and stigmatized actors must find ways to defend themselves against the corrosive impact of this discreditation. The excluded must, to borrow a term from Castells (1997), develop ‘resistance identities’ to exclude the excluders who are the source of their discreditation.

Austerity

It is one thing to live on the social margins with the hope of future centrality. It is quite another to see that your already precarious situation is likely to worsen. Some commentators have challenged the idea that the 2011 riots could have been triggered by planned government spending cuts arguing that most of these cuts have yet to be implemented. However, in *Austerity and Anarchy* (2011) Jacopo Ponticelli and Hans-Joachim Voth (2011) challenge this view. They analysed the relationship between social ‘unrest’ (riots, anti-government demonstrations, general strikes, political assassinations and attempted revolutions) and governmental austerity in 28 European and 11 Latin American countries over the past 75 years. They found that it was not the experience of cuts that fueled unrest but their anticipation since, in a majority of cases, the unrest narrowly preceded the planned cutbacks. They argue that one reason austerity creates the conditions for unrest is that cuts in public spending tend to hit the poorest hardest. These effects are intensified, it seems, by low growth and high unemployment. They also found that the more governments cut, the more frequent these incidents of unrest became, so that when austerity measures reach three per cent or more, the number of incidents doubles. The UK is particularly volatile in this respect

because for every percentage point of UK government cuts, instability rises by more than the average in all the other countries studied.

Cupidity

It is almost certainly the case that this volatility is intensified by the pervasive feeling of unfairness that now besets the country. In *Them and Us: Politics, Greed and Inequality – Why We Need a Fair Society* (2010) Hutton argues that Britain today is more polarised than ten years ago because the ‘economic bubble, which burst in 2008 has created both a new super-rich and a disenfranchised underclass. He writes:

The British are a lost tribe – disoriented, brooding and suspicious. They have lived through the biggest bank bail-out in history and the deepest recession since the 1930s, and they are now being warned that they face a decade of unparalleled public and private austerity ... Yet while the country is now exhorted to tighten its belt and pay off its debts, those who created the crisis – the country’s CEOs and bankers, still living on Planet Extravagance, not to mention mainstream politicians – all want to get back to ‘business as usual’: the world of 1997 to 2007.

Conclusion

Like the out of town riots of twenty years ago chronicled by Bea Campbell the inner city riots of 2011 demand that we ask new questions about community, solidarity, law and disorder amongst men and women living with desperate local economies. To respond to this crisis with ever more severe sentencing and a National Citizens Service which is destined to become the UCAS C.V. enhancer par excellence, while leaving poor young people untouched, is no response at all.

Will the government rethink its planned spending cuts which, while gifting public services to city financiers at bargain basement prices, will consign thousands to the dole? Will they adopt a growth strategy that targets those on the social margins and draws them back to the centre? Will they pursue an educational strategy that does not lead inevitably to the creation of ghetto schools attended only by the poor, and keeps a university place within the grasp of all young people irrespective of their means? Will they restore the £3.5m funding axed from locally based and locally embedded youth work programmes that actually reach estranged young people? Or will they settle for burgeoning social and economic polarisation as a price worth paying for the approval of the international money markets and rating agencies. Perhaps the clue is in the song:

We are the famous Bullingdon Club, and we don’t give a fuck!”

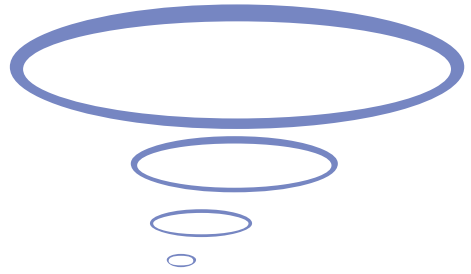
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THINKING SPACE



What's Positive for Youth? A critical look at the Government's emerging 'youth policy'

Bernard Davies

I STARTED TO write this article twenty four hours before last month's riots exploded onto the streets of our cities. Tempting though it has been, I have resisted making straightforward causal links between what happened over those four days and nights and Government policies which since April have done their own vandalising job on youth work and local authority Youth Services. Those 'disturbances' anyway have left me deeply confused over a release of a level violence which, sometimes apparently tinged with racism, killed and injured people and put others in their own communities in extreme danger while often seeming to be inspired more by capitalist consumerism than by a social activism aimed at challenging this.

Nonetheless, as I struggled over the following days to complete the article I was bombarded by explanations which, whether offered by political 'leaders' or the justifiably 'livid' woman whose shop had been ransacked, rarely got beyond 'feral rats', 'mindless thugs' and 'failed parents', or a resort to a genetically criminal gang culture. The Prime Minister's crude 'broken society' mantra may have been transposed by the events of August into the 'sick society'. Nonetheless, these same events quickly overwhelmed his public rebranding aimed at distancing him from the Thatcherite, 'there are only individuals and families'. Once again personal evil and parental inadequacy were resurrected as the only possible rationales for an eruption of collective public anger as widespread, as sustained, and as destructive as any we have seen for decades.

And what are these commentators offering in response? Little more, it seems, than an instant rediscovery of faith in a police force whose 'oppressive policing, especially towards ethnic minorities' (In Defence of Youth Work, 2011) provoked the nearest thing to 'political' coherence during the riots. In London moreover this is the same force whose role in newspaper phone hacking

may soon result in some of its officers facing charges of corruption and collusion with criminality.

This evacuation of political analysis and responsibility is not of course a one-off. It is there, too, if in more low-key ways, in the current Department for Education's *Positive for Youth* consultation on a proposed 'cross-Government vision and policy statement on young people and services for young people'. Using as my evidence-base some of the consultation's sixteen 'themed documents', I want to argue that core features of the ConDems' hands-off approach are already so firmly in place that they are way beyond the influence of any consultation process. Deliberately and systematically, the push is to seek to shift onto individuals, families and 'communities' responsibilities which for well over half a century we have assumed will be collective, particularly the state's. Rather than alleviating the conditions which have prompted the latest youth uprisings, the 'youth policy' which the Government is planning thus seems certain to exacerbate the sense of exclusion felt by so many young people from key resources, including long-established forms of democratic and emancipatory youth work.

The analysis from which the Government is proceeding starts with propositions which, though promising as rhetoric, are as I write being severely tested in practice. These include assertions that 'there is no such thing as a typical teenager', that '*Positive for Youth* values young people as a vital part of the fabric of our society', that 'public perceptions...of young people must also change', and that young people must be 'active and empowered'.

The limitations of the DfE's understanding of young people's situation emerge very quickly however in its list of 'different things that impact on teenagers and their lives'. Much that is included, though blandly presented, may in itself seem unarguable – young people's 'passions and interests', 'numerous social networks', 'faith and other cultural beliefs', 'family structures', 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities', 'caring responsibilities'. Most striking, however, are the absences – above all of any recognition of the deeply embedded structural inequalities and injustices which so many young people face because of their immovable class and economic position in the hierarchies of their society (whether 'broken' or 'sick'), their ethnicity and also their gender. Made much worse by the banker-induced global economic crisis, it is what these 'disadvantages' bring – joblessness and minimal income, constant police harassment in their own communities, a struggle for everyday survival – which is cumulatively so destructive of any sense of a positive future of their own making.

