

youth & policy
no. 88
summer
2005

Youth & Policy

Number 88
Summer 2005



The National Youth Agency

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Published by:

The National Youth Agency,
Eastgate House,
19–23 Humberstone Road,
Leicester LE5 3GJ.
Tel: 0116 242 7350.
Fax: 0116 242 7444
E-mail: nya@nya.org.uk Website: www.nya.org.uk

Proofread by:

CN Proofreaders. Tel: 0191 581 2427

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The National Youth Agency

supports those involved in young people's personal and social development and works to enable all young people to fulfil their potential as individuals and citizens within a socially just society.

We achieve this by:

- informing, advising and helping those who work with young people in a variety of settings;
- influencing and shaping youth policy and improving youth services nationally and locally; and
- promoting young people's participation, influence and place in society.

ISSN 0262 9798

Material from the journal may be extracted for study and quotation with acknowledgement of the journal and author(s).

The views expressed in the journal remain those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Editorial Group or The National Youth Agency.

Whilst every effort is made to check factual information, the Editorial Group is not responsible for errors in the material published in the journal.

Subscriptions: 0116 242 7427

Advertising: 0116 242 7480

Information for contributors: Inside Back Cover.

82

Contents

Youth & Policy
no. 88
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Youth Work: A Manifesto for Our Times <i>Bernard Davies</i>	5
The State of the Youth Service: Recruitment and retention rates of youth workers in England <i>Stephen Moore</i>	29
Youth Related Community Cohesion Policy and Practice: The Divide between Rhetoric and Reality <i>Roger Green and Rebecca Pinto</i>	45
Practitioner Knowledge and Evidence-based Research, Policy and Practice <i>Mary Issitt and Jean Spence</i>	63
What has John Holt got to say about youth work? <i>Louise Paterson</i>	83
Reviews	91
Obituary	109

Contributors

Bernard Davies is a trained youth worker and freelance consultant. He is a member of the management committee of 42nd Street in Manchester, a community-based mental health resource for young people.

Stephen Moore is Reader in Social Policy, APU, Cambridge.

Dr Roger Green is Director of the Centre for Community Research based at the University of Hertfordshire.

Rebecca Pinto is a Researcher at the Centre. Research interests include community cohesion, social exclusion, youth service policy and marginalised groups.

Mary Issitt is in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies MMU Cheshire at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Jean Spence is in the School of Applied Social Science at Durham University.

Louise Paterson is a Youth Worker in Newcastle.

Bishop Roger Sainsbury is Chair of The National Youth Agency.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times

Bernard Davies

In this Special Feature, Bernard Davies sets out what he judges to be the most important and salient features of the activity which names itself 'Youth Work'. Davies brings to bear the full weight of his broad and historically informed experience of practice, teaching, and research to assess the significance of the impact of the contemporary policy environment. He argues that it is crucial that youth work identifies and clarifies those aspects of its practice which distinguish it from other approaches to work with young people and the Manifesto is offered as a contribution to that process. Davies believes that if those associated with the work undertake this task effectively, youth work might grow and flourish in the new context. If practitioners and intellectuals do not take up this challenge, there is a danger that youth work might lose what little authority it already has to address the needs and interests of young people.

Davies has been the most significant practitioner and intellectual in the field of youth work in the last fifty years. His understanding of the nature of the work is based upon an enduring sympathy for the position of young people in society. This sympathy is informed by a systematic and critical understanding of the structural position which they inhabit as young people and as members of different social groups in an unequal and dynamic world. The Manifesto is not presented by Davies as a means of supporting youth work as a profession for its own sake, but because his understanding of the possibilities of the approach indicate that youth work at its best can offer a service to young people which is educational in the fullest meaning of that term and can make a contribution to social justice. Youth work which knows itself, is successful because it knows young people, and knows its own limits, tensions, possibilities and contradictions in relation to the interests of young people in a social, economic and political context.

Youth and Policy is publishing this Manifesto at an important juncture in the history of youth work. The publication of the Green Paper, 'Youth Matters' in July of this year sets the terms of the emerging debate within parameters decided by politicians. The next issue of the journal will be devoted to such debates. The Manifesto offered by Bernard Davies, (which will also be published by The National Youth Agency as a separate offprint), sets the scene for another debate, one conducted in the terms set by those involved in the youth work field. It is this which must surely inform the terms in which the Green Paper is ultimately judged and interpreted.

Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times

Bernard Davies

The current policy context

Has youth work ever been so fashionable – or at greater risk? All over the country services which in the past could barely give it the time of day have suddenly discovered that it can reach previously (for them) unreached and unreachable parts of the adolescent population – and help them ‘consult’ on what they should be doing. Yet these conversions are often highly conditional – even perhaps illusory. Because, in pursuit of their most pressing and precious ‘outcomes’, these agencies frequently end up demanding a cherry-picked, some might say a de-rooted, version of the practice that so attracts them.

The enthusiasts ...

Expectations of youth work rose steadily throughout the 1990s. After 1997 it was ratcheted up still further by New Labour’s increasing pressure on public services to tackle social inclusion. For example:

- In 1993 the Department for Education and Employment funded a three-year ‘youth action scheme’ to test the Youth Service’s ability to reduce young people’s offending (France and Wiles, 1996).
- Between 1996 and 1998 the Home Office invested in research aimed at establishing youth work’s potential for preventing drugs misuse. (Ward and Rhodes, undated).
- Youth work was seen as important for addressing a range of other health concerns, including young people’s sexual health. (See for example Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2001).
- The Neighbourhood Support Fund, resourced to the tune of £70M over its two three-year phases, depended very heavily on youth work methods for reaching and sustaining engagement with that 9% of young people identified as NEET – not in education, employment or training. (Davies and Docking, 2004).
- The Cattle Report (2002) on the 2001 northern cities’ ‘race riots’ identified effective youth work provision as vital for increasing ‘social cohesion’.
- Perhaps most high profile of all, after a rather grudging start, the Connexions Service came to rely more and more on its youth workers for providing key elements of its remit – particularly developmental opportunities and targeted support for more vulnerable young people.

This new youth work chic is not merely flattering. It also seems to underwrite youth work’s survival and even perhaps to promise finally to move it from the recreational margins of public provision for young people. Yet it is within this very possibility that the sharpest paradox lies. Understandably, as well as consultation with their more elusive (non)-users, what these new

courtiers most want from youth work is its *product*: contact with and impacts on young people seen as 'on the edge of – but not yet in – crisis' (Lloyd, 2005). Often, however, they have much less patience with the process which generates these outcomes: with suggestions that for youth work, the medium is a crucial part of the message, that its *hidden* curriculum of inter-personal interaction (especially young person with young person but also young person with adult) is as important for generating the desired outcomes as its declared and overt content.

In addition to substantial anecdotal evidence coming from the field, two recent major pieces of research support this view. The 2004 national study of street-based youth work identified 'a mismatch between the specificity of many of the funding streams supporting street-based work and the complex realities of the field in which it is undertaken'. It concluded that the Department for Education and Skills' *Transforming Youth Work* policy-initiatives were 'moving street-based youth work in the direction of an even more tightly focused approach' and suggested 'the need for greater recognition amongst policy-makers, funders and agency partners of the ... diverse timescales required for effective practice' (Crimmens et al., 2004: 73-4. See also Spence, 2004, who uses evidence from this study to develop arguments parallel to those advanced in this paper). The 2004 national evaluation of the impact of youth work also noted that because 'what is often referred to as "the youth work process" ... is not always evident or transparent' other non-youth work professionals can be left 'unclear and at worst sceptical about what youth workers do' (Merton et al., 2004: 34).

Like any educational endeavour, youth work is value-based – explicit about its duty of care for individuals; committed to their greater self-realisation; concerned to help maximise their potential contribution to the greater good. On occasions, these values are presented as defining youth work's distinctiveness. However this position is hard to sustain. If proof of this were needed, it has come, instantly and strongly, in the way youth work, like all the helping professions, has fallen over itself to embrace the five key outcomes for children and young people laid down by the 2004 Children Act: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to community and society and achieve economic well-being. Here as in most similar contexts youth work's value-base hardly acts as its distinguishing feature.

The central arguments of this paper, therefore are twofold. One is that, though (of course) it is a value-based practice, and indeed that some of these values are embedded in the methods it chooses to prioritise, what distinguishes youth work from other related and often overlapping practices is its methods: *how* it seeks to express those values, and particularly its *process*. The second is that unless partners understand that this is what they are buying into, they are likely to end up with something which isn't youth work at all. And the paradox in *this* is that, by not getting the pay-offs which first made youth work seem so alluring, they are setting it up to fail. This will surely leave youth work even less credible than it was before they threw their conditional embrace around it.

A more pessimistic but not, I believe, wholly unrealistic reading of the current policy situation is that this could easily happen in the coming months and years. Faced with high priority Government targets which, at minimal cost and often via time-limited funding, need to be met yesterday, many of youth work's new allies have been showing irritation (at best) with how long the process takes and with how labour-intensive it is, especially for engaging a more

obstreperous young clientele. Moreover, as we shall see later, this is happening just as the terms of engagement, particularly leverage on resources, are increasingly being set by non-youth work agencies.

... and the sceptics

With struggles over the future of youth work going on concurrently in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the enthusiasm for youth work in England seems to run out fastest at some of the highest levels of policy making. In part this may be because the policy makers have failed to understand its potential in work with young people. However, it is possible too, that the ministerial ambivalence stems from the opposite – a sense that the way youth work goes about its business may not be wholly supportive of key government agendas.

And so, asked by a youth worker to clarify where youth work might best fit into the structures emerging from the new Children Act, England's then Minister for Children and Youth judged this as 'symptomatic of a flawed attitude' and of a reliance on 'a silo approach' (Barrett, 2004). Even within a generally affirming ministerial policy statement on youth work, 'evidence' which purports to show youth club attendance as a potentially negative influence is preferred (Hodge 2005) over very recent and substantial findings by direct studies of youth work (Crimmens et al., 2004; Merton et al., 2004), one of these funded by the Minister's own Department.

Even more soundly based national policy analyses can display similar blank spots about youth work. Thus, in a search for more effective responses to disadvantaged 16-25 year olds, the Social Exclusion Unit is examining 'practical approaches that get results by successfully considering how young adults think and behave', that is, practices which start where young people are starting, intellectually and emotionally. One of this paper's main arguments is that such starting points, broadly defined, constitute a key defining principle – even the *raison d'être* – of all youth work.

Given the downward pressures from central government, these absences of mind are, not surprisingly, being replicated in local policy-making and provision. In England, even as extended schools are being pushed as the hub of all community provision, 'youth workers' operating within school settings can still find themselves simply filling resource gaps in the teaching or counselling of lower stream pupils or in sports coaching. In the name of 'community safety' youth workers are constantly being pressed to douse teenage 'hot spots' in local neighbourhoods. In the longer run, the demands of Children and Young People's Trusts (CYPTs) heavily committed to younger children and to child protection, threaten even more distorting effects. Indeed, even as the trusts were forming, anxieties were being voiced that 'hungry predators from education and social services will train their beady eyes on Youth Service money' (Barrett, 2005).

However, money, though vital, is not always the organisational predator's only prey. Especially in the days of target-driven, partnership-based service delivery, the scent of adaptable methods can also be attractive, not least for those policy makers and managers with strong territorial instincts. When the chase is over, some of the most easily digestible parts of youth work may have survived. But again the question has to be asked: will these filleted extracts still

be recognisable and effective as *youth work*? And, perhaps even more telling ultimately, how much will be left of the Youth Service – the only agency which, with all its flaws, has had an explicit public remit to nurture and develop this practice as a distinctive way of working with young people?

Nor, within all of this would it be wise for the voluntary and community sector organisations to be too complacent. In the context of increasing uncertainty, not to say pessimism, within statutory services, government (central and local), may seem to be offering them a bright new (and secure) future by courting them to take over whole services. Ultimately however, the same bottom-line principle will operate here too: that the piper calls the tune. Who then will guarantee that the practice they are expected to deliver is recognisably 'youth work'?

Finally, amidst these pressures, how will youth work survive the new drive to develop a 'common core of skills and knowledge' for work with children and young people as envisaged by the new Children's Workforce Strategy? This development, we are being assured, does not mean that 'the Government is trying to dragoon all professions into one box' or 'to produce a Jack-of-all-trades practitioner' (Rogers, 2005). A less rhetorical and more grounded safeguard may be provided too, by the recent decision to move towards a three-year degree entry qualification for youth work, validated through the Youth Service's own approval mechanisms.

Nonetheless, those of us who remember the rush to 'genericism' and the consequent loss of specialist expertise which resulted from the Seebohm reorganisation of social services in the 1970s are bound to approach such developments with trepidation. In general what they risk, perhaps out of a PC-type fear of seeming to claim king-of-the-jungle status in professional circles, is a denial of professional difference. Yet such distinctions are vital if 'the client' (in this case young people) is to be offered a genuine choice of service. Youth workers no less than other professional practitioners need to be confident that, in going into partnership with teachers, social workers, the police and others, they can make a *complementary* contribution to young people's support and development rather than bland lowest-common-denominator responses.

More particularly, once the bargaining begins on what should be defined in as the 'common' skill base, youth work is unlikely to be operating on a level playing field. Given the present politics and priorities of the new world of children and young people's services, the skills and knowledge of some practices are bound to be seen as more equal than others. Despite its current popularity, youth work is unlikely to be one of those. This again raises the question: in order to avoid its marginalisation to the point of extinction, how best can we ensure that, within this new 'coherent' workforce, its distinctive potential is clearly and strongly presented, and represented?

Why a manifesto – and in what form?

Whether the starting point is an enthusiasm which is under-informed and over-simple, or under-whelming and dismissive, the messages for youth workers are still largely the same. In making the case for youth work, their most convincing supporting evidence will come through practising in ways in which the quality and impact speak for themselves – particularly through

the voices of young people. At the same time, where partners and commissioner of services rule, youth workers as never before are going to have to be clear, confident and articulate about just what this practice is and how it can make its distinctive (which of course is not the same as saying superior) contribution. In doing this the pressure will be on particularly to explain what they mean by 'process' and what it means to be 'process-driven'.

Nor will it any longer do for youth workers to reach for their usual crutch: 'It's the relationships, stupid!' when professional colleagues and agency partners ask, as they so often do, what is this youth work. The need is for an explicit and coherent 'manifesto' which by unpacking such slogans, spells out the practice's essential features, and then from these, without claiming superiority, identifies those which set it apart from other practices.

In support of critical debate

What follows is a personal attempt to construct such a statement. It is quite deliberately purist, setting out a strongly principled position. It does this in the full knowledge that what is verbalised and conceptualised here is often far from the reality of practice on the ground. It also accepts that, even in agencies where such purism is not or cannot be applied, 'youth work approaches' or 'a youth work style' are being used – in schools, in youth offending teams and health promotion and drug projects, with young parents; and that, despite some very different starting points and operating principles, these are adding considerable value to what is being done.

In what follows, however, extended responses are offered to a series of leading questions with a view to setting out youth work's own 'defining characteristics'. The questions are:

- ▶ *Have young people **chosen** to become involved – is their engagement voluntary?*
- ▶ *Is the practice proactively seeking to tip **balances of power in young people's favour**?*
- ▶ *Are **young people perceived and received as young people** rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of a range of adult-imposed labels?*
- ▶ *Is the practice **starting where young people are starting** – particularly with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and have fun?*
- ▶ *Is a key focus of the practice on **the young person as an individual**?*
- ▶ *Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to **young people's peer networks**?*
- ▶ *Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to **young people's wider community and cultural identities** and, where young people choose, is it seeking to help them strengthen these?*
- ▶ *Is the practice seeking to **go beyond where young people start**, in particular by encouraging them to be outward looking, critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them?*
- ▶ *Is the practice concerned with **how young people feel** and as well as with what they know and can do?*

The responses to these questions are quite deliberately presented in an assertive and hard-line way. One reason for this is that, as a manifesto should, the paper aims to make clear some bottom-line positions – in this case, to important professional worlds outside youth work.

Another, equally unashamedly, is to try and concentrate minds within youth work on what at this moment they need to be stating, and defending.

The assertiveness should not deceive, however. For me, this is the latest stage in work which has been in progress for over twenty-five years and which, in some form, has appeared and indeed been reworked in previously published papers and articles (see for example Davies, 1979; 1981; 1999). Its use in a government policy statement (Department for Education and Skills, 2002: 20) has perhaps suggested that one element of it has an (undeserved) finality. Nonetheless, it is offered here for critical use by colleagues concerned to develop their own explanations of youth work and its distinctive style and methodology.

Given the historical moment in which youth work now finds itself, I hope the offer will be taken up widely. I particularly hope it will encourage wide structured as well as informal debate amongst youth workers, managers and policy-makers. A key aim of such debates could be to produce explicit 'youth work statements' addressed to potential partners and other professionals, to complement and underpin the 'curriculum statements' now adopted by most Youth Services. Maybe, too, as a challenging extension of the project, some parts of it can even be developed in a language which would encourage some parallel exchanges with young people.

Interrogating practice: towards a clarification of youth work's defining features

► *Have young people **chosen** to become involved – is their engagement voluntary?.*

Though it has now become a focus of sharp debate and indeed dissension, including amongst youth workers themselves, the principle of young people's voluntary participation is a – perhaps *the* – defining feature of youth work. The basis for this position is not simply theoretical or ideological, as has sometimes been asserted – 'conservative' or bloody-minded youth workers holding onto a belief which has passed its sell-by date. Rather, it is rooted in the historical fact, and it is a fact, that such 'voluntaryism' has from the start shaped the development of the *practice* and especially its process. This was true even in periods when provision was largely dependent on the patronage of the privileged; and it continues to be true today within a state-dominated Youth Service.

- 'The voluntary principle' ensures that, in their dealings with the institutions which provide youth work and with the practitioners who deliver it face-to-face, young people possess and retain a degree of *power* which is *intrinsic to the practice*. Both adult and young person know that at any point the young person can just walk away, thereby leaving the adult powerless to have any influence on them. Perhaps uniquely in our society's public provision for young people, this power is therefore not just a concession made to the young by benevolent adults who see benefits for themselves in 'letting the young have their say'. Young people have this power (limited and negative though it may often be) because of a role and a status which are *structured into* their relationships with the adult providers.
- Because this is the starting point, practitioners have no choice but to *negotiate* with

young people. Moreover, this cannot just be a 'tactical' manoeuvre concerned only (as for example often in teaching) with easing them through 'boring' but pre-set and essential tasks in order to arrive later at the more interesting or rewarding ones. The youth work negotiation has to be based on a built-in long-term strategy and requires an openness to a real give-and-take which will probably have to be sustained throughout the whole period of the young person-adult engagement. Only then are the young people likely to stay long enough to become exposed to experiential opportunities which might (though they might not) interest and benefit them – and then to sustain a personally committed rather than a merely compliant participation.

- The voluntary principle also impacts significantly on the *content* of the youth work providers' 'offer' to young people. Because historically young people have engaged in youth work 'in their own' time', and because many still do, built deep into the youth worker psyche is the presumption that s/he must deliver returns which young people will personally experience as valuable. Moreover, integrally linked with the requirement to negotiate, 'valuable' here has often to mean: in its own right, here-and-now or at least pretty soon, and not just as a means to later value or gain. For young people attending in their 'time off', youth workers cannot assume that gratification delayed too long is an option – of the kind for example which many (though clearly not all) pupils are prepared to settle for on the promise that hard work today, even on syllabuses experienced as 'irrelevant', will in due course bring them good qualifications and well paid jobs.
- The voluntary principle also has significant impact on youth work's '*hidden*' curriculum, on the way adult and young people each see each other and interact. For, here too youth work *requires* a greater parity of esteem and treatment than most other adult provider-young person exchanges *impose*. Young people constantly assert that, in their encounters with adults, they expect to be respected for who they are, with abilities, ideas, opinions and experiences of their own and with a right to be listened to and have a say in what is decided. Their (relative) power in their relationships with youth work providers adds considerably to the force of these demands since any youth worker who patronises, rides roughshod over or simply ignores them is liable to find her or himself without a clientele to work with.

In the conditions, especially the funding climate, in which youth work currently operates, youth workers are often now having to apply their distinctive skills to in effect, convert young people's enforced attendance into a form of 'voluntary' participation. Crucial amongst these skills are likely to be those of building trusting relationships with young people based on mutual respect, engaging young people in as many decisions about content and method as are compatible with laid down curricula and available resources; and nurturing their motivation to take on unfamiliar and taxing experiences (see for example Merton et al., 2004, para 9.4.5: 28). Evidence is now accumulating that in many areas and projects such approaches are being made to work. This however should not be taken as proof that the voluntary principle is no longer relevant. Rather it needs to be understood mainly as an additional pressure on practitioners to negotiate and re-negotiate the terms of engagement with young people so that youth work's distinctive style and processes can be allowed to develop.

- ▶ *Is the practice proactively seeking to tip balances of power in young people's favour?*

The voluntary principle forces youth workers to confront questions of power – who has it, how much, used in what ways? – as a central feature of their relations with young people. These are issues which for many policy-makers and agencies are today newly fashionable, emerging in debates on how to get young people to ‘participate’, how to ‘empower’ them, how to give them a role in decision-making. For the youth worker, such goals are not incidental luxuries, the icing on the cake. Responses to them may not be, indeed usually will not be, embodied in formal constitutions and machinery. Nonetheless, youth workers’ everyday routine exchanges with the young people they meet have to be shaped from the start and throughout, by participatory principles, by the mutuality of respect and influence which these assume – that is, by a recognition that in the end young people are the most influential and active agents in the unfolding of their own lives.

The power which young people can and do actually exercise within the youth work relationship is, of course, relative. It is relative, still, to the degree of especially formal power (for example over money, buildings and equipment) which the youth worker retains within that relationship. And, even more significantly, it is relative to young people’s very limited formal power, sometimes coming close to powerlessness, in other spheres of their lives – at home, within education more widely, within employment and (unless they have real money in their pockets) even in their leisure. Indeed, despite high profile official initiatives to foster their ‘empowerment’, the fundamental shifts which have occurred over the past two to three decades in the labour market, the benefit system and, now, higher education mean that their hold on real material and even psychological power over their lives has weakened still further.

Youth work’s commitment to at least tipping these balances of power a little in young people’s favour needs to be seen in this contemporary context. But it needs to be understood, too, in a much broader way: explained bluntly as ‘young people are citizens, too’. Though apparently a simple notion, some might say an over-simple slogan, it needs to be asserted uncompromisingly at a time when so many current policies assume that, just because young people (and indeed children) need to be prepared for citizenship, they are therefore not *already* citizens. Youth work’s starting proposition, however, is an entirely contrary one. This insists that the need for preparation and support cannot be elided into a denial that young people, now, possess the same basic civil and legal rights as their elders. At a time when the moral panic over ‘anti-social behaviour’ is repeatedly resulting in just such a denial, re-affirming this proposition has never been more urgent.

In such circumstances, youth work’s commitment to tipping balances of power in young people’s favour emerges as particularly striking, especially since, again exceptionally if not uniquely, it has in some form been embedded in its public remit throughout its history. As such, it has therefore not *just* been a grudging concession. Nor has it just been a tactical manoeuvre to convince a potential clientele to ‘give youth work a chance’ or to draw them into adult-designed and directed programmes. Rather, it exists as an integral element of the practice, there in its own right, as inescapable for youth work as a subject syllabus is for a teacher or a diversion curriculum is for a youth offending team member or as procedures for responding to abuse are for a child protection social worker. Within the delivery of youth work, ensuring situations exist or develop in which young people will take decisions, follow them through and take responsibility for their consequences is therefore not just a means to

an end. It is an end in its own right, to be deliberately pursued including, as appropriate for the young people, in arenas without as well as within the youth work context.

- Are **young people perceived and received as young people** rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of adult-imposed labels?

Youth work can and does work with 'special groups', including focusing on their specialist interests, needs and concerns. The young people who are engaged may also take a variety of routes to that engagement, including on occasions referral from a non-youth work agency required to concentrate only on those carrying a specific label.

For youth work, however, those labels do not constitute the *raison d'être* of the work. That resides solely in the fact that those who arrive belong to a section of the population which is at a particular point in the life cycle – at a particular stage in their personal development, with the needs, demands and opportunities that creates. This in turn assumes a holistic perception of and set of responses to those needs, demands and opportunities. The practice which emerges will be therefore, as far as possible, unblinkered by presenting and usually pejorative labels which are usually 'laid on' by powerful adults and adult institutions and which threaten to mask or even obliterate personal characteristics within broad classifications.

As always in such practices, this stance is not without its contradictions. One of the trickiest is that 'young people' – or 'youth', or 'teenager', or 'adolescent'- has become, especially in today's climate, one of the more pejorative of labels. Once attached, it is liable to have the same kinds of consequences as any other such prior and rigid categorisation of individuals: prejudgement of their personalities and behaviour; a lowering of expectations of them; defensive rather than expansive and affirmative responses to them.

Youth work seeks to guard against such negative effects of the 'young person' label in a number of ways. Most of these are captured later as other key constituent elements of youth work are explored – particularly in its adoption of potentiality rather than deficiency models of 'youth' and its respect for and active response to young people's self-chosen peer and wider community and cultural identities.

- Is the practice **starting where young people are starting** – particularly with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and have fun?

'Connect, only connect' – with the person, what they know, how they feel, what they want from the encounter – is the tactic of any educational enterprise aiming at 'owned' and transferable learning. In more formal educational environments like schools, colleges and universities the main connection sought is likely to be with the learner's intellectual starting points. In these environments, but perhaps especially in non-formal educational settings, emotional connections will also be seen as important, focusing for example on the learners' levels of confidence, on their self-esteem or on the 'baggage' they bring with them from past schooling or current family experiences.

The youth worker, too, seeks connections with these starting points. In youth work however, other connections are also vital. One, initially and maybe on-going, will be with young

people's own 'territory', with the physical and geographical spaces (indoor and/or outdoor) which, certainly for leisure purposes, they come to regard as 'theirs', where they can 'freely associate' and where they feel most comfortable. Often these will be public spaces which for periods of a day or week they use and even take over – a key stimulus for detached youth work.

However, in part again because young people are choosing to participate, they will need to experience even the more institutional contexts and environments in which youth work operates as, to a significant degree, *their* territory, emotional space in which they feel comfortable. Adult- as well as young people-defined rules and boundaries will necessarily operate within these spaces. Nonetheless, sufficient freedom and informal and sociable control of their use will need to be permitted to enable their users to experience high levels of ownership of them: as welcoming, flexible, responsive to their starting points – again, as substantially 'theirs'. And, once again, to be practised, youth work will be working with and out from those starting points.

