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# About *Youth & Policy*

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

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# Youth Work in a Cold Climate

Tom Wylie

## Abstract

*This article anticipates the impact of the economic recession and public spending cuts on young people and services for them. It explores three different approaches to making the case for youth work in a hostile economic climate and advocates a stance of 'principled pragmatism'. Such a position would seek to articulate how youth work contributes to different aspects of social policy but needs to demonstrate robust evidence of its impact. It also requires the development of youth work's own infrastructure notably a more skilled workforce with a licence to practise and more determined national advocacy of youth work's value in achieving social justice.*

**Key words:** economy; youth work; traditions; workforce; skill.

Youth work has rarely marched with the wind at its back and the warming rays of the sun on its face. There have been brief periods when its contribution to social policy was appreciated nationally, and relatively substantial finance, by youth work standards, flowed into the work. These periods included a few years in the 1960s after the Albemarle Report and again in the first decade of the 21st century with *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* and *Aiming High*.<sup>1</sup> But most of the time it has been a case of 'make do and mend' as capital to replace outworn buildings was not made available and, given the absence of agreed national standards on the scale of provision which should be made in neighbourhoods, funding for recurrent spending drifted towards capricious decision-making by local authorities, voluntary endeavour and charitable fund-raising. In recent years the national lottery has made an ad hoc input to different themes concerned with young people though the demands of the 2012 Olympic Games extravaganza in London will diminish this source.

As a nation and as a sector devoted to improving the condition of the young, we are living once more in wintry and troubled times. The crisis in financial services has pulled the whole economy into recession. There is a distinct possibility that any recovery will be largely jobless as those businesses which survive may prove reluctant to re-hire people to those posts they have shed and reductions in public service employment may last for years. The consequences for the young will be particularly hard as the experience of being unemployed during young adulthood is not only immediately discouraging but has been shown to have severe results in terms of long-term health, future income

and blighted lives. The scars will be notably marked in those areas from which public and private capital fled in earlier economic re-structuring and recession; these have become communities of the left-behind with horizons narrowed, hopes and aspirations diminished.

Already one in five young people are unemployed, jobs for young adults are often casual or part-time and many in the youth cohort sit inside a population of 13 million living in poverty. The gulf is widening, both geographically and in human and social capital, between those who are doing well, those getting by and those going nowhere. Social mobility has stalled and the constraining contours of class and privilege are evident. Divided, unequal nations become underachieving societies in which the more vulnerable are prey to extremism. Although some short-term, remedial initiatives may be introduced, for example on employing apprentices, overall spending on public services will be constrained for years to come. It will not be a good time in which to grow up. Cuts in spending will have a devastating effect on what is offered to young people in the local authority and voluntary sectors alike. Indeed, the loss of youth provision is already evident.

Moreover, despite occasional bursts of financial sunshine and sporadic policy interest over the last decade, the Labour government missed the opportunity to develop a vibrant youth work sector which would have had the resilience provided by a robust infrastructure to ride out an ice storm. Granted, there was a little new capital to improve the building stock; a few short-term innovative programmes; a marginal improvement to the legal basis for youth work; and some attention to strengthening the voice of young people in decision-making. But many of those who work in the sector felt diminished by the absence of consistent policy support for its values and approaches, by the endless re-structuring of services with as yet unknown consequences for funding streams, especially for work with those aged over 16. The latest configuration of local services, following the botched design and implementation of the previous Connexions fiasco, served to marginalise the place of young people as distinct from children, of personal development as distinct from safeguarding, and of youth work as a profession which can complement others and not be subsumed by them. Instead, we saw a renewed search for the holy grail of joined-up services, with a good deal of vagueness about what this means in practice for the structures of local governance and decision-making, for support to voluntary bodies, and for the workforce. Although recent Ofsted reports described the effective contribution youth work makes to young people's lives and some improvements in the overall effectiveness of this approach, the sector is not well-equipped to face harsh economic winds. How is youth work now to argue its case in competition with cancer screening or care for the elderly? Or even with other parts of the wider children's and young people's sector including Sure Start, youth justice and the ever open maw of schools? Can it handle the process of being commissioned against outcomes? Making the case for youth work has rarely been more important.

### Three Traditions

Three different traditions of advocacy for youth work have long been evident. First, the romantics. These adhere to ‘the old-time religion’ of youth work (though without the rousing gospel hymns): heart-warming tales are told of young brands plucked from the fire, of lives turned around. Some of these accounts are even true: many youth workers have good stories to tell of supporting individuals in difficult circumstances, of helping them to put their lives back on track, of offering them new experiences in order to escape the limiting contours and low expectations of their own neighbourhoods. Some romantic purists would stop there. Tell the stories. Describe youth work in its own terms. Assert the enduring truths of ‘the voluntary relationship’ and ‘the convivial conversation round the pool table’. Indeed, in a piece emblematic of these views, one distinguished colleague recently argued that youth work should ‘break the shackles of New Labour’ and find an alternative to government targets and the whole gamut of ‘depersonalising, technocratic and anti-democratic’ policies. (Davies, 2009).

As George Orwell once wrote ‘one has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that, no ordinary man could be such a fool’ (Orwell, 1945). Consider for a moment the politics of appearing to imply that youth workers don’t need to be accountable to those who are paying. Frankly, tales of personal triumphs with individuals can add colour to a narrative but they don’t convince even sympathetic politicians in good times. Especially not when the tone adopted is one which suggests a measure of victimhood in the profession.

The second kind of approach – the technocratic – goes along with whatever new managerialist ideology triumphs as local services emerge from the latest round of re-structuring and financial stringency. Under pressure to demonstrate early success for new structures, the technocratic adherent accepts meaningless targets and fashionable mantras about ‘ending silo working’, ‘radical workforce transformation’ and much more, articulated – if that is not too generous a term – by careerists who have little knowledge of how youth work actually engages with the young and their communities. The term ‘Integrated Youth Support’ is a case in point; each word is problematic: what actually is to be understood by ‘integrated’, at what age does ‘youth’ begin and end, what features constitute ‘support’? The consultants and officials who coin such vague jargon see any challenge on its interpretation as unwelcome dissent, even rebellion, and don’t appear to read the evaluative accounts which emerge before they move on to the next voguish idea.

The third group – in which this writer places himself – is of principled pragmatists. We draw from the deep well of youth work values, we know that many youth workers don’t need national targets to make contact, develop relationships, negotiate a shared curriculum and encourage young people to make progress towards achieving important outcomes (the terms ‘curriculum’ and ‘outcomes’ don’t find much favour with the romantics). But we believe also that youth work projects and youth services need to be able to express their contribution to the broader goals of contemporary social policy to



developing skills for employability and for life, to preventing offending, to emotional well being, to democratic renewal. The task of articulating such outcomes can carry its own dangers. It is important to be positive about youth work's virtues but some advocates claim too much by suggesting that it can remedy all manner of social ills. The process can also split the sector with some voluntary bodies being quick to claim that they can go faster and fly higher (and more cheaply) than the agents of the state. They are seduced by talk of a 'big society', ignoring the necessary, state-regulated, framework and support which would make it possible. Some call in aid the Ryanair philosophy currently abroad in the land: pay only for the most basic service, never mind the quality. Some ideologues, and their voluntary sector fellow-travellers, would gladly 'shrink the state', though they are not so keen on picking up the bill when the consequences eventually come in by way of poor health, crime or unemployment. Passing responsibility for community services to volunteers may work in some places but is not a solution for the more intractable social issues and localities.

Youth work needs to make a convincing case for proper investment and show, in figures not just in stories, how individuals, communities and society benefit. It is not unreasonable, surely, for youth workers to be able to say: 'with this level of resource we will be able to reach this number of young people, we will be able to help more of them to decide things for themselves, take responsibility for this or that activity ('recorded outcomes'); and for a number of them to make progress in acquiring new skills which are robust enough to be accredited by an external body, if they choose'? Properly aggregated, and backed by good research on beneficial impact, such an approach would show convincingly how youth work contributes to individual well-being and social capital.<sup>2</sup>

Not all managerial practices or approaches to target-setting in the past decade have been either wise or feasible. We should discuss what kinds of outcomes are now relevant and what accreditation systems, such as ASDAN's, best capture personal and social development when that accreditation is needed. But, as the climate chills, we should not see the end of specific targets as some form of liberation. On the contrary, it may mean that youth services are not worth funding better since they can't, or won't, demonstrate what they achieve. Youth work exists to benefit the young. If it is to flourish, perhaps even survive, it needs to be better able to demonstrate how these benefits are realised. It has to be able to answer cogently these three questions:

- how much did we do?
- how well did we do it?
- who is better off?

## Priorities

This last question, as well as the pressure of contemporary structural fads such as 'targeted youth support', opens up the contentious issue of priorities. Youth work has always aspired to be universal

and has usually resisted any suggestion that it should focus its activities on those disaffected with life or with institutions. Moreover, it is well known that services for the poor often become poor services. It is possible that one of the explanations for the weak funding of local authority youth services down the years has been the lack of engagement by middle class parents on behalf of their children who have not been encouraged to participate in council-run provision. However, the money has never been there for it to be established as a universal service similar to schooling and, in practice, local authority youth services, and some voluntary sector projects, have tended to be concentrated in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. This seems to be a wise allocation of public resource; indeed it is one which is socially just or, in current language, represents the goals of ‘progressive universalism’. We surely want the benefits of youth work to be available to those most in need? Moreover, such an approach is not in itself in breach of the understandable desire to offer open access provision alongside or incorporating more deliberate, structured intervention and programmes designed to meet particular needs of those involved. Such programmes could include, for example, the specific personal and social development needed by young people who have difficulties keeping a job or moving into independent living or managing relationships with family or peer groups: exactly the kind of ground youth work occupies but rarely explains how.

### Workforce matters

It is not just the wider politics with which we need to be concerned. It is also a matter of how to secure good practice in everyday encounters with the young. At the heart of excellent performance is dialogue and reciprocity. Conversation, yes, but conversation with a purpose. A voluntary relationship, yes, but one which looks towards growth and development. The ability to take forward encounters ‘on the wing’. The capacity to work with others for changes which will better the lives of young people in their communities and in those institutions, such as schools, which are meant to serve them. Such tasks, and the whole approach to assessment, curriculum design and evaluation in non-formal settings, have always demanded a high level of skill from youth workers in the great range of settings in which they operate. So the development of a competent, idealistic workforce, both voluntary and professional, has to be at the heart of the action. It is a matter of regret that there are still voices in the sector which resist the creation of a proper ‘licence to practise’ for youth work as the foundation on which a fully successful workforce can be built. In this resistance there is often an unholy alliance between the romantics and the technocrats. The former resist because they believe that ‘convivial conversation’ needs no particular skill or that, if it does, it is not for the state to determine what it is. The technocrats resist because they wish to blur the boundaries between professions; and/or in order to keep costs down. We need youth work organisations, in all their rich diversity, each to establish an appropriate ‘fit and proper person’ test for staff appointments and for the system nationwide to make available a range of training and qualifications to meet the needs of individuals in different roles; a detached youth worker needs different skills to those of a scout leader, even if they share a value base. And both are different in principle to nursery teachers or sports coaches. (They are different because

the use of the term 'youth work' implies the presence of three distinguishing features: a focus on the personal and social development of young people; the use of experiential learning especially in groups, and the conscious presence of a particular value base. Youth work, of course, is present in a variety of settings, not just those managed by traditional youth work organisations).

Good workers think about their practice and take responsibility for becoming better at it but all youth workers need continued professional development if they are to keep their skills and knowledge up to date and apply their approaches, values and ethical principles in changing circumstances, for example in handling potentially confidential disclosure or dealing with embryonic political extremism. Such continuing professional development should be a compulsory element in renewing any licence to practise.

Individual workers and the sector overall need to keep both developing and learning from different forms of work, including from different countries (the absence of serious engagement in European youth policy and practice is a particular British blind spot). Easier access is needed to research and to the findings from inspection, to cogent interpretation and critical analysis of policy, to stimulating journals of different kinds, to reasonably priced seminars and conferences shaped to promote debate not absorption. Much learning and support can be achieved at low cost through networks of practitioners in different settings such as schools or detached work but these in turn require modest infrastructural support. Not least, the sector needs champions – bodies and alliances which will help youth work better express its role, establish clear standards, inform and lobby parliamentarians, celebrate young people's achievement, and challenge not only policy-makers but also the sector itself. Did we used to have a national agency which did some of these things? On a technical note, preparation within the sector ought to have assembled evidence for the Spending Review which will shape national departmental budgets for years ahead. Perhaps reflecting a more general distaste for quantitative approaches, the youth sector is not good at building a cogent economic case, or even at understanding how public spending operates.

## The public mind

One of the major changes of recent years has been a growing caution in the minds of adults about their relationships with young people. For some, this has extended to a more overt suspicion, even hostility, and these attitudes have been amplified by parts of the media and by politicians anxious to use surveillance as the 'silver bullet' to control all manner of undesirable behaviour. One looks forward to the day when a Secretary of State will announce at a party conference a commitment to increase the number of youth workers, not police officers. Negative public attitudes about young people, when taken with doubts about the efficacy of youth work as an intervention, make it increasingly hard to argue the policy and financial case for developmental services for the young, especially if this case is only expressed by chippy romantics. So it is vital to further extend those structures and processes

which enable young people, individually and collectively, to give their own testimony about their needs, to be involved in local budget devolution and to create and run more projects for themselves: the development of volunteering offers some scope here for much greater innovation, building on the imaginative work of ‘v’.

There are important tasks also for those in management in both the local authority and voluntary parts of the sector. These include the reviewing of priorities, the re-allocation of resources and the selection, support and scrutiny of personnel. Financial pressures make all these tasks harder. Careful consideration is required on where youth work should now be positioning itself alongside other services for the young, notably schools and colleges but also the neglected arena of the arts, especially theatre, music and new media. At its best, youth work has been a service driven by local imperatives so, as any national drive to offer direction diminishes, the consideration has to be how it can establish its place and what it can offer within a local structure of how needs are identified and the shape of provision determined, planned, managed and governed. It is timely also to consider merging some voluntary bodies, both locally and nationally, the better to consolidate skills and focus effort. Of course, a reasonable level of diversity is essential in order to maintain local choice for young people but there is so little actual differentiation in what some bodies offer that administrative and other costs could be reduced by a judicious coming together of organisations. Such efficiency gains would free up resources for what is now usually described as the ‘front line’ (though one hesitates to use the military metaphor in speaking of work with young people).

## Conclusion

Arguments about arcane aspects of youth work’s theology – ‘the narcissism of minor differences’ – will not take us far, especially if these are the only tunes heard by politicians and their officials. A bolder, more vibrant approach should be adopted, backed up by strong evidence of impact. This would re-assert the central moral purpose of youth work: the exploration with the young of the question, ‘what kind of person do I want to be?’ In a chilling landscape where the language of the marketplace holds sway, we need to advocate the politics of the common good and demonstrate how we are achieving it. All the while keeping a clear-eyed idealism. To adapt some words of Robert Kennedy, it is the great task of youth work: to see pain and try to end it; see prejudice and strive to overcome it; see potential and seek to nurture it.

The changing seasons alter the landscape and we are now in the winter of policy and funding. Perhaps in this bleak environment one of our great Foundations would consider establishing a high-powered Commission of Inquiry to chart youth work’s way forward towards these ends? A diminished, impoverished state is not likely to do so.

## Notes

- 1 Policy documents referred to in this article are primarily concerned with England. The most comprehensive account of youth work policy is in Bernard Davies majestic three volume *History of the Youth Service in England, 1939-2007* published by the National Youth Agency. A shorter account of developments in the period 1982-2007 by Tom Wylie appears in *Youth and Policy* 100, Summer/Autumn 2008.
- 2 As expressed for example in 'The benefits of youth work' by Viv Mckee et al published by Unite/Lifelong learning UK in 2010.

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# Straws in the Wind: The State of Youth Work in a Changing Policy Environment

Bernard Davies

## Abstract

*This article presents the main findings of the second phase of a 'modest Inquiry' into the state of youth work within the still evolving integrated youth support services of eight local authorities. The Inquiry, carried out in the summer of 2010 by staff of Leicester De Montfort University, explored how youth work's defining features were responding to the continuing influence of New Labour requirements to meet statistical targets, to target 'at risk' and 'risky' young people, to 'integrate' youth work with other services; and to the early stages of the Coalition's public service cuts. Though the evidence was limited, it suggested significant gaps of perspective and experience between managers and workers on some of these issues. Concerns also emerged within the voluntary sector about the implications for them of these developments and also about the commissioning regimes increasingly being implemented by local authorities. Young people's views on some of these issues were also recorded.*

**Key words:** youth work; integrated youth support services; voluntary and community sector; cuts.

## Policy contexts – from New Labour to the ConDems

In the politics of the UK the ten years New Labour set itself for implementing its strategy for positive activities, set out in *Aiming High for Young People* (HM Treasury/DCSF, 2007), seemed to be a very long time indeed. With its underpinning assumptions of continuing and even expanding public expenditure, this provided a key policy context for De Montfort University's (DMU) first 'modest Inquiry' into the state of youth work in twelve of the (local authority children and young people's services newly established in England in 2008-9 (See Davies and Merton, 2009a; Davies and Merton, 2009b). Yet by the time of the second Inquiry in mid-2010 that context belonged to a different era. From the first day of its election in May 2010, overwhelmingly the new government was preoccupied with reducing the public debt following the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. Though some differing policy emphases within the coalition administration emerged from time to time, these were insignificant when set against its overriding and agreed priority, quickly and massively to cut public spending. In doing this the deliberate intention for some conservative ministers was to do what they had long wanted to do anyway, and what the Thatcher governments of the 1980s had sought and failed to do: substantially to shrink the state and the services it provides. In the process, in the name

of a very weakly defined ‘Big Society’, expectations were raised that ‘the voluntary and community sector’ – here meaning not just organisations and groups but individual volunteers – would take up the (huge) slack left by the run down of the welfare state.

Other than confirming, again in only the broadest terms, the creation of a ‘national citizens service’ for 16 year olds, this self-declared austerity agenda gave no hint that the government was working within, or towards, any kind of coherent youth, never mind youth work, strategy. All we had were straws in the wind – ad hoc ministerial (and indeed pre-election shadow ministerial) statements which gave some, sometimes clear, sometimes highly contradictory pointers to the government’s likely direction of travel.

Thus, though little was heard of it after the general election, the Liberal Democrats had committed themselves at their March 2010 conference to put youth services on a statutory footing (Cook, 2010). Only two months earlier, however, Tim Loughton, at the time the Conservative’s shadow children’s minister and then its under secretary of state for children and families, had declared, unprompted, that for him ‘the quality of youth services through the local authorities leaves a lot to be desired’. Giving a clear indication of his own party’s policy orientation, he asked rhetorically: ‘Why would the world fall in if a local authority contracted out the whole youth services department?’ (Gore, 2010). The most positive message he was able to offer youth workers while in opposition was that they would ‘have a crucial role in preventing young people becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or falling into gang culture’ (Hillier, 2009).

After the election the policy gap was to some extent filled by key agencies providing their own pragmatic ‘take’ on where priorities lay. In an Ofsted report on outstanding local authority children’s services (Ofsted, 2010b), youth work, though appearing occasionally in a walk-on role in one or two of the case studies, remained permanently in the wings in the substantive discussions of these ten services’ achievements. Implicitly, an earlier Ofsted evaluation of eleven integrated youth support services (IYSS) seemed to confirm youth work’s marginalisation with its ‘key finding’ that ‘the priority given to targeted support for a minority of young people seen to be at risk had often undermined the contribution of universal youth services made to the development of young people more generally’ (Ofsted, 2010a: 5).

Indeed by late 2010 even one of youth work’s ostensibly strongest advocates, the National Youth Agency (NYA), had apparently decided that in the new financial climate open-access provision had already become all but indefensible. In its response to the government’s spending review framework (September 2010), it highlighted informal education, young people’s voluntary engagement and responsiveness to their preferences as distinctive characteristics of youth work practice. Nonetheless, in the substantive body of the document, it explicitly advised government that though ‘all young people benefit from high-quality universal services ... the economic value that targeted support and

early intervention provides is particularly pronounced' (NYA, 2010: 5). Indeed it went further. In a statement in which 'communities' has to be understood to mean 'volunteers', it unambiguously suggested that:

*By separating the universal activity based offer to young people and supporting communities to deliver this to their young people it will be possible to target the time and skills of professional staff to the young people who need it most* (NYA, 2010: 7).

Meanwhile, overshadowing all such pronouncements and analyses were the new realities of austerity. Well before the comprehensive spending review was completed, as millions of pounds were cut from local authority and central government budgets, across the country youth worker posts were being threatened or lost and local authority youth clubs and other youth provision threatened or closed. Moreover, potentially risking even greater long-term damage, a number of authorities began actively to explore how they could 'outsource' their youth services (See for example Watson, 2010; Lepper, 2010).

This turbulence and churn within the youth work sector contributed significantly to the fact that over half of the services which had participated in the first DMU Inquiry were unable to do so again. Even with three new ones agreeing to take part, within the time frame of the Inquiry – June and July 2010 – only eight Services could accommodate the day visits needed for the hour to hour-and-a-half focus group meetings with managers, workers, young people, and in this case voluntary sector staff. Given this small sample, no generalisations about the current overall state of youth work can be or have been made in this article which reports upon the second Inquiry. What at best the Inquiry provided was a snapshot of how those directly engaged in providing youth work were responding to the challenges they were facing. The final report was given the title *Straws in the Wind* (Davies and Merton, 2010) because this seemed to capture best the main overall message from the findings..

## Youth work's distinctiveness – and the New Labour legacy

### *Identifying youth work's core features*

The initial prompts for the focus group discussions, including those with young people, as in the first Inquiry, sought to clarify what participants saw as distinctive about youth work as a practice. Here again, a clear consensus emerged around some core defining features. These included young people's voluntary participation in carefully nurtured processes which aimed at developing challenging informal educational opportunities in safe, relaxing, sociable and 'fun' environments. The approach, it was also again emphasised, was substantially young people-led and rooted in trusting and, for the young people, empowering relationships.

The second Inquiry also sought to gather updated responses on whether and how some key New Labour policies were continuing to influence this practice. These included the requirement to provide



‘positive activities’, including at weekends, to extend young people’s ‘voice and influence’ and to prevent ‘violent extremism’. However, the specific New Labour youth policies which evoked the strongest reactions – the main focuses of this article – were again those concerned with meeting targets, particularly for accredited and recorded outcomes and with targeting at risk or ‘risky’ young people.

## The struggle with targets and targeting

### *Hitting the targets*

Despite the fact that integrated youth support services were no longer subject to judgement against best value and national indicators managers generally saw target setting as compatible with the defining features to which they too were committed:

*We’re not driven by targets such as crime-reduction. (We’re) person-centred above all else.*

A number of field workers were also finding targets useful, in particular where the accreditation of young people’s achievements could be integrated into the on-going youth work process:

*It’s given the social workers the outcomes they need – hitting their targets. And the young people got youth work... It wasn’t adult-run, shaped.*

(Full-time ‘Voice and Influence’ worker with looked-after young people)

On the other hand, the Inquiry again generated a range of much less positive reactions to target-setting, with senior managers themselves occasionally voicing reservations:

*We’re narrowing the focus. It’s all about outcomes but we’re never able to demonstrate the longitudinal outcomes... It’s all measured in short-term blocks.*

However, criticisms came most often from field staff, some explicitly contradicting senior managers’ generally positive views. Indeed, one part-time worker was particularly impatient that targets were now so much part and parcel of the work that managers no longer listened to their concerns while a full-time worker commented that managers’ different perspective from those in the field sometimes was resulting in their imposing directions which they did not themselves have to justify to young people. Other telling comments included:

*The young people’s pace isn’t always the officers’ pace.*

*They (the managers) are on your back.*

As during the first stage of the Inquiry, a further frustration was the paper work required to demonstrate that targets were being met, which could distract from the face-to-face work:

*Out of a three and a half hour working session ... I spend (only) two hours in the actual work. We need to prove what we've achieved.*

(Full time youth worker)

Indeed, with number crunching the predominant mode, some workers suggested that what was being measured wasn't youth work at all:

*On reception ... I'm just ticking boxes. Just young people coming in. But ... a 'contact' could be two minutes or two hours.*

(Advice centre worker)

*Our centre is the best generator of figures in our service for recorded and accredited outcomes. When the service did face-to-face youth work we couldn't deliver stats. Now we don't have a single qualified youth worker ... I trade off accreditations for money – the more accreditations we can offer, the less we charge.*

(Outdoor education centre manager)

One area manager summed up the frustration for many respondents, commenting that, with the focus on 'numbers through the door', what was neglected was 'quality evidence – support for individual young people'.

