FROM SOCIAL EDUCATION TO POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In March 2009 an Open Letter, 'In Defence of Youth Work' was circulated at Youth & Policy's History of Youth & Community Work Conference. Its sweeping and controversial condemnation of the plight of English youth work began,

> *Thirty years ago Youth Work aspired to a special relationship with young people. It wanted to meet them on their terms. It claimed to be on their side. Three decades later Youth Work is close to abandoning this distinctive commitment. Today it accepts the State's terms. It sides with the State's agenda. Perhaps we exaggerate, but a profound change has taken place.*

Now the argument that a voluntary, person-centred and open-ended youth work practice was being suffocated in particular by the imposed instrumental demands of New Labour was hardly original. Tony Jeffs was warning us over a decade ago that the Blair administration was likely to press the accelerator of increasing authoritarianism within education rather than put a brake on it (1998, 57). More recently Bernard Davies, in an insightful account of the evolution of a distinctive youth work practice in the UK, argues that its definition, "deeply rooted historically and widely embraced is not one that our most influential policy-makers want to hear - least of all implement" (2009: 64). However it took the implosion of neo-liberal free market economics in late 2008, seen optimistically by some as the end of the age of greed, to spark a collective response from below, visible as the In Defence of Youth Work Campaign at http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk . In this chapter I will delve back as far as the 1960 Albermarle Report to shed light on how the impasse has been reached, specifically within the English context. This will provide a historical backcloth to my argument that a progressive commitment, however flawed and fragile, to the nurturing of active young citizens capable of both governing and being governed has been usurped by a regressive desire to manufacture young people into compliant and conformist consumers. Drawing at times on my own experience I shall trace the twists and turns of youth work's allegiance to the much used and abused concept of social education and the present danger of it (or its successors such as informal education) being dismissed from the agenda entirely to be replaced by the social engineering at the heart of Positive Youth Development.

I have divided the last 50 years roughly into four periods. Within each of these I shall address the intertwining of the following questions:

- What is the State's view of youth work? To what extent can we identify a clarity or otherwise of policy?
- What is the rhetoric and/or theory informing the training and management of youth workers?
- What is the discernible impact of policy, rhetoric and theory upon youth workers' relationships with young people?
- And what has been the significance or otherwise of youth work's engagement with the political parties, especially the Labour Party, now banished into Opposition after thirteen years in power?

1960 – 1975 THE OPTIMISM CRUMBLES

At the end of the 1950's the economic and political mood in Britain remained optimistic, caught in the Conservative party slogan, 'you've never had it so good'. The consensus was that a judicious mix of public services, symbolised by the Welfare State, and a sensibly regulated market had resolved the contradictions of capitalism. The State did not perceive young people as deficient in skills. Rather the worry was one of motivation and alienation. Moral panics reflecting fears about the generation gap erupted around the spectre of tough 'teddy boys' and dissolute 'beatniks'. The State was concerned that young people did not waste the seemingly endless opportunities on offer. The Albermarle Report responded to the supposed dilemmas confidently with expansionist proposals for the informal world of youth work:

- setting in motion an unprecedented building programme of youth centres,
- founding the National College to train and professionalise a full-time cohort of youth leaders,
- combining these with a desire to strengthen the relationship between the voluntary sector and the burgeoning professional state sector, concerned that their differing but complementary contributions should be mutually recognised.

The Conservatives and Labour backed these developments as being in harmony with the spirit of the post-war pluralist consensus.

Reflecting this pluralism and its largely positive view of young people's abilities, the training approach pursued at the new College emphasised active and experiential learning, non-directive and non-judgemental approaches (Ewen, 1972). A cadre of professional youth workers emerged, guided by an emphasis on method, striving to be technicians in human relations. This perspective was deepened by Davies and Gibson (1967) through their introduction of the concept of social education, interpreted as an increasing consciousness of one's self on an uneven and uncertain journey to social maturity. Reading between the lines they were developing a critique at odds with the charade of ideological neutrality claimed by many in the fledgling profession. For Davies and Gibson social education was a person-centred, contradictory process, which questioned youth work's dominant tradition of social adjustment to the status quo. This said, the rhetoric and theory of the period was weak on power relations, lacking any grasp of the significance, for example, of class, gender or race.

