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FOREVER YOUNG?

YOUTH WORK THEN AND NOW

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Editors: Mel Aitken and Mae Shaw

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Youth Work: A 2020 vision

Editorial Introduction

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Future commentators looking back on the first decade of the 21st century will undoubtedly be drawn to accounts of the unprecedented political, economic and social changes that have come to define this epoch. Across the UK, the effect of economic austerity has been felt no more acutely than in local youth work services.

Youth work has been placed on the back foot. More and more, the sector must effectively respond to the primacies of government policy whilst also meeting the often-contrasting needs of young people in local communities. Such a task is made more challenging by diminishing resources. This is a tall order, with the added requirement demanded of practitioners to increasingly demonstrate outcomes and impact of their practice intervention in this context. Seemingly against the odds, youth work endures.

The publication of this collection of work is timely. The papers confirm and reflect the events of recent years and showcase evidence of the ensuing challenges for the youth work sector, as well as respective issues arising in the lives and lifestyles of young people. The opening paper by Bernard Davies reminds us of the importance of tracking the historical evolution of youth work and the ever-changing relationship it has with the policy and politics of the state. Change it seems is inevitable, whilst continuity for youth work practice in terms of purpose and values is subjected to periodic scrutiny regardless of the dominant ideology at any given time. In other words, we have been here before, but for Davies the political future and that of youth work is far from certain.

The discrete practice sector in Scotland is critically examined by Annette Coburn and Sinead Gormally. Austerity has been felt UK-wide, however the position of youth work in Scotland appears on more solid footing compared to England. Despite this, the paper

points to embedded contradictions in the sector between current policy and the traditions and principles of practice. The authors contend that the context demands further scrutiny to help determine future priorities for youth work.

The central role of local government in the management of youth work services is the subject of Tony Taylor's contribution. Through an annotated review of his own CV stretching back to the 1960s, we get insight to the influence over decades of pervasive neo-liberal concerns and the emergent adoption of new public management. Through understanding the forces at play over time, valuable lessons can be learned about contemporary relations between the respective local government and third sectors.

A common thread running through this collection is the agency of young people; participation has been a longstanding central tenet of youth work practice. The case study presented by Christina McMellon confirms the potential of young people in acting on issues that concern them, in this instance gender inequality. The reflective learning and development of these young people is testimony to the power of the youth work process.

The voices of contemporary practitioners are captured in the interview data presented by Mel Aitken and Mae Shaw. Whilst the interviewees bemoan the varied challenges of the current context, they also shine a light on the essential role that youth work plays in engaging with young people on the margins through building long-term trusting relationships.

The final paper from Alan Mackie presents a somewhat bleak picture for some young people embarking upon post-school transition. We are reminded of the importance of 'place' as a marker of identity and a source of support in the lives of contemporary youth. More positively, this paper presents a clear challenge in terms of how youth work practitioners can support young people through the arduous teenage years. A key emergent question is how we support young people to become and continue to be the 'agentic players' in their own neighbourhoods and communities.

These are complex times for youth work; the historical legacy and contemporary issues faced by practitioners are brought into sharp focus through this collection of papers. Taken together they present a topical resource to help in shaping our future vision for the practice sector.

‘Open’ youth work in 2019: a backward look

Bernard Davies

Bernard Davies is one of the key figures in the development of youth work in Britain over the past 50 years. His recent book *Austerity, Youth Policies and the Deconstruction of the Youth Service in England* (2018) is published by Palgrave MacMillan.

Introduction

This article makes no claim to providing a definitive response to its title. Indeed, what follows is often speculative, particularly in its re-examination of the periods of youth work’s history it covers. Its main aim is to offer critical analysis and comment, not least as a possible prompt for identifying messages from that history which might be relevant to the current struggles to sustain and reinstate ‘open’ youth work in England and perhaps beyond.

‘Open’ youth work: towards a definition

In England at least we are at a point in that history when both statutory and voluntary sector policy-makers now often label almost any kind of work with young people ‘youth work’. It seems essential therefore to start by clarifying how the term is understood and used in this article. Its description as ‘open’ is intended to highlight two of the practice’s key distinctive features: the openness of the settings in which it is offered to any young person who chooses to attend voluntarily; and its openness to ‘outcomes’ defined by *those* young people, by their concerns and their interests. It also assumes throughout the other ‘cornerstones’ proposed in the 2009 *In Defence of Youth Work’s* Open letter (IDYW, 2009) - that youth work:

- offers informal, personally developmental educational opportunities;
- works with and through young people’s peer networks and other shared identities of, for example, class, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability and sexual orientation;
- gives value and attention to their here-and-now as well as to their ‘transitions’; and
- seeks to develop mutually respectful and trusting personal relationships - amongst young

people and between young person and adult.

In 2019 there remains one key rationale for holding to this definition: the evidence that, while they were still widely available, settings offering this practice were being used by significant proportions of the relevant age group. For example, even three years into the ‘austerity’ decimation of England’s local authority Youth Services set out below, a National Council for Voluntary Youth Services report was indicating that over 30% of 10-15 year olds - that is, anything up to one million young people - said they were attending a ‘youth club’ once or most days a week (NCVYS, 2013: 2).

Youth work in 2019: two contradictory narratives

However, unless this provision met the wider youth policy aims of our most powerful state policy-makers, this evidence seems barely to have counted. For, example, Boris Johnson, when he was Mayor of London, stated support for uniformed groups was justified because, he said, they ‘... help equip [young people] with the skills they need to succeed in life ... by instilling self-reliance, discipline and a sense of competition...’ (Lepper, 2012). In the years running up to 2019, Government ministers from the Prime Minister down made it clear, too, through action and inaction, that the youth club model of youth work, at least as provided through English local authority Youth Services, was not to be trusted to meet these societal requirements.

Research by the trade union Unison thus revealed that between 2010-11 and 2018-19 these Services’ budgets across the UK were cut by £400 million, over 4,500 youth work jobs were lost, 763 youth centres closed and, by 2016, nearly 140,000 ‘young people places’ removed (Unison, 2016; 2018). The resultant deconstruction of local authority Services across England were subsequently confirmed by reports from two All Party Parliamentary Groups of MPs (APPG, 2019; Booth, 2019; Jacobs, 2019A) and a House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee

(2019).

According to the government's own figures, by as early as 2013-14 the balance of local authorities' 'youth services' budgets had thus tipped significantly towards 'targeted' programmes, with the proportion spent on 'universal' provision falling from 55.25% to 47.5%. (McCardle, 2014). Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, Essex – once a pioneer in Youth Service development – recorded a £0 spend on 'universal' (that is 'open') services for an 11-19 year olds population of 150,000 (APPG, 2019: 39). And, even as ministers were claiming from 2018 on that austerity was over, Derbyshire was in 2019-20 planning to remove all funding for 'generic youth activity clubs' (Derbyshire Council Council, 2019).

Moreover, in the same years that major budget cuts were 'unavoidably' being imposed on public services, government departments were still managing to find amounts of money for favoured youth organisations which far exceeded what was being taken away from local authority Youth Services.

- Between 2012-13 and 2017-18, as well as some £179 million already being provided by the Ministry of Defence, the armed services' cadet forces shared an additional approximately £70 million of government funding with the Scouts, the Guides, the various Brigades and other uniformed organisations.
- Within three months of its creation by the government in 2013, Step Up To Serve was making the first of many grants - £11 million to 41 organisations - to support 'safe' forms of 'youth volunteering' rebadged as 'social action'.
- According to the government's own figures, between 2014-15 and 2017-18, 94% - some £634 million - of its funding for 'youth services' went to the National Citizens Service (NCS) (Puffett, 2018) even though in that period it recruited only 12% of its 15-17 old target group (Booth, 2018).

Cuts: so – what's new?

Two quotations from the late 1950s illustrate that, where local authority youth work in England is

today, it has been before.

Fred Bush (1957) President of the National Association of Youth Leaders and Organisers:

2,000 in 1951 – 700 in 1957. These figures represent the estimated number of full-time leaders in the country...When one ... learns of the apathy and lack of interest which emanates from the administrators it is surprising to find that there are even 700 full-time leaders left

Sir Gilbert Fleming, Permanent Parliamentary Secretary of Education: evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Estimates (1958):

It is certainly true that, amongst the many services which might be further expanded and developed in order that all possibilities open to an education ministry are fully carried out, the Youth Service is one which it has been definite policy for some time now not to advance. There is no quarrelling with that at all.

The promise of social democracy

Why did this earlier rundown happen, what prompted an eventual recovery and - perhaps most significantly - why has this not been sustained over the following decades?

Tony Jeffs, writing in 1979, pointed to a missed opportunity in the 1950s 'to construct a real partnership between the voluntary and statutory sectors'. As a result, he concluded, Youth Service provision from then on 'depended increasingly upon the willingness of central and local government to lend both moral and financial support' (Jeffs, 1979). Yet the legislation which had purportedly made such support statutory - the 1944 Education Act - named neither youth work nor the Youth Service. Relying instead on vague phrases such as offering 'leisure time occupation ... for any person over compulsory school age', it thus left both the practice and the providing state structures weakly embedded in the post-1945 welfare state.

The Services in England and Wales can now be seen to have come closer to gaining that status as

a result of the recommendations of the Albemarle report, published in 1960 (Ministry of Education, 1960). These included a ten-year development programme for the Service; ‘a generous and imaginative building programme’; an increase in the trained full-time workforce within five years from 700 to 1300; a national committee to negotiate these workers’ salaries and conditions of service; and, to advise the government, a Youth Service Development Council (YSDC). Moreover, not only did the then Conservative government accept all the Report’s proposals on the day it appeared. By the time it lost power in 1964 all of them had been implemented, with the Minister of Education himself by then chairing the YSDC.

No less significant was the Report’s often nuanced commentary on the kind of practice needed to be effective with young people. This started by asserting that their ‘voluntary attendance is important’ not least because, in contrast to attending school, ‘it introduces adult freedom and choice’. More controversially, particularly perhaps for many in those sections of the voluntary sector which recent governments have favoured, the Report concluded that terms such as “service”, “dedication”, “leadership” and “character-building”, though still being used ‘as though they were a commonly accepted and valid currency’ ... do not seem to “speak to their [young people’s] condition”. This, the report made clear, did not mean that youth workers should adopt ‘an abdicating assimilation to the adolescent’s view of the world’. It did though point to a practice which was ‘peculiarly challenging because it requires a tense day-to-day walking on a razor-edge between sympathy and surrender’.

Both Albemarle’s actual recommendations, the depth of its analysis and its subsequent impact have often been attributed to the influence of key Committee members. Lady Albemarle herself, for example, was at the time described as ‘a professional’ who ‘devotes her energy to working the machinery by which public services of all kinds are performed’. (*The Observer*, 1960). It was she, apparently, who proposed Richard Hoggart as a Committee member (Hoggart, 1992) after reading his *Uses of Literacy* – a classic text of the period which full frontally confronted the sensitive class and wider challenges posed by the newly-emerging mass consumer society (Hoggart, 1957). Important inputs clearly came, too, from Leslie Paul, a founder of the left-leaning Woodcraft Folk who co-drafted the report with Hoggart and no doubt also from Pearl Jephcott who had been

researching and writing about young women and youth work since the early 1940s.

In explaining Albemarle's substantial and immediate impacts, what more importantly has to be acknowledged is that it was to a significant extent the product of a social democratic period which assumed that the state, national and local, should – indeed, often must – play a central role in shaping, funding and providing services which, at least implicitly, were understood as a citizen's right.