Youth workers were often worried too about how such monitoring approaches restricted the spontaneity and informality of their practice and young people's own agenda-setting:

*... Black History Month – we were told what to do. We had no time to ask the kids (what they wanted to do).*

(Part-time youth worker)

Though not always seen as negative, the pressure to hit targets was also being felt by many voluntary sector organisations:

*All funders have targets now – not just the local authority. The monitoring means there's less work done because it's target-led...*

Nor had the pressure on staff to meet their targets gone unnoticed by some young people. Accreditation was welcomed by one group – though not as the reason for being involved in youth work projects

– and in a second ‘targets that can be achieved’ were seen to be helping to improve youth work. However, a third group was aware of its possible distractions from good youth work:

*Targets – (they) make workers rushed. (They) end up putting pressure on young people – making you feel bad if it’s not done.*

### *Open access vs targeted work*

Both workers and especially managers were keen to demonstrate that open access work, even if not thriving, was at least surviving. Stressing the need to continue working with young people and not on them, one worker commented:

*Centre-based work is really good because it’s like being part of an extended family. You’re there all the time (for them) ... like grandparents and have the benefit of being with young people in a different kind of way to their immediate families.*

Often however the wider context of such work appeared to be somewhat threatening while what was actually being done was described in rather defensive ways. One senior manager, though describing the local politicians as being ‘very pro open access work – they like their local youth centre’, was clear too that they still expected the work to become more targeted. This service was working to an audit of local needs for

*... targeting areas of need. We have open access in order to target... Targeting is difficult if you don’t already have relationships with young people.*

It was also targeting ‘particular groups and types – like knife crime’ while personal advisers and youth workers were working together to target ‘NEET’ young people in every youth centre.

On the premise that ‘universal work is threatened – the interface is problematic’, another service had created a ‘universal team’ ‘to ensure a focus’:

*We’re creative with resources. If there’s one targeted young person on a trip, we take five others. (The dilemma) is not going to go away.*

The senior manager of a third also provided a stout defence of open access provision:

*We’ve resisted pressures to be more targeted from other authority officers who don’t understand the universal work. If young people access voluntarily you get better outcomes.*

Nonetheless, widespread concerns continued to be expressed by youth workers as well as by some of

their managers that open access work was increasingly being squeezed. For example, in the context of likely future moves in one authority to commissioning services, one voluntary sector manager commented:

*Our present contract (for the open access work) ends in March. There are no guarantees it will carry on... It would be a tragedy if open access is lost.*

Indeed, the threat was seen as likely to grow as more and more funding was directed towards the social control of young people:

*It's harder to respond to young people's expressed needs. Now it's about ticking the boxes.*

According to one group of part-time workers this was resulting in targeted provision being prioritised at the expense of young people who were getting on or getting by.

### ***Voluntary vs referred and required participation***

Overlapping the struggle to safeguard open access provision was a defence of young people's right and opportunity to attend youth work facilities by choice – something which was seen to be coming under growing pressure as youth work became more fully integrated into wider children and young people's services and their referral mechanisms for those 'at risk'.

A number of interviewees – workers and managers, again including some from the voluntary sector – offered evidence that such voluntary engagement remained a defining feature of their provision and practice:

*100% (of the young people) attend voluntarily.*  
(Part-time worker)

*The majority of our resources are going into the voluntary engagement. Social inclusion (work) happens only within Target Youth Support.*  
(Senior manager)

Moreover when a service did accept referrals some managers would insist that young people attend voluntarily:

*The teenage pregnancy work provides a range of groups and positive activities for young women who are referred mainly to youth workers at the fortnightly referral meetings but who engage by choice... There's a high retention rate.*

However, as suggested by the caveat ‘I hope that’s protected’, added by this last worker, many staff were aware that young people’s voluntary participation, far from being taken for granted, may at some point have to be defended. (In one service, the fact that managers had provided just such a defence prompted a spontaneous appreciative comment from one worker). Thus, when a young man refused to join a local sexual exploitation project, one group of full-time workers found themselves needing to justify his freedom to choose. In another authority, an area manager commented that:

*Getting youth workers into schools... they don't appreciate there's no voluntary relationship. Other services buy in what they think is youth work (but) it won't be what people wanted.*

Moreover, ambiguity about what ‘voluntary participation’ means may be growing. In one group, for example, it emerged that, though workers had taken some referrals, including some from social services, the police and the youth offending service, only senior workers and managers would be likely to know this and whether a young person had been referred. Other responses suggested an even greater potential slippage in what has traditionally been understood within youth work as participation by choice:

*It's a voluntary relationship – they choose to come. But there are incentives. If they stop coming they don't get the money.*

(Pre-employment course worker).

*The only compulsory part is our induction phase – young people have to come to that, maybe with a parent. After that there's a shift to choosing to come – once they realise the opportunities and activities we offer, the benefits of accreditation.*

(Voluntary sector manager)

Though the evidence was limited, there were also indications that as youth work became more fully embedded in IYSS, such confusions may have been deepening and pressure increasing. The perception of one full-time worker for example was of other professionals going to a multi-agency meeting to swap referral forms:

*They refer people to other agencies who work with them for six weeks. It's like passing the buck and nothing gets done.*

Elsewhere, a full-time worker was explicit that ‘the social inclusion work isn’t voluntary’.

What seemed like straightforward examples of work which assumed required attendance by the young people were also offered. Thus much of the work of an arts project run by part-time youth workers involved ‘NEET’ young people all recruited via referral from an E2E programme and students at risk of exclusion from school:

*What we do in the school isn't youth work. The young people have no choice.*

However some youth workers testified to benefits when working with vulnerable young people who had not engaged voluntarily. After initial reservations, one group of workers were very positive about the approach when they saw how much at risk under-age drinkers were:

*I really feel I am needed. And I am. These kids are very vulnerable. We can't stop them drinking but we can help them moderate it. We can keep them safe.*

Within such approaches, however, one worker saw '... a confusion – that youth work (just) means youth work skills'. This was a view apparently born out by contributions from workers from non-youth work backgrounds one of whom apparently saw moves from open access and voluntary attendance as progress:

*Youth work has adapted. It's so much better than in the past when it was all about table tennis and pool...*

Such reactions led professionally trained and experienced youth staff to conclude that, for example:

*Youth work is being lost – we have no choice.*  
(Youth worker)

*You take for granted what you do. Don't always realise what you've lost. Maybe losing the methodology. For example group work ... the dynamics.*  
(Senior manager).

## The long and winding road to integration

### *The challenge to managers and workers*

At the time of the first Inquiry (the winter of 2008-9) IYSS was at an early stage of implementation. In response to what one senior officer had vividly described as 'the exploding demands of integration', progress in local authorities was shown to be uneven as they sought to change gear from working as partners to much closer and more organisationally structured forms of co-operation. Following pathfinder experiments in some services new structures and processes were being put in place, requiring managers and practitioners to start to share information, skills and resources.

At the time of the second Inquiry a question of real concern for policy-makers, managers and practitioners remained the extent to which successful routes to integration lay in attitudes of mind or in structures and processes. Each however was likely to act in interaction with the other since making

connections between service providers is unlikely to happen unless people want it to; and unless they create arrangements which enable rather than inhibit the process.

The second Inquiry also indicated the need for managers and practitioners to be clear about the purpose of integration and the roles associated with its implementation, for dedicated time and resources for communicating these, and for relevant induction and training. All this implies a willingness and ability to handle the complexities and relationships entailed in ‘joining up’ and in managing and responding to the often substantial change involved. In an effort to address some of these challenges, in the period between the first and second Inquiry the government had sought, through training, to equip senior and front-line managers with leadership and management skills for developing integrated support for young people, with over 4000 staff in scope for this initiative.

### *The managers’ standpoint*

Perspective depends on standpoint. Most of the senior staff interviewed for the second Inquiry seemed positive about the moves towards integration. Some had caveats about how much progress towards it their service had made or how the policy was actually working. Nonetheless, the starting point of almost all of them was an often strong in principle commitment to it. As one head of IYSS put it:

*I’m over the moon we’ve got an integrated service, especially for young people with multiple issues.*

However, given the variety of structural arrangements which had been created, it was perhaps not surprising that they described the form and impact of integration differently. In more than one authority, senior managers clearly saw themselves as having had to negotiate their way through wider and perhaps major structural change. One senior manager for example talked of a management team (of which they were a member) which now included all services, a single referral route into the common assessment framework (CAF) procedure and a strategy paper aiming in the future for ‘inter-disciplinary location’.

In another authority, where the retrospective message was: ‘We’ve kept the (youth work) ethos by winning the argument’, the process had included agreeing written protocols on, for example, young people’s voluntary attendance and confidentiality in information-sharing, and ensuring youth work was explicitly woven into the authority’s children and young people’s plan.

Elsewhere however, based on a recognition that each contributing service had its own expertise, joined-up working seemed often to rely less on changed structures than on the flair and initiative of individual staff – managers and workers. In one the model was more one of ‘evolution rather than revolution – a salad rather than soup approach’ and one which could be ‘informally managed’. As demonstrated in another area, the benefits of integration could sometimes best be realised by a change

of leadership bringing a more outward-looking approach, enabling youth work within the integrated environment to extend its reach and drive up standards. Indeed, at times managers seemed to be relying heavily on the leadership of individual workers to make integration work:

*We work closely with all other services: planning, joint work. People just work together.*

Many of the managerial perspectives on integration, however, were less positive. The firm set of structural moves towards integration described by the youth work lead quoted above, by her own account was apparently, at best, still represented only weakly on the ground, still struggling with ‘... ingrained cultural roots in staff’s jobs’. The distance still to be travelled was perhaps also highlighted by this manager’s reply to a question on the co-location of staff – ‘(there’s) not a room big enough’ – which seemed to assume that co-location referred only to planned future staff consultation and/or training meetings.

The naming and designation of services could particularly affect how staff perceived their role and the impact they could have on young people. In one area, after having been relabelled ‘a young people service’ the youth service had regained its original title and confidence. Indeed, its recent history and current situation were perhaps most vividly captured by one senior manager’s comment:

*We came back from the brink...from youth workers in locality teams under social care managers. (Along the way) we lost three managers.*

They clearly saw themselves as having carried on a determined fight-back, in the process reasserting the place of youth work as they defined it by creating a ‘universal provision’ team headed by a senior manager. At the same time they had done

*the multi-agency thing – offering what worked, what young people needed... [We said]: ‘If you do it this way we’ll get to the outcomes, be effective’.*

On the other hand, some managers looked back to a time when the educational focus of youth work was better understood, valued and structurally acknowledged. For one, when located in an education department, ‘we’d had a place’, but ‘now there is no main heading... everyone is (said to be?) doing youth work’. One member of this team, too, while acknowledging this wasn’t necessarily different from in the past, wondered whether senior departmental managers ‘know our business’.

Though this was one of the very few explicit references during the Inquiry to youth work’s move from a specifically ‘education’ location, it was a development which could be seen as having wider implications. In none of the authorities visited had structural links been retained to what might be termed ‘developmental’ rather than more ‘remedial’ forms of educational provision, with social



care most likely to be the dominant departmental practice model. As with the first Inquiry, this left open the question of what this relocation might mean in the long term for youth work's historic commitment, not just to 'child saving', but even more strongly to the young people's personal and social development and the potentiality model on which this drew. As one middle manager put it:

*Strategically it's a weird arranged marriage – I won't say forced! ... Why put together **those** services (Youth Offending Service; Connexions)? Why not youth work with the schools and colleges? ...*

### **Views from the front line: local authority workers**

As suggested at the start of this section, successful policy implementation depends on effective communication between managers and practitioners on the rationale behind the policy and its likely impact on practice. Yet, in all the services visited, front-line, especially part-time workers had limited awareness and understanding of the integration policy, often laced with scepticism and disillusion. Indeed in one group of ten full-time workers the mere mention of the word 'integration' was greeted with uproarious laughter suggesting something bordering on cynicism.

For a few workers the move was welcome – even long overdue:

*I've been keen to integrate services for years.*

One worker's qualification – 'it's not damaged us, youth work' – suggested that field staff's sense of distance from recent developments could be interpreted as management having successfully cushioned them from or even headed off the more threatening possibilities of integration.

Nonetheless, the lack of awareness that something – anything – significant had changed was often striking:

*I have to remember I'm working for IYSS, not the Youth Service.  
It's just a change of title – there have been no physical changes.  
They just got young people to design a new logo.*

Underlying these reactions – in the case of the last two comments, in a service whose senior managers acknowledged that the planned induction and training had not yet taken place – was disappointment that little had been done formally to prepare them for the changes. These workers felt they still did not know key workers in other services – 'there have been no formal introductions' – while only one of them seemed to know about plans for joint work across agencies as part of a major international event taking place in the authority in the near future.

In one authority this drew from one worker the conclusion that the focus on integration was coming from managers but not being transferred to practice. Moreover, as this was one of the services where management's description of integration had come over as an enhanced form of partnership-working, an additional comment that joined-up working was being done on an ad hoc basis also seemed telling.

Where levels of awareness about integration were higher, views on the limitations of what had been achieved also emerged – for example in a group including experienced and qualified youth workers and pre-employment course tutors and an information, advice and guidance worker:

*We spend a lot of time pursuing different outcomes.*

Within a single service, front-line workers thus sometimes voiced very different views about the value of joining services up, including sometimes struggling with the actual or possible impacts of co-location with other professionals. Views could thus vary from one worker's welcome of the 'chance to shine', via what another saw just as 'teething problems', through to a third whose experience of a 'pilot integration office' had suggested longer-term problems. In this last case, though the social workers in the team had apparently recognised that youth workers worked differently, and despite monthly staff meetings, managers' heavy workloads were seen as having inhibited the move towards integration.

This sometimes happened too because of other services' limited understanding of the nature and benefits of youth work and how trained and qualified youth workers might contribute to integration. Workers thus complained of being regarded as highly-paid bus drivers; others of just being called in 'in case anything cracks off'. In one service, despite being a joined-up part of a more integrated youth support service, youth workers and Connexions personal advisers still, we were told, regarded each other with mutual suspicion. Some youth workers also saw personal advisers as still having a 9-5 Monday-Friday attitude and that:

*... (while) we have to do all the hard graft and help get the young people ready for EET opportunities ... they (Connexions) take the credit for the placement.*

### ***Views from the voluntary and community sector***

One of the stated intentions of the integration policies is to make professional staff from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) key partners, particularly through tendering and commissioning procedures. Some VCS representatives saw this as being realised by working closely with the local authority in ways which allowed for critical engagement rather than absorption.

More often however, even where it enjoyed a good reputation and good relations with the local authority, the VCS appeared even more detached from, and even less prepared for, integration than

field staff in the statutory sector. Serious problems were voiced for example about its capacity to be represented at key meetings:

*If you're not round the table you don't get talked about.*

Some organisations particularly expressed concern that their reliance on untrained volunteers was not recognised and about tokenistic attitudes towards the sector, leading to feelings of marginalisation:

*The third sector is the poor partner... partnership work is talked up but there not much in reality ... I went to an inter-agency meeting – it was local authority-led.*

Many were particularly wary of the onset of commissioning, seen potentially as an 'onerous beast', excessively bureaucratic and undermining of the constructive joint working which had characterised their existing partnership relationships. As one VCS interviewee put it:

*...there is a key tension between the business side of things and doing what is best for young people.*

In combination these developments threatened to draw the VCS into additional (and not always welcome or achievable) operational roles and activities. Within multi-agency groups, for example, pressures could build for all existing providers to respond to individual young people by, for example, 'captur(ing) data on who and how often', participating in the CAF process and taking on the role of lead professional:

*The young people often have needs beyond our limitations – doing one-to-one in a youth club. And then feeding back into a three-way relationship – the worker, the young person and another practitioner.*

*You ended up being made to feel ashamed for not doing it. 'You won't be the lead practitioner!'*

Most fundamentally perhaps, underlying these comments was a VCS view that the statutory bodies' pressure for partnership working was failing to respect the voluntary sector organisations' autonomous status, with statutory sector managers sometimes assuming that better work could (only) be achieved through partnerships. Indeed, for one interviewee integrating services put at risk the very features which set voluntary sector organisations apart and made them attractive to some young people in the first place – their separate and different identity. From all this, another drew the conclusion that:

*We are being drawn into what feels more like a local authority agenda than a voluntary sector agenda.*

### *Views of young people*

In one area, a group of young people displayed some awareness that integration had happened – and had some (critical) reactions to the changes.

*Since the move into a young people's service it's a lot more regulated. Everything's checked and rechecked.*

*It's hard to define the line (between the different parts of the new Service).*

*The service is bigger. It's harder to keep track. It was better all in the same building. Everything's bitty. 'Where do I go?' 'Who do I see?'*

*It's harder to access the help I need.*

*Merging – all into one. Two organisations just chucked together. It's not made enough difference.*

### **The impact of some key IYSS priorities**

#### *Youth work as 'prevention and early intervention'?*

Overall, integrated services have been set an important role in 'prevention', often requiring efforts – for example by establishing early intervention teams – to intervene in the lives of young people seen to be vulnerable or at risk before serious problems can take root. This high priority brief seemed to have brought its own pressures on the kinds of practice youth workers regard as distinctive.

In one authority, for example, the senior management team talked of having had to 'negotiate back' from an initial departmental failure to take account of young people's voluntary engagement with youth work and to build a youth work perspective into the department's early intervention strategy. In another authority, a full-time youth worker was at pains to stress how, exceptionally it seemed, her project had avoided these expectations:

*Early intervention workers have all got caseloads – referred young people with targets to get them off NEET.*

Evidence on this key feature of IYSS was limited. However, even when more positive outcomes for youth work were mentioned, a question remained: in the longer term, and especially as resources are cut, will preventative and early intervention priorities put additional pressures on open access forms of youth work currently attended by choice by young people not seen as 'at risk'?

### *One-to-one work vs work in groups*

Some workers painted a familiar picture of work with individual young people emerging organically out of informal group settings. This however was not the one-to-one work to which many drew attention. In one authority one discussion focused on their role in identifying individuals needing help within a school setting. Though workers in another authority said they did not formally take referrals, they said that at some partnership meetings they might be asked to follow up with an identified individual with whom they already had a relationship. Concerns were particularly apparent that much of this one-to-one work was concerned more with the social care and safeguarding of young people than with their informal learning and personal development, with expectations that workers would use the Common Assessment Framework seen as helping to drive such approaches:

*...they are taking on pseudo second-class social work assignment.*  
(Youth work manager).

As a result workers felt they had less time for the kinds of work with groups which help define youth work and which youth workers particularly value because of the importance of group life to young people's personal and social development – something which other professionals often fail to appreciate.

Where work with groups was discussed, the nature of the youth work being described could sometimes be unclear. In one group for example, three qualified and experienced youth workers described 'on the wing' practice in fluid group settings. However, an advice centre worker openly acknowledged that, with 98% of its work focused on individuals, the centre was not doing youth work while the contributions of two tutors on pre-employment courses were more ambiguous. Though working with mainly pre-structured groups and following a set curriculum, they nonetheless saw themselves as doing youth work because, they said:

*It's not just about preparing CVs or for interviews. We talk in groups about how they feel about themselves, what they expect from life.*

### *Information-sharing*

As in the first phase of the Inquiry, questions were raised during the second about the sharing of young people's personal information amongst professionals. In one authority one of the youth workers' concerns was that, especially for information they needed for doing their jobs, their expectation that they would be treated as 'on the same level' as teachers, social workers and YOT workers for example, was not being met.

Elsewhere discussions raised more fundamental practice issues. In the group discussed above, the pre-employment course tutors found it hard to understand why their youth work colleagues did not

want detailed advance information on individual young people. As well as being an aid in their work with the young people, the course tutors saw such prior briefings as protection for themselves in what could be potentially risky work encounters. For the youth workers however, a far higher priority was that their first meetings with the young people should not be influenced by other professionals' perceptions – and perhaps prejudices. Workers in a different authority seemed to be making a similar point when they talked of '... "challenging" kids in school [who] are often the best in the club' and of '[multi-agency] meetings [where] a name pops up of someone who's done nothing [wrong] in the club'.

For the youth workers anyway, the collection of information, far from being an instant event or a formalised procedure, was often integral to the whole youth work process:

*Young people won't give us their names. They're homeless, on drugs. They [only] started talking about drugs on a trip to Alton Towers.*

(Full-time youth worker)

These and other youth workers, had two further related principled questions: had the young people given genuinely informed consent for this information to be passed on; and, therefore, was confidentiality being compromised? As procedures within integrated structures further restrict workers' room for exercising professional discretion in such matters, the potentially fundamental challenge to youth work practice of 'weak' interpretations of such consent was illustrated by one experienced youth worker:

*A social work student on placement went with a young woman for a pregnancy test. Her tutor insisted she must record that on the data base. The student refused.*

## Partnership working outside the integrated structures

In more than one authority, both workers and managers were keen to highlight that, in various guises and contexts, effective partnership working had prefigured integration, with valued results:

*[We] are good at external relationships – making links and partnerships.*

(Area manager).

Indeed, the moves towards integration seemed sometimes to have concentrated minds harder on these wider forms of intra-departmental and inter-agency working and in some cases helped extend them. In one authority, for example, moving into new central council offices had created opportunities for much easier (and time-saving) face-to-face communication with non-IYSS authority staff with whom links previously had often been weak. An area manager in another service believed that '[workers]

may be far closer to other [services] than [the ones within IYSS] which bring in the money' while, more concretely, in a third, cross agency area-based 'learning teams' were being developed comprising youth workers, police, YOT and drugs workers, chaired by a youth work manager.

However, such arrangements could throw up their own tensions for face-to-face practice:

*[The Fire Service staff] don't challenge young people like we do... They nip outside for a smoke during session – in front of the young people. They took a group out in their minibus – I had to run down the path after them waving at the kids to put their seat belts on!*

(Part-time youth worker)

It was work with the police which seemed in many areas to have taken off, including in at least one case involving a voluntary sector project. Though often slow and stumbling in its progress and clearly bringing its own tensions, by the time of the Inquiry these relationships in one service were felt to have been successfully negotiated:

*We can have a close dialogue about what's not working well – tell the police managers and they'll listen.*

*We now understand the police roles*

Indeed workers and managers here talked with some pride about what they were calling early intervention 'triage' work in police stations, designed 'to support young people at stressful moments'. Outreach work had also been established, with a police officer or drugs worker and a youth worker working out of police vans initiating discussions with young people on relevant issues.

*We explain [to young people] we're youth workers – make them aware of what we do.*

## Managing youth work within integrated structures

One of the key functions of leadership and management in any service is to establish a clear vision for the work and inspire and encourage staff to implement that vision to the best of their ability. Clarity of purpose is thus vital. This second Inquiry suggested, however, that this is becoming harder to achieve as elected members and senior officers, after years of being required both to respond to and initiate highly specific policy objectives, priorities and plans, face something of a policy vacuum. Combined with an awareness of imminent and large cuts in funding, this was making it harder for managers to keep the workforce informed about the direction in which the service was moving.

*The view from below: workers' expectations and experience*

Workers' views on management were not explicitly sought but often emerged as other issues were addressed. Most positively, some workers made clear that what they most valued from their managers was support, not least in helping to reduce or deal with the demands of the paper work, or, as described by one full-time worker, in easing some tricky external relationships:

*I got an email from [another agency] asking for 'any data' on these two young people. I said I couldn't help them – unless the young people agreed. They demanded I share the information I had. I passed it up to my manager.*

(Full time worker).

Moreover, the absence of this support was sometimes explicitly noted – and regretted:

*The senior managers don't come to these [area] meetings. Today is the first time I've seen [head of service] for months.*

(Full time worker)

*When they do come it's usually bad news.*

(Full time worker)

And workers in one authority believed that their managers could be more assertive about the importance of youth work:

*We should be shouting from the rooftops about what we are doing.*

Some workers' comments on their managers and their service's management structures and procedures within which they worked went deeper, however. One group of full-time workers seem agreed that whereas senior managers in the past had come to workers' meetings with a feel for the work, now they came to defend not promote. Elsewhere workers commented that now 'the managers manage downwards', that 'there's so much management speak' and that, particularly in the light of so many policy changes, managers could not now do all the work and manage as well. This last group concluded that they had therefore had to delegate some of their responsibilities, which could particularly affect lines of accountability:

*Hierarchy is so different now. There is nobody where the buck stops... You get told it's nothing to do with me, it's a different district.*

When considered alongside workers' more specific and often harsh criticisms, outlined earlier, of the monitoring of service targets and the implementation and management of IYSS, a picture emerges of



many field staff feeling distanced from their management and experiencing a significant gap between their own perspectives and priorities and those of their managers.

### *The view from middle management*

Though what it meant in practice could vary from worker to worker and over time, most middle managers saw offering support to field workers as still a significant part of their role. One manager gave particular emphasis to helping front line staff interpret and apply local authority guidance on safeguarding policies and procedures.

However, a middle management team in another authority concluded that, though their contact with the field was important, regular visits had dropped down the priority list – that they were ‘treading water’. They were working, they felt, to retrieve the situation (‘it’s coming back slowly’), for example through six-weekly service-wide meetings and four-weekly locality team meetings. For a manager in another authority such a task seemed to be daunting:

*... Keeping up staff morale is really difficult. The workforce is demotivated... They’re passionate about what they do but suspicious – they’ve lost faith in senior management protecting them.*

Moreover, for such middle managers supporting field staff was only one of their responsibilities. Some still had face-to-face commitments which could add to their pressures:

*I’m a project manager with responsibility for the project budget. And I do fifteen hours face-to-face work a week...*

(Full time worker)

Those who were full-time managers also found themselves, as one of them put it, ‘juggling’ a range of expectations – in effect being trapped in the traditional ‘meat-in-the-sandwich’ role:

*I’m not so much pressured as powerless... in the middle, keeping the messages consistent, information flowing. Dealing with fear about cuts.*

Moreover, as one manager made clear, this role was if anything becoming more testing within IYSS:

*Upper [departmental] managers make assumptions about what youth work is and isn’t. They miss a lot of the inter-relationships [between workers and young people]... Some are very supportive ... but they don’t understand the importance of the relationships...*

And on top of these internal demands were increasingly those coming from partner agencies:

*I'm flying the flag at partnership events. Explaining the role of youth work.*

*We've built the relationship with the YOT manager, through co-working.*

### ***The view from the top: the experience and perspectives of senior managers***

Senior managers were specifically asked to consider their management role and in particular the balances within it amongst managing relationships, managing resources, managing processes and managing expectations. Many, as one respondent put it, found this 'a very difficult question', either because the suggested distinctions failed to capture how they themselves categorised their priorities or because it was hard for them to identify precisely where the balances fell.

