The history of youth work in Europe and its relevance for today's youth work policy

Mei, 2008
Blankenberge

The identity of youth work

- Efficiency crisis and/or identity crisis
- Youth work produces active citizens, but is inaccessible for excluded young people?
- Counterproductive policies- Formalising the informal
- What is (good) youth work?

Why history?

- Looking back as starting point for reflection (Lorenz)
- Youth and youth work as social constructions
  - Not a hard and fast youth work concept
  - But convictions and concepts underpinning youth work and questioning self-evident aspects

Aims of Blankenberge I

- Reflection on the history of youth work and youth policy

- Identifying close links between youth work/youth policy and socio-cultural trends

- Building an international comparative perspective

- Putting the history of youth work and youth policy on the European agenda

Programme

- Introduction
- 7 country reports
  - Flanders
  - France
  - Germany
  - UK
  - Malta
  - Finland
  - Poland

Report: five main issues

- The *history* of youth work: different approaches and perspectives

- The *identity* of youth work: is there a clear youth work identity? Or: youth work between distinct activity and contingent practice.

- The *politics* and *policy* of youth work: is it an autonomous field? Or: who defines the youth work agenda?

- The *pedagogy* of youth work: between individual aspirations and social expectations. Or: youth work between emancipation and control.

- The *practice* of youth work: between lifeworld and system/structure. Or: the increasing formalisation of the non-formal.

1. History

- The *social* question and the *youth* question. Youth work in relation to the
  - welfare state
  - status of youth
- Research, policy and practice: interwoven perspectives
- Continuity and discontinuity

2. Identity

- Identity crisis? Open identity?
    - being young together,
    - Building relationships,
    - often sharing an ideology or a project,
    - nurturing associational life,
    - providing opportunities for social contact, recreation and education,
    - Voluntary attendance,
    - Self-government and participation
- Adults?

2. Identity part II

- Identity question is not neutral and distinct, but contingent and political
- Weapon for all targets?
- Gap between theory, policy and practice? (social education vs recreation).
- Legitimacy?!

3. Politics and policy

- Youth work is an instrument
- In whose interests?
- Autonomy under pressure
- Collective free space?

4. Pedagogy

- Youth work between
  - private aspirations and public expectations
  - Emancipation and control
- The balance works out differently
- Pedagogy is not one-sided

5. Practice

- Between lifeworld and system
- Different positions possible
- Youth movements, associations, oganisations? Service? Space?
- Participation is always a key word

Discussion and conclusions

- *The social question*: Youth work is "social and political work"
- Its pedagogy and identity cannot be defined apart from interventions and develoments in private and public spheres.
- Over-emphasizing the youth question de-socializes youth work
- Youth work theory focuses on psychological and sociological questions

Pedagogical questions

- Looking within youth work or looking out to society.
- The social dimension in youth work: confronting individual aspirations with societal norms
- Emancipations as normalisation: youth work contributes to individual social mobility, but is society better off?
- Youth work and social change, destabilisation?
- Pedagogy: beyond 1 to 1 relations

Methodicalization

Reducing youth work to a method:

- a two-track policy,

- which ends in the formalisation and instrumentalisation of youth work,

- and reinforces dividing lines within youth work and between different young people.

Reconnecting, without co-opting

- Youth work is being resocialized, but in a 'methodical' (a-historical) way
  - No purpose of its own – in the service of labour, education, safety, …
  - No direct action:
    - Employment	→	Employability
    - Failure of school		→		Failure at school
- Youth workers exclude (themselves) from the social debate on education
- Youth work is 'social work': between lifeworld and system

Blankenberge II

- Southern Europe?
- Is youth work:
  - Working together with youth to gain biographical, institutional and political skills (and thus making social provisions/life chances more accessible/useful?)
  - Pedagogical provision in the third milieu?
  - Supporting "youth in action"?

Blankenberge II

- Youth work history or pre-history?
- Youth work and the state?
- Youth work and professionalisation?
- Youth work and adults?
- Experiences of youth workers and young people?