... and its limitations

Looking back from 2019 with the wisdom of hindsight, however, the report itself and the process of producing it carried some cautions. For example, rather than focusing on the personally developmental aims which many youth workers even then claimed to prioritise, Albemarle's government-defined terms of reference required it first to clarify the Youth Service's possible contribution to '... assisting young people to play their part in the life of their community'. It was specifically told, too, to take into account 'current trends in other branches of the education service': an echo perhaps of policy-makers' doubts at the time about whether local authority Youth Services would still be needed after 1963 when the school-leaving age was to be raised to 16; and - as was also planned - once part-time further education had been made compulsory for all 17 and 18 year olds via a national network of 'county colleges'. By reminding the Committee 'to advise according to what priorities best value can be obtained for the money spent', Ministers - in terms still resonant in 2019 - clearly sought also to set some financial boundaries for its proposals.

The inclusion in the Committee's brief of a reference to 'changing social and industrial conditions' indicated an expectation, too, that it address wider perceived threats to the social order, not least from young people themselves. These, explicitly examined in sub-sections of the report, included a predicted 'bulge' in the 15-20 year old population from 2.5 million in 1950 to 4.3 million in 1966; rising levels of juvenile delinquency; the 'potential strains' resulting from the 'changing pattern of women's lives'; and the phasing-out by 1963 of national military service - widely if not always accurately seen as a vital disciplining experience for young men. The Committee was clear too that, even allowing for 'regional and occupational differences', the Youth Service could not ignore young people's 'new spending power', the 'consumption for pleasure' this was encouraging and concerns that this new teenage generation – 'the litmus test of a society' – was

‘increasingly materialistic; “couldn’t care less”; and ‘have no moral values’.

Even allowing for Albemarle’s sophisticated negotiation of these parameters and the major advances for youth work it made possible, were we subsequently, perhaps, too optimistic, even complacent, about the depths of the roots of this social democratic moment in youth work’s history?

Beyond Albemarle – and social democracy

After ten months of silence, the then Education Secretary – one Margaret Thatcher – shelved the next major report on the Service by the Fairbairn-Milson Committee (Department of Education and Science, 1969) because, she said, she was unwilling ‘to change the nature of the service ... radically by setting up a youth and community service’. Though some local authorities, by adding ‘community’ to the title of their Services, did save its proposals from disappearing without trace, evidence is scarce on the impacts these had on actual practice or provision.

By then, however, the fault lines within the social democratic commitment to the Albemarle conception of youth work were beginning to be exposed. Even as she was rejecting the Fairbairn-Milson report, Thatcher for example ruled that local authorities should target their youth work provision on young people living in areas of ‘high social need’. By then, too, broader anti-statist ideas were penetrating policy makers’ thinking, as evidenced from the later 1960s on, particularly within education, by a series of ‘Black Papers’.

These shifts coincided with – indeed were given strong impetus by – deep cuts in public expenditure which followed that period’s own major financial crisis and recession in 1973-75. One result was an extension of the targeting approach within youth services in order to deal with rising levels of youth unemployment. Over the decade and into the 1980s youth work’s personally educational practice was thus further side-lined as government policies focused on ensuring that young people were equipped with the ‘social and life skills’ seen as needed to get and hold a job. In 1982, in its response to the next Youth Service review, the Thompson Report (1982), the Thatcher government thus ruled that local authorities were to concentrate on the young unemployed by ‘incorporating the Service’s resources and skills into the (Manpower Services

Commission's) Youth Training Scheme'. More broadly, local authorities were also told that they must 'appraise carefully their funding for the statutory youth service relative to other claims on their total expenditure'.

In order to concentrate local Youth Services even more sharply on the most socially needy young people, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, via a series of 'Ministerial Conferences', the government was pressing the youth work field to develop its own 'core curriculum'— a move seen by one commentator at the time as 'a bizarre extension of Whitehall rule'. Another review of the Service – significantly, carried out this time by a leading private business consultancy, Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte (1991) – did offer a defence of youth work's informal education tradition. However, its report not only failed to acknowledge the bottom-up push for recognition of the innovative youth work then going on with young women, Black and gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. It also injected into the youth work/Youth Service discourse what were to become familiar neo-liberal notions of business plans, resource models and performance indicators.

By 2005, without consultation or debate, youth workers were being told by a Labour government Minister with the title 'Children, Young People and Families' that in the future their practice was to be '... primarily ... about activities rather than informal education'. This injunction came also with the inescapable New Labour riders that these 'positive activities' must be targeted primarily on those labelled 'vulnerable', 'disadvantaged' and 'at risk' and that 'hard' measures for assessing 'value for money' must be applied.

Though the New Labour policies did bring extra resources, ideologically the ground was thus well laid for that reconceptualisation of youth work by post-2010 governments as any form of work with young people whose primary rationale was to reach and re-socialise relatively small and pre-labelled sections of the youth population with 'outcomes' pre-determined from above.

Reinstating youth work: top-down or bottom-up?

One of the Theresa May government's few gestures to tackling this marginalisation of the 'open' model of youth work was, in April 2019, to propose a Youth Charter 'to develop a vision for young people over the next generation and beyond'. At the same time a review of the statutory guidance on

local authority Youth Services was promised which was being implemented in the late summer and early autumn through a series of National Youth Agency ‘roadshows’ and a government consultation-by-questionnaire.

Given the admission by over half of 97 local authorities as far back as 2014 that they were at best only partly fulfilling their legal duty in relation to Youth Service provision (McCardle, 2014), these initiatives were clearly needed. However, as this is being written in September 2019, it is very far from clear how or even if a populist law-and-order Johnson administration will follow through on these commitments. More fundamentally, throughout the history briefly outlined in this article, the problem for open youth work anyway has not just been the looseness of the phrasing of statutory guidance which has given local authorities ample room to cut their Youth Services when the financial pressures are on. Much deeper systemic shortcomings have existed within their top-down and bureaucratic decision-making and managerial structures and procedures which, increasingly post-Albemarle, were experienced by youth workers as insufficiently flexible to accommodate their ‘on the wing’ practice. (HMI, 1987).

Though they come with some major cautions, the MPs’ reports referred to earlier do offer some positive possibilities for moving forward. So, too, does the Labour Party’s ‘National Strategy for Youth Work’ with its proposals for ring-fenced funding for local Youth Services and for ‘strategic leadership’ by local authorities to be implemented through ‘local youth service partnerships with young people, parents, professionals and councillors’. (Labour Party, 2018; Jacobs, 2019B).

However, given some of the lessons emerging from the Youth Service’s more recent history in England, including during its brief period of social democratic endorsement, much more fundamental shifts in thinking and action will be needed if such partnerships are to work. Above all, underpinned by the wider commitments of some more progressive councils to, for example, ‘community wealth building’, ‘social value’ and ‘mutual self-help’ in running services (see for example O’Neill, 2016; Baird, 2017), local state providers will need also to be much more open to sharing their power with other key stakeholders and much more flexible in how they allocate and

evaluate the use of the available resources.

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Youth work: Converging and diverging responses in England and Scotland

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In March 2019, Annette Coburn was invited to review *Austerity, Youth Policy and the Deconstruction of the Youth Service in England* by Bernard Davies (Palgrave, 2018). Having submitted the review, Annette, and colleague Sinead Gormally, were then invited to write a response, exploring Scottish perspectives and questions generated by the original review. Both are presented below.

Book Review

Bernard Davies shows his adeptness in convincing readers of the requirement to understand history and its relationship to contemporary and future policy and practice. Critically examining the consequences of ‘austerity’ measures, Davies raises important concerns and questions as a precursor to reconstruction of youth services in England. Whilst acknowledging that in different parts of the UK youth work has been developed differently, Davies’ explanation of circumstances in England will resonate with youth services across the UK and beyond.

Anyone interested in young people or youth work, will find this book invaluable in analysing seismic shifts in youth policy across multiple policy areas. The destructive power of government-led cuts framed within a pervasive neoliberal project is clearly articulated. Davies also discusses a demonising and discriminating discourse about young people, and offers a compelling critique of successive policies that sought to shift youth work from its informal and emancipatory purpose towards more controlling and formulaic practices, as shown in outsourcing contracts for ‘delivery’ of outcomes-based programmes or in the separatist approach of the Prevent Strategy.

Davies treatment of neoliberalism, in creating a disconnect between political decision makers, policy developers and youth services or youth work practitioners, offers a coherent reading of destructive ideological positions that readers will find informative and thought provoking. The range of policies explained, examined and critiqued creates a 'golden thread' that gives a real sense of the challenges facing youth workers who were present at the moment of introduction, and in successive policy iterations. Davies' analysis considers State youth services, and tracks programmes such as National Citizen's Service, My Place, 'Youth Zones' and the position of the voluntary sector, all of which had reduced youth work to a 'reasonably practicable' service, largely misunderstood.

This book particularly illuminates the scathing nature of austerity cuts in England. It shows how quickly a once highly-valued state service, with sound infrastructure and staff support for Degree qualification, was deconstructed by policy drivers that did not understand the youth service contribution and its transformative potential, seeing it instead as in need of transformation! Yet, it offers a hope for renewal in making the 'deconstruction' process clearly visible - which can inform our reconstruction of services and prepare us for on-going struggles.

A response: Converging and diverging responses on youth work in Scotland

Davies' (2018) detailed examination of the consequences of service cuts, under the guise of 'austerity' measures, tracks the shifts in youth policy that led to a deconstruction of youth services in England. Undoubtedly, this analysis resonates with the experiences of youth work practitioners across the UK. Whilst there has been on-going critique (Callaghan, 2019; Cooper, 2012; Fairweather, 2011; Taylor, 2010) this depth of wide-angled analysis has not been conducted in Scotland, in a single volume. We offer this snapshot article, outside of specific or micro level analysis, to illuminate wider perspectives on policy and practice developments in Scottish contexts.

In reading Davies' (2018) detailed and critical analysis, we were reminded of policy and practice developments in Scotland that led to different historical and contemporary

responses to similar social conditions and UK-wide policy turns. This response explores contexts for youth work in Scotland, as a useful starting point for understanding policy and practice here. Davies (2018) makes a strong correlation between neoliberalism and the disconnect this creates among policy makers and practitioners. Whilst neoliberal ideology has undoubtedly impacted on all service provision, promoting competition (de St Croix, 2017) and individualised measures of success (Crowther, 2013), the Scottish context has historically differed somewhat from that in England, particularly in relation to being less reliant on state funding, and in forging a coherent alliance between statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Whilst recognising commonalities and distinctions in the underpinning philanthropic and voluntary efforts, in the late 19th to early 20th Centuries, where early youth work was a charitable reaction to young people who were adversely affected by conditions of poverty and a changing society (Coburn and Wallace, 2011; Smith, 2013), our starting point for this article is the publication of the Albemarle Report (HMSO, 1960) in England and Wales, and the Kilbrandon Report (HMSO, 1964) in Scotland.

While Albemarle brought unprecedented levels of investment in youth service development and a comprehensive building programme to support what has been described as a ‘golden age’ for youth work (Davies, 1999a, 1999b; Robertson, 2005), Kilbrandon (HMSO, 1964) established the unique Children’s Hearings system, that sought to keep young people out of the criminal justice system and included investment in creating ‘school wings’ with increased evening use of schools for youth club activity and a new impetus for social education.