Indeed, one senior manager seemed to speak for many when, spontaneously, she reacted to the prompt with: 'managing is bloody hard'. To the comment also that 'managing [is] about holding onto our personal and professional values', colleagues added their own gloss:

*It's now just hard. They keep asking for just a little bit more. There's always something else to remember to ask workers to do... Its complexity. A massive range (of tasks)... Translating strategy into practice.*

*I've never worked as hard – as long hours. It's how we lead, manage. We do it so others don't have to.*

Though emphasising (like others) the importance for them of close team working, this team also suggested that 'we're not good at managing ourselves' and – notwithstanding their own honesty and introspection in responding to the question – they reported that 'there's no time for reflection'.

In spite of these personal as well as professional pressures, the senior management teams interviewed were clearly striving to work strategically, offer a lead and exert influence. In one authority, the head of service reported that the principles underlying change were integration and co-location, with progress being made on both fronts simultaneously. A senior manager in another service asserted that part of the job of management was to 'open up dialogue between different people and different structures' and that this had led to a good relationship between managers based at headquarters and those leading services in the field.

*We are aware of the tensions between the field and those here at HQ. But these relationships are crucial to enabling us to manage both the operational and the strategic aspects of our work simultaneously.*

Nonetheless, most were still struggling with the impact of the move to integration, with one head of service noting:

*We're a relatively new Service – [formed by] integrating two separate services. The transition was probably as good as it could have been but it's hard for staff to understand – why [different parts of the Service] work different hours – during the day and in the evenings.*

As a result, as was openly acknowledged, there was still some management distance to travel:

*We should be managing an authority-wide system – managing the politics [of change] for workers at authority-level... But we're only about half-way there.*

Added to the pressures for senior managers stemming from these longer-term changes was the unpredictability of often unrelenting operational demands, arising partly because priorities changed over a year. However, as one team member made clear, it occurred too because, just as an overall balance in the management tasks had apparently been reached, it was disturbed by a new incident such as a police operation or (at least in the past!) by new money suddenly becoming available.

Within these shifting scenarios, meeting service targets remained a key priority for most, particularly as a way of demonstrating high service standards to influential interests outside the service, including politicians of different parties and, in first-tier authorities, in different district councils:

*... outcomes can't be allowed to slip... We need to emphasise our high class work ...*  
(Head of service)

Methods for monitoring these standards included peer inspection procedures and 'snapshot' observations of practice. However other accountability processes seen by managers as important had become more difficult to sustain as departmental structures had become more complex and hierarchical and as managers' time and opportunities for contact with staff was squeezed by more strategic responsibilities:

*Historically I've had easy access to the team I'm managing – to calm the ship through personal contacts... Now I don't have that ready access to field staff. I can't get everyone together. I have to work through the IYSS management team... to adjust my own management role.*

A second key senior managerial priority for many was developing and then maintaining all those extra-departmental partnership relationships discussed above. However, as illustrated in at least two authorities, managing the expectations of these other agencies could throw up its own dilemmas – particularly the need to fend off what one head of service characterised as pressures to adopt other

services' agendas. The result for one senior management team was what they termed 'subversive management'

*We're managing more by stealth. 'Youth work' doesn't have enough of a statutory 'wrap' so we describe what we're doing in business terms – as outcomes. We know what we want to deliver (as youth workers) and how but we're less and less upfront about it.*

## Resources in a time of cuts

Youth work has always been under-funded. It was therefore no surprise that a number of the responses, including from the voluntary sector, revealed evidence that 'cuts' – or at least constraints on resources – were far from a new experience for youth workers and their managers. Managers had clearly dealt with these pressures through a mixture of strategic responses – for example weaving youth work into various strands of the authority's Children and Young People's plan – and, backed up often by field staff's own efforts, though well-honed opportunism for attracting funding.

What many such initiatives had generated was an increasing dependence on short-term external funding with all the problems this entailed.

*We were told we had [the money] in November; [the programme] had to be completed by December. There was no planning, no time to consult young people.*

*The money ends, the work ends... There's only continuity for young people by inter-weaving from one project to the next to the next.*

The result was that the work was always at risk of being funding-driven rather than defined by young people's needs. Concerns again also emerged that practice was increasingly being shaped by funding streams tied to control and safeguarding rather than educational priorities, with some potentially perverse consequences:

*... every child deserves a childhood but if you're a bad person you get a nice one!*

As the second Inquiry was in progress, at very short notice the new government withdrew many of what a senior manager labelled 'little pots [of money] for little bits of work'. The freezing or actual ending of funding for both YOF and YCF carried the particular risk of damaging the faith of the young people involved just as they had begun to gain some control over resources. These were understood by all those we interviewed to be just the first warning signs of much worse to come – though precisely what that was remained unclear and so a focus of great personal and professional anxiety.

Already they felt, workers and managers in one authority had fought back from potential disaster. A proposed cut to youth work provision of £3.1m had eventually been reduced to £300,000, nevertheless resulting in long-term damage in the view of one respondent:

*Workers have lost trust in how they're valued by the higher ups... It gets in the way of talking about the real work.*

(Area manager).

Elsewhere, cuts had already been confirmed with in just one area both pre-employment courses and a v project ending months earlier than planned.

For two heads of service, the lack of any kind of strategic approach to what they knew was coming was proving especially damaging:

*We know about the cuts but we don't know about the policy leading the cuts... You can't just cut everything that isn't screwed down... We'll need to try and deliver on statutory duties without just slash and burn [elsewhere].*

*I don't know what this government's aspirations are for young people. Which makes it ... nigh impossible to plan.*

Despite these policy vacuums, hope, it seemed was not always entirely exhausted. One senior management team was putting some faith in the Service's profile and that this was valued, in another in that it was *in good shape* – 'it's ... has a high reputation... We have partners' support... Local people, communities, know the Service's quality'.

In one authority, at the stage of the Inquiry, only minimal cuts to the IYSS budget had been imposed, achieved without cutting staff, though for 2011-12 it was anticipated that the level of the budget reduction would require major departmental restructuring. In at least two other services, cuts already identified or taking place seemed to be driving the integration agenda further and faster. In one, successive cuts were leading to seven integrated service teams being reduced to three, placing seriously at risk broad-ranging universal services provided through Connexions and by youth workers, including their 'preventative' agendas. These resource pressures were also seen as having clear implications for the skills sets of youth workers, with consideration being given to combining their generic skills with those of providing information, advice and guidance to create a single body of front-line staff.

In the second authority, on the back of reductions in Children and Young People's Service's budget (£1.2 million for 2010-11; £5.6 million for 2011-13), 25 co-located teams were being proposed, to

take on more targeted work and to ‘think family’. A number of dedicated youth work buildings were likely to be sold off with pressure likely to build for youth workers to demonstrate ‘impact’ – though without as yet any clear means of doing so.

In most authorities, the uncertainty these threatened or actual cuts was often resulting in falling morale:

*Integration is now irrelevant for staff. They're more anxious about cuts, their jobs. We're the managers and we don't know.*

(Area manager).

*Are we well prepared? No! I'm gloomy...*

(Senior manager).

Though some young people were inclined to be quite sanguine about the situation – ‘the cuts are needed now; in my school we are spending money we don't need to spend’ – some of them too were pessimistic:

*Taking away things young people have isn't going to help them get rid of anti-social behaviour, bad stuff.*

Voluntary sector organisations also often expressed particular anxieties:

*... (the) third sector [is] invisible to the Youth Service... So it's particularly at risk...*

*Some projects are particularly at risk – with disabled young people.*

*March 2011 is the big date as three five-year funded initiatives will come to an end.*

*Existing competitiveness is huge... The cuts will exacerbate that.*

What ultimately most frustrated respondents was, not surprisingly, the pending damage to young people's projects:

*... young people have had lots of new experiences – residential, outdoor activities... the most successful elements of youth work... [these are] now going down the pan...*

(Voluntary sector manager).

*Things won't get better – just when things were good.*

(Young person)

## Some emerging themes and issues

Two years on from the first Inquiry, there remained some grounds to be positive about the condition of youth work. Judging by continuing referrals from schools, police and health services, its stock remains high. Youth workers were still making important and distinctive contributions to the integration of support and development services. They and their managers had found creative and flexible ways of responding to government policies. Under constant pressure they had stayed true to tried and tested principles, particularly involving young people themselves in shaping programmes to meet their needs and aspirations.

Nonetheless, though no grand generalisations could be drawn from the very limited sample of services, and though some services felt they were responding effectively to the challenges, the testimony of many suggested that, if anything, the dilemmas we identified two years ago were even sharper. Services remained pre-occupied with targets, requiring youth workers to measure the value of their interventions by numbers reached rather than by the quality of the relationships and opportunities created. The meaning of voluntary participation had become even more ambiguous as partner agencies called upon youth workers to run programmes young people had to attend. As integration had taken hold, it had not just increased emphases on prevention, early intervention and the use of referrals. It had also brought together practitioners who, though all presenting themselves as ‘youth workers’, had very different understandings of what this meant. In combination with extended partnership working, particularly with the police, this new organisational dynamic appeared to be leading to significant ‘under-the-radar’ shifts in both the meaning and practice of youth work and, for many experienced and qualified workers and some managers, to a significant diversion from its key principles. Strong cultural differences apparently also persisted between professions over key operational matters such the sharing of young people’s personal information.

One effect of these complex and closely inter-related developments appeared to have been a widening and deepening of the gap in perceptions and priorities between managers and those they manage. Though to some extent this had probably always been the case, three additional factors seemed to be accentuating and intensifying this trend.

One was policy. Nowhere during the Inquiry was the manager-worker gap more apparent or deeply felt than in their contrasting – indeed at times sharply conflicting – experiences of and responses to ‘integration’. At the very time that managers’ numbers were dwindling, they were being drawn more into more strategic policy-focused roles, with external alliance-building being a top priority. As increasingly their primary frames of reference became other managers, including those in other services, these appeared to be diverging significantly from those field staff for the dominating preoccupation was to sustain what they saw as the defining features of their face-to-face practice. Secondly, at a time of professional uncertainty, when systems were becoming more complex and

fluid, managers were liable to think that they had less on which they could communicate with any degree of confidence. As a result they were, it seemed, saying less and so unwittingly increasing their staff's levels of anxiety. Thirdly, the squeeze on resources and the determination of service providers to protect front-line delivery had resulted in an erosion of managerial posts. As minds were concentrated increasingly on serious job insecurity, the reduced amount of time managers were able to commit to keeping their staff in the loop and supported had, unsurprisingly, had further adverse effects.

In a harsh financial climate policy makers and funders, again unsurprisingly, increasingly started to target services on – including rationing distinctive youth work methods to – already identified individuals, groups, localities and issues seen as needing most attention. Notwithstanding their in-built preventative properties, this made the educational principles and purposes of open access youth work and its spontaneous and 'on the wing' interventions, much harder to safeguard as ones in favour of 'child saving' and youth control were increasingly prioritised. The demand for evidence of the positive impact of the use of scarce resources also tended to encourage a narrow focus on interventions that (apparently) could lead to immediately demonstrable outcomes. Despite local authority assurances of full partnership in the integration process, voluntary and community sector organisations and staff, also caught in the backwash of these pressures, have often been left feeling both marginalised in the implementation of integration and yet having their independence jeopardised by a reliance on state funding whose uses were being more rigidly and more narrowly prescribed.

Overshadowing all of these issues, however, and causing huge uncertainty and anxiety, was the emerging age of austerity. Despite its often short-term and targeted nature, external funding had over many years made possible imaginative and effective youth work practice, much of which was being rendered unsustainable even as the Inquiry proceeded. Added to this, within the reducing budgets of the new integrated departments – and amid concerns that cuts were being made in a policy vacuum, without any consideration of their strategic impact – open access youth work provision seemed certain, substantially, to be squeezed even further.

It was thus hard at the end of this second Inquiry to find much cause for celebration from the straws in the wind we have sought to capture. Drawing on the profession's hallmarks of resilience, resourcefulness and resolve – the characteristics it seeks to engender in young people themselves – a determined, creative and sustained defence of good practice seemed increasingly to be required, by managers and field practitioners, if – when we return for a third phase of the Inquiry – we are to find that youth work continues to make its distinctive contribution both to young people's wellbeing in their here-and-now and to their longer-term positive outcomes.



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# The Antisocialisation of Children and Young People: Undermining Professionals and Colonising Everyday Life

Stuart Waiton

## Abstract

*This paper analyses the changing nature of relationships between adults and young people. Adopting aspects of the work of Frank Furedi, the question of the socialisation of children is addressed. It is argued that the problematisation of behaviour, coupled with the development of new state and institutional processes, has led to a growing spread of 'professional' and contractual involvement in everyday life. This is something that relates to and is accelerated by the emergence of micro-politics and micro-social policy over the last few decades. This colonisation of the lifeworld, it is argued, is increasingly formalising informal relationships and undermining spontaneous relationships between adults and young people. It also distorts the nature of professions and the relationships developed between them and young people. The real relationships between adults and young people are consequently being undermined and replaced by an ersatz form of socialisation.*

**Key words:** antisocial, state, behaviour, socialisation, regulation.

Within critical sociology attempts to understand and explain changes in social policy often focus upon the socio-economic changes that have taken place. What is in essence a left wing critique of modern capitalism, this approach often emphasises the issue of power and inequality, focusing on structural questions like poverty to explain the 'real' problems in society. This paper in contrast focuses less on these socio-economic issues than upon the nature of institutions today and the expanding nature of state and professional intervention and colonisation of everyday life, a form of colonisation that is arguably impacting upon every adult-child relationship, and undermining the socialisation of the young.

This is a process that has been identified, particularly in the United States, since at least the 1950s, but which has become more systematic and qualitatively problematic in the last two decades in the UK – not least of all, because of the collapse of political life. In this regard this paper, unlike those that focus on the 'neo-liberal' nature of society, suggests that many of the problems discussed below have developed less because of the enforcement of any right wing agenda, but rather, because today there is no agenda.

## The problematisation of behaviour

In the 1990s as the social and political imagination shrank, ‘big’ outlooks, (whether national or international) declined, while smaller things, like ‘community’ (Bauman, 2001) and the ‘individual’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) emerged as the focus for government and state attention. However, and ironically, as Hobsbawm notes, this focus on community did not reflect a new vibrancy in community life but actually emerged at a time ‘when communities in a sociological sense became hard to find in real life’ (Hobsbawm, 1994: 428). Likewise, the new focus in social policy on the individual reflected something quite different from the individual of previous times. The moral and political subject of the past is today far more likely to be understood and engaged with through a fragmented psycho-social lens, one that is increasingly preoccupied with how we behave and react, rather than what we believe and how we consciously act (Waiton, 2008).

As the understanding of social problems moved away from structural questions, an increased gaze was set upon the behaviour of individuals within politics, schools, communities and families. Within the realm of politics, the Labour MP Frank Field, for example, argues that we have entered a period where the ‘politics of *behaviour*’ is central (Field, 2003). The government has helped to make the problem of antisocial *behaviour* into a national issue and in schools the *behaviour* of pupils has become of great concern for education authorities and teacher’s unions alike. Meanwhile behaviour in the home and the issue of parenting has become problematised and understood as a relatively new ‘skills’ – based issue, necessitating expert intervention (Furedi, 2001). Consequently, the ‘management of behaviour’ has become a growth industry, something that is at times imposed, but is perhaps more often demanded or seen as a necessary form of support in our more individuated world.

If the telecommunications advert is correct and we really are the product of ‘every one – to – one we’ve ever had’, it increasingly appears that these one – to – ones should be carried out with the assistance of a third party, or at least by following a form of awareness training that helps us to understand the correct way to act and react to one another in our daily lives.

It is this emerging and professionalised framework through which everyday interactions occur which is the focus of this paper. Interactions that were often informal, or were informed by the specific nature of a professional relationship with a young person – like that of a teacher and pupil – have been transformed in recent years. Through the problematisation of relationships, a form of colonisation of the ‘lifeworld’ has emerged, a process that is arguably undermining the spontaneous and autonomous relationships between people – and especially between adults and children. This is a process that despite its intentions should be understood as a form of antisocialisation.

## Clientization

What is the nature of the state, post welfare? For theorists like Jurgen Habermas who developed the idea of clientization (Habermas, 1987), the activities of the state in the 1970s was seen as being highly problematic. There was a legitimization crisis in Western society he argued, one within which the contradictions of capitalism had been internalised by the state – a state which developed new areas of intervention into more aspects of life but ultimately failed to resolve these irresolvable economic and social problems (Habermas, 1976). Nevertheless a kind of spiral effect resulted where systems, bureaucracies and new state structures consequently felt the need to intervene further, to reform themselves yet again, to develop new and ‘rational’ forms of ‘best practice’, to ‘perfect the system’, or to use an example from today – to make that child ever safer and make sure ‘nothing like this happens again’ (and again, and again).

In Christopher Lasch’s book *Haven in a Heartless World*, American society in the 1970s was understood to be replacing the moral and political framework for state activity with mere laws (Lasch, 1977). For Lasch (1979) the loss of legitimacy of society’s dominant ideas and organisations had resulted in laws and regulations becoming a replacement for morals and politics and a more overt mechanism for directing people at a time when moral and political meaning was in decline and less able to direct the ‘energy of the people’ (Findlayson, 2003).

Interestingly, in his critique of state intervention into the family, Lasch argues that as early as the 1920s in the U.S., helping professionals – ‘agencies of socialized reproduction’ – monopolised the knowledge of how to socialise the young and then gave it back to the disempowered public in the form of parenting ‘knowledge’ – giving it back to them in a mystified fashion ‘that rendered parents more helpless than ever, more abject in their dependence on expert opinion’ (Lasch, 1977:18).

A similar critique of the deforming nature of state institutions and professional life and the new forms of intrusive practices that emerged can be found in Edgar Z. Friedenberg’s excellent little book *The Vanishing Adolescent*. Writing in 1959, Friedenberg argues that teachers in America had become disempowered in their relationships with pupils. Having lost a belief in the centrality of enlightenment values, teachers no longer embodied a passion for knowledge as something that formed what they were, how they understood the world and how they taught. Consequently, because teachers had lost the fundamental belief in education as an enlightening process they lost their authority over students. The result Friedenberg believed was that schools, without a clear sense of purpose, began to utilise external ‘experts’ to ‘manage’ pupil’s behaviour and to adopt therapeutic methods to ‘manipulate’ rather than to educate young people.<sup>1</sup>

The above authors all highlight a changing and developing form of state and professional intervention into people’s lives which disempowers the public. This is a process whereby informal or relatively

autonomous and self regulating areas of life become areas of external intervention, where private life is to some extent exposed to professional and public scrutiny, and where certain professions are degraded, teachers for example becoming counsellors rather than educators and pupils are transformed into clients, users or even consumers.

## Therapeutics

More recently Frank Furedi has summed up the latest developments in state formation in his work *Therapy Culture* (Furedi, 2004). Here he argues that therapeutic practices that relate to us as emotional (and fragile) beings have developed throughout society over the last three decades. For Furedi, the trends identified by Habermas, Lasch and Friedenberg were (at least in the UK) held back by the continued existence of conflicting and active political parties, organisations and the associated institutions, in society. With the decline of political ideologies, collective organisations and identity, he argues, today's more individuated society has become re-engaged by a new form of professional authority through the prism of emotionally framed therapeutics. Categories, insights, discourses and practices have consequently reframed social problems and social solutions around the idea of the therapeutic individual. So we develop education to support young people's 'self esteem', we understand ourselves and our experiences through the idea of syndromes, addictions, stress and trauma – and we find institutions and services increasingly incorporating elements of counselling and emotional management. Similarly in the United States, James Nolan in *The Therapeutic State* observes that there are now more therapists in America than librarians, fire fighters or mail carriers, noting that, 'police and lawyers outnumber counsellors, but only by a ratio of less than two to one in both instances' (Nolan, 1998: 8).

## Legalisation

Reconnecting with Lasch's prior observation about the rise of a legal framework for developing (or in reality abandoning) social norms, another American, Philip K. Howard has critiqued the rise of law as another key framework for organising society and relationships between people today. Using the example of children's art work hung on school walls that needed to be taken down because of new fire regulations, for example, Howard notes that fire codes have existed for decades but only in recent times have new bureaucratic rules lost any relationship with common sense and human judgement. As government becomes more distant from the public he believes an avalanche of laws, rules and codes of conduct have filled the political and institutional vacuum, becoming a new regulatory basis of mediation between people. Government by manual, by precise rules, with excruciating detail has replaced the important standard of what a reasonable person would do (Howard, 1994). For Howard, in this more fractured world where big ideas and beliefs have declined, avoiding risks has become a new religion and is something that suffocates individual and indeed institutional responsibility. Instead of looking where we want to go, he observes, Americans are constantly looking over their

shoulders, worried not about doing something wrong but about someone claiming they have. In an impassioned demand for human judgement and authority to be reintroduced in society Howard concludes that:

*Relying on personal beliefs seems old fashioned, like using a horse and buggy. But what's our alternative? Law can't think. Good values and good judgement aren't provable. Zero tolerance, stupid warning labels, paranoid doctors and burnt-out teachers are all symptoms of a legal system that doesn't allow personal belief* (Howard, 2001: 216).

### The preoccupation with and occupation of the informal world

Looking at the issue of state, professional and legal intervention into everyday life, there does appear to be a change from past forms of law, support and intervention. The number of laws for example, being created by government has exponentially increased in the last decade. Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg has noted that by 2006 the Labour government had introduced over 3000 new laws – one for every day they had been in office. Not only does this far exceed any previous administration, Clegg also notes that the speed of the introduction of new laws is increasing every year (Waiton, 2008a: 82). As Howard has also observed it is not only the quantity of new laws that has increased enormously, but their detail, to the extent that they are incomprehensible to anyone other than experts. Unlike the entire American Constitution, he notes, which can be written on one piece of paper, fire codes for buildings fill an entire book.

Historically, as Lasch argues, the development of professional expertise and intervention grew significantly in the first three decades of the twentieth century. However there appears to be two differences today in terms of the nature of 'intervention'. Firstly, new codes and laws are more directly involved with the informal interaction that takes place between people and secondly, today there is little opposition to wider and more diffuse levels of intervention and 'support'. Regulations have encroached upon the very day to day interactions between people.

Aspects of everyday life where there would previously have been a cultural expectation for people to resolve things for themselves have become mediated through new legal and institutional practices (Waiton, 2008a). For example, the state intervention and construction of the family has been extended to a point where there is a growing belief in the need to give 'parenting' skills to individuals to enable them to care for their children. Antisocial behaviour initiatives, community wardens and environmental protection officers today act to resolve problems between people in communities. Speech and harassment codes structure what is deemed 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' to say at work and indeed in public. Adverts on buses and trains help us to understand what it means to be polite to one another, while there are codes about bullying and indeed emotional management in both schools and workplaces today.

Rather than these forms of parenting, public and work place behaviour, or institutional practices being developed by and between parents, workers or professionals themselves – often at an informal level – they have become formalised as official rules, skills and contracts.

### The socialisation problem

There is a concern today about the behaviour of young people, on the streets, in schools and to some extent in the home itself. Usefully, some, like the Institute of Public Policy Studies (IPPR) have discussed this problem in terms of a ‘socialisation gap’ (Margo and Dixon, 2006). To some extent this issue has been highlighted by the Conservative leader David Cameron in his discussion about ‘broken Britain’. Unfortunately, while these concerns relate in part to genuine social problems, the way the issue of socialisation is understood is situated within a highly problematic framework and one that was already adopted and addressed by the Labour government. This is an approach that often myopically and negatively focuses on the poorest in society, or on the antisocial behaviour of young people, an approach which problematises ‘behaviour’, further promoting the idea that more controls and greater ‘support’ and regulation of everyday life is necessary.

### Antisocial Behaviour

Take the example of antisocial behaviour. Here we have a social problem, ‘antisocial behaviour’, which in terms of public and political life had no existence until the 1990s (Waiton, 2008: 14). It has in the last 15 years however become an accepted way of understanding a whole array of issue and troubles and which has been backed up by laws, initiatives, council strategies, government speeches, public service advertisements, departmental briefs, police targets and so on. Troubles and issues between people, which may at best have ended up as an issue of concern for the local councillor, are today social problems addressed through a legal and police framework. These in turn are covered by local government strategic plans and targets and become part of the national political agenda (Flint, 2006).