What the DfE offers instead is, for example, a paper on brain development during adolescence which, drawing on speculative neuro-scientific evidence, highlights the Government's preference for individual/biological rather than social explanations; another on equality and diversity focusing largely on legal and technical issues; and a third entitled 'key issues for young people and their parents' which comes close to 'blaming the victim' by simplistically associating failure to achieve

five good GCSEs with membership of ‘the poorest families’ and ‘deprivation’ (unexplained) ‘with higher levels of recorded crime’. Finally, as if to drive home that governments bear no responsibility for creating or dealing with any of these conditions, the section concludes by reminding ‘local community groups, charities, civic organisations and faith groups’ of their ‘vital role in helping the most disadvantaged young people succeed...’.

Indeed, notwithstanding their billing as consultation documents, overall the DfE papers contain a number of bottom-line assumptions and uncrossable boundaries on how services will be provided. As Peter Taylor-Gooby of the University of Kent has pointed out, the aim here goes well beyond cutting state spending during this Parliament. Rather, it is ‘to change fundamentally how the welfare state works, so that private capital and the market are embedded at the heart of public provision’ – that is, ‘the destruction of the public realm’(Taylor-Gooby, 2011).

Needless to say, the *Positive for Youth* papers don’t say this out loud. However, littered with neo-liberal terms like ‘contestability’, ‘value for money’ and ‘consumer choice’, they take it as given that as many services as possible will be commissioned out. They talk too of overcoming ‘barriers to a more competitive market’ and, under a sub-head of ‘Market development’, of a Government committed to ‘opening up public services to a wider range of providers’. After acknowledging that the cuts in public spending have brought ‘significant reductions in universal services’ for young people, the required local authority response is then defined as ‘build(ing) the capacity of communities’ so that ‘a greater share of publicly-funded activities ... (will) be delivered through voluntary and community sector providers’.

Notwithstanding its ‘big society’ and ‘localism’ rhetoric, none of this means that the Government is going to be hands-off in ensuring its aims are met. Moves are promised away from ‘competing national targets, overly prescriptive funding streams, issue specific strategies, action plans and guidance documents’. A need is still identified however to ‘monitor progress and benchmark against others’, with local authorities ‘legitimately’ looking to central government to set outcomes. ‘A more consolidated and more authoritative voice for the sector’ is also seen as necessary ‘to define and uphold standards of evidence’ and for monitoring and evaluating services. The standards are to be produced by the Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions, a DfE-funded research consortium one of whose members is the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Meanwhile, though only mentioned in passing in the DfE papers, looming increasingly are proposals for the government’s preferred way of measuring standards – payment by results.

Where then does all this leave youth work? The overall context is for ‘local authorities to make their own decisions about the relative priority of different services...for young people’ – in itself, as we have seen, a recipe for abandoning open-access youth work. However, such choices will now be made within ‘three main roles’: ensuring ‘young people at risk of dropping out of learning

... engage in education or training'; preventing 'crime and risky behaviours'; and providing 'opportunities for those who don't otherwise acquire them to develop the personal and social skills they need for learning, work and transition to adulthood'. In making their choices, local authorities will need to take into account 'the government's overall steer' towards early intervention, targeted and 'intensive specialists' services, in the process, as the papers' constantly stress, prioritising work with NEETs and on reducing 'anti-social behaviour', teenage pregnancy and alcohol and drug abuse.

The role for youth work, or at least for youth work skills, that is recognised seems certain only to hasten the slide from informal education to youth social work. Open access youth clubs and centres are described as providing 'safe places for leisure' and 'opportunities for personal and social development' – though presumably, given how the third 'main role' above was explained, with a primary focus on adult-defined transitions rather than development as young people might wish to shape this. 'General and specialist youth clubs' are identified as valuable for providing 'positive activities' and youth workers and youth work approaches as needed within multi-agency settings. Particularly telling however is the advice to 'other services' that, 'where existing services close', consideration should be given to the 'benefits youth workers and youth work methods can bring' and to a need to redeploy youth workers 'within multi-agency locality teams which provide early intervention services to families'. Finally, though young people's 'good relationships with adults they can trust' are seen as important, mentoring by adults in the community (but not youth work) is used to exemplify this.

At this point however it is important to loop back to the sections of the papers which set out *how* and by *whom* the Government now sees youth work being provided. With schools and colleges assumed to be the main providers of 'universal services', integrated local authority services are encouraged to make these available through a 'more strategic relationships with voluntary organisation', with 'business, philanthropists and social investors [playing] a significant supporting role'. Local authorities are also told to consider 'how they can build the capacity of community groups to offer clubs and other personal and social development opportunities not publicly funded'. Finally, as a major qualification to the papers' 'welcome' for young people's 'voice' in decision-making, government support for, for example, the UK Youth Parliament, will in the future 'be subject to a competitive bidding process', though 'on a progressively reducing basis' which assumes that long-term there will be an 'increase (in) corporate and other sponsorship'.

Driven by rigid ideology far more even than by the ostensibly economic and financial imperatives which are providing such useful cover for its 'austerity' programme, this Government is unlikely to be at all diverted by this 'consultation' from the policy course it has set itself. Nor can we expect these policies to begin to touch the feelings of powerlessness and disillusion, not just of those young people who last month so destructively (and often self-destructively) took to the streets

of our cities but also of those in villages and small towns around the country suffering the same poverty of opportunity. Indeed, given the crudity of the law-and-order responses which flowed after the riots we can anticipate that this disconnect will only get wider and deeper.

All of which points to a long and hard struggle ahead, not least for genuinely person-centred forms of youth work which might help young people give their dissatisfactions a sharper and more effective political edge. This will require considerable and continuing collective effort – not least, it has to be said, against our own fatalism and in a political environment in which organisations like NYA and NCVYS are falling over themselves to accommodate uncritically to government rhetoric.

Perhaps therefore for those taking a more critical stance – the unions, the Training Agencies Group, the Woodcraft Folk, BYC, IDYW – this is the moment through, say, the Choose Youth alliance, to bring together young people and youth workers (separately or together) to take on the really tough question: after such a massive show of disaffection by so many young people, what now for youth work; and what future?

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Reviews

Sarah Banks (Editor)

Ethical Issues in Youth Work (Second Edition)

Routledge 2010

ISBN: 978-0-415-49971-2

£15.99 (pbk)

pp.215

Hilary Orpin

THIS BOOK, edited by Sarah Banks, includes twelve chapters from a variety of practitioners and academics. This second edition brings the ethical issues presented in the first edition up to date and highlights new and developing areas of practice and youth policy. Like the first edition it is split into two parts. Part 1, 'The ethical context of youth work', includes a re-written chapter on youth policy and revised and updated chapters on ethics and the youth worker; ethics, collaboration and the organisational context in youth work; and resourcing youth work. Part 2, 'Ethical issues in practice' includes two new chapters, 'Youth workers as researchers' by Janet Batsleer and 'Young people as activists' by Jason Wood. There is also a new chapter on 'Youth workers as professionals' by Howard Sercombe, which examines managing dual relationships and maintaining boundaries.

Like the first edition, this book explores the role of youth workers as moral philosophers, controllers, converters, critical interpreters, mediators and confidants. Questions are asked by exploring the different methods of working with young people and identifying the different groups of young people youth workers work with. The book presents a variety of practice examples and critically examines the dilemmas youth workers face. This edition is made more accessible by the clearer layout and the reflections at the end of each chapter. Each chapter concludes with questions for reflection and discussion. These sections present useful questions which could be used by lecturers or trainers to develop a critical understanding of the ethical debates in youth work. They also enable lecturers to use the book as a key text on a variety of courses.