Unlike Albemarle (1960), Kilbrandon did not bring similar levels of investment in buildings infrastructure, and by the mid-1970s Scotland had only one purpose-built, local authority (LA) ‘experimental youth centre’ (Coburn and McGinley, 2011, p. 118). Further, the promised social education department (within the Education system) was lost in the Social Work Scotland Act (1968) which promoted a, ‘reorganisation of social work...serving all age groups and many other community needs’ (Asquith, 1995). In

the early to mid-1970s, the idea of informal and social education persisted in youth work that thrived as a voluntary and community-based endeavour. This included routine community use of schools in the evenings, supported by local county councils. Grassroots community development work also thrived in supporting local groups such as Tenants' Associations to fight for full control and management of their own locally run youth and community buildings (Gibson, 1979; 1996). Undoubtedly the lack of investment specifically in building infrastructure impacted on the subsequent development of youth work, compared to the direction of travel established under Albemarle (1960). Davies (2018) specifically explores state youth services in England but tracking youth work is a trickier feat in the Scottish context due to the relationship between statutory, voluntary and community sector youth work, that was not always state funded. There was no such 'golden age' in the Scottish context.

The Alexander Report (1975) created a clear divergence from the rest of the UK. This committee of enquiry sought to remove barriers to education as a life-long process and established the use of 'community education' as a term that included a range of cultural, educational, recreational and social activities for learning and personal development across statutory and voluntary organisations where, 'the parts cannot be linked in one single organisation...[and so requires]...co-operation and collaboration' (HMSO, 1975, p. 35). This shift recognised that education could not be limited to teaching within specific institutions, such as schools, colleges or universities, as it would simply, 'reflect the dominant values, of the society which controlled it' (p.26). Bringing values to the forefront of practice, positioned community education as a practice of freedom and democratic entitlement and a means of challenging established orthodoxies on what education was for, and how it might be achieved. Community development, adult education and youth work were all critical aspects of Community Education practice.

Community Development was therefore embedded in the kind of issue based and participatory youth work practice that was evident during the 1980s where, for example, Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC, 1984) emphasised:

Young people have the power to cause change...[and]...’the very term “youth service” has some demeaning associations...[as though]...something is going to be provided by other people who know what is best.

SRC (1984, p.16)

The idea of young people having the power to cause change, was aligned to interests in democratic processes that, aligned with Young (2006, p. 15) and, ‘introduced political education onto the youth work agenda’. During the late 1970s Westminster-imposed funding cuts set public and voluntary sectors in competition with each other, chasing a reduced level of short-term funding. Youth work in the 1980s suffered further cuts and economic recession brought high youth unemployment as youth work became an all-day endeavour involving daytime work with longer term unemployed young people (up to age 25) and in the evening engaging in project, centre or street based youth work (SRC, 1984). The Youth Enquiry Service (YES) information project was established through collaboration between the Scottish Youth Issues Unit (SYIU) and Strathclyde Regional Council (1984). This work laid foundations for the establishment of, ‘SCECs second office, in Brussels, as the hub for what became a European-wide network of Eurodesk information centres’ (McConnell, 2014, p.137).

Innovative local and national practices were developed through the leadership and vision of Marcus Liddle at the SYIU, located within the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC) which sought to:

...identify the sorts of issues young people were concerned about and then, to support their involvement in tackling these, working with youth workers, other public sector professionals, such as the police, health workers and with the media.

(McConnell, 2014, p.138)

Practitioners saw SCEC and the SYIU as offering a counterbalance to persistent cuts and constraining policy drivers that aligned with Davies' (2018) outline of the experiences of colleagues in England. A decline in youth club attendance and shifts in

young people's use of leisure time, meant that policy changed from providing to enabling; from paternalistic to democratic (Hendry, 1983; Hendry, Shucksmith, Love and Glendinning, 1993). Despite being impacted by trends toward outcomes driven practice, alternative spaces and purposes for connecting with young people beyond 'traditional' youth club work emerged. Enshrined in the UN Convention that asserts the rights of children and young people to be included in decision-making about matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989), ideas like citizenship and participation emerged as key elements of youth work. This introduced youth strategies that sought to empower young people by involving them in decision making, for example, through the creation of local youth fora and national initiatives that informed developments such as Young Scot and the Scottish Youth Parliament in 1999, with a UK Youth Parliament following in 2001.

In articulating a national strategic vision for community education, the Carnegie Report (1997), cited in McConnell (2002, p. 60) stated that:

Community education recognises the educative influences and the educational potentialities inherent in a local community...[including]...multifarious groups and agencies, formal and informal, industrial, commercial, religious, social and recreational, as well as explicitly educational.

This report aimed to overhaul professional education and training, and proposed the creation of a national body for programme approval. However, the timing of its publication during Local Government reform that introduced single-tier governance in Scotland meant that ideas from this and subsequent reports, were not fully realised (Mackie, Sercombe and Ryan, 2013).

More recently, within Scotland, the National Youth Work Strategy 2014 -2019, was developed by the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and YouthLink Scotland and identified its 5 ambitions to:

- Ensure Scotland is the best place to be young and grow up

- Put young people at the heart of policy
- Recognise the value of youth work
- Build workforce capacity
- Measure the impact of youth work

On the face of it, this strategy valued the importance of youth work in Scottish policy and practice, stating that ‘Youth work has a significant impact on improving the life chances of Scotland’s young people’. In 2017 a review on progress created eight priorities for 2017-19, to a celebratory ‘Year of Young People, 2018’ and further work on:

- Rights and participation
- Health and wellbeing
- Workforce development
- Attainment and inequality
- Measuring impact
- Strategic and local planning
- Strategy evaluation and future plans.

This strategy brought a much needed £11m investment in youth work across Scotland. Yet, beyond its surface, tensions remain (Bell, 2013; Coburn and Gormally, 2017) in regard to compliance with a market-driven economy that persists in valuing measurable outcomes and impacts, while disregarding youth work as a discrete profession in its own right – reduced instead to an approach or method for ‘other’ professions to adopt. Regardless of its empowering and emancipatory intent, without critical questioning of the world we occupy, the possibility of misinterpretation and a less than assured or clear future can be increased.

A clear policy that commits to youth work and recognises its importance in ensuring young people have the best chance of making a good life is important in assuring an adequately resourced future. Right now, in 2019, widespread public consultation on the next youth work strategy is on-going. The tensions between strategic and ethical youth

work practice remain but we are hopeful that a clearer articulation of ethical youth work (CLDSC, 2011;2017), including paid and unpaid professionals, is articulated in the next strategy, as integral to the Scottish Government's commitment to community empowerment.

Across Scotland, youth work has connected with young people who are viewed as holistically integrated within their communities of interest. Community Education has been used as a conceptual descriptor for discrete community development, youth work and adult education practices. Whilst there is a larger discussion to be had about the similarities and differences in each of these practices, it is noteworthy that youth work has not been positioned in isolation, and its aims should be seen 'within a community development context...concerned with the individual's role in relation to the wider society and his or her active participation in it' (SRC, 1984, p.7).

Although the political landscape in Scotland has greatly changed since the Albemarle/Kilbrandon days, it is unsurprising that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) has become a key driver of policy. This recognises our Government's commitment to supporting communities to take ownership or control of land and buildings, and strengthen local voices in decision making.

However, it remains to be seen, whether this Act is consistent with Crowther (2013) in clarifying understandings of power as relational, and bringing shifts in power imbalances that are required for communities to take collective action for change. Enhancing a narrative of community empowerment is admirable, provided it is adequately resourced. For example, Matthews (2015) has critiqued this policy shift which places more responsibility on communities, removing ownership from local councils. Nevertheless, if enacted in alignment with Community Development values and principles there is potential for this Act to offer an alternative to deficit driven, pathologising and labelling policies and as such, can promote purposeful participation in decision making.

Committing to holistic and collaborative methodologies has been vital in communicating how children, young people and communities are viewed. For example, *More Choices, More Chances* (MCMC) (2006) was the Scottish policy response to young people classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Despite using a more salutogenic title, MCMC was aligned with Westminster's focus on addressing those young people identified as NEET, which in itself was problematic, as Yates and Payne (2006, p.329) argue:

'NEET' is a problematic concept that defines young people by what they are not, and subsumes under a negatively-perceived label a heterogeneous mix of young people whose varied situations and difficulties are not conceptualised

While the Scottish narrative acknowledged that categorisation of young people as NEET included, 'those with parental or caring responsibilities and those in transitional states, for whom being NEET is not necessarily a negative or problematic situation' (Finlay, Sheridan, McKay and Nudzor, 2010, p. 854), Scottish research raised concerns about:

- the problematic nature of the discourse of NEET sub-groups;
- the challenges of school-exclusion policies and practices; and
- the myth of low aspirations.

Finlay et al., (2010, p.859)

All of this has led to rejection of the NEET category by asserting its continued use as unhelpful.

In a recent move, and recognising the need for professionals to work holistically, Education Scotland has created an Empowered System approach (2019) in attempting to improve children and young people's outcomes. Whilst this resource is still in development, it creates an eight part jigsaw aimed at promoting a collaborative partnership model for improvement (involving parents and carers, school leaders,

learners, local authority and regional improvement collaborators, Scottish Government, national organisations, partners, support staff, teachers and practitioners). Acknowledging the need for a holistic approach to create the best chances for young people is important but we have noted (Coburn and Gormally, 2019) if this ambitious system is to be realised:

...educational youth work should not be viewed as an ‘add-on’ to formal education or to health, crime prevention or employability. Rather, it should be viewed as an integral, yet distinctive, educational practice, where qualified youth workers have a crucial role to play in ensuring that young people are active participants in individual and collective decision making as part of wider society.

Despite such ambitious policy statements for holistic and empowered practices, the Scottish youth work sector has undoubtedly been negatively impacted by broader austerity cuts, whereby, ‘the Conservative Government’s Austerity programme will result in a further £2billion of cuts to Scotland’s public services’ (Unison, 2016, p.4). The Christie Commission (2011) noted a detrimental impact from public service cuts, particularly given the increased demand for key services, and Unison (2016) found that over 70% of practitioners had an increased workload, while 79% of respondents experienced service cuts.

Thus, whilst the dramatic destruction of state services experienced in England is not quite comparable to the Scottish position, the impact of austerity policies, particularly in the public sector, has been devastating. Having weathered a persistent Westminster storm, resisting core policies like privatisation of public utilities, the ‘Poll Tax’, and rejecting Connexions and National Citizen Services, youth work in Scotland has survived the worst of centralist policy directives, sometimes bypassing UK Government to engage directly with European partners to develop international policies and fund new practices. Yet, while neoliberalism persists in privileging competition, we must challenge deficit discourses and resist under-resourcing of vital practices, to

help bring forward a ‘compelling counter-narrative that puts community and connection in its place’ (Ledwith, 2018, p 16).

Concluding thoughts

This brief outline of critical policy and practice moments in the post-Albemarle/Kilbrandon era, is a story of determination and hope. Prompted by Davies' (2018) depth of analysis, we were reminded of forgotten past struggles for youth work in Scotland, too many to mention here, but which are key to understanding and reclaiming a more radical kind of youth work future. This article begins to examine our distinctive grounding within a hybridised ‘family’ of community practices that created differences in the ways that youth work policy and practice evolved in Scotland compared to England. Yet, there remain contradictions within youth work in Scotland, and the true extent of the divergence in Scottish policy and practice requires more detailed analysis. This raises more questions for us in seeking to understand what is happening beyond current youth work and community empowerment discourses, and whether identified distinctions are real or imagined, resistant or compliant, in taking forward shifting youth work practices.