Ideally, of course, these environments will be of high physical quality offering good, even state-of-the-art, facilities. Even when they are very basic, however, young people may still be willing to engage because workers, working with the young people themselves, bring to bear skills for developing an environment which is young people-oriented and young people-centred. And key to defining and creating this ethos is the making of another key connection – with the interests, and especially but not only with the leisure interests, of the young people actually involved, with the aim of providing opportunities for them both to enjoy these and to develop them further. Hence the creation of well used youth clubs in even the drabest of church halls and of productive detached work emerging from contacts made on the bleakest street corners or in a 'youth shelter' stuck out in the middle of a dark field.

► *Is a key focus of the practice on **the young person as an individual?***

A focus on individuals has been a central feature of liberal education in this and other countries for many decades. An essential complement to these countries' democratic values, it underpins commitments to, for example, the right to vote, the rule of and equality before the law and a range of personal freedoms. It particularly asserts that respect for persons which, as we have seen, all young people constantly demand (but do not always feel they get). It also embodies a societal commitment to help realise that potential within each of us to become more than we presently are, and even perhaps, if we can break the constraining bonds of material or social circumstances, more than we have ever envisaged for ourselves. Its explicit expression is therefore a vital guiding principle for youth work as for other educational practices.

This individualistic ethic has not just become deeply embedded in our society. It has become dominant to the point where, in youth work as in other practices, it is usually treated as self-evidently the primary (even perhaps the only appropriate) guiding and shaping principle. Yet, contradictorily, it can also significantly constrain personal growth and self-expression. By requiring, implicitly or explicitly, that individuals compete with each other for key rewards, it also means that some (indeed, often many) individuals end up as one of the losers needed to ensure that some winners do indeed emerge.

► *Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to young people's peer networks?*

Youth work seeks at least to balance and at times to challenge this preoccupation with individual development and achievement through a commitment to working with and through the 'collectivities' to which young people are attached. At the very least, these include their peer networks and (considered later) those rooted in community and culture.

Because most young people give such high priority to their relationships with their peers, a practice committed to 'starting where young people are' has to work with and through their friendship groups and wider peer networks. Most obviously these are arenas in which young people share and develop leisure interests and activities – formal and informal, casual and organised, some less 'social' or indeed legal than others. As well as the considerable personal growth these can stimulate, they provide vital opportunities for young people to live and gain experience which they value in its own right, *here and now*. This is a focus on the adolescent present, which adults, largely preoccupied with adolescence-as-transition, constantly underplay and even at times deride or dismiss. For youth work, however, attending to the meaning and value of current experience for young people themselves, is a very high priority.

Involvement in peer group relationships and networks has other powerful meanings, especially for young people. Many of these *do* contribute to adolescent transition. Their often intensive interactions with friends are to a significant degree constructed precisely to create a separation of time, space and activity from parents and other power-holding adults, social and emotional 'territory' exclusive to their age group. This then provides leeway for them to start to define a distinctive and more autonomous adult identity: who they are as individuals, what is special about them and their potential, how they wish to express this difference. More positively, it also offers support as well as, often, painful challenge from others who are in the same boat, both vital for navigating this tricky process of self-definition.

Nor need the gains be merely individual, personal. Working with and through the collectivity, making use of the extra human resources and capacity generated by strength in numbers, can also produce *collective outcomes*. Youth work's focus on the teenage peer group is intended to help young people seek and develop such outcomes, to make gains which are achievable because the whole is at times greater than its parts. It also has the potential to help redress the increasingly organised and articulate influence on policy-makers of 'grey power' groups, some of which seem actively hostile to 'youth'.

In order to establish productive connections with young people and to have impacts which *they* value, acceptance of the reality and indeed centrality *for them* of peer interactions, experiences and networks is located at the very heart of youth work practice. Though not exclusive to youth work, this remains still an exceptional position. As we have seen, our most powerful educational and welfare ideologies continue to be overwhelmingly focused on individual potentiality or individual pathology. When young people's groups do appear on the radar of the institutions applying these ideologies, most still, implicitly if not explicitly, see and treat them as unhealthy, risky, threatening, as gangs to be broken up. Youth work on the other hand starts from the premise that because such peer networks are so binding on the individual young people who belong to them, they represent a crucial point of access to and departure for work with young people. Precisely because this proposition is so exceptional in

educational and welfare practice, it embodies one of youth work's key defining features.

Achieving access to these networks on terms which are substantially acceptable to young people is therefore a crucial element of that negotiation process between youth worker and young person outlined earlier. It is in this context that seeing the youth worker-young person engagement as a negotiation is especially important. For, though a – perhaps *the* – vital point of contact with young people, peer networks are indeed *not* all benign, ready-made sites for the realisation of either the young person's unique talents or the wider social good. Like all collectivities they can also be restrictive, oppressive and even damaging. Nor is it only older people who are affected. Young people too, indeed, probably mainly, are on the receiving end of such pressures as is demonstrated by their daily experience of bullying and sexual and racial harassment. Here, therefore, the agreements being sought through the youth work negotiation will not only need to be acceptable and credible to these young people via respectful but open and honest exchange, they will need also to be ones which the youth worker too, can stand over professionally.

For the most part however, a much more creative view of the potential of young people's peer networks shapes youth work practice, a perspective which has been at its heart from its inception. It is an essential element of what is described later as seeking to prompt young people to go beyond where they are starting in the youth work encounter. Moreover, it assumes that a key aim and a key dimension of the skill required is the proactive development of such group experiences. Using a range of media which non-youth workers have at times mistaken as mere 'treats' – sport, the arts, outdoor activities, residential experience and so on – youth work seeks to harness the positive potential of peer interaction by deliberately creating new and stretching group experiences into which it seeks to draw young people.

This emphasis on the collective does not of course rule out a deepening of individual relationships. In addition to being valued in their own right, these can also lead to forms of productive one-to-one work within the youth work practice itself as well as to increased trust by the young person needing to be referred to more specialist services. Nonetheless, youth work's core perspectives and its core activities remain negotiated interventions into the self-formed groupings which in our society are so central to so many young people's current experience and to their longer-term development.

- ▶ *Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to **young people's wider community and cultural identities** and, where young people choose, is it seeking to help them strengthen these?*

Youth work which 'starts where young people are starting' also requires a commitment to respect and be responsive to other collectivities, particularly those of 'community' and 'culture'. In this context, the former may be defined geographically or by a group's commonality of interests and identity; the latter by individuals' consciousness of the values, norms and practices which they share with others (immediate family, wider kin, friends, neighbours); and which often in profound ways, shape their long-term as well as their everyday exchanges with each other.

For youth work, there are both negative and positive perspectives at work here. The negative

ones seek to distance the practice both from notions of personal growth as a matter *only* of individual choice and effort, and from explanations of individual failure as the product *only* of individual (or indeed family) weakness, inadequacy and breakdown. These also recognise that our society is still experienced by many, and not least for young people, as increasingly isolating and personally dislocating. Enhanced involvement and identity with others can then contribute to a more satisfying sense of self. They recognise, too, that our society still readily excludes and even demonises those who choose, again like many young people, to retain and publicly display difference, and who have little power to answer back. In these conditions the collectivities of community and culture offer a degree of security and identity to vulnerable individuals as well as a possible additional strength in numbers.

These collectivities, however, also have a much more positive and developmental potential which fits closely with youth work's educational and developmental aspirations. Strong community and cultural identities can be decisive in helping individuals to establish a clear and confident self-identity. They can also help enrich young people's lives in much broader and social ways. This can be true both for those who define themselves as within these collectivities and for those who, though outside their boundaries, welcome the rewards which come from actively embracing rather than merely (at best) tolerating social diversity. And they can be the basis for a raised consciousness of shared issues and concerns from which political engagement in its widest sense may flow.

Here too contradictions and dilemmas are embedded in such a practice. Like peer networks, these collectivities, as well as being supportive and liberating, can be constraining and even oppressive. Some may support cultures which marginalise or harass or actively reject individuals or whole groups, for example women and young gays. Even where such prejudicial attitudes are not culturally endorsed, an individual's efforts to balance self-expression and personal growth with respect for and adherence to community or cultural expectations can be painful and even, at the extreme, destructive. This ambivalence can be experienced particularly sharply where those individuals, though wanting to sustain their identity, nonetheless come to resent some of the demands and constraints it places on them. In such situations, youth work will be striving to identify positive and supportive responses, perhaps by offering the young people additional role models or alternative affirming experiences.

Because youth work has to work within these tensions, the application of its commitment to working with and through the community and cultural identities central to young people's lives is therefore never straightforward or one-dimensional. This however merely highlights again the centrality to the practice of carefully judged and focused – that is, again, negotiated – entry into these collectivities. Here, too, a key aim will be to achieve a mutually acceptable matching of, on the one hand, the starting points defined by young people themselves and, on the other, youth work's own values, purposes and insights.

In this delineation of the 'wider networks' on which young people draw, one 'absence' is particularly striking: that of 'the family'. This is not because most young people do not value their familial relationships, often broadly defined. Nor is it to suggest that youth workers seek to work deliberately against these, or, whether or not they are supportive, that they underestimate their significance for young people. It is however to recognise that, for youth work, they do not have the same profile or priority as either community or culture. This is

because, in starting where young people are starting and by working on their territory, youth work engages with young people at just those moments and in just those contexts where, often explicitly, they are seeking some separation from familial, and particularly parental, oversight and control.

Clearly circumstances will occur where involvement with family may be necessary and even urgent, occasionally almost in spite of what an individual young person might choose. Dilemmas, sometimes acute, are also likely where the lines between 'family' and 'culture' are especially blurred, for example by class or ethnicity. However, where the choice presents itself: 'Whose side do I need to be on – the young person's or the family's?', the 'default' response, set once again by the young person *choosing* to engage with youth work, remains 'the young person's'.

- *Is the practice seeking to **go beyond where young people start**, in particular by encouraging them to be outward looking, critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them?*

Because of its emphasis on process, particularly in its various expressions on starting where young people are starting, youth work can too easily be misunderstood as giving too little priority to product, to outcomes. This risk is further heightened by locating so much youth work within young people's leisure time and contexts and starting much of it from what, to a casual observer, can look like 'low culture' or 'pop culture' recreational activities. Youth workers themselves at times reinforce such perceptions by taking a line of least resistance, avoiding the often tough process of negotiation with the young people they meet and settling for unchallenging 'pass-times'. In the process they may do little more than confirm the young in the already circumscribing traps of limited opportunity and experience.

It is here that youth work as a value-based practice needs to be asserted. Crucially underpinning these values is a commitment to working from a potentiality rather than a deficiency model of the young. This points particularly to seeking, within their social context, to helping realise a version of each young person which is greater than the one she or he knows they are bringing with them; greater than the one they are currently displaying to others; and maybe even greater than the one they may yet have imagined for themselves.

Moreover, such stirrings in young people's self-images will be stimulated by inputs deliberately intended to foster a new or renewed confidence – including, however modestly, to take the world on a bit. An so, rather than just accepting it for what it is and as it has always been delivered to them or just responding in terms conventionally laid down by powerful others (especially elders), good youth work will seek to provide a security and a facility which affirm more critical and creative responses. (For practical examples of this principle at work see Brent, 2004; Davies and Docking, 2004, Sections 2 and 3).

Few of us, whatever our class background, gender or other prescribed social role or situation, come close to achieving such raised self-expectations and the personal development these can generate without the prompting and prodding of others, including often, of course, our peers. The links made therefore with young people's starting points, with the expectation of relaxing and having fun; with their needs, interests and aspirations as young people and

as individuals; with their identification with peer, community and cultural networks – are, as we have seen, vital. But they are just that: starting points. Or, more actively: they are launch pads from which lift-off can begin towards a newer and more developmentally stretching and liberating orbit of personal and indeed collective achievement and satisfaction. Though objectively this may look quite modest, subjectively the distance thus travelled, the heights reached, can feel and be quite giddy.

Here again, the notion of process is central. Such changes in self-image, such expressions of this new self in new actions are rarely instant events, especially if they are to be sustained. Nor are they often brought about in isolation, insulated from the stimulus and support of others, especially those who in some key ways are seen and experienced as 'like me'. They are most often and most effectively the product of carefully nurtured – including, again self-nurtured – engagement with others around shared interests and concerns: a description which, when applied to practice with young people, can be seen as one key feature of youth work.

► *Is the practice concerned with **how young people feel** and as well as with what they know and can do?*

Again because of the focus on process, indeed, as another dimension of that perceived lack of attention to product, youth work's concern with helping young people to *know* more and be able to *do* more can be under-estimated. Yet such focuses have to be at the heart of the practice because, if they were not, it is doubtful if that negotiation with young people for sustained involvement could be successful. For young people too, want to see something for their efforts which they can recognise, value, find useful. In the process, they will expect to use and also build on and extend the knowledge, understandings and skills needed for ensuring that such products are realised. Though they may be different in kind, 'outcomes' for them are thus usually at least as important as they are for providers and funders.

However, again as the emphasis on process highlights, for most young people these, though important, are in themselves rarely sufficient. As well, young people are looking for responses and experiences which will help them accomplish some of the key developmental tasks of their particular stage of life: to be respected as individuals; to speak for themselves and be listened to; to exercise some power, especially in their encounters with adults; to have their peer relationships recognised and, again, respected; to have their community and cultural identities affirmed. Practice which is obsessively instrumental, preoccupied only with the technicalities of what is to be done or with which attitudes and behaviours are to be changed, is always liable to close down the space or block the responsiveness needed for these tasks to be adequately addressed. And this in turn is liable to alienate young people, turn them into 'excludes', not just from key institutions and programmes but from an identification with core societal values and norms.

Essential to reversing such negative processes is another of youth work markers: a sensitivity to and valuing of what and how young people feel about themselves, about others, about their wider world. This again will need to include specific attention to their here-and-now as well as to the futures (as workers or parents in the making) which are required of them or which (ostensibly) are being promised to them by currently dominant policy imperatives. For, just as, for youth work, young people are citizens now they are also *people* now, with

feelings needing to be recognised, emotional needs to be satisfied and actual as well as potential 'emotional intelligence' to be developed. The evidence is now accumulating on how important these affective dimensions of living are, for young people no less than for adults, in achieving personal happiness and individual fulfilment. In a society increasingly focused on qualifications and vocational success, they merit, in their own right, the kinds of committed and sustained inputs which the youth work process can (with others) provide.

Configuring youth work

Of course, many other practices-with-people also lay claim to some – many – of the features of youth work set out above. Some, for example in further and higher education, would say they too rely on participants' voluntary engagement. Most would say that they take their starting points as the starting point for their intervention. Most would see their mission as helping young people develop well beyond these starting points. Most would assert their commitment to the client or student or indeed patient as an individual, to showing respect for their community or cultural identities and to connecting with their feelings.

Not only would no other practice lay claim to all these principles, however on some of them where there is common ground, youth workers would insist that they wish to go further – for example, from respecting to actively embracing young people's collective identities and seeking to help them to assert these identities more confidently. Whatever the precise balances in these areas, however, there are two main reasons for spelling out youth work's core characteristics in this way:

1. It is their overall *configuration* as outlined above which defines youth work, with the whole thus becoming something different from -greater than - the sum of the individual parts.
2. Within this configuration, some of the elements are given such prominence – even pre-eminence – that together they generate a definition of a *distinctive practice*. These elements are the explicit commitments to:
 - young people's voluntary participation
 - seeking to tip balances of power in their favour
 - responding to their expectation that youth work will offer them relaxation and fun
 - responding to their expectation that youth work will penetrate unstimulating environments and break cycles of boredom by offering new experiences and challenging activities
 - seeing and responding to them simply as young people, as untouched as possible by pre-set labels
 - working on and from their 'territory', at times defined literally but also as appropriate to include their interests, their current activities and styles and their emotional concerns
 - respecting and working through their peer networks

It is when these elements of the practice are configured into a whole that a distinctive practice emerges: youth work.

The youth work process

The features of youth work outlined so far represent signposts for implementing the practice – checkpoints along the way for ascertaining whether (or not) the work is on course. What they do not do is clarify what that 'way' is, the direction that 'course' needs to take, that is, what movement(s) need to occur to make the practice as responsive as possible to the young people who actually become engaged with it. For much of the time youth workers plot their route through these 'intuitively', 'sub-consciously', as part of the second nature of what they do. However, this movement is not random. It is guided and shaped by usually unarticulated questions, in effect posed to themselves at critical moments. These underpin both planning and preparation and, in the usually highly interactive face-to-face situations in which they operate, their 'on the wing' reactions (Department of Education and Science, 1987).

The final section of this paper seeks to make a start on capturing some of the potentially significant of these questions, posed starkly, in admittedly under-developed ways. This approach has been adopted mainly because I recognise that my thinking and analysis on these is still very under-developed, at the point I had perhaps reached in unpacking the questions addressed in the previous sections some ten or fifteen years ago. What follows therefore is even more 'work in progress' than what has gone before. However, rather than conceding to the temptation to omit it altogether I have included it as something which most urgently needs wider critical debate and input. This especially needs to come I believe, from practitioners, since credible 'answers' are only likely to emerge from systematic, critical and indeed collective as well as individual reflection on practice.

For me however, at this moment, the beginnings of a framework for encapsulating what youth workers mean when they talk about 'the youth work process' might perhaps be built around the following types of question:

- ▶ *Who are **these** young people?*
 - Why are *they* here?
 - Why are *they* *here*?
 - What individual abilities, interests and aspirations are they bringing with them?
 - What are their levels of confidence and self-esteem:
 - as young people;
 - in their relationships with their closest friend or friends;
 - within their wider informal peer group structures ;
 - with which adults;
 - into possible relationships with us, the youth workers actually in touch with them?
 - What are, for them, important peer relationship/group contexts?
 - What are the power relations, rules and sanctions within these?
 - What effects are these having on individual young people?
 - What effects are they likely to have for any youth work intervention?
 - What for them are explicit or possible wider identities which need to be respected and embraced?
 - What do these 'readings' suggest might be the most promising connecting points for a possible youth work intervention?

- ▶ *Is some youth work intervention in these young people's lives **justified**?*
 - What is the justification?
 - On what evidence?
 - How motivated are these young people likely to be to receive/respond to these?

- ▶ *How do we **personalise this first contact**?*
 - How do we tailor a first contact to respect these young people's right to choose whether or not to become engaged beyond this initial contact?
 - How do we tailor it to who they are and where they have reached in their (personal and group) development – particularly as young people?
 - How do we tailor it to their wider collective identities?
 - Where could this contact best happen?
 - Who should try to make it?
 - Does the identity of the worker(s) matter – whether, for example, they are local or 'an incomer', male or female; black or white; gay or straight, (dis)abled?

- ▶ *Within what '**activity**' or on what other '**territory**' could the contact be best initiated?*
 - What are the (stated or implied) individual and/or collective interests, concerns, aspirations – preoccupations – of these young people?
 - What are the points of youth work access to and entry onto this territory?
 - Where will an appropriate youth work intervention fit on an informal-formal continuum of activity and structure?

- ▶ *What **connections** might be made between these young people's starting points and ways of moving on beyond them – for **prompting additional developmental opportunities** for these young people?*
 - Again:
 - What individual abilities, interests and aspirations have these young people brought with them?
 - What are their levels of confidence and self-esteem:
 - What connections can be made between these starting points and potential developmental opportunities?
 - How motivated are these young people for actually looking for, making and acting on such connections?
 - What youth work inputs might be needed to create/increase this motivation?
 - What youth work inputs might be needed to build these connections?

- ▶ *Within all this, how best to tread the delicate line between supporting and increasing, and certainly not undermining, **these young people's independence and their control over their own lives**?*
 - How do these young people define:
 - their starting points, including their starting motivation;
 - their interests, abilities and aspirations;
 - their levels of confidence and self-esteem;
 - their significant peer relationships and community and cultural identities?
 - How far do the potential youth work definitions of each of these co-incide with those of young people?

- Where are there significant discrepancies between the two?
- What are the justifications for trying to go beyond – maybe even override – these young people’s perceptions and definitions?
- What might be the cost-benefit balance for these young people of seeking to do this?

An unfinished practice

As already indicated, the question form here has been adopted in part to emphasise the internal self-reflection and, with colleagues, the explicit debates essential to understanding and defining any youth work process. This form, however, is meant to do more than just *describe*. The questions are also an attempt to illuminate – to give a little more life to – some of the realities of the process stemming from some of the core and distinctive features outlined earlier. Particularly significant here are youth work’s negotiable power relations with young people and its location (at least initially) both on recreational and emotional as well as physical ‘territory’ chosen by them and within their fluid and largely unpredictable peer interactions. For, this mode of operation will constantly be throwing up further questions which – again often ‘on the wing’, in the very middle of the action – will require responses if not actual ‘answers’. Again over-simply, these may need to include:

- *Do I correct that factual error – or that one? Or just ignore both?*
- *Do I follow up that implied personal disclosure? Now? Not at all because the implication is so weak?*
- *Do I react to that racist remark now? Or later? By a confrontational challenge, by a more indirectly questioning approach – by prompting a discussion; or by arranging some direct contact with the despised ‘other’?*

If some at least of these questions, or questions like them, help explain why ‘process’ is at the heart of youth work practice, then they reveal youth work as always an ‘unfinished’ practice. It is unfinished in the sense that, whatever clear and ‘hard’ outcomes it may in due course generate, to be effective it, *par excellence*, requires of its practitioners – to say nothing of the young people engaged with it! – a constant exercise of choice, recurrent risk-taking, a continuing negotiation of uncertainty. As a ‘professional’ practice, it is guided by vision combined with tactical ‘nous’ and requiring balance, timing and nerve. The actual course of its practice, however, is ultimately decided by human interactions which are always fluid, continuously shifting and which therefore can offer no guarantee of reaching certain and final endpoints.

All of which returns us with a bump to our starting point – to the fact that, by its very nature, youth work will (at best) be able only accidentally to sight its targets with the sharpness or mould its outcomes with the neatness which most current policy-making is demanding. This of course is not just youth work’s dilemma: which teacher or social worker or Connexions PA would not say something similar? However, because it is so process-driven, the dilemma for youth work is especially sharp since over-enthusiastic and under-analysed colonisation by non-youth work agencies could so easily extract from the practice what ultimately makes it youth work.

From words to action

This paper has been written on the assumption that this need not happen – that in human affairs what is subsequently explained as inevitable is too often the result of a fatalism bred of pessimism which results in a failure of capable and responsible people to act. In this context, 'acting' will hopefully mean, at the very least, a spirited but coherent articulation by those of us who identify ourselves as youth workers of what is distinctive about youth work and how it contributes to young people's growth and well being.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Rob Hunter, Tony Jeffs, Mary Marken, Jon Ord, Jean Spence, Ian Trafford and Tom Wylie for taking time to offer critical comment on the first draft of this paper.

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The State of the Youth Service: Recruitment and retention rates of youth workers in England

Stephen Moore

Recruitment and retention rates for youth workers have been an issue of particular concern to employers for a number of years. This shortage of qualified workers is now particularly acute in the South-East and East of England. The article provides details of a research project which reflects upon the views of youth work students, practising youth workers and Principal Youth Officers on the problems of recruitment and retention in the South-East/East of England, and places them in the context of changing policies towards youth work by the government in the last eight years. The results are compared with the recommendations of the NYA / DfES Workforce Development Implementation Group. It concludes that the move toward an all graduate profession is a significant step forward, but that there needs to be an even greater emphasis on raising the status of youth work if the problem is to be fully addressed.

Keywords: youth service, Transforming Youth Work, recruitment, retention, professionalisation.

It is in this context that renewed attention has been given to the methods and skills of youth workers, a group of professionals who have for many years worked within a loosely knit, insecure and underfunded Youth Service (CYWU: 2003). Frequently operating on the margins of the people-professions, lacking a firm statutory footing, and often denigrated as a Cinderella Service... (Spence, Pugh and Turner, 2003:59).

Spence and her co-authors succinctly describe the state of the youth service, portraying a marginal group of professionals, unsure of their own status and position, in a poorly paid and insufficiently funded service. The result of this situation is that it has been particularly difficult for local authorities and non-statutory youth agencies to recruit sufficient staff, and just as difficult to retain experienced youth workers in employment.

Although there has been considerable concern over recruitment and retention rates, leading to a conference in 2002 (NYA/DfES/Connexions: 2002) and a subsequent working group, (NYA/DfES/Connexions: 2003) there appears to have been no previous study of the views of youth workers and youth work students relating to this matter. This article provides the results of a regional survey of statutory sector youth workers, Principal Youth Officers and youth work students who were asked to state their views on the problems of recruitment and retention in the service. The results of the research are compared with selected outcomes of the working group to assess any differences in emphasis. There appears to be significant agreement

issue of social exclusion (Watts, 2001). The impact of *Bridging the Gap* was soon apparent with the introduction of The Connexions Service. Connexions was intended to 'end the ... fragmentation of services' and to 'take responsibility for ensuring all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner', with the new 'Personal Advisers' being drawn from 'a range of backgrounds including the Careers Service, Youth Service, Social Services, teachers and Youth Offending Teams...' (DfES, 2000). This second policy shift moved from a stress on young people as potential offenders to young people as socially excluded (and therefore potentially at risk of offending). It did seem at this time that youth work would be subsumed into a wider and more dominant partner, The Connexions Service, which would take over many of the roles of the youth service (DfES, 2002). Once again, in this shift of policy, youth work continued to have a lower priority with the government than the more intervention-based and target-oriented Connexions approach.

However, with *Transforming Youth Work: Developing Youth Work for Young People* (2001) and *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (2002) there appeared to be some concern in government thinking about the decline in the youth service. Certainly, *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* may have emerged within a context of growing disillusionment by the government with the apparent ineffectiveness of both Connexions and the Youth Offending Teams to work effectively with the broader sections of young people, rather than a small minority of socially excluded and potentially anti-social youth. Connexions in particular had been given a difficult, almost contradictory task – designated as an agency for all young people, but borne out of a concern for the smaller proportion of socially excluded youth (Garrett, 2002; Taylor, 2003).

Indeed, Connexions appeared unable to cope with the range of young people it was required to work with. Furthermore, if another aim of introducing Connexions was to limit the number of agencies working with young people and to prevent them overlapping in their functions (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999), then this had failed. *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* recognised the importance of the Local Authorities' Youth Services and offered higher levels of protected funding and training opportunities for staff. Some degree of recognition too was finally being given by the government for its specific occupational skills, particularly in the areas of outreach and detached youth work, although funding was still precarious for this work (Crimmens et al, 2004). However, this renewed interest in the youth service was not necessarily a recognition by the government of the success of youth services:

The nature and quality of youth services are too varied; the level of resources too uneven; too many services are rated as poor by OFSTED; there's a lack of consistency and focus on age ranges; and there isn't enough to resource reaching the hardest to help. We need to create a level playing field, but we need to do that by levelling up, not levelling down (Lewis, 2003).

