

Defined by history: youth work in the UK

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Framing the narrative

One question, posed a number of times at the Blankenberge Seminar, seemed to have considerable resonance for many of the participants: *'Why can't youth workers define what they do more clearly - and more credibly?'* For me however, I realised that this had not been a particular concern in preparing my own contribution. In fact, my paper was, and still is, underpinned by a quite contrary premise: that over the past century and a half in England – and indeed, it could be argued, over the UK generally - core features of a way of working with young people have been formulated and refined which, as an overall configuration, provide a well delineated if as always 'unfinished' definition of a distinctive practice which we now call 'youth work'.

That this definition is unfinished of course goes without saying. In all human endeavours of this kind contradiction, debate and revision are permanent features, with the product inevitably problematic and contested, never 'final'. Nonetheless, my reading of the past is that, within these parameters of continuing dialogue, the current problem over definition in the UK is not that one does not exist. Nor is it that it is not widely shared, including (as we shall see later) by young people. Rather, as I also argue in the final section of this paper, the problem of definition in the UK currently is that the one which is deeply rooted historically and widely embraced is not one which our most influential policy-makers want to hear - least of all implement. This was something which the government's 'youth minister' Beverley Hughes made very clear in December 2005:

Primarily (youth work is) about activities rather than informal education. Constructive activities, things that are going to enhance young people's enjoyment and leisure... I want activities to be the main focus.
(Cited in Barrett, 2005: 14-15).

To trace how over some 200 years the UK has reached this official position, this paper, though not giving equal attention to each, takes as its starting points the three key questions set for the Blankenberge Seminar:

- How has youth work policy, pedagogy and methods evolved historically?
- What role have these played in integrating young people into society?
- How has youth policy more generally dealt with that role?

The paper's responses to these questions are shaped by the proposition that youth work is a social construct whose creation has to be understood in the context of the wider political, economic and social conditions in which it developed. This approach is for me important partly because it exposes to explicit examination historical struggles and events worth considering in their own right. For this paper, however, it has another value. It helps to throw a critical light on how the historic UK conception of youth work has been achieved – and how, in a different context and under pressure from changed political priorities, policy-makers are seeking to narrow and even subvert that definition.

To illuminate these arguments, the paper starts by giving some attention to the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Here it focuses on working class struggles to generate bottom-up forms of 'popular' education within which, it is suggested, some recognisable features of a youth work approach are discernible. By mid-nineteenth century, however, these struggles had very largely been lost, to be replaced increasingly by an acceptance of (or at least compliance with) top-down institutions – particularly church- and state-sponsored 'schooling'. As a result, by the later decades of the century, when an adolescent segment of the population was being newly identified as needing recreationally-based and mainly group-focused forms of 'improvement' in their leisure time, it was taken as self-evident that the 'youth leadership' which this required, far from being 'popular', had also to be 'provided', in this case by a range of philanthropic institutions.

With some bridging between them, three 'landmark' periods of this 'official' (and dominant) history are then examined:

- The late nineteenth and early twentieth century; when voluntary philanthropic effort constructed 'youth leadership' as a distinctive practice with young people.
- The years between 1939 and the 1960's when a state commitment to youth work was secured and consolidated.

- The period since 1997 when (at least in England) youth work practice was re-shaped and redirected if not actually redefined by neo-liberal welfare principles of the New Labour governments led by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

This rather schematic approach clearly carries some risks – particularly of giving too little attention to the complexities and contradictions of the historical processes. Not least amongst these is the fact that, in each of the four UK countries, youth work has developed some very different policy frameworks and trajectories. This has been increasingly true from the mid-twentieth century and especially since the devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the 1990s. For the period before these changes an attempt is made to distil some key features common to all four countries. From the 1960's onwards, however, the focus is increasingly on developments in England.

A youth work 'pre-history'?

A movement for 'popular' education

In the UK, the origins of youth work and its policy development can be traced back to the mid- to late nineteenth century, with the establishment of a range of philanthropic organisations concerned with providing (usually separate) leisure-time facilities for boys and young men and girls and young women.

However, the half century before these developments occurred – the period encompassing the early stages of the industrial revolution in Britain and the class struggles which this produced - has long seemed to me to merit a broader youth work attention than it has usually received. Though more recent studies may now be available, this interest was prompted for me initially by my encounters with the work in the 1970s and 1980s of the - now defunct and out of fashion but too easily forgotten - Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, based at Birmingham University. For me the main stimulus came from the historical research and writing of Richard Johnson. Though no doubt unintentionally, this carried intriguing hints of some earlier 'alternative', albeit barely emergent, forms of 'youth work' hidden within the 'popular' education movements he was describing – and, once these had been largely defeated, subsequently hidden too from history . Some of the wider discussions at the Seminar – particularly on the formative impact on youth work in some European countries of

youth and wider political ‘movements’ – made an at least tentative exploration of this possibility seem even more relevant to this paper.

Other historians have pointed to precursors of modern British youth work in this earlier period - particularly the network of Sunday schools which from the late eighteenth century were established for working class children by Robert Raikes and by Hannah More and her sister. (See for example Smith, 2002). And it was as early as 1844 that a group of middle class young men founded what is widely regarded as the UK’s first ‘national voluntary youth organisation’, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), with the declared aim of ‘uniting and directing the efforts of (other) Christian young men for the spiritual welfare of their fellows in the various departments of commercial life.’

What Johnson was describing however was something very different. In particular, unlike Raikes’ and More’s initiatives, it was not being done *to* working class people by their ‘betters’ but by and for working class people themselves. For example, Johnson (1976, 1977) examined in some critical detail ‘the discovery of indigenous educational traditions’ which, he showed, were at work from the late eighteenth century up to the demise of the Chartist movement in the later 1840s. (See also Harrison, 1961; Silver, 1965; Simon, 1972)

Though the result, Johnson concluded, was less a system than a network – or a movement? – it nonetheless amounted to a ‘strategy (which) was substitutional’ and through which, in three main ways, ‘they did it themselves’. One was to maintain ‘a running critique of all “provided” (or “philanthropic”) forms of education’ – particularly the forms of schooling then developing but also the institutions being developed for working class adults. This critique was extended to the role of the state – seen as an instrument of capitalist employers – including, by the 1830s, its first interventions into schooling for working class children.