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The Decline of the Local Authority Youth Service in England: Reflections of an actor in its demise

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Introduction

These assertive and tentative reflections cover the period from the genuine promise of a radical 1968 to the artificial optimism of a populist, authoritarian 2019. Across four decades I sold my labour to three different Local Authority Education (LEA) departments. Most recently, retired from the fray, I've sought to observe and comment upon the shifting landscape of contemporary youth work. For better or worse, however flawed and forgetful my memory, I've been party to the ups and downs of Local Authority (LA) Youth Services in England. In this spirit I will begin the story with two snapshots from my chequered career.

In the first I am to be found in the main hall of a rambling Wigan youth centre. A hirsute, profusely sweating part-time youth worker, I organise on two evenings a week a diversity of activities from weight training to basketball predominantly with young men, offset by a token last half hour of mixed volleyball. At first glance I appear to be the Positive Activities worker of New Labour's late 1990's dreams. Contrarily, I am seeing myself more and more as an informal educator, stimulated by the flux of my interaction with young people. I am intrigued by the infinite, if uncertain possibilities of association and conversation, the potential of relating without either imposed authority or a prescribed script.

More than a quarter of a century later I am to be found, besuited as befits a Chief Youth & Community Officer, in the Wigan Enterprise Centre surrounded by colleagues from the Planning Department. We are putting together a bid for time-limited funding aimed

at 'disadvantaged' young people. The rules of the competition demand that we promise to deliver on a number of targets - percentage reductions in anti-social behaviour, drug use and teenage pregnancies. I try to argue that the introduction of these outcomes will distort the Youth Service's relationship with young people. My misgivings are expressed to no avail. I leave, heavy of heart, having in the name of jobs rather than young people's needs, been incorporated into a sham. A colleague attempts to persuade me I have been pragmatically principled. I am reduced to uttering dismissive expletives.

With these 'selfies' as a backdrop I will propose that the decline of the LA Youth Service is rooted in the contrasting fortunes of two opposing economic and ideological expressions of capitalism, namely social democracy and neoliberalism. The former was founded on a post-war consensus favouring a benevolent, interventionist, if bureaucratic state, the necessary regulation of the market and a commitment, however partial, to the common good. The latter is based on a malevolent, interventionist and still, whatever the claims, a bureaucratic state, the rule of the market and privatisation, in the sense of both privatising services and of individualising every corner of our existence. Viewed through an educational mirror, social democracy at its best sought to nurture the active citizen, whilst neoliberalism's focus is upon 'homo economicus', the manufacturing of the compulsive, compliant consumer.

For the purposes of the following exploration I've identified four periods, which correspond to my best sense of the LA Youth Service's rise and fall over the last 60 years.

1968-1985: The Years of Relative Autonomy

Having gained my teaching certificate, which in those times allowed me to pass as a qualified youth worker, my first teaching post ought to have brought me into contact with the LEA. It did not. Naively I took for granted the autonomy this absence afforded. There was no external monitoring of the contradiction in the church primary school between my erratic child-centred post-Plowden approach and the headmaster's conservative, paternalistic outlook. Thus his class faced the front in rows, whilst with a kindly shake of his head he suffered my insistence on arranging the desks into groups.

Once the concertina of a partition was closed he left me to my own devices.

Over in the youth club, where I started as a part-timer on two sessions per week, a similar lack of hierarchical oversight prevailed. We did whatever we wished, provided it was welcomed by the young people and didn't arouse the ire of other workers or the management committee. Whatever our disagreements, classically whether to ban or not the 'foul-mouthed', the argument stayed in-house.

This vacuum of explicit collective purpose was to be filled dramatically from 1974 onwards with the reorganisation of local government across England. By chance, just as the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan was formed, I became a full-time youth worker in the new authority. The fledgling Youth Service was top-heavy, composed of 6 youth officers, all but one graduates of the post-Albemarle National College for Youth Leader Training, yet less than dedicated to its questioning philosophy; keen above all to steer clear of trouble or complaint. They managed not to manage a mere 5 full-time staff.

Their prospect of a quiet life was to be shattered from above and below. From on high the Education Department witnessed an influx of creative professionals committed to cajoling schools and colleges into embracing a progressive child-centred and teacher-friendly agenda. Overwhelmingly in the early days white and male, these catalysts for social change were disciples of the Enlightenment. Within the next decade, led by a charismatic risk-taking Director of Education who, above all, invested trust in practitioners, a rich array of initiatives unfolded, amongst which, to mention a few, were the introduction of teacher advisors in all subject areas; a dedicated Arts Studio; an award-winning Youth Jazz Orchestra; a theatre company in residence and two outdoor education centres.

Despite this vibrant atmosphere the Youth Service management dragged its feet. Meeting under their own steam the workers seized the initiative, drafting a Programme of Action, which quoted Brecht's advocacy of 'the little fishes' (when the sharks the sharks devour/Little fishes have their hour) and democratic participation in its introduction. Such rhetoric was music to the ears of the Department's senior management. The Programme was accepted by the Education Committee,

strengthening the influence of those seeking to transform the Service from below. In the ensuing period the grassroots, bolstered by the recruitment of workers heavily involved in the social movements of the time, took control. Amongst the developments which transformed the Service were the remarkable advance of a feminist-led Girls' Work and an innovative Youth Co-operative.

Towards the end of 1981 I moved to Leicestershire to become a Training and Development Officer in the County Council's Community Education department. Fortuitously, or revealingly, a similar liberal culture of grace and favour prevailed with its Senior Community Education Adviser having the ear of the Director, and seemingly unchecked independence. Once again the purpose and direction of the Service was up for grabs. As in Wigan there was significant scope for influencing policy and practice from within and without the official channels. Leicestershire adopted and revised the Wigan part-time youth work training course, which encouraged workers to grapple with the implications of class, gender, race, sexuality and disability for their practice. Indeed the curriculum was used lock, stock and barrel on a City & Guilds course for Youth Opportunities Supervisors. Interestingly this desire to politicise the County Council's Community Education perspective lagged behind the practice of youth and community workers in the Leicester City Council's Recreation Department, many of whom were unqualified, women and drawn from the diverse ethnic communities of the city. At the time this tension was often stimulating, but it contained the seeds of issues to come, particularly around the themes of professional qualifications and remuneration. The LA Youth and Community Education Service remained the bastion of a JNC qualified professional cadre with its own distinct pay and conditions.

1985-1990 Swimming against the tide

I moved to a post in Derbyshire, another County Council, as a District Community Education Officer in the midst of the highly charged atmosphere of the Great Strike of 1984/85. A newly elected Labour administration riding on the back of the dispute sought to implement a manifesto which included the radicalisation of Community Education. I was explicitly a political appointment, meeting within days directly with

the socialist-feminist Chair of the Community Education Committee. In this context the radical agenda was being imposed problematically by the ruling Labour group and my job was to be their enforcer. On the ground, Labour's insistence was disrupted by both layers of senior and middle management alongside long-serving staff, who paid lip-service to the rhetoric and carried on as before. For my part, I fell between all stools. I was distrusted by senior officers as being too close to Labour. Gradually, because of my high profile and my close relations with the mining community, I was perceived by key politicians as having political aspirations of my own. Personality conflict aside, the Derbyshire project was ill-fated. By the late 80s social democracy and its offspring municipal socialism were on the retreat. It was perhaps no coincidence that the Bolsover District Team, for which I was responsible, whose territory was the heart of the Derbyshire coalfield, became known as the Headbangers for taking the Council's progressive policies too seriously. As it was, thanks to the support of a compassionate senior manager, who to my everlasting shame I had bad-mouthed, I escaped by the grip of my dentures the wrath of the Council's authoritarian leadership.

Before moving to my last LA destination, this is an appropriate moment to reflect on the role of the youth work trade unions across the period I've traced, in particular when thinking about how a progressive practice seemed to swim successfully in the 1980s against the neoliberal tide. At the beginning of the decade the majority of LA Youth Service activists were to be found in the Community & Youth Workers' Union (CYWU) born out of a quiescent professional association and transformed into a trade union with a radical constitution based on the right to caucus, the creation of which paralleled the development of work with young women, black youth, gay and lesbian young people. Local branches flourished, exerted considerable pressure upon the employer and played a leading role in the resistance to the Manpower Service Commission's neoliberal attempt to colonise work with young people. Inevitably CYWU in its radical guise came under pressure from within and without as the political balance of forces moved towards neoliberalism. CYWU endured a number of internal crises and adopted a more traditional model of organisation. Given neoliberalism's attack on trade unions and collective organisation in general, no matter what form CYWU might have taken, it would not have arrested a decline in influence, linked

organically to the demise of LA Youth Services.

1990 - 1997 Coming Home

By twist of fate I was appointed to the post of Chief Youth & Community Officer back home in Wigan, where the liberal culture hung on and where officers rather than politicians still made the running. In one of the last throws of the progressive dice, the Education Committee agreed to a new structure for the Youth Service, notable for the adoption of two Advisers specifically for work with young women and the opening of a number of young women's centres on the Authority's council estates. The budget was increased and more staff appointed. The mood was optimistic, but hopes were to be dashed as post-Poll Tax cuts began to bite.

The '94/'95 budget saw a full-time workforce reduced from 32 to 12 and the Authority's youth centres closed. Whatever my concerns about the undermining of workers' self-organisation by the presence of a supposed radical manager, in an enormous tribute to 25 years of grassroots activity, over 5,000 people with young people at their head marched in protest. It was a stirring expression of improvised, yet rehearsed collective social action. It is still a testimony to the genuine impact of a Youth Service on the social fabric of the Authority. It came to nought. Of course a rearguard action took place. In Wigan we defined a new role for the remains of the Youth Service as the conscience of the Authority's Services for Young People. Like many other Services shattered by the budget reductions, with little or no option, we entered the neoliberal market, bidding for short-term targeted funding to keep something of a compromised show on the road.

Many of my colleagues in the now redundant Confederation of Heads of Young People's Services took refuge in Blair's 1997 victory, taking me to task for failing to grasp that a managerial commitment to delivering and accounting for agreed outcomes would be the salvation of the Youth Service. In the event New Labour did inflict gradually an instrumental data-demanding agenda. In the process New Labour all but deleted the term 'youth work' from its increasingly authoritarian discourse, replacing it with the patronising notion of 'positive activities'.

Lest I forget, it's necessary to mention that in this period I pursued enrhusiastically the creation of a Council for Voluntary Youth Services. My pluralist effort to bring closer the 'professional' and voluntary wings of provision was too little, too late and expressed an underlying tension - the qualified youth worker's indifference, even disdain, for the voluntary sector. At its most extreme this was revealed in the attempt to block funding for the Scouts in Derbyshire on the basis that the Association was a quasi-military outfit. I suspect that this arrogant perspective was widespread at a local and national level, leading to a parallel indifference within voluntary youth organisations to the fate of the Youth Service. It explains perhaps why leading voluntary youth organisations have been seduced by neoliberal funding streams heading in their direction, even as this state finance threatens their historical independence.

2000: On the sidelines

From the year 2000, having left the Youth Service for pastures elsewhere, I have been reduced to being no more than a commentator on ensuing events. However my thoughts upon proceedings have the enormous benefit of being grounded in a continuing critical conversation with practitioners, not least through my significant involvement with In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW). In retrospect, neoliberalism was a long time coming, but when it arrived explicitly in the guise of New Labour, it found the LA Youth Service not fit for purpose. Of course my anecdotal description of the Service might well be seen as an exercise in nostalgia, an ageing form of homesickness. Nevertheless I will offer some observations on why it was not up to neoliberal scratch and ponder whether the very idea is consigned to the refuse bin of history.