Whilst reading the book I wondered what made it distinct from Jonathon Roberts' (2009) *Youth Work Ethics* and Howard Sercombe's (2010) *Youth Work Ethics* (reviewed in this issue). On reflection I decided that what Banks' edited book does, along with Roberts and Sercombe, is reinforce the importance of youth work ethics. It provides a respite from the cuts and managerialism that has consumed youth workers, encouraging us to concentrate on critical thinking and ensuring ethics is at the heart of practice. The emergence of three books on youth work ethics perhaps provides evidence that youth work ethics is central to our practice and gives youth workers a useful tool in the debate about youth work's future.

This book enables practitioners, academics and students to examine their own cultures and experiences. It does this by examining the influence and impact these values have on practice. This exploration is best highlighted in Umme F. Imam and Rick Bowler's chapter 'Youth workers as critical interpreters' where they argue that youth work ethics are based in the theory of transversalism. They argue that ethics and values remain central to youth work practice:

transversal values and ethics are of relevance to all groups of young people. Practitioners may be rooted in their own perspectives and values but shift in order to place themselves in the position of the service users or young person with different values. What is important is that in shifting one does not lose our own rooting and values. (p.153)

Kerry Young's chapter on 'Youth workers as moral philosophers' highlights that 'in our hearts all human beings want to be good' (p.102) In universal or generic youth work this is the starting point of work with young people. Youth workers identify the good in the young person. Young's chapter provides a strong argument for students, academics and practitioners for supporting the importance of preserving universal provision. If we only work from a targeted stance our starting point with young people is from the bad and as Young points out 'I have not yet met a person, who deep down inside, felt good about being a bad person, people who generally think of themselves as bad people generally feel bad about themselves' (p.103). Young continues to argue if our starting point with young people is the bad, instead of teaching them to be moral philosophers and feel good about themselves, the conversations we have continue to reinforce the feelings of low self esteem and feeling bad. Young's chapter has an important role to play in current youth work education by providing a strong argument for preserving the core values of youth work and highlighting the distinctiveness of the profession.

The chapters in *Ethical Issues in Youth Work* clearly highlight why universal provision is central to youth work. They are a useful tool to help students, practitioners and academics keep ethics central to our practice. In the current climate this book, along with Roberts (2009) and Sercombe (2010), provides a welcome reminder of the values that are central to my practice and why I became a youth worker.

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Hilary Orpin is Senior Lecturer at Greenwich University on the Youth and Community Work Degree. Her recent research is on the professional identity of youth workers.

Jeremy Brent

Searching for Community, Representation, Power and Action on an Urban Estate

Policy Press 2009

ISBN: 978-1-84742-323-8

£19.99 (pbk)

pp.340

Sue Robertson

JEREMY BRENT worked in Southmead, Bristol, the urban estate of the title, for 25 years until he sadly died in 2006. In 1975 he started work on the adventure playground, moving on to be the youth worker at the local youth centre including detached work and project work. Central to the book is Jeremy Brent's own identity as both an insider and an outsider in Southmead; this must resonate with all centre or patch based workers. He interweaves theory and practice and his roles as researcher, participant and practitioner in Southmead, 'both a practical space full of people and a realm of theory and knowledge' (p.15).

The book published here is a collection of Brent's work including previously published articles (Brent, 2001; 2002; 2004) which perhaps could have been more clearly demarcated. Chapters one to nine are his thesis and as such are written in an academic style and heavily referenced. There is also a foreword from Doug Nicholls paying tribute to Jeremy's work for CYWU, and an introduction by Richard Johnson who was an academic adviser on his PhD thesis and describes how Jeremy appreciated 'the freedom of sustained thinking during his time as an MA student at Birmingham' (p.2). Sustained thinking is certainly evident here and reflection on practice; the notion of reflexivity is explored in depth. There are personal notes from his sons who also provide an epilogue to bring us up to date with Southmead now and an afterword by Marjorie Mayo of Goldsmiths College.

Brent describes four themes: Southmead, his own long term involvement in the area, young people in Southmead, and community. These themes are woven together throughout the book, often using vignettes of Brent's and diary entries from his own work. Chapter 10 is the article Brent wrote for *Youth & Policy* about curriculum (2004), *The Smile and the Arch*, which sums up what youth work is about better than anything else I know. It is an answer to those who demand targeted results and certificated outcomes. As Brent says, 'we have to continually articulate, for ourselves and others, why it is that our informal and non-managerial relationships with young people are so valuable' (p.268).

In chapter five, Brent discusses his role as a youth worker in Southmead and describes himself as the outsider within, moving within and outside boundaries, crossing between worlds. However, no

one who attended the celebration of Jeremy Brent's life in Southmead after he died in 2006 would have described him as an outsider, as hundreds of people of all ages had gathered to celebrate his contribution as a youth worker on the estate. This chapter also appeared previously as an article in *Youth & Policy* (Brent, 2002) which I have used with youth and community work students as it so well discusses the dilemma of a worker wanting to identify with the people on the estate but never quite one of them. He demonstrates his empathy with the residents and the difficulties of estate life without being sentimental. Estates are one of those facets of modern England that many politicians wish under the carpet (Hanley, 2007) but Brent celebrates the life of Southmead while critiquing the policies that affect it.

Brent is concerned throughout that the book should not be seen as a judgement on Southmead, as 'being surveyed is the common experience of poor people and poor areas' (p.37). His writing on community draws on the work of scholars from Alinsky to Zizek. The reflexivity Brent brings to his writing about Southmead allows us a unique insight into the thinking of a practitioner who is informed by theory and values its insights but is keen to develop his own ideas; he is not in awe of Foucault but able to use him. Brent covers all the giants of community theory but his own voice comes through. He is someone who really has a sociological imagination, who recognises the importance of experience as a source of original intellectual work (Wright Mills, 1959). His analysis is that of a participant who wants to participate properly through maintaining a critical position.

Brent describes his research technique as bricolage and therefore himself as a bricoleur. He uses a variety of sources – written publications, previous research, conversations and his own experience – and a variety of ways to interpret them. He explains his use of this term and the theory behind it in chapter two looking at accumulation, reading, re-presenting and writing. There is richness in descriptions of the work and the dilemmas that arise. However Brent is at pains to acknowledge that any exercise in knowledge is also an exercise in power. He writes about these issues and the difficulty of being 'on the side of young people' (p.62), struggling with studying people from a libertarian non-repressive perspective. Although he writes, 'I have to work in a place that is not being cared about by those with the means, but who are at a distance' (p.131), his optimism shines through.

Chapter 3 looks at official and media representations of Southmead. In all the reports Brent analysed he found young people were seen as problematic. Young people and their relation to community is key to the work; the focus on young people and their behaviour as a problem to the community is of course a lot wider than Southmead. He acknowledges that the behaviour of young people can be difficult and he certainly experienced some of that in his own work. But he also stresses the collective action young people engage in which is often not acknowledged in writing on community. Using examples from his work such as Radio Southmead, Brent demonstrates that

young people can be central to the building of community. However, he argues that young people need a separate space of their own.

In the fourth chapter he looks at the knowledge that comes from within Southmead. This involves a different epistemology – knowledge developed by subordinate groups, such as a community play called *Lifelines*. In much of this Jeremy was involved and I feel he often underplays this involvement. In much of what happened in Southmead, Brent was a catalyst in the best traditions of community work. Southmead was Jeremy's life's work and he epitomises the value of service. This is a challenging book combining practical examples of work with critical thinking and use of theory. It will be an excellent resource for students and teachers of community development, youth work and informal education. Jeremy Brent will be remembered for this as well as for his work in Southmead.