The second key feature of the strategy as outlined by Johnson was ‘alternative sets of educational goals’, including alternative definitions of the ‘really useful knowledge’ required by working class people not just for daily living but for radically changing an unequal and unjust society. Thirdly, Johnson pointed to ‘a vigorous and varied educational practice’. This was implemented through the wide dissemination of a radical press and other printed matter, through secular Sunday schools and ‘halls of science’ and, Johnson suggested, through the at least partial subversion of ‘provided’ institutions such as mechanics institutes. Its methods

also included learning through a variety of other grass roots bodies and from ‘the knowledgeable friend, relation or neighbour’.

Youth work – or not?

What Johnson was describing was ‘bottom-up’ ‘indigenous’ working class activism based on self-help and self-organisation. Some significant and indeed fundamental differences from the youth work we know today – both in purpose and pedagogy – are therefore clear. For one thing, because these educational activities were seen as a vital contribution to assuring and sustaining class solidarity, group action was much more than a means to other ends. The kinds of *self*-development which so dominates current educational provision were certainly valued. Collectivity, however - a commitment to working and achieving together for the common good – was, in its own right, a key desired outcome.

Secondly, it was assumed that, as an essential element of this search for solidarity, the approaches for implementing the education on offer, though undoubtedly intended to include young people, needed to be cross-generational. Thirdly, within the content of this education ‘... practicality and liberality were not seen as incompatible (as they are by many modern “academics”)', not least because social analysis and social action (‘theory’ and ‘practice’) were assumed to be both inseparable and essential for dealing with the punishing daily ‘labouring’ experience of society and how it operated.

Despite these divergences – and without overstating or romanticising what was actually achieved - it is possible to discern within the ‘popular’ education which was being advocated and indeed practised some pre-figuring of a ‘youth work’ pedagogy and methods as these are now understood in the UK. What Johnson describes as an endorsement of “‘reasonable” adult behaviour’ towards children mirrors the long-standing youth work assumption that adults will seek respectful relationships with young people rather than dominate them or patronise them as ‘not yet quite complete’. This was also a practice based on experiential learning which stressed ‘the child’s own activity’. Much of this learning, as we have seen, was to be developed in informal educational ways, in and through group experience and interaction. Moreover, because it was explicitly designed and intended to bring about social change, it was inherently (rather than as an extrinsic ‘curriculum subject’) designed as a form of citizenship education. Indeed, within it were organic forms of learner ‘participation’ and

commitments to their 'empowerment' which make their currently fashionable UK versions look insipid and manipulative.

Even though such claims can be made only very tentatively – some I suspect may even judge them fanciful - for me a speculative exploration of this kind is important for a more general reason. It reminds us that other informal and indeed non- or only minimally institutionalised forms of education were in the past not only seen as possible but actually practised. The 'youth work' which the rest of this paper examines, far from being 'inevitable', has therefore to be treated as above all a social construct - the compromised product of intense inter-personal and inter-group processes and conflicts with deep historical roots.

From 'popular' to 'provided'

Later versions of the indigenous educational tradition described by Johnson have been identified - for example in an independent working class adult education movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. (Phillips and Putnam, 1980). In a very different context the tradition was perhaps again discernible in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s as Black communities strove to provide indigenous educational (including youth work) provision for their young people. Significantly, however, in a strong echo of what happened to the educational movement which Johnson was examining, by the late 1980s many of these pioneering Black activists had 'decided they needed to take the grants, the jobs and the positions on committees that would bring them closer to the new site of struggle – the local state'. (Shukra 2007).

For, following the defeat of Chartism in the late 1840s, the 'popular' education tradition had weakened substantially and eventually all but disappeared. By then organised working class activity was softening its view of the state and its possibilities and concentrated increasingly on gaining access to and improvements in 'provided' institutions, including those offering 'education'.

Such incorporation was interwoven too, however, with a growing ruling class determination to secure firm control of this crucial educational terrain and, particularly through schooling, to become the dominant provider for 'the labouring classes'. As Raikes' and More's efforts show, this was not a new approach. However from the 1830s onwards, the dominant

philanthropic and state providers set in train something which was much more radical – and which, at a time when 21st century UK governments have become obsessed with young people who are ‘NEET’ (not in education, employment or training), again has a strong contemporary ring. These initiatives Johnson had described in an earlier article as

... an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behaviour of the working class ...- (designed) to raise a new race of working people - respectful, cheerful, hard-working, loyal, pacific and religious. (Johnson, 1970: 119).

It was this far-reaching aspiration, underpinned by the organised working class’s increasing engagement with state provision, which from the mid-nineteenth century squeezed out any practical possibility of sustaining recognisable forms of indigenous working class ‘youth work’ or indeed any similar educational endeavour. As E. J. Urwick, subwarden of the Toynbee Hall Settlement in London in the early 1900s, put it in 1904, the assumption by then was that:

The children of the poor follow where they are led. Their ‘betters’ are their leaders, and the example of their life determines their path. (Quoted in Gillis, 1974: 140).

It is therefore to the ‘provided’ educational philosophy and institutional forms generated by these ruling class perspectives and ambitions to which we must look for the origins of what over the next 150 years established themselves in the UK as the dominant versions of ‘youth work’.

Pioneering ‘provided’ youth work

New challenges, new responsibilities

It was not until later in the nineteenth century that changing social and economic conditions prompted a UK-wide development of such a practice. By then, commentators were convinced, these changes were presenting the nation’s young with new and tough challenges – and those with means and in positions of power with new responsibilities. Not unrelated, in this period those passing through a newly discovered (or constructed?) phase in the life cycle, ‘adolescence’, were seen as needing some of the protections and nurturing as well as the disciplining already in place for children.

Some of the challenges were domestic. As the demand for unskilled (especially child) labour reduced more and more young people were neither in school nor at work. Where 'corrupting' commercial facilities such as 'drink-shops' and the 'penny gaff' (the 'low' music hall) did not fill this new leisure gap, 'the street, and only the street, remained', offering ready opportunities for the young to indulge in 'one main amusement' - gambling. (Russell and Rigby, 1908: 10-11).