1. Let me begin by noting a number of narratives, which have gained common currency within youth work and which have played into the hands of the Youth Service's critics and opponents. Firstly I want to counter the self-indulgent narrative so prevalent in youth work circles that our practice was, indeed continues, to be little understood. This belief in the mystery of our practice has been a godsend to the

technocrats, who proposed that following their instructions would be the key to explaining to ‘stakeholders’ what we ourselves couldn’t explain. For what it’s worth, my experience of reporting to, talking with managers, councillors, parents, young people and folk on the street was that by and large they got the message. Providing places and creating moments of association and activity outside of formal education was, in their minds, beneficial to young people and the community. Wilful ignorance, especially amongst politicians, regarding the Youth Service’s identity only reared its head when the money ran out. Secondly, much to the delight once more of the managerialists we have colluded with the narrative that the Youth Service in the past never explained or justified properly its endeavours. Indeed I remember well a young youth worker berating me for what she saw as my generation’s failure. I could but respond, that albeit inadequately, from the very first report to a youth club management committee to my very last Annual Report as a Chief Officer I sought to make the case for the cause, using art, drama, music and of course involving young people along the way. Thirdly, another problematic narrative peddled without much thought is that the Youth Service was bureaucratic and stifled initiative and/or that it condoned poor practice. However as I have tried to show, the Youth Service and Community Education were far from bureaucratic. Whether the quality of practice under social democracy or neoliberalism can be defined as good, bad or indifferent begs questions of subjectivity, interpretation and politics from which we shy. As it is I fear my own efforts as worker and manager seen through a radical lens were sometimes worthy of praise, sometimes neither here nor there and sometimes poor.

2. The LA Youth Service expressed, albeit imperfectly, a holistic educational perspective. It was a pluralist, argumentative project. It was often unruly. Its rhythms were orchestrated by young people and youth workers in concert. From the point of view of neoliberalism it was not under sufficient manners. It needed to be monitored and regulated. One of the exquisite ironies at the heart of neoliberalism is that whilst it advocates the free market and despises the regulation thereof, it is obsessed with both regulating public services and regulating the behaviour of the individual. Hence, after 30 years, none of the authorities for whom I worked possessed any files on the individual young people, with whom we engaged. Today, courtesy of questionnaires

on first contact and devolved social work-lite caseloads, every young person appears to be under the bureaucratic microscope.

3. The LA Youth Service failed to provide neoliberalism with the evidence (or should we say data) demanded by its competitive market-driven ideology. By the time of New Labour's election Outcomes-Based Management, born of the early 1990s with its avowed goal of measuring efficiency and effectiveness was dominant and being embraced by Youth Service management. Because the outcomes agenda required structure and surveillance, the Youth Service's tradition of open access and open-ended voluntary provision could not deliver. The illusion that personality can be measured, that inventories could provide comparable metrics in relation to the ebb and flow of a young person's emotional and social condition required the funding of work with referred, targeted groups which were imposed, time-limited and prescribed.

4. Problematically for neoliberalism, the LA Youth Service possessed a measure of stability in terms of funding and staffing - an utterly unacceptable and inflexible scenario. Thus, core finance was gradually reduced in favour of competitive bidding mechanisms, dressed up as strengthening the youth sector market and encouraging social investment. By 2013 the National Youth Agency was advising projects that collecting the right data was crucial to surviving in a world where the Youth Service was disappearing in the face of commissioning, outsourcing and payment by results. In this manner young people themselves were commodified, turned into data for sale and exchange. The existence of a permanent unionised workforce on nationally agreed pay and conditions (JNC), able to challenge management, was an affront to neoliberal sensibility. Thus LAs starved of resources made JNC workers redundant and, in the turn to outsourcing and short-term contracts, opened the door to the use of inferior pay and precarious conditions.

5. The LA Youth Service was based on collective reference points for its engagement with young people - the youth club, the local street or park, the young women's project and so on. Neoliberalism abhors authentic collectives of shared interest. Neither accident nor austerity explains the closure of 600 youth clubs between 2012

and 2018. New Labour's Minister for Youth had previously revealed neoliberalism's hostility, declaring that youth clubs were dangerous places where gangs would prosper. Prime Minister David Cameron's insight was to recognise that the demolition of Youth Services had to be countered by an alternative, namely the National Citizen Service introduced in 2010; an unremarkable but heavily advertised Summer month-long programme, based consciously on the promotion of the mixed social group of young people in opposition to support for young women and men's own peer groups.

6. As the above suggests, no incoming ideology can achieve dominance without incorporating some of the features of previous ideologies. The leap would be too far. Hence neoliberal rhetoric is laced with references, for example, to empowerment and participation. The absurdity of someone being empowered from above by the powerful is a political question lost in talk of young people becoming more confident, resilient and entrepreneurial. As for participation, it is dressed up in the garb of volunteering and social action, the latter no longer meaning an agitational practice in support of the community, but one in which involvement enhances primarily the CV of the individual.

7. The undermining of the LA Youth Service has posed serious dilemmas for the training agencies tasked to produce youth work's professional cadre. A shift from the welfare professional under social democracy to the performative professional under neoliberalism can be perceived [Bradford 2015]. The former sought to be critical, relatively autonomous, siding with the young people's agenda. The latter accepts obediently the surveillance, monitoring and metrification of practice, siding with the State's agenda. As the Youth Service collapsed and the workforce fragmented, placements, where open youth work prevailed, were ever more difficult to find.

8. One of the achievements of the LA Youth Service in the struggle about the meaning and purpose of practice was to bring to the fore via, for example, the emergence of autonomous work with young women the heterogeneous make-up of young people; that they could only be understood as individuals through the inextricable collective relations of class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and faith.

Bearing this in mind does not lead to simple conclusions. This dialectical grasp of the human condition is an anathema to neoliberalism with its unerring emphasis on being responsible for one's self. Within youth work we see the resurrection of that implausible being, the general young individual and the generalised category, young people. It leads inexorably to an acceptance that in a world of generalised competition all social problems require individual resolution.

9. In a nutshell, the assault on the LA Youth Service has been but one moment in the neoliberal aim of depoliticising social relations. Whatever its weaknesses, the Youth Service was a contested political space. Staff meetings were moments of collective reflection not unquestioning instruction. The best of its practice grounded its involvement with young people in the continuing relations of oppression and exploitation at the centre of capitalism. Today, the voices in English youth work emanating from such as the National Youth Agency and the Centre for Youth Impact reflect the watchwords of the so-called 'third culture' - 'no politics, no conflict, no ideology, simply science, delivery and problem-solving'. Evidently another Framework of Outcomes, another imposed technical template, floating above society, will bring enlightenment and secure youth work's future.

Is the Tide Turning?

Is the Youth Service dead in the ditch, to borrow a phrase? Last year a series of events under the title, 'Is the tide turning?' prompted the following agreed points amongst others in an *In Defence of Youth Work* position paper. Interestingly, reference to a Youth Service is nowhere to be found:

The rejuvenation of a distinctive, state-supported youth work focused on inclusive, open access provision ought to be based on a radical and complimentary relationship between the Local Authority [LA] and a pluralist, independent voluntary sector.

The renewed practice should be sustained by statutory funding, the purpose and allocation of which ought to be determined locally via a democratic youth

work ‘council’ made up of young people, workers, voluntary sector representatives, officers and politicians.

Certainly, the initiative was prompted by a degree of optimism about the Labour Party’s social-democratic turn under Corbyn, which has dampened as the Brexit farce has unfolded, especially as the overall debate shifts yet again to the soft policing of problematic youth.

Let me finish, though, on a fanciful if melodramatic note. Given the present political turmoil, it is possible that by the end of the year we will be governed by either an authoritarian, right-wing, populist administration or by a progressive alliance [Labour, SNP, Greens, Plaid Cymru] committed to a social-democratic programme of redistribution and renationalisation. In these contrasting scenarios, what price youth work, what price a Youth Service?

This article draws in particular on the ‘On The Sidelines’ section of a fully referenced chapter I co-authored with Paula Connaughton, Tania de St Croix, Bernard Davies and Pauline Grace to be found in the SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice. However, in this specific case, the history of the LA Youth Service, my interpretation might well be challenged by my friends and comrades.

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For a sense of In Defence of Youth Work’s history and purpose, see <https://indefenceofyouthwork>.

“That was another moment where people were like ‘wow! These young people have really done something!’”

Christina McMellon

A conversation between three young people who designed and wrote a storybook challenging gender stereotypes, supported by Christina McMellon Associate Researcher, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh.

Young Edinburgh Action

Young Edinburgh Action (YEA) is a participation project supported by City of Edinburgh Council. YEA enables young people to set an agenda for action and supports groups of young people to undertake research and make recommendations on topics about which they feel strongly. The approach draws on academic research suggesting that a move away from formalised participation structures towards opening up spaces for inquiry, dialogue and action can enable young people’s meaningful participation and active citizenship (Percy-Smith, 2010). The YEA model is made up of several interconnected core activities that respond to and feed into other youth services in Edinburgh and across Scotland:

Gatherings

Gatherings, which take place annually, are events planned and facilitated by young people with the aim of identifying issues that young people want to be taken forward by the action research groups. Gatherings ensure that young people set the agenda and focus for YEA.

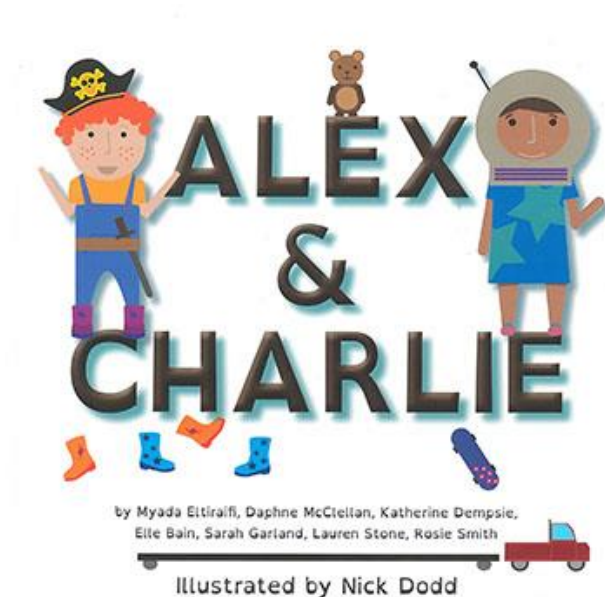
Action Research Groups

Action research groups are at the heart of YEA's approach and enable a core group of young people to explore and present the views of a wider group of young people in Edinburgh. An action research group is established for each of the topics chosen at the Gathering. The group is open to any young people who are interested in the topic and is usually made up of between 6 and 15 young people. The way that the group operates is flexible, depending upon the topic and the participants, but with the support of YEA staff each action research group will:

- Think about the topic and what it means for young people in Edinburgh
- Investigate the current situation around this topic and find out the views of other young people in Edinburgh
- Make recommendations to the people who make decisions about this topic

Conversations for Action

From the beginning of the action research process the groups discuss the impact that they hope to have. A Conversation for Action is convened at the end of each action research process. The agenda for the conversation is set by young people and the meeting is chaired by the senior worker in YEA. This meeting is an important interface where young people and adult decision-makers invited by the young people come together to discuss the topic and develop an action plan.