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Sue Robertson is a youth worker in Brighton and a youth work researcher, writer and educator. She is involved in the Defence of Youth Work campaign.

Stephen Case and Kevin Haines

Understanding youth offending: risk factor research, policy and practice

Willan Publishing 2009

ISBN: 978-1-84392-341-1

£28.99 (pbk)

pp. 352

Bethany Alden

THIS TEXT discusses the factorisation of risk and how this approach to researching, predicting and treating offending behaviour amongst young people has developed from the 1930s to today. The authors take the view that this approach, termed risk factor research (RFR), needs to be evaluated and exposed in terms of its methodological rigour, validity, conclusions and practical applications. Furthermore, it is evident that, in their view, doing so would be germane for the 'development of risk-related theory, policy and practice' (p.51).

In terms of this pursuit, Case and Haines appear to be two of the best people for the job. In their roles at Swansea University's Department of Applied Social Sciences, both are heavily involved in teaching, research and writing in the areas of criminology and youth offending. Moreover, this book is not merely a reflection of their own chosen perspectives but rather a product based on their own journeys of carrying out, publishing, while simultaneously critiquing RFR.

In many ways, this book represents the process through which we have developed our own research and the conclusions we have reached about RFR and the uses to which it has been put in the development of youth justice policy and practice. (p. 14)

Case and Haines not only look at RFR as a process and product but also they encourage the reader to consider the paradigmatic aspect of risk factorisation. Claims that RFR is a means to achieving objectivity in its findings and practical uses are countered by arguments that emerge from its decontextualisation of young people to mere sets of social variables. In this critique of RFR and the risk factor paradigm, the authors use Chapter 1 to identify and discuss six 'unresolved methodological paradoxes' of RFR.

1. *simplistic over-simplification*
2. *definitive indefinity*
3. *risk-dependent protective factors*
4. *replicable incomparability*
5. *unconstructive constructivism*
6. *heterogeneous homogeneity* (pp. 16-17)

'Simplistic over-simplification' has been used by the authors as a term to explain the way in which factorisation fosters data sets that are less accurate and representative of young people's reality. 'Definitive indefinity' is used to describe situations where conclusions are built on concepts that remain ambiguous in their own definitions. The authors argue that the use of the term protection relating to RFR has almost exclusively been used in a negative sense (e.g. in terms of offending and risk), giving rise to the methodological concern of 'risk-dependent protective factors'. The aggregation of large-scale data sets have focused on replicability but the authors explain that the findings of these studies do not necessarily represent inter – or intra-differences within the sample, thereby creating a situation of 'replicable incomparability'. A further unresolved conflict is rooted in the inability of constructivists to offer real alternatives to RFR, giving rise to the paradox of 'unconstructive constructivists'. Finally, the authors explain that, despite a surface reflection, there are actually several strands of approaches to RFR that are characterised by different theoretical and methodical traditions. The unfair assumption that RFR research shares a common approach or underpinning is coined 'heterogeneous homogeneity'.

It is with these tensions in mind that the authors frame the rest of this book. Chapter 2 brings to life a historical description of the development of this research area. The timeline begins with the Gluecks' study of 510 young male adults incarcerated in the Mass Reformatory from 1911-1922. The origins of risk factorisation are rooted in the researchers' inquiry into the high (80 per cent) rate of recidivism following this imprisonment. This questioning brought the Gluecks to one conclusion that the men's own biographies could enlighten this phenomenon. The study produced a table based on the factorisation of the interview data. Despite what Case and Haines regard as significant oversights on the part of the Gluecks, they state that '...the die was cast'. A chronological table outlines the development of RFR through the decades (pp. 102-103) taking the reader through the various manifestations of this risk factor research.

Chapter 3 examines RFR research in England and Wales by analysing four longitudinal studies in terms of theory and method. Longitudinal studies, particularly those that are prospective (rather than retrospective) seem to be commonplace in RFR research. Furthermore, the authors state that longitudinal studies yield the 'most influential RFR' worldwide (p. 104). While it is highly plausible that longitudinal research may offer a broader lens to view the 'causal and predictive risk factors for offending' (p. 104), Case and Haines conclude:

The most prominent longitudinal RFR studies in England and Wales have, therefore, typically under-exploited the methodological potential of the longitudinal design and perpetuated a series of methodological paradoxes that undermine the utility and validity of RFR. (p. 153)

Cross-sectional RFR is discussed in Chapter 4, again by probing theoretical and methodological issues around several significant studies. The authors suggest that the UK government's need for speed in taking action on youth offending has created some reliance on cross-sectional research. Comparatively speaking, cross-sectional research is cheaper, faster and more generalisable than longitudinal data. However, Case and Haines have been able to identify several flaws in this approach to RFR. Chapter 4 discusses these drawbacks and concludes that perhaps cross-sectional research designs may be wrongly categorised as RFR because they haven't 'actually been capable of identifying "risk factors" at all' (p. 191).

The remainder of the book discusses the notion of a universal risk factor (Chapter 5) the usefulness of risk assessment in the Youth Justice System (Chapter 6) and implications of RFR on policy and practice (Chapter 7). These chapters bring together the ideas from the previous sections and here the reader can see the major issues surrounding the application of theory to practice/policy. The book concludes with the authors' reflections on their own 'journey' of investigating RFR, a rather poignant ending when one remembers the book was intended to be a product of their own experiences along this path to understanding.

Despite the authors' unambiguous standpoint that RFR falls short in theoretical and methodological rigour and robustness, Case and Haines have succeeded in producing a relatively balanced text on these issues. The contents of this book will serve both an academic and policy-maker audience with its analytical and evaluative discussion around key RFR studies. This text is important reading for researchers and practitioners in the areas of youth offending, risk factorisation and in more general terms of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Bethany Alden is a PhD student at the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University.

International Network of Social Street Workers and Dynamo International
International Guide on the Methodology of Street Work Throughout the World

Dynamo International, Brussels: 2008

£10 (pbk)

pp. 103

Paul Davies

AT FIRST GLANCE it is hard to draw comparisons between youth workers on the streets of Vietnam and Senegal and those working in English provincial towns. This book seeks to do just that. Written by members of the International Network of Social Street Workers and Dynamo International, its premise is that street based work has a set of standards which can be utilized regardless of the location and the circumstances in which the work takes place.

It is difficult to identify the book's target audience. It seeks to be a 'how-to guide' but the number of contributors and the widespread experiences tend to make it rather bland and lacking the insight a practitioner often seeks from such a book. It is probably at its best when recounting individual experiences from particular projects. The stories and accounts of workers' own experiences are fascinating and show the link between the different types of work in a way that is not always encapsulated in the adjoining text. Therefore the book is best viewed as an overview of street work and is probably of more interest to students of youth work or those with an interest in global perspectives than to practitioners. That does not mean to say that the book fails to be effective as a guide, but viewed from a British perspective there is little new information about the practice and method of street work that cannot be gained from earlier publications.

Perhaps the real focus of the book is to act as a rallying cry for street based workers to resist the pressures placed upon them by an ever increasing global economy. The book seeks to identify social exclusion as a shared experience for those who live on the streets or choose it as their place of safety, regardless of the severity of their circumstances. The role of the street worker is identified as being a 'privileged witness' to a global system 'dominated by the market' that creates inequality

that transcends borders; and within that context it becomes more essential to have a set of shared values and understanding of what street work is, and probably more importantly what it is not.