The youth of the country were seen as being tested, too, within a new international context. In an early version of 'globalisation', Britain in this period - no longer the undisputed 'workshop of world' - sought to bolster its political and economic position by embarking on a revitalised imperial mission. Were the young ready for the demands of this 'burden'? What extra guidance and support did they need to be sure they could respond? Youth work as we now know it emerged in part as one response to this national self-searching.

But who should, who could, take on these emerging responsibilities? Pragmatic and often major compromises with the *laissez-faire* principles which had so shaped Victorian Britain had already been made - in order for example to guarantee public health and spread elementary education to the whole population. Nonetheless, in this later nineteenth century period and even into the early decades of the twentieth century the state remained, at best, an unwelcome intruder into the personal and social spheres of people's lives. For responding to the newly identified leisure-time needs of young people, a state role was therefore never apparently considered. Self-evidently, these were '... suitable fields for voluntarily supported clubs' (Berry, 1919: 96) - a task for 'thinking people who felt something must be done...' (Russell and Rigby, 1908: 12); for those who were conscious of what their 'happier fortune has bestowed on us from our circumstances' (Booton, 1985: 14); who were 'fortunately placed' and therefore 'felt very strongly that in some way (action) was incumbent on us' (Schill, 1935: 5).

By the early decades of the twentieth century the result was a network of local independent boys and girls clubs across the UK. From the 1880s, under the influence of William Smith, military-style brigades for boys and girls also took hold and by the 1900s were being supplemented and indeed often underpinned by Baden Powell's Boy Scouts and later the Girl Guides. In due course these sought mutually supportive links by setting up a range of local, regional and national associations and federations.

The men and women who formed these clubs, 'battalions' and 'troops' never envisaged them as a 'universalist' provision: indeed they constantly fretted that:

.. none of these agencies – not even the Boys Club, laying itself out merely for the boy's amusement – make an appeal to the mass of the boys of this (working) class. And the boys who come are precisely those who need the Club least. (Freeman, 1914: 129).

From the start these new institutions sought explicitly to be 'selective' - in the current jargon of UK social policy, 'targeted'. Their explicit focus was 'working lads', 'the factory girl' – in the Ardwick area of Manchester 'those who had to spend their lives in the mean and squalid districts and slums of our city'. (Schill, 1935: 5).

Motives and purposes

Nor, at this early stage, were these pioneers talking about 'youth work'. 'Youth leadership' was what they were seeking – a term very deliberately chosen as an explicit statement of intent. Indeed, most often the language in which those intentions were expressed displayed an openness and absence of ambiguity which today have been lost or (more likely) knowingly abandoned. No evasive talk here of 'the deprived' or 'the underprivileged', of 'the disadvantaged' or 'the socially excluded'. 'The poor' were the poor, 'the lower orders' the lower orders.

Moreover the aims which they then set themselves, though as always run through with contradictory pulls and pushes, continued to reflect that earlier highly ambitious commitment identified by Johnson: to 're-moralising' a whole class. Some were explicitly focused on 'improvement' - 'to educate them in other ways than book learning'. (Quoted in Booton, 1985: 32). Though this included encouraging and supporting young people to acquire 'harder' (especially recreational) skills, it also focused on what today would be labelled 'soft' personal and social skills – on 'bring(ing) the Public School spirit to the masses' (Berry, 1919: 9); on what the founders of St Christopher's Working Boys Club in the early 1900s called 'a better tone' and 'good form'. (Quoted in Booton, 1985: 14).

These broad goals were framed within some taken-for-granted gender perspectives and boundaries. Thus the first object of Openshaw Lads Club, founded in Manchester in 1888,

included the aspiration ‘to encourage manliness of the highest order’ (Flint, 1948: 8), while for Maud Stanley, a girls club innovator and leader in the 1890s, it was important that :

...we shall ... give the working girl an influence over her sweetheart, her husband, her sons which will sensibly improve and raise her generation to be something higher than mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. (See Booton, 1985: 51).

As a number of the quotations above show, much of what was being attempted was also located in the wider ‘child saving’ movement so prominent in this period. Some of the interventions were explicitly, sometimes passionately, concerned to rescue the children of those hewers of wood from exploitation by their capitalist employers. As Water Lorenz pointed out in his keynote address to the Blankenberge Seminar, this propelled some of these pillars of their community, perhaps in spite of themselves, into forms of political activism - though rarely ones which posed a direct challenge to ‘the system’ itself.

Within the leisure contexts of the new youth leadership much of what was done also sought to counter the perceived dangers embedded in young people’s daily lives and everyday social world. One of the most influential women pioneers, Lily Montagu, was clear for example that

Our dances competed with low, cheap, dancing halls where girls went for a sixpenny hop ... and (where) the company was most objectionable. (Montagu, 1954: 78-9).

And so too were the founders of Openshaw Lads’ Club:

None will dispute the appalling lack of facilities at that time whereby young men and boys could spend their leisure hours usefully and prepare themselves for worthy citizenship. (Flint, 1948: 7).

Moreover, with so many of these activities understood as wicked, immoral, indeed straightforwardly sinful, underpinning all these effort was an again undisguised and unapologetic Christian proselytising – an open commitment, expressed by the founders of St Christopher Working Boys Club, ‘to help (the young) learn that the service of God is the highest service’ (quoted in Booton, 1985: 14); or as the founders of Openshaw Lads Club put it ‘... to help them to be Christians in life as well as in name’. (Flint, 1948: 8).

Altruistic intentions cannot however be taken as the only ones which moved the pioneers. Much self interest was at work here, too, often driven (as today) by fears which dated back at

least to the start of Britain's industrialisation. Some of these were experienced keenly and very personally. In the view of one commentator for example in the 1870s:

If we in the Church of England do not deal with the masses, the masses will deal with us. (Quoted in Davies and Gibson, 1967: 38).

Some three decades later, journalist and historian, C. F. G. Masterman, echoed these same anxieties:

They (the ruling class) dread the fermenting, in the populous cities, of some new, all-powerful explosive, destined one day to shatter into ruins all their desirable social order. (Quoted in Davies and Gibson, 1967: 35).