Transforming Youth Work (TYW) included a clear statutory definition of the requirements of Youth Services; government expectations that local authorities would strategically organise youth services in conjunction with voluntary and charitable organisations to meet targets and standards regulated by Ofsted and an expectation that local authorities clearly identify resources available to provide youth work.

This new policy interest was received with mixed responses. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2001) and National Youth Agency (2001) criticised *Transforming Youth Work* for a number of perceived failures which were relevant to retention and recruitment, including its failure to address the training and recruitment deficit in youth work and the negative views taken of part-time and sessional staff, (particularly important given that part-time staff outnumber full-time staff by a ratio of 8:1 (Nicholls,2000); failure to offer parity of wages and prestige with Connexions advisors; failure to reconcile the different approaches towards youth taken by youth workers and Connexions advisors; and inadequate provision of resources to enable local authorities to carry out the roles dictated to them in *Transforming Youth Work*.

The final and current shift in government thinking has resulted in *The Children Act* (2004) and the proposed reorganisation of the diverse services for young people into Children's Trusts, which will have the power to commission appropriate services for young people. At the time of writing, the anticipated Green Paper on Youth has once again been delayed for a further few months, having been originally planned for November 2004, but indications of government thinking seem to suggest that it promises an increase in the role and status of youth services (Hodge, 2004). It would also appear that the dominance of Connexions will decline, with funding for careers and youth services being given to Children's Trusts (Ward, 2005). If it comes to fruition this may well have the biggest impact on the Youth Service in recent years. Children's Trusts are to work on a multi-agency basis, with work commissioned in order to achieve the five target areas outlined in *Every Child Matters* (2003): being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic wellbeing. The Youth Service has a strong claim to be able to contribute significantly to most if not all of these areas.

It is within this policy context then that The Youth Service has consistently had to confront a very significant problem of recruiting adequate numbers of youth workers and then retaining them. The policy background has clearly not helped these matters, as the Youth Service has had to operate at a minimal level of resourcing whilst facing the growth, higher status and increased power of other agencies concerned with young people.

Towards the end of 2002, the NYA in conjunction with the DfES, held a conference to investigate the 'recruitment, training and retention of a skilled workforce ... and issues associated with raising demand; improving supply and providing a national framework...' (NYA : 2002). Organisations which were represented included The Association of Principal Youth and Community Officers, The National Council of Voluntary Youth Services, Higher Education Institutions and the Community and Youth Workers Union.

The parties involved in the conference concluded, amongst other things, that:

- all sectors of youth work and providers of youth work qualifications were experiencing difficulty in recruitment, but this was particularly difficult in the South East.
- Youth Services were competing with better paid and conditioned services, such as Connexions.
- Youth service provision was 'patchy', varying considerably between Local Authorities.
- There was a lack of coherence, clarity and opportunity regarding training for youth work.
- Many people who might have 'good people skills' and were working voluntarily or unqualified/part time may not have felt strong enough to take on the academic rigours

of the JNC qualification, and were therefore being wasted as potential full time youth workers .

- There is an absence of consistent induction for new but unqualified staff.
- Many students were confused about the value of youth work qualifications in comparison to Connexions
- Finally, the CYWU also want funding of youth field work placements, and management training to be introduced.

The various agencies involved in the conference agreed to form a working party to review these issues. In the next section of the article, I will provide an outline of the research undertaken and its conclusions and then in the final section compare and contrast these with the findings from the working party.

The Research Project and Methodology

Coincidentally with the conference and subsequent working group we were conducting an investigation into the issues of recruitment and retention in the East and South-East of England. The aim was to find the views of youth work students and practising youth workers on the reasons for the poor recruitment and retention. In order to gain a full understanding, representatives of these groups and of Principle Youth Offers were asked for their opinions as follows:

Youth Work Students: APU researchers conducted a focus group of youth work students attending a JNC youth work diploma at a university (not that of the author). Academic staff at the university were extremely helpful and arranged for a mixed, self-selected group of students to meet the researchers. No university staff were present during the focus group meeting. Questionnaires were then sent out to staff at two other universities teaching youth work students, who distributed them to students. The questionnaires were completed anonymously by students, and posted back to the APU. In total we received 43 questionnaires.

Youth Workers: Questionnaires were distributed to all full-time and part-time youth workers employed by the Community Education Departments of two Local Authorities. These were mailed directly back to APU. In all we received 27 completed questionnaires. A smaller sample of youth workers completed questionnaires on the internet and mailed them directly back to APU. Of these, a sub-sample (8 people) agreed to be 'interviewed' via e-mail.

Principal Youth Officers: Six Principal Youth Officers completed questionnaires of whom two engaged in informal, in-depth interviews.

Before continuing, it is necessary to mention that some difficulties emerged in the gathering of data. Despite repeated issuing of the statistical questionnaires to management, statistics were not given in the format asked, were inaccurate (figures given in different parts of the questionnaire were contradictory), or were not provided. One local authority's human resources department was not prepared to divulge the figures without payment. This does not allow us to state what percentage of employees completed the questionnaires, nor how typical they are in terms of full-time or part-time employment, sex or age.

Research Findings

The views of youth workers and youth work students

Following analysis of the questionnaires, interviews and focus group data the findings for youth workers and youth students were categorised around the following themes:

- Contributing to society
- Stress
- Supervision issues
- Working Hours
- Domestic Commitments
- Academic Issues and Qualifications
- Professional Status
- Salaries

Contributing to Society

The study began by asking students and employed youth workers what attracted them to the job/study in the first place. The most common answer by far was the desire to contribute something to society (73 per cent). Indeed, as one student in a focus group commented, anyone who wanted to be a youth worker had to have a 'burning desire' to enable them to overcome the obstacles to working in this area. However, in both questionnaire responses and in the focus groups, respondents stated how committed they were to youth work. Comments such as 'love the job', 'work that they loved', 'morally committed' were used and 44 per cent of respondents mentioned one or more of these terms. The single most common statement made by 56 per cent of respondents was that they liked the 'challenge' of working with young people.

A demanding and stressful job

The project began with a literature review on the subject of the difficulties faced by youth work. The literature review overall found general agreement that youth work is a challenging and at times, stressful job, taking place in a wide variety of settings. Jenkinson sums this up:

Youth Work by its nature is a stressful occupation, often characterised by long hours, a hectic schedule, working with young people facing difficult situations, and a scarcity of resources...The youth workers main tool is his or herself and so workers spend a lot of time giving of themselves ... (Jenkinson, 2002: 21)

This was a frequent theme with employed youth workers and with students who had already completed a placement. One female student commented that she would complete the qualification, but not proceed into youth work because:

I experienced working full-time in a very pressured situation, its made me realise I can't commit to full-time (youth work) having two children. The job is too demanding ... (Female: Focus group)

Supervision

Youth Workers are active in a wide variety of settings, including community centres, mobile centres, detached work and in a range of other residential, project or outdoor setting.

Much, or all of this face to face work is unsupervised and many workers are part time and/or unqualified. This leads to particular problems in terms of collegiate collaboration, isolation and division between full-time and part-time workers (ACAS, 1995 cited in Nicholls, 2000). Jenkinson (2002) in agreeing with the view of youth work as a difficult and demanding job, points out that much of this stress could be limited by supportive supervision.

Youth work staff in our research often felt isolated and 60 per cent stated that they felt they 'lacked support' in their jobs. This was not a criticism of management – more that the nature of the job left them feeling unsupported. 20 per cent of youth workers in our study felt that pressure was increased because of staff shortages and claimed that unpaid overtime was 'expected of them'.

Home/Work Life Balance

That youth work is a demanding and stressful job was recognised by students as well as workers. The students in the focus group stated that the motivation to become a qualified youth worker had to be a 'burning desire' (see above) to enable them to overcome the lack of time and cope with the combination of work, domestic and academic pressures. This belief was borne out in the questionnaire replies.

As already indicated, in some cases, the study and work placements had made a minority of students realise they simply could not manage the work load: 'The job ... (is) ... too demanding, it's not 9 – 5, it's not 37 hours, and I can't do that ...' (Female student in focus group). Students with domestic and caring responsibilities who responded to our questionnaires stated that domestic and work commitments made it difficult to find the time to study; and often affected their ability to study effectively. Some students stated that they struggled financially, and some had difficulty accessing appropriate, affordable care for their children, which placed greater stress upon them and made them realise the difficulties they would face in full-time employment .

Over 40 per cent of youth workers also raised the issue of stress. Of those who did not have any stress or low levels, a minority (7per cent) stated that they didn't struggle because of an understanding and flexible approach from management. However, a larger group (almost 30 per cent) attributed low levels of stress to the emotional support of their partners.

Academic Issues and Qualifications

Blundell (2001) argues that given that youth work is already a challenging job in itself, the JNC qualification actually expects too much from trainee youth workers. It expects them to be theoretically informed and ready to deal with each and every possible youth work situation, regardless of the very different contexts that youth workers can find themselves in. Blundell's argument was confirmed by youth work students in our focus group who claimed that there was a lack of study skills support; the course was too condensed; and that they were not provided with enough management skills. It is important to note that students were not complaining about the teaching or the academic staff, but the curriculum.

The explanation for these complaints seems to lie in the fact that the youth work qualification is simply too short in duration and it is difficult for any institution to achieve all the requirements in two academic years. Interestingly, two of the students in the focus group said

that they 'felt like failures' because of their inability to cope with the academic pressure. This suggests (perhaps rather tentatively, given the few students saying it) that some youth work students may well enter employment feeling unprepared and inadequate.

In our original focus group, students commented that the JNC Diploma provided a good qualification for entry to other, 'more respected' (in the words of one student) professions than youth work. In fact, 44 per cent of all the youth work students stated in the questionnaires that they saw youth work as a career of less than 5 years. Just over 30 per cent (overlapping with the previous group) cited using the qualification and experience as a way into other work. However, it is worth mentioning that this also works in reverse, since some youth work students (14 per cent), spoke of their move into youth work being related to the skills they had learnt from other professions (one citing her previous career in a drug and alcohol unit).

Thirty per cent of youth workers also agreed with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation criticisms of *Transforming Youth Work* (JRF, 2001) that there was inadequate funding for further training of youth workers, and cited this as a way to improve the service as a whole.

Professional Status

The issue of professional status loomed large in the focus group and in the questionnaire returns with 50 per cent of the youth work students surveyed suggesting the promotion of youth work as a profession would address recruitment issues. This concern over low status appears to be felt strongly by youth workers too, with over 20 per cent mentioning the importance of 'creating a more professional image of the service'.

It does seem that greater professionalisation links a number of different issues in this research. In terms of education, longer study periods (equivalent to three years full-time) leading to honours degree standard is now accepted as the minimum requirement of a profession. As we shall suggest later, the move towards an all graduate profession, announced in February 2005, may well be the key to increased recruitment.

Lack of Financial Reward

The concerns raised by the NYA criticisms of *Transforming Youth Work* (2001) regarding the lack of financial reward and professional respect were also borne out by the youth workers in the research, who stated that income had to be a secondary consideration in the work, with some unable to work in this field without the financial support of their partners. Interestingly, while students suggested that increasing the salaries of youth workers would increase the recruitment rates, no student specifically mentioned it as a factor influencing them, as an individual, to do youth work. Presumably those who were influenced by financial reward had not chosen to do youth work and were therefore outside the population studied.

Of employed youth workers surveyed, 50 per cent mentioned salaries (or if part-time workers, inadequate number of hours) as an important factor and an overlapping 31 per cent mentioned the cost of living in the South/East of England.

The views of management

The small scale survey of the Principal Youth Officers produced fairly close agreement with the views of both youth work students and youth workers, though with some revealing

differences. Here we will comment simply on selected issues which we consider particularly important or which differ with the views of the youth work students and youth workers.

Competing organisations

First, managers accepted that the JNC status qualified staff for other, better paid work, often with better conditions too and they were very conscious of the 'pull' of these competing organisations. However, there was some ambivalence about training youth workers to JNC level. Although they were generally positive, believing training good for the youth service and the individual, they did feel that this made trained youth workers attractive to other 'competing' organisations.

Professional Issues

Principal Youth Workers felt strongly that youth work as a profession needed to be better respected. They strongly believed that the status of youth work needed to be raised and that this (with an associated career structure) heavily influenced both the numbers of people choosing to enter youth work and the retention levels of staff in youth work.

Financial Issues

All six Principal Youth Officers were operating in the South East and East of England and were aware that pay rates were relatively low in relation to the cost of living in the region. They all thought that pay rates ought to be higher and that this would considerably ease their recruitment and retention levels. This might be an issue specific to these regions but overall, the Principal Youth Officers did feel that salaries were very important in the retention of experienced youth workers.

Supervision and Support

Perhaps the points above could have been predicted. Less predictable was their response to the concern that youth workers simply did not receive enough supervision in their work. Linked to the idea of supervision was the general sense of isolation and lack of support expressed by current youth workers, particularly in detached work situations. A majority (4 of the 6) of Principal Youth Officers cited this as a 'probable reason' for staff leaving the service after a short period of time. However they did not see this as an important influence on more experienced workers leaving.

Whereas youth workers and students saw the pressures of the job as being a reason for lack of staff retention, the general view amongst the Principal Youth Officers was that there was a failure on the part of youth workers themselves to understand the responsibilities required of them. This returns the debate to discussions over the content of training programmes.

We did not define 'supervision' in our research and left youth workers and Principal Youth Officers to define the term for themselves. We had, perhaps mistakenly assumed a common understanding of the term. On reflection, there does seem to be differences in understanding what supervision means. Although we did not have the opportunity to go back to youth workers and Principal Officers to explore this further, it appears that for youth workers supervision involves someone providing a sense of team leadership and support, whereas for the Principal Officers it is related more to questions about individual responsibility.

Educational Issues

The views expressed by the Principal Youth Officers regarding training and qualification are particularly interesting, and perhaps surprising. While the youth workers and students had agreed that the JNC qualification was either helpful or essential to their work, the Principal Youth Officers saw it as a barrier to recruitment. Three of the six of the questionnaires cited greater flexibility in qualifications as a way to remedy recruitment issues. However, they felt that retention would be helped by better and more training in employment. The general view was also that it would be better if this training were provided locally and thus reflected local needs. To some extent it could be argued that this contradicts their argument for the need to improve the professional status of youth workers.

Discussion

This section of the article discusses the relevance of the research findings in the light of the recent decision of The NYA to make youth work an all graduate profession and in terms of the introduction of the Advanced Practitioner Grade. Linked to these, the discussion will also compare and contrast selected outcomes of NYA / DfES *Workforce Development Implementation Group* and the findings of this research project.

In February 2005, NYA's Education and Training Standards Committee decided that youth work will become a graduate-based profession by 2010, with the youth work qualification becoming a three year degree, rather than the current diploma or two-year foundation degree. The avowed aim is to put youth work on a par with social work and teaching (Gregory, 2005). While higher education institutions have largely welcomed this decision, arguing that there will be greater time to develop skills and that management training will also be able to be included in the three year programmes, it has not been universally welcomed by Principal Youth Officers. Critics amongst these claim that a three year (or six year if part-time) degree might well put off applicants and actually be a barrier to recruitment (Gregory, 2005).

The recent agreement for the introduction of an Advanced Practitioner Grade, which provides a higher salary for practising youth workers to remain in post rather than have to move into management in order to improve their salaries, is a second highly relevant issue. This innovation forms part of a restructuring of youth work pay scales to reward what people actually do, rather than to reflect qualifications. The question is, does the introduction of the three year degree programme as the qualification for youth work practice and the restructuring of the pay scales address the fundamental problems of recruitment and retention in this context? We now turn to examine this question by examining the outcomes of the NYA/DfES *Workforce Development Implementation Group* and the results of this research project in the East and South-East of England.

The main outcome of the NYA /DfES organised conference at Warwick was the formation of a *Workforce Development Implementation Group*, the purpose of which was to consider the conclusions of the conference and discuss how best these could be put into practice. The working group specifically declined to comment on salaries as this was outside their remit, and was being dealt with separately. However, the main issues regarded as significant by them which they felt able to cover included:

- qualification development;

- quality assurance of HE provision;
- resourcing youth work education and training;
- (not) creating a General Youth Work Council;
- staff development policies; and
- the development of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Each of these will be discussed in turn, but it is necessary to begin with a discussion on salaries.

Salaries: Our research suggests that salary levels may not be the vital factor in the initial recruitment of youth work students, but they do play a significant part in their retention. It is clear from the results of the study that youth work students were motivated by a desire to work with young people, and only later in employment does income start to play an important part in their decision to change employment. As we saw in the responses to the questionnaire by youth work students and in the focus group, the initial driving force to enter youth work was to engage with young people and 'make a difference'. It seems unlikely therefore that the increase in salary levels and the Advanced Practitioner Grade will impact significantly on recruitment. However, there did appear to be a considerable number of disillusioned, experienced youth workers who felt that there was an inadequate pay and career structure. Indeed, over 50 per cent mentioned this. It does seem as though the changes in the salary structure and the creation of the new Advanced Practitioner Grade may well result in higher levels of retention.

The development of qualifications: It is very interesting that the Education and Training Standards Committee recommendation to move towards a three year degree qualification is not related to the list of factors seen as causing recruitment difficulties according to the Working Group. In relation to qualifications, the Working Group thought that there should be greater stress on developing additional routes into youth work and pointed to the prohibitive cost of employers sponsoring students through three-year degree courses. Indeed, a major concern was the difficulties faced by existing non-qualified workers in finding the time to study and work and the anxiety which studying can create. The Working Group therefore suggested the creation of a National Vocational Qualification in Youth Work at Level 4, and the development of a Modern Apprenticeship Framework for youth work. This latter qualification could be used by Local Authorities and voluntary organisations to sponsor unqualified youth workers through a work-based route to professional qualification. The results of the research project throw some light on such proposals. The Principal Youth Officers in the survey suggested a preference for ignoring the insistence on a JNC qualification, since they saw this as a barrier to recruitment. They preferred a more flexible-entry into youth work, reflecting the views of the Working Group.

However, a majority of students and youth workers below management level stated that they felt the JNC qualification to be essential to their work. Indeed there was a considerable desire to increase the level and content of the qualification required to practise youth work. The qualification recommendations of the working group appear to be adopting the management view of the recruitment situation, rather than youth workers' and students' views. The move towards a three year degree therefore accords with the wishes of the majority of the students we surveyed. It would seem therefore that the move towards a degree will increase

recruitment and quite possibly retention. There is no evidence in our study to support the argument that current non-qualified youth workers would object to the introduction of three year degrees for qualification status. With the range of APEL, open learning and portfolio assessment available in most universities, flexible routes through an equivalent to a three year degree could certainly be made available. This would allow a flexible, open route for non-qualified staff (and volunteers).

The Quality Assurance of Higher Education provision: The Workforce Development Implementation Group devised extensive proposals for quality assurance of HE. In particular, the Working Group want the NYA, who currently validate youth work courses in higher education to continue to do so, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and addresses the concerns raised by the CYWU about inadequate training in areas such as health and safety, staff supervision, child protection and legislation. The NYA are also keen to identify with HE institutions the best ways to ensure quality supervision of students on placements, since 40 per cent of training operates in field placements, and they also wish to track universities' teaching outcomes by following up students at intervals post graduation (NYA, 2003: 4).

The research bore out the relevance of some of these conclusions, in that students commented that the courses were too condensed, and that they were not given time to develop an adequate level of these skills. As mentioned earlier, some students stated that they 'felt like failures' because of their inability to cope with the academic pressure. This was less a criticism of the university courses, as an expression of awareness that they needed longer to develop these skills. It seems that the proposed three year degree programme will allow the extra time to develop the skills, and the confidence of students. Such a qualification will put youth workers on a par with social workers in terms of professional training but does not fit with the more flexible approach to training suggested earlier by the Working Group.

Principal Youth Officers expressed the belief that students were not given realistic expectations of youth work during education/training. It may well be that students with a longer training period would, later in employment, feel more confident and have less need of the supervision which they currently feel is lacking in youth work.

Resourcing of Youth Work Education and Training: The NYA / DfES conference highlighted the fact that comparative professions such as Nursing, Teaching and Social Work all receive high levels of funding for field placement, whereas youth work is funded at levels adequate for classroom- based training only. Social work degree students are now given bursaries for the cost of tuition and £500 towards practice placement costs. Nurses and graduate teachers also receive bursaries. The Working Group suggested that the Higher Funding Education Council for England should reconsider the funding of youth and community work provision to include finance for field placements (NYA, 2003:7).

While any extra funding can only help the provision of youth work courses in HE, the main concern of the students was that they struggled to afford to maintain themselves and their families while studying and working, particularly in relation to travel and child care costs. While the Workforce Development Implementation Group conference and working group recognise that there needs to be more accessible training and education, there is a strong argument in the meantime – and potentially in the future, to support the introduction of a

hardship bursary towards costs such as travel and/or child care. This will become particularly important when three year full-time (or six year part-time) degree courses begin.

Not creating a General Youth Work Council: During the Warwick conference it was proposed by some that a 'General Youth Work Council' be established along similar lines to the General Teaching Council and General Social Care Council, who would establish and maintain a register of qualified youth workers, and consider issues such as ethical conduct. The working group recommended that this not be adopted for the present owing to the length of time this would take and the current state of flux within youth work as a profession (NYA, 2003:8). Yet in the context of the possible changes in youth work and the issues faced by inter-agency working in Children's Trusts the very opposite strategy may be more worthwhile for youth workers.

A functioning and prestigious General Youth Work Council would be in a situation to look after the situation of youth workers and 'fight their corner' in debates over professional autonomy. The changes I am referring to are those posed by the introduction of the Children's Trusts discussed in the first part of this article. At the time of writing, it seems likely that Connexions in its present form will cease to exist and the possibility of a General Youth Council may well help youth work to gain the professional status which it lacks in the eyes of a number of students and some youth workers in our study. Indeed, if one conclusion emerged from our study, it would be the need for a professionalisation 'strategy' to be adopted by youth workers to enhance their status. A General Youth Work Council would aid the professional image of Youth Services in the public and policymakers minds.

In Davies' *History of the Youth Service* (1999) he notes that a similar debate took place in the 1970s between those who saw youth work as a profession and those who preferred a more traditional 'trades union' approach. Davies argues that the 'trades union' approach won. The reason for the success of this strategy was that after the *Albemarle* report there was a significant increase in staff, many of whom, according to Davies (p180), 'had given up "artisan" jobs in order to take up employment in youth work. These recruits (particularly the males) brought with them 'a strong commitment to workplace organising' in the trades union tradition. Over time as budget cuts brought increasing threats to their jobs and they viewed themselves as 'insecure and disempowered employees' their response was to turn back to the trades union tradition in order to defend their jobs. Davies suggests that this provided the context for the failure to engage in 'sustained and systematic intellectual labour' (p183) which could have provided the academic and philosophical underpinning of a profession.

However, these conditions have now gone. Recruitment into full-time posts is more likely to be female; there has been a decline in the practice and even culture of trades union activity; and there now is sustained and intellectual labour, as evidenced by the work of The NYA, the activities of research departments in universities, and the publication of journals such as *Youth and Policy*. Moreover, as the professions have been required to become more open to new recruits from a range of backgrounds and to be more accountable to the public and especially to public funding regimes, that 'closed shop' class-based exclusivity against which youth workers in the 1960s and 70s argued is now no longer characteristic of professional status.

The formation of a General Youth Work Council to underpin and regulate professional status

in the contemporary climate would necessarily be a complex business and considerations would have to be given to its funding and powers. However, nursing, teaching and social work, similar occupations, have such bodies and they have formed an integral part of the process of professionalisation. It is not unreasonable to argue that despite issues over power and funding, there should be moves in this direction.

Staff development policies: The Working Group commented on the observation by Ofsted that too few Youth Services provided enough in-service training and that most was patchy or non-existent. The TYW *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* document states that up to five per cent of the staffing budget should be spent on this. A range of measures were proposed by the Working Group to increase and improve in-service training and according to our research, this would certainly aid the promotion of youth work as a profession, and would be a valuable development within the service. It would also help to address issues of lack of support and isolation.

Comprehensive Marketing Strategy: The working group recognised the need for public promotion of the value of youth work to society, alongside effective careers guidance and promotion of youth work to potential recruits, but decided to postpone such a strategy until the other workforce development strategies are operational. However, the research suggested that this was an issue that needed addressing sooner rather than later, with some of the youth workers surveyed stating that they hadn't previously known that youth work was a specific, discrete profession and that they had 'stumbled into it'. As we noted earlier, over half suggested that the promotion of youth work as a profession would significantly help address recruitment issues. The working group's strategy for marketing youth work and for training youth workers largely addressed the question of younger people. In contrast, our research with youth work students indicated that over 75 per cent were aged twenty-five or over and 30 per cent were aged over thirty-five. This suggests that any marketing policy might be usefully aimed at mature candidates rather than, or in addition to, younger ones.

Conclusion

Youth work is currently suffering from poor levels of recruitment and retention and has done so for some years. This survey of youth workers, youth students and Principal Youth Officers in the East and South-East of England suggests firstly that both recruitment and retention are heavily influenced by the notion of youth work as a profession. Students and employees would like greater status and recognition for the work they undertake. Secondly, salary levels are an important issue, particularly in the retention of youth workers who see other forms of employment where they can use their skills, which provide higher salary levels. Retention levels are low as youth workers are attracted elsewhere. However, salary is not the most important factor attracting people into youth work studies in the first place. In this study at least, entrants are motivated more by a desire to work with young people than by financial return. Of course this does not mean that a reasonable starting wage is unimportant – merely that in deciding how to allocate the 'pot' of money available for youth work salaries, employers would do better to give higher percentage increases to experienced youth workers than increasing starting salaries.

Early attrition rates of students and youth workers seem to be linked with a sense of being overwhelmed by the skills needed in the job and the lack of support and supervision they receive. A lengthening of the educational qualification for entry to youth work to three years, as is now being planned will enable these skills to be taught and for students (and youth workers in the early part of their careers) to need less supervision, have greater confidence in their abilities and also bring them to an equal education standard as social workers – a directly comparable group. However, higher salaries and degree status are only part of a broader strategy which is needed if youth workers are to be retained

The lack of confidence in the professional status of youth work apparent in our survey is likely to become increasingly important as an issue with the development of multi-professional working in the new Children's Trusts. In organisations where colleagues are drawn from different professional groups, the more powerful positions are taken by those from 'higher status' professions. If youth work is to recruit and retain an appropriate size and quality of workforce, it needs to address the question of professional status as a central and immediate question

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Youth Related Community Cohesion Policy and Practice: The Divide between Rhetoric and Reality

Roger Green and Rebecca Pinto

Based on empirical research this article provides a critical review of the government's concept of community cohesion and the implementation of its youth related policies at the local level. Grounded in a case study (Pinto and Green, 2004) of a multicultural local authority in South East England, the authors argue that community cohesion is a flawed and contested concept and in practice is a struggle to deliver. The research also raises important questions concerning the role and ability of the youth service to develop cohesion across the youth populations of culturally diverse communities. In light of the paucity of existing academic research on the practical application of the government's community cohesion agenda, the research provides an important and much overdue empirical perspective to contemporary community cohesion policy and practice.