In 1969 the Milson-Fairbairn Report 's attempt to extend the definition of social education further in underlining 'the critical involvement of young people in a changing society' fell on barren ground. Its proposals were at odds with increasing ruling class anxiety as the post-war settlement began to crumble under the weight of oil prices and rising popular unrest. Both Tory and Labour governments declined to support its rationale. Whilst within youth work itself the Report's ambition to go beyond the individualist character of social education, to raise the question of youth within the community, served to inspire, confuse and alienate the diversity of those engaged with young people.

For meanwhile on the ground the deep-rooted, character-building tradition within youth work was distinctly unimpressed. An alliance of paid workers and volunteers resisted stubbornly and effectively the introduction of the lax notions of youth-centredness. The collision between tradition and trendiness, as one of my sceptical colleagues put it, was expressed in everyday disputes about swearing, about whether young people should be banned from the youth club. To add to the confusion the ambivalence towards a questioning form of social education was not down to the reactionary responses of supposedly ignorant part-timers and volunteers. In the Authority where I worked, all of the half dozen workers or officers trained at the National College were quick to deny the non-directive creed when challenged by the local councillors or their hierarchical superiors.

As for my question about the relationship of workers to the political parties, it seems irrelevant in this period. The common-sense agreement was that political affiliation was a private matter. Indeed it was not deemed professional to allow politics to intrude. Without doubt this naïve equation of 'party politics equals politics' was widely shared, but it reflected also the lack of debate about 'politics as power' in the training of the post-Albermarle vanguard of full-time professionals.

1976-1990 POLITICS FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

A minority Labour government had little time to spare for thinking about youth. Its traumatic reign ended in the chaotic 'winter of discontent' as workers refused to co-operate with its austerity measures. In its wake neo-liberalism with its fetishism of the free market and its distrust of the State surfaced in its initial Thatcherite guise. Piece by piece the Conservative government put together an increasingly coherent, if always contradictory national youth policy, intervening on the basis of a populist authoritarianism in schooling, employment, welfare and justice (Davies 1986). Within this scenario youth work itself was spurned as a site of serious state intervention. Thus the 1982 Thompson Report's failure to jettison a liberal commitment to the whole young person in favour of the shift to behaviourism saw it shelved. Such was the government's distrust and distaste for what it saw as a refuge of permissiveness that it sought to bypass or colonise youth work through an early and significant quango, the Manpower Services Commission. A host of Youth Training Schemes proliferated. The very concept of social education was under attack from a narrower notion of social and life skills training. This assault was eloquently criticised (Davies 1979) and resisted. I declaimed that the government was intent on nothing less than “the behavioural modification of the young proletariat” (Taylor 1981). The Community & Youth Workers Union fought against attempts both to reduce workers' wages and conditions and to undermine the social-democratic ideological base of professional youth work. For the time being the contest ended in a truce.

In the background youth work training was in turmoil. The growing unease reflected a feeling that its perspective was white, male and behind the times. By the mid-1980's an infusion of women and black lecturers had begun to alter the outlook of the training agencies. Indeed by the end of the decade an Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Discriminatory (AOP/ADP) analysis of practice had achieved a contradictory hegemony. This success was reflected in the emergence of the critical academic journal 'Youth & Policy'; in the determination of Jeffs and Smith (1987)to puncture youth work's anti-theoreticism; in Val Carpenter's (1986) avowal of independent Girls' Work, together with the seminal exploration of the experience of black youth by Gus John (1981). Under the searchlight of analyses informed by feminist, anti-racist and even socialist theory, social education was found wanting. By the end of the decade Smith was suggesting that it was no more than a rhetorical device, a useless tool, whilst I was arguing for its redundancy, its replacement by the notion of political education.

Whilst to talk of political education was certainly a step too far, we have to explain why both the theory and training informing the route to full-time status became Left in its orientation during a period when the Right became evermore ascendant. The answer is to be found below in the social movements of the late 1970's. From within these vibrant, if short-lived settings, politicised activists entered youth work. Their intent was to radicalise practice, symbolised by the rise of autonomous work with young women, black youth, gay and lesbian, and disabled young people. Faced with this convulsion youth work theory and training had to run to catch up with the prefigurative, oppositional work emerging on the ground, seeking to marry its liberalism with the rising radicalism.