What is more, by then those 'masses' were indeed seeking to challenge the system itself - were organising themselves through trade unions and a political party advocating socialist solutions to their grievances and were sometimes too, it seemed to those in power, intent precisely on destabilising that desirable social order. As influential a youth leadership protagonist as Baden Powell thought it 'no exaggeration to hope for valuable results from scouting in the direction of ultimately solving class differences'. (Quoted in Davies and Gibson, 1967: 38). Indeed, for him the need was urgent to maintain and strengthen both Britain's internal unity and its wider imperial mission:

Remember, whether rich or poor, from castle or from slum, you are all Britons in the first place, and you've got to keep Britain up against outside enemies, you have to stand shoulder to shoulder to do it. If you are divided amongst yourselves you are doing harm to your country. You must sink your differences. (Quoted in Springhall, 1977: 59).

We must all be bricks in the wall of that great edifice – the British Empire. (Quoted in Springhall, 1977: 15).

Defining and constructing a distinctive practice

For working with what today would be labelled a very 'challenging' client group, the aims which the original youth work sponsors set for themselves were thus very stretching. For responding to this challenge, much of what they did was probably intuitive, pragmatic, heavily reliant on trial and error. Much too, no doubt, was transient - long lost to history. Nonetheless, far from merely 'emerging' out of some accidental or inevitable impersonal process, the 'youth leadership' that was pioneered in the period from the 1860s and 1870s

into the 1900s was designed and constructed: drawing on a self-conscious analysis of the needs and characteristics of the groups to be attracted; incorporating learning from the experience of actually doing the work; generating a small but significant literature; and, through this, disseminating that experience more widely. The youth leadership this constructed was therefore no fly-by-night enterprise – no passing whim. From the start it was an endeavour which, though added to and refined over the next century and a half, went a long way towards defining the core features of a practice with young people which distinguished it from other approaches.

What were these core features? Because of its implications for how the work overall would need to be initiated and developed, most fundamental was the presumption that young people would choose to attend and to continue to participate:

In the first place the boys had to be persuaded to come... (Russell and Rigby, 1908, 18).

It is no use asking girls to whom one is unknown; they will not come; they are distrustful of such invitations, and shyness also will prevent their entering a strange place. (Maude Stanley, 1890: 57).

A compulsory programme is contrary to the Boys Club method. (Henriques, 1934: 7)

This fact of young people's voluntary participation remained a central – perhaps the defining - consideration in much of the pioneers' subsequent thinking and planning. In particular, their determination to provide young people with an educational experience broadly defined – to move them not just beyond the interests and activities but also the values, beliefs and habits which they brought with them – meant that they needed, constantly and constructively, to respond to this reality. It showed up repeatedly for example in their acceptance and indeed often positive embrace of young people's demand that, during their precious leisure time, they had a chance to relax, meet with friends and do things they enjoyed:

... the first object (is) Recreation ... the compelling force which brings members to the clubs... The second object we may call Education... The first object in itself leads to the second ... (Russell & Rigby, 1908, 19)

Most Clubs make amusements and sports the main concern of their organisation. That is right, because, otherwise, the boy who is tired after his work will not attend. (Freeman, 1914: 129).

In setting these processes in motion, the early youth work providers also emphasised what we now might call ‘personalisation’ – the need to meet and engage with young people as people, as individuals:

To know about the boy is by no means the same thing as to know the boy. (Emphasis added). (Henriques, 1934: 51-2)

As the essential underpinning of this, they sought to build relationships which demonstrated respect for young people: as the founders of St Christopher Boys Club expressed it: ‘... to ourselves mix with them freely’.

Any helper in a girls’ club should have friendliness in her manners and in her heart. (Stanley, 1980: 56).

Also embedded early were notions of what today in the UK we would call ‘participation’:

A few boys’ clubs place great reliance on the principle of self-government by the members. (Russell and Rigby, 1908, 85).

... it is the right principle, as soon as the lads reach years of discretion, to draw them into responsibility for the club’s welfare... seniors should have their own committee to look after the working of the department. (Schill, 1935: 52; 54)

Finally, the work was built on a recognition of young people’s own friendship groups as important and valuable to them and so as a potentially positive medium through which to engage and work with them – ‘where the boy picks up valuable habits from association with other lads ...’ (Freeman, 1914: 129).

Real pals ... are generally keen and even insist on sticking together. It is not uncommon for a boy to refuse to join the club unless his friend is also taken in. (Henriques, 1934: 46).

Indeed for Urwick, ‘the street gang was in some sense the school for the poor’ (Gillis, 1974: 63):

Understand it (the street) and you hold the key to many of the riddles of social morality, and let this too serve to explain how it is that the majority of boys and girls

for whom the home does so little and for whom the school has so little chance of doing much, nevertheless grow into decent and respectable citizens... (quoted in Gillis, 1974: 64).

Though spread unevenly through the written records and analyses of what was being attempted at the time, these were recurrent features of the new youth leadership – voluntary attendance; education through leisure-time activity; a focus on the individual and a personalised relationship with him or her and his or her peer group; participative approaches. As these came together over these decades, they defined a distinctive practice which was handed onto, and progressively consolidated and developed by, subsequent generations of youth leaders and their advocates.

The state takes a hand

Small stumbling steps

What also continued to be taken for granted was that this practice must be provided largely through charitable action. As a result, well into the twentieth century youth work in the UK lacked a coherent national policy framework. Fiercely independent voluntary organisations, often liable to respond in highly competitive ways, continued to dominate the field. Though usually operating on clear philosophical and organisational principles of their own, the only UK youth work policies which could be said to exist were by and large their policies, with the most unifying issue amongst them often being their distrust of the state.

Not that the state was entirely passive in the first half of the twentieth century. Though inconsistent and lacking follow-through, governments did seek to respond to the effects on young people of the war-time conditions of 1914-18, particularly by trying to bring greater local coherence to what the voluntary youth organisations were doing. More fundamentally, over these decades the wider political context shifted. Pressures again built up from below for the state to take greater responsibility for ameliorating the worst excesses of capitalism, particularly from the labour movement – though one key component within this, the trade unions, showed little interest in something as marginal as youth work to their overwhelmingly work-focused concerns. More pragmatically, whole populations and key economic and social institutions had to be mobilised to fight two ‘total’ wars and then to carry out major post-war reconstructions.

By the 1940s therefore the popular mind-set on state intervention had changed significantly. This gave governments a much stronger mandate for involving themselves in areas of provision which, for them, had previously been off-limits. As a clear sign of this changed environment, in 1936 most of the national voluntary youth organisations set up a loosely structured ‘standing conference’ as a minimal form of collective self-defence against government ‘interference’.