Keywords: *cohesion, multiculturalism, community, youth work, youth services, young people*

During the summer of 2001 the towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham were characterised by violent riots. In total, there were approximately 1500 reported incidents of disorder, 476 people were injured and around £10 million worth of damage accrued (Denham, 2001). The Government's immediate response was a package of practical measures, which included implementing diversionary activities to occupy young people in the remaining holiday period and establishing 'Community Facilitator' posts. The Community Facilitation programme aimed to aid dialogue between different communities in localities that were identified as posing a potential risk for future outbreaks of conflict.

A period of debate followed with the publication of a number of official Government reports (Cantle, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ouseley, 2001; Ritchie, 2001), which examined inter-ethnic and inter-neighbourhood divisions and tensions. The reports described deeply segmented communities, divided along religious, cultural, generational and socio-economic lines and outlined the causal factors that had contributed to the fragmentation and polarisation of community groups. The issues identified included:

- weak political, municipal and community leadership;
- segregated housing patterns;
- single-faith and mono-cultural schools hindering integration;
- the perceived unfair allocation of funding and facilities;
- inconsistent and insufficient youth service provision;
- high levels of poverty and unemployment;
- inflammatory activity by far-right groups; and

- misleading coverage in the media, both national and local, regarding sensitive issues, such as crime and asylum.

Divisions were so entrenched that many of the community groups were seen to lead 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001).

It was highlighted in the ensuing debates which followed the publication of the reports that the precipitating factors were not exclusive to the towns which had experienced the disturbances, but characteristic of the majority of communities throughout the UK. Thus the need to minimise the potential of future outbreaks of conflict and build stronger community relations was seen as a national priority, and accordingly given high precedence in the Government's policy agenda.

The northern town riots, the worst scenes of disorder witnessed in mainland Britain in 20 years (Blair, 2001), signalled the demise of multiculturalism as the dominant ideology in UK race-relations policy and discourse (Webster et al., 2003; Kundnani, 2002). Adopted by successive UK governments since the 1960s, multiculturalism recognises and values cultural differences. According to Modood (2004) its central tenets are equality, the 'multi' concept and integration. It was most recently officially endorsed in 2000 in *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (Runnymede, 2000). However critics claim that multiculturalism simultaneously contributed to segregation. For example, Malik (2002) argues that by the mid-1980s, political struggles which had previously helped to unite communities and build bridges were being replaced with cultural differentiation such as that promoted in the debate that surrounded faith schools, which fragmented communities along old and new divisions.

There has been a widespread departure from multiculturalism in recent policy across Europe (Modood, 2003; Joppke, 2004) and in April 2004, Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) announced that the concept of multiculturalism was dead. He argued that it had reinforced segregation and prevented second-generation ethnic minorities from fully integrating into British society (Phillips, 2004). The reports into the 2001 riots served as 'markers for a new official discourse about race' (Lea, 2003) with the range of core thematic issues identified emphasising the need for a multi-faceted approach that overlapped into multiple policy areas (Green and Pinto, 2005). The proposed policy solution to the 2001 riots was 'community cohesion', which Phillips advocated should replace the abandoned multiculturalism (Burnett and Whyte, 2004).

The rise of 'community cohesion'

Since the period of civil unrest in 2001, 'community cohesion' has become a 'new buzz concept' (Sheriff, 2002) with both the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties, as well as the Labour Government, demonstrating a commitment to the community cohesion agenda (Singh, 2003). Despite the term gaining widespread prominence there is still no general consensus regarding its meaning. The most often cited definition was contained in *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (2002) issued by the Local Government Association (LGA):

a cohesive community is one where:

- *there is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;*

- *the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;*
- *those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;*
- *and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods (LGA et al., 2002: 6).*

Similarly, 'community' remains an elusive and contested concept (Crowe and Allen, 1994; Pople, 1995) which 'has been described as an omnibus word' (Poplin, 1979: 3, cited in Ferlander and Timms, 1999: 3). Despite the lack of consensus, community is most frequently defined in physical (spatial) or psychological (interest) terms. For example, the Active Citizen Centre, part of the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit, defines community as:

A specific group of people who all hold something in common. Community has tended to be associated with two key aspects: firstly people who share locality or geographical place; secondly people who are communities of interest. Communities of interest are groups of people who share an identity – for example Afro-Caribbean people; or who share an experience – for example people with a particular disability (www.active-citizens.org.uk/glossary.asp).

Recently there has been an international resurgence of the notion of community in public policy discourse and practice (Adams and Hess, 2001). The trend is heavily evident in New Labour's policy initiatives (Burnett, 2004), for example, 'New Deal for Communities', 'Sustainable Communities', 'Community Safety Partnerships', 'Community Facilitation Programmes', 'Community Plans', 'Community Empowerment Fund', as well as 'Community Cohesion'. The recent significance attributed to 'community' is in part due to it being so closely related to other central facets of the ideas which inform New Labour's social policy, such as social capital, social exclusion and social cohesion (Adams and Hess, 2001). These concepts are so closely intertwined that they are often used interchangeably: for example, the World Bank uses social cohesion as a synonym for social capital.

The most widely used interpretation of social capital is in reference to types of social infrastructure and connections. Putnam defines it as 'features of social life-networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared interests' (Putnam, 1995: 664–665). Social capital has been further distinguished into 'bonding' and 'bridging' capital (Gittel and Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000; and Warren et al., 1999). Bonding social capital commonly refers to relationships between similar individuals, such as family members, close friends and neighbours, whilst bridging social capital refers to relationships between less heterogeneous individuals, such as colleagues, distant friends and associates. Woolcock (2001) claims that bridging social capital is more often engaged by affluent members of society to 'get ahead', whereas bonding social capital helps to 'get by' and is often employed by impoverished individuals.

Bridging rather than bonding social capital is more conducive to promoting cohesion, as the relations involved are diverse. Consequently the Home Office Citizenship Survey (2003) has included a question on interactions between people from different educational and ethnic backgrounds in an effort to measure bridging capital as an indicator of cohesion. However,

social capital is extremely hard to measure and further research in this area is required. In addition, more research is needed to explore the recently identified link by Costa and Kahn (2003) between high levels of ethnic diversity and low levels of civic engagement which indicate low social capital.

Social exclusion is also inextricably linked with cohesion. This concept focuses on the needs of individuals and groups who are excluded from services and has been high on the political agenda since Labour came to power in 1997 (Back et al., 2002). Although equal access to life opportunities and local services, such as sport and leisure, are areas of concern within the community cohesion agenda, the Government argues that '[c]ommunity cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of...social inclusion' (LGA et al., 2002: 6). However despite the distinction, one point of contention stems from the lack of clarity between social exclusion and community cohesion, and consequently some view community cohesion as just another exercise of 're-branding existing activities' (Pearce, and Blakey, 2004: 9).

The definition of community cohesion in relation to social cohesion is also a source of confusion. Community cohesion can be expressed as 'groups who live in a local area getting together to promote or defend some common local interest' (Forrest and Kearns, 2000: 8). In comparison, social cohesion adheres to 'participation [that] extends across the confines of local communities, knitting them together into a wider whole' (Ferlander and Timms, 1999: 9). The distinction between these concepts is outlined by Webster (2003), who identifies community cohesion as 'pluralistic and potentially exclusive' and social cohesion as 'universalistic and potentially inclusive' (Webster, 2003: 22). If these definitions are accepted, it follows that community cohesion is more likely to contribute to divisions and tensions, than to building bridges when considering the wider societal level (Webster et al., 2003).

Despite the differences, many policy makers and community practitioners use community and social cohesion interchangeably, seemingly unaware of their distinctions (Webster et al., 2003). For example, the Home Office employs the term 'community cohesion', whereas the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) uses 'social cohesion'. Whilst the lack of uniformity is acknowledged in the *Government Response to the ODPM Select Committee Report on Social Cohesion* (Home Office, 2004a), there is no reference to any conceptual difference. This leads to a lack of common understanding: terms 'become normalised and their ubiquity obviates any need for a discussion of their meaning – they acquire a status of common sense' (Shukra et al., 2004: 193).

Community Cohesion as a Flawed Concept

Despite Government recognition that community cohesion refers to different issues depending on the locality (LGA et al., 2002), criticism has been directed at the Government's focus on race within its national community cohesion agenda (Webster, 2003). Community cohesion is closely associated with race issues, but not exclusively, either in theory or in practice. However, the Government's emphasis on race has led to a common assumption that community cohesion is only concerned with racial inequalities and conflicts. This ignores other forms of division, such as disability, age, residency and sexuality, and particularly social class.

The Home Office's usage of 'community cohesion' rather than 'social cohesion' to address community tensions is misguided. Individuals can be excluded from full access to the services and benefits of wider society but connected to and integrated within their neighbourhood/community. Efforts to cement bonding capital within local communities, which are expressive of the communitarian agenda which influenced New Labour, can have a negative effect upon citizenship and identification with the wider society. Young (2003) argues that as a consequence of the United States adopting 'communitarianism, a mosaic of separate communities, each homogenous in their own values, and secure in their own identities' (Young, 2003: 459) there have been high levels of inter-ethnic tension. The riots in northern English towns might be viewed as an example of the devastating consequences of micro-communities becoming too cohesive.

In order to secure social stability Government needs to aspire to the development of policies for cohesion, which goes beyond the confines of locality or markers of communities of interest (such as race or religion). In the foreword of the Parekh report, Britain was described as 'both a community of citizens and a community of communities' (Runnymede, 2000: preface). Concentrating efforts on building the former, which suggests the development of 'bridging' capital, is more likely to lead to social cohesion across ethnicity, than efforts to reinforce the latter.

The community cohesion agenda is intended to derail the decline of community and social capital which is evident in the US and becoming apparent in the UK (Home Office, 2004b), by championing the revitalisation of local communities and the re-building of community spirit and pride. Whereas multiculturalism focused on celebrating differences, community cohesion concentrates on similarities and commonality. The aim of community cohesion is to develop common values, a shared vision, a sense of belonging, and to create a strong civic and common identity (Cantle, 2001). However, the Cantle report made no reference to building 'a "meta-community" in the singular to tie them all [micro-communities] together' (Joppke, 2004: 250).

Alongside the Europe-wide departure from multiculturalism policy has been a shift in policy towards assimilation, driven as a consequence of the fear generated by September 11th and the subsequent 'war on terror' which incorporates a powerful anti-Muslim agenda (Fekete, 2004). Critics of the community cohesion agenda (such as Fekete, 2004; Burnett and Whyte, 2004) have argued that what is actually being proposed under the guise of community cohesion is assimilation and cultural homogenisation. Much of this argument stems from the then Home Secretary's, David Blunkett, introduction of citizenship ceremonies and English language tests for immigrants.

In contrast, Blunkett (2004) claimed the premise behind community cohesion as a policy agenda is that cultural diversity and integration are compatible. Thus, community cohesion has prioritised increasing opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and discourages segregation (Karla, 2001). Examples of implemented measures have included engineering more socially mixed neighbourhoods, and twinning programmes between schools with pupil populations of predominately one culture. The precedence placed on encouraging integration within the community cohesion strategy is such that Shukra et al., (2004) claim that cohesion has replaced what was previously referred to as integration.

Integration has been a long-standing feature of UK Government race relations policy, referring to immigrant individuals and groups developing relations with members of the resident community and adopting the culture of this dominant group in society. Multiculturalism attempted to counter-weight the assimilationist nature of integration, in that celebrating cultural diversity allowed people from minority cultural backgrounds to retain preservation of cultural distinctiveness. This approach is more in line with Jenkin's view of integration as 'equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Jenkins, 1966, cited in Kundnani, 2004). When Trevor Phillips announced multiculturalism, as a policy, redundant, he called on all citizens to 'assert a core of Britishness' (Phillips, 2004). However, his push for more concerted efforts to integrate in the UK, and contemporary discourse in line with his view, is 'not really about integration but assimilation' (Kundnani, 2004). With such endorsement coming directly from the head of the CRE, there has been an increasing expectation that minority members adapt to the cultural norms (with all their inequalities) imposed by Government and England's dominant and majority society.

The spotlight on integration within the community cohesion agenda is based on a lack of understanding regarding the competing realities of the different community groups in the localities that witnessed disturbances in 2001. For example, it ignores examples of low levels of inter-ethnic conflict within ethnically segregated areas of cities, such as Leicester and Birmingham (Karla, 2001). Furthermore, it fails to give credence to social deprivation and racism (institutional and other) as a source of conflict (Kundnani, 2005).

Research (such as Valentine and McDonald, 2004) indicates that most peoples' prejudices are directed at groups with whom they have limited if any contact, such as for the settled community, asylum seekers and travellers. Thus, rather than integration, what is needed to build bridging capital and create a more cohesive society is meaningful interaction across different communities, which Back (in Amin 2002) argues takes place in sites such as schools and the workplace.

Community Cohesion Policy: The Role of Local Government

Local factors can create subtle differences in the expression of prejudices between groups (Valentine and McDonald, 2004). The Government reports recommended a series of measures designed to build bridges between fragmented communities, but variations in the demographic, economic and social make-up of local populations entail the need to customise the recommendations so as to ensure they effectively address local needs and priorities. For example in Tewkesbury, community cohesion work has attended to removing the divisions and barriers between the resident community and traveller communities (ODPM and Home Office, 2004). Constant changes in social composition, social trends and technological advances imply that the corresponding needs of local populations are in a state of flux. As a consequence of the dynamic nature of society, implemented services and practices need to be regularly evaluated and modified. Thus, to be meaningful, community cohesion must be an ongoing and never-ending process.

The localised nature of community cohesion as a concept, resulted in part in local government being attributed the main responsibility of promoting it. Consequently the majority of the

recommendations contained in the Government reports on the riots were intended to inform local authorities. This diversion of responsibility to local politics has been a constant feature of the Labour Government's race relations agenda since 1997 (Back et al., 2002). For example, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000), one of the outcomes of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report (Macpherson, 1999), placed a statutory duty on local authorities to promote good race relations.

Much of the Government's focus has centred on building 'the context in which cohesion can grow' (Home Office, 2004a: 2). Central to this approach has been the identification of examples of good practice to contribute to a growing body of practice knowledge in facilitating cohesion (Home Office, 2005). For example, in October 2002 the Government launched a two year Community Cohesion Pathfinders programme providing funding of £6 million to 14 Pathfinder partnerships to develop and assess innovative methods in building community cohesion. A further 14 'shadow' areas participated in the dissemination process but did not receive funding. Furthermore, in April 2003, London Borough of Barnet, Cheshire Fire Authority, Leicester City Council, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Tewkesbury Borough Council, were awarded Beacon status for best practice by local governments/agencies in developing cohesion, after it was included as a theme in the fourth round of the Beacon Council Scheme.

These two national initiatives raised the profile of community cohesion at a local level. Government implemented policies which have attempted to build community cohesion into the agenda of local government have included requiring local authorities, in conjunction with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) (made up of local residents and local organisations from the public, private, commercial, voluntary and community sector), to develop community plans, under the Local Government Act (2000), which promote a shared local vision. 'Community plans' are required to outline a delivery plan to realise this vision which gives weight to facilitating cohesion generally and to targeting community cohesion issues across the area of local government responsibility. More recently from 2005, community cohesion was included as one of the criteria to be assessed in local government Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPAs) under the banner of 'Safer and Stronger Communities'.

Community Cohesion Rhetoric: The Role of Young People and Youth Work

The reports into the riots and subsequent debates have attributed particular significance to the role of young people in developing community cohesion. This in part was due to young people being identified as the predominant perpetrators of the 2001 riots and also because young people are generally viewed as the custodians of the future. However, there is evidence that the potential for championing of young people as leading efforts to build community cohesion has not been achieved. For example a survey commissioned by the CRE (YouGov, 2004) found that young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities were twice as likely as their elders to have a group of friends that completely excludes whites. Other studies (eg. Heim et al., 2004) have also found the reality of inter-community relations among young people in the UK to be in stark contrast to the Government's agenda of a cohesive community.

The importance attributed to young people in realising the Government's community cohesion agenda can partly be attributed to the degree to which the Government is able to intervene in young people's lives. Youth work, and more recently schools, have been identified as crucial settings to develop the Government's vision.

The Transforming Youth Work agenda, of which a central component has been the implementation of the Connexions strategy, has been presented as the most significant development for the youth service since the 1960s (Smith, 2003; NYA, 2003). In particular, *Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002) marked a turning point in youth service policy, outlining Government expectations of youth service provision by local authorities and their partners, and a vision of modernised youth work practice and provision with a range of targets and service indicators.

The reports into the riots described youth work provision as patchy and linked the decline of quality youth provision with rising inter-ethnic tensions amongst the local youth population. Subsequent debates all alluded to the integral role of youth service provision in building cohesion. The Youth and Community Practitioner Group of the Community Cohesion Panel underlined three main areas where youth service provision could exert a positive influence on inter-community relations:

- *integrated service provision;*
 - *provision of support and training in community cohesion to organisations and staff;*
 - *and representation and empowerment of young people in decision-making process.*
- (Ministerial Group on Community Cohesion, 2002: 1)

The Reality of Community Cohesion

The authors undertook a case study of the development of community cohesion policy and practice delivered by a local authority youth service and its voluntary sector partners in South East England. The council had identified the pivotal role of the youth service in delivering community cohesion as requiring further research. The research upon which this article is based was commissioned to explore the reality of the youth service and its partners in delivering community cohesion in a multi-ethnic borough that was experiencing minor racist incidents and pockets of rising inter-ethnic tensions, particularly among the younger community members.

The study adopted an action research model (see Reason and Bradbury, 2001), central to which was the establishment of a research project steering group comprised of key community representatives from statutory youth service, voluntary sector, police, and youth cabinet members. Allocating the responsibility for overseeing the development of the project to steering group members facilitated active engagement and grounded the research. The research employed a multi-method approach. A visual mapping of venues and sites hosting statutory and voluntary youth clubs and projects was undertaken and postal questionnaires were sent to statutory and voluntary youth service providers and staff across the borough. Focus groups were conducted involving statutory full-time youth service staff, Connexions staff, and young people (both users and non-users of youth service provision) and semi-structured interviews were undertaken with youth service managers, local councillors, police,

members of the local youth parliament, and voluntary youth service providers.

The borough had an ethnically diverse population with 27% from black and minority ethnic groups (Census, 2001). The main ethnic minority populations were Pakistani (9%) and Bangladeshi (4%), with both experiencing growth due to their young demography. More than 40% of the Asian population was concentrated in two wards of the town, with a third of local residents in each of these wards being white. Furthermore, these two wards were ranked in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and ODPM, 2000), which measures levels of deprivation on the basis of six domains (income, employment, health, education, housing and geographic access to services), as falling within the 10% most deprived wards in England. In addition to this geographic segregation, racial segregation between Asian and non-Asians was found to be prevalent among secondary schools in the area (Burgess and Wilson, 2004).

The main aim of the research was to examine the extent that the youth service and its partners had contributed to the council's overall community cohesion agenda. The findings reveal the limited extent to which community cohesion had impacted on the youth service and its work with young people.

Young People's experiences of racism

The findings indicated that racism is increasingly featuring in the everyday lives of young people. For example, a Hindu female member of the borough's youth cabinet stated that: 'In my school, it's majority Muslim, it's really hard for people who aren't Muslim...Me personally, I'm not a Muslim and it's really difficult...I feel left out and they call me names and everything.' Although experiences varied, there was widespread acknowledgement by the young people in our case study that race had impacted on their daily experiences. Inter-ethnic hostility and racist incidents were perceived as an ever-increasing normal and regular characteristic of young people's lives in the borough with one African-Caribbean member of the youth cabinet claiming:

There is a racist culture that isn't being taken seriously in schools. You hear people being called Paki just casually like it doesn't mean anything ... or Nigger ... it's just not taken seriously, it's just like that's the norm.

The majority of young people in schools with a more culturally mixed intake of pupils identified a relatively high degree of self-segregation along ethnic lines, predominantly by young Asians, both male and female. Patterns of friendships amongst the young white and African-Caribbean members of schools with an ethnically diverse intake of pupils tended to be mixed in terms of ethnicity, compared to young Asians who tended to be friends with pupils who shared their culture. This lack of cross-cultural interaction between pupils of white and Asian heritage has been well documented in previous studies, for example, in South Wales (Scourfield et al., 2002) and Lancashire (Simmill-Binning et al., 2003). Interestingly, Simmill-Binning et al., (2003) also found that the few friendships that were established and carried out at school between young white and Asian pupils were rarely continued outside the school setting.

The study also highlighted self-segregation along ethnic lines outside school. One young Bangladeshi male commented: 'Everyone likes to keep themselves to themselves...People don't tend to mix. Even if you organised a big community-wide event people wouldn't mix.' A young Asian female reiterated this view: 'When the events are actually organised and everyone comes to them, but when they're actually there, they're all in different corners, like the Asians get separated, Blacks get separated, Whites get separated...'. This behaviour was also observed by Thomas (2003); Asian young women mixed freely during mixed sessions at a Youth Service organised conference, but then 'experienced tensions in the lunch break' (Thomas, 2003: 33).

Serious racial tensions were repeatedly identified in the research between young male members of the Asian community, specifically Bangladeshi and Pakistani, and young male members of the African-Caribbean community. A youth worker from the voluntary sector claimed that such racial tensions were linked with fighting to gain supremacy of drug dealing across the borough. However, another voluntary sector youth worker working with the African-Caribbean community, opposed this view:

I think we've got some serious problems, especially with young people. There is a race problem...newspapers report it...but its not just gangs fighting for turf...that's not correct...it's about race...no one will admit there's no strategy to deal with it.

There was a general consensus among youth workers, community representatives and young people that there were divisions and tensions amongst young residents in the borough along geographic lines. This was mainly exhibited through patterns of territorialism. Frontline youth workers and young people repeatedly identified the same wards as experiencing high levels of territorialism. A Connexions personal advisor commented: 'Young people want to stay in their comfort zone and feel uncomfortable going into other areas.' This sentiment was echoed by a police officer interviewed who stated that 'Groups of young people tend not to enter these areas alone, but go mob-handed for extra security.' Recent studies (Thomas, 2003; Simmill-Binning et al., 2003) corroborate the notion that the nature of young people's lives is increasingly being racialised. The prevalence of territorialism following patterns of racially defined areas is also evident in other research (Ray and Smith, 2004; Donnan and Wilson, 1999; Webster, 1995; Webster, 2003;). This impacts on young people by inhibiting their movement and generating fear (Simmill-Binning et al., 2003).

Community cohesion awareness and training needs

Only 33 per cent of voluntary youth service staff in the case study and equally few young people questioned had previously encountered the term 'community cohesion'. In contrast, the majority of statutory youth service staff had heard of the term but had only a vague understanding, unclear of its distinction from other concepts such as social inclusion, community development and equal opportunities. There was also a common perception amongst statutory youth workers that community cohesion was 'just another buzzword.' The lack of clarity and suspicion regarding the term has also been observed in other studies (Pearce and Blakey, 2004).

Whilst no frontline youth service staff, either in the statutory or voluntary sector, had received or been offered any formal training relating to community cohesion, all statutory youth workers and the majority (83%) of voluntary youth service providers thought guidance on community cohesion should be offered to all youth service staff. Differences of opinion were expressed in relation to what training in community cohesion should entail due to it overlapping with issues such as social inclusion and racial equality.

Youth service provision and practice

There was widespread agreement amongst statutory youth workers and young people, both users and non-users of youth service provision, that youth service provision needed to be increased and improved. As one community stakeholder said of the youth service in the borough: 'It promises a lot, but fails to deliver.' Youth service staff from both the statutory and voluntary sector commented that the youth service had been historically under-resourced, creating staffing problems, both in recruitment and retention, that had affected service provision. Whilst this was being addressed with the reorganisation of the service and a clearer management structure, some issues still remained. For example, one part-time youth worker in the statutory sector claimed that staffing problems has resulted in the reduction of opening hours at a youth club, which had contributed to a rise in anti-social behaviour amongst local young people.

Other community members commented that during the summer when provision was needed most, some youth service provision remained closed. In addition, youth workers conceded that provision made available in the holiday periods was often characterised by duplication, due to a lack of co-ordination between statutory and voluntary agencies. The lack of diversity among youth work initiatives and the availability of youth service provision catering for older teenagers (aged 15 plus) were particularly criticised by both youth workers and young people. At the same time, lack of awareness and information relating to youth service provision, were cited by young people as barriers to accessing youth service provision. Young female Asians commented that they found lack of safe transport links to be particularly relevant to their inability to access youth service facilities.

Youth service provision and funding was perceived by some key members of the African-Caribbean community working with young people as unfairly distributed, with other communities being over-represented at their expense. As one African-Caribbean worker commented: 'The African-Caribbean community needs are not being met by the youth service...we've been struggling for them for years...[our] club has not been well resourced... other youth clubs have had better resources.' This view was supported by a young African-Caribbean female who felt discriminated against and excluded due to the lack of African-Caribbean targeted youth service facilities. The significant need for service provision catering for young members of the African-Caribbean community was highlighted as responsible for them hanging around in the street and the rise in so-called 'nuisance youths'.

Course there is a need for provision for us. There's a lot of black youths out there and a lot of those black youths are getting arrested, going to prison for life...like those riots, if they want a replica [here], they can get it, carrying on giving us nothing. There's nothing

for us to do except make trouble, in' it, so that's what we're going to...

Asian staff within the statutory youth sector and Connexions claimed that in areas that had become increasingly ethnically diverse, but had historically been populated by predominantly Asians, the vast majority of provision still catered exclusively for Asians. Members of the youth cabinet generally felt that while youth provision serving particular ethnic groups exclusively functioned as support groups, particularly for young Asian females and young asylum seekers, such services might contribute to fragmenting communities further. Young people and youth workers involved in such provision felt that such effects could be minimised by encouraging more opportunities for interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds, mainly through twinning initiatives. When asked what would bring young people from different communities together and develop community cohesion, responses from young people included: film clubs, photography classes, writing classes, trips and residentials, music clubs (learning about different cultural music and dancing styles, learning how to MC, DJ, and play musical instruments) and sport-based activities (with a heavy emphasis on football). However, youth workers conceded that opportunities for twinning initiatives between mainstream and targeted youth service providers had not been sufficiently utilised as partnership working between different youth service providers, particularly between the statutory and voluntary sector, had been dogged by problems, such as a lack of information sharing.

