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 Carnegy 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.

<div align="right">Finlay et al., (2010, p.859)</div>

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 collaboraters, 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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