In these years ‘the youth of the nation’ remained a major focus of attention and concern. Increasingly governments fretted over how fit and motivated young people were for defending their country and how they could be guaranteed guidance and discipline while their fathers were away fighting. UK prescriptions for state action in this period were constantly circumscribed by cautionary references to the monolithic (and very un-British) youth movements of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. Nonetheless, by the later 1930s, as another war threatened, it was accepted that an at least limited state role was needed if the ‘youth leadership’ on offer was to be relevant and effective. Most concretely this was expressed in new powers given to local authorities to pay for youth facilities in the years running up to World War Two.

From wartime enthusiasm to the constraints of austerity

However, the real state breakthrough only came after the war started. The first of a series of government circulars and policy statements appeared in 1939 and 1940. In 1942, all 16 and 17 year olds were required register with their local office of the Ministry of Labour in part ‘to secure contact between them and the Youth Service’ – though not, the Government circular stressed, ‘to apply compulsion to the recruitment of youth organisations’. (Board of Education/Scottish Education Department, 1943: para1). Perhaps most significantly, key clauses were inserted into the radical education act passed in 1944 which required local authorities to secure – though not necessarily themselves provide - ‘leisure-time occupation’ and ‘facilities for recreation’ for young people. The UK thus emerged from the war with a formally designated ‘Service of Youth’, to be delivered locally in ‘partnership’ with the voluntary organisations but underpinned by central government resources, oversight and even an occasional ‘steer’.

Though some local commitments remained strong, the notional partnership between local authorities and local voluntary organisation was rarely easy and often ineffective. Indeed, as old fashioned British class snobbery got to work, to many of those involved the last thing it must have seemed like was a partnership. As the very sympathetic director of education for Derbyshire, Jack Longland, commented in 1951, on the one hand for many of the charitable sponsors:

...(as) local authorities belonged traditionally to the servants' hall, their unsympathetic bureaucrats the last people to be trusted with so delicate and esoteric a mystery as youth leadership. (Ashbridge Conference report, 1951: 33).

On the other hand, he recalled:

Some Directors of Education - old style – and perhaps a civil servant here and there, were shocked at being told to initiate a service so imprecise, without compulsory sanctions or school attendance officers ... (Ashbridge Conference report, 1951: 32).

A central state commitment to youth work did not last, however. With official policy committed to keeping all young people in at least part-time education till they were 18, powerful voices began to question whether a Service of Youth was anything more than a dispensable frill. Such doubts were reinforced by the severe 'financial constraints' which throughout most of the 1950s sapped the central state's war-time enthusiasm for youth work. Indeed, it subsequently emerged, the government's deliberate but undeclared policy was by the end of the decade 'not to advance the Youth Service'. (Labour Party, 1959: 19).

Under pressure from lobbying from within the Service, ministers and their civil servants eventually began to rethink this position. If a Service was to be justified and supported out of public funds, they seemed to conclude, then a radical shake-up was needed – not least to confront those entrenched and outdated voluntary sector attitudes highlighted by Longland. (See Smith, 1997: 41-3). The outcome in 1958 was the appointment of a seasoned committee chair, Lady Albemarle, to head an independent review of the Service.

The Albemarle effect

Creating a state policy framework

When it reported in 1960, it was clear that the committee's recommendations were carefully geared to what Lady Albemarle judged the government would accept. As a result the report

was endorsed by the Minister of Education in its entirety on the day it appeared. This included its proposal for a national policy framework for the Youth Service which identified the local authority's task as '... to determine policy in their areas ... and to ensure that adequate and varied facilities are provided' – though still, it made clear, 'in consultation with the voluntary bodies'. (para 160). The role of central government was also to be strengthened, particularly for '... securing the performance by local education authorities of the duties put upon them by ... the Education Act of 1944' (para 155) - a gentle if often ineffective reminder to local councils of what statutorily they were supposed to offer in their areas.

The committee also gave a strong push to the professionalisation of those it still saw as 'youth leaders'. It recommended that over the following five years – later extended to ten - a specialist one-year emergency training course be established to qualify 140 new workers a year. Extra resources were to be made available for employing full-time staff and nationally recognised machinery created to set their salaries and conditions of service. In combination, these developments generated an often sharp debate over the following decade on whether the voluntary work which, as we have seen, had historically been the main resource for providing youth leadership in the UK could survive this purportedly professionalising onslaught.

Responding to a teenage generation: values...

Beyond these structural changes, the report presented the government – and certainly many of the historic sponsors of youth work – with more than they had bargained for. In spite of violent reminders on the streets of London and Nottingham in 1958, the committee seemed able, it is true, to offer only a puzzled and evasive response (para 74) to one of the most far-reaching social shifts getting under way in the UK – its often reluctant transition to a multi-racial society. Nonetheless, a number of the key committee members proved highly responsive to other important social and cultural changes of the period. They particularly spotted the emerging challenges to deep-seated class attitudes - particularly to Britain's deference to 'elders and betters' - of a younger generation of 'teenagers' with increasing disposal income and consumer power. Looking back in 2004 to what impelled him in 1962, aged 21, to write his autobiography, Ray Gosling – initiator of a highly publicised

‘alternative’ youth project in Leicester in the early 1960s – vividly caught the mood of many (though not of course all) of his generation at that time:

... we said and acted out a NO that went on to change the world, we did. I did. Our people did. Our generation did... That back then we/I said NO to family, past, church, religion, tradition, work as nine to five, as factory fodder; say no to the Lord and no to the Vicar and no to ownership. (Gosling, 2004: ix-x).

Two years before Gosling’s biography appeared, if in rather more circumspect language, the Albemarle report had offered a not dissimilar explanation of its efforts to prompt some accommodating shifts in youth work’s values and purposes. Uncompromisingly, it declared:

... (the Youth Service’s) way of embodying aims is mistaken. For many young people today the discussion of ‘spiritual values’ or ‘Christian values’ chiefly arouses suspicion.

Committee members had been struck, the report went on,

... by the great number of occasions, in the evidence presented to us, on which words such as the following have been used as though they were a commonly accepted and valid currency: ‘service’, ‘dedication’, ‘leadership’, character building’.