Role of the youth workers

After being informed of the meaning of community cohesion as defined by their local authority, the majority of voluntary and statutory youth service staff agreed that this should be part of their remit and that they were well placed to play a significant role in promoting community cohesion amongst the young people they worked with. Furthermore, the majority of statutory youth workers surveyed (87%) considered that the work they already undertook with young people promoted community cohesion, citing as examples providing informal education on equality, citizenship, cultural diversity, and cultural awareness; having an inclusive policy and not condoning discrimination of any kind; and involving young people in decision-making processes, particularly through the youth cabinet. Examples of some existing positive youth work encouraging cross-cultural interaction in both statutory and voluntary sector included: community cricket matches; residential weekends with young people from different cultural backgrounds, including young asylum seekers; summer projects and midnight ice-skating. At one level these can be interpreted as examples of multi culturalism but they promote cohesion insofar as they also tackle stereotypes, such as racism.

In recent years the Government has placed a number of agendas on the youth service, including crime reduction, active citizenship, and community cohesion. Youth workers and young people argued that schools should be more involved and invested in the development of cohesion. For example, the majority of youth workers cited that the potential for youth service involvement and partnership working with and across the borough's schools, particularly relating to Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes was limited.

Doubt existed among statutory youth workers as to whether the Connexions service had the

ability to promote community cohesion due to accreditation targets and increased paperwork. There was a view that Connexions work focused on individual young people, which negated a more community-wide role. Consequently, the majority of the youth workers surveyed claimed to feel that the responsibility of developing community cohesion was burdened solely on their shoulders.

One statutory youth worker described the youth service as 'the biggest resource we have' in developing community cohesion, but there was a consensus amongst youth sector staff that they could not develop community cohesion in isolation. While the youth workers identified themselves as making critical interventions in limiting the escalation of tensions, they viewed their abilities as constrained, due to increased bureaucracy, required outputs, and local politics. In addition, statutory youth workers argued that long-term funding for sustained projects rather than short-term initiatives was needed.

Conclusion: The divide between rhetoric and reality

The findings revealed that the delivery of community cohesion policies at the local level was limited, in that the extent to which the local youth population experienced community cohesion intervention was minimal. The youth service, the main vehicle for policy implementation appeared under-resourced and characterised by a hybrid of disjointed provision and over-stretched staff. With the introduction of community cohesion as a policy measure and its application to local conditions, additional pressure was placed on youth workers, which was not met with a sufficient change in youth service provision or practice. Consequently the local authority's youth service had difficulty in tackling the entrenched issues that were negatively impacting on inter-community relations in the borough.

The extent that community cohesion is developed relies on a much wider context than has been the focus of this study, however the findings demonstrate the reality facing youth services in developing community cohesion. It raises important questions relating to their ability to play a crucial role in delivering the government's community cohesion agenda and has key implications for local and national policy. Although partnership between schools and the youth service could go some way to contributing to the youth services' existing efforts, careful consideration should be directed at the terms of reference through which this will be achieved and the resources which are needed to accomplish it. Equally citizenship education, introduced as a statutory subject in secondary schools since September 2002, has the potential for creating greater understanding and respect for cultural differences, if community cohesion became a more central theme within the citizenship agenda. However, one of the most significant findings to emerge was that the legacy of low investment in the youth service, locally and nationally, has resulted in a weakened service, unable to address established and emerging needs of young people or to effectively meet the different agendas set by Government. Thus, greater resources are needed for the youth service, separate to Connexions. Whilst the findings presented here are specific to the borough in question, there is little reason to question whether they are atypical of youth services' experiences across England. For example, the need for sustainable, long-term youth service funding is an increasingly persistent feature within contemporary discourse on the youth service.

In October 2002, while addressing a conference on community cohesion, Beverley Hughes MP, then Minister of State for Citizenship, Immigration and Social Cohesion, claimed: 'the theory [of community cohesion] isn't difficult. But the practice is' (Hughes, cited in Runnymede, 2002: 8). We agree that the theory is not difficult, but as noted in our introduction, we believe that the Government's understanding of community cohesion is flawed, based on a misunderstanding of the realities of the sources of conflict in the riot towns and other communities across the country. Consequently it follows that any plans for developing cohesion based on these misinterpretations will be equally flawed. Our findings showed that the youth service did struggle with the conceptual ambiguity and confusion in relation to the concept of community cohesion and the realities of trying to implement policy based on such confusions. Within an under-resourced and badly organised local environment, such problems seemed exacerbated.

In relation to Hughes' point on the practice being difficult- there is a crucial need to address the lack of empirical research within the practical application of community cohesion policies. Despite a shift in policy emphasis over the last three years, community cohesion remains a struggle to deliver. Progress has been uneven and slow: for example in 2003 the Commons Select Committee for the ODPM launched an enquiry into the slow momentum of developing cohesion.

Recent BNP electoral successes, rising Islamophobia, and public concern regarding the effect of the EU expansion on economic migrants, exemplify the current climate of race relations in the UK. Community cohesion has become arguably the most significant issue across Europe and is being regularly challenged by contentious issues such as faith schools, religious dress, the disproportionate number of 'stop-and-searches' conducted on Asians and the demonisation of young people and asylum seekers in the media. This article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on race relations policy and practice.

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Practitioner Knowledge and Evidence-based Research, Policy and Practice

Mary Issitt and Jean Spence

Current political imperatives for evidence-based practice in work with young people privileges externally produced knowledge over that which practitioners derive from and apply in their work settings. The practice/research relationship and its outcomes could be enhanced through critical reflection on the dynamics of the personal, professional and political aspects of practice both for researchers and 'face-to-face' service providers. This would provide opportunities for the joint creation of knowledge that is transformative,

Keywords: *critical reflection; research; evidence based policy and practice.*

More than twenty years ago Donald Schön (1983) argued for a new approach to the development of professional knowledge by focusing on practitioners' reflection on experience, rather than relying on the imposition of external knowledge. The current vogue for evidence-based practice in educational, health and welfare services once again puts the experience of fieldworkers at centre stage, but implies that the quality of interventions have to be evaluated and verified through external research (Solesbury, 2001; Catan, 2002; Fox, 2003). Whilst having evidence to support practice would appear to be non-controversial and the potential for 'objectivity' and 'transparency' desirable, this article argues that prevailing modes of evidence-gathering privileges particular types of researcher knowledge and this serves to silence the practitioner voice. We revisit Schön's work, advocating a reframing as critical reflective practice with the aim of promoting a shared endeavour for professional fieldworkers and researchers to give voice to the practitioner evidence base.

Communicating practice: problems with external verification

Face to face practice, by its very nature is not concerned primarily with gathering evidence and creating meaning, but rather with personal and social change. Within relationship-based occupations, and particularly within youth work in which the voluntary participation of young people is central, communicating the apparently mundane and everyday nature of practice has not historically had a high priority:

What hope would a club leader have of securing funds who stated, 'last year my boys learned nothing except how not to cheat at games quite so often, to wash their hands

occasionally, to take their caps off in the club, and to enjoy being together'? (Brew, 1943: 49-50)

Moreover, there are aspects of the relational elements of practice which necessarily take place in the realm of the interpersonal, extending beyond the organisation:

The relationships that young people make with each other in a youth project are just as important as the relationship they make with a worker (Robertson, 2004:78)

The interpersonal takes great skill to communicate if it is not to be misunderstood and is almost impossible to quantify. Consequently, there have often been silences in practitioner accounts of their work around those very elements which are at its heart.

In the contemporary climate, it has been suggested that

The language of both accreditation and so-called smart outcomes (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) with their promises of measurable and completed results, seems to have robbed youth work of its ability to express and explain itself on its own terms and in its own more subtle vocabulary (Brent, 2004:69).

Failure effectively to communicate the importance of what might appear mundane or subjective in informal educational work with young people has sometimes led to distortions in public perceptions of the nature of the work, unease about the public accountability of such practice and tension between policy intentions and practice realities.

The knowledge generated within the people professions has always been informed by theory and empirical evidence: without this, such work could lay no claim to professional status. However, professional practice also includes a knowing which springs from the experience of everyday interventions and association with service-users. Although there have been some excellent efforts in recent years to give voice to the meanings of practice from professional worker perspectives, (see for example Brent, 2002, 2004) such 'knowing' is not readily accommodated by the standard approaches of research and evaluation. The complex and subtle understanding of practice derived from the interpretation of experience over time (Spence, 2004) often eludes evaluation through externally designed research methodologies which seek to establish general and universal criteria for measuring 'quality' for purposes of public accountability. Nevertheless, significant policy decisions, which set the terms within which practice must proceed, are made with persistent reference to 'evidence' derived from such research and evaluation:

There's an obsession with evidence-based policy...if Number 10 says bloody evidence-based policy to me once more, I'm going to deck someone and probably get unemployed. (Louise Casey, Director of Anti Social Behaviour Unit, quoted BBC News, 6th July 2005, 1.00pm).

Casey's outburst during an after-dinner speech implicitly assumes the value of knowledge which is not 'evidence-based'. Her frustration arises in a climate where such knowing is not acknowledged and where criticism of policy in terms which do not fit the evidence-base

as defined by government, is foreclosed. In this scenario, narratives encapsulating the full range of practitioner knowledge, which are not embraced by this prevailing 'evidence-based' approach, are undervalued.

The invisibility of the experiential knowledge of practitioners has been addressed theoretically with reference to problems of subjectivity, power and equality in the research relationship. In this regard, ideas about praxis, process, and reflective action have been explored in relation to validating and accessing practice knowledge (eg. Everitt et al, 1992; McNiff, 1994). Within the professions, Schön's concept of 'reflective practice' (1983) has been seminal in illustrating the significance of 'insider' knowledge in problem solving. Despite such ongoing theoretical debates and the impact of *The Reflective Practitioner* within people-oriented professions, the evidence-base voiced by external researchers and evaluators prevails, fueling anxieties about the nature and quality of the substantive practice of professional workers:

How do you measure the impact it has on young people? A lot of the time it's hard outputs in terms of crime statistics, health stats and stuff. Whereas a lot of the time when we work with young people it's going to be on a preventative level and it's going to be longer term. You're not going to see the outcomes. So it's quite difficult in terms of how we describe youth work and the impact youth work has on young people's lives. (Youth worker, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)

Practice can seldom fully recognise itself in the 'evidence' drawn from research (Fox, 2003). Consequently practitioners struggle to adjust to the assumptions and imperatives of policy makers who call upon such evidence to justify their decisions. Within the framework and systems for practice which result, the experiential knowledge of practitioners is further down-graded, and practice discourse further displaced, adding to a cycle of control and anxiety which provokes demands for ever more externally evaluated evidence of 'quality'. This is one aspect of the de-professionalisation which currently affects all the human service professions. It is particularly problematic within youth work which has never fully established its professional credentials and where 'evidence' might be seen as a means of clarifying professional status:

S. There needs to be some evaluation. It's back to...being professional and not being seen as professionals, being able to say what we do and saying, 'This is what we do. Here's some evidence'.

Notably this worker goes on to say:

...It doesn't have to be playing the game in terms of 'bums on seats'. But it has to be something. (Youth worker, group discussion. Durham University, 2005)

As evidence based policy and practice regarding 'what works' have become the watchwords within managerialist agendas for engagement and action designed to achieve concrete 'outcomes', face-to-face workers are structurally disadvantaged by the underdevelopment or silencing of coherent discourses relating to the knowledge which comes from fieldwork experience. Professional practitioners are often treated by researchers as 'gatekeepers', providing access to users, rather than as agentic partners or producers of meaning in their

own right. Simultaneously, regular evaluations of their work assume deficiency in their practice. Evaluation is presented as the means whereby workers can learn how to improve the efficiency of 'service delivery' to participating user groups and through which policy makers can expect accountability. Insofar as aspects of practice knowledge are not included within the discursive frameworks of research, the resulting evidence may be of limited value in the field. Worse, when such partial understanding informs policy, it may lead to distorted priorities and deskilling in practice, the very antithesis of what *The Reflective Practitioner* seek to achieve.

Theory and practice

The notion of reflective practice developed by Donald Schön (1983; 1992) has been influential in framing approaches to community and youth work education and practice (Smith, 1994; Bamber, 1998; Bessant, 2004). Schön observed a crisis of public trust in the ability of professionals to solve problems in areas where they claimed expertise. He argued that an over-reliance on positivist epistemology (which has again come to the fore in gathering evidence about practice), represented the 'academic high ground' and contributed to this crisis, separating theory from its application. In this paradigm, theorising is an activity discrete from the ongoing, daily, difficulties and challenges of the 'swampy lowlands' of practice. Its dominance leads to the imposition of technically rational solutions to practice problems (Schön, 1992: 54). Professional problem-solving thereby becomes an 'objective' enterprise to be prosecuted by an expert elite. This fails to incorporate significant subjective pressures or to utilise the active engagement and experiential knowledge of the practitioner.

Schön's ideas were formulated at a time when counter-professionals were becoming increasingly vocal in their critique of what had come to stand for professional expertise. Whilst acknowledging their insights, Schön was concerned that radical ideologies might themselves become a new elitist orthodoxy. Pursuing a more fluid understanding of professional knowing, he argued that this should include the capacity to deal with 'indeterminate zones of practice – the situations of complexity and uncertainty, the unique cases that require artistry, the elusive task of problem setting, the multiplicity of professional identities...' (Schön, 1992: 51). These require on-the-spot action and reaction to non-routine situations which are beyond the scope of technical rationality.

For Schön, professional knowing requires practitioners to access their tacit understanding in order both to identify (set) and solve problems. Utilising his observations in various occupations, he sought to systematise professional engagement, celebrating in his analysis the possibilities of 'reflection-in-action' (during an event) and 'reflection-on-action' (after an event had taken place). Through his version of reflection, practitioners could access hidden knowledge that otherwise would not be available to them. For Schön, 'reflection-in-action' enshrined a new epistemology of practice, applicable across a wide range of disciplines (Schön, 1983). It is not surprising that reflective practice has been widely taken up within the people-centred professions such as teaching, social work, nursing and youth and community work as it resonates with the conditions of face-to-face work already described (Eraut, 1995; Palmer et al., 1994; Yelloly and Henkel, 1995).

Schön's epistemology of practice has been subject to criticism, not the least being that

'reflection' is an imprecise method (summarised in Issitt, 2003). His focus on practitioner performance also has limitations akin to the technicism he attacked, missing the potential for reflection to be a transformative or transgressive learning activity, addressing the wider, moral and political issues that impact on users, professional organisations and individual practitioners (Mezirow, 1981).

Nevertheless, reflective practice has been adopted as an accessible and meaningful concept to help communicate, critically evaluate and theorise practice knowledge (Bamber, 1998; Issitt, 1999, 2000; Woods, 2001). In particular, reflective practice counters the downgrading of critical analysis which has resulted from the emphasis on 'performance' and 'delivery' in the framing of professional practice as occupational competence (Bessant, 2004). Yet reflective practice on its own has been insufficient to withstand the political demand for empirical evidence derived from externally validated research and evaluation. Practitioner knowledge remains low down the hierarchy of valid data.

The nature of the divisions between theory and practice shift according to the political climate. Schön attempted to provide a theoretical rationale for systematising professional understanding which countered the limitations of positivism within professional practice. The contemporary focus encompasses an implicit criticism of theory-making in general, based upon a perceived gap between theoretical research and the informational needs of the 'real' worlds of policy and practice. To justify funding for its activities research practice is now required to be relevant to policy-making, and to professional practice as the delivery-arm of policy (Catan, 2002). This forces apart critical, value-based scholarship, reflective practice and research processes.

Practice and the academy

Within debates about the relevance of sociological research, it has been suggested that social scientists might usefully adopt Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* in order to integrate values and practical questions (Flyvbjerg, 2001). *Phronesis* assumes the possibility of taking a principled position, 'a moral disposition to act truly and rightly' (Smith, 1994:164). The adoption of such an idea might contribute to a reflexive approach amongst researchers which would more fully sensitise them to the subtleties of practitioner knowing. However, such a position is not encouraged in a climate in which scholarship, research, and professional practice are physically and intellectually disaggregated. Instead of encouraging *phronesis*, the research and evaluation market undermines the connection between values and action. This is signified by the separation of theory, research and teaching within universities. In the market for gathering 'evidence', values and scholarship are not required. Meanwhile teaching, the experience of which might aid the reflexive processes and practice understanding of researchers, is denigrated as mere technical 'practice'.

Yet within research communities there have been robust debates about the principles and appropriateness of methodology for the purposes and values of inquiry which suggest a commitment to *phronesis*. This includes the possibility of user participation, of making practitioner knowledge visible and of producing research that supports practice contexts. Such approaches are often written into research applications and set as criteria for funding, but the

ideals are seldom fully realised. A climate of short term funding arrangements for research and for professional practice, characterised by professional segregation and employment insecurity, can hardly facilitate the precondition of fruitful and open dialogues over time. Moreover, the implementation of such ideals is inherently threatening. Integrating research and practice would undermine the currently lucrative market for researchers and evaluators. Meanwhile, a comprehensive orientation towards the articulation of practice knowledge may lead to methodologies that are challenging and 'disruptive', flying in the face of current political demands for 'evidence' as a measure of the 'value for money' of professional outcomes (Edwards, 2002; Fox, 2003; Smith and Hodkinson, 2002).

Political questioning of the value of social science theory is informed by issues of power and control rather than questions of *phronesis*. Critics such as David Blunkett (cited in Kingston, 2003) and Chris Woodhead (1998) display an interest in the production of evidence for particular kinds of practice, creating a new form of 'crisis' in the relationship between theory and research practice in which research which does not directly serve policy imperatives or address problems relating to the policy priorities is defined as deficient. The conditions of intellectual work have become more tightly controlled, encouraging instrumentalism within the academy (Gorard, 2002). Competition, rigid timetables and pre-determined criteria for the assessment of outcomes characterise the terms of research contracts, are apparent within the functions of the Research Assessment Exercise and inform the processes of the research councils, delineating the conditions under which the social sciences might survive as publicly funded disciplines (Solesbury, 2001). Research is required to generate politically 'useful' information.

Many researchers who have worked on consultancies, contract research and evaluation studies will have experienced the pressure, subtle and not so subtle, put upon them to produce results in accord with some pre-determined plan. It is as though 'research' is being conducted to find evidence for an already existing agenda. (Gorard, 2002: 5)

Politicians have cynically used research 'evidence' to promote the particular positions they are taking. Thus the spectacle of Margaret Hodge citing research which suggested that youth clubs were of little value (Hodge, 2005), despite the availability of more recent available evidence to the contrary commissioned by her own department (Merton et al, 2004). Such cynicism is not lost upon those in the research and evaluation field who maintain their positions and pursue academic careers by accessing research income and consultancy without any value-based criticism of the terms in which it is framed and without reference to whether or not the 'evidence' gained will add to the understanding of workers and to the quality of their interventions with user groups.

A particular matrix of relations of power and control between the academy, policy makers, funders and practitioners is inscribed within the current fashion for 'evidence-based policy and practice' which has become central to government thinking. Financial stringency ensures that ultimately, research is mobilised in the service of managerialist agendas for 'efficiency' and 'value for money' in the public sector. In youth work, which has long been resource-poor, the situation is further complicated by private finance in the voluntary sector. Much 'research' is commissioned as an in-built requirement of funding for short term projects. The motivation for such a requirement cannot be towards the development of 'good' practice, but rather to

provide 'evidence' that public and/or private finance has been spent according to the purposes of the sponsors, be they the political needs of current administrations to demonstrate the efficacy of their policies, or the positive promotion of the name of a private company. In this process, evidence is marshalled in order to represent the work according to pre-set demands:

J: *There's a pressure to report back to funders on lots of their objectives And there's a game that goes on. I see a game going on. We get young people to tell us how good we are, and then we tell the funders how good young people think we are... ...I definitely think there's a big game goes on with all this. Reporting back to funders and evaluating things.*

K: *There has to be in this big, bad, work we live in. There has to be.*

J: *It doesn't make it right though.*

K: *But there has to be some sort of formal system. Because we're a voluntary charity organisation, we have to probably prove more, that we are worthwhile. Very much we've always said that we're qualitative work, and that to me is just a face because you always have to prove your stats at the end of it. So how can you support quality in youth work when you have to prove it or back it up with statistics? That does not show good quality youth work. That just shows you are good at creative evaluations.*

J: *Are you saying that statistics prove quality?*

K: *No... funders want statistics, they don't want quality.*

J: *At the end of the day that means there could be loads of organisations out there...doing loads of damage to young people. And they are reporting back to funders...Mega statistics to make them look great. So that's OK then? That's the way it's got to be?*

K: *No. It's not OK. But it's the way it is. It's a game. (Youth workers, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)*

Questions which might be generated by intellectual and reflective work within scholarship and fieldwork practice or through dialogue between theoretically informed research and professional practice, become secondary to the pragmatic needs of policy making and marketing. Publications based upon such 'research' seldom have any impact beyond the immediate gratification of the sponsor's needs for data. In these circumstances, dialogue and debate in the research community concerning purposes and methodologies may be dismissed as 'unresolved intellectual turmoil' (Smith and Hodkinson, 2002:295). Intellectual values, independence and theoretical analysis become luxuries of secondary importance in both universities and professional organisations. Worse, legitimate findings can be distorted (Rosenstock and Lee, 2002) or, if considered unsuitable, simply discarded.

Evidence-based solutions

Research and evaluation, used appropriately, is undoubtedly necessary to inform practice development. Instead, in the public sector it is used to control and focus practice, ostensibly to inspire 'confidence' in professions characterised by a 'crisis of trust' (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999). Policy, research and practice are expected to cohere around mutually agreed questions and problems in order to create an ordered symbiosis between all those concerned with the design and delivery of human services (Solesbury, 2001; Pitts, 2003). Critical reflection and debate

find no place within this neat, closed circle.

The assumption of shared values and partnership between policy makers, practitioners and researchers emphasises consent rather than dissent, complementarity rather than difference in approaches to social and organisational questions. Reference to the real relations and divisions between various interest groups is absent (Levitas, 1998). The claim that evidence gathered from within these 'shared' values is spurious but it protects politicians from accusations of ideological bias in policy-making, helps to impose conformity within practice, and disciplines research workers to use 'admissible' methodologies which remove them from the everyday (inter)-subjectivities of service delivery. The demand for 'objectivity' results in the assertion of

a hierarchy of research designs, with meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials at the top and qualitative studies somewhere close to divination (Fox, 2003:85)

Qualitative knowledge advanced by practitioners from a different foundation may be downgraded as mere anecdote, an 'irrational other' in binary opposition to 'the claimed rationality and enlightenment of research evidence' (ibid). In the face of dominant discourses of research methodology, practitioners become either the passive objects of the research or feel forced to 'perform' for its benefit (Draper, 2001).

This trend runs counter to the ideals suggested by Schön's notion of the 'reflective practitioner'. Yet in his later work, Schön himself seems to have endorsed the movement away from practitioners directly researching and transmitting knowledge. On the grounds of objectivity, he advocated a research, policy, practice triad. Endorsing a spatial theory-practice separation, he argued here that knowledge grounded in practice is more effectively articulated by academics undertaking research within the practice situation, or through the removal of the practitioner-researcher from the practice context into a position of neutrality such as a university (Schön and Rein, 1994). The difficulty with this approach is the assumption of neutrality and of equality between each party in the triad. It underestimates the material realities which silence practitioner knowledge.

Displacement of practitioner knowledge contributes to an apparently low take-up of research findings within the professional field. Despite the injunctions of politicians that practice should respond to evidence, and despite the efforts of researchers to include practitioner perspectives and to make their research questions relevant to policy and practice, it is frequently asserted that research findings are having little demonstrable effect:

...there is a concern among researchers in the learning and skills sector that much good work continues to be wasted. It is either ignored by policy makers or fails to reach those at the sharp end: the lecturers, trainers and college managers.

All too often a project commissioned by the government, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or another agency and paid for out of the public purse, ends up simply gathering dust on the bookshelves of the researchers who carried it out. (Kingston, 2003:46).

Thus the question of dissemination has now become important to research sponsors. Increasingly, in their funding bids, researchers must pay attention to strategies for ensuring

that their findings are communicated effectively to the worlds of policy and practice. For example, the ESRC 'Research Capacity-Building' project included within its brief, 'the creation of new models for transforming findings into usable forms' (Gorard, 2002). This has been further reinforced by the new terms of reference for the Research Assessment Exercise which stresses the dissemination of findings to a range of appropriate audiences (www.rae.ac.uk).

Increasing the awareness and broadening the access of practitioners to useful information and knowledge is important. However, the market led conditions of evidence-production ensure that much research has little to offer. Simultaneously, the top-down thrust of evidence-based approaches fails to recognise that research might be covering questions and issues which are of secondary rather than primary relevance within the world of practice. It is possible that practitioners do not routinely use externally generated research, not because they do not know about it, though this may be partially true, but because research findings tell them what they already 'know', and/or elide the complexity of the knowledge-in-process required for successful practice, and/or fail to engage with the immediacy of 'everyday' processes. Further, practitioners might be refusing research findings as a defence against 'evidence' which is not located within the pressing needs of local contexts, and which only generates anxiety about the validity and quality of their practice interventions.

Practitioner anxiety expresses the realities of the contextual conditions of practice rather than any real loss of quality in understanding and knowledge in the field. The distribution of power in favour of central organisational and political interests has redefined criteria for success in managerialist and financial terms and has co-opted research and evaluation towards these interests. Process-based understanding and questions which might otherwise encourage dialogue amongst practitioners and between practitioners, researchers and policy-makers, have been identified as inefficiencies and problems to be solved. Relationships which were previously implicit and organic have become mechanised, formalised and degraded.

Research and practice: borderlands and partnership

Research and evaluation have traditionally been integral to the people professions. Professional education draws upon the findings of empirical research to explore the context and issues of fieldwork practice. Knowledge of social scientific research methods is included as core learning across the range of professional education and is explicitly required within the professional education of youth workers. Within practice itself, evidence is marshalled as a means of informing local strategy and action, frequently on a daily basis and always interpreting and re-interpreting the meanings of the 'evidence':

I'm thinking of session evaluation. We'll use that to then plan the next session. If something went down rubbish, then you don't use it with that group. But that's not to say you'll never use it again. It all depends on the group dynamics. That might work with another group. (Youth worker, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)

Professional workers do publish 'evidence', often in the form of case studies derived from practice (Draper, 2001; Madden, 2002/3) or in the form of practice 'stories', in attempts to give voice to evidence they regard as important:

We have specific targets that we have to meet in terms of numbers, we have to do it. We just have to do it to have our project going. But we always try to put in individual stories, like the skate park and the dancers, and we try to give funders little stories as well, so we're not just firing figures at them, but we are sort of giving them a bit more personal stuff as well. (Youth worker, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)

As reflective practitioners, concerned to look at and communicate what they are doing, workers also participate in the design and development of significant research projects. For example, the quotations from discussion groups with youth workers used in this article are data from a research project devised by Weston Spirit, a youth organisation working in partnership with Durham University community and youth work programme (Durham University, 2005). Moreover, there has been a tradition of practitioner research which has led to fruitful insights into the realities of practice and influenced generations of practitioners, without the mediation of politicians. This includes the classic detached youth work interventions of Mary Morse (1965) and Goetschius and Tash (1967).