In terms of the extension of both a legalistic and therapeutic state, the ASBO framework is a good example. The ‘antisocial behaviour’ arrangement both potentially criminalised more aspects of everyday life and acted as an emotional manager of communities. It did this by defining antisocial behaviour as anything that causes alarm or distress to the individual. Here, how we feel towards other people, rather than simply the actions of the ‘deviant’ person have been central and the role of the state official has been to engage with our feelings of distress and reduce our fear. Despite its intentions the ASBO framework has discouraged people from being active in their community and taking more responsibility for the behaviour of others. It has done this by encouraging a culture of complaint, a kind of ‘my rights’ perspective, where other people become seen not as part of *your* community, but as something that has nothing to do with you, someone else’s problem (Waiton,

2008: 28). Through advertisements and all the various initiatives and forms of political rhetoric, adults – and especially young adults who have never known any other way – have been trained to phone the police or the council to sort out all sorts of relatively petty problems (Waiton, 2008a: 103–127). The result of this third party approach to everyday life in terms of the socialisation question is three fold. Firstly, the level of contact between people declines and where this happens conflicts are no longer resolved between people. Secondly, with regard to young people, the role of local adults in establishing, enforcing and developing community norms over and with young people is reduced or even disappears. Finally, the loss of the experience of dealing with other people, and perhaps especially with young people, undermines individuals' own development of authority and character. Carried to its extreme we end up with communities where the 'socialisation' of the young is carried out by paid officials, where adults and young people never meet, and where to be 'socialised' means to know your 'right' (to a quiet life) and know how to use the correct procedures and protocols to deal with your neighbours (Waiton, 2008).

### The problem of adult-child relations

The issue of adult child relationships and the socialisation that takes place – at least in part – through the public interaction between the two should not be confined to the discussion about youth antisocial behaviour. Indeed the preoccupation with young people's behaviour obscures the wider confusion and difficulties that exist when addressing this question.<sup>2</sup>

Stories have appeared in the press in the last decade or so about children in distress being ignored by passing adults. Similarly there is concern about the declining number of men applying for teaching posts in primary schools (*Observer*, 12 July 2009). Adults, and especially men it seems, are today less sure about approaching other people's children at least in part because of the heightened awareness of the issue of 'strangers' or paedophiles. While often denouncing the 'panic' encouraged by certain newspapers around this issue, and dismissing the occasional community outburst about 'paedos', the authorities themselves have engaged the issue more systematically, with for example the establishing of vetting procedures for all adults who come into contact with children and young people. This in turn has heightened the climate of suspicion with little evidence of greater protection of children.

Another issue regarding the relationships between adults and children is that of both adult authority and also adult solidarity – whereby adults more generally accept the authority of other adults with regard to their own children. As Furedi observes, where previously there was an expectation that adults would back each other up when disciplining a child, with neighbours, parents and teachers 'holding the line' (Furedi, 2001: 10), today the reality (or at least the perception of it) is that if you attempt to discipline somebody else's child the parent is more likely to back up their child and question the adult's judgement. But why is this?



There are objective changes to the nature of society that help explain this declining solidarity between adults. For example, the public sphere has declined in society and people have a more disconnected relationship with institutions and indeed with one another (Habermas, 1992). Alongside this the family has become more insular – consequently children are no longer seen as ‘public property’ (Furedi, 2001). However the changing and more confused and distant relationships between adults and children has also been accelerated by the problematisation and professionalisation of these relationships.

The title of a recent pamphlet by Frank Furedi and Jenny Bristow sums up this development quite well – *Licensed to Hug*. Here we are offered an analysis of a form of clientization of relationships, where relationships between adults and even very young children have become more problematic, formalised and guided by rules which undermine or at least distort previously spontaneous interactions and norms (Furedi and Bristow, 2008).

This it is argued is a problem not simply in communities but also for professionals working with children. For example, it is becoming common practice today, in gymnastics for example, to ask a child if it is OK to hold them while doing an exercise; in schools and nurseries ‘touch’ is sometimes seen as acceptable only if it is ‘initiated by the child’; some injuries are today being left untreated, while sun cream consent forms are regularly sent out to parents. Even Santa has been advised by Rotary International to always be accompanied by another adult (*ibid*).

As the researcher Heather Piper has argued, in the process of developing ‘correct’ procedures around touch, touching itself is becoming confused and confusing and doubt about others and even about ourselves creeps into previously natural and professional behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, despite the framework for this being in ‘the best interest of the child’, it appears that this is rarely the outcome as we look over our shoulder more concerned with protecting ourselves than dealing with the crying child (Piper et al, 2006).

One teacher, relating to the emergence of correct ‘touch’ procedures in schools and nurseries described this process as a form of ‘implanted awareness’ (*ibid*). Here you no longer think for yourself, use your experience, your knowledge, indeed your humanity, when relating to children – but rather a rule book, or a check list that both you and the child have been made aware of. You no longer think for yourself, react as a professional or indeed a person, but as a follower of procedures that have been imported from some external authority. In a sense, what Piper is suggesting is that we learn to mediate ourselves, even to distrust and be suspicious of our own instincts; we incorporate a third party approach to relationships with children. Consequently, once again the socialisation of children and young people is deformed as adults neither act naturally or professionally but within a contractual and defensive straightjacket developed by lawyers and relationship experts.

## Problematizing peers

One recent example of the colonisation of a new area of life previously untouched by professionals is the development of relationship education in schools. Here we see the emergence of a micro-management approach to a newly perceived problem and an invasion of a private part of young people's lives. Rather than peers developing relationships as part of the process of growing up they are actively discouraged from relying on themselves, on one another, and indeed on informal discussions with adults in forming their understanding of sexual relationships (Lee, 2002: 33-48).

Through a problematisation of relationships new 'norms' have been imported into *education*, largely predicated upon the one dimensional outlook of 'zero tolerance towards peer pressure' (ibid). Through this new professional discourse, it is argued, a framework of distrust and suspicion helps young people to re-understand their relationships as potentially dangerous and to reconceptualise themselves as being potentially 'at risk' when developing intimate relationships with their peers. For example, in classroom discussions where the question, 'is it ever OK to put any pressure on your girlfriend or boyfriend', the 'correct' answer must always be 'no'. But is this a 'real' answer or a 'correct' answer, and does it in a one – sided way frame these youthful relationships as dangerous rather than merely immature or awkward, part of what may previously have been interpreted as a rite of passage? Once again, if taken to an extreme level, what we could be witnessing is an area of life that was once developed within young people's informal world, being brought into the classroom, reinterpreted by experts and academics, problematised and, as Lasch would see it, given back to young people as an official – and mystified – part of their education.

There is little room for grey areas here and teachers must themselves be educated about how to manage this process, be aware of the guidelines, the curriculum, the appropriate responses from teacher and pupils, the potential legal aspect regarding child safety, and indeed the therapeutic approach necessary to correctly teach relationship education.

Arguably, following the logic of Habermas and Furedi, one consequence of relationship education being professionalised is that an aspect of life where young people can develop and grow and can often establish strong relationships with both friends and lovers at a more mature and intimate level is potentially undermined.

This is also potentially the case in terms of relationships with teachers who will arguably be less inclined to be honest with their older pupils when informally asked for advice about relationships. Faced with the new curriculum and expert knowledge on relationship education, there will be a pressure to stick to the guidelines rather than to use personal judgement based on the experience of life and of teaching. Again, this development will arguably undermine the potential for a more profound, mature and trusting type of relationship with a young person being established.

Where official relationship education has been incorporated into school and youth work activities it runs the risk of transforming previously unmediated relationships between peers, and restricting both professional and personal judgement. Here, the most basic aspect of the informal socialisation process is changed into an expert-led, skills based activity between clients and deliverers of service – rather than people.

## Conclusion

Looked at separately, the ASBO framework, touching policies or relationship education appear to be very different, and to be dealing with diverse and dissimilar social problems. However, central to them is the problematic of behaviour and relationships. At a wider political and societal level we can situate this within a new form of state, institutional and professional micro-management of everyday life.

Despite previous forms of state intervention in the twentieth century and previous forms of moralising about behaviour this new framework of intervention and ‘support’ is arguably quite different, quantitatively, for example in terms of the number of new rules, laws, procedures and proscribed forms of behaviour.

Alongside this there appears to be relatively little opposition today to many of these new forms of intervention, which are in the main understood to be forms of support. This has no doubt been assisted by both the decline of the libertarian right<sup>4</sup>, and also the collectivist left who both maintained a sense of separation and opposition to aspects of state ‘interference’.

Today with the decline of collectivity, we have a more individuated society and yet also a decline of the traditional liberal sense of individualism. Added to this, as Furedi notes, through today’s therapeutic prism the fragmented individual has been recast and understood as vulnerable rather than robust, and therefore in constant need of support in all aspects of their life.

Consequently, with these developments, the very meaning of socialisation has changed. Previously a significant aspect of socialisation was assumed to emerge through direct contact between people. This was developed by the actions and interaction of free individuals acting in both public and private space. Today however, spontaneous relationships have become problematised and confused by legalistic, managerial and therapeutic discourses.

Norms are now established within a defensive framework where unregulated interactions with children and young people are increasingly something we have come to dread. Rather than doing the right thing, adults are inclined, and encouraged, to watch their backs, to stay safe and to mediate their encounters with youngsters through third party professionals with ‘expert’ knowledge: As a

result newly developing norms have little to do with the experience of local people and the personally developed authority and expertise of adults. Rather, personal authority has been side stepped and the development of these ‘norms’ are contracted out to those who write ‘best practise’ manuals and ‘correct procedures’ codes.

Unfortunately, these new ‘correct’ forms of behaviour, mediating and educating adults, teachers and even young people’s interactions, act as a barrier to a real socialisation process. They minimise the contact between people, discourage the honesty and spontaneity of adults, and replace real relationships with one dimensional men and women nervously clutching their codes of conduct. Here the nature of relationships become more limited while the space for personal judgement and action is diminished.

Consequently, what is meant by socialisation is very different today. Less about the development of relationships between free individuals, than about the restriction and regulation of this freedom. It appears that we have lost trust in society and in individuals within society to become socialised and are actively, if not intentionally, undermining the genuine socialisation of the young.

Further research is needed to examine the extent of the changes outlined above. What, for example, if anything, is acting as a barrier to these developments, and to what extent can we understand these changes as a universal development, or is there a class dimension to the colonisation of everyday life? Are there sections of society, or aspects of ‘youth’ life, sub-cultures, for example, that insulates people from these trends. Indeed, to what extent are local people, teachers or young people doing things in ‘secret’, informally, and ignoring ‘correct’ approaches and procedures?

If the dynamic outlined above is correct perhaps a more appropriate approach to answering these questions is to explore the extent to which the problematisation and ‘professionalisation’ of behaviour has become an internalised phenomenon. Consequently a deeper exploration of the impact of these developments is needed to examine the effect this is having on not only the development of relationships between people, but also the development of the self.

## Notes

- 1 Friedenbergs’ idea was that enlightened education was not simply a matter of subject knowledge but was something that informed your entire life and approach to the self and society. As such, educators should be in an ideal position to educate the whole child – not by getting them to focus in on themselves as they do in therapy – but to take them out of themselves and allow young people to understand themselves in the context of the world around them.
- 2 A year ago in Stansted Airport waiting for a flight to Glasgow there was an interesting example of how awkward we all feel when having to deal with other people’s children. Sitting at the

terminal gate I and a hundred or so other adults watched as a couple struggled with their three children to board the flight. We all waited in embarrassed silence as the father attempted to get hold of his three year old twin boys. The mother waited with the six year old girl in arms as the father picked up one of the boys only to watch the other go running off. The father then put one boy down and pick up the other, only for the first child to run off. This carried on for almost five minutes with none of the other passengers or indeed the flight attendants offering assistance to the parents. In the end, simply because of my personal preoccupation about the problem of adult child relationships I offered my assistance to the surprise of the father, picked up the 'free' twin, and carried him onto the aeroplane.

3 See Piper et al 2006.

4 In 2007 for example the British Social Attitudes Survey found that only 15 percent of Labour voters opposed identity cards, compared with 45 percent who opposed them in 1990. Remarking on the decline in libertarian values in the UK Professor Colin Gearty said, 'It is as though society is in the process of forgetting why past generations thought those freedoms to be so very important' (*Guardian* 24 January 2007).

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# ‘Preferred Futures’: Active Citizenship, Government and Young People’s Voices

Jason Wood

## Abstract

*Young people have been subjected to an increasing number of interventions designed to prepare them for ‘active citizenship’ over the past decade. These educational and welfare strategies are underpinned by sources of evidence that frame young people as lacking the capacity to engage in responsible political, social and moral behaviour. Two particular problems are often cited as the rationale for citizenship education: young people’s political literacy and anti-social behaviour. Using governmentality perspectives and drawing on a recent study that investigated how young people define and experience active citizenship, this article critically reviews these two problems and the intentions of citizenship education by drawing on young people’s real-world experiences. Their stories offer alternative evidence about young people’s engagement and demonstrate that citizenship education is effective only in the narrow management of young people’s behaviour.*

**Key words:** Young people; active citizenship; governmentality; citizenship education; anti-social behaviour

In 1998, the UK government appointed the Advisory Group on Citizenship (AGC) to make recommendations for the teaching of citizenship in schools. The report, and subsequent adoption of the recommendations by the New Labour government, marked a watershed in political and social education. In the ten years that followed, a country previously uncomfortable with notions of British citizenship (Annette, 2008) became witness to a substantial expansion of initiatives designed to strengthen the moral, political and social character of young people through citizenship education (Wood, 2010).

Young people can now take citizenship as an examined subject at school. In addition they have been able to make significant decisions about the funding of youth work and services through the *Youth Opportunities Fund* and elect their peers to serve as Members of the Youth Parliament. Arguably they are also the first generation to have a grounded familiarity with human rights legislation and the Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

This generation also suffers from regulation, over testing, incarceration and exclusion (Hine and

Wood, 2009). There has been no other time that young people and risk have been so intrinsically intertwined. An expansive youth justice system coupled with extensive targeting at those 'most at risk' has determined the landscape of youth policy (Kemshall, 2009). It is within this context that young people are identified, targeted and educated towards responsible adulthood, what Kelly terms 'preferred futures' (2003).

The result is policy ambivalence towards young people (Williamson, 2009). On the one hand, children and young people are to be listened to, engaged and encouraged to participate (Hine, 2009). On the other, an 'institutionalised mistrust' (Kelly, 2003) of their capacity to grow up independently of intensive surveillance and support, has tightened the welfare net around young people (Hine and Wood, 2009). In the context of such ambivalence, citizenship education is almost instantaneously problematised and like other governmental initiatives, lays itself open to critical interrogation.

This article considers the problem of citizenship education for young people. In drawing on governmentality perspectives, it re-examines the evidence-base used to justify state intervention, and considers the impact upon young people. Drawing on a recently completed study with nearly 100 young people (see Wood, 2009 for full details about the methodology), the article examines how young people define and experience concepts of active citizenship in their everyday, real world situations.

### Active citizenship and the governmentality thesis

Citizenship is a normative concept, intimately tied to the social, political and economic context in which it operates (Frazer, 2008). In order to become active citizens young people are subjected to a series of governmental practices that steer them towards these norms (with citizenship education the most obvious example). Therefore, questions of what it means to be a good citizen and how a good citizen is to be moulded become questions of government: defined by Foucault (2002a) as the 'conduct of conduct'.

Dean suggests that 'government entails any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of our behaviour according to particular sets of norms and a variety of ends' (1999: 10). Given that active citizenship is a desired end for young people, the processes and attempts to shape behaviour require some degree of interrogation. For Foucault this requires analysis of the wide range of control practices that underpin 'the art of government': the government of the self, 'that ritualization of the problem of personal conduct' (Foucault, 2002b: 201). Questions of government are thus epistemological, moral, ethical and technical. Citizenship raises critical and thought provoking questions about how governmental power is exercised, and to what end:

*'How?' not in the sense of, 'How does it manifest itself?' but 'How is it exercised?' and 'What happens when individuals exert (as we say) power over others?'* (Foucault, 2002a: 337)



Dean (1999:30-32) sets out a number of factors that warrant consideration when analysing government, each of which are attended to here.

### *Visibility of government*

First, there is the consideration given to the nature of the problem under investigation. Dean calls this the ‘examination of fields of visibility of government’ (1999: 30), where it becomes possible through analysis of how the problem is defined to ‘picture’ the nature of the problem. Who is to be governed? How is the relationship of government (between agent and state, for instance) to be designed? The term visibility is most appropriate, and Dean makes a comparison with those in the medical profession who consider the patient’s body to be a field of visibility. In governing a problem, it is incumbent on the investigator to visualise this field as fully as possible. For citizenship, this means mapping the problem of young people within the social, political and economic context of their lives, exploring their transitions and the associated problems and identifying their interaction with various agents of the state including youth workers and other citizenship educators. Moreover, it requires us to attend to where the governing will take place: in the instituted formal sphere of schools or within the less formalised, but powerful ‘third space’ of community (Rose, 1999).

### *Technical aspect of government*

Questions here concern the governmental techniques deployed in order to fulfil the realisation of its values: ‘by what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies is authority constituted and rule accomplished?’ (Dean 1999: 31; see also Dean 1995). These form the conditions of governing, but also limit what is possible. This commands an analysis of the approaches taken to foster active citizenship through education, welfare and criminal justice. In order to manage young people’s behaviour and to map the preferred futures, instruments and techniques are required and those used are those that are most preferable: methods are not merely means to an end, but worthy of investigation themselves.

### *Government as a rational and thoughtful activity*

The third consideration concerns the ‘episteme’ of government (Dean, 1995): the forms of ‘knowledge that arise from and inform the activity of governing’ (Dean, 1999: 31). There is a relationship between ‘thought’ and ‘government’ (hence the hybrid term, govern-mentality) that helps us to understand what knowledge, expertise and rationality are used to explain practices of governing. Thought in this case is produced within the limits of time and space, and is presented in material form. For young people and citizenship, this means the representation of certain forms of ‘truth’ about their behaviours in the context of contemporary advanced liberal democracies. Using this idea we can determine how the problems and solutions of citizenship are rationalised. An illustration of this is present in our understanding of anti-social behaviour. The legislative framework establishes anti-social behaviour as a defined problem. This in turn is measured and calculated using official police data and public

surveys. Forms of anti-social behaviour and their incidence become ‘truth’ and the response in the form of state intervention becomes rational and justified.

### *The formation of identities*

In this final point, Dean invites us to consider the ‘forms of individual and collective identity through which governing operates and which specific practices and programmes of government try to form’ (1999: 32). Identity in this sense is multi-faceted and concerns not just the objects of governing (ie young people) but also the agents of governing (teachers, youth workers, the community and so on). For citizenship new collective identities are constructed. Young people become identified by their political, social and moral characteristics. Communities become reconstituted as collective entities in pursuit of the common good. Teachers and other employed agents of the state are reconstituted with the expertise to support the development of these identities.

### **Diagnosing the ‘youth problem’**

Analysis of social policy over the past decade suggests that those most targeted by measures to increase active citizenship are young people. They are subjected to measures in formal education, criminal justice, welfare and youth work – all arenas in which the question of ‘how best to develop the active citizen’ are played out. What then is the youth problem? If there is a need for unprecedented levels of interventions both by the state and at a community level, what precisely drives these concerns? Put simply, if there is a solution offered in the form of citizenship education, why do young people need it?

In a risk society, this process of transition from childhood through youth to adulthood is subject to greater uncertainty, fluidity and complexity (Smith, 2007). Youth and social policy today is designed not to alter systems or to significantly influence the structure of society, rather it is concerned with preparing young people to participate effectively within the contours of late modernity: to build the capacity of young people to be reflexive (Giddens, 1991). The difficulty with this process is that young people engage in, and are subject to arguably greater risks than previous generations (Kemshall, 2008) and this warrants unprecedented state interference under the guise of early intervention and informed by a risk factor paradigm.

Michael Ungar once asked his friends if children today are more at risk than when he and his peers were young. Most ‘could tell stories about the risks they were routinely exposed to that we would never expose our children to’ (2007: 101) but:

*everyone ... believed that children today need to be more protected, that children today live in a world more dangerous than the one we grew up in. [...] More than ever before we perceive the risks children face. We hear about them more.*

(ibid)

Ungar raises an important point that identifies risk both in terms of its changes but also its continuity. Perhaps it is true that once ‘it was expected that children had to some extent learn about risk through experience’ (Ball, 2007: 58) whereas now we seek to regulate and contain as much risk as possible. This is in part because we know more about the risks that young people face. In a review of youth studies research, ‘risk taking behaviour’ was an investigative pre-occupation for psychological studies of adolescence (Ayman-Nolley and Taira, 2000). Our exposure to media information about risks certainly aids our understanding (Ungar, 2007) often in ways that are somewhat disproportionate to reality; the threats posed to children by dangerous sex offenders is a case in point (Kemshall and Wood, 2007). This is unsurprising, since ‘patterns of media attention [rarely] parallel the actual trajectory of any particular threat’ (Hughes et al, 2006:250).

Our fixation with transitions and with the risks associated with the process have led us to design preferred futures (Kelly, 2003), those trajectories that are seen to result in responsible adulthood and contributory, participative citizenship. Thus citizenship can be seen as a desired end-goal for transitions, a proxy for responsible adulthood. Social, political and moral responsibility are all qualities associated with maturation and are therefore desirable of autonomous citizens who are required to be economically functional. If we accept the thesis that for citizens to be necessarily prepared to undertake this role they need citizenship education, we accept that there is a requirement for government to intervene early in the life course in order to shape this preferred future. This proposition requires further critical thought: what is it precisely, other than a generalised anxiety about youth transitions and risk, that indicates young people are incapable of performing their duties as active citizens either now or in the future? What is the rationale set out by proponents of citizenship education?

Two specific problems are often marshalled as evidence. The first concerns the political literacy of young people manifested in low uptake of the voting franchise, declining political affiliation and a general lack of interest in politics. Concern about young people’s political participation remains high on the agenda.

The second problem concerns perhaps a more generalised anxiety about young people and in particular their social and moral behaviour. If symptoms of greater individualisation are the breakdown of social ties and the fracturing of communities then it is towards young people that the greatest level of concern seems to be targeted. To what extent young people engage as morally and socially responsible citizens is at the heart of most government youth policy.

### *Problem one: democracy in crisis*

The AGC identified political disengagement as a primary driver for recommending citizenship education. The report draws on studies that have indicated low levels of ‘public issue discussion’ in schools, low and declining levels of voting behaviour amongst the 18-24 age group and a lack of

'support' for political parties amongst young people (AGC, 1998: 15). The argument put forward is that 'schools should have a coherent and sequential programme of citizenship education' (AGC, 1998: 16) suggesting that 'values can modify behaviour when mediated through a good teaching programme' (Ibid: 17). The concern about political literacy and the crisis of democracy is not limited to this small number of studies used to influence the report. There are indeed wider concerns about political disengagement about youth, and it is to these that we now turn our attention.

If 'political participation' is an established 'citizenship norm' (Dalton, 2008), then a feature of contemporary democracy is a pre-occupation with the disconnection between citizens and the political processes designed to govern them (Coleman 2006; Dalton, 2008; Edwards, 2007). Contemporary democracy is in 'crisis' (Coleman, 2006) with much academic, policy, media and political attention directed towards addressing a 'democratic deficit' (Jeffs, 2001). Within a broad and negative analysis of the state of democracy, the issue of engagement amongst young people has attracted much political and academic debate. Claims are made that 'young people are estranged from conventional politics and are becoming increasingly politically apathetic' (Wallace, 2003: 243).

In the main it is voting behaviour that most attracts analysis, since it 'is the most obvious example of political participation' (Electoral Commission' 2002: 15). The arguments about poor voting levels amongst young people are generally well known but are worth rehearsing here: young people are amongst those least likely to vote, claiming powerlessness and evident cynicism directed towards party politics (Electoral Commission, 2005a). Those aged 55 and above are twice as likely to vote as those aged 18-24 (Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, 2006). In the 2001 general election just 39% of the 18-24 age group voted, with a drop to 37% in 2005 (Electoral Commission 2005b). Across all demographic groups in the 2005 election, only one other age group (45-54 year olds) showed declining engagement against a general trend of increase in voter participation. The general election of 2001 was notable for representing the lowest turnout since 1918, and the 'lowest ever under the full democratic franchise' (Electoral Commission' 2002: 6).

The detachment of young people from formal democratic processes has been blamed on entrenched apathy (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995) and selfishness (Pirie and Worcester' 2000). However, Edwards (2007) rejects claims that individual deficit is at the heart of disengagement. Writing in the Australian context where one fifth of the age group (18-25) does not vote in compulsory elections, Edwards conducted a study of young people's attitudes towards registration (known as enrolment) and voting in order to understand motivations and barriers to electoral participation. She determines that 'education alone is not sufficient to produce higher youth electoral turnouts' considering the issue to be 'disenfranchisement rather than of "deficit"' (2007: 540). Thus where voting and party allegiance indicators are low, the popular conclusion is that political knowledge and participation must also be in deficit. Kimberlee (2002) identifies a significant counter-argument in the literature that she terms the 'alternative value' discourse. This approach concerns 'the new politics' where young people are less

likely to engage in traditional or conventional party politics in favour of issue-led campaigns, such as environmental work. Evidence suggests that young people’s participation in these movements has actually increased in recent years (Roker et al, 1999). Across Europe for instance, there is very real evidence of young people’s involvement in high levels of political activism, especially in resistance movements or challenges to government rule (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998).