Gender Inequality: Alex and Charlie

At the YEA Gathering in 2015 young people chose gender inequality as a topic for an action research group. For over 2 years the group explored the topic and decided that they wanted to write a storybook for very young children to challenge gender stereotypes. In 2017 the group was granted funding to publish the book and print 2 copies for every nursery and primary school in Edinburgh. The following conversation is an edited transcript of a discussion between myself and three young people who were involved in the group and in writing ‘Alex and Charlie’.

K: I’m K I’m 17 and I was already involved in YEA because I’m interested in changing my community and realised after being in it that we could do that quite well on a much larger scale than I thought and then when I got the opportunity to get involved in such a big topic I was like YES! Let’s do this!

M: I’m M, I’m 16 and I also got involved through YEA, ummm, obviously the topic was really really important to me and I’m from a background where the topic wasn’t really talked about at all, but it is important and should be talked about and should be tackled.

D: I'm D, I'm 17, I got involved after the YEA Gathering where we decide what issues to research and obviously gender equality is really important and so I came along and, once I got into the group, the ideas were really good and I thought they might be going somewhere.

Christina: I was so pleased when gender inequality came up at the gathering because I think it's such an important topic. Why do you think people chose it?

K: it wasn't a surprise that people chose it because it's such a big topic at the moment

Christina: Why do you think that gender inequality is such a big issue for young people?

M: it's so prominent in our lives, it's all around us

D: it's everywhere, yeah, everyone's affected by gender inequality

Christina: can anyone remember why we decided to organise an event to collect our data?

K: we needed to ask for more information and we wanted to ask people about what's happening in their life and you can't really get people to tell in a survey

M: yeah...it is part of the action research process...to get information from other people

D: I remember we watched a video [in a YEA meeting] and it had some people telling about their experiences and other people in the room were like...I had that experience too and then we were thinking that other people probably have had too and we'd like to collect those experiences.

Christina: Who can remember anything about the event?

K: we had a graffiti wall!

D: and there was like a rotating group thing where people went round and did lots of different activities

M: My favourite part was like the discussion when we went into one of the little rooms and it was just like a big debate and I remember we didn't have enough time to end our debate because we all wanted to speak

Christina: one of the things that I found really interesting at that event was how many terms young people were using that some of the adults in the room had no idea about. Did that surprise you guys? I remember there was a conversation about intersectionality and a few of the adults were like 'whaaat?'

K: I don't think it surprised me because I know a lot of young people have a lot more knowledge than adults just cos of generations and stuff because some things just didn't exist in society then...

D: I think I remember someone explaining pansexual...and asexual as well...there was a lot of sexuality discussion but I only remember tiny details

Christina: was there anything in the event that surprised you?

K: the topic definitely made people come out of their shell more, because we were quite concerned that people might not be prepared to talk but within the first rotation everyone was like...RIGHT! OK...well this is my topic!

Christina: so, after the event, what happened?

M: it's such a long time ago... (laughter)

Christina: I remember having a meeting where we got all the information from the event out and looking at what people had been talking about and all I remember was that there were two big things that came out of that meeting that people kept saying again and again about needing to challenge gender stereotypes and about age and how we need to be challenging gender stereotypes with young children and how it's too late by the time you get to 14 and 15...is that right, do you remember that?

M: yes, I remember that meeting. There was so much information.

Christina: I don't remember who it was who suggested writing a children's book to challenge gender stereotypes. Can anyone remember?

K: yeah, I think it got mentioned when we were doing the group about sex education but it didn't quite fit then, but then it came round again and everyone was like yeah...this idea's already come up and it's good.

Christina: so, what were your first impressions about the idea of writing a book?

M: at first I was like, lol, that's not going to happen...can we do that?...do we have the resources and the budget and whatever to be able to do that?...and the time?...but as it when on and as it became more like possible...yeah we all jumped into it head first and got on with it

Christina: can you remember the point where you thought 'actually, yeah, maybe this is gonna happen'?

K: I think for me it was when Nick [a graphic designer] started sending the illustrations cos like having all the words and that it was like 'oh, well this is a children's book, is this even a good children's book?' but then when we had all the pictures it was like 'oh. Wow. This *is* a children's book'.

D: Yeah...I think even when we decided that Nick was going to be doing the illustrations for us I thought like...if he's invested in it then we've got an illustrator, we *have* to do it

Christina: can you remember anything about how we developed the story? It feels like such a long time ago now...

All: yeah

M: I think, wasn't it like we wanted it to be really normal, like sort of everyday situations that we would've had to have gone through as kids and then putting in the sort of things where gender inequality happens

Christina: what's your favourite bit in the story?

M: the last page where they've painted who they want to be when they grow up and it sort of brings the entire book to a sweet close cos they realise that they can be whoever and whatever they want to be when they are older and that they shouldn't let anyone stop them from that and that they are both the same

K: I just realised that we wrote it so that sometimes it was adults correcting the kids and sometimes it was the kids correcting the adults, I just realised that, I didn't click on to that before. So, the firefighter says, yeah you can be a fire-fighter and a woman and then later Charlie says yeah, I can be a woman and a pirate...

D: so, it's like a learning relationship between adults and kids, it goes both ways!

K: for a while I was scared that it wasn't going to be an interesting children's book, I was like oh my god...I was worried we were making it too day-to-day life, but then as it progressed and then we did like the pilot studies and kids loved it and wanted to take it home I was like...thank god!

Christina: tell me a bit about the piloting in schools?

M: It was so fun, I had such a good time. We went from nursery to P3 and we read and reread the book and got loads of questions from the kids and none of them really clocked that it was about gender equality and they just really liked the book, so they didn't see anything wrong and they saw the whole thing as really really normal...which was exactly what we wanted...like to catch them before they see the stereotypes

Christina: were you nervous when you went in?

M: I was worried that they wouldn't find it interesting or like they'd think...there's no dragons swooping to get the kids or anything! But they really enjoyed it.

Christina: Can you remember the focus group that we had with professionals?

All: yes

K: oh yeah and they kept saying something and we'd say well 'actually we've already thought about that!'

Christina: and then there's the activity pack...

K: ...that was so fun to do.

D: I think the teacher's pack really adds a lot to the storybook.

Christina: yeah... cos the book's point is that it doesn't constantly talk about gender but this gives teachers ways to link it to gender and to stereotypes
So...then the Conversation for Action, what do you remember about that?

K: I just remember that guy [Alistair Gaw: Director of Communities and Families at City of Edinburgh Council] saying, 'ok cool, we'll fund it' and we were like 'ok!!'. I just remember there being no negative feedback and them being so taken aback by us...they were a bit like 'oh god, you've done your research, you really have'

Christina: yeah cos we were really nervous about it. We were like 'we *have* to get the funding for this'

K: I was thinking more they'd tell us about some tiny library charity somewhere that we could apply to and then he was like...ok we'll pay for it and it'll go to every single school... It was kind of like the meeting finished really early, like we said stuff afterwards but the actual meeting...like the decision was made in the first few minutes

Christina: and then the launch...

M: that was such good fun

K: and we had so much positive feedback from that. That was another moment where people were like 'wow! These young people have really done something!'

Christina: Have you given the books to people you know?

M: yes, I kept one for myself, I gave one to my school, and I gave 2 to my two favourite teachers in my primary school, like the ones who helped me form my ideas as a kid because I grew up in an environment where they didn't have all those ideas so it was my teachers who suggested and made me think, so I gave it to them and I said 'this is because of you, thank you'. One of them started crying, it was nice.

K: I gave one to my aunty's friend's little boy who wears a dress and, apparently, they read it all the time. I remember they took it and read it and then they came back to me

and said ‘can you write a wee note on it so that when he grows up, like he’ll know he knew you’ and I didn’t know what to write...

I explained the whole process of doing the research and writing the book to his mum and said I thought it might be good for him because there’s a boy wearing a dress and apparently he pointed out the dress...and said something like ‘oh my god the dress has stars on it’ and I was like...that’s so cute

Christina: How do you feel about the book now?

M: It’s weird, I feel like we didn’t write it almost, like we had nothing to do with it and then I think...’WOAH but we did do it and this is our work!’

Christina: I’m so proud of you guys. It’s one of my favourite bits of work that I’ve been involved in! Do you think you learned anything from being involved?

D: Of course!

M: No dream’s too big! Who knew we were going to be publish authors at 16?

D: I feel a bit weird about that actually, like I feel a bit weird having my name on it ...I’m not saying I regret having my name on it, but it feels a bit weird

M: I love having my name on it.

K: I cared about having YEA on it but not the individual names.

K: I think I also learned a lot about the reality of publishing a book, it was like ‘oh god, people go through a lot to do this’

D: I learned that there’s a special dyslexia font that it’s easier to read if you have dyslexia

K: Yeah and I feel like it's important to point out that we were the ones who thought about that, not the adults

Christina: Is gender something that you guys talk about with your friends?

K: If someone in my friendship group says something negative, 100% I'll pipe up, I'll be like 'arggg...you shouldn't be saying that' and they'll say 'I know but it's just like you guys' and I'll say 'I know but us guys are still affected by it so...'

Christina: Do you think you do that more because you've been involved in this group?

K: I think I chose to get involved because I already do that – but this probably makes me more knowledgeable in doing so

M: I would probably speak up more now because of this group, because now I know that lots of people have the same opinions as me.

D: And it gives you a bit of a back as well. Like people think you are just talking and talking about it...

K: Yeah people say...well what are you going to do about it?

D: and now I can say 'I've written a book!'

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Relocating place in the life of neo-liberal youth

Alan Mackie, Teaching Fellow, Learning in Communities, University of Edinburgh

It has been heartening of late to note a growing focus on the importance of 'place' in the sociological literature in relation to the lives of young people. For any youth work practitioner its importance is not lost, but it has often been overlooked in academic writing as scholars (quite rightly) sought to unpick mechanisms of discrimination and inequality related to factors of class, gender, race and disability amongst others. Recently, however, many authors have noted that alongside these more traditional 'axes,' place should be incorporated into (not alongside - an important distinction) the dynamic, such is its influence.

In an excellent paper reviewing 'space' in sociological literature, Thomas F. Gieryn (2000) suggests that academics regularly give the impression that they aren't interested in conceptualising the role of place and space. For those interested in youth, this is of critical importance when we begin to unpack the role of locality in shaping identity, life-chances, opportunities to socialise, play and develop. It is an interesting exercise to just pause and think back to your own childhood and youth and consider the areas that you yourself frequented, with adults and when with friends. How do you think these shaped your youth? Are these memories happy? How much freedom did you have? Were these places comfortable, could you relax? How do you think these shaped your identity growing up? Did you have opportunities to play, socialise and develop? Doubtless there are a whole host of questions one could ask at this point.

Gieryn differentiates between space and place. Space, he argues, is when place has all the meaning and value sucked out of it. Place, he suggests, is 'space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations...place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game - a force with detectable and independent effects on social life' (p466). He makes the important point that place is relational – that is, it is the buildings, roads, streets, parks and geographic locations where we live and operate, but

it is also about the meanings, interpretations and identifications we have with those places. We act upon our place – but it acts back on us. The meanings that we (as individuals and groups) attach and ascribe to places are rooted in culture, history and identity. They (can) create a sense of belonging which is important to identity formation (May, 2017). But for young people growing up, particularly in urban areas I would suggest, these factors are hugely important in limiting (or not) the experiences and opportunities available to them as they grow up. It is also important to note that what some think of ‘deprived neighbourhoods’ can often be seen as places of safety for young people growing up there. This is where the relational aspect of place comes to the forefront – family and social networks which offer security, friendship, love, respect and a sense of belonging. In short, the ties that we all cherish.