Here the principles of action research, adopting informal educational approaches have been particularly important, enabling practitioner-researchers to reflect upon and change daily practice, promote learning and social change (Hart and Bond, 1995). This approach engages with the question of process in practice, acknowledges the fluidity of the field and takes responsibility for the ongoing impact of research upon the fieldwork situation in a manner which mirrors responsible professional practice. Action research has the potential to shift power from researcher to researched, to constitute the latter as participating subjects (Winter, 1998). It has been influential amongst those who argue that values and purposes, which are open to different meanings and interpretation, are important features both of research processes and of professional practice in educational and welfare settings (Everitt et al. 1992; McNiff, 1994). However, action research can be time consuming and expensive, unsuited to contemporary circumstances. Despite the fact that it remains within the canon of available research methods, often debated and much promoted, it is seldom operationalised in an environment in which short terms 'results', which can give credence to decision-making, are favoured over long term interventions leading to empowering and critical change and development on the ground:

Civil servants don't understand the job that we do, they're not youth workers. They don't tend to be, they don't want to know. They're looking for cost benefit, cost benefit analysis. They're looking at the quick fix. They're looking at short term and they're looking at election time coming up... And they don't understand the process of evaluation. They don't understand it's a long process, you can't sustain billions or millions of numbers doing what you do. It's small, focus based youth work. It takes quite a long time. But they don't understand that. They want to see results. (Youth worker, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)

Within professional practice, feminist research has also been influential (Spence 1996; Issitt, 2000; Francis and Skelton, 2001). Feminism reminds both practitioners and academics of the impact of research upon its subjects, that the subjective engagement of the researcher is inevitably affected by experience of social divisions such as class, race and gender (Ramazanoglu, 1992; Gelsthorpe, 1992), and that 'factors of power and values cannot be

added on afterwards, they are fundamental' (Griffiths, 1995:61). Like action research, this underlines the constructive potential of developmental and educational principles applied within the research encounter and like action research, it is more often discussed than practised, not least because it is capable of raising uncomfortable questions which threaten the complacency of the status quo.

The work of action researchers and feminist intellectuals is frequently multi-disciplinary, problematising epistemological, disciplinary and professional 'borderlands' (Stanley, 1990), which accord with Schön's 'swampy lowlands'. The theoretical and methodological approaches which are most sympathetic to practice inhabit these borderlands in which theory and research, policy and practice interweave and combine with the personal, professional and political. Evidence gained there can make claims to be rigorous, representative and valid and takes seriously the ideas enshrined in concepts of reflective practice and *phronesis* but it is marginalised or dismissed as mere experience when it foregrounds values, purposes, subjectivity and relationships, eschewed by more 'sanitised' research methodologies. It is allowed no claim to the academic high ground of objectivist knowledge, and comes low on the research pecking order described by Fox (2003).

Whilst reflective practice and research-mindedness within professional work seem destined to remain in the 'borderlands' or 'swampy lowlands', political agendas from above reaffirm positivist methodologies as a means of measuring service outcomes and ensuring efficiency (Pitts, 2003). The emphasis on 'partnership' seems to offer a seductive opportunity for the possibility of dynamic interchange between related worlds (Statham, 2000) but it masks an inherently static authoritarianism. Partnerships are not constructed from the motivation towards educational development in practice or with the intention of improving policy in response to practice insights. Instead, they represent an effort to maximise the impact of policy outcomes and efficiency of delivery.

The frequent crossing over the borderlands by academic researchers into the world of 'service delivery' to evaluate and develop knowledge appears to promote shared and integrative perspectives, but the symbolic frontiers between knowledge and experience have become more pronounced. The drive for efficiency and the tightening of managerial control within employing organisations has created a more rigid specialisation and division of labour between practitioner and researcher. The practitioner as researcher has been the victim of deskilling and deprofessionalisation, squeezed out by the nature of contracts in which 'research' and evaluation is an external exercise in support of managerial control. Research is no longer integral to the job descriptions of face to face workers. This leads to a 'stove-piping' of accountability through separate organisational systems. Thus the practitioner is accountable for the service to line managers, while the researcher is accountable for conducting research or evaluation according to the methodology prescribed in the contract. The worst case scenario is that research will have no impact or opportunity to inform evaluated services which end when short-term funding is exhausted and the policy is re-framed or abandoned. It is not surprising that the uptake of research findings by practitioners is patchy (Fox, 2003).

Under such circumstances, contract outcomes carry greater weight than process. There is no necessary connection between research design and action and the values of the practice arena. The values of practice are displaced by abstract codes of research ethics (e.g. BSA,

ud). Though ethical considerations do help to protect researcher and the researched, and are capable of acknowledging the values of the practice situation, they do not take the values of practice as a starting point. To work within professional value systems would be to question objectivist assumptions in research and to risk raising questions which challenge the outcome driven demands of policy.

The values of professional practice in educational and welfare settings are rooted in a human rights perspective. Questions of justice, equality and democracy are transgressive sites for practitioners, users and also for responsible, engaged researchers (Colley, 2003; Edwards, 2002). Such values invoke the possibility of a creative encounter between professional workers and users, which is necessarily open-ended and unpredictable in outcome and which recognises interpersonal subjectivity and informality in the creation of relationships as a necessary aspect of professional intervention. Goals enshrined within 'empowerment' and 'anti-oppressive practice' inevitably open possibilities for professional intervention as an agent of political and social change (Dominelli, 1996). Educational endeavour is intrinsic to such possibilities, presupposing a dialogical subtext, and purposeful communication rather than quantifiable 'service delivery' as the intention of practice.

In principle, sympathetic research processes could offer opportunities otherwise unavailable for participants to meet, reflect and take new courses of action. Equally, the research engagement can go beyond data collection to promote the researcher's own critical reflection and learning (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; Stanley and Wise, 1990; Issitt, 2000). However, it is unlikely that this will be achieved within the narrow, conservative and controlling terms of evidence-based approaches, even if they claim a commitment to 'equal opportunities'.

Practitioner knowledge, visibility and critical reflection

In educational and welfare professions, the practitioner is the vehicle for policy implementation through relationships which are at the centre of a dialectic between personal, professional and political dimensions of practice. Evidence-based research methods linked to policy demands interrupt this dialectic, privileging the externally produced research narrative, excluding or separating the personal and the political from formal discourses. Value based research which seeks to understand fully the relationship between theory and practice, and to accredit reflective practitioner knowledge, would necessarily engage with all elements in a dynamic and interpretive encounter with the practice-in-action. It would capitalise on the creative possibilities of the borderlands between disciplines and recognise the relations of power between the personal, professional and political.

Practitioners require technical knowledge and information to demonstrate competence but practitioner knowledge is more than a series of actions that can be measured by external standards (Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995). It involves a complex but self-conscious process of continuous personal development and learning, inextricably linking structure and agency. Reflection can transcend the mechanistic evaluation of task performance and lead to emancipatory practice (Mezirow, 1985). The dialectics of practice knowledge involve:

- self-consciousness about key personal and professional values;
- sensitivity to a wide range of working relationships including those with co-workers, managers and user groups;
- an explicit analytical understanding of organisational possibilities and indeterminate zones; and
- an ability to negotiate within structures and relations of power, and knowledge about the wider socio-political factors which impact upon practice and within which practice is inscribed.

These aspects of knowledge can, of course, be investigated as discrete entities within evidence-based research, but they need to be mobilised in combination by the engaged and critical practitioner (Brent, 2004). This process defies generalisation because it is context and situation specific whilst at the same time being a series of momentary snapshots of an ongoing developmental and open-ended process. Such knowing-in-action cannot adequately be articulated as externally produced evaluation.

It is difficult for evidence-based research to capture the 'personal' elements of professional practice insofar as this is the most 'risky' and least predictable element of practice, flourishing in Schön's indeterminate zones, which involve notions of tacit understanding and artistry. The self is constantly used in the relational act of engagement with others (Ord, 2004; Spence, 2004). That act can never be reduced to a set of standard procedures:

It's giving them that sort of, love's probably the wrong word to use these days because it's taken far too much out of context, but they do get that to an extent. One of the main things folk need, and it isn't just young folk, it's everybody, they need that certain extent of love and somebody that's really caring for them (Youth worker, group discussion, Durham University, 2005)

There is always an element of practice which is unknowable to the outsider, which is entirely in the person of the practitioner and which practitioners themselves are charged to develop ethically in the process of inter-subjective engagement. The challenge for the dynamic and creative practitioner is to engage in personal reflection, evaluation and development as a necessary aspect of professionalism, and accountability for this process is within their person, as well as through agencies and procedures external to the individual.

The political elements of education and welfare present a problem of a different order, transcending Schön's conceptualisation of reflection. Addressing political dimensions involves attention to issues of power which may themselves be contentious, as well as critical analysis of the social, political and economic context within which practice functions. This invites engagement with external processes of decision making and is beyond the formal terms of professional practice. Political awareness also requires continual review of practitioner values and their synchronicity with, or questioning of, service demands (Issitt, 2003).

A framework for reflection that promotes critical practice triangulates the personal, professional and political. In such a framework, professional workers engage in reflection as a necessary component of critical practice, identifying and addressing limits to professional knowledge within practice as reflexive individuals and through interpersonal-professional

dialogue. Pursuing this involves:

a cycle of critical reflection to maximise the capacity for critical thought ... professional freedom and connection with, rather than distance from clients (Pietroni, 1995: 3)

Reflection is not a neutral process, but requires awareness of and commitment to anti-oppressive values and actions, and 'continually checking back with the value-base' (Issitt, 1999: 31), to be vigilant of the state's capacity to transmute the transgressive nature of anti-oppressive practice into an individualising and controlling institutional orthodoxy (McLaughlan, 2005).

All this implies democratic engagement and an educational approach to practice which seeks both understanding and change within the social, political and organisational context of practice as well as amongst practitioners and users. Technical expertise and subject-specific knowledge are necessary, but insufficient for the success of this process which in crucial and complex situations requires spontaneity and experiential judgement informed by theoretical understanding rather than formulaic approaches. This is illustrated in Issitt's (1999: 31) research as participants used critical reflection to make connections with different aspects of people's lives, that anti-oppressive practice involves. According to one woman:

reflective, anti-oppressive practice is a way of life, a state of being. It encompasses one's personal, social and professional practice. The long-term goal being the creation of a more inclusive society.

This might be idealistic but it was important to have a vision to aim for and the synthesis of anti-oppressive and reflective practice is demanding for workers and organisations:

It requires you to do two jobs at once. It requires you to be a reflective practitioner and be anti-oppressive about what you have done. (ibid)

Insofar as there are differences of interest between user groups, practitioners, researchers and politicians, such a process is risky in that it is likely to encourage a critical perspective on and 'distance from' the intentions and values of policy initiatives. The price of the security offered by evidence-based practice is the loss of criticality.

Unlike the 'disinterested' evidence required for policy development, the approach to critical reflection advocated here implies that practitioners not only adjust to the professional world which they inhabit, but that they also act reflexively to construct and reconstruct it. This is undertaken as they are confronted by and create changing relationships and structures (Ellison, 1997; Brent, 2004). Reflection involves not only observation, recording and evaluation, but also, in association and dialogue with others, the creation of new knowledge and understanding (Flyvbjerg, 2001). It is an act of ongoing learning, which includes the perspectives of users. Critical reflective practice is not a neutral activity; all processes and practices are constructed by experiences of the wider social context which concurrently reproduces inequalities and sites for their resistance (Issitt, 1998). This approach, which sees the possibilities for, and constraints upon personal agency in relation to the professional and political, can obviate the dangers of self-surveillance whereby practitioners internalise and

blame themselves for problems not of their own making (Bleakley, 1999).

Practitioner knowledge is constantly evolving through professional association which demands dialogue and conversation between practitioners as subjects and subject-others (Smith, 1994). Aside from the formal and 'knowable' aspects of practice, there are everyday actions and conversations which in essence are open-ended, risky and developmental for those engaged. These 'indeterminate zones' are the bedrock of practice. Without success at this level, practitioners in educational and welfare contexts cannot hope to succeed even in a technical sense. Yet it is these very aspects of practice which are being colonised and destabilised by the separation of research from value and practice concerns, by the imperatives of policy-making and efficiency in guiding research which inevitably focuses upon the technically and mechanistically knowable. Such an approach to research is doomed to undermine that which it pretends to improve.

Researchers as critical reflective practitioners and conclusions

The interests of the academy are now tied to practice through questions often not generated within intellectual work or the practice situation, but through the instrumental and authoritarian demands of politicians. Social scientists and professional practitioners, independently and with reference to different organisational 'missions', serve the demands and dictates of policy and are expected to perform to externally generated criteria that promote separation of delivery and evaluation.

Nevertheless, researchers have an acknowledged expertise in research methodology. These are capable of yielding evidence which has general application, transcending the localism and particularity of the practice situation. Intellectual work, both within professional practice and within the academy must use empirical evidence as part of the process of knowledge-making and meaning-making. However, to direct practice only in relation to evidence produced within research and evaluation as currently constructed, and to elevate the data from these practices above knowledge generated within the relational aspects of practice, can obstruct effective and meaningful partnerships between researchers and related professional practice. Privileging 'research evidence' over practice knowledge subverts the possibility of improving practice in collaboration with researchers who are alert to this situation, and who espouse a similar framework for critical reflection in relation to their own research practice (Colley, 2003).

Not all responsibility for initiating dialogue lies with the researcher. Without undertaking the work required to create a set of practice-informed discourses, or the risks involved in criticality, practitioners will inevitably remain vulnerable to the imposition of externally generated meanings. To reflect in a manner which systematises the knowledge emerging from everyday professional action is but one part of this process. Practitioners need to appraise themselves of wider issues of data collection, theorisation and policy making and must seek to participate in these processes from their own perspective. This includes the injunction to engage with theory, to develop the means of critical engagement with the research process and to contribute to policy making from the perspective of a considered understanding of the purposes, possibilities and limits of practice.

There are enormous implications for evidence-based policy. For policy to be effective, a much more considered understanding of the demands of practice 'on the ground' is required of policy makers. Policy changes are frequently enforced through a combination of structural re-organisation and evaluation procedures, but these processes in themselves are insufficient to ensure that the spirit of any given initiative is incorporated into everyday fieldwork relationships. Practitioners sometimes dissemble and subvert these in order to maintain their own priorities in action (Spence, 2004).

Professional practice, research and the creation and implementation of policy, are inextricably related. Each contains its particular purposes and areas of expertise, but none can be effective in isolation from the other. In order to maximise the possibilities of creating effective and progressive change to benefit service users, 'evidence' must be positioned in relation to other types of knowledge and truth claims. In particular, the knowledge which emerges from critical reflective practice, which is born of the necessity to create meaningful relationships with user groups, must be articulated and defended by practitioners, and must be acknowledged and embraced by researchers and politicians.

This is rarely witnessed because it requires and implies significant shifts in relations of power between politics, the academy and the field, a democratisation of research and policy-making and a renewal of intellectual work as a significant aspect of, and in dialogical relationship with practice. It indicates a dissolution of the artificial divide between those who are paid to think, research and evaluate and those whose role is to perform. Ultimately, the fault lines, tensions and gaps which are expressive of 'crisis' in the relationship between theory and practice will not be healed unless professional practitioner knowledge is legitimised within structures of power. As well as recognising that such knowledge cannot always be pinned down and concretised as 'evidence' there is a need to re-assess the place accorded to more conventional forms of evidence within regimes of truth that are commensurate with its limits as well as its virtues.

In order to assert the authenticity of the research process and to maintain the authority of policy to prescribe the conditions of practice, practitioners and research/ theoreticians are exhorted to work in partnership. However, partnership can only be meaningful if the terms of reference for research shift back towards practice and away from the demands of policy. If researchers are seriously concerned to break down the barriers between academic and professional knowledge, it is essential that they recognise the dialectical and developmental dimensions of the process of acquiring practitioner knowledge and seek to reflect on being 'self' conscious of this in their own practices and procedures (Edwards, 2002). If they too view themselves as critical reflective practitioners, the notion of *phronesis* becomes a useful and meaningful concept as inquiry becomes value-based rather than artificially disconnected from research contexts.

Critically reflective research is seldom practiced because it is potentially transgressive in the contemporary, funding-led environment. This has been recognised by Fox (2003) who has attempted to address some of the issues raised by the notion of 'evidence-based practice', suggesting that this might be inverted to produce 'practice-based evidence'. The aim here would be for knowledge production to be relevant to the immediate local context, not always forced into the methodological straitjacket required for 'scientific' generalisation. Colley (2003:161) also

questions the proliferation of prevailing forms of evidence arguing that we need more 'theory-based policy and practice and practice-based evidence' enabling 'practitioners, and others who work in the field to do justice to the meanings they make in practice'. Such concerns rehearse similar debates within action research about its democratising potential for making visible and useful the discourses of practice (Winter, 1998).

Creative partnerships would break down rigid role boundaries between researcher and practitioner and avoid the danger of perpetuating existing knowledge divisions at the local level, exploring the spaces to generate researcher/practitioner knowledge that disrupts unproductive and wasteful separation of endeavour. They would promote critical reflection for knowledge generation about the personal, professional, political dynamic in which all are engaged. Hart and Bond (1995) suggest that the approach that is likely to be most empowering is one in which researchers and practitioners become co-researchers and co-change agents. Here researchers would become facilitators of the research and dissemination by practitioners and service users who may be the best placed to gain and make visible different kinds of knowledge. This does not mean that researchers become redundant. There is a need for range of knowledge and information for different purposes, but the power imbalance between evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence needs to be challenged (Fox, 2003).

The exchange of skills between researcher/practitioners and practitioner/researchers has the potential to make visible the discourses of educational and welfare practitioners. In practitioner/researcher partnerships, researchers may need to apply their research skills differently to facilitate the research and disseminate the findings of practitioners and service users. They are in a position to go beyond 'official' research and evaluation in which organisational responses may gloss over problems, silencing other important narratives.

Engagement in research processes has a dimension that is educational and developmental for both researchers and practitioners. This is seldom given due emphasis in current contracts as it is not defined as a research outcome. However, practitioner-informed research might afford precious space for personal and group-based reflection which may otherwise have been squeezed out of daily practice (Issitt, 1999, 2000). This can only enrich the knowledge constructed through the research process. A starting point for research partnerships would be to identify the individual and collective possibilities afforded by a shared approach to critical, reflective practice that seeks to understand the personal, professional and political dimensions involved.

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What has John Holt got to say about youth work?

Louise Paterson

For many young people the time spent within formal schooling, and traveling to it, has expanded to the degree that it now seriously erodes their opportunities for participation in self-directed learning. Draining away their capacity to engage with the youth service and with others able to help them develop their interests and offer opportunities for social inter-action. When Holt's work first appeared there was far less urgency than now for those in youth work to read it. Now however as youth work increasingly mirrors formal education with its pre-set curriculum, tests, accreditation and certification the need to listen to what he has to say becomes more pressing.

Various justifications are forwarded for going down the 'formal route' and abandoning the values of informal education. Some centre on appeasing funders and bureaucrats who fear the possibilities of educational encounters taking place beyond their control. Generic youth work has not had a longstanding concern with curriculum and other off-the-shelf outcome-driven products (see Smith, 1988; Davies, 1999) not least because it has never seriously been required to certificate informal education nor work through a prescribed syllabus towards goals specified by top-down measures. However there has always been a need for youth workers to consider content and ensure it is synonymous with the core values of informal education.

Historically such considerations have never been as significant as the needs of the participants. Workers certainly have long arranged or devised curriculum-based courses or used outcome-based exercises but always with the realisation they were moving from the informal to the formal. Youth workers have traditionally worked with the twists and turns of conversation and sought to respond to the participants' burning issues of the moment. There have been those however (NYB 1975; 1983 cited by Smith, 1988; Huskins, 1996) who strove to provoke curriculum thinking and during the early 1980s the government began to dictate that agencies offering services for youth should accept greater centralised direction. Whilst some resistance was shown, the state strengthened its diktat, making the youth service more accountable via the imposition of outcome driven ways of working. A problem for bureaucrats and funders is that learning facilitated by informal education is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to control and measure. The workers whilst having some idea about what might occur before an encounter are unlikely to have pre-set rigid plans to hand. Even if desirable, devising a one size fits all structure for learning and expecting it to suit each young person when their learning needs are by no way standardised, seems senseless. Young people's needs are unique to them and differ over time. Thus at times the work may appear somewhat haphazard making it difficult to track and measure. Another problem is that learning may occur after a considerable gestation period, when the workers, needing to tick boxes showing outcomes are met, are long gone. The act of trying to measure the effect of informal

encounters is also somewhat pointless for the learning can never be solely attributed to the interventions of the worker – there are far too many variables. Moreover, so crude are the tools used for assessing learning, there is little hope they will tell us much, if anything, worth knowing.

However, some workers and managers welcome such outcome driven packages. It appears they see them as a way of avoiding thinking about their work practice. I certainly encountered examples of this at a meeting introducing Newcastle Local Authority part-time youth workers to the 'National Curriculum for Youthwork' being implemented following an Ofsted inspection that recommended their adoption. As one part-time worker said 'the curriculum is a wonderful idea, it's about time we had something to tell us what we are supposed to be doing'. Others endorsed a call for a manual showing workers how to do their job. Some workers at Newcastle YMCA showed similar keenness for rigid structures and instruction in the form of off-the-shelf glossy packs and staff training programmes that sometimes accompany them. In money terms such packs are often grossly expensive and when lack of interest in them prevails, they are shelved. Whilst the service has personnel clearly lacking confidence, or simply without a clue as to what to do, such opinions are going to be commonplace. My fear is that some workers, competent or otherwise, will willingly or reluctantly, offer no alternative as they try to whip participants through pre-set stages to give their funders the numbers they desire and secure for themselves some weird job satisfaction. I fear they do this without any regard as to whose needs they meet and with, all too often, a slavish acceptance of the demands of 'authority'. There are however workers well aware of what they do but who fear their job is at risk if they fail to heed politically inspired priorities to equip the 'targets' with skills and attributes desired by employers, politicians and opinion leaders. Whether or not the latter is possible, the fact is that participant's opportunities to explore their pertinent issues are being denied. John Holt would have understood the fear of autonomy expressed in such pleas for guidance and leadership. Indeed he would have recognised it as a by-product of schooling designed to produce compliance and docility on the part of workers.

Holt

John Caldwell Holt (1923-1985), one of America's most controversial educational writers and educators, is credited with formulating 'unschooling'. Whereas 'schooling' seeks to get students to behave the same way and learn set things 'unschooling' aims to let them follow their own directions, to learn through a process of interest-led discovery and exploration via interactions with the adult world. Holt favoured schools where facilitators provide materials for exploration and students were free to study anything that interested them – no tests or grades, or formal curriculum to follow – just child-led, interest-based learning, without fear of punitive measures.

This way of working has historically been used with conviction by some youth workers who have been rightly hailed as remarkable, early informal education theorists. During the 2WW Blitz, Marie Paneth (1944) for example, laid buffets of resources before the young people of one London bunker-cum-youth centre, including herself in the way of being open to participants' questions about her knowledge of the adult world. Each participant took what interested them and her only rule was no committing injury to feelings and property

of others. Josephine Macalister Brew (1946) was also keen to work with people's interests and enthusiasms. For her, it was just a bit of encouragement that was often needed not dependency on the notion of 'subject', 'course' and 'syllabus', arguing many educational opportunities are lost because young people are compelled to follow pre-set agendas. In perhaps some of the most difficult of youth work situations these workers have been among many for whom these methods along with time, have facilitated a turn around in young people, once described as unruly, into individuals ready to learn and pursue their interests enthusiastically. Likewise, I have seen young people be so rude and exit the club before lobbing a brick at the window, at best, and assault workers or half kill each other at worst, when all on offer in a youth club session was a programme to which they had no input. The same participants were doubtlessly charming when allowed real participation – democracy – a say of what goes for the participants for a change. The environment that prevails is one more conducive to learning when the assaults stop and participants began to trust workers who are interesting and can help them find resources for their interest-based learning when they need it. Holt believed everybody whose capacity to learn was undamaged, could be trusted to learn about the world with minimal interference. That we are educated predominately by the 'society' around us rather than by what happens in schools bound by curriculum and buildings. For him positive praise, or any interference, frequently inhibits learning. Young people can tell how they are doing therefore when adults give evaluations, rather than concentrating on doing something of intrinsic value, students will try to please the adult. Indeed, using phrases like 'that's good' or 'you did well' reinforce that this is what the adult is after.

Accurately reading the learners' need for intervention is no mean feat even for the skilled youth worker. The skill lies in the worker's awareness of when they cross the boundary from being responsive to being intrusive irrespective of whether the intervention is either verbal or non-verbal. There is a difference for learners being supported by a skilled informal educator rather than a teacher in a formal institution for if the former interferes inappropriately the learner can walk away, perhaps to start again later without fear of punishment. However those trapped by compulsion have no such privilege and consequently too often many get sick of learning. Holt's advice is best wait until one is asked for help. Youth workers are always thinking up things for others to do, and therein lies the danger of reinforcing their dependency on adults for inspiration and guidance. Holt says educators must accept they are merely 'guides and pilots' on the learner's expedition, never the 'captain' (1978: 217). The captain is the learner and they must be allowed to stay in charge of their own learning experience for 'real learning' only takes place when the young person is 'both the learner and teacher, doer and critic, listener and speaker' (1970: 49). He is not saying educators should never attempt to influence participants. Far from it, for they may need introducing to tasks and activities that support skill advancement. But participants must not be forced to learn and educators must stand back and be prepared for the rejection. The information or resources a youth worker brings may interest participants but to force this upon them by, for example, offering nothing else or holding up promises of trips upon completion would not only be anti-democratic but futile, as participants may do the task but resent the coercion and learn nothing. It is unreasonable to expect real learning under such conditions as real learning 'is a process of discovery and if we want it to happen we must create the kinds of conditions in which discoveries are made' (Holt, 1989: 101). This environment he refers to is by no means esoteric. All that is needed is time, leisure, freedom and lack of pressure. As simple as his

formula for ensuring a learning environment is, the problem is that each condition called for is being systematically eroded as the government extends young people's formal schooling and other youth work funders join them in forcing young people to succumb to their strictures of the outcome package of the season. Whether it be a school-teacher feeding a script in time for exams; a Connexions advisor offering training of no interest in return for not cutting your benefit; or a youth worker delivering the curriculum for youth work or working on some glossy achievement award manual; the unifying feature is that little time, if any, is left for young people to seek opportunities to develop their interests – find answers to their life-choice questions of the moment.