And they drew the conclusion that

... these particular words now connect little with the realities of life as most young people see them: they do not seem to ‘speak to their condition’. (Albemarle Report, 1960: paras 143, 145 – emphasis in the original).

The committee made clear its concern that, in making these strictures, it might to be misunderstood. It thus emphasised, somewhat unconvincingly, that it was seeking only to challenge the language in which youth work’s values had been and were being expressed and not the values themselves. Nonetheless, in such a high profile state paper, the blunt expression of doubts about what, for nearly a century, had been so taken-for-granted by most youth work sponsors had the effect, albeit briefly, of opening up new spaces for debate and action within youth work. Within ten years for example women, Black and lesbian and gay workers were struggling to occupy this space by injecting explicitly liberationist aspirations into their youth work practice - though, significantly, even then struggles around class within what remained a predominantly ‘provided’ practice still ‘dare not speak their name’. (See Taylor, 2007).

... and methods

Underpinned by this (albeit partial) deconstruction of youth work's historic value base, the Albemarle committee reasserted and reframed some of the core features of youth work practice inherited from its nineteenth century originators. Apparently taking young people's voluntary participation as a given, it for example re-stated youth work's educational role – as it put it, its goal of offering 'training' and 'challenge'. At the same time, as the first sponsors had done, it emphasised that, in the youth work context, such educational goals could only be realised through the provision of acceptable and engaging recreational activity. It thus gave equal emphasis to the need for what it called 'association' (para 135), in the process contributing to a reconceptualisation of youth leadership during the 1960s not just as youth work but as 'social education' (para 132).

Starting from the proposition that 'too often it must appear to the young that by joining a club or group they forfeit the opportunity of doing things in the way they like' (emphasis in the original), the Albemarle report also placed a renewed stress on young people's 'self-determination', on their 'self-programming' and on '...valu(ing) very highly the active participation of young people and their own leadership of groups which they bring into existence themselves'. (Para 188). Indeed, it defined the Service's users as its 'fourth partner', alongside central and local government and the voluntary sector. Finally, while confirming the individualistic aims which have continued to dominate 'provided' education in the UK – '... to help many more individuals to find their own way better, personally and socially' – it recognised the importance of a 'sense of fellowship' (para 135) for young people and that their '...gang loyalties are intense'. For the committee, clearly – as, again, for the pioneers - working with and through young people's peer relationships remained an important feature of youth work.

From 'the permissive sixties' to a new 'public managerialism'

Towards targeting

Within a decade, the egalitarian and libertarian pretensions of the 1960s were being tested to their limits, revealing roots which were extremely shallow and ill-adapted to harsher climates. Within government policies, most were quickly swept away by the economic shocks of the mid 1970s – the rise in oil prices, another UK financial crisis, harsh IMF-

imposed restrictions on public spending. Though hardly top of the policy-makers' priority list, youth work soon felt the consequences.

Attempts began early – in 1971, for example, by one Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education - to concentrate youth workers' attention on state-defined targets such as 'areas of high social need' and young people 'who are demonstrably disadvantaged'. It was under the Thatcher administrations of the 1980s and 1990s, however, that this refinement – narrowing – of youth work's focus became more systematic. Underpinning Thatcherite social policies was an explicit and principled repudiation of the UK's post-1945 'welfare consensus' and the 'settlement' it had produced. Here, their starting premises included, firstly, that 'there is no such thing as society – only individuals and families'; and, secondly, that high taxation and high public expenditure was undermining both personal responsibility and national economic prosperity. With youth work suspect anyway for its perceived links with the 'permissive' 'woolly liberal' notions of the 1960s, it found itself a victim of the Thatcher government's constant efforts to reduce local and central government spending. And, where resources were being provided, youth workers were increasingly told that they must target their work - prioritise groups such as the young unemployed and 'young people at risk of drifting into crime'.

By this stage policy directions for youth work in the four UK countries had already diverged, in some cases significantly. Even though its overall ideology had its impact throughout the UK, once the Labour government devolved some legislative powers to Scotland, Wales and eventually Northern Ireland, policy and structural differences became even more marked. The focus of what follows is therefore on England.

New Labour 'modernisation'

This 1997 'New Labour' government saw no reason to reverse Thatcher's social policy reforms: on the contrary, it shared much of her disillusion with the 'old' welfare state and with many of the ideas on which it had operated since its creation. Under Blair and then Brown repeated attempts were made to radically restructure – 'modernise' – public services. To achieve this, heavily reliance was placed on two key approaches: an unrelenting search for the holy grail of 'joined up' services and 'seamless' provision; and a tight, top-down micro-management of policy-implementation and direct practice through the targeting of

resources on groups identified by national policy as priorities and through an insistence on 'measurable outcomes'.

Over the whole of the New Labour period, these strategies crept steadily closer to youth work provision. One 'failed' attempt was made to implement both at same time through the creation of a comprehensive 'youth support service' for all 13-19 year olds – Connexions – which was originally planned to absorb the Youth Service. In the event, however, it was two other initiatives which had the greatest impact on youth work, how it was conceived and how it was delivered. The first was announced in *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002) which, as the title suggests, had a specific focus on Youth Service and very direct implications for youth work. The second, *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003), had a much broader focus – the reorganisation of all services for children and young people delivered through local authorities, including youth work.

For youth work, *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (REYS)* represents something of a landmark document – a threshold crossed. For one thing, it set quality standards for the delivery of youth work which each local authority was expected to meet. Secondly it provided a statement of values which gave at least rhetorical endorsement to many of the practice features which had been embedded in the formulations of 'youth leadership' by the first youth organisations and then re-affirmed by Albemarle. As significant however, beyond this rhetoric *REYS* for first time also set local youth work providers 'hard' statistical targets. These were focused for example on how many of its 13-19 year old population it 'reached', engaged with 'actively', worked with 'intensively' and helped achieve an 'accredited or 'recorded' outcome. Youth workers were also required to meet a range of locally agreed targets for work with 'at risk' young people such as 'NEETs', potential offenders and drug users.