Furlong and Cartmel caution against being swept up in the idea that this represents a ‘generational shift’ towards a new politics. They argue that young people have always participated in single-issue campaigns. These movements, such as the anti-war movement, environmental action groups, the ‘Make Poverty History’ and Jubilee 2000 campaigns, are all evidence that ‘young people display different forms of civic engagement and often prefer the simplicity of single issue politics where they both know what they are buying into and can judge progress towards specific goals’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 134). Whilst there is certainly evidence of weaker commitments to traditional party politics, there is no definitive claim that young people are more individualised in their politics:

*Young people still express collective concerns, although they frequently seek personal solutions to problems which are largely a consequence of their socio-economic positions and expect politicians to act in accord with their interests and values.*

(Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 137).

This argument leads Wallace to conclude that: ‘We may be looking at the wrong things when prematurely announcing the disengagement of young people from politics’ (2003: 244).

To narrowly conceive of politics as the process of voting behaviour is perhaps to ignore significant strands of other forms of politics. Indeed, other forms of political action are very popular amongst young people such as joining demonstrations, signing petitions and participating in boycotts (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Like other forms of social practice, political engagement is open to judgements about acceptability. Some forms of political engagement (participation in demonstrations) may be deemed less acceptable than others (voting).

To what extent has citizenship education impacted upon young people’s political literacy? It is hard to judge: only 10% of young people in the government commissioned evaluation of citizenship education identify citizenship as ‘voting, politics and the government’ (NfER, 2006). In the author’s study most young people understood active citizenship as being related to membership of a community, being ‘socially responsible’ and ‘being good’ with just a small number relating the concept to politics (Wood, 2009). For those who did identify a political dimension to active citizenship this was understood in terms of the processes of law-making and elections, but was not significantly developed as a main theme for young people. This is all the more interesting given that most young people involved in the study had engaged in learning about citizenship at school and through their youth projects.

In addition to voting and identification with political parties, ‘having a say’ and using this ‘voice’ to have an influence have been cited as important strategies for increasing the political involvement of young people. In line with a wider ‘turn’ towards citizen engagement in public services (Andrews et al, 2008), local authorities began ‘investing in the active involvement of young people as part of a drive to modernize’ (Merton, 2002: 19) supposedly shifting the power to make decisions towards (young) citizens. In practice this is often actualised where teachers or youth workers set up systems or structures to provide a channel for young people’s views to be heard. Examples might include school councils, youth forums and youth management committees.

Evidence from the study suggests that young people identified decision-making and exercising control as significant components of active citizenship. Indeed, young people were able to provide evidence of engaging in a range of important decisions related to their personal identity and development. These employed careful reasoning and negotiation skills made, as they often were, with their friends and family. However, these decisions were often individualised and limited in their capacity to influence circumstances. For example, young people provided limited examples where they had made decisions in their local communities. Whilst they indicated that they had high levels of control in community contexts, more often than not they associated control with the power exercised over them. As one of the participants said:

*We can’t make decisions...who listens to us? We’re not allowed to go to the [park] we can’t be with our friends...the adults in [the estate] hate us and they don’t even know us. The police don’t listen...so no we don’t make decisions...*

(Paula, Music Group)

For those young people engaged in programmes of citizenship education, there was evidence that decision-making had the potential to influence institutions though this too was in a limited way. One group, involved in a school council, had successfully campaigned to have a breakfast club restarted within their school. However, this positive example was accompanied by a failure to secure support from the school to develop a basketball area for young men. In the case of the breakfast club, there was high evidence of parental and teacher support for the initiative whereas in the case of the basketball court, ‘there wasn’t the same kind of support’ (Eleanor, School Council). Furthermore, the reasons for the rejection of the basketball idea were not communicated to the council members. There was recognition by the young people that ‘you can’t always get what you want’ (Peter, School Council) and that the school council would not always have the impact it desired.

Yet, the contrast between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ acts of participation was evident. This reveals a problematic issue in relation to active citizenship and youth participation that reflects a long-standing concern about whether young people can act on issues independent of adult approval. There is a degree of ‘acceptability’ present: in the case of the school council, adults ultimately defined what

was considered an acceptable act of participation. The extent to which young people meaningfully participate has always been contingent on how the idea is defined, supported and encouraged (Invernizzi and Williams, 2008). This is often a problem in school-based contexts, since they can fail to provide spaces for the empowerment of children (Morrow, 2008): schools remain adult-managed, hierarchical, anti-democratic institutions and often rely on citizenship education that is ‘transmission’ orientated (Evans, 2008). Here, the purpose of educational programmes (with school councils as an example) is to reproduce a ‘reflection of existing societal patterns’ (Evans, 2008: 523) through established teaching and learning methods.

As a lesson in the processes of democratic decision making, adults in this case have also failed to effectively communicate with young people about why certain things can be pursued and others cannot. This leaves young people confused and uncertain. For Boyden and Ennew (1997), this represents the difference between ‘taking part’ and ‘knowing that one’s actions are taken note of and may be acted upon’ (p33). These two issues are interrelated. They demonstrate that, on the face of it, the school can hold up examples of actively involving young people (through the breakfast club) but when further investigation is undertaken, these can be defined as quite limited and not within a wider ethos of supporting young people to understand both the processes and problems of active participation.

In sum, young people did not readily associate citizenship with politics, voting and government. Where other political qualities (such as decision-making) were identified, these were often narrow in their influence and oftentimes hindered by the very structures designed to stimulate young people’s political development.

### *Problem two: anti-social behaviour*

If political illiteracy is deemed to be a major problem for the demonstration of active citizenship, it is in social and moral behaviour that a very real crisis is perceived. Whilst political education had long been the key driver for citizenship education in schools, the final version put forward by the AGC in 1998 determined a broader framework that attended to a very different form of youth alienation. Here:

*Truancy, vandalism, random violence, premeditated crime and habitual drug-taking can be other indicators of youth alienation, even if historical comparisons are difficult; and the spurts, fits and fashions of vivid media coverage can make it difficult to judge how much is real increase and how much is justifiable public intolerance of things once taken more or less for granted.*

(AGC, 1998: 15).

As the report acknowledges, it is hard to make historical comparisons in relation to youth crime and disaffection. Young people have long been subjects of adult anxiety in relation to their criminal or

anti-social activity (France 2007) and as a result the objects of ‘moral panic’ (Jeffs and Smith, 1999). As Muncie noted in his 1984 analysis of youth and crime in post-war Britain:

*The young have consistently been identified in the post-war years as a major social problem. Many of these fears have clustered around the image of ‘vicious young criminal’ or ‘hooligan’ intent on ‘meaningless’ violence, who has made the streets unsafe for ‘law abiding citizens’.*  
(1984: 179)

Over two decades later, public perceptions of dangerous youth are magnified through ‘amplification by the media’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 119), reinforcing a dominant perspective that young people and risk are increasingly intertwined (Kemshall, 2008). Many commentators note that there has been an ‘authoritarian drift’ (Kelly, 2003) not only in youth justice, but in wider youth and social policy. Youth crime is no longer merely a welfare issue addressed by social workers and the criminal justice system. The focus is on the ‘pre-criminal’, the aspects of young people’s social and moral behaviour that can be classified as anti-social. New laws have been designed not to address criminal activity, but to prevent it through measures located at the site of the individual and the community. Moreover this authoritarian drift concerns itself with incivility: behaviours that were once distasteful are reframed as anti-social and potentially criminal.

The prioritisation of anti-social behaviour over the past decade or so has brought with it a new energy in targeting young people on the ‘margins’. It is certainly true that for over 200 years, ‘the scientific and professional discourses about our bodies, our minds and our relationships to each other and society’ have often concerned ‘youth’ (Watts, 1993/1994: 120). Similarly Kelly has identified certain groups of young people that have long been represented as ‘ungovernable’ and lacking in ‘self-regulation’ (Kelly, 1999). However, ‘A major problem for young people today is that they increasingly cause adults anxiety [that] translates into a raft of responses that have young people as their targets’ (Kelly, 2003: 166-167).

Consequently, forms of government exist to institute new processes of surveillance that are ‘targeted and focused, in the interests of the economy, at those populations who pose, or face, the greatest dangers and risks’ (Kelly, 2003: 167) and ‘powerful narratives of risk’ loom large in attempts to regulate youth identities (Kelly, 2000: 303). A combination of lower levels of public tolerance for incivility together with an increase in the fear of young people serve to disguise the reality of a general decline in youth related criminal activity (Armstrong, 2004). Such fear reproduction effectively stigmatises young people further, resulting in yet more surveillance and regulation (Kelly 2003) and a perverse consequence is of a vicious circle: ‘Society [...] becomes increasingly fearful, suspicious of youths, which in turn means they are more closely supervised by the police than any other age group’ (McKenzie, 2005: 194).



The regulation of behaviour occurs through new legal and civil measures designed to reduce ‘anti-social behaviour’, deter young people from congregating in public spaces and to assign new professional groups to identify and address early warning signs of incivility (such as the deployment of detached youth workers to ‘hot-spots’ or the introduction of the Police Community Support Officer). Such a response is perhaps unsurprising when surveys that have explored the public’s perception of anti-social behaviour identify ‘young people hanging around’ as the most widely perceived individual problem (Upson, 2006). Of those participants who had ‘seen young people hanging around’ in the past twelve months, the top three concerns were ‘swearing/using bad language’, being a ‘general nuisance’ and ‘being loud, rowdy or noisy’ (Upson, 2006: 47). These acts are not criminal, nor are they exclusive to young people. In a sense they represent a moral distaste for certain activities (swearing the case in point) which *may indeed* be construed as anti-social. Conversely for young people, might the use of swearing within their own groups be evidence of a very pro-social dialogue?

Unsurprisingly, in research young people talk about the value they place on ‘hanging around’. It is for them, a critical part of young people’s social identity formation (Holland et al, 2007) where individual identities can be ‘asserted’ and ‘tested’ (Hall et al, 1999). This does not mean that young people are always at odds with their local communities: they strongly identify with the surrounding neighbourhood (Weller, 2007; Wood, 2009). For young people, public spaces serve as ‘meeting points’ when more ‘affordable and accessible’ activities are less available (Weller, 2007). In a context where the majority of young people liked living in their community but only ‘34 per cent felt a sense of belonging’ (Weller, 2007: 133), young people hanging around was deemed by others as not ‘a legitimate use of space’ (Ibid: 135). Public space ultimately becomes what Reay and Lucey (2000) termed ‘child-hostile social landscapes’.

In this author’s study, young people across all groups described socially responsible behaviour often in terms of not engaging in certain activities that have been classified elsewhere as ‘anti-social behaviour’ with ‘hanging around’ as the main behaviour to be avoided. One young person presented a view represented by most participants in the study:

*I think [being responsible] is making sure that we don't hang about...they don't like us to meet around here and ... it's probably not responsible...being responsible probably means being at home.*

(Matt, Street Group).

This suggests that young people recognised the fears and concerns of adults and what they needed to do in order to be accepted. However, this contradicts the positive benefits that young people associated with ‘hanging around’:

*I love being with my mates... we can meet up after school cause we all go to different places in*

*the day. I'm not really mates with people at school... We hang around the bus shelter ...*

(Paula, Music Group)

The disconnection between anxieties and positive feelings of hanging around cited by young people reveal competing narratives about the use of public space in a community context. The desire of one group (in this case young people) to engage in certain pro-social practices is probably outweighed by a more dominant perception of irresponsible behaviour: an example of Staeheli's 'contests' (2008). Staeheli argues that communities are places where several competing interests are played out, and ultimately the most dominant discourse is the one that prevails. The consequences though are not simply limited to an academic dissection of the differences in age or context-related perceptions: they have profound implications for the inclusion and exclusion of groups as the following case example demonstrates.

During one group session, young people reflected on a recent incident that has implications for how we understand the relationship between 'hanging around' and 'being responsible'.

#### *Case-example: young people hanging around*

**A group of young people spend lots of their evening time with each other, 'hanging around' local shops and communal areas. They used to hang around the front of the local supermarket. Following complaints by residents (but not by the supermarket), they were continuously moved on by the police. Eventually, they began to hang around a local communal garden before again, being moved on by the police. When asked by the researcher why they chose these two areas, they said they were very near to their homes, and friends, and they were safe and well lit. There was a local playing field but they were scared to go there due to adult strangers hanging around at night. Eventually, after being continuously moved on from the two 'safe' places, they went further away from the estate and ended up by a railway track. One of their friends was messing around on the line when he was fatally hit by an oncoming train.**

The case study illustrates a number of important points reflective of other situations that young people describe throughout research. There was the perceived rationality of their own decision making and responsible action (seeking a safe, local place to meet). This was in turn described by others as irresponsible and was consequently penalised (the perceived threat of groups of young people on local residents). Young people moved into more irresponsible and risky situations as a result (the train track).

Responsibility, like other elements of active citizenship, is intimately tied to the meaning we give it. Behaviour and decisions made by the young people above were at odds with how adults perceived

these decisions resulting in what can be seen as a difference between ‘objective irrationality’ and ‘subjective rationality’ (Evans, 2002; Ungar, 2004; 2007). The objective outsider may view the behaviour of young people as irrational and therefore failing to warrant endorsement as ‘responsible responsibility’. However, as we quickly learn, those who justify their behaviour or decisions do so, with rationality that is bound to their interpretations of the circumstances (subjective rationality). Young people’s behaviour that may be seen by outsiders as ‘deviant’ may in fact be navigation strategies that young people employ in order to ward off greater risks (Ungar, 2007).

Citizenship formulation is in part the result of how young people define and experience their discharge of social responsibility. However, what is externally defined as responsible behaviour is often at odds with how young people themselves define it. The definitions and experiences are not on a ‘level playing field’ and are contextualised by existing power structures within communities and institutions (Staehele, 2008). This invariably leads to greater contradictions in the process of citizenship formation.

The example illustrates the wider implications of a gulf between different perceptions of risk and responsibility by adults and young people. Whilst in this case we rely only on the views of young people to review the situation they describe we can draw inferences about the adult motivations for ‘moving’ young people on. As the discussion above demonstrated, groups of young people ‘hanging around’ are synonymous with a perceived danger and whilst this behaviour has always been of concern (see France, 2007), policy makers have increasingly sought to contain and manage the risks posed by groups of young people (Yates, 2009). This has led to an increasing emphasis on the regulation of public places, the use of dispersal measures and strategies to literally ‘break up groups’ (Yates, 2009) and arguably keep young people ‘off the streets’. Local media climates assist in the process of portraying young people as a dangerous threat; 71 per cent of media stories involving young people are negative, with a third of articles focusing on anti-social behaviour and crime (HM Treasury, 2007: 4).

It was not possible to determine from this study the impact on the public of the media and political priorities about managing groups of young people. What we can determine is that young people often feel penalised by local communities already riddled with a fear of risk of harm by the groups. As a result young people ended up being more at risk and taking less responsible action. A further consequence of this case was that the group felt high levels of resentment towards their local community, a point illustrated by other groups who felt they were not treated with respect. As one young man stated:

*I hate them for [friend] dying. It’s their fault. The police and the others. I’d like to show them what they did, see how they’d like their best friend dying in front of them.*

In adopting the governmentality thesis, Rose (1996) contends that the individual citizen is charged with making regulated choices in the context of their own freedom and that this is underpinned by the idea that [young] people 'do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves' (1996: 45). The other contention is that communities are new sites of governance where regulation can occur at the micro level, as opposed to the use of intrusive government programmes (Amin 2005). To some extent both of these aspects of 'responsibilisation' are evident within contemporary definitions of citizenship. Young people appear to have accepted the need to adopt certain conditions of social responsibility, externally defined and regulated by the community.

The definitions of the problems presented within this article firmly establish the individual as a culpable subject in need of 'a whole array of programmes for their ethical reconstruction as active citizens' (Rose, 1996: 60). These problems become the justifications for citizenship education, a programme of renormalisation based on the transmission of knowledge and appropriate values. Governmentality perspectives invite us to ask 'what forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek?' (Dean, 1999: 32). The two justifications for citizenship education frame an individual as sans appropriate knowledge, sans acceptable values and as a consequence, lacking the necessary qualities of a future citizen. Let us revisit and summarise both problems in the light of this claim.

Firstly there is the issue of a democratic deficit. This problem is not seen in terms of a failure in governing systems at a structural or societal level. Rather, the problem is located within the individual's capacity to participate as an effective citizen. The episteme of government (Dean, 1995) is based upon a set of calculable patterns concerning individual voting behaviour and engagement in party political groups. An assessment of this knowledge posits that the reasons for non-engagement are apathy, unawareness or antipathy. Alternative value positions (such as the range of other political practices that young people engage in) are disregarded since they do not fit within the required measurements of democratic performance. It follows that education is designed to address knowledge and value deficits in the individual. Simply put, if people understand how democracy works and what their role is within it, then they will participate. Further, the systems designed to open up young people's influence may in fact restrict the possibility to engage in making decisions.

Secondly whereas once crime and anti-social behaviour may have been seen as symptoms or causes of structural disadvantage, they are now rooted in a moral underclass discourse (Levitas 2006) that identifies the individual as culpable for engaging in morally or socially irresponsible acts. They are literally recast as people 'whose self-responsibility and self-fulfilling aspirations have been deformed by the dependency culture, whose efforts at self-advancement have been frustrated' (Rose, 1996: 59). Individuals are thus expected to make the correct choices to disentangle disadvantage and crime. Education for citizenship is tasked with remoralising young people towards desired socially responsible behaviour and communities are charged with regulating this behaviour through new legal

and civil measures. Garland has famously identified this shift in criminal justice towards a community responsabilisation strategy: ‘central government seeking to act upon crime not in a direct fashion through state agencies...but instead by acting indirectly, seeking to activate action on the part of non-state agencies’ (1996: 452).

Muncie (2004) illustrates how communities, individuals and the family are all now held responsible for managing problems of youth crime and anti-social behaviour with a series of ‘programmes which seek either to remove young people from the street or to provide them and their parents with coercive “retraining”’ (Muncie, 2004: 139). The consequence is that the criminal net around children widens and welfare issues become a criminal justice concern (Hine and Wood, 2009).

The justifications put forward for citizenship education are therefore based on a process of restructuring individual knowledge, values and behaviour. This position assumes that active citizenship in advanced liberal democracies is accepted and adequately defined as a ‘normative ideal’. Whilst the history of the struggle for citizenship and equality easily lends itself to liberal education or empowerment theory the model that emerges from contemporary social policy suggests that citizenship education is little more than preparedness to conform to prescribed standards of socially responsible behaviour. Thus young people are seen as problems to be managed, moulded and reformed rather than as active citizens who can think and make decisions about issues that concern them (Gewirtz, 2000). Consequently, ‘Citizenship education ... appears to have evolved into a much more apolitical individualistic version of citizenship teaching, focused around imparting information about moral obligations and students’ responsibilities towards society’ (Cunningham and Lavalette, 2004: 258).

### The importance of young people’s voices

If Dean (1999: 30) argues that in order to understand the nature of government we must examine the ‘fields of visibility of government’ then sometimes our gaze must be adjusted to take account of alternative perspectives. Whilst policy definitions and actions have defined citizenship and young people’s engagement in negative terms, there is evidence from research of young people’s alternative perspectives that provide illumination of the lived experience of active citizenship.

In the author’s own research, young people both accepted and challenged policy conceptions of active citizenship. On the one hand their own definitions, examples and experiences reflected dominant ideas about what constitutes an active citizen. There is evidence not only that young people consider and actively engage in responsibilities, but that these responsibilities are often adult-defined. In the discussion that explored ‘hanging around’ we saw young people rejecting their own preferred definitions of social behaviour in favour of adhering to community level norms around what constitutes being an active citizen. Young people have defined citizenship less in political terms and more in terms of the expectations adults have of them in relation to their local communities. Examples of decision-making and the exercise of power and control appeared limited in both their range and

their potential influence with institutions effectively limiting opportunities for young people to increase such influence.

Yet there is evidence that young people offer challenges to the dominant policy conceptions of citizenship. Whereas policy – makers may favour structured, accredited activity as preferred indicators of social engagement, there is evidence from this study that young people engage in a wide range of social participation practices not easily reducible to tight definitions of voluntary work. Examples included high levels of voluntary and charity work; informal political action; activities with political implications; awareness raising; and general social participation (Wood, 2009: 249). This reflects Lister et al’s (2002) ‘socially constructive model’ of citizenship insofar as young people evidence a range of different contributions that they identify as social participation. They represent evidence that young people engage in a range of activities in their communities and that this challenges dominant discourses of youth anti-social behaviour.

The challenge is also evident in the recognition that there is a disjuncture in how different groups define different aspects of active citizenship. Taking the earlier example of the group who were continuously moved on by the police, we can see that young people and adults defined socially responsible behaviour in very different ways. Through listening to young people’s voices on this occasion, we understand that what may appear to be irresponsible behaviour is in fact defined as responsible when seen through the lens of young people.

This offers an important perspective that builds on the work of Ungar (2004; 2007) around resilience: in order to understand risk-taking and resilience building, we must understand how young people define and experience behaviour seen as irrational by adults. It also reinforces the call of youth studies academics that in order to better understand young people’s real lives, we need to investigate their own interpretations and experiences (France, 2007; Hine, 2009) to better understand the nature of local ‘contests’ in the formation of citizenship (Staeheli, 2008).

### Concluding comment

Growing up in the risk society presents challenges of uncertainty for young people. Government concerns itself with the ways in which to risk – manage the complex process of transition, in the face of both change and continuity in the fabric of young people’s experience (Wood and Hine 2009). Evidence suggests that the emphasis over the past decade has been on the effective management of the individual’s social and moral behaviour.

Initiatives such as citizenship education offer the promise of reining-in happenstance: they mould preferred pathways towards desired adult futures (Kelly, 2003). Through a formalised curriculum, underpinned by a transmission model of learning, young people can be equipped to know and act upon

their apparent deficits. Yet such an approach should make us uncomfortable. Citizenship education does indeed have a long history, but it is not a history aligned with unthinking subordination. Rather it is bound in a recognition of the value of universal rights and participation for the greater good. It can be a momentum concept where the very boundaries and structures of our everyday experience are put under intense scrutiny by the generation that follows us.

The paradox is that if we attempt to over-manage the acquisition of these qualities in young people through instructive citizenship education, we may in fact diminish their curiosity and capacity to negotiate their own social identities. The consequences of such over-management may be that young people, in all their diversity and complexity, become further reduced to simplistic labels and categories. Similarly, if we target our efforts only at one group (on account of their age) at the expense of challenging existing power relations, we may in fact reproduce the contextual barriers that hinder active citizenship.

The promise of meaningful education for citizenship is one that reclaims the social, and enables both young and old to engage in a meaningful process of deliberative dialogue. It should not be the preserve only of the professional educator. The very best models of community integration arise out of meaningful interchange between adults and young people. And that, we could argue, is the duty of us all.

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# The 'Teen Brain' Research: Critical Perspectives

Howard Sercombe

## Abstract

*The new generation of brain research, using Magnetic Resonance Imaging and other techniques, has been making an increasing impact on our understanding of young people and the application of policy. A previous article in this journal outlined the positive contribution of these findings in relation to young people and their social environment. However, the interpretation of data associated with this field of research is frequently locked into old deficit models of youth, with potentially serious consequences for policy. This article outlines some problems in interpretation in brain science, especially as it applies to young people, and urges brain scientists and social scientists to collaborate.*

**Key words:** brain, MRI, adolescence, teen, risk.

In a previous article (Sercombe and Paus, 2009) the major findings of the new generation of brain research were surveyed as they apply to young people. As that article explained, an exponential improvement in the technology has led to a range of new possibilities for understanding how human beings work. Many of these findings have radical implications, leading us beyond narrow binary conflicts, such as the 'nature/nurture' debate, that have plagued thinking about young people.

However, these possibilities are not always explored as thoroughly as they might. Data emerging from Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanners are frequently interpreted within frameworks for thinking about young people which see adolescence pathologically. For example, a *Time* magazine feature article suggested that, 'Increasingly, psychologists...are trying to connect the familiar patterns of adolescents' wacky behavior to the new findings about their evolving brain structure' (Wallis, Dell, and Park, 2004). The opening chapter of *The Primal Teen*, a best-selling popularisation of the adolescent brain research by science journalist Barbara Strauch (Strauch, 2004) is entitled Crazy by Design. Similarly, international newspaper headlines over the last couple of years have included:

- *Teen sulk could be growing brain pain* (Payne, 2007);
- *Losing their minds: new studies show that changes in the adolescent brain may explain why teenagers are so difficult to get along with* (Boyd, 2007a);

- *Teenagers can't think straight, scientists say* (Boyd, 2007b);
- *What's the (gray) matter with teens? Scans of brain suggest teens are not yet wired for sound judgment* (Anderson, 2006);
- *Scans show what really goes on inside the head of that stropky teenager* (Smith, 2008).

The academic literature is often more careful than this and, at its best, is overt about how little we yet know about brains at any age, the complex interplay of variables, and the dangers of over-interpreting the data. However, often poor causal arguments are built from premises about what the data 'might' mean to much more solid conclusions about the inadequacy of teenage brains. On this basis recommendations are made for the development of law and policy relating to the protection and control of young people. For example, in a recent conference paper presented at the annual Developmental Science Conference devoted to *Adolescent Brain, Social Cognition and Innovative Intervention*, evidence was presented to argue that young people might be more driven by the reward centres of the brain, that they might be slower at referring decisions to the pre-frontal cortex and that they *might* be less adept at inhibiting their impulses and assessing consequences of actions. From this it was deduced that they are *highly likely* to be more prone to drug addiction and destructive drug use more generally (Mayes, 2007).