Background

Like many involved in 'unschooling' Holt was initially a school-teacher although never formally trained. He attended a prestigious New England boarding school before university. Subsequently he maintained he owed nothing to formal 'learning situations'. For him, perhaps, the pre-eminent learning situations occurred between 1943 and 1946 when he was an officer on a submarine – 'the best learning community' he ever knew. This experience led him to believe the fundamental educational problem of our day was how to establish ways to help young people become citizens with a desire to do no harm to others or the environment. Schools, he believed, rather than addressing this issue made matters worse as they sought to ensure students left ready to hate or kill anyone their leaders declared an enemy. The Navy also provided another great educational experience for he had an unusual captain who gave untested officers weighty responsibility believing the best way to learn something was to start doing it. The Captain, soon after he embarked, came on deck and said 'you know, Jack, you're not a passenger up here. You can turn this thing in a big circle if you want to'. Holt interpreted this as 'if he needed to turn the craft in a circle in order to feel that he has the power to do it; then just do it'.

Following discharge Holt drifted into school-teaching figuring he enjoyed children and they liked him. He taught in various private schools until 1967. At this point Holt describes himself as a conventional schoolmaster using lesson plans, visual aids and devices for motivating students, coupled with careful evaluations. But he found formal teaching did not work well. Whilst teaching he saw students supposedly competent who were not retaining information learnt for tests sat some years earlier. Holt, rather than blame students for their 'failings', set about finding what was stopping them learning. It was when he stopped teaching, and started sitting in on other classes that he began to see where he went wrong. Carefully watching, in an attempt to see the classroom from the pupil's perspective, he realised the students were not learning what was 'taught' but merely pretending to learn. He observed the defence methods they employed to avoid appearing stupid as well as their fear of failure, punishment, and disgrace. Fears that diverted them from learning into employing strategies to fool teachers into thinking they knew what they didn't. When he stopped using traditional teaching methods and started giving students things to figure out for themselves and time for doing so they learnt with great ease – it was the 'teaching' that was the problem. Holt's concluded routine school procedures primarily worked against, rather than with, children's natural ways of learning. Schools were places where children learn to be stupid and any learning, if any at all, proved neither permanent, relevant, or useful. Rather it was

fragmented, distorted and short lived. Schools overwhelmingly failed to fulfill young people's real needs and to grapple with real problems in ways that would help students make sense of the world, themselves and others. Structures ensured 'they fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding, and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use of' (Holt, 1965: 9). Nobody was born stupid and everyone starts off with the desire and ability to learn but this extraordinary capacity to learn and develop intellectual growth was destroyed, more often than not, by the misnamed process – 'education'. Adults, he argued, obliterate much of young people's intellectual and creative capacity with the things they do to them or make them do. Consequently students fail because 'they are afraid, bored and confused' (ibid: 9). Afraid of making mistakes, failure, ridicule, feeling stupid, disappointing the hopes and expectations of others, and of some official punishment. Bored and confused by the exercises and the 'tell-em and test-em' methods forced upon them these approaches rarely challenge their abilities. Trivial, dull, contradictory and hardly connected to what they already know so they make little if any sense. He saw schools with their dictating curriculum, record-keeping, compulsiveness and ceremonies of humiliation as serious infringements of civil liberties comparing them to jails. As places where you are made to go, shut up, sit up, do as you are told or be punished. Basically he views schools as a waste of time – time that could be spent on 'real learning'. Arguing what is essential to realise is that children learn independently, not in bunches; that they learn out of interest and curiosity, not to please or appease the adults in power; and that they ought to be in control of their own learning, deciding for themselves what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. (1967: 169)

Having identified how school systems fail he relentlessly advocated their replacement with places where independent self-directed learning and self-evaluation would reign. Where people learn, with and from each other, what they most want to know, instead of what authorities think they ought to know. Places where learners could experiment with many things and that encouraged the curiosity and pleasure of learning. Holt called for more people with varying degrees of experience and knowledge to work in schools to share their insights about the outside world and for young people to have more access to the outside world to broaden their learning.

Although his books sold well and he became a popular lecturer 'on the circuit' he concluded the educational reform movement was principally a fad few took seriously enough to support or even tolerate freedom, choice, and self-direction for children. A few who tried out his ideas, he noted, did so not because they trusted children but because they were seen as a good motivational device offering the appearances of freedom and getting students to toe the line. Holt decided bringing more freedom into the classroom was not the solution to school failure. As he argues in *Freedom and Beyond* (1972) schools could not be reformed for they were inherently flawed institutions founded on the perception that children are putty to be shaped and that learning can only be a product of teaching. Instead schools should be replaced with more intelligent arrangements for learning that are not based on 'uninvited teaching'. Principally he believed schools would not change because they met the needs of the capitalist-class by keeping so many people like 'sheep' (1970: 36), maintaining the poor on the lower rungs of society whilst convincing them it was their own doing.

In order to protect young people's individuality and rescue them from the stifling conformity

of the schooling system he advocated creating space where children could learn without conventional schooling. He supported home-schooling and free schools. His book *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better* (1976), called for an underground railroad to help children escape compulsory schooling and this attracted many letters from parents involved in home-schooling, legitimately or otherwise. He founded a newsletter and mail-order resource catalogue, *Growing Without Schooling* designed to help 'unschoolers' exchange ideas and materials. The last thing he wanted was to be misinterpreted and for parents to simply remove children from the schools then simply re-create the same at home. He died in 1962 leaving behind ten books exploring education theory and practice, children's rights, alternative schools, and social issues related to schooling. His first, *How Children Fail* (1965) with his observations on how forcing young people to learn makes them unnaturally self-conscious about learning and stifles their initiative and creativity by making them focus on how to please the teacher with the answers that secure the best reward, remains the best known. His second, *How Children Learn* (1967) details the process of learning and suggests how we might encourage young people to learn in ways that foster a love of learning – a love that will stay with them throughout their adult life.

Conclusion

Holt viewed communities as places laden with under-used resources for learning. Resources all too often locked away or inaccessible to young people. The only musical instrument available to a group of young people attending an after school club in one of Newcastle's poorest neighbourhoods was a plastic penny whistle from a lucky bag. Predictably its feeble construction under strenuous demands soon left them with nothing to feed their hunger for learning something, which on this occasion was music. There was the old piano from which they stole a strum on passing and cupboards of other instruments earmarked as defunct but I found no logical reason why some keen students were forbidden to use them. They have no apparent monetary value and were not being used. The instruments are probably still collecting dust or worse in a landfill. These young people could not access tools for learning when the building was open but what about all those other useful things lying around schools and community projects that as citizens we pay for – books, computers, maps, a phone line, things for measuring, recording and cutting, directories of specialists, a life jacket, a tent and so on. Some civic funded buildings have plush meeting facilities that are used a few hours a day, if that. Underused resources not being accessible annoyed Holt and likewise me. Libraries, for instance, could offer so much more than they do he argued – musical instruments and tools being examples. Whilst our communities are laden with good things for learning they are also crammed with human resources. Many individuals who have much to offer young people in terms of what they know about a specific issue or activity or an experience they could offer. Perhaps youth workers should consider the shameful waste of resources lying around us and seek ways of making them accessible instead of trying to fit young people to some outcome-based product.

This article has sought to offer a taste of the wealth of wisdom to be encountered in Holt's books. Each in turn challenges those who have a faith in schools. Equally they test the thinking of those youth workers who have abandoned the values of informal education and self-directed learning. Those uncomfortable with the focus on delivery, curriculum and force-

fed information may find his insights and passionate belief in every young person's ability to learn from the world a delight. Avoiding the treacherous language that so often clutters educational books he puts his case clearly, employing thoughtful anecdotal writing to bring his theories to life. I am certain Holt would argue the best youth workers could do is to help young people grow as social, self-directed, active learners and good citizens who can locate the resources needed to develop themselves and communities for the better. That youth workers should make the world as far as possible accessible to young people, pay serious attention to what they do, answer their questions honestly and help them to explore the things they are interested in. In short then, the best thing young people can learn from good youth workers is how to teach themselves better.

Too often we insult young people by denying them their right to self-reliance and autonomous action by imposing a top-down delivered curriculum upon them that disempowers the learner and reinforces the belief within them that learning is a passive process, something that someone else does to you. As Holt shows such pre-set structures tell young people they are worthless, untrustworthy to learn, fit only to take other people's orders, a blank sheet for others to write on. The bulk of young people who youth workers target have had their capacity to think curtailed, consequently they stand little chance of effectively questioning their leaders finding their way through often conflicting and misleading information from 'experts' when they seek to make decisions effecting their lives. Sadly, the youth workers, who are ideally skilled and positioned to assist, will be too busy ticking boxes and trying to coerce young people with outcome-based products to help.

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Reviews

Robert Beckford

God and the gangs

Darton Longman Todd, 2004

ISBN 0 232 52518 8

£10.95

pp130

Jonathan Roberts

Charlene Ellis and Latisha Shakespeare, shot dead in Aston, Birmingham in January 2003 were the spur for this excellent book. Beckford combines the clarity of an excellent teacher with experience of work with young black Britons in our first black city and the British prisons that act as the rite of passage for so many of our young black men. This is a book for all who try to work with young black people but it is particularly aimed at the churches. It has valuable insights for the black communities and it is not difficult to transfer the wisdom of the observations to other communities of faith.

The story of the book is worth a comment in its own right. Following the vivid deaths of the two young women, churches tried to play a part in challenging the violence. John Sentamu, Bishop of Birmingham, and other black church leaders tried to undertake analysis and action in response to the events. Beckford found himself faced with majority black led churches where the response is prayer and a holy group, but no analysis and no real engagement with the lives of many black young people. In frustration he walked away from the absence of effective action. With Sentamu's foreword, this book tries to articulate alternatives. What does he offer?

Relationships with black young people must be the starting point. This is a challenge to those who seek power (as black young people are the furthest from influence and turn to violence as a way of finding power). It is hard for those who find black young people frightening and for those who find their funding from the mainstream power brokers. These relationships lead to a proper engagement with their life experience.

Colonialisation of black culture exists in a powerful form sufficient to block the potential of the black urban churches to act as community leaders. Beckford refers us back to his insight in 'Jesus is dread' that 'the greatest colonial legacy lies in the inability of the urban churches to politicise their faith; that is to develop explicit forms of political engagement on behalf of black communities under siege. The reason for this is the reluctance to let go of the slave master's religious proclamation that we should not worry about our life on earth because "everything will be all right in heaven"' (p. 50).

Beckford chooses the pastoral cycle of liberation theology to analyse and propose action. It is explored with the care of a good teacher, but it allows him to make some glorious themes come alive. He describes the subjugation of black culture as being a product of enslavement and the need to find the roots of civilisation and humanity in Africa, as things of supreme value. He also describes the need to criticise the white culture's claims on everything of

value. By raising up the downtrodden and bringing down the proud he allows us to find alliances between black and white in tackling dehumanisation.

All this sounds wordy and not practical. But this is to misrepresent Beckford who is eager to engage with the lives of young black people. For example, he cites the work of the Ascension Trust as they try to negotiate between the police and young people in London. He reminds us of the positive empowering work of some black artists. He recognises the positive way in which older black men in prison would act as father figures for new black inmates. He seeks a movement for change in our culture: for example why not boycott media that demonises black young people? (p. 53-60).

So, is Beckford right? He is illuminating about young people's lives. He has described gang culture in a way that connects well with other understandings of urban gangs. Like other writers (e.g.: MacDonald, 1997) he draws attention to the alienation of young people within urban settings, and the impact of multiple forces of exclusion on their lives. But his words and life speak strongly of ways of building bridges into their lives.

Beckford powerfully addresses the polarisation of British society where 70% of the BME population live in the 86 neighbourhood renewal areas, subject to multiple disadvantage, and challenges us to undertake practical engagement. In a sense, the feeble effort of the white majority to carry out their rhetoric of social cohesion leaves the ball in the court of the black adult population. Readers from a non-Christian background may find the particular theological points he makes hard to connect to their work, but those from faith communities will recognise the dilemma of maintaining dignity in worship as a means of owning a public space in a hostile society.

The book could inspire white people to fund and support more adequately the delicate work done with black young people. It is excellent to see the roles of black political leaders in sound areas of government but it would be good to see this very risky area of policy addressed with courage too. Too many Local Strategic Partnerships identify the issue of excluded young people, particularly from the BME communities, and then there are too few long term plans for the development of work that will make a significant difference. Beckford has written in a way that should encourage all those seeking the best future for our black young people. Here is a timely book for British youth work.

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Jonathan Roberts, Senior Lecturer, University of Teesside.

S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett and C. Robinson
Doing Research with Children and Young People
 Sage 2004
 ISBN 0 7619 4380 3
 pp 294

V. Lewis, M. Kellett, C. Robinson, C. Fraser, and S. Ding
The Reality of Research with Children and Young People
 Sage 2004
 ISBN 0 7619 4378 1
 pp 306

Carol Devanney and Carole Pugh

These 'companion' texts have been developed to accompany the Open University course Research With Children and Young People and draw together accounts from different disciplines and methodological approaches. They aim to provide an introduction and overview for students and practitioners preparing to undertake research in fields such as education, health, welfare, childhood and youth studies, psychology and sociology. *Doing Research with Children and Young People* seeks to outline key issues to be considered when planning and undertaking research. *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People* seeks to provide an insight into the research process.

The books highlight the difference between research with and research on children and young people and locate this in a historical context where previously children and young people were not seen as 'beings' or as 'competent' to be actively involved. They document the move away from researching children and young people as 'objects' towards their involvement as 'active participants'. Throughout there is a recognition of the contribution that interactionist approaches can bring to understanding the experiences of children and young people.

The first section of 'Doing', entitled 'Setting the Context', contains chapters that provide a background and explore different perspectives to research with children and young people. Fraser opens with a discussion about what research is and what makes social and psychological empirical research different from other activities and forms of knowledge. Kellett et al. provide a useful introduction to the historical context and the way different disciplines such as anthropology and sociology approach the study of childhood. Masson covers the legal and ethical considerations of carrying out research with children and young people in different parts of the UK and highlights that that which is legal is not necessarily ethical. This chapter also discusses the role of 'gatekeepers' and parental responsibility. The final chapter by Fraser and Robinson provides an introduction to the main paradigms of social and psychological research from the historical and philosophical origins and relates them to current issues in research. The overview of the paradigms and the accessible explanations assists understanding of the key fields that inform empirical research. Given that Fraser and Robinson maintain that philosophical consideration is useful in the preparatory stages of research the content of this chapter may be better located earlier.

The second section, 'Research Relations', explores the nature and influence that the

relationship between the researcher and the researched has on the research process. Robinson and Kellett focus upon issues of power drawing on feminist perspectives. While ethics are a key concern throughout the text Alderson focuses specifically on this and raises questions to consider when conducting research with children and young people around 'gatekeeping' and informed consent. Jones develops this thinking further and presents a framework for involving children and young people as researchers. Pattman and Kehily focus upon gender and highlight that the gender relationship between the researcher and the researched becomes a central dynamic of the study and needs to be reflexively considered in the research process.

The 'Diversity' section begins by examining issues associated with undertaking research with children and young people of different ages and argues that 'poor data' is a product of inappropriate methods and not attributable only to the age of the child. Gaining informed consent is considered, the importance of asking children and young people as well as gatekeepers is highlighted, and practical considerations about safeguarding young people are outlined. Lewis and Kellett explore disability, focusing on child development. They raise issues about the assumed homogeneity of groups of children or young people with a disability and assert the value of participative and interpretive approaches that consider lived experience. The focus of the chapter by Nieuwenhuys differs as it offers less direct practical input, instead presenting the rationale for and experiences of non-government organisations undertaking research in the majority (or non-western) world. This methodology generates knowledge that is respectful of local practices reflecting their everyday experiences and challenges the minority (western) notion of children as subordinate and passive objects of care. Maniam et al. address issues of race and ethnicity and critique the way that assumptions about assimilation and multi-culturalism impact on research. They promote approaches that take account of the constantly evolving discourses that underpin the racialisation of any given group.

Finally the 'Relevance, Evaluation and Dissemination' of research is considered through examples drawn from Health and Social Care, Education and Childhood studies. Roberts focuses more on practical considerations, identifying the differing pressures brought to dissemination by varying agendas of policy makers, funders and university departments and highlights a number of factors which can contribute to successful dissemination and maximise policy and practice interest. The other chapters focus on the theoretical examination of the interactions between research, policy and practice. Edwards focuses on examining models that show the complex relationships between research, policy and practice and looks at using participatory methods to maximise the usefulness of research for practitioners. McKechnie and Hobbs consider the process by which research can influence policy and practice by examining the role of social context in determining whether findings are implemented.

Doing Research with Children and Young People is easy to read. There is great variation in the content and focus between chapters which can feel disjointed and produces a patchwork of different experiences from various traditions and approaches rather than a 'whole picture'. The structure does not provide a systematic approach to the material resulting in repetition, particularly around issues of 'gatekeeping', informed consent, competence of children and young people, ethics and power differentials.

The Reality of Research with Children and Young People consists of 13 research 'stories' drawn from different disciplines that utilise a variety of methodologies. Each chapter contains a published research paper followed by a commentary. The papers follow similar structures, providing background information, outlining the methodology and identifying key themes and findings. Some make recommendations for further study or draw policy or practice implications. The commentaries provide a subjective outline of the 'reality' of the research process. The chapters are non sequential and therefore can be read in any order or chosen with specific interests in mind.

The papers cover a great breadth of subject matter from examining children's experiences of short-term accommodation in the UK to considering how children living in rural Bolivia negotiate the use of their time. The studies involve children from age 4 months (examining the acquisition of sign language, Takei) to 21 years – the transition to adulthood for disabled young people in Northern Ireland (Monteith). Issues around race, gender and disability are addressed (see Monteith; Ince; Rasool; Thorne). Some draw from large samples (Evans and Norman; Pickett et al.), others focus on detailed analysis of small numbers of case studies (Takei). Clark introduces the development of a methodological approach with young children, the 'mosaic approach'. The studies include examples of qualitative and quantitative approaches and use of a wide range of research tools from naturalistic observations (Punch; Thorne) to standardised psychometric tests (Sutton et al.), photographs and drawings (Clark; Coates) to the construction of personal histories from casework files (Aldergate and Bradley; Ince). Given the emphasis placed upon participatory approaches it is noticeable that in the 'Doing' book only two chapters incorporate this approach (Clark; Griesel et al.).

Some commentaries examine practical and personal concerns, such as the daunting feeling of being overwhelmed by data, the practical difficulties of co-writing a report and the challenge of developing reliable tools. Others focus on issues that relate to research with children and young people, for example, gaining access and consent and ensuring that the tools and methods selected are age appropriate. The commentaries reveal an insider's perspective to the research process; however not all place emphasis on issues specific to working with children and young people. The commentaries often stop short of outlining solutions to the problems they describe, rendering them interesting rather than necessarily useful. All authors were asked to comment on the same issues (origins of the research, access, ethics, choosing methodology and provide a reflexive account of the research process) which leads to none of the issues being dealt with in-depth.

The range of disciplines, theoretical bases and methodologies covered in this book means there is great variety. However moving between an analysis of how children's early drawing may relate to language development to a detailed statistical analysis of the correlation between risk taking behaviour and injury in teenagers leads to a disjointed feeling. The research is all gathered loosely around issues relating to children and young people; however this is not given sufficient emphasis in the accounts or commentaries to produce a feeling of unity.

While the books are identified as 'companions' some of the key issues highlighted in the 'Doing' book are either omitted or under-represented from the selected papers in the

'Reality' text. Notably the emphasis placed on practitioners engaging in research and the development of participatory approaches with children and young people. With the authors being drawn from academic rather than practice backgrounds the balance of content may be more appropriate to research students undertaking research with children and young people rather than practitioners.

The books struggle to strike the balance between providing introductory material on social research and engaging specifically with issues around research with children and young people. The combination of the range of disciplines and the structuring of the chapters leads to repetition, omission and an overall lack of coherence. The books are designed to accompany an Open University course which may explain why they feel more like a reader than a systematically constructed textbook.

Carol Devanney and Carole Pugh, Centre for Applied Social and Community Studies, University of Durham.

Claudine Fox and Keith Hawton

Deliberate Self-Harm in Adolescence

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004

ISBN 1 84310 237 4

pp.143

Steven Walker

The subject of deliberate self-harm in adolescence is generating more attention from professionals, policy makers and parents keen to stop the increasing prevalence of such self-destructive behaviour. Unfortunately not as much attention as anti-social behaviour and the search for ever more ingenious ways to demonise and punish young people in need of understanding and support. This ambivalence towards young people and the ways they try to cope with their internal contradictions, dilemmas and overwhelming feelings partly explains why the root causes of both issues are not being addressed. As a contribution to the literature on this subject Fox and Hawton's book is a welcome addition. This book aims to provide guidance for professionals and parents caring for children and young people at risk of self-harm and suicide. The two authors are academics and researchers in child and adolescent mental health who draw upon the work of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' FOCUS project – designed to bring together practical and policy-level suggestions with analysis of current research. Whether this achieves its aim to 'facilitate discussion, the seeking of help and an increase in treatment compliance,' as the authors hope, remains to be seen. This is illustrated by the frequent and confusing habit of using statistical evidence only then to question how reliable it is. For example we are told that there has been a marked increase in attempted suicide yet the sources of these data – hospitals and coroners – are inconsistent in the way data are collected, while the majority of cases do not come to the attention of the emergency services. Furthermore when it comes to defining deliberate self-harm the conventional psychiatric classification systems

(DSM IV and ICD 10) do not provide criteria for the diagnosis. There is no agreement on definition and a variety of terms such as self-injurious behaviour, self-cutting, self-poisoning, attempted suicide or parasuicide are used throughout the subject literature. In terms of prevalence the United Kingdom has the highest rates of deliberate self-harm in Europe with self-poisoning being the most common method. Self-poisoning is more common in girls than boys although self-injury is more common in boys. In a national survey of child and adolescent mental health (Meltzer et al 2001) it was revealed that there was a significant disparity between reports of self-harming behaviour from teenagers and their parents. This illustrates the stigma and secrecy surrounding this issue and highlights a crucial area for those working with young people. The authors emphasise that one of the most challenging areas for research into suicidal behaviour is to find out why it occurs and to identify risk factors. Generally speaking evidence suggests that no one risk factor is the cause- it is more a case of the consequence of a build up of stressors in a person with few protective factors and whose resilience is poor. Specific correlates of suicidal behaviour include:

- Bullying;
- Bereavement;
- Sexuality;
- Relationships;
- Drug/Alcohol abuse;
- Family discord.

The authors again are cautious about extrapolating from the available data. They report links between suicidal behaviour and depression, substance abuse and conduct disorder then state that empirical research suffers from small sample sizes and other methodological limitations in the data. On the other hand they are emphatic when it comes to generalising from studies of the influence of the media on rates of suicidal behaviour. There is compelling evidence that suicidal behaviour can be learnt through imitation where the film or newspaper portrayal was dramatic, methods were specified, where it involved celebrities and where it was repeated.

Included in Chapter 4 is a review of contemporary screening instruments for the identification of at-risk adolescents. However the conclusion is that their predictive validity is questionable and attention needs to be paid to understanding which risk assessment instruments are better for which adolescent populations. The authors describe what services should be available for young people who deliberately self-harm but it is disappointing that they focus more on statutory and health care services. These are the places where many vulnerable young people will either not present for help or when they do so in a crisis they will be treated in a brutal and punitive way. The recent *Children's National Service Framework* (DfES 2004) offers the prospect for more attention being paid to child and adolescent mental health services but without specific funding or targeted outcome measures many experts feel local commissioners will fail to respond adequately with appropriate services.

In terms of after care the authors review recent studies to test their effectiveness. Treatment options include: problem solving therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, outreach and intensive therapy and family therapy. However as usual there is no definitive guide to what works better than anything else. This is due to low compliance and the fact that very

few reliable studies have been undertaken into interventions with deliberate self-harm in young people. Even the most recent systematic reviews comparing the efficacy between psychosocial and pharmacological interventions found little evidence with which to offer firm recommendations about which treatment is more effective in reducing repetition of self-harming behaviour. This book is important not so much in what it tells us but in what it does not tell us and how little valid research is available in this critical and growing part of child and adolescent mental health. Invariably with its psychiatric pedigree this book reflects a medical discourse, which is not a criticism, rather a note of its limitations – for instance in paying little attention to racism and homophobia in causality and/or intervention. It succeeds in painting an honest and worrying picture of the ‘state of the art’ in deliberate self-harm and the need for research informed by young people themselves. A further measure of its success will be how much government, policy makers, commissioners, professionals and parents acknowledge that they all need to learn to communicate better with young people, to begin to address this modern problem (Walker 2003). Because it is only by finding out from young people themselves what help and support is acceptable, in which form and where it should be located that the shame, stigma and guilt they feel can begin to be acknowledged in a way that encourages them to make use of the right sort of help, at the right time, with the right people.

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Steven Walker, Programme Leader, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Anglia Polytechnic University.

Karen F. Evans

Maintaining Community in the Information Age: the importance of trust, place and situated knowledge

ISBN 1 4039 1245 9 (hbk)

Palgrave

pp202

Keith Pople

The impact of globalisation and the neo-liberal agenda is causing wide-spread damage to thousands of communities in the UK and elsewhere as governments attempt to create the circumstances which will best maintain and increase economic growth. Despite spin to the contrary it is clear that New Labour has decided to develop and extend the Thatcherite aim of transforming social democracy (including decontrolling large areas of the public sector by allowing a substantial increase in private capital, deregulating the

labour market, and 'modernising' public services) whilst allowing the free-market, and the inequalities it sustains and perpetuates, a clear run. During the Thatcher/Major years and now during Tony Blair's stewardship of No 10 Downing Street, considerable inequalities of corporate and individual wealth and income have been allowed to go unchecked.