Inevitably the world of practice was riddled with even more tension, highlighted in a major piece of research into the state of part-time youth work training, which mistakenly supposed that the content of training mirrored the reality of practice. The author, Steve Butters (1978) claimed that the traditional character-building model had been overtaken by the Social Education Repertoire (SER) - a mix of personal awareness, community development and institutional reform. However in his view the SER itself had to be overthrown by a Radical Paradigm, within which young people themselves were transformed into a vanguard leading the struggle against oppression. The analysis was incisive, yet skewed. However its use in the National Youth Bureau's Enfranchisement Project (1985) illuminated the contested nature of youth work practice. Utilising an exercise within which workers positioned themselves according to their ideological allegiance, the Project's workers, Andy Smart and Marion Leigh, exposed the plurality of conflicting perspectives that were out there, alive and kicking. The emerging contradiction was that, although a radical interpretation of youth work was the dominant voice at a rhetorical level and had supported imaginative pockets of practice, a conformist view of work with young people was still hugely influential.

Simply to give a flavour of these internal conflicts from my own experience in a number of English authorities:

- The struggle to have Girls Work accepted in Wigan split the Youth Service.
- In Leicester there was a tense relationship in the mid-1980's between independent Black young people's projects born out of the community, staffed by local unqualified workers and a professional Community Education Service, perceived as institutionally racist.
- And, in Derbyshire in the late 1980's I came closest myself as a manager to being incorporated into an imposition of the anti-oppressive agenda, to the detriment of a democratic dialogue with both workers and young people alike.

This reference to the dangers of foisting from above a supposedly emancipatory practice takes us to the question of Youth Work's relationship to the Labour Party across this period. We have mentioned earlier the transfusion into the work of activists from the social movements. Within this motley crew there was ambiguity regarding the Labour Party and the trade unions. However sufficient were in support of the struggle to establish Women's and Black Sections in the labour movement as a whole. This was reflected within youth work by the metamorphosis of the Community and Youth Service Association into the Community & Youth Workers Union (CYWU) with a Women's Caucus in the forefront of the change. Implicit in the activities of many of these youth work activists was a hope that a genuinely socialist Labour Party would be in the interests of young people and the work. This belief did not lead necessarily to membership of the party, but it did inspire workers to gravitate towards the municipal socialist councils of the early and mid-1980's, for example, the Greater London Council, Sheffield and Derbyshire. These islands of 'socialism' were seen as places where freedom of expression and support would be forthcoming.

However as the decade drew to a close the radical insurgents within youth work were on the retreat in common with the Left as a whole. The defeat of the Miners in 1985 had devastated the labour movement. The maverick 'socialist' councils losing both confidence and finance, abandoned being refuges of radicalism, especially as the Labour Party itself began the process of reinventing itself as a party of the Centre. Faced by similar pressures the social movements were abandoning their autonomy, taking the grants and seeing their leaders recuperated by the State (Shukra 1998).

Increasingly across these years a prescriptive Right agenda nationally was matched by an imposed Left agenda locally. Social education as a term lost its resonance. The radical praxis, which had sought to supersede it, forgot its roots in diversity and critical tolerance. Increasingly issue-based and fractured it took on an authoritarian character. Failing to win hearts and minds, some of its advocates adopted a managerial approach, looking to insist that their agenda be met.

1990 – 1997 MARKET AND MANAGERIALISM PREVAIL

As the neo-liberal desire to introduce the discourse of the market into all corners of our existence continued apace, the Conservative government remained equivocal about youth work. Turning a little of its attention to this uncertainty it called a series of ministerial conferences, the first in 1991 in Birmingham. The Tories hoped to persuade the disparate elements within youth work to agree a core curriculum, against which performance could be measured. In perhaps its last moment of collective solidarity an alliance of the voluntary and state sectors, remembering its rich and pluralist history, repelled the government's intrusion. From this moment on successive governments abandoned direct ideological intervention and turned to influencing the purpose of youth work through managerial control of whatever funds were deemed to be available.