The book is split into three main sections. The first, 'Street work, a global approach', identifies the principles and objectives of street work drawing the distinction that street workers work alongside those who occupy the streets rather than seeking to resolve their perceived issues. The rationale behind the work is that prevention is better than cure and that by building an effective relationship workers can help offset or reduce some of the problems faced as a consequence of the existence of street populations. Against the current background in Britain where the government is seeking to reduce the extent to which the state funds services this concept is being challenged and this book which relies on anecdotal evidence fails to address this argument significantly.

The second section which forms the main bulk of the book is entitled 'Practices, methods and tools of street work'. This part is very well presented and there are some excellent examples of how street workers can provide support for people who have the most needs. I was particularly taken by the Belgium street worker's account of the relationship formed with a 50 year old prostitute and how they supported her in forming a positive relationship. The real essence is that this can only be achieved by building a long term relationship, and examples like that are proof of the street workers' effectiveness. The difficulty again is being able to quantify this in real terms. How many hours did it take to build this relationship and what did the workers achieve that could not have been completed by other types of workers over a shorter period?

The final section looks at the 'Contexts and challenges of street work'. Here it is identified that street work takes place under a number of different guises in a majority of countries, which would suggest that it is recognized on a global scale as being essential in tackling the issue of social exclusion which appears to be becoming more acute as globalisation continues. The question it does not ask is whether street based work can continue to argue that it is an essential part of this process, particularly as communication moves forward. Is the greatest threat to social inclusion now access to the methods of communication rather than the physical place one finds themselves?

The book provides a one page conclusion which seems very short and avoids making firm conclusions by passing the main questions back to the reader and then going into the difficulties of writing this kind of book. There is then a rather long epilogue by Jean Barion, a leading light within Dynamo International, who argues for the need for street workers in rather more academic language than that which has gone before. He identifies the causes of much of the social exclusion we see today and the responsibility of individual states to listen to those who bear witness to the failings of the global economy.

All told this is an interesting read and I would suggest anybody who believes in street work's

effectiveness will draw comfort from it. It is not clear from the text how the knowledge that street work is similar across the globe will support workers, particularly when fighting to save their services against the savagery of cuts. Perhaps the timing of this review, from a British perspective, is therefore unfortunate. When the book was initiated the global scene was very different, and the idea that the market economy would be found failing was less of a reality. Now as workers seek to pick up the pieces of the collapse against the background of reductions in services, cynics like myself are looking for something more substantial.

The publication can be downloaded from:

<http://www.travail-de-rue.net/files/files/Guide2008AN.pdf>

Paul Davies is a youth worker in Westminster and is actively involved in the Federation for Detached Youth Work and London Detached Workers Forum

Majia Nadesan

Governing Childhood into the 21st Century: Biopolitical Technologies of Childhood Management and Education

Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

ISBN: 9780230613218

£55.00 (hbk)

pp. 245

Priscilla Alderson

HOW ARE governments managing children and young people today, and what is likely to happen in the near future? Majia Nadesan's very broad-ranging analysis is packed with supporting examples and research references. Although she works in the United States, Nadesan takes a global view, contrasting privileged young people in wealthy countries with their disadvantaged peers in affluent and in poor countries. After the US, the book is most directly relevant to the UK because, as the political and economic histories in the book repeatedly show, the UK is the most prompt and faithful imitator and sometimes inheritor of US policies. Grounded in detailed histories over the past century, the book is almost up to date and has much to say on how the 2007-2008 global economic crisis particularly affects young people. Refreshingly, the book not only connects young people with 'adult world' politics and economics (which far too few authors do) but also keeps reminding us about how young people can be even more powerfully affected than many adults are by current policies.

'Biopolitics' stem from Foucault's view that people are disciplined and controlled, privileged or excluded, judged and micro-managed, through their bodies. Growing divisions between rich and poor in almost all countries are especially visible in the colour divide of the US: the 'white flight' to the suburbs while poor black families remain in hollowed-out decaying inner cities. Nadesan

carefully compiles the evidence for how and why Western governments, over the decades, have blamed the effects of global transfers of employment from West to East, and growing unemployment and poverty in the West, on to the personal failings of the poor. Public opinion is led to blame poor families for their reactions to extremely hard circumstances and for their supposed ‘culture of dependency’, with mounting contempt, mistrust, hostility and controlling biopolitics towards the poor, street children, migrants, ‘terrorists’ and foreigners generally. Public information and debates about policies to respond to climate change, and to dwindling global resources of fresh water, land, food and minerals, are framed in terms of fear of rocketing birth rates and hoards of angry, unemployed black and brown youths ‘swamping’ the world. Concerns are seldom discussed about how the highly over-consuming families in the US and UK exacerbate these dangers. Today, justice and solidarity across the world and between older and younger generations have never been more urgently needed, to help us to meet pressing economic and resource and ecological challenges. Yet Nadesan shows how governments are inciting paranoia, hostility and war, and are forcing the sale to private businesses of public assets: land, forests, and services relating to education, health, welfare, crime/justice, and other vital public needs.

Foucault contended that modern liberalism created two models of humanity: the rights holder and the homo economicus. The two models are partly complementary. However, neoliberalism is sacrificing the first to the second model in ruthlessly cutting wages, taxes and public services and amenities. Children and young people are then especially vulnerable, except for the privileged few who promise the exceptional success that everyone is supposed to achieve. The great majority who will inevitably fail to do so are seen as costs and burdens, dependent on state services now and potentially throughout their lives.

Nadesan’s conclusions might seem extreme, until you see how carefully she builds, illustrates and references her arguments, and connects past with present trends. She ends by quoting expert warnings that Western populations may not be able to rebuild the industries they have lost to Asia. Young people will be repaying massive debts and paying huge pension costs for the very many more old people. This will divert funds away from welfare, health and education services for young people, and so undermine their future employment opportunities and hopes of prosperity. The affluent few will enjoy even more separate private services, goods, transport and gated communities in a life apart. They will control government, with little concern for the lives and needs of the majority. Severe disadvantage, hunger and illness, when essential treatments and support are beyond their reach, increase stress in families that is associated with child and youth neglect and abuse. We have nearly a million unemployed young people in the UK. How do they manage each day, with constantly rejected work applications, little if any private space at home, and the police officially having to (criminalise and) ‘disperse’ meetings of two or more young people in ‘public’ spaces?

One partial remedy to economic crises could be to reduce the soaring expenditure on arms, war,

police, surveillance and prisons. The US has over 800 military bases abroad to protect its trade and security. So far, however, the US and UK governments and mass media largely support expanding all these expenditures. They justify this partly by displacing blame and risk on to vulnerable groups at home and abroad, on to feckless people who ‘waste’ public resources and welfare instead of on to reckless bankers, for example. And until recently, censure was diverted away from the tyrannous dictators who prop up Western oil and military interests, on to supposedly dangerous, volatile young protestors, economic migrants and terrorists. Official rhetoric squares the circle by insisting that more, not fewer, armies and police are needed to defend our freedom by controlling everyone through multiplying the repressive security biotechnologies. This will prepare against anticipated growing foreign and also domestic protests about economic hardship and injustice, as prices inevitably climb and essential supplies inevitably fall and fail.