Even with researchers who are generally careful, the kinds of metaphors they use reveal biases. Giedd and colleagues, for example, in talking about the myelination process, use the analogy of a sculptor creating a masterpiece by getting rid of unwanted material from a block of stone (Pezawas et al, 2005). In the analogy, the teenager is the block of stone, the adult the fine and finished sculpture. That seems to exaggerate the beauty of the adult mind versus the teenager's. Moreover, researchers are not always careful, especially in their interactions with the media. In an interview with Robin Williams of the *Science Show*, researcher Sarah-Jayne Blakemore led the interview by saying, 'There's a whole host of things that teenagers are famous for. Yes, being impulsive, being risk-takers, not being very good at empathy, not being very sociable, or at least being sociable with certain groups but not with others like adults. All sorts of things change at the onset of puberty' (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2006). Little wonder then that following her presentation at the British Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Festival in September 2006, the BBC news headlined with, 'Now we know why the surly teenager storms off in a huff after being told to tidy their bedroom.'

Functional MRI studies have reported significant differences between the ways that teenagers and other adults use their brains. In particular, they claim to show that young people tend to be slower to engage the 'thinking' part of their brain, the pre-frontal cortex, and to do more processing in parts of the brain which are more reactive/responsive in the way they work, such as the amygdala (Steinberg, 2004). It has not been unusual to interpret these differences in ways that are unflattering to young people. For example, the amygdala is often described as a more 'primitive' part of the brain. Strauch (2004: 67) writes of Yurgelun-Todd's experiment that 'younger teens not only tended to use the more

crocodile-like amygdala when they processed emotions, but they often got emotion wrong to begin with ...' Aside from the fact that Yurgelun-Todd was scanning under-14 year olds (arguably children, not young people) this depiction of a functioning and necessary part of the brain is not very useful. In the popularization of research, it can be tempting to slip into explanations in line with 'common sense' which might be no more than an affirmation of old prejudices.

In the following section, criticisms of the 'teen brain' research will be addressed. They can be usefully grouped into two areas: problems of method, and problems of interpretation.

## Problems of method

### *Sampling*

There are a number of difficulties which are endemic to the teen brain research field. The equipment is expensive, so any research can only work with limited numbers of people. This is improving, as more scanners come on line and the costs per scan fall. In some areas of study, especially MRI scans which look at brain structure, researchers are not limited to the scans they do themselves: they consult libraries of scans in other laboratories giving access to data from hundreds of individuals. There is a bigger problem in functional MRI research that looks at how the brain works while a person is thinking. These studies will often look at tens of individuals, and questions about the representativeness of the sample, or controlling for factors like socio-economic status are often overlooked.

It is already known that there is a continuing dance in the brain between experience and genetics, brain structure and brain function, all of which are in constant feedback loops. Therefore it is difficult to isolate any particular item for study as none of the factors will sit still long enough. For example, if the sample only includes middle class teenagers, or teenagers in school, or boys, and something interesting is discovered, it may well be that the salient feature is a consequence of them being middle class or in school or male, rather than about them being teenagers. Brain structure and function is particularly likely to be affected by socio-economic and other environmental factors and it is essential to control for these to be clear about conclusions. To be confident about results, large numbers, and preferably repeated scans over time are needed, so that these extraneous factors can be excluded. The smaller the sample, the higher the risk that a researcher is not measuring what they think they are measuring. The work is still important, but there needs to be caution about the significance claimed for the results.

There is also a broad developmental range even within the categories identified as 'teenagers', 'young people' and 'adolescents'. Studies frequently select their participants by age: but age is an imprecise measure of development. Very few studies measure brain development even by pubertal stage. Mostly they include young people at different stages of development. While the number of longitudinal studies is increasing, and more sixteen and seventeen year olds are being included, many

have worked with ten to thirteen year olds, such as Yurgelun-Todd's (Baird et al, 1999) and Allen's (Whittle et al, 2008). Whether these are all studies of 'youth' or even 'adolescence' can be contested.

### *Design*

Research design is especially important in functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) studies. Functional MRI uses the MRI scanner to measure the footprint of oxygen use in different parts of the brain (and so brain activity) while a person is awake and mentally active. It has huge potential for understanding what parts of the brain are employed for different mental processes. A limitation of fMRI studies is that the person has to be completely still to obtain reasonable pictures. It is possible to talk to the subject while they are in the scanner and to show them videos, still photographs or text to record their response. However, this is not 'real life': it is a *simulation*. Functional MRI can only work with people's responses to simulations of angry faces, or embarrassing situations. The fMRI scan, then is measuring how the brain reacts to simulations. We presume that this tells us something about how it reacts to real situations, but this is largely untested. It could be the case, for example, that the celebrated differences between the way teenage and other adult brains process emotional information has little to do with the process of emotions and everything to do with a difference in the way teenagers process *simulations*.

It is entirely reasonable that this would be the case. Because young people are going to school, and most school work deals with simulations, they work with simulations all day every day. Add to that their experience with the media, video games and the internet, and it is clear there are *also generational differences in the experience of simulations*. If young people don't engage their prefrontal cortex to process material they are shown in a MRI machine, it may be that they don't need to. They are blasé about photographs of angry faces because they distinguish them as simulations, not because they lack empathy.

The material that research subjects have to respond to is a representation – of an angry face, a threatening gesture, an emotionally-charged situation. In order for the experiment to work, the representation must be unambiguous and free from cultural or contextual interpretation. This, however, is not the nature of representations. This research presumes that one ought to interpret a photograph of a facial expression (or whatever) in the same way that the researcher does, and that if you don't, there is something wrong with your interpretation, or in the case of young people, something deficient in the way your brain works.

### **Problems of interpretation**

Brain research does not account for how different populations think, nor does it provide an understanding of limitations in their capacity. The machines show pictures of brains, the shape of internal structures, in the case of fMRI, with different parts lit up. What that indicates is that different

parts of the brain are activated in response to various stimuli. These are not 'thoughts'. To go from there to judgments about limitations in capacity requires a great deal of interpretive work which takes place against a backdrop of what we think we already know about young people.

The first problem here is the *over-interpretation of the data*: taking a fragment of information, such as a difference in the location of brain activity in some research subjects, and reading off some generalisation about the nature of all young people, offering explanations for why young people are lazy, why they take risks, or why they are vulnerable to addiction. Especially in fMRI research, extreme caution needs to be taken about the implications of this kind of difference. This is a science which is still in its infancy. We know that while all these things can be true of some young people some of the time, they are self-evidently not universally applicable nor are they confined to youth. Clearly then, these characteristics are not *determined* by adolescent brain structure. Brain research needs to be pulled alongside other established cognitive and sociological research, rather than common prejudice, in the interpretation of the data. Currently such interdisciplinary work is absent from the literature reviews of most scientific articles in this field.

The second problem of interpretation is that of *cause and effect*. As was noted in the previous article (Sercombe and Paus, 2009), one of the most radical and exciting findings of the brain research is that the structure of the brain is shaped by experiences, as well as the other way round. The way that this made the age-old tension between nature and nurture obsolete was noted too: that behaviour rests on a continuous dance between experience and the genetically driven structure of the brain. However, discoveries about brain structure or function are continuously presented as explaining teenage behavior in terms of their brain structure. The opposite causal process – that brains are different because the experiences of young people are different – is usually entirely absent. Biological determinism continues to dominate the discussion.

The third problem involves a bias in interpretation that privileges the age, class and cultural position of the researcher. The previous article discussed two significant findings in the research. One is that there are significant changes happening to brain structure during the teenage years: specifically the increase in myelination, which we would expect to make neural circuits more efficient and effective. The second is that fMRI studies of the teenage brain have reported significant differences between the ways that teenagers and others use their brains (Steinberg, 2004). It has not been unusual to interpret these differences in ways that are unflattering to young people. There has been a lot of commentary about the significance of these changes. Most commonly, the adolescent brain is discussed as 'a work in progress', as unfinished (Pezawas et al, 2005). This is, of course true. As it is for others. There is no such thing as a finished brain, unless it is a dead one.

Myelination has its advantages and disadvantages. There is likely to be an increase in reliability and efficiency, as pathways that have worked well are confirmed as the dominant ways for the brain



to process and respond to information. The increase in efficiency is at the cost of flexibility and availability for new learning. Older adults can do things they know how to do better than young people, as a rule. But they find it harder to learn things they don't know how to do. Commentators celebrate the increasing 'maturity' of the brain towards the end of the twenties, without grieving for the loss of flexibility in processing information that this inevitably involves.

Myelination happens first in the more fundamental structures of the brain, and later in the parts where conscious processes happen. According to some, this means that the more 'primitive' functions of reward and sensation seeking are made more efficient some years before the more conscious departments which deal with inhibition, risk assessment, and thinking through consequences (Mayes, 2007; Pezawas et al, 2005; Steinberg, 2004). Simplistically, you could say that the frontal cortex is concerned with rational thought, and the amygdala with emotional reaction, so you can also say that young people don't think, they react. They are bad at processing risk, because thinking about risk happens in the pre frontal cortex. So, the argument goes, young people are biologically more prone to irresponsibility, risk taking, hedonism, drug use, driving cars fast, and a range of other potentially dangerous behaviours.

This is possible. But there are a number of reasons to be doubtful. First, as discussed, structure does not unilaterally determine function. It may be the other way round: that taking risks is precisely the experience that develops the pre frontal cortex. To use the analogy outlined in our previous article, (Sercombe and Paus, 2009), were the roads sealed because they were used a lot, or were they used a lot because they were sealed? By preventing young people taking risks, we may be consigning them to a conservative and fear-driven adulthood that does not know how to assess and manage risks healthily. Second, we know that brains are both structured and flexible. Damage to a particular part of the brain doesn't necessarily mean that those functions have gone for ever. People's brains can learn to use a different part to do that job. Not always, but often enough, especially when they are young. We don't know that people who seem to be using a different part of their brain aren't working in very similar ways to the rest of us: just using a different tool for the job. It's just too early to be able to tell. Third, most young people are not irresponsible, reckless risk takers: the other evidence (rather than prejudice or common wisdom) does not support the conclusion. Finally, it is another set of ideological assumptions that regards conscious rational thought as superior to other forms of intelligence. It is not unconnected to the fact that it is this kind of thought that has been refined and promoted in Western Europe alongside the decline and forced under-development of emotional, spatial, communal and spiritual forms. In the West we prefer emotionally disconnected (or 'objective') intelligences to emotionally connected (or 'subjective') intelligence, non-material to material. So we say that the 'higher' (and conscious thought driven) reasoning of the frontal cortex is superior to the 'basal' (and unconscious emotion-driven) reasoning of the amygdala.

Pessimistic pronouncements about what young people are capable of and how risky they are just do not measure up. The majority are reasonable, rational and law abiding. The picture of impulsive,

risk-blind, irrational fear-and-desire driven rampaging youths who should be kept away from the alcohol bottle or the car keys at any cost is just one more ogre generated by the adolescence-discourse machine. And it serves a political and social purpose. By emphasising the irrationality and disturbance of young people we affirm our own basic rationality, peacefulness, conformity and decency.

### So why is this interpretation happening?

Foucault (1986) argues that at some point in the development of a field of study, some person or persons bring together the key ideas and crystallize them into a way of thinking about a subject. Before this point, thinking and writing about a subject is essentially undisciplined. By setting down the parameters (or *axioms*) within which thinking and talking and writing about a subject can happen, a discourse is established. Other kinds of thinking can happen, but if they happen outside the discourse, they happen in a kind of wilderness and tend to be easily lost or forgotten.

Since 1905, thinking about young people in the West has been dominated by the discourse of adolescence. Framed initially by G. Stanley Hall (Hall, 1905), this discourse is based on three primary axioms:

- adolescence is a 'stage of life';
- it is universal across all human communities;
- the content of this 'stage' is about trouble: adolescence is deeply, and endemically, problematic (Bessant, Sercombe, and Watts, 1998; Epstein, 2007: 119-126).

All three axioms have been extensively contested. The stage of life idea was disputed by learning theorists (Bandura, 1964) and in a different way by interactionists (eg. Sullivan, 1953), who argued that human development was much more continuous and seamless than the stage theorists were portraying, and that when big shifts were observed, they often coincided with big shifts also in the external environment – like going to school.

The second idea, that adolescence was a universal stage, was under early attack from the Chicago school, including Margaret Mead (Mead, 1939, 1975), and was carried forward by Seig's work in the 1970s (Seig, 1976). These theorists argued that in many societies studied by anthropologists, there was no observable adolescent stage. Young people were initiated into adulthood at or around puberty, and moved reasonably smoothly into the community of men and women.

The third idea, that adolescence was by its nature full of turbulence, 'storm and stress', was the central dispute also in Mead's work but carried forward more rigorously by Offer and his associates (Offer, 1969; Offer and Baittie, 1970; Offer and Offer, 1972). What the research finds, when 'normal' populations of young people are surveyed, is that young people are not particularly troubled. They

are not significantly less happy, more stressed, or more angst-ridden than other populations, and are certainly not universally so. They lead relatively peaceful lives and get on well with their parents with whom they share core values. Of course, if you research troubled young people, or those in institutions, you find that they are quite troubled!

Notwithstanding this however, the discourse that youth (as adolescents) are a deeply troubled population is still dominant within public talk about young people. And of course, interpretations of new data are carried on within that discourse. It creates a way of thinking that assumes that all differences between young people and older people are deficits. This information, or disinformation, is already beginning to shape aspects of policy, for example in response to campaigns to increase the drinking age.

## Conclusions

The first of these two articles suggested that brain architecture research represents exciting and fertile ground for understanding more about young people: about the nature of youth and adolescence, about its potentialities, and the continuities and differences between youth and adulthood. It pushes us to develop concepts and theories beyond old and unproductive dualisms such as nature/nurture. It may help us to correct social policies which are harmful to development, and which produce populations that are fearful, constricted, and conservative. However, interpretations of the data remain locked into the hundred year old framework for understanding youth in terms of a qualitatively different stage of human development characterised by trouble. Amidst the overwhelming dominance of this discourse, alternative conceptions struggle for traction, and experimental work which seeks to discover the capacities of young people, rather than their deficits, struggles for funding. Notions of adolescence which conceive the teenage years in terms of a blossoming, emergent adulthood (rather than a turbulent compartment of the human experience to be contained and controlled) continue to be sidelined in favour of scientifically unsustainable 'hate speech' about young people mainly peddled in the media.

Yet social scientists and youth practitioners can be reactive and alarmist about the brain research, seeing in this new field of work a reiteration of earlier attempts to measure and predict human consciousnesses based on their physical manifestations, such as eugenics and phrenology. Like those earlier discredited attempts, many commentators see in these studies a resurgence of discriminatory and oppressive assumptions. At the same time, social scientists' understanding of this field is often poor, and it is easy to slip into inaccuracies and misconceptions.

The development of collaborative liaisons between disciplines has never been more important. While much of the science is beautiful, it needs the complementary intelligence of psychology and sociology to avoid interpretations which merely confirm common sense. Common sense is too often

merely old prejudice. More than ever, this field of work needs people to be communicating across the divide between the life sciences and the social sciences. There was already a great deal of research published about how the brains of young people work and why, long before the first MRI scan: in psychology, sociology and in the range of professional disciplines that have attended to young people as thinking subjects. If the teen brain research is pursued in ignorance of this work, it is in danger of retracing earlier problematic discourses about young people and making claims which have long been disproved in other disciplines. What we know already about confounding social factors such as socio-economic status will be missed, to the detriment of the science. At the same time, there is potential for a cascade of new insights about young people from cognitive neuroscience. Partnerships between social scientists, psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists as well as practitioners might make for some heated kitchen-table arguments, but may also produce some fascinating new perspectives on how to think about young people, as well as how young people think.

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# What has Cornelius Castoriadis to say about Youth Work?

Tony Taylor

For over 30 years Cornelius Castoriadis has done my head in! In the mid-70s, being a pamphlet junkie, I could not resist his *History as Creation*, written under the pseudonym of Paul Cardan. Inside a few pages my head was throbbing. At the time I was a recent Marxist convert, bowled over by the sweeping explanatory power of Karl's grand theory. To be honest, the last thing I desired was some little known dissident revolutionary sowing uncertainty just as I had discovered certitude. Here was Castoriadis casting doubt as to whether any social theory or political programme could hold the key to understanding humanity's past, present or future. I was torn from his dangerous embrace by the damning verdict of my Trotskyist group's leadership. He was condemned as being little better than a liberal, a revisionist undermining the historical mission of the working class. This scathing put-down touched the raw nerve of my own liberal wavering in the face of Leninist orthodoxy and discipline, so I internalized my misgivings. To my shame, for most of the next decade, Castoriadis was consigned to a cardboard box under the stairs. For my part I strove to be the dedicated Marxist youth worker, armed with the correct scientific analysis, committed to politicising work with young people.

However, my cry of 'get thee behind me, Castoriadis' did not spare me the questions posed by life to anyone arguing for the radical transformation of society:

- To what extent do we have a real grasp of why people think and act in the ways they do? What do we mean by notions of individual and collective consciousness, by the very idea of personality?
- And, given that 'personalities', amongst other things, are black, white, straight, gay, women and men, born into contending classes, how might they discover and act upon a common sense of purpose in all their interests?
- How indeed might revolutionary social and political change come about? As Castoriadis puts it, 'to what extent does the contemporary situation give birth in people the desire and capacity to create a free and just society?' (1988a:33).

As a would-be agent of change, inside and outside of work, I wrestled with these fundamental dilemmas. Neither Marxism nor youth work provided convincing answers. Both fell short of comprehending the whole picture. Of course Marxism's supposed commitment to class struggle as the motor of history seemed to resolve the matter. However, its singular failure to appreciate the

individual in all her idiosyncrasy weakened its collective aspiration. As for youth work, its claim to be person-centred was built on the shakiest of foundations, an eclectic mix of generalisations drawn from a social psychology devoid of any sense of exploitation and oppression. Confronted with this divide I rushed from pillar to post, arguing in Marxist circles for the importance of individuality, ranting in the youth work milieu about the centrality of class conflict. Neither side was won over. It was the late 1980s before I began to renew my acquaintance with Castoriadis and his fix on this mess of contradictions.

## Biography

And so to the man himself; he was born in Constantinople on March 22nd, 1922. Within months his family had fled the city amidst its Greek-Turkish tensions. By the time of his youth he was a ‘bolshie’ member of the Greek Communist Party, ‘smitten’ (in his own word) by philosophy and on his way to studying it, law and economics in Athens. The end of the Second World War witnessed him, latterly a heretical Trotskyist and thus the target for both Fascist and Stalinist retribution, fleeing to France on board a New Zealand troop ship. From this critical moment we follow a remarkable intellectual and political journey, central to which is a profound confrontation with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. His quest was to comprehend as well as possible and to contribute positively to humanity’s struggle for autonomy, freedom and justice.

The ensuing twenty years saw Castoriadis pursuing his commitment to revolutionary politics, co-founding in 1948 the influential group ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’, whilst earning a crust as a professional economist with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris. These were the days of his prolonged encounter with Marx from within Marxism. By the time the group disbanded in 1967 he was concluding that ‘... the very body of Marx’s theory’, for instance its failure to escape the shackles of the capitalist fixation upon production, ‘had become the principal obstacle to new reflection concerning the problems of revolution’ (1988a:25). Ironically as ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’ dissolved, some of its key notions were springing into life in the hands of students and workers at the heart of the May 1968 uprisings in France. Such infamous slogans as ‘Forbidding is Forbidden’, ‘Culture is Disintegrating. Create!’ and ‘Creativity, Spontaneity, Life!’ echoed ambiguously motifs in Castoriadis’ writings, a debt acknowledged openly by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, perhaps the most famous of the student leaders.

In 1970 he retired from his post as Director of the National Accounts and Growth Studies of the OECD. Thence in a dramatic shift he began to train as a psychoanalyst, starting to practice in 1974. Thus started his equally prolonged encounter with a second great white male theorist, Freud. Funnily enough, when I caught up with this perceived slide from the political to the personal, I warmed to the bloke even more. Certainly this required the partial suspension of my long-standing antipathy towards the pretension of most psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Given the depth of my

prejudice, fuelled by my hostility to the exaggerated influence of social psychology in the training of youth workers, this was no mean feat! However, Castoriadis' effort to understand at one and the same time the making of the individual and the making of the social gave me fresh inspiration. Rediscovering Castoriadis jolted my overwhelming emphasis on visible human activity as the basis for thinking about 'personality'. Castoriadis, along with Janet Batsleer and students at Manchester Metropolitan University in the late 90s, pushed me to ponder anew the unconscious, desires, dreams and the imagination.

By the time of his death in 1997, Castoriadis had left a legacy of critical thinking which challenged theoretical, political and professional assumptions across the board. As for youth work, his probing perspective ponders whether it can ever be an arena in which young people are free to criticise and improvise in their individual and collective attempts to control their own lives. He sheds a different light on the classic concern over whether youth work is an instrument of social control or social change. Specifically in terms of youth work's own history, but also much more broadly, he reflects upon and even despairs at the retreat of the liberal and critical tradition in the face of the neo-liberal, contemporary consensus. Vitaly, he asks us whether we dare to rekindle a radical resistance to the 'generalised conformism' presently suffocating social life. Bluntly he wonders whether youth workers have an ounce of fight left in them.

### A Word of Caution

Before exploring some of the key themes in the thinking of Castoriadis I must share a couple of concerns. Firstly his corpus of work is sweeping in its scope. He traverses in one way or another almost all of the natural, social and human sciences, never mind the arts, history and philosophy. To my mind he is often unnecessarily complex and dense. Like more than a few other Parisian intellectuals he can leave me feeling dizzy and daft. Thus I am conscious that I am open to the charge of grossly simplifying his outlook. Secondly, I am acutely aware that I could be drawing your attention to the similarities and differences between Castoriadis and thinkers from within and without the radical tradition, inside and outside of youth work. Alas, in the space allowed, I am unable to do justice to this widening of the debate. Sadly too, a pernicious outcome of this absence is to put Castoriadis seemingly on a pedestal in the grand manner to which many great thinkers are accustomed. I trust you will treat any evidence of such sycophancy, which is utterly at odds with Castoriadis' intentions, with the required contempt!

### History as Creation

In thinking about history, Castoriadis insists on the essential part played by human creativity. This is our individual and collective ability, leaning on the past, to construct the present and to imagine beyond the present. Whilst obviously this stress on 'human agency' (people make the world, who



else?) is in tune with Marx's dictum that 'men make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing', Castoriadis rejects the idea that a template of explanation can be imposed upon history. There are no scientific laws to explain its unfolding. There is no inexorable dynamic of 'progress'. Indeed, in his view, history is unpredictable. None of which is to mean, as he says time and time again, that we shouldn't do our damndest to understand where we have come from, where we are up to, and where we would desire to go. It is no wonder that he admired Edward Thompson's wonderful *The Making of the English Working Class*. It opens with the memorable declaration that 'the working class did not arise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making' [1968: 9]. Human beings desiring, if you will forgive the banality, a better place to live, are capable of incredible leaps of thought and practice, what Castoriadis termed 'the masses' unpredictable ingenuity'. This said Castoriadis counsels caution. For creativity can wear different faces. To hark back to the last century, humanity can imagine and design ways of acting together in equality and co-operation, for example, the Spanish communes of 1936, the Hungarian Workers' Councils of 1956 and the British Miners' Support Groups of 1984. On the other hand humanity can summon up the totalitarian nightmares of the Stalinist Gulag or Fascist Auschwitz. The dynamism of an emancipatory creativity is always opposed by those in power and by those who acquiesce under the gaze of the powerful.

With all this in mind Castoriadis ponders the formation of societies. How have they come into existence, been organised and how have they survived or not, as the case may be? His contention is that the overwhelming majority of societies, following the surge of creativity involved in making or 'instituting' themselves, stagnate into a defence of their very existence. Once made or 'instituted' these societies desire to be permanent, even eternal, and impose norms, values and goals for individual and collective life. The said society produces what Castoriadis terms an 'imaginary of significations' which constitute the glue binding the whole together. He uses the notion of the 'imaginary' to convey the sense that these significations are in no sense necessarily 'true' or 'rational'. They have been made up. To take but a few examples of the taken-for-granted significations in so many societies, we can note but the following:

- the necessity of obedience to the hierarchy;
- the devotion to 'Leaders';
- the inferior 'servicing' status of women;
- the unquestioning acceptance of a sacred text;
- the notion of cultural or racial superiority to Others, whomever they might be.

However, crucially, these societies mask the origin of these significations and the institutions built around them, notably the Monarchy and the Church. Rather than being seen as invented, the society's own creations, these significations governing attitude and behaviour are experienced as coming from outside, classically from an all-seeing, all-knowing God. For Castoriadis, such societies dominant throughout history are 'heteronomous'. They believe that their existence, their sense of purpose and

direction, depends upon Another, the Other. A God will see them through. Such societies demand allegiance to the prevailing order, to the voice of authority.

Yet even within these heteronomous societies, there has been conflict and dissent. Not everybody's desire to be free from imposed relations of oppression can be tamed into submission. Individuals and groups have struggled against the prevailing order, but their utterly vital efforts (for without them where would we be?) have almost always been hidden from history. For Castoriadis though this desire for autonomy as opposed to heteronomy, this wish to take responsibility for ourselves, not abandon our fate to a Supreme Being, sweeps into collective existence for the first time, as far as he can see, in classical Greece, in the Athenian polis. Here, briefly, institutions and ways of viewing the world were created – vitally democracy and philosophy – which opened up the unceasing interrogation of tradition. Of course, Athens was far from a perfect model, witness the status of women and slaves, but as Castoriadis underlines, its short-lived storm of self-criticism and active participation sowed a seed, both frail yet hardy, for the future. As it was, the provisional gains of the Athenian experiment, their attempt to change the character of how we view ourselves and the world we live in, were almost forgotten.