As numerous scholars have argued, for young working-class people attachment to place can play an important part in their sense of self and their sense of belonging (Reay and Lucey, 2000; Skeggs, 2004; MacDonald et al, 2005; Stahl and Baars, 2016). As Cuervo and Wyn (2014) write,

It is about the social relationships that provide a life anchor, a sense of personal physical and symbolic location...young people’s relationships to people and places are a source of well-being and security, particularly in times of uncertainty (p907-13)

Such connections are critical to young people, yet the importance of place is often lost in policy which can exhort young people today to be ‘mobile’ and to look outside their immediate locale in order to seek employment and opportunity (Fejes, 2010; Corbett and Forsey, 2017; France and Roberts, 2017). Here we can witness an inherent tension – on the one hand, neoliberalism exhorts young people to be flexible and mobile; on the other hand, young people can seek the security and familiarity of their home as an anchor in a sea of uncertainty. Policy discourses appeal to a certain subjectivity in young people; neoliberal, individualised and highly flexible (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013; Stahl and Habib, 2017). However, such subjectivities are highly classed and for young working-class people, their attachment to place is potentially bound up in their

marginalisation. When the policy discourse prioritises flexibility and mobility, young working-class people's attachment to their neighbourhoods can potentially contribute to their misrecognition. As Stahl and Habib (2017) note, 'within a neoliberal conception which privileges a trajectory of upward mobility...working-class attachment to place often connotes stagnation, ambivalence, defeat and failure' (p2).

Webster (2009) states, 'working-class young people's marginalised transitions to adulthood often take place in inner city neighbourhoods and peripheral estates characterised by de-industrialisation, destabilisation, deprivation' (p70). Young people growing up in poorer areas have a tendency to remain rooted within their neighbourhoods and communities (McDowell, 2002; MacDonald et al, 2005; Farrugia, 2014). In my own study a regular feature of the young people's narratives concerned the options available to them. As Roberts (2012) so presciently notes, structural influences such as place circumvent the horizon of young people's opportunity. In the locality under scrutiny, the young women in my study were pursuing jobs and/or training in social care or hair and beauty whereas the young men were being guided towards training in trade professions. The volume of hair and beauty salons in the locality appears to be influencing the post-school choice of many of the participants, as does the availability of gendered courses at the local college (which do not require high level qualifications to access). Kintrea et al (2015) ask the very pertinent question:

...whether, and if so how, living in a particular place (as distinct from coming from a particular socioeconomic, class or ethnic background) influences people's life chances? The key question is whether such neighbourhoods merely reflect poverty or if they also serve to maintain and extend it by embedding their residents in a context that activates further disadvantage. (p669)

To stress, there is nothing inherently wrong with young people following career paths in hair and beauty, or in construction or other manual industries. But what is questionable is that occupational aspirations continue to be formed by discourses that appeal to traditional gender roles concerning masculinity and femininity (MacDonald

and Marsh, 2005). Although young people can display remarkable agency, it is often shaped by class backgrounds and the local availability of opportunities that follow traditional gendered roles. The question is are these opportunities led by the young people or are the young people being led towards these particular careers by the availability of these courses? The point in terms of social justice is that 'choice' does not exist in a socio-cultural (or economic) vacuum. Young people's future paths are heavily circumscribed by what is available to them in their immediate locale, their treatment by the agencies they engage with and their ability to seize on opportunities that come their way. It is pure fantasy to suggest that all young people currently have equal opportunity to pursue a path to a successful and stable career of their choice. Or that 'choice' is made in a purely rational, socio-historic vacuum.

Further, when policy discourse foregrounds the importance of young people's individual choice within education and labour markets, the importance of their attachment to place shifts the inequality of local opportunity structures to the foreground. This is critical in terms of misrecognition, certainly here in Scotland as the Scottish Government (2014) prioritises career services and guidance as a means of enabling young people to seize control of their future:

By offering young people - from as early as during their primary/nursery school education - a clear picture of all the career choices available to them, we will equip them with the skills and knowledge to make more informed choices throughout their school studies and beyond. (p29)

But this may be in vain for young people who are unable to access the stepping stones that can act as a 'launch pad' in the here-and-now. Much research highlights that young people growing up in poorer areas are being lost in the 'social limbo' of 'the secondary labour market' characterised by the poorest working conditions, pervasive un- and underemployment and the most precarious working conditions (Shildrick et al, 2012; Pascual and Martin, 2017). The more pernicious aspect of this precarity is that this instability breeds ontological insecurity, creating 'a structure of affect which represents

a heightened sense of expendability or disposability that is differentially distributed throughout society' (Butler, 2011: 13). For these young people, a lack of finance and experience of hardship in the immediacy can result in them being unwilling to look too far into the future, beholden as they are to dealing with issues in the present. Such a situation exacerbates already existing (redistributive) inequalities, allowing young people with more capital to work with greater clarity towards a stable and more secure future (Foster and Spencer, 2011; Bryant and Ellard, 2015). There is a danger that young people growing up in poorer areas may be blamed for seemingly 'drifting' in the labour market. The government, for example, can argue that young people have been equipped with the necessary guidance to work towards a stable and secure career. However, these young people are unable to imagine or begin to work towards a 'career' due to structural impediments in their immediacy. The paradox is that as we have seen the growth of individualisation and the associated pressures of the 'choice biography', the key social institutions of school, work, community and the family are no longer acting as guarantors of successful youth to adult transitions in the way they once did (Leccardi, 2014). Wyn and Woodman (2006) make the important point that when the onus of 'choice' is placed upon the shoulders of young people and they are forced to draw on their own and their family's resources to achieve their goals then the result is, inevitably, one of inequality.

It is important to highlight, however, that the marginalisation of young people is not impacting on their future aspirations. A common charge in more recent times in terms of social policy is that young people struggling in the labour market are lacking in aspiration (Clair et al., 2013; Baker et al., 2014; Berrington et al, 2016). However, evidence consistently highlights that young people desire a stable job from which they can anchor and build themselves a career – and for most, hopes include a car, a home and perhaps a family in the future (Finlay et al, 2010; Archer et al, 2014; Hartas, 2016). However, the ability to cogently connect the present to the future is becoming (or has become?) far more challenging for young people – particularly marginalised young people. Devadason (2008) notes it is one thing to have hopes and dreams, no matter how conventional these may be, it is quite another to be able to connect the immediate

to those hopes in a coherent and structured way; ‘a lack of progress in their employment and insecurity feed into their reluctance to plan. For those young adults present uncertainty seems to promote vagueness’ (p1136). Bryant and Ellard (2015) found in their study:

For our participants a ‘normal’ future meant prioritising paid employment in the sequencing of their futures. Most participants were only minimally concerned with the type of work they wanted. Although some held clear ambitions, most expressed the view that employment was fundamental to achieving a secure future. (p490)

Instead, perhaps a more accurate way to locate marginalised young people’s future hopes is to think of their aspiration as ‘bounded’ (Evans, 2002). As other studies have found, rather than having low aspirations, young people may in fact have low expectations - certainly in the immediate future - due to their lack of qualifications and a growing sense of disenchantment given their struggles to gain a stable foothold in a hostile labour market. Much like other research has found, the ability of young people to develop a ‘choice biography’ is severely limited given the lack of options available to them to secure stable employment. As Hoskins and Barker (2017) note, ‘the issue facing many disadvantaged young people is the process of translating their high aspirations for the future into a lived reality’ (p48).

As other research has found, the important point is that opportunity structures, and the extent to which young people feel their options are open or constrained, are largely dictated by the structural conditions around them. Hardgrove et al (2015) noted that for the young people in their study:

...they bounced from one job to another without any sign of advancement or continuity in employment. There were no predictable pathways that led to desirable outcomes. We argue that such a predicament diminishes ability to imagine specific possible selves toward which to navigate. (p168)

Finlay et al (2010) make the point that the discourse of ‘more choices, more chances’ was a welcome addition to the Scottish policy discourse. However, there is less focus given to the structural impediments that can inhibit young people’s ability to develop and realise long-term objectives and ambitions (Mackie and Tett, 2013). What is perhaps needed is a move away from discussion on aspirations and choice towards an emphasis on ensuring young people can find routes towards interesting, fulfilling and decently paid employment (Archer et al, 2014). With widening inequality and cuts to public resources to support young people in the transition from school-to-work, a focus on aspirations alone is doomed to failure on current evidence.

Offering intensive career guidance without addressing the cause of young people’s initial marginalisation will do little to alter the issues which led to their marginalisation in the first place. Government policy that emphasises that young people need to take responsibility for their own career choices severely risks constructing an agentic and individualised view of young people’s ability to construct a coherent career path by airbrushing out of the picture the innumerable impediments disadvantaged young people must overcome to fulfil their potential. Young people are desperate to find work and display remarkable agency in searching for employment, but it is a situated agency, and this informs the types of opportunities that they feel able and willing to take up. As such, it is important to add ‘place’ to the ‘choice dynamic’ in order to understand the impact of poverty and inequality on young people growing up in marginalised neighbourhoods. Particularly when it is contrasted with young people growing up in areas with more resources (economic as well as social and cultural) and more opportunities. The result is often the demonization of young people growing up in poorer communities, as lazy, ignorant calls for them to ‘get on the bike/bus’ fail to understand the complex reasons behind their reluctance to be ‘footloose, entrepreneurs of the self’. The sense of security they derive from their locality is in sharp contrast to the precarity that punctuates other areas of their lives – the poverty, the stigmatisation, the lack of opportunity and the feeling that they have been forgotten by those in power.

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On the ground! Interviews with three youth workers:

Sabrina Tickle, Karen Anderson & Gemma Burns

For this Special Issue, we interviewed three practitioners from the Edinburgh area in order to get a brief snapshot of youth work on the ground in the current context. While this sample is by no means representative, it nonetheless offers a glimpse into the contemporary world of youth work and illuminates themes and concerns which are more widely expressed: the adverse consequences of longstanding inequality and poverty - the outcome of wider social and economic processes - as they manifest in available resources, family relationships and personal anxieties; competing expectations, demands and loyalties; a social media world which too often creates and amplifies fear and self-doubt; a sense of pessimism about the future which limits personal aspirations.

Those interviewed are themselves, like many others, working under increasingly precarious employment conditions, causing personal anxiety and limiting scope for the kind of long-term engagement with young people they think is necessary. Whilst negotiating the many contradictions of politics and policy, rhetoric and reality, they strongly reassert the importance of work with young people on equal and respectful terms. They demonstrate the need to create opportunities for young people to relate their own personal experience to macro relations of power, and to consider their options. They are aware of the necessity to work strategically and purposefully within the constraints of context.

Opportunities for building collaboration and solidarity within youth work are often hard to find, but they are always there, as these three workers remind us. We are grateful to them for making the time to think about the questions we put to them, and for the frankness of their responses.

Mel Aitken, Project Worker, Health Opportunities Team, Craigmillar, Edinburgh

Mae Shaw, Honorary Fellow, University of Edinburgh

The Interviewees:

Sabrina Tickle, Sikh Sanjog, Leith, Edinburgh (ST)

Sikh Sanjog helps many 'invisible' women every year who are facing personal challenges. They provide support for BAME women and young people to integrate fully into Scottish society, advice on education and career possibilities and 1:1 counselling services.

Karen Anderson, SHE (Social, Health and Education) Scotland (KA)

SHE is a social enterprise funded by schools who pay the organisation to undertake educational workshops with pupils. The organisation aims to support girls and young women to be empowered, supported, aspirational and improve their life chances.