Nadesan (pp.195-6) quotes the 2009 World Bank report warning that, because of the global credit crunch, up to 53 million more people would join the over 1.5 billion who live in dire poverty on less than \$2 dollars a day. And that this would lead to the deaths of thousands of children and young people who are half the people in the world. Nadesan (pp.196-7) also quotes plans by the US Department of Defense (DoD) for radical military responses to ‘shocks’, both abroad and at home, of natural disasters, epidemics, and ‘home-grown’ disorder. Eventually, the DoD expects that it might have to become the US (military) Government in order to ‘ensure domestic tranquillity’. If this happens, model one, the rights holders, will entirely lose out to model 2, the entrepreneurs. Governments, who promote public fear of risks, fear their own people it seems, especially youth. The Arab rebellions show that young people who do not have the property and family responsibilities that older people have (although many brave young and older protesters have these) may have greater freedom and courage to risk their lives in protest. The (generally older) people at the top of US government seem coolly to plan for the possibility of scenes from North Africa being repeated in America, with young protesters fighting young police and soldiers in their own cities, just as governments now send out disadvantaged young people to fight their wars abroad against mainly young combatants.

This is a dense and depressing read – unless you are already deeply concerned and welcome such powerful advocacy for younger generations. There are at least two reasons for everyone who works, researches, and plans with and for young people to read this book, and to ask their library (if they still have one) to order it. The first is to learn more about many vital urgent matters to discuss with young people. The second reason is to help us all to reflect on the world we are bequeathing to the next generations. How does our own work reinforce or challenge the trends away from global justice and solidarity, and towards money, cost-cutting and private profit becoming the measures and goals for everything?

Priscilla Alderson, Institute of Education, University of London

Robert Putnam and David Campbell

American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us

Simon and Schuster, 2010

ISBN: 978-1-4165-6671-7

£18.99 (pbk)

pp. 673

Stephen Pihlaja

AMERICAN GRACE by Robert Putnam and David Campbell investigates the changing role of religion in American society over the last 60 years, drawing heavily (although not exclusively) on the rich data contained in the *Faith Matters* surveys. These surveys which asked a diverse set of question about the religious lives of Americans, as well as ‘civic involvement, social relationships, political beliefs, economic situations, and demographic profiles’ (p. 10) were unique in that the same survey was conducted twice, once in 2006 and followed up in 2007, providing not only important information about the attitudes of respondents but also how opinions shifted over time. Coupled with the *Faith Matters* data analysis and other quantitative datasets taken from other surveys conducted both by the authors and others throughout the book, short ‘vignettes’ are included which provide ethnographic descriptions of different places of worship throughout the US. Although these vignettes are not the focus of the analysis, their inclusion is intended to ‘complement the statistical story’ told by the survey results (p. 32).

The book begins by discussing the historical setting of religion in America and describes what the authors call the ‘shock’ and two ‘aftershocks’ to religiosity in the US in the 20th century. The ‘shock’ to American religious life, the authors argue, occurred in the 1960s during which the US experienced deep social, political, sexual, and religious upheaval, creating the ‘perfect storm’ for social change and revolution (p. 91). The two ‘aftershocks’ occurred following the sixties: first, with the rise of religious conservatism in the 1970s and 80s as a backlash to the moral permissiveness of the 60s and second, in the 1990s and 2000s, in which youth, the authors argue, have grown disaffected by religion. These social changes provide the background for the presentation of the data from the *Faith Matters* survey as the authors argue that understanding this context is key for understanding how Americans feel about the role of religion in society now.

Analysis of data in the text focuses broadly on three main issues: the role of changing opinions towards gender in religious practice, ethnic diversity and division in religious institutions and practice, and the role of religion in politics. The presentation of the data (and particularly the inclusion of the vignettes as illustration of the data) give a diverse picture of religious practice in the US, in which, although it may be possible to describe some trends, there are quite often exceptions to the rules. One example occurs in the descriptions of ethnic divisions in Christian churches. Although the authors present several cases in the vignettes of churches (and correlating data) that

appear to show religious institutions as deeply divided by ethnicity, the data also shows that the rise of the ‘megachurch’ (i.e., churches with weekly attendance in the thousands) also includes a rise in ethnic diversity in those churches. In other cases, the data seems to contradict popular conceptions of religious institutions. For example, despite a perception that American conservative Christian churches are often engaged in overt politicking, there appears to be little evidence of this, but rather liberal churches are much more likely to engage in overt politicking from the pulpit.

Putnam and Campbell conclude that although it does appear that Americans tend to think the country is divided along religious lines, the statistics show a much more complicated story. Although the majority might not, for example, support a Buddhist temple being built in their neighbourhood, Americans consistently and overwhelmingly view religious diversity as a good thing for the country and, perhaps surprisingly, that people of other faiths will go to heaven. Putnam and Campbell argue that the data shows that American religiosity is, in general, a positive influence on American society, leading to social cohesion, civic awareness and engagement, and altruism, although they are careful to point out that this is likely due to the social networks that religion helps facilitate rather than a moral superiority among the religious. Ultimately, this conclusion emerges from Putnam and Campbell’s consideration of correlation between religiosity and positive social outcomes and whether or not there is a meaningful causal relationship between the two, a laudable feat for a book of such wide scope and focus.

Much of the focus of *American Grace* is on Christian religious practice in the US, and although this is certainly to be expected given Christianity’s dominant status, the absence of discussion of, in particular, Islamic religious practice seems a bit of an oversight, especially given the resurgence of interest and trepidation around Islam following September 11th. This is not to say, however, that the data and vignettes focus entirely on mainstream Christian practice as a Jewish synagogue and a Mormon temple are included in one section of vignettes, but it does highlight a larger problem with the book. Although *American Grace* is an essential read for anyone interested in the role of religion in American society in the late twentieth century, it feels disjointed at times, struggling to maintain a balance between a statistical presentation of the *Faith Matters* survey data and the narrative voice of the vignettes. The vignettes, although perhaps the most interesting part of the book, are limited in their scope, given their purpose of complementing the statistical description. Given the sprawling nature of the book, one feels the attempt at broad description is perhaps too broad and may well have benefited from narrower focus. This does not detract from its value as a deep source of information about the changes of religion in American society over the last sixty years, but it does result in a book that is difficult to read from cover-to-cover and will likely be most useful as an organised source of the *Faith Matters* surveys data.

Stephen Pihlaja is a PhD student in the Centre for Education and Educational Technology (CREET), The Open University

S. Sayyid and A.K. Vakil (Eds.)

Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives

Hurst, 2011

ISBN: 978 – 85065 – 990 – 7

£15.99 (Pbk.)

pp. 319

Richard McHugh

At a point in history when Arabic Islamic countries are engaged in such a prolifically (news) covered political movement, and when the anglicised West is still pursuing a signified and apparently amorphous enemy borne out of the Other of the West (more typically known as the East); Sayyid and Vakil's *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* could not come at a better time.

The book is compiled from a collection of papers produced by academics and researchers from a diverse range of disciplines (including Sports Policy, History of Philosophy, Youth and Community Work, Music, and Sociology). Although the contributors to this volume are from institutions across the globe and as far as China and Russia, the bulk are UK based. The discussions, etymologies and histories presented are at several points enlightening and a stark point of consciousness expansion for the reader, but it would have been an added value to have a less weighted mix of contributors from the UK and to have included colleagues from the United States and the African nations. However, it must be acknowledged that the genesis of the collection came from a workshop hosted by the Centre of Ethnicity and Racism at the University of Leeds during 2008, which may be the point of alignment of contributions.