From thence, through a period of over 1500 years, epitomised by what are known as the Dark Ages, heteronomy and the closed society ruled. By and large, folk did as they were told. According to Castoriadis, the next rupture of its claustrophobic domination emerged in the period of the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment. Demands for autonomy on a personal and collective level, the right to question and innovate, clashed and compromised with the authoritarian institutions of Church and Monarchy. Jumping ahead somewhat, over the last 200 years the banner of autonomy and emancipation from imposed authority has been carried most proudly by men and women contesting the oppression imposed on them because of their class, gender, race or sexuality. In these struggles of the social movements young people have not been backwards at coming forwards. This political conflict in all its varied forms – strikes in the workplace, demonstrations on the streets, occupations within communities – has been central to the making of today's society. Without these struggles our lives would be very different. This is a reality which today's spin-merchants attempt to erase from society's collective memory.

However, over this last two centuries and more, the project of autonomy (to use Castoriadis' way of describing what in the past he himself would have seen as the struggle for socialism) has faced the formidable contemporary force of heteronomy, Capitalism, relentless in its compulsion to master the world. To complicate matters further, there has never been a neat divide between the two antagonists. Castoriadis talks of the 'mutual contamination' of both by each other, which always seems to be to the advantage of heteronomy (2003:135). Thus from the capitalist point of view, it has derailed its opponent most successfully when its hierarchical and bureaucratic practices have insinuated themselves deep into the soul of the workers' movement. As for the project of autonomy, it has to

be forever aware Capitalism's 'unbelievable ability to reabsorb, divert and recoup everything that challenges it' (1988a:35). As I wander into the living room for a break from writing, the television advert throws my thoughts back into my face. 'Imagine creating your own world', it implores, 'create your own price plan!' In this context it is perhaps enough to mark the way in which the social movements have dissolved into being little more than identified markets – women, blacks, gays ('the pink pound') and youth. Thus the struggle for a collective political identity has been transformed, 'commodified' into the pursuit of a prescribed lifestyle.

As the 20th century drew to a close, Castoriadis concludes that the capitalist imaginary, its tapestry of themes into which we are all woven, seems to hold the upper hand. Such primary significations as the ever-expanding need to produce and consume and the assertion that this system is as good as it gets, seem beyond question. He recalls Robinson's paraphrase of Schumpeter, 'the system is certainly cruel, unjust and turbulent, but it does deliver the goods and, damn it all, it's the goods you want' (2005:115). The catastrophic capitalist compulsion to be the lord of all it surveys, to burrow its way into every nook and cranny of our existence, seems to have all but suffocated its adversary – the collective desire to make sense of the world for the common good. Indeed from the 1960s onwards, Castoriadis argues that the project of autonomy has been in disarray, symbolised by the increasing retreat from solidarity, apart from certain inspiring moments of resistance, into a 'privatised' world of passivity. In his later writings he talks of a rising tide of insignificance, within which a generalised pseudo-consensus stifles criticism, commercialises and trivialises dissent. As things stand in the first decade of the 21st century, in Western Europe certainly matters have, if anything, got worse. Has heteronomy in its capitalist guise, reflected in post-modernism's 'atrophy of the political' (1997:39), won the day?

Yet, as Castoriadis was always at pains to argue, this need not be the case. Humanity retains its potential to imagine and create an equal and just society, but there are no guarantees. To quote Castoriadis back in 1972, 'we do not have any Good News to proselytise concerning the Promised Land glimmering on the horizon, any book to recommend whose reading would exempt one from having to seek the truth for oneself' (1988a:35). With this stricture deeply in mind, we are forced to ask 'where are we up to?' For those of us opposed to the present situation, we need to explore again what might be the essential ingredients of a project to revolutionise society. And, as I shall go on to wonder, in what way does any of this have significance for the membership of the institution of youth work, its youth workers?

## The Project of Autonomy

For Castoriadis this project, this struggle to which he was utterly committed, recognises the inseparability of individual and social autonomy. I cannot be free unless you are also free! To be individually autonomous is to decide the rules by which you choose to live, except that such decisions

cannot be made in isolation. We must face the consequences of our own and everyone else's needs and desires. Thus a group aspiring to autonomy or indeed the autonomous society of the future must decide collectively its social laws and values. Forgive the repetition, but crucially such a fledgling group, acting in the here and now, or the future autonomous society itself, knows that its members or citizens have created these norms and no-one else. Unlike the Ten Commandments, Chairman Mao's 'Little Red Book' or the FTSE Index these conclusions are forever open to challenge and change.

For Castoriadis the struggle to create an autonomous, open society as opposed to a heteronomous, closed society is never finished. Such a society will always be being composed and interpreted. It cannot breathe without philosophy, the never-ending interrogation of supposed certainty and truth. Neither can it be sustained without an authentic democracy based on the direct power of its members within which all decisions and all representatives, if and when needed, are always open to repeal and recall.

An essential part of such a people's democracy is its collective sense of self-limitation. Merely to propose this is to expose the gulf between its sentiment and the present-day arrangements. How far are we from accepting that 'we can't all do or have whatever we fancy', which is expressed most dramatically perhaps by the ecological question, 'what on earth are we doing to and with the planet's resources?' Without doubt Castoriadis risks the sneers of all those wedded to perpetual production and ceaseless consumption when he suggests that in the face of the potentially catastrophic effects of capitalist expansion upon the environment, this is a moment for 'phronesis', a degree of caution and prudence in how we face the future.

Of enormous importance in thinking about the project of autonomy is its relationship both to theory and education. As early as 1964 Castoriadis suggests 'theory as such is a making/doing, the always uncertain attempt ... to elucidate the world', doubting the total grasp of any theoretical explanation as such (2005: xxx). Thirty years later Castoriadis reflects that social theory rather than being a constant search for knowledge is reduced in the main to the reiteration of established beliefs. On what basis he asks does the social theorist stand outside of and contemplate the very social relations of which she is an integral part? For there are no such grounds available to the social individual. There is no elevated vantage point from which the intellectual speculates as if she is above it all. To paraphrase Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who did not abandon his critical role, the theorist tries to stand still within and make the defining comment upon the movement of a turbulent stream, whose unpredictable currents will sweep both him and his conclusions off their feet.

This same tension haunts the social educator, in our case the youth worker, whose relationship to her students, if it seeks to encourage autonomy, cannot be based upon her hierarchical status or the supposed superiority of her knowledge. Her task, following Aristotle, is to play a part in educating both herself and her students to be citizens capable of governing and being governed. Indeed a

radical 'paideia', a process of life-long learning, seeks unceasingly to undermine imposed authority, understanding that the claim to know more or better so easily masks a desire for power.

### And, so to Youth Work

There is little doubt that the 20th century history of youth work places it firmly in the camp of heteronomy. Its wish has been to socialise young people into an acceptance of such key significations as 'discipline', 'the work-ethic' and 'reverence for authority'. In the early days of a new millennium what has changed? Today, both 'directeurs and executants', to borrow a phrase from Castoriadis' early writings on bureaucracy, the order-givers and the order-takers within youth work, talk of 'respect' and 'prescribed behavioural outcomes'. In defence of their pragmatic acquiescence to an agenda of social control, they intone, 'we must fit in, young people must fit in – there's no other game in town'. Of course, critical opposition to this sad scenario exists. Against the tide, individuals duck and dive, doing their best to ride the waves of compliance. However, explicit dissent is dismissed as political naiveté, the time-worn response of the politically neutered. The majority's supposedly superior common sense dictates that once again heteronomy, doing as you are told, seems to be in the ascendancy. Unfortunately their advocacy of subservience to New Labour's less than new arrangements forgets youth work's own history. Our status as officers or workers is not a gift from our betters. Rather it is the fragile outcome of previous contests around the meaning and significance of youth work.

Indeed, in its early days an alternative to conformity was proposed by working-class youth organisations, confident in the ability of young people to be part of changing the world. Throughout youth work's history dissidents expressed a commitment to a democratic approach full of optimism about young people. Disconcertingly these voices were sometimes found to be within the institution's hierarchy, its great and good, giving the impression that on the ground practice was more enlightened than was really the case. However, more recently and in a collective form I have underestimated, the struggle for autonomy surfaced in the social-democratic inspired birth of the professional Youth Service following the 1959 Albermarle Report. Its person-centred, process-led perspective, drawing on Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers, amongst others, challenged and disturbed the conservative concord within the work. By the mid-70s this critique was under pressure itself from the proponents of a radical youth work practice, symbolised by separate work with young women and with black young people. Whereas the desire to change things via professionalism was bedevilled by its top-down origins, in the heady days of its youth the radical critique emerged from below, intimately related to the social movements of the time. It was creative and oppositional, of the autonomous tradition, but this period was short-lived. Whilst a fusion of the person-centred with the political, often labelled as Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Discriminatory Practice, aspired to be the official line of the institution, not least within the corridors of the training agencies, its health was fading fast. In particular two developments contributed to its abandonment of an autonomous orientation. Firstly, the initiatives

forsook self-criticism, falling back on a closed theory, which explained everything in the name of the Other, the Enemy, be they men or white people. For a period to criticise this heteronomous way of explaining oppressive relations was defined without trial as essentially sexist or racist. Secondly, as the tide turned against municipal socialist-feminism and the crumbling social movements, more than a few of its zealots rationalised their embrace of so-called ‘new managerialism’. If they couldn’t win hearts and minds, they would impose their agenda by bureaucratic and technical means. No wonder they danced in joy as New Labour came to power. By the mid-1990s a living, collective current identifying itself with the liberal, libertarian or radical positions of the 60s and 70s had all but vanished. Is this the end of the story?

### **Battling Back – Renewing a Critical Youth Work Practice?**

The present situation can easily induce pessimism, but remembering our Gramsci, let us show optimism of the will and believe that a renaissance of a collective, radical practice is possible. Drawing on Castoriadis, what might be among the essential ingredients in the renewal of a sense of purpose within the work?

1. Youth workers must strive to be critical thinkers. They need to become philosophers, the ceaseless interrogators of whatever proposals are put before them. Thus they must abandon their historic allegiance to ‘common-sense’, whilst refusing the closed certainties of religious and secular ideologies, be they Christian, Muslim, Feminist, Marxist, Neo-Liberal or whatever. In countering heteronomy they must debate and organise independently of their management.
2. Youth workers must be authentic democrats. They need to question the absurdity of unaccountable and unrecalable representation, symbolised by today’s parliamentary democracy. Consequently in their work with young people, they should endeavour not to mimic the roles and institutions of the present-day democratic charade (Youth Councils, Youth Parliaments or Young Mayors). With all its pressures, they ought to foster the direct involvement of young people in any decision-making process, knowing that this is the only way that any of us become democratically educated
3. Fifty years ago Castoriadis was reflecting on the insanity of ever-increasing production and consumption, pursued without the slightest concern about the planet’s resources. In my younger days under the spell of Trotsky’s belief in our mastery over Nature – ‘we can move mountains’ – I failed miserably to appreciate the environmental dilemmas. Today, youth workers must be sincere ecologists, which will be no easy matter. It’s tricky and complex with more than a few Greens becoming the new authoritarians. In terms of dialogue with young people both parties will have to confront one of contemporary society’s most powerful imaginaries, ‘the never-satiated compulsion to consume’. Few of us have resisted its seduction.

4. Since the mid-70s I have been obsessed with the profound question of how best to understand why individuals act as they do. At this moment I am thrown into turmoil by Castoriadis. As is clear I think the Heteronomy versus Autonomy thesis is of real value. However it can lead to a dubious dualism. It's either one or the other. To some extent this is illustrated in Castoriadis' insistence on 'the intimate solidarity between a social regime and the anthropological types needed to make it function'. As examples he cites the selfless civil servant or the dedicated teacher. Presumably in a heteronomous society these souls are committed to the sustenance of the social order. For my part I have fought all my political life against the notion of a general typology of personality. Of course there is no time here to discuss this further. All I can suggest is that it seems to me more fruitful to explore the tension in all of us between being heteronomous or being autonomous, between accepting or challenging the system. How open to influence is this fluctuating balance of allegiance? Thus, in my view, there is a contradiction between his functionalist notion of 'anthropological types' fabricated by a particular society and his description of a psychoanalytic process focused on the liberation of the particular individual, the pursuit of autonomy. His sociological argument is in danger of reducing humanity to the brainwashed servants of the powerful. On the other hand, his psychoanalytic proposal that the creative impulse flowing from the Unconscious is stifled in the main by social and political orthodoxy has significant implications for work with young people. Youth workers worth their salt need to think anew about how they interpret their own and young people's 'behaviour'. In particular they need to be wary of the seductive simplicities offered by the recent revival of an instrumental adolescent psychology, dressed up as Positive Youth Development (Smith, 2003).
  
5. As Castoriadis often notes, one of the most dominant imaginaries historically is the belief that without hierarchy, without so-called experts, life would collapse. In his analysis of the work place he illustrates, to the contrary, that the company would disintegrate if the supposed subordinates, classically the clerical staff, did not correct constantly the mistakes of their management. In this context youth workers must struggle against the widely held view that it is the Executive, whether they be David Cameron or his clone, Nick Clegg, Richard Branson or Alex Ferguson, who hold the key to success. It will be well worth revisiting critically the person-centred, non-directive approaches fostered in the 60s and 70s. All the more so given the contempt with which such permissive ideas were regarded during New Labour's authoritarian occupation of power.
  
6. Controversially, given the significant influence of religion upon Youth Work, Castoriadis challenges youth workers to face up to their own mortality. To recognise our mortality is to accept fully our essential responsibility for the world in which we live. Freed from the suffocating, illusory mask of immortality proffered by religion, the figment of an eternal insurance policy, we know, recognising our debt to the past that the present and the future depend on our active creativity. If Armageddon occurs it will not be God's judgement. It will be the tragedy of our own collective, human doing.

7. Castoriadis throws down the gauntlet to youth workers when he speaks about education. In his eyes, the key to having a chance of changing affairs is the development of radical pedagogy. Such an oppositional educational practice is suffused with optimism about humanity's potential. Echoing the sentiments of liberals and libertarians from John Dewey to A.S. Neill, he stresses that education is about 'becoming a person'. He asserts that the educational relationship must be based on nurturing to the maximum the conscious self-activity of all those involved. He demands that any educational institution, not least youth work, must at every turn answer the questions, 'why are we learning, discussing, doing this?' At the height perhaps of 60s naïveté, youth work desired to be holistic and emancipatory. For sure it fell short of these ideals, but today it seems to have abandoned this unpredictable commitment in favour of doing as prescribed. Without doubt, in far more difficult circumstances than 40 years ago, youth workers must try to breathe fresh life into pedagogy, the point of which 'is not to teach particular things, but to develop in the young person the capacity to learn : learn to live, learn to discover, learn to invent' (1997:130).
8. Youth workers must be philanthropists not misanthropists. As I construct this sentence I can but smile. In my time I've hardly been a great supporter of youth work's philanthropic tradition, its ideology of doing good from above to a backward working-class youth. Perhaps, in vain, I wish to propose an alternative definition of philanthropy in harmony with its Greek origin, 'philanthropos', a love for humanity. This seems important within a contemporary climate of misanthropy, fuelled by a dislike towards and distrust of others, perhaps especially 'dangerous youth'. Indeed, at the risk of being misinterpreted wilfully, I will stand with Castoriadis in saying that it was the teacher or youth worker, who we loved and who loved us, who inspired our love of learning. Of course, in the present climate such a proposal is to invite not only scorn, but outraged, even violent hostility. So I'll settle for suggesting that, even though young people can be bloody hard work, we must reclaim the politics of 'being on their side'.

### And, the Wider Struggle Continues

At this point I suspect that I reach an ironic moment in the proceedings. I have tried to draw out the significance of Castoriadis' thinking for a resuscitation of the Radical Youth Work project. However, in truth, Castoriadis has a lot, but no more and no less to say to youth workers than anyone else. All those desiring to play a part in changing the world are social and political educators, whether they be parents, community activists, trade union militants or indeed youth workers. Of course all those opposing change have a social and political agenda too, despite their usual apoplexy at such a suggestion, and I have collided with many of this persuasion across youth work. Ironically, within the profession, the overwhelming majority from either side would be deeply reluctant to admit that the basis of their interference in a young person's life is but a matter of opinion. Yet, whether we wish to socialise young people into believing in or politicise them through a critique of the status quo, ours is a subjective act. Our intervention into social relations is not objective, scientific or based on some



certificated body of superior professional knowledge. None of which is to deny that, in my opinion, some opinions are infinitely more informed and better than others. Whether I can persuade anyone to agree with me is the very stuff of political debate and struggle. Even now to question youth work's special status is likely to be viewed as an act of treason by a fledgling profession, serviced by a mini-bureaucracy of managers and consultants, desperate for official approval.

Ironically, whatever its rhetoric, state-funded youth work seems to have embraced with few tears the prescriptive agenda espoused until its recent demise by New Labour. In tune with the times, reflecting the widespread fatalism felt by so many, youth workers seem to be shrugging their shoulders in resignation at their situation. And yet, the struggle is not over. We do not need to accept the prevailing heteronomous view that human beings are the objects of history; that somehow we are nothing but pawns in the hands of a destiny determined either by God, Nature or the Global Market. In the spirit and pursuit of autonomy we must reaffirm that human beings create history. In doing so, therefore we know that the task is to nurture our striving to be individually and collectively autonomous. This never-ending process of mutual education will take place wherever we decide to give it a go – in the family, in school, in the workplace, within the community. It will be at its most intense in the collective passion of political struggle. Without doubt youth work can be such an arena, but it will be tough. Practitioners such as I, have wasted perhaps more promising circumstances, but we can learn from the past if we are self-critical together. What's certain is that isolated individuals will not reforge a creative and questioning youth work practice. For this task we need each other's energy, analysis, experience, warmth, wit and humanity.

In his earlier writings, for instance, *On the Content of Socialism*, Castoriadis (1988b: 90-193) attempted to map out in detail the character of a future society, but over the years his work became more abstract. Nonetheless, David Curtis, his indefatigable translator, is right to stress the presence in his writings of the evocation of a way of living together that is cooperative and improvisatory, like the best kind of jazz or the finest moments in Youth Work! It is 'a kind of life that does not deny rationality, planning and organising, but does not confuse the plan with living nor does it live for the plan' (Foreword, 1988a: xviii). It is a kind of life that requires the passionate commitment of its participants. In his fondness for Greek sources Castoriadis quotes from the great chorus in 'Antigone', 'there are many amazing phenomena, but none as amazing as the human being'. His emphasis on the heights to which humanity can climb contrasts with the sullen or complacent routine passivity prevalent today, summed up in the absurd adage, 'nothing ever changes and nothing ever will'. As citizens and youth workers we must keep aflame a belief in the possibility of creating together a world that truly belongs to us all, the autonomous society of Castoriadis' and our imagination. Indeed, in the last year or so the embers of resistance have been poked into life by the emergence of the In Defence of Youth Work Campaign, which asserts in the name of democracy and emancipation, 'the essential significance of the youth worker, whose outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious, yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice with young people' (IDYW:

2009). I will leave the last word with Castoriadis himself. 'It is not what is, but what could be and should be, that has need of us' (1997:130).

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Chris Shute

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pp. 129

Rosemary Charles

‘Just like mother used to make’ asserts the box front of a frozen apple pie. My mother made pie from the Bramleys which grew in our garden, covered with hand-made pastry and served directly from the oven, a result with which the supermarket version bears scant but feebler resemblance.

This analogy came to mind having read Chris Shute’s recent publication about Joy Baker. I first read Joy’s own book *Children in Chancery* relatively recently and was gripped by her erudite but entertaining account of bringing up seven children almost entirely single-handed. Joy did not see any separation between upbringing and educating so none of the children went to school, a path which unfortunately taught them more about the processes of the legal system than anyone would have chosen. It seems likely that the Bakers were not the sole 1950s family to have taken the ‘or otherwise’ route provided in Section 36 of the 1944 Education Act but they appear to have been the only ones who were subjected to lengthy court battles to use the rights they had and almost certainly unique in having published accounts of these years. As well as *Children in Chancery*, Joy Baker wrote *The House on the Hill* using the name Frances Wilding.

Joy’s views mirror in many respects those I thought myself to be newly discovering when home-educating my own (fewer!) children some decades later. Apart from the passing years having erased the notion that girls and boys should be prepared for adult life differently, I was enthused to find that Joy and I, along with the numerous home-educators of today, agreed on so many aspects of bringing up a family without the artificial environment, imposed curriculum and testing of schools. I was delighted to discover Joy had lived only a few miles from where I now do and that many of the public figures mentioned in the account of her legal nightmares of the 1960s were current when I first came to the county a decade later. Still with the warm glow of having found a kindred spirit, both philosophically and geographically, in Joy Baker I greeted the news of a new volume about her from the Educational Heretics Press with enthusiastic anticipation. This was to be a home-made apple pie moment among my mother’s best!

Unfortunately the slim volume which arrived was more akin to the frozen-version pie. This book tells Joy's story, with some analysis, in half the number of pages used in her own account but with print twice the size. One result is much feeling of her personality is erased. Chris Shute gives a reasonable summary of the situation and introduction in the opening chapter followed by a retelling of *Children in Chancery*. No direct acknowledgement of Joy's work is given but the author reproduces much of her book, both in direct quotes and also in paragraphs which pass as commentary but are in fact more reprints with only small alterations to the original text.

From chapters one to nine we learn of Joy's philosophy that the state had no automatic rights over her children and her conviction that when she said her family was being adequately educated, as stipulated by the law, she should then be left alone to get on with the task. Unfortunately for the Bakers, they encountered representatives of the Local Authority who could not comprehend the spirit of the Education Act and interpreted its letter to mean that only school attendance could equal education. When Joy was away for one night (she arranged a live-in carer) the, then four, children were seized from their beds and taken to a children's home with the intention of forcing their attendance at school. Although it failed, this disturbing act, in all senses, cemented Joy's determination to retain responsibility for her own, a decision which led to a series of court appearances spanning a decade, both locally and in London. Eventually, after the two eldest children were beyond school age, the cases were finally dropped and Joy was left to continue the upbringing of the remaining five children.

In *Children in Chancery* the story is lightened and enhanced with entertaining asides and details of family life. By contrast in Chris Shute's *Joy Baker* the tale is interspersed with pieces of analysis, some of which one is surprised to see at that point in the text, for example on p22 the narrative is diverted for an anecdote about learning to read. However the majority of comment is reserved for chapter ten. Here, one hoped, might be a study of the differences between home education in the 1950s and now, especially what has been learned from Joy Baker's landmark court cases; perhaps the media reporting of those times could be revisited; people involved in the events are still alive and interviews now would be fascinating; maybe the Baker children themselves might be traced? None of these avenues is explored. There is no attributed quote in the book although newspaper reports are mentioned, nor is there a bibliography. Chris Shute's overview of non-school educational ideas, in part linked to the previous text, will provide insight for readers new to this subject. However his authority to draw conclusions is undermined by incorrect implication, on pages 2, 105, 113 and 128, that parents have to be 'allowed' to home educate. Home education has an equal place in law with school education and it is the right of all parents to follow this path if they feel it is in the best interests of their children according to 'age, abilities and aptitude' – exactly what Mrs Baker was trying to establish!

Reading Chris Shute's book will give you an introduction to the life and achievements of Joy Baker just as supermarket apple pie is satisfying if none other is available. But for the full taste experience,

seek out a copy of the original, *Children in Chancery*, still available from libraries.

**Rosemary Charles is an experienced home educator although her children are now adult.**

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*Gunn Strand Hutchinson (ed.)*

**Community Work in Nordic Countries**

Universitetsforlaget, 2009

ISBN 978-82-15-01508-8

£30.88

pp. 191

Amelia Lee

**C**ommunity Work in Nordic Countries is a good example of the influence that British youth and community work has had on other countries. In the first chapter ‘The Mandate for Community Work’, British models and theories from the 1960s and 1970s in particular are cited as vital motivators for the work carried out in the Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Although there are significant nuances between countries which separate out their distinctiveness (for example Iceland became active in community work in the 1980s, twenty years after the rest of the Nordic Countries and at a time when other countries faced threats to their community work practice), it is clear that all these countries share a common ideology and pragmatism which has helped them understand and develop community work in such a way that has placed it in a central position within ‘social work’.

The stages of community work detailed in the book follow the same stages that the UK has gone through in recent decades including:

- A model of social democratic development where an awareness of social inequality has led to the development of community work through a desire for an ‘egalitarian redistribution of wealth’ beyond a blaming culture;
- The movement towards ‘collective individualism’ redefining the nature of the work as ‘communitarianism’ – a balance between the rights of the individual and their responsibilities to the community;
- The rise of professionalism within community work which then gave rise to a critique of this;
- The issues of bureaucracy within community social work giving rise to the worker being the ‘helpless helper’ (p34);
- Community work in a multi-disciplinary landscape.