Gemma Burns The Health Opportunities team, Craigmillar, Edinburgh (GB)

The Health Opportunities Team supports young people aged 12-25 with their emotional well-being, mental health, and sexual health. They offer therapeutic 1:1 sessions and group work in schools, through drop-ins, and in the community.

The Questions:

1. Describe your role with young people

ST started as a sessional youth worker with Sikh Sanjog over 6 years ago, moving on to Youth Work Manager, and now Youth and Community Work Manager. Her post is funded by a combination of Lottery and local authority and her contract is funding-dependent.

Her primary role in the organisation is to plan and implement strategic direction and secure funding, but she also chooses to be involved in direct work with young people.

She regards herself primarily as a youth worker and wishes to retain that role within the organisation.

Amongst other things, the organisation offers activities and support for 5-16 year olds. This unusually wide age range is largely because: a) for cultural family reasons, older young people are largely unable to attend without their younger siblings; and b) familiarity between younger and older young people creates an informal mentoring culture which pervades the project. There has in recent years been a changing focus on the younger age group in order to further develop this mentoring relationship. The project emphasises long-term relationships with the users of their services. Many parents/adults were involved in the project as young people, so there is an underlying level of trust in and support for the project. This degree of credibility within and from the local Sikh community is essential for providing legitimacy, particularly in relation to funding, but it can also create tensions for professional practitioners operating to different values.

As BAME communities in general come under increasing social stress and economic pressure, traditional beliefs and practices which may be at odds with liberal values can become further entrenched. Emphasising, or insisting upon, traditional roles for girls and women is one example. The agency manages this dynamic by holding issue-based group work upstairs with girls, and a more open access youth club downstairs for younger siblings. Sabrina describes this as a 'slow and gentle approach' which takes account of local sensitivities.

The credibility afforded the project over time offers the opportunity for workers to 'plant a seed' in relation to challenging particular rules and roles, within a social justice policy framework, whilst at the same time retaining trust and confidence within the community. This can be a delicate balance to maintain and relies on sustained and respectful relationships as much as policy.

Although Sabrina is not, herself, a Sikh and is aware of the optics of a non-BAME person holding the most senior role in the organisation, this position is also seen to confer a degree of objectivity which can be viewed as an advantage within such a tightly-knit community.

KA's role is to conduct workshops, alongside volunteers (SHE ambassadors) who, in turn, become involved in running workshops in their own schools and in the local community. Such workshop experience can be formally accredited through an SQA mentoring award with Edinburgh College (20 weeks).

The organisation is essentially run by women for women and has the following purposes:

- To train up women to go back into working with girls, in schools and youth work contexts
- To provide positive role models for young women
- To provide a supportive network of women - a 'sisterhood'
- To produce positive impact on attainment and ambition amongst girls
- To deliver issue based girls work on the themes of self-esteem, resilience, confidence, relationships and transitions.

The project was piloted in 2017/18, drawing upon Karen's established background and connections within the area, along with her long experience and advocacy of girls work in a range of settings and funding models. These factors, together, have given the project added credibility amongst potential participants and funders. She has recently trained as a life-coach, as a supplement to her Community Education degree, in order to prepare for the specific demands of the project.

GB's role is to support young people in the South West of the city who are affected by their own or parents/carers substance use. This includes therapeutic 1:1 sessions, therapeutic group work and advocacy. The key elements of the role include relationship

building, listening and developing coping strategies based on what young people find difficult and what they feel would benefit them. This post is partnership-funded by the CORRA Foundation (previously Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland) and the Big Lottery. The relationship with funders is largely positive because they look beyond typical quantitative measures, valuing the qualitative impact the work potentially has on young people.

2. What do you think are the most important issues for young people?

ST

Gendered social inequalities, restricted family expectations and gendered ambitions for girls in particular. Young people are generally encouraged by and within their community not to discuss views or identities which challenge traditional values. This can present difficulties for young people who inhabit (at least) two sometimes incompatible worlds which have to somehow be negotiated, and can bring them into conflict with their elders and/or with their peers. This context highlights the importance for youth workers to provide safe spaces where these conflicting experiences and expectations can be aired and discussed. A prime recent example is sexual health, where traditional messages about gender identities may need to be explored or challenged.

A general lack of suitably experienced and qualified BAME youth workers is a major disadvantage.

KA

Mental health, both their own and that of family, friends, and the surrounding community. Sources of mental ill health are complex, but include generational poverty and the impact that has on living circumstances, future prospects, aspirations, and self-esteem; anxiety and loss of social connection caused by the damaging effects of some forms of social media on face-to-face interaction and the ways people relate to each other on- and offline; constant judgement by others, including overt intimidation,

leading to fear and extreme self-doubt; a very limited view of the world, their place in it, and positive values which might guide their lives.

The debilitating effects of class-related differences, and gendered roles which limit personal aspirations.

Although tackling mental health is constantly asserted as a policy priority, insufficient resources are made available to address it in any meaningful way; rather, expectations are created, but left largely unfulfilled.

Lack of opportunities for group work which is framed around personal development (as distinct from personal attainment).

GB

Mental health in general and severely low self-esteem in particular constitute an 'epidemic' that young people are experiencing. Alongside this, there is a severe lack of services equipped to support children and young people with their mental health. What is available is completely insufficient. For example, the lengthy waiting times to access CAMHS (Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service), young people not meeting the restrictive 'criteria', and a '3 strikes and you're out' policy. This has an added negative impact on the young people affected and is not conducive to building the positive relationships required at the time of a mental health crisis. The project can offer some support in this regard: 'When young people suffer, talking helps, we listen, things can get better.'

Rising poverty and generational trauma whereby households, families and communities are impacted by longstanding adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). A high proportion of young people using the project have experienced the distress of family breakdown, crime, parental mental ill health, sexual abuse and neglect. Poverty, mental health, substance use and a lack of services are clearly interlinked.

Eating problems related to poor self-esteem as a result of increased social media exposure, pressure from peers and constant negative comparison with others.

3. What do you think are the problems for contemporary youth work?

ST

Lack of diversity across the board in services. Because of traditional/specific values, requirements and expectations, access to mainstream services (such as are available) are not always an option. In addition, all BAME people tend to be regarded in policy and practice as the same in terms of needs and demands, leading to inappropriate services.

Lack of youth facilities in general. Young people are effectively excluded from many existing community facilities because of funding requirements, and a widespread business model which demands that such facilities are self-funding.

Geographical boundaries tend to be numbers- and funding-driven, excluding young people who do not relate to such boundaries. In some areas, young people are 'claimed' to meet targets, whilst others are excluded. This can lead to a kind of tokenism: 'Everybody wants you' when under pressure to justify funding applications or satisfy policy agendas.

Competition between groups for limited funding.

Funding cuts which result in short-term support, make maintaining relationships with young people almost impossible because these involve time and effort. This context also restricts the kinds of activity which can be undertaken because it is so outcome-driven.

In any case, the current preoccupation with measuring impact means that there is less open-ended contact with young people, on respectful and mutual terms. The benefits of youth work are impossible to measure with any real impact only becoming apparent years later.

Reluctance to professionalise youth work resulting in it not being seen as a legitimate and valuable career choice.

The emphasis on 'lived experience' in policy can reframe poverty and inequality as personal troubles requiring personalised solutions/fixes rather than as public issues which need to be addressed at a political level.

The gap between 'local engagement' and political structures and processes which individualises social problems and has little impact on policy development.

KA

The way the education system/curriculum limits the possibilities for personal development in favour of measurable outcomes.

Insufficient recognition at policy level of the value of group work for young people in the short and long term.

The way in which increased competition for resources forces organisations to 'offer more for less' leading to a potential dilution in the quality (and/or quantity) of youth work offered.

A measurement-driven policy regime in which quantitative impact is valued over qualitative interaction through long-term relationship building.

Insufficient time for practitioners to undertake additional training, or for evaluation and planning of their work.

Insufficient training opportunities for youth work practitioners in supporting young people with increasingly severe mental health problems.

An acute lack of childcare for initiatives aimed at women, severely limiting the possibilities for such opportunities to be taken up. Although mutual childcare models are being developed, more intensive resourcing for childcare is required to make an appreciable difference in provision.

GB

Lack of long term financial sustainability for youth projects. At the core of work with young people is relationship-building, and this cannot be achieved with short-term funding.

Not only do young people suffer from such short-termism, but also youth workers themselves. There is a tacit expectation that, in spite of budget cuts, projects complete the same amount of work with less staff and less resources. This causes extra stress and has an adverse impact on practitioners' own mental health and well-being.

Increased incidence of tertiary contracts, whereby youth workers are employed short-term, for particular pieces of work. This insecure form of employment results in working multiple jobs simultaneously, many of which pay only for contact time with young people. This means that work planning, evaluation, support and supervision are conducted in workers' own time, or not at all. The demands of this form of employment can easily lead to burnout, or to personal dissatisfaction at not being able to perform at the best level for young people.

4. What do you think are the possibilities for contemporary youth work?**ST**

Some of the 'problems' outlined can also offer some degree of possibility. For example, a model which needs 'customers' to meet targets potentially provides opportunities for 'bargaining': being strategic, finding spaces for more open-ended engagement.

There is a growing recognition among practitioners that work with young people around their needs, interests and concerns needs to be revived.

Drawing upon 'lived experience' in planning of services can be valuable if it is genuinely undertaken, and not simply applied in a tokenistic or managerial way. More BAME voices need to be heard.

Organic collaboration between youth organisations in spite of the difficult circumstances in which many operate.

There is a strong case for offering spaces and places where young people want to come, rather than be 'referred' by various welfare agencies.

NB Sabrina also referred to youth work she is involved with in a disadvantaged area of Edinburgh. This work is locally crowd-funded and is largely independent of the state. This example of 'communities taking control of their own services' is a challenge to 'public services' as they have been traditionally understood and raises questions about the appropriate role of the state.

KA

An acknowledgement that the distinctive relationships which can be created between young people and youth work practitioners continues to offer a unique opportunity for personal and relational development.

Youth workers should seek opportunities to emphasise the positive contribution they make.

Working in partnership, in spite of dominant competitive models. This involves working collaboratively and strategically in mutually-enhancing ways.

The possibilities for extending the SHE model elsewhere: 'It's not just a name, it's an aspiration' .

The possibility of developing a fellow organisation *He for She* (currently being piloted) aimed at creating more positive relationships between boys and girls, taking into account more fluid gender relations and offering non-gendered activities.

Opportunities for wider collaborations (eg with the arts) to explore and examine the damaging effects of social media on body image, and for relating the personal and political dimensions of the online world.

GB

The possibility to work alongside funders to renegotiate targets reflexively in order to best meet young people's needs. This includes the possibility of framing funding bids to include meaningful consultation with young people, potentially addressing needs which are not necessarily consistent with funding priorities. This change in dynamic would also allow for budgets to be more creatively directed, and for funding relationships to become more equal/negotiable.

Possibilities for genuine partnership working, whereby young peoples' multiple needs can be addressed by a range of appropriate agencies simultaneously, without them being continually 'passed on' to another service.

A more co-ordinated approach could encourage stronger networks based on collaboration in spite of funding regimes which create competitive relations between projects.

The distinctive qualities that youth workers bring, in particular the skill of building relationships, should not be undervalued. Youth work has the possibility to be about exchanging Really Useful Knowledge, with young people as experts in bringing their experiences and needs to set the agenda. Services need the flexibility and expertise to make this possible. Acknowledging the impacts of ACEs, looking behind behaviour, and reinforcing an approach that is strengths-based and builds resistance is a significant opportunity.