However it has been claimed by many since the early 1990s that the 'information age' will bring greater equality and a fairer distribution of wealth and income as increasing numbers of people become computer literate and are able to take up new employment opportunities in the fast changing economy. Since the 1990s, in both the UK and in countries around the world, governments have attempted to transform their economies by providing their citizens with the most advanced communications infrastructure possible, linking government with homes, schools, universities and colleges, and the business sector. Governments everywhere have seen the potential of harnessing information and communication technology (ICT) to raise their country's economic position. At the same time many have argued that these new developments will empower individuals and local communities. It is against this background that Evans has conducted interesting and note-worthy research that is presented in this informative book.

Evans deploys her research on the information society as the centre piece of the book. The focus of this particular research is an exploration of the experiences of community activists and organisations that are working with ICT to build communities in markedly different areas. One was a relatively affluent community in Colorado, USA, and the other a much poorer one in Salford, England. However the results from these dissimilar localities draw a comparable conclusion which is that ICT by itself does not raise the economic potential of individuals and local communities. To quote Evans, 'despite claims of many enthusiasts for computing and ICT, the introduction of computing technologies into the research areas in the UK and US, has not led to a transformation in their community life, nor a shift in the ways in which the subjects of the research generally relate to one another and to the world around them'.

What is more likely to determine people's economic position and to 'empower' or 'dis-empower' them is their location in society and whether they are excluded and distanced from other groups due to increased inequality and poverty. Furthermore, the argument that there is a 'digital divide' or a 'digital underclass' suggests that certain groups of people have not embraced ICT due to a lack of awareness. However as Evans discovers in her fieldwork, the research participants were well aware of the potential of ICT. What held the participants back was not a failure to learn how to use the different soft-ware, for many did embrace ICT, but rather their feelings that success depended on their ability to use these new skills to improve their life chances. As Castells (1998) has pointed out many individuals and communities will not easily move from circumstances which have wreaked havoc in their life chances. The loss of employment, lack of education, and withdrawal of services can do considerable damage to people's confidence and Castells suggests that many find moving on to new situations difficult.

What Evans does discover is that, contrary to suggestions that the notion of community is in decline, locality and local affinities remain for many 'truly significant'. Evans discovered that many of the people she interviewed were bound into close-knit networks that were

largely based around neighbourhood. To quote the author 'the importance of locality, of "situated knowledge", of networks built around trust and shared experience have been largely disregarded and the global, the expert and disembodied community unconstrained by the limits imposed by place, have been perceived as the most significant in contemporary Western Societies. This has distorted perceptions of more traditional and locally based, face-to-face interaction which has been considered limiting, insular and in many ways as looking backward rather than forward.'

Maintaining Community in the Information Age is an informative examination of the debate on the value of new technology and addresses some of the myths and misinformation that have been presented in the push to link up communities and individuals. There is no doubt ICT has many advantages but the question we need to ask is who benefits most from the revolution that was started some 15 years ago. Evans' work indicates it has not been the 'poor'.

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Keith Pople, Faculty of Health and Social Care, London South Bank University.

Wendy Mitchell, Robin Bunton and Eileen Green (eds)

Young People, Risk and Leisure: Constructing Identities in Everyday Life

Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

ISBN 1 4039 0116 3

£45.00 (hbk)

pp257

Martin Young

This book is based largely on a research project named 'Action Risk' conducted between 1997 and 2001 by the Centre for Social Policy Research (CSPR) Teeside University. The project was undertaken in a large, socially deprived, industrial town in the north of England, referred to as 'Townville'. As stated in the introduction... 'Townville exhibits a range of features of recent economic and social transformation in the industrial regions of the UK that is in many ways at the forefront of transformed late modern industrial society. Consequently, the economic uncertainties of 'risk society' are highlighted in this community' (p.6). As the editors point out, Townville is therefore a particularly appropriate place to explore how young people respond to the economic uncertainties of a 'risk society', and in which to locate an action research project. Five chapters in the book are directly drawn from the qualitative data generated by the research. They are all concerned with how young people perceive, respond to and manage risks in the context of their own social and spatial settings. Dual emphasis is placed on the engendered nature of risk and on its management

in public places.

This base is broadened by the inclusion of eight other contributions on the same general theme of youth and risk. Three of these are also from towns in the north of England, two are UK-wide in scope, one is from Scotland, and two are from Australia (both on leisure-travel and risk in Sydney). In terms of real-world context, then, the collection is heavily and empirically centred on the north of England. This is not to suggest that the focus is too narrow. On the contrary, the detailed qualitative material provides a mechanism for starting to open and dissect some broader conceptual and theoretical positions, specifically about the emergence, or otherwise, of Ulrich Beck's 'risk society'. Indeed, the basic and uniting theme of the volume is the various relationships of different groups of young people to the professed onset of the risk society. The collection therefore '...reflects the growing interest in young people and risk and offers reflection on the different ways of conceiving young people and risk. It includes a number of studies that address everyday understandings of risk, providing insight into the ways that risks are routinely encountered and managed and the complex ways in which risk manifests itself for young people living in contemporary Western society' (p1).

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the first qualities evident upon reading this collection is the applied, situated nature of the contributions. The idea of 'risk' is conceptualised and applied in order to help us better understand the constructed identities of different groups of young people in different social and spatial settings. In other words, the volume consistently presents an approach to risk that is contextual, and that highlights the value of applied work. The argument of the book, if it could be understood to have an overarching one, is that risk may not be adequately understood independently of social, cultural, and spatial settings. It is certainly not a static, thing-like social fact, but a subjectively constructed relationship between individuals and their lived worlds. The engendered and spatially situated nature of the phenomenon is explored at great depth and this is a real contribution of the book, as it consistently grounds the abstract in the real. There is, of course, a flipside to this approach. It is evident in reading the various chapters that risk is difficult to come to terms with in an applied research sense. Obviously, this is in part due to the very nature of the concept itself, where risk is defined in relation to its socio-spatial context. However, this does highlight one of the criticisms of risk research of this nature, namely that it does inevitably feature some conceptual ambiguity and definitional looseness. As a result quite different conceptions of risk may appear under the same rubric or in similar guise. With a collection of different works such as this it is therefore possible to question the clarity and the validity of the links between described experience and social theory.

As the book is a collection, and by definition incorporates a range of different perspectives, interpretive approaches, research methods, and depths of analysis, it is difficult to meaningfully comment at a more detailed level on the book's overall contribution. For many of the chapters, however, a common starting point is the sociology of risk as represented by the work of Beck and Giddens. This provides the basic theoretical framework within which the various responses to risk and management of risk are located. This is not to suggest that the risk society thesis is universally accepted, with some contributors actively contesting it, notably Cartmel in Chapter 5. Indeed, some chapters are theoretically rich and diverse enough to probably demand responses in themselves. Examples include Aitchison's

theoretical exploration of gender-leisure relations in Chapter 6; and Crawshaw's use of Bourdieu to theorise young men's risk-taking in Chapter 13.

For this reason it is worth separating out the chapters and approaching each one individually as opposed to reading them in fewer sittings. This will do two things. First it will avoid the repetition that may be experienced by the reader as each chapter seeks to situate itself in a similar literature. Second, it will avoid any confusion in working out which contributions were part of the 'Action Risk' project in Townville and which were located in another of the northern England towns studied. It was necessary to clarify this as the chapters based on the 'Townville' study referred to the introductory chapter for a description of the research setting. Thus the reader of any of Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 and/or 13 would also need to read Chapter 1 to get the full research context.

Inevitably then the book is a series of articles on the broad theme of young people's responses to risk, predominantly those in northern England. However, there is enough variety in approach and content to make the volume of interest to a much wider audience. While the volume hangs together rather awkwardly, this need not be an obstacle to the reader who would be served by selecting specific chapters of direct interest. The introductory chapter does an excellent job of providing a 'road map' for this purpose. As a collection of related perspectives on the negotiation of risk by young people the book serves very well. As a cohesive and integrated investigation of young people, risk and leisure it serves less well.

**Martin Young, Research Fellow, School for Social and Policy Research,
Charles Darwin University, Australia.**

Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland (eds)

Rural Racism

Willan Publishing

ISBN 1-84392-056-5

£25 (pbk)

pp 210

Courtney Taylor

On picking up a book on rural racism I initially assumed it would tell me what I already know; that there are fewer Black people in rural areas facing very similar issues to that of Black people within other areas of Britain. Towards the end of the book I was given this very information 'In many respects racism in rural areas is similar to that in urban areas' (p. 177). I was pleased the book was more comprehensive than that and attempted to highlight the key differences of urban and rural racism, with the emphasis obviously placed on the former, for its target group of academics, students and practitioners. It is important to note also that the book covered a wide range of minority ethnic groups including travellers and asylum seekers.

The book is essentially written by academics who bed the work within recent research and ongoing practice, this is supported by the words of the minority ethnic people in these

communities which give an air of creditability to the work. Although it is formed from a collection of contributors working within Scotland, England and Wales, the collation by the editors gives the book a feeling of flow rather than that of discrete pieces of work. This is mainly due to the way the book is ordered according to three distinct themes. The first of these 'Contextualising Rural Racism' explores the idealistic imagery of rural life as caring and with the existence of a monoculture. Indeed the dangers of a portrayal of British rural people as '...white and probably English, straight and somehow without sexuality, able in body and sound in mind...' (p. 22) leads to the belief that Black people in rural areas are somehow 'out of place'. This configuration is explored by a number of contributors. The rural idyll is put forward and then this myth is torn apart. The second theme 'Assessing the Problem' considers the key issues faced by minority ethnic people in rural areas. This was brought home by the suggestion that you can be ten times more likely to be a victim of a racist attack within a rural than an urban area. It stressed the seriousness of the problem which includes the very real issues of social isolation, difficulties in accessing services by minority ethnic groups and the suggestion of increased activities in rural areas of far right groups such as the BNP. I have some difficulties, however, in making the links from the actions of white supremacists in the US to the BNP. The final theme 'Tackling the Problem' looks at practical suggestions to alleviate the problem and includes a case study into on-going work within Suffolk.

A constant question that kept coming to my mind throughout the book was: Are the issues any different from that which Black people faced in the 50s and 60s when they arrived in larger numbers within white communities and what could be learnt here? This is epitomised in a report by the CRE (2001) which is quoted 'Ethnic minorities are living in the year 2001 in urban areas. We cannot say this of rural areas, they are seemingly stuck in 1961' (p. 42). The suggestion that the situation in rural areas is also exacerbated by 'white flighters' escaping the 'perceived "negatives" of crime and large minority ethnic groups' bringing prejudices with them was also an interesting one (p. 130). All of the contributors would argue that it is and where urban solutions are attempted without consideration of the rural nature of communities these are doomed to failure. Also there is a danger of extrapolating research undertaken within urban areas to rural areas, and that more research needs to be undertaken to 'demonstrate how, and explaining why, rural racism is not a monolithic entity that is the same everywhere and for every person' (p. 85).

The final three chapters indicate ways forward but I would challenge any suggestion that this will be achieved through a co-ordinated Social Service approach alone and would therefore like to have seen a greater response in this section from the position – 'It is important to explore creative solutions by involving minority ethnic individuals as active agents. Rather than focusing upon deficit models' (p. 53). The chapters, however, did offer ideas for the practitioner regarding inter-agency working, developing reporting systems, investigating and developing educational programmes. The investigation side of any incident did pose particular problems in balancing action against trying to avoid exacerbating the situation and increasing the isolation of victims.

From a Youth Service perspective it was disappointing that the developmental work in Suffolk was achieved through the Youth Offending Service – giving the impression of being reactive rather than proactive – and the rare mention of a role for the Youth Service within

education (p. 163) was not developed. Another disappointing aspect related to explanations of the terminology employed. The issue of rural dwellers not knowing what to call minority ethnic people was highlighted (p. 126). However I felt the book could have offered guidance to a large number of people who will and could read this book but who might be very confused by the array of terminologies it employed. I came across black and brown-skinned people, people of colour, minority ethnic people and immigrants amongst others. There now might be some confusion of why not 'coloured people' and 'ethnic minorities'.

The main benefits I gained from reading this book have been the useful information provided through the impact of Inquiries, Reports and Laws in the 1990s and early 2000s made on responding to racist incidents and how we as practitioners and policy makers can react in support. This type of work is no longer an option as one writer says 'It is a statutory duty and professional obligation' (p. 178). Policy makers should read this book, consider the key points raised by the contributors, including the need for mainstream funding, and take action.

Courtney Taylor is the Acting Assistant Chief Executive of the Wales Youth Agency.

Daniel Romer (ed)

Reducing Adolescent Risk: Towards an Integrated Approach

Sage Publications

ISBN 0-7619-2836-7

£27 (pbk)

pp 515, xx (including 134 pages of appendices, references, indexes and notes on contributors)

Geoff Nichols

This book contains 39 papers presented at a conference in 2002. Presenters were all from the United States of America, with several from Pennsylvania; where the conference was organised by the Annenberg Public Policy Centre. In his preface, Romer, the Research Director of the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute (ARCI) established by this Centre, explains that the conference was part of an aim to develop 'more effective strategies for healthy adolescent development and to communicate the findings to the policy community as well as to parents, youth, and persons who care for and educate young people' (xiii). Present difficulties identified by Romer are: the development of policy by individual US states, that differ dramatically in programmes and the allocation of resources; the focus of programmes on separate problems with separate strategies (such as reduced drug use, healthier sex, reduced violence, etc.); and the increasing emphasis in the education system on academic targets, which squeeze out time for 'behaviour-specific prevention curricula' (xiv).

So, a rationale for the conference was a search for a 'holy grail' of an intervention that will address all the problems of adolescent youth, or at least will offer a more coherent approach, and which will influence the policy makers in the federal states.

Romer opens the book with his own account of a national telephone survey conducted by the ARCI of 900 (response rate 50%) young people aged 14 – 22. This examined statistical

relationships between: five risk behaviours, mental health problems, four categories of activities that 'involve high degrees of excitement' (p. 3), and religious attendance and community service. One conclusion is that 'a focus on multiple risk behaviours and potential common pathways of influence on those behaviours can identify intervention strategies to reduce risks to healthy development across a multitude of risks' (p. 6). An example is given of reducing sensation seeking as a risky behaviour by offering alternatives. While I accept a role for quantitative analysis, I limit a critique of the methodology to noting that this example is reliant on a representative sample of respondents, answering honestly, closed questions. A very small percentage of respondents admitted to a total stranger on the telephone that they had planned for suicide, and 64.4% reported that they never used marijuana (the question did not specify inhaling!).

The important point arising from this opening chapter is that it gives the reader an indication of the prevalent methodological approach taken to answering the tricky, implicit questions of: 'what works' and 'what are the criteria for evaluating evidence to show this?' – a reliance on inferences from statistical relationships. The rest of the book is structured into 4 parts. The first deals with adolescents as decision-makers. Part II, 'Common Pathways and Influences on Adolescent Risk Behaviour', is divided into sections on 'Multiple Problem Youth', 'Personality and Other Predispositions', 'Peers and Parents' and 'Media Interventions'. The next comprises separate sections on research. Focussing respectively on, problem behaviours of: gambling, sexual behaviour, suicide, and alcohol – tobacco – drugs. The structure of this section seems at odds with the aim of developing interventions that deal with all these difficulties at once, but reflects the need to build on previous research, as reflected in the contributions of conference presenters. Part IV returns to the main theme by attempting to draw out, 'Overarching Approaches and Recommendations for Future Research'.

Dipping into the contributors: Byrnes (Chapter 2) challenges some of the assumptions about young people and risk, and presents his own model of decision making. In common with other contributions in the book, the focus is on understanding how young people perceive risks. The policy orientation of the book probably prevents a more critical view of how and why young people's behaviour is itself perceived as 'risky' by the policy community. Similarly in Chapter 8 Johnston discusses evidence of young people's changed perceptions of a range of drugs and factors that influence this. An interesting result is the publicised use of steroids by a successful athlete that appears to have provided a role model promoting use of steroids by young people, although the overall conclusion is that publicity on the negative effects of drugs will reduce their use. Stanton and Burns (Chapter 22) examine the role of parents' expressed values and conclude 'parents who communicate their expectations clearly, who express their concern for their children, and who monitor their offspring, are more likely to raise ...children with less involvement in problem behaviour...' (p. 197). A difficulty is that parents do not always express themselves clearly. I suppose there is also the possibility that parents might express values contrary to those of the policy makers who define risk.

Given the government sponsored promotion of the National Lottery in the UK, and the policy debate over the imminent wave of mega-casinos, the four chapters on adolescent gambling may have a particular interest for UK readers. The first of these by Griffiths draws

on several UK sources, one of which shows that adolescents who had problems with scratch card use were highly likely to be males, have an income of over £5 a week (how else would they buy the cards?) and have parents who gambled and did not disapprove of their offspring's activities – an example of the influence of paternal values. Scratch cards and slot machines are shown to share several characteristics that contribute to their addictive nature. This chapter includes a welcome review of some of the methodological problems in studying this behaviour; perhaps because it is unfamiliar territory to most of the conference delegates. The policy recommendation is for government to enforce existing legislation on the legal age of gambling. Of course, a broader discussion might point to a difficulty of achieving the conference aim of coherent government policy as government policy objectives may conflict. For example reduce youth gambling versus promoting the National Lottery to maintain income for 'good causes' the tax payer would rather not pay for; or reducing youth binge drinking versus liberalising pub opening hours.

The three chapters on suicide were frightening: suicide is the fourth most common cause of death of 10 to 14 year olds in the USA and firearms the most common method. Males are more likely to complete suicide, and females to attempt it. But here there is no reference to UK data, and the analysis is shallow. For example mention is made of Durkhiem's classic study, but analysis only goes as far as a correlation between church membership and suicide. For me this is illustrative of a weakness of the approach to causality, characteristic of the contributions in this book: a reliance on statistical relationships rather than using them as part of an approach which employs them to develop or test broader sociological concepts.

Two of the four chapters in the last section appear to be arguing for approaches to youth development that are more general than just focussed on helping young people deal with a particular problem, on the basis that most risk behaviours are inter-related. But this is without a broader conceptualisation of what that development is, beyond a list of competencies, skills, or qualities (p.356). The final chapter by Jamieson and Romer is a short overview of proceedings. Consistent with the aim of influencing policy, most of its five pages are concerned with policy recommendations, although these are brief. An example would be the one to develop 'parental interventions to reduce access to guns' (p. 377) as guns are the major vehicle for adolescent suicides. A more radical response might have been a recommendation to change gun laws, but perhaps we have to be realistic in the American context. This chapter concludes with the ritual academic call for more research, this time to understand the connections between risk behaviours. I'd suggest this would benefit from a broadening of the research paradigm and theory development that went beyond mapping statistical relationships. Still, as the 'restriction of gun access' recommendation above suggests, there may be a lot of mileage in the obvious!

To the extent that the contributors represent contemporary thinking on these issues in the United States, this book will provide a valuable overview. I am not in a position to evaluate this, although I know that some of the more influential writers on leisure / sport related programmes are not represented. It is worth buying for libraries that serve courses in youth studies, youth work, and youth related criminology. The implications for policy come from specific chapters, and the very brief summary at the end, so are probably insufficiently developed as yet to make the book recommended reading for policy makers.

Geoff Nichols, Management School, University of Sheffield.

Ros Burnett and Colin Roberts (eds)

What Works in Probation and Youth Justice: developing evidence-based practice.

Willan Publishing 2005.

ISBN 1-84392-059-X

£20

pp 267

Steve Rogowski

Probation and youth justice services have changed significantly over the last few years. We have seen a move away from the rehabilitation/welfare/treatment towards a pre-occupation with the surveillance, control and punishment of offenders. We now have a National Probation Service (soon to become part of the National Offender Management Service) and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). The latter, deal with young offenders aged 10 to 17 years, and comprise individuals drawn from the police, health, education and Connexions services as well as probation and social workers. And managerialism, a belief that the organisation of public services are best served by managers rather than professionals or bureaucrats, now bedevils practice. There is a resulting emphasis on procedures, targets and paperwork that goes hand-in-hand with a move towards evidence based practice. Much of the foregoing is the focus of this publication.

The editors (Burnett and Roberts) bring together a collection of papers presented at a conference entitled 'Towards Evidence-based Practice in Probation and Youth Justice' held in 2003. The book largely comprises pairs of chapters, one in each pair dealing with probation issues and the other youth justice, though there is, of course, some overlap. Included, for example, are chapters on – the current emphasis on evidence-based practice; the usage of systematic assessment tools in both probation and youth justice; the development of cognitive behavioural programmes in probation and intensive supervision and surveillance in YOTS; and the focus on education, training and employment in both the sectors. Other chapters deal with such areas as casework skills; community service or community punishment, as it is now referred to; and the pursuit of evidence-based inspection.

A widespread concern amongst practitioners is that many of the changes outlined involve a deskilling/deprofessionalisation of both probation and social workers. Not least that they are increasingly engaged in repetitive, form filling tasks with a resulting loss of professional autonomy and judgement. As a social worker I can certainly empathise with those colleagues who subscribe to such a view following their experience of using the paper tool for youth justice, Asset. The latter is the name for an assessment profile focussing on young peoples' criminal history; family and personal relationships; education, training and employment; substance use; attitudes and behaviour; and so on. Other criticisms of this tool relate to the spurious scientific accuracy that such forms produce, plus the fact that they concentrate on the negative aspects of young people's lives. In her chapter on Asset, Kerry Baker acknowledges such criticisms and attempts to deal with them, but unfortunately I did not think she was wholly successful.

As for Probation's emphasis on cognitive behavioural programme – changing thinking, reasoning and hence behaviour – Colin Robert's rightly points out that even if such

programmes work (and current research is at best ambivalent) this should not detract from the fact that 'good case management', meeting the needs of offenders in terms of employment, accommodation, drug treatment, etc. is necessary. The implication here is that much of what traditional social work was about is still required, but one only has to recall that it was not long ago that New Labour decided probation officers no longer required a social work qualification. Ros Burnett's chapter on one-to-one work with offenders relates closely to this area. It focuses on the importance of the relationship between offenders and those who work with them. It even seemed to hark back, to what now seem to be somewhat heady days, when probation officers and offenders could be seen as collaborating with a view to providing help with problems as defined by the latter. It could also even be seen as the 'old' advising, assisting and befriending young offenders.

Another optimistic chapter is provided by Sue Rex and Lorraine Gelsthorpe on community service, although, as indicated above, it is now referred to as community punishment. This time the emphasis is on the rehabilitative potential of such orders that can provide offenders with the opportunity to learn new skills and responsible behaviour, as well as making a contribution to society. This is all well and good but I am not sure the name change implies the same.

Despite the optimism of some of the chapters referred to, a criticism of this book is that it displays a largely uncritical acceptance of the changes that have and are taking place in probation and youth justice. Not least, there is the fact that evidence-based practice in probation and social work, unlike medicine, comes from outside rather than from within practitioners own professional experience (see Smith, 2004). Surely evidence-based practice should be derived not only from external evidence but also on individual expertise and client/user choice? Furthermore this collection also fails to deal with other fundamental questions such as what is to count as evidence and who decides this; how can the thing that made the difference be identified, and how predictable and orderly can social and probation work become?

Despite the view expressed in the last paragraph, the book I felt is still well worth reading as it does provide a succinct account of recent developments in probation and youth justice. Students, practitioners, managers and policy makers alike, as well as those interested in crime and control are all likely to find it of interest.

Reference

Smith, D. (2004) *Social Work and Evidence-based Practice*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Steve Rogowski is a social worker (children and families) with a local authority in the North West of England.

Obituary

The Rt. Rev. Lord Sheppard of Liverpool

In the autobiography he completed just before the serious illness which led to his death, David Sheppard, in a chapter called Young People – Problems and Possibilities, recalled his experience as a 1960s youth worker in words that are very relevant today in debates about ‘hoodies’ and ASBOs:

A gang of ‘rough’ young people at first seemed frightening. Was it possible to keep control? Would they speak to me? But, as I came -slowly- to know them by name, and to share experiences and stories of their world with them, they ceased to be ‘Folk Devils’ and became young men with fears and hopes like the rest of us.

David shared these insights with others and I was particularly grateful to him during this period as a part-time youth worker in Spitalfields, in a community where the Kray Twins were very active and youth crime was a major concern. He encouraged me to be patient and not to expect immediate results. I took this important lesson with me when I went to be a full-time worker in Liverpool and earlier this year I was able to share it with a youth worker in Portishead, where I now live, who has been under pressure facing an Ofsted inspection.

David was a founder member and first secretary of the Frontier Youth Trust. There is an important motion in the FYT minutes of October 13th 1966 moved by David ‘commending the profession of qualified youth worker in the Youth Service as a Christian vocation.’ In many ways he was the person who laid the foundations for the flourishing Centre for Youth Ministry and Oasis youth work courses validated by The National Youth Agency.

David was also a member of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Youth Clubs and a member of their working party that tested the idea of ‘detached youth workers.’ The report was published in a Penguin book, *The Unattached*, by Mary Morse which, until the 2004 NYA/Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on street-based youth work, was the standard book for those of us committed to working with young people on the streets.

As Bishop of Liverpool, ‘Justice and Peace’ was at the top of his agenda. Sir Mark Hedley, the judge and patron of the NYA, told a story in his sermon at David’s Memorial Service in Liverpool Cathedral of the time David and his wife Grace joined the young people of Shrewsbury House Youth Centre and their families in a street demonstration demanding justice for residents of West Everton threatened with eviction. Others at the service told of his and Archbishop Worlock’s important work of reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. David I know appreciated the recent addition to our NYA Mission Statement on ‘a socially just society.’

On retiring as Bishop of Liverpool he continued to be active in supporting young people and youth workers in his work in the House of Lords. I will always remember leading a delegation with David of young people from Liverpool and East London at a meeting with the Government Minister responsible for the Youth Service. The minister talked non-stop for twenty minutes about his views on the future of the Youth Service before David stopped him dead in his tracks saying, 'Minister please stop talking and listen to these young people.' I would never have dared to say such a thing! But David had the stature and the authority to speak in that way and for the next hour the minister listened attentively to the authentic voices of the young people.

At The National Youth Agency we will miss his presence in the House of Lords and hope that others will take up his mantle.

Bishop Roger Sainsbury

Chairman – The National Youth Agency.

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Correspondence:

For Journal Content:

Youth and Policy,
Durham University,
Elvet Riverside II,
New Elvet,
Durham DH1 3JT
E-mail: jean.spence@durham.ac.uk

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Eastgate House,
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Report:

The Thompson Report (1982) Experience and Participation, Cmnd 8686, London: HMSO.

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Bernard Davies

The State of the Youth Service: Recruitment and retention rates of youth workers in England

Stephen Moore

**Youth Related Community Cohesion Policy and Practice:
The Divide between Rhetoric and Reality**

Roger Green and Rebecca Pinto

Practitioner Knowledge and Evidence-based Research, Policy and Practice

Mary Issitt and Jean Spence

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Louise Paterson

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