In the chapter by Päivi Turunen on ‘Nordic Community Work in Transition’ there is a detailed account of how each country has developed in relation to community work and how there has been significant

convergence between social work and community work. Social work does have its own interpretation from country to country within the Nordic States, but there appears to be a great deal of overlap with the British concept as illustrated by Jones and Novak in Gordon Vincenti's chapter:

*The view of Social Work from below has been largely negative. There is a widespread sensibility in many working-class neighbourhoods that Social Workers are to be avoided because of their powers to remove children or commit people to mental hospitals. There is very little trust.*

There is not necessarily a critique of the trend towards community social work, though the author does examine a piece of research which shows how community work has often been squeezed out of a social worker's day-to-day practice. The exception is in places such as Finland, where decentralised Social Services have resulted in community work being carried out as part of ordinary social work. The piece talks about an 'hourglass phenomenon' (p43) whereby community work was expansive pre-1980, then became very narrowly defined for a time, and is now to be found across disciplines such as in housing, social work, environmental neighbourhood work and even in social entrepreneurialism, which makes it hard to define or quantify.

Echoes of David Cameron's new 'localism' can be heard in the way that the decentralisation of power has taken place in the Nordic States. The power movement from central government to 'municipalities', to local institutions and then to the community is known in the Nordic Countries as the 'third decentralisation'. Again, the book documents these transitions in scientific chronological order rather than critique the effect that they have had, and where either successes or challenges lie with these models.

In Alf Ronnby's chapter entitled 'Empowering people by community building', the author makes a case for empowerment and power for ordinary people: 'We must recreate community spirit because alienation, loneliness and greed are problems of our time' (p19). This chapter is a useful handbook for any new community worker in terms of the theory, practice and praxis of mobilising communities, with some case studies which could equally apply in the UK as they could to the Nordic States. There are also some movements such as the 'New Village Movement' which show how and where empowerment of local communities can work, and how cooperatives can play an important role in this.

Mary Alice Økland and Kjell Henriksbø look at two projects to explore bottom-up and top-down community work in their chapter 'Two Norwegian Cases'. These case studies exemplify that where the community is genuinely the 'central actor' that both approaches, 'power with' in the grassroots 'Bare Angst' example, and 'power to' in the 'Melkeplassen' top-down example, can be highly effective (p166).

In the final chapter we are presented with some tensions, conundrums and questions. Karna Lindén asks us a question pertinent in most European countries: ‘What will come of this situation where the state tends to prescribe what [community] social work should be like and economic considerations often decide its content?’ Grodon Vincenti in his chapter ‘Community Work in Denmark, a Watershed of Possibilities’ offers us the following directions: ‘marketisation’, ‘social inclusion’ or ‘radical resistance’.

Overall this book is a good generic introduction to community work applicable to most Western countries, as well as an important documentation of the development of community work in Nordic Countries, which thus far has been relatively undocumented in the wider field of Youth and Community Work.

**Amelia Lee is a youth work trainer and facilitator for ICA:UK, a keen ‘feminist webber’, and leads on strategy for the LGBT Youth North West Network**

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*Ani Wierenga*

**Young People Making a Life**

Palgrave Macmillan 2008

ISBN 978 0 230 54928 9

£52.00 (hbk)

pp. 243

Susannah Rigg

**A**ni Wierenga’s new book, *Young People Making a Life*, offers an appealing insight into the world of 32 young people from Myrtle Vale, a small town in Tasmania, Australia. Relying upon data from a 12-year longitudinal study, she investigated how these young people went about ‘making a life’. Examining the resources that young people called upon to do this she highlighted how young people without access to the necessary resources are potentially restricted in their ability to make a life for themselves.

A great strength of Wierenga’s book comes in the framework that she creates to help make sense of the great complexity of youth transitions. After extensive empirical research, she develops four ideal-types, which she uses to explain the differences in young peoples’ experiences of growing up. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of ideal-typical models, her framework nonetheless proves useful in identifying the different possibilities for young people in the transition to adulthood. The author describes young people as ‘exploring’, ‘settling’, ‘wandering’ or ‘retreating’. This typology allows for class and gender definitions to be attached to each group. She explains that ‘explorers’, for example are generally made up of mixed gender, middle class and female working class. They draw



upon global references and resources that are external to their everyday environment to tell coherent stories about their life. Conversely, ‘settlers’, predominantly working class males tell coherent stories, however they draw upon locally generated resources to do so. ‘Retreaters’, who are predominantly working class females, call upon similar local resources to ‘settlers’, yet their stories tend to be fragmented and uncertain. The final ideal-type, ‘wanderers’ (mostly mixed gender and working class) exhibit incoherent forms of narratives based on their intention to achieve social recognition beyond the confines of Myrtle Vale. The author uses these ideal-types throughout the book to make sense of the variety of resources utilised by young people growing up.

In addition, Wierenga makes some interesting assertions about the effect that relationships have on a young person’s ability to ‘make a life’. She describes how ‘in all cases, flows of important resources depend upon relationships of trust (with individuals, groups, and/or institutions), that in turn depend upon individual and group history’ (2008). Furthermore, she suggests that young people generate stories about their lives by drawing upon narratives from their past, present and future. These, according to her, are often limited by their ‘known worlds’ (2008:51). In order to develop clear narratives the young people must therefore be able to access ‘backward references (building on history)’ and ‘forward references’ (2008:55). If these resources are not available then narratives become inconsistent or incoherent. These claims have implications for policy making, which are highlighted by the author. She argues convincingly that it is necessary to create networks of trust on which young people can rely. This would aid them in generating coherent life narratives. This is, undoubtedly, particularly important for young people who do not have established trust networks or generational histories as a resource when attempting to construct their identities.

It is clear throughout the book that Wierenga places much value on the practice of narrative formation, something that she defines as ‘storying’. She describes it as ‘the act of listening to, telling, re-telling or revising a story. Rather than being completed products, stories can most usefully be understood as ongoing creative endeavours’ (2008:54). Wierenga’s fundamental point then is that it is the act of storying, rather than the final narrative product that is important. In my opinion, here the author approximates Giddens’, ‘Reflexive project of the self’ (1991:5). He is just as concerned with the ‘project’ or the ‘act’ of narrative formation as he is with the final results.

A further criticism could be added to that. Only this time it would relate to the books’ failure to fully draw me into the life stories of the young people. At times I felt that the wealth of data collected over so many years, disappointingly lacked depth. This is unfortunate since longitudinal studies are known for their capacity to allow for all that temporal richness inherent in life-stories to come through. On a closer note, however, one must allow for that all-important ‘ethicity’ to stand out when it comes to research. It is easy to imagine that, out of a preoccupation for good practice, the researcher was forced to make choices. This would involve limiting the amount of information presented due to the confined location where participants lived, as identification of participants would have been facilitated by the

demographic dimensions of a small town.

Nevertheless, *Young People Making a Life* delivers a well researched portrayal of young people growing up in rural Australia; at the same time that it produces theories that hold relevance beyond its very particular setting. The four-ideal types framework can be utilised and perhaps tested by other scholars working in this field. This study has certainly produced valid suggestions for youth policy, highlighting important issues that must be seriously considered.

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Cambridge:Polity.

**Susannah Rigg, Birkbeck College, University of London**

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*Janie Hampton*

### **How the Girl Guides won the war**

Harper Press 2010

ISBN number 978-0-00-735631-7

Price £20 (hbk)

pp. 310

Jonathan Roberts

**W**hat an interesting book! Janie Hampton has listened to many women's stories and worked them into a lively patchwork of voices that express the identity of Guides and Guiding. This is a last hurrah for the youth work and the workers of 70 years ago, and a challenge to the Guides as they celebrate their centenary.

If you have led a robust resistance to an armed siege and applied your life after 50 to young people (Jeal, 1989), it should not be surprising that your youth work helps young people to be resilient in times of total war. The reputation of the Guides for respectability only reinforces my delight to see Guiding taking on the nightmares of the Second World War. This is the first theme of Hampton's book: it is the genetic product of Baden – Powell and all his works. Again and again there are stories of girls trying to smile in appalling situations, doing good deeds, and trying to do their badge work. Like the Founder, this book seems in places to be 'a compendium of bite sized pieces' 'a piece of textual and cultural "blasting and bombadiering"' (Boehmer, 2004:xxxvi). The respect of the sources for the great man meant that they wrote in imitation of his delight in cheerful adventure and skilful social development of young people. So, we get to hear and see the in-house publicity as it encouraged

its readers to be effective on the Home Front and there is little surprise to find Guides and Brownies collecting paper, rose hips, cotton reels and much else (chapter 10). Again there are diverting reports of trying to run things as usual (chapters 3, 7, 8 and 18) and even some descriptions of Buckingham Palace, so close to HQ (chapter 11).

But these nice images are not the ones that stay. Just as the Commandos recruited Scouts for what they had learned as teenagers, so the Guides were recruited for their First Aid skills, their capacity to roll victims of incendiary bombs in blankets, take messages through the Blitz: living out the Founder's stories (p74 and see Baden Powell, 1908: 12). The British Guides found real roles in the war and this book gives details to fill the empty coats on the women's memorial in Whitehall. The capacity of adult leaders to use what they had learned from Guiding to care for children who had no other adult (the Kindertransport, chapter 4), and most impressively, three women who cared for 40 children evacuated from Glasgow to near Perth (chapter 16). Finally there are the stories of preparing Guides for post war relief work in devastated Europe (chapter 21). This is disciplined courage dealing with the here and now, and I did wonder if our generation's youth work would be as effective.

It was a world war and Guiding is a worldwide movement, and the book takes us around the world. The scene is set with European Guides meeting at an international peace camp in 1939 in Hungary (Prologue). Refugees to Britain's Guides became known as Golodrinns to express the hope that this migration was like a summer bird. But we read more about occupied Europe. The Channel Islands continue to surprise with their mix of British pluck and miserable brutish occupation (Barrows and Shaffer, 2008). Polish Guides use their organisation to resist occupation (chapters 6, 15, 17), maintaining Guiding in Ravensbruck for four years (I liked the patrol names: Bricks, Cement, etc. (page 223), and living the Guide promise in Auschwitz: 'We must survive in the best form' (page 219). Each story is astonishing: a group of Poles interned in Uzbekistan, passed through Iran, finding safety in East Africa (chapter 19). Guide leaders using Brownie and Guide groups in internment camps in the Far East to create hope for the future and a sense of normal life for the girls (chapters 9, 14, and 20) – this is a useful complement to *Tenko*, and *The Empire of the Sun* (Ballard, 1984).

This book matches Cannadine's summary of what sort of history is being written now: 'History as it is written and researched, and above all as it is presented to a popular audience, at the beginning of the 21st Century, is about identity, about who we are and where we come from. At a time when other sources of identity such as class and region have declined, history is stepping in to fill the gap.' (Cannadine, 2002: 12). This ought to sell to a country where maybe 25% of all women pass through the Guiding movement, but I am still not sure why my 14 year old Guide niece would read it, or my grown up Guide daughter – despite the ease of the prose. The unease we have about the Guides is addressed a little in chapter 22 with the record of so many women who have disliked the movement, as well as those who identify with it. I am not sure that it will do to bridge the cultural gap to the war with the recommendation to be cheerful and smile.

At one point the book steps up a gear to be more than a chronicle of stories and to seek meanings: the Guide movement addressed the attachment disorder studied by John Bowlby. Instability and lack of parental love were addressed by the order of the programme and the care of the leaders. This is important critical thinking and could be linked to the work on resilience that is important for youth work (Benard, 2002, 2004; Gilligan, 1999), the studies of Feinstein et al (2006) on the effectiveness of different approaches to work with young people, and the wider studies of social capital (Putnam, 2000). I like Guides' robust approach and the imaginative researching of what girls and young women think and do, it might help them too to explore in more depth what is going on in the interaction between women leaders and girl members.

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Joanne Griffiths

**Becoming a Professional**

YTC Press 2007

ISBN 978 1 84753 720 1

pp. 116

Kate Robinson

*Becoming a Professional* attempts to tackle an area of research that has been largely overlooked in our profession and as such should first and foremost be commended for getting the discussion ‘out there’.

However, the academic presentation of the argument was not one I expected. I assume the author originally intended her work to be written as a dissertation for her MA studies. The fact that her work produced findings that hold content significant to the profession and have therefore been published gives credibility to her research, but readers need to be aware of the nature of the book. Those who are unused to reading essays may find the first part of the book somewhat of a struggle, as the author is required to ‘go through the motions’ of an academic piece of writing. Whilst arguments are easy to follow, the useful content is harder to get at due to the need to wade through the opening chapters. This does not however negate the fact that the findings are not only valid but also incredibly useful to those embarking upon first post employment as well as their employers.

Griffiths begins by outlining previous research and literature about the establishment of professional identity in other contexts. She uses theories of stages of professional socialisation to provide a framework for her own theories and studies. Her work highlights the fact that very little direct research in this area has been applied to the youth work profession. She goes on to justify her methodology, expounding her use of certain methods to gain the most insightful findings to analyse.

The final three chapters of the book develop her findings and argument, and the reader is drawn in with interest. I have to admit it did come as some relief to get to this point! None the less, as an individual currently in her first post following graduation from youth and community work training, the insights found are invaluable and encouraging. Griffiths helpfully pulls out themes such as expectations, performance, integration and identity to discuss common experiences of workers in their first post. She looks at these in regards to youth workers ‘becoming professional’. At times the book seems to suggest that difficulties within a first post revolve around learning how to manage teams, interact with government and faith based agencies, keeping up with legislation and funding issues as key areas that workers need to deal with as a new ‘professional’.

This raises questions about what elements make a youth worker a ‘professional’? The aforementioned are certainly demands of most youth worker posts and are certainly more of a shock to the system

than one would expect, but competence in these areas does not necessarily make for a good youth worker. However her analysis does not end here; ‘becoming a professional’ does not mean simply having more responsibility than previously experienced in placement or elsewhere. To quote a comment from one of Griffiths’ focus groups, *‘lots of things around you might change, like policy, people you work with and stuff like that, but if you are self-aware and can hold onto the principles of youth work in it all, then you will do ok’*. (p.59)

It is recognised that simply attaining a qualification does not automatically catapult people into the realm of ‘professional’, rather it helps to shift people up a gear. In the same way Griffiths suggests that the first post has the potential to make a further important gear shift in professional youth work. The importance lies therefore not in students learning how to complete specific tasks before they can function fully as a youth worker, particularly in a world dominated by other ‘professionals’. Rather, skills and ‘know-how’ have the potential to boost the performance and effectiveness of any youth work post but if the worker is not well managed they also hold the power to drain away all time and energy for the real ‘youth work’. Knowledge and skills can be quickly adopted and attained; it is how these are applied within the context of the worker’s prior experience and understanding of youth work that is key. Griffiths’ most poignant argument therefore is the need for suitable, reliable and effective support systems for students embarking upon their first posts: particularly to ensure maintained reflective practice within such a demanding new role with seemingly innumerable responsibilities.

There is a danger that as this research focused on graduates from a particular degree course that the findings would simply reveal holes in the specific training delivered. However Griffiths manages to largely avoid this potential pitfall. The fact is that even the best courses and placements are unable to prepare students for the reality of their first post. Griffiths helps by outlining factors that are crucial in determining the success of this post, where the responsibility lies with the training programme, employers and the youth worker. Those searching for posts as well as those who are truly seeking to create a post that will best serve young people should take good heed of these.

This work leaves the field wide open for further research and commentary to be made from this foundational research. For example the book fails to tackle those who have perhaps had years of youth work employment and experience who then study as mature students and continue work after. I wonder whether it is the stage of life most of Griffiths’ participants were at that were a key factor in these results, due to their relative lack of prior experience in the field. This raises the question of whether it is studying that makes a difference or the new level of responsibility that accompanies the first post once students have graduated?

To summarise, the content of the book is detailed and insightful and well-worth reading and reflecting on. At present the potential for its widespread utility and effectiveness is slightly hampered by the academic layout. This could be helped if it were written up in a format accessible to a wider audience

who deserve to benefit from it.

### Kate Robinson works as Centre Director for Durham Youth for Christ.

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*Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain*

#### **Riotous Citizens: Ethnic Conflict in Multicultural Britain**

Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008

ISBN: 9780754646273

£55 (hbk)

pp. 193

Kalbir Shukra

**T**his book exposes key myths surrounding the 2001 riots that took place in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley and provides an alternative understanding of the events. If at the point of opening the book you have any notion that each of the riots in the north of England that year was a single event consisting mainly of Asian youth resolved to cause mayhem and destruction because their parents had irresponsibly lost control of them, then you will find your understanding seriously challenged.

The authors adhere to the important principle of placing the violent disorder in its local and historical context and so we learn about the specific social and economic conditions in the three towns. It is onto this understanding that the various perspectives of the riots gleaned through the research are grafted. A wealth of data is presented to demonstrate that there are many competing understandings of the riots and that there was a high level of diversity in relation to the age of the participants, the actions that they took and what those actions meant to them. Crucially, the perspectives of rioters themselves is included and in the process a very different picture emerges to that painted by mainstream journalists, politicians and promoters of the community cohesion agenda. The authors use the interviews to provide us with other readings of both the events that led up to the crises and the management of them. The considerable use of interviews allows us to hear the voices of the communities who were actively involved and most seriously affected by the events.

In developing their critique of the 2001 events, the authors draw on concepts that will be familiar to most readers of *Youth and Policy*: the construction of Asian young men as ‘folk devils’, the process of manufacturing ‘moral panics’ and the criminalising of young people. In addition there is a theoretical discussion of the ‘the crowd’ that might be of interest to readers of this journal. There are important parallels with the 1980s that are drawn on, though the authors are keen to also stress the distinctiveness of anti-Muslim and anti-Asian discourse and the effect of 9/11 on the state’s response to individuals caught up in the riots as well as the behaviours attributed to Asian communities generally. Bravely, the authors take on key proponents of the community cohesion agenda, including Ted Cantele, and

question ideas that became New Labour orthodoxy.

One of the many strengths of the book is the generous supply of detail and thick description, giving voice to so many whose voices are not otherwise heard. The book is primarily concerned with Bradford – so we find out how Asian people in Bradford came to know that trouble was brewing, what the nature of that trouble was from different points of view, how the police and local authority handling of it exacerbated the situation, how rumours spread on the streets and why events that began in the city centre with one set of actors turned into something quite different at the other end of town and with a different set of participants feeling under siege. From the strength of this understanding, the authors are able to compare Bradford with the riots in Oldham and Burnley, identifying some startling differences. In addition, the book explores how the events affected relationships between different ethnic groups and how harshly the criminal justice system disciplined those found to be involved.

While back copies of *Youth and Policy* have included a range of papers critiquing community cohesion, preventing violent extremism and Islamophobia, this book significantly adds to our critical understanding of a number of key developments. These include the crisis in Bradford in 2001, the development of the community cohesion agenda, and the brutal policing, criminalisation and punishment of Asian communities. The harsh reality of post-80s riots policing is clearly identified by the writers. What they could have registered too is how the policing, surveillance and legislation measures brought in against those arrested in 2001 were based on the state's accumulated experience of policing protestors, strikers, IRA bombings and inner city riots of the 1980s.

The authors point to a shift in the perception and treatment of Asians from being an 'enemy within' to 'a new wider global enemy' (p177) after the attacks of 9/11. Thereafter, overt expressions of anti-Muslim and anti-Asian prejudice became commonplace and it became almost impossible for Asians being policed in those areas to expect justice. Simultaneously, there were many less visible effects on relationships between people from different minority communities.

Around a decade on from the events, this book remains a strong reminder of the value of hearing directly from those involved to gain a grounded and critical understanding of events. Such an understanding is developed by analysing the local social, political and policy context to challenge the political, policy and public discourses that define the people that we work with as problematic, and that turn them into objects of repression, surveillance and remedial measures. This book is one we should all read and discuss but my fear is that the price will make it inaccessible to many.

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*Filip Coussée*

**A Century of Youth Work Policy**

Gent Academia Press 2008

ISBN: 978 90 382 1275 3

No price attached

pp.136

Howard Williamson

This book was produced explicitly as an anchor manuscript for the first European seminar on the history of youth work in Europe, held in the Flemish part of Belgium in April 2008. It is essentially an abbreviated and abridged translation of Coussée's doctoral thesis which has already been published in Flemish. That, so I have been told, is a scholarly account of the history of youth work in Flanders which puts Filip Coussée up with Louis Vos as authorities on youth associations, youth movements, youth work and youth social work in Belgium – and indeed across a wider Europe. The translation was supported by the Flemish government and the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, the joint sponsors of the seminar.

In England, there is the comprehensive three-volume history of the youth service written by Bernard Davies (who contributed his knowledge to the seminar), but elsewhere such histories are generally (sadly) lacking. Any further contributions to youth work history in different contexts are therefore very welcome. Though Coussée's book is inevitably essentially about the specifics of Flemish 'youth work policy' over the past century, it is regularly placed in a broader European context, with references to work largely from the UK, Germany and the Netherlands but also further afield (Sweden and Italy, for example, get a mention). In this respect, it stands as a very valuable reference point for those interested in the development of youth work across Europe, despite recurring evidence that the translation was rather rushed, with some glaring grammatical errors and rather incomplete referencing. This aside, the book is well-written, with many engaging turns of phrase. It is a mine of information, with a commanding bibliography. It is both a valuable empirical resource and a useful theoretical challenge.

On p.77 Coussée notes that there is 'nothing new under the sun' and on p.98 that 'history repeats itself'. His fundamental argument is that, underpinning and overlaying all the tensions and contradictions that will always be present in ideas about 'youth work', there is a double-edged youth work paradox. There is a crisis of efficiency, in which demonstrable success works only with young people who may be least in need of it (and doesn't work with others because they cannot be reached or do not wish to get involved). And there is a crisis of *identity*: what is youth work all about? In Flanders, there has been an interminable debate between the idea of youth movements (relatively autonomous youth organisations guided by a light adult touch, though sometimes powerful ideological roots) and an emergent youth social work, connected to welfare issues and determined to reach the less

attached. Coussée calls the former ‘mainstream’ youth work and the latter ‘professional’ youth work, terminology with which some readers may struggle a little until they get used to it. The youth work paradox, according to Coussée, influences – indeed infects and arguably paralyses – the practice and method of youth work, whether or not it is ultimately radical or conformist, critical or integrative, clearly positioned in the ‘third milieu’ (leisure time) or more embedded in wider policy interests around crime, (un)employment, health and other issues.

The historical perspective is quite fascinating. There are numerous quotations that could, with only minor adaptation around some quaint language, be attributed both to proponents and critics of contemporary youth work in the United Kingdom (and, I presume, elsewhere). But the central concepts of ‘third milieu’ and ‘social pedagogy’ are likely to be rather less familiar to readers in these islands. The third milieu is relatively self-evident: the context of life beyond family and school (or the workplace). Social pedagogy has remained contested but was developed initially, and minimally, as a specific form of learning in a social context and through social experiences. At its core are relatively free learning possibilities, organised significantly by young people themselves, albeit often under (young) adult supervision.

There have been numerous permutations and distortions on this thinking in relation to youth work (and, indeed, social work, cultural work, children’s play, and more), to the point of losing any pedagogical meaning whatsoever. In fact, Coussée argues that, in order to respond to demands to broaden engagement with ‘youth work’ by a greater proportion of the youth population, much of what still called itself youth work abandoned any sense of learning within leisure, and simply provided leisure. That was how social pedagogy got corrupted from the ‘bottom’ (because it was seen as the only way young people would want to take part) while from the ‘top’, the state increasingly made demands of ‘youth work’ that moved into other milieu and departed dramatically from the organisation of the ‘social’. (This has not in fact been such a prominent development in Flanders as in, for example, the UK or the Netherlands.) Coussée pulls few punches in his critique of state-sponsored youth services increasingly required to established targeted provision for hard-to-reach young people. He will win both friends and enemies for this attack, but his argument is important, if only because he suggests that even if the ‘right’ young people are reached (and history is not on our side on this one), the impact of interventions is likely to be minimal. On the other hand, the youth work methodology around self-determination and emancipation that has worked pretty well with a different ‘class’ of young people is not likely to prove of interest, let alone, effective with others.

All this does make one wonder what youth work is for, as well as what it is. Despite the damning critique, Coussée is unequivocal in his support for ‘youth work’, albeit with two key caveats. After all, his history does show considerable value and participation across a range of models of youth work practice and over time (even if the mass participation of earlier years has now dwindled). First, he says, the pedagogical component of social pedagogy needs to be restored. Secondly, and more

importantly, the social component needs to be restored to pedagogy. Group association, activity, dialogue, unity and 'non-formal' social learning may ultimately be more important for both personal development and social integration than any more individually-based achievement that youth work may at times foment. Those who manage and make policy on youth work in the UK and across the rest of Europe, particularly those having to deal with social division and community cohesion, please take note.

**Howard Williamson is Professor of European Youth Policy at the University of Glamorgan**

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# HISTORY OF YOUTH & COMMUNITY WORK CONFERENCE

Start: 17.00 Friday 4th March 2011

Finish: 14.00 Sunday 6th March 2011

## Ushaw College, Durham

Residential place(s) @ £215 per person

Non-residential place(s) @ £150 per person

Fees include a £20 non-returnable deposit

Interest in the historical development of youth and community work has continued to grow in recent years. Yet still there remain few opportunities for those interested in this topic to share their knowledge, ideas and research. *Youth and Policy* is therefore sponsoring what will be our sixth study conference on this subject, to be held at Ushaw College, Durham.

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