By 2008 this framework for planning and evaluating youth work had come to dominate not just local authority services but also, as they were increasingly converted by New Labour into an arm of state policy (see below), many voluntary youth organisations, too. Policy-makers, many managers and some youth workers welcomed it as helpful in increasing accountability and driving up quality. For many field practitioners, however, the new measurement regime proved deeply alienating. (See for example Brent, 2004; Spence, 2006). For them, the targets were experienced as valuing – indeed in practice often allowing - only

what could be ‘measured’ statistically, resulting in youth work’s historic core features being treated as irrelevant, even as obstacles to achieving the desired policy outcomes.

Every Child Matters was much more wide-ranging in its intentions – indeed, it was one of the most ambitious social policy documents of the New Labour period. Overwhelmingly shaped by a major child abuse scandal and backed subsequently by two *Youth Matters* papers with a particular focus on youth work-type provision, this had as its primary goal the ‘integration’ of all local state children and youth services, including crucially the pooling of their budgets. As a result, as from April 2009, all statutory youth work provision in England was planned to operate through local integrated youth support and development structures, embodied often on the ground in integrated management and practitioner teams comprising a range of professional disciplines. In the process, without any declared change of policy, the one state-funded albeit deeply flawed institutional structure which had had an explicit remit for developing (and, often even more importantly, defending) youth work - the local authority Youth Service created in 1939 – was in effect dissolved. Almost as though it had never existed, from 2004 onwards references to it simply disappeared from state policy papers and from ministerial statements, to be replaced by the generic concept of ‘youth services’.

From youth work to ‘positive activities’

As this paper is being completed in mid-2008, much of the evidence on the effects on youth work of these changes is anecdotal. On the positive side, the overall New Labour youth policy framework gave a new emphasis to strengthening young people’s influence within the services catering for them, including their leverage on decision-making and resource allocation. Particularly significant here was the creation of Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds, with grants from the Funds to local youth projects and activities being decided by local youth panels operating with considerable autonomy. (See Golden et al, 2008).

By mid-2008 however, in many parts of England, the concerns of many youth workers and some of their immediate managers about what was happening to youth work were running wide and deep. One was that, operating from a deficiency model of young people rather than the potentiality model which had shaped much youth work in the past, the overriding policy expectation being placed on staff, and the non-resistible call on their budgets, would be to

stop children being abused and prevent young people from becoming offenders. A second was that the new local children and young people services would be dominated by staff from child care (especially child protection) and youth offending backgrounds with little first hand understanding of or sympathy for youth work.

At the same time, the government was insisting that activities for young people, especially 'disadvantaged' young people, must be 'positive' and 'constructive' – indeed, it was using such formulations as in effect a substitute for what it saw as the 'unstructured' youth work approaches in which ministers clearly had little trust. As the Beverley Hughes statement quoted at the start of this paper illustrated, it was also suggesting that, as 'activities' apparently had intrinsic developmental qualities independent of the human interactions and personal relationships through which they were delivered, it was no longer necessary to conceive of them as even informally educational.

These emphases on 'structure' and in-built 'constructiveness' signalled the evacuation of another key youth work principle - starting with the agendas which young people had brought with them to their encounters with youth workers and through which, as we have seen, workers then sought to develop their educational programmes. In particular, what Russell and Rigby had understood a century earlier as 'Recreation - the compelling force which brings members to the clubs' was clearly no longer seen as a particularly helpful arena in which to meet young people or seek to develop their interests and talents, at least as they were conceived by powerful state policy-makers. Instead, before they had met or had chance to develop rapport with a single young person, youth workers were increasingly being expected to define what the appropriate agendas were to be – with 'appropriate' here determined largely by top-down central government policy priorities: preparation for work, reduction of teenage pregnancies, prevention of drug misuse, diversion from 'anti-social behaviour'. More and more therefore youth work was seen, not as a practice in its own right, but as a tool for other agencies to import in order to achieve their own policy priorities, especially when these required them to 'consult' young people and fine-tune their actual delivery of services.

This relocation from open leisure contexts where practitioners worked on young people's own territory, to much more formally structured institutional settings and pre-determined schemes of work had another even more far-reaching implication for youth work. It

undermined what as we have seen, had from its earliest days been taken as intrinsic to all its practice: young people's voluntary attendance. In 2006, this assumption was openly questioned by one of the government's most favoured 'think tanks', the Institute for Public Policy Research. In a report which was to become a major reference document for government policy-makers, it proposed that, in the provision of 'positive activities' an 'element of compulsion within an overall package of user choice' might be needed and therefore permissible. (Margo and Dixon, 2006: 173-4).

In the main however the threat of compulsion was less direct, more creeping, as youth work, often as the only way of getting essential funding, was inserted into other settings. These included for example schools and colleges, youth offending teams and 'entry to employment schemes' where young people's attendance was a requirement and where therefore power relations were tipped firmly in favour of the providers. Some reconceptualisation of youth work was therefore by some seen as necessary in order to accommodate these political and financial pressures and their impact on practice processes. (See for example Williamson, 2007: 33; Ord, 2007: 58-62). For anything resembling youth work to occur here, one of its crucial process elements, the on-going 'negotiation' of the terms of engagement between young person and adult, had to be adjusted, often radically. In particular, practice needed to confront and overcome the (at best) unmotivated compliance or (at worst) unrelenting and even aggressive resistance with which many young people responded to these impositions on their freedom of choice. Only if the attendees could be 'won' to a more willing and authentic participation in what was on offer could anything like a youth work process have a chance of developing.

The wider New Labour policy context in which youth work was now operating also encouraged a much more negative view of young people's peer groups and their wider peer networks than historically youth workers had adopted. The Blair governments' unrelenting demonisation of 'youth' as violent, as 'feral', as 'yobs' bred a climate in which even two young people on the streets together could be read as a threat. More specifically, key reports and policy documents emphasised how teenage peer groups could block 'disadvantaged' young people's participation in 'positive' activities and reinforce their 'anti-social behaviour'. (See for example Margo and Dixon, 2006:118-120). For youth workers, too, validating work with and through the teenage peer group became more difficult as they found themselves negotiating an organisational culture within the newly integrated children and

young people services dominated by social work perspectives, by a preoccupation with individualised assessment of ‘client needs’ and by one-to-one responses to these.

Individualisation, as we have seen, had never of course been absent from youth work. From its earliest days youth leadership had sought to ‘know the boy’ (and girl) personally, as an individual. Increasingly, too, it had come to stress the importance of seeing them, not through the filter of adult-imposed labels – young offender, drug user, teenage mother – but for who they were as a young person.