The scope of the contributions is exceptionally broad, covering topics as diverse as Islamophobia in football (Millward), Sikh identity distancing from Islamic monotheism (Pal Sian), and Islamophobia and activism in cyberspace (Yakoub Islam). For the latter, Sian illustrates Sikh identity distancing with reference to a fear and moral panic-driven discourse around the forced conversion of Sikh young women, while Islam uses the example of the increasingly popular *Second Life* to highlight Islamophobia and far right aggression toward Islam as being a current cause for concern, arguing that cyberspace has presented a new front for potential racial and cultural exclusion and far right extremist activity. Simultaneously, Islam demonstrates that cyberspace, in particular in a virtual environment, provides a new ground for activism and resistance to oppression and exclusion. Perhaps as a progressive and active platform this chapter provides significant scope for further debate, thought and action as a means of engagement in global change in oppressive macro discourse, not only in relation to Islamophobia, but also to other forms of systemic and symbolic violence against people deemed to be the Other (culturally, racially, sexually or by gender).

In the chapter entitled 'The Racialisation of Muslims', Meer and Modood go some way into a brief

etymology of the word Islamaphobia, moving into a lively and engaging discussion surrounding the sliding of concepts in relation to race and religion; via the popular (mis)understanding of Muslim as race, or a stereotype of what it is to be Muslim. The discussion here lends itself to a deconstruction of ideological conceptual shifts in popular discourse. The process fades boundaries and potentially diminishes consciousness of meaning for race(ism), culture(ism) and the hierarchal values attributed to religion. This potentially equates to (anglicised) ideological discourse control. The latter being is explored via the example of Martin Amis' apparently *permissible* impermissible comments such as 'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order' (p.80).

Here, as is the case with other chapters within this volume, the theme is of Islam and Muslim as a being (from Ummah to individual) that is Othered and being in deficit (to the Anglo-American West). Perhaps, it is argued, this is indicative of an ideological attempt at inverting an ideal-ego on the East – this being one manifestation of *orientalism* in discourse on Islamaphobia).

Tzanelli and McCargo's chapters, dealing with the complexities of Islamaphobia in relation to Hellenophilia and state control of Islamic peoples in Thailand respectively use the concepts of *displacement* and *condensation* derived from psychoanalytic film theory. For Tzanelli, a displacement of Greece's history manifests in a simultaneous socio-psychic distancing from Muslim elements of Greek history and an externalised Western approved and Idealised interpellation of a *Classical Greece*. By default this demonstrates a potentially semi-passive anti-Islamic notion.

For McCargo, the argument for condensation of all that is Islamic is neatly packaged into a particular lineage of news reporting and discourse (in particular with reference to insurgency). Minimal coverage of violence in this case is related to the incorporation of Islam into state apparatuses and attempts at corralling the Muslim faith in Southern Thailand. This point relates to Bourdieu's (1998) suggestion of corralled discourse via internal news controls and which is a notable point of reference in critical consciousness of the production and regeneration of the term Islamaphobia.

There are other contributions worthy of remark, although to give the remotest of credit for each of these is beyond the scope of this review. My only criticism of *Thinking Through Islamaphobia* is that the range of chapters, although diverse in approach and discipline, are unfortunately also diverse in length and clearly defined referential support. Although in general the quality is of a high standard, there are a small number of chapters which seem to have inferred anecdotal evidence or not included enough explanatory background or comparison for a reader who may not have a foundation for understanding a given subject. For example an elaboration on Kahn's section referring to Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIP) (pp. 87 – 88) may not be easily digested by a reader without a nuanced understanding of the wider youth justice system.

Thinking Through Islamophobia is a very thought provoking read and is a must for youth and community workers. Likewise, this would be a more than worthwhile read for educators working in a school setting, in particular in relation to citizenship and history, and also as a resource for any practitioner with significant interest in critical dialogue with young people within informal education.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *On Television*. London: Pluto Press.

Richard McHugh is an informal educator.

Howard Sercombe

Youth Work Ethics

Sage 2010

ISBN 9781847 876041

£20.99 (pbk)

pp. 182

Rajni Kumrai

AS ITS TITLE suggests, this book is an exploration of the core ethics in youth work. It is written predominately as an accompanying text or conversation to enhance the teaching and learning of staff, students and practitioners on youth studies and youth and community work courses. Its publication comes one year after a book by Sarah Banks which covers similar territory (reviewed in this issue) and another book by Jonathan Roberts which carries exactly the same title. Notwithstanding the close timing of three publications in this field, Howard Sercombe offers another useful and considered dimension for revisiting a wide and relevant spectrum of debates and issues in this valuable area.

The book is written in a clear and accessible style and is divided into three parts which enables the reader to navigate easily across themes. Most of the chapters in each part provide short case studies, reflective questions, exercises and chapter summaries which draw on earlier themes.

The first part explores the idea of a professional, the profession of youth work and the role of ethics within this community of practice. The well trodden questions, as acknowledged by the author, of what is a professional, what is youth and youth work are revisited to foreground the exploration of ethics. In particular, Sercombe considers the logic of youth work as a profession and focuses his analysis on youth as a client group. He makes insightful comparisons to the New Zealand and North American context. His analysis would appeal to a wider readership by considering more closely

the current UK context i.e. where the notion of ‘client’ has been historically problematic and with reference to recent policy reviews of the youth work profession. Equally, some recognition of the global diversity of young people and their communities in the UK would also have been welcomed. At a time when the 2011 census is offering translation services into 55 languages in England and Wales, concepts of age, adolescence and exclusion would be worth revisiting within a more international context.

The chapters in the second part consider methods and theory in ethics including ethical judgements, consequentialist, deontological and virtue-based strands of ethical theory. They offer a moral philosophical framework which will enable readers to gain an accessible introduction to some highly complex arguments. This is a welcome inclusion as it is often an overlooked area in the curriculum delivery of youth and community work courses at undergraduate level. By its inclusion here it may appeal to students at a later stage in their studies in terms of an extended research study. The last chapter in this part compares codes of ethics with UK, Australia, North America and New Zealand. Having reminded the reader of the limitations of codes in that they are a relatively recent phenomenon and tentative at best, there seems to be scope here to investigate more globally how other countries approach, adopt and enforce ethical practices which protect young people and those working with them.

Parts One and Two provide a useful introduction and theoretical grounding to explore the final part which considers a number of key ethical issues and conflicts. Although not intentional, it is this latter part that is likely to appeal specifically to practitioners as it focuses on the actual practice of ethics within a youth and community context. Sercombe brings his own background into the shaping of the narrative. This part spans many important aspects of ethics ranging from framing ethics within policy and funding debates, to issues of confidentiality, risk, boundary-setting, power and dependency, corruption, equity and justice, and difference. Overall, the coverage of issues develops an awareness of the complexity of working within an ethical framework, provides helpful ways to reconsider these issues and promotes greater sensitivity.

In particular, the set of chapters on power, equity and justice and difference are highly significant areas to explore although not unproblematic to address within the scope of the many issues identified. Within each of these chapters it would have been useful to have some explicit acknowledgement that there is a growing readership familiar with being a minority; that the discourses on identities and difference can themselves be exclusive where the assumption is based on normative perceptions risking reinforcing notions of ‘othering’. Given the complexity of issues in terms of framing and addressing difference Chapter 19 would merit further investigation.