In the aftermath of major post-Poll Tax cuts to youth services, new State funding for work with young people was channelled through specified initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget. To compete for finance, politicians, bureaucrats and youth work managers had to agree to achieve predetermined targets and outcomes. Although in its infancy monitoring of this strategy was sloppy, the writing was on the wall. In such a climate youth work was manoeuvred in the direction of a preventative and welfare model. Insidiously the tradition of social and informal education was eroded, surviving sometimes only at the level of soothing platitudes.

Yet contradiction did not disappear entirely. Within the training agencies the AOP/ADP commitment of the 80's clung on, its advocates still in post. Although its dominance was showing signs of stress. Some within the institutions felt that the litany of anti-sexist and anti-racist practice was becoming institutionalised. Sceptical students were learning to regurgitate what was expected in their assignments. Fearful perhaps of losing control of a last refuge of the radical spirit, academic staff were sometimes slow to submit their own endeavours to critical scrutiny.

Meanwhile in practice a tightrope was being walked. The devastating cuts of 1992/93 mentioned above were paving the way for a step by step change in the direction being taken by youth work. Within the field many began to make their pact with so-called 'new managerialism', others sought to duck and dive in defence of a pluralist tradition. In Wigan we attempted to call the bluff on the increasing calls for a corporate approach to services in local government. We created a new structure underpinning Services for Young People, which brought together all departments of the Council – Education, Social Services, Leisure, Housing along with other interested parties such as the Police and the Council for Voluntary Youth Work. Within this collective of concern the Youth Service preserved its distinctive identity and autonomy, being identified as the soul and conscience of the enterprise. This relatively successful initiative did not survive the arrival of Integrated Youth Services a few years later, within which youth work began to move from the core to the periphery. The disciples of 'new managerialism' within youth work were winning the day, claiming that to have credibility youth work had to embrace the discipline of measurable outcomes.

In this acceptance of neo-liberal ideology a significant number of managers and workers were at one with the outlook of Blair's transformed Labour Party. Despite evidence to the contrary there was still a lingering belief in youth work circles that New Labour would be a vehicle for social progress. In accord with the direction of the party youth managers and workers moved, consciously or otherwise, to the political Centre, leaving behind them the last vestiges of a critical perspective. Thus it was that many within youth work danced in the streets for joy when Blair swept to a landslide victory in 1997.

1997-2010 ENTER THE PRESCRIBED AND PREDICTABLE

Once in power New Labour inflicted slowly but surely an instrumental agenda upon youth work, utterly in keeping with a neo-liberal desire to generate individualised conformity; utterly in keeping too with the renouncing of any alternative vision of the future. In place of the Old Labour dream of a State managing Capitalism in the interests of the workers, New Labour substituted a State managing the workers in the interests of Capitalism. New Labour's mind was made up. Young people needed to shape up. As Jeffs and Smith note the last decade of governmental documents such as 'Every Child Matters' (2003) and 'Transforming Youth Work' (2002) were 'simply prospectuses for the delivery of already agreed priorities and outcomes' (2008, 280). With the introduction of the strategy of Integrated Youth Services, youth work as a distinctive site of practice came under increasing threat. Voluntary and open encounters with young people were perceived as inherently out of control and dangerous. Increasingly New Labour all but deleted the term youth work from their authoritarian discourse. It was replaced by the patronising and simplistic notion of 'positive activities'. Social and informal education were declared outcasts, banished to the pedagogical wilderness.

At a theoretical level there was never a serious debate about what ideas might support this shift from the educational to the recreational. The mantra of 'new managerialism' was a facile utilitarian 'what works works'. Via this atheoretical and anti-intellectual route managers pressed workers to accept a prescribed approach to their engagement with young people. However even crude pragmatism needed some theoretical nourishment. Imperceptibly and surreptitiously ideas drawn from the American tradition of Positive Youth Development (PYD) were smuggled into the thinking of both managers and workers. To my knowledge the only systematic case for its efficacy was made by Davies and Schulmann (2007). At heart PYD draws upon what it deems to be the science of adolescent or developmental psychology to inform the design of 'developmentally appropriate' programmes for work with young people.