Within the structures which developed out of the New Labour reforms, however, youth workers seemed likely to be drawn more and more into engaging with young people mainly or only because, as individuals or products of a range of family pathologies, they had problems or were problems. Responses were then liable to assume that they needed to be treated on an individualised basis or, at its widest, as son or daughter or sibling of a family. Amongst other consequence, these expectations posed a threat both to the youth worker’s role as the young person’s advocate, including when necessary with and against the family and to a commitment, more recently acknowledged, to respecting and working actively with young people’s wider collective and cultural identities. Above all, however, they threatened to marginalise youth work’s historic focus on the young person as peer group member even as new evidence was emerging on how young people’s peer networks could help them to stay safe on the streets (Seaman et al, 2006) and facilitate personal and collective development through the ‘traditional’ youth club. (See Brent, 2004; Hilton, 2005).

Some lessons from history

What broader messages does this rapid and often simplistic survey of the history of youth work in the UK – particularly England – have for the UK itself and perhaps for European colleagues?

The overall policy framework

In the UK, once the struggles for indigenous forms of ‘popular’ education were lost, it became a ‘given’ that youth work had overwhelmingly to be a ‘provided’ activity. Over these 150 years its development has been far from one-dimensional or one-directional, with

struggles surfacing from time to time over its purpose and form. These however have rarely or centrally been to challenge its top-down control and direction. Rather, the overall narrative has been of an initial and long dominance by a range of philanthropic bodies in what was assumed to be a no-go area for state; followed by state offers of 'support'; developing into the state seeking to ensure clearer direction and greater coherence; to – finally – the assertion of effective control of overall youth work policy and priorities by the state.

This current stage is proving to have major implications for that initially dominant interest, the voluntary youth organisation as – now reassigned by New Labour to 'the third sector' – it responds to the state's expectations and requirements. Research by the Charity Commission for example, carried out in 2007, revealed that two-thirds of charities with an income of £10M and over were by then getting 80% of their money from state while only 26% of those delivering public services felt 'free to make decisions without pressure to conform to wishes of funder'. (Charity Commission, 2007: 2–3). The locus of power and decision-making has thus shifted decisively from the days when a 'curriculum' area such as youth work was treated by state policy-makers as a 'secret garden' into which they ventured at their peril.

Purpose and values

Here too the narrative is not one-dimensional. The 'providing' organisations – philanthropic and state – have always been subject to a number of conflicting value pulls and pushes. These have particularly sought an often unspoken balance between on the one hand an altruism emphasising individual need and on the other a defence of self-, class and national interests. Moreover, the balances achieved here have shifted repeatedly in different periods in response to the dominant economic, political and social conditions of the time.

Today, though some of these contradictions persist, the balance framing youth work in particular has been tipped, often very firmly, towards its role as a societally integrating resource. Even the New Labour preoccupation with young people's 'participation', though producing some innovative opportunities, remains centrally concerned with overcoming the young's reluctance to participate in the electoral process. More broadly, much of what youth workers are now being asked – required – to do is to skill-up young people for working as uncritically as possible within existing institutional frameworks and processes: that is, to implement a new version of that nineteenth century aspiration to 're-moralise' a whole class – or in this case 'sub-class'.

Practice

What this narrative also traces over this century and a half is an incremental build up of a distinctive practice, rooted in a number of core features and working principles. However, as the state's role has strengthened, particularly in last ten years, these have been substantially unpicked, at least in England. Less and less is youth work provided as part of a leisure facility which, with young people choosing to attend, roots itself in an adult-young people negotiation which the young people help to jump-start and out of which a 'curriculum' develops based on how they define their interests and concerns. More and more practice is driven by pre-defined, adult intentions and priorities which, at best, are liable to be impatient with the essential process-led nature of the youth work approaches inherited from the past.

In mid-2008, the youth work practice created by its nineteenth century pioneers and revised and refined since thus seems – to put it at its most optimistic - at a cross roads. In England at least it is operating in a local environment which is offering considerably less institutional protection for its distinctive methodology than at any time over most of past seventy years. Its 'traditional' national and local voluntary organisations, where they are not willing collaborators, are having to struggle to avoid becoming mere instruments of the state's intentions. And key power holders within the central state itself have developed a mind-set which is at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to many of youth work's core practice features.

In adopting this stance New Labour ministers and their civil servants could be seen, not for the first time, to be breaking two of the 'rules' central to their policy-making rhetoric – that planning must be 'evidenced-based' and provision increasingly shaped by user ('consumer') expectations and demands. For, not only do young people continue to insist to inspectors, evaluators and researchers that for them youth work is a valid and valued way of working. They often also assert, or at least imply, that it is precisely those key historic features of the practice which make it so productive for them.

Let the final words of this paper therefore be those of young people:

On choosing to be involved:

We chose what to spend time on – we planned the six weeks between us.

Before everyone else is in control, never us.

... a teacher said I was a shy person and recommended (this project) to me. I came last year and felt more confident and this is my second year...

On being 'empowered':

I don't get told; I get asked.

(The youth worker) has helped me stand on my own two feet...

(Youth workers) are honest, they set boundaries, for example about confidentiality... and I'm empowered to make decisions by that.

You tell (the youth workers) what you need rather than vice versa.

On 'personalisation' – being seen and treated as individuals:

(The youth worker) doesn't treat you like some kid she works with – she treats you like a person.

...they understand that everybody's different.

They know us ... You know they want to talk to you.

I don't ever feel patronised...

On starting with young people's interests and concerns:

You get to do things you enjoy.

I like all the activities here because the learning is made more enjoyable.

On going beyond these starting points:

When you say you can't do it, they say you can.

I ... can do new things.

... the worker is always telling us we're doing well...

... (The workers) give you a second chance ... they want you to move on.

On working with and through young people's peer network and friendship groups:

I have made new friends ...

I liked working with the other three people; and I've opened up to everyone.

You can see past the colours now. It's not a problem no more. Girls and boys got to know one another.

(Davies and Docking, 2004: 16, 20; Merton et al, 2004: 43-9, 56, 127)

That then is how young people see – define – youth work. Is anyone up there listening?

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