The final two chapters focus on professional development and self-care. Both these areas are critical to developing an holistic approach and Sercombe provides a timely reminder to readers of the

significance of establishing support structures for practitioners at in-service and post-qualification level.

Overall, this book is another resource to add to the growing work on youth work ethics. It offers a carefully considered opportunity to re-conceptualise understandings of the core ethics of youth work.

Rajni Kumrai is Senior Lecturer in Youth Studies and Youth Work at London Metropolitan University.

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Obituary Andy Gibson

Jean Spence

ANDY GIBSON arrived in Sunderland as a youth worker in 1979 to work at the Pennywell Youth Project. This was one of three community based youth projects in what were described as ‘Areas of Need’ in a town already suffering post industrial decline and about to be even more sorely ravaged by the subsequent policies of the 1980s. Those who appointed Andy, a young southerner, who looked and sounded very different from the working class young people who lived in Pennywell, must have thought they were taking a risk; but it was a risk which certainly paid off as Andy subsequently went on to make a contribution to youth and community work in the north east region which was unique in its breadth and creativity.

Andy was not an ordinary worker. For example, he did not seem to have to think about ‘participation’. Participation was what he did. He approached his work on the principle that we are all capable of more than we know, that we can imagine better ways of living and that we can make that better way if we act co-operatively with each other. He used conversation, persuasion, questioning, argument and sometimes silence in ways which could be inspiring and sometimes infuriating, but with young people, his approach pushed them to the limits of their ambitions and beyond. He made them want things they hadn’t thought possible and then he worked with them to find the means whereby they could achieve what they had identified. If they didn’t move, he didn’t. Using this process, he was a pivotal influence in the success of the Sunderland Musician’s Collective. I shall never forget his delight in what the collective was achieving as he showed me around the old Green Terrace School which he had helped them to acquire, before they eventually moved to the old Bakery in Stockton Road where they established the Bunker as a creative performance and work space run by young people (<http://bunkerarchive.com/>).

Andy had high ideals but he was not naïve. He was a practical worker, always aware of the social and political context, constantly cajoling colleagues, decision-makers and potential funders to give time, use their influence and offer funding to back up his work. The politicking did not go down well with everybody, and sometimes there was difficulty around areas such as feminism, while his enthusiasm for ‘tools’ to facilitate youth or community activism sometimes seemed mechanistic. Nevertheless, it is a testament to the respect which people held for him that even when disagreeing, people mostly trusted his motives. Moreover Andy was well-informed and thoughtful. It was not an accident that he could perceive the privatisation agenda with reference to youth work over a decade ago (Gibson and Price, 2001).

The principles of co-operation which Andy applied in his working life were not only meant for

others but also for himself. He tried hard, and nearly succeeded in establishing a housing co-operative (Roosters) in Sunderland in the 1980s amongst a group of community and youth workers. Since his death, I have remembered many small kindnesses that he practised quietly, sometimes using his many craft skills, and he and his family were generous in sharing their home on a small Scottish island, Erraid, with unruly friends. Erraid is perhaps where he loved to be more than anywhere and as another friend suggested, there he was ‘most himself’, especially when he was out in his boat fishing for mackerel.

Andy began his career in Sunderland in a period of high and rising youth unemployment, in an environment diminished by the impact of de-industrialisation. He died whilst working for the Scotswood Strategy, in an area of Newcastle changed beyond all recognition by the processes of de-industrialisation in which the local working class population had been seriously marginalised by the decision making processes which instigated and followed the closure of old industries. In between, he worked for the Sunderland Youth Employment Project, the Social Welfare Research Unit at Northumbria University, and the Keyfund. In all those positions, he carved out his own job, raising the money to do it, creating work for others which would otherwise have not existed and directing the energy towards the benefit of disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups of people.

In an issue of the journal which is focused on the question of research, it is worth noting that Andy assumed that research was integral to practice. He undertook research and writing himself, but never adopted the persona of a conventional academic. Indeed, he was more at ease when raising the questions for research, finding the funding, sponsoring the investigation and ‘disseminating’ the findings. I have a mouse-pad in my possession which was illustrated by a young person with information about the findings of research into the New Deal for Young People which Andy instigated when he was employed in the Social Welfare Research Unit. Andy had thought hard about how to communicate the findings of the research to the young people who were affected by the New Deal.

Any policy maker seeking evidence of ‘impact’ could begin by assessing the contribution firstly of Jeremy Brent whose posthumously edited writings are reviewed in this issue of the journal, and then they might move on to the work of Andy Gibson. The value of Andy’s work might be assessed with reference to the extent of the loss felt by those who had the privilege to have worked with him. The tribute below from Booga (Paul Maven) is a testament to work which can change lives.

Reference

Gibson, A. and Price, D. (2001) ‘How Youth and Educational Services in the UK are being Privatised’, *Youth & Policy*, 72: 50-62.

The following appreciation was published by Paul Maven on the Bunker Archive website on the day Andy died:

CHEERS ANDY

THE WORLD LOST A HERO TODAY. Andy Gibson died early on the morning of 8th July 2011.

It will be hard not to sound too sentimental here, as I am talking about someone who over the last 15 years I saw no more than 6 times. I didn't know much about his private life. I suppose I would be exaggerating if I said he was a friend.

But Andy Gibson changed my life.

He was the bloke who organised the first ever meeting of the Sunderland Musicians Collective, the forerunner of the Bunker. His guidance, support, and encouragement resulted in the establishment of a music project in Sunderland that has a 30-year legacy attached to it. He spent hour after hour helping us get the original Green Terrace ready for the first gig. Getting his hands dirty as well, not just delegating jobs and being 'the adult'. When all the hard graft was done, he just left us to it, stating it was our place, our night, and he didn't come. He inspired me in so many ways. I asked him about what he did, this 'Youth Work' thing. In a nutshell, I wanted to do what he did, because it was amazing. He never ever once came across like a youth worker. He genuinely believed in what we were doing, and if there ever was an individual in my life that personified the notion of altruism, it was Andy. And he continued to hold that belief in the potential of all the young people he worked with throughout his career. A few years ago, I met up with Andy during the research for this website. He asked me what I was up to. I told him that since my involvement with the Bunker had waned, I had gone on to college, gained a BA, went on to do an MA, had been doing a youth work Job with a national remit and had started my own business. What I didn't tell him, but now wish I had, was that the inspiration, encouragement and guidance given to me by him had played a pivotal role in all of that. I would not be exaggerating if I said I am who I am and do what I do, because of Andy. When I asked what he was doing, he sort of shuffled in his chair a bit. 'Just the same really. I work with young people in the west end of Newcastle. Helping them develop their ideas and projects. Just like the stuff I was doing with you lot. A bit sad really'. I didn't think it was sad, I thought it was admirable. This was a true testament to a man who didn't want any flag waving or accolades. He just wanted the best for the communities he was involved with. I am just one individual whose life has been touched, indeed changed, by the influence of Andy Gibson. I am in no doubt there are countless others. The thing is, back in the early days of the Bunker, I was blind to the influence this 'scruffy southerner' was having on my life. But his actions, the way he treated me, things that he said, his respect for me and belief in my potential, they became ingrained in my subconscious. All of this has kept cropping up over the years. And will continue to do so. Although I am deeply saddened by the loss of Andy, it is comforting to know he will continue to positively affect many lives for many years.

Cheers Andy

Booga



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

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

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

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

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