Within the English tradition mention of adolescence has been metaphorical rather than scientific, speaking of a passage to adulthood, which might be rough,smooth or both, but not one reducible to formulaic stages. PYD takes an opposite stance, confident in its certainty. PYD claims that its scientific underpinning allows it to identify the particular assembly of attributes or competencies a normal 14 or 16 year old ought to possess. It proposes that there are measurable developmental benchmarks. In its misguided arrogance it argues that the implementation of its programmes will, for example,

- encourage self-determination, but, we might ask, at what cost to others?
- provide recognition for positive behaviour, yet ignores the issue of who defines what is positive?
- create opportunities for pro-social involvement, failing once more to address who defines what is anti-social?

None of these awkward questions though ruffled New Labour's adoption of its philosophy. It was a way of seeing things whose time had come. Its functionalist focus chimed perfectly with the government's demonisation of all those young people, who were perceived as anti-social and dysfunctional. Through this lens Youth Work was transformed into Positive Activities – 'give them something to do and all will be well'.

When scrutinised PYD falls at the first hurdle. The subject of its enterprise, the normal adolescent, is an ideal type distilled from all manner of comparative experiments, tests and scores. At heart this adolescent of whatever age is an abstraction and a myth. She is a general individual, who doesn't exist (Burman, 1994). Nevertheless the easy explanations afforded by PYD have proved enormously seductive. The model adolescent of PYD's fantasy, normative in behaviour and attitude, attuned to the needs of the prevailing order, was New Labour's empowered model citizen. In parallel PYD offered the prospect of the model youth worker planning meticulously their scientifically predetermined programme of social integration.

To the best of my present knowledge PYD has not found its way yet into the curricula of youth work's training institutions. Its bearers into the heart of the work have been the managerialists, the external trainers and consultants. Nevertheless, as Jeffs and Spence (2007) note, the impact of modularisation and the consequent fragmentation of knowledge, the ever increasing emphasis on standards and competencies, reflected in the rise of National Vocational Qualifications, have combined to undermine a theoretically informed and argumentative youth work education.

Nevertheless the eloquent voices from academia continue to fight the cause of a critical informal education (Batsleer, 2009).

As Davies documents the New Labour years have witnessed the evacuation of what were key principles underlying social or informal education – starting from their agendas, negotiating a critical dialogue, within which the educator is educated too and, not least, the voluntary relationship [2008: 79]. In reality the workforce has been split asunder, although this fissure remains partially hidden. Workers defending the informal tradition speak of 'losing a belief in what they are doing', pursued as they are by the turn to individualised casework, by the pressure to accredit experiences, however ephemeral, and by the shift to explicit surveillance and policing. Meanwhile many more workers than the profession dares to admit have adjusted to and even welcomed the tidier, less complicated and contradictory world of prescribed targets and predictable outcomes. On another level, to return to the influence of PYD, its instrumental outlook has fitted perfectly the expansion of short-term initiatives. In one London borough, whilst youth centres were being closed, a proliferation of 6- 8 week modules focused on positive activities and healthy lifestyles were targeted on particular working class estates. Staff were parachuted in to deliver these developmental programmes, only to disappear a few weeks later, The task of growing roots in a community and building relationships had been jettisoned.

It is important to note too the debilitating effect upon the voluntary youth sector of the last two decades of 'funding by numbers'. A once fiercely defended independence has been ground down as voluntary youth organisations have been pulled into competing for funding and capitulating to the attached government's strings.

As we close discussion of this final period we trip over once more the relationship of those within youth work to New Labour. Certainly a notable number of managers and indeed key national figures were New Labour fellow travellers. Despite the party's neo-liberal rebirth it seemed that they believed that a social-democratic pulse was still to be felt. They took refuge in the fact that New Labour improved the funds available for work with young people. Their incorporation into the New Labour project in all manner of ways meant that they were reluctant to face the decisive question. What was the purpose and character of New Labour's transformation of youth work? By the end of its tenure New Labour had all but completed the journey from youth work as social education, as a form of critical pedagogy, to youth work as a tool of social engineering.

ISSUES FOR DEBATE

1. Is social education dead and cremated or can its resurrected body in contemporary garb rise from the ashes? In recent years those of us campaigning in defence of youth work in the UK have talked of 'democratic and emancipatory' practice. The strength of this definition is that its commitment to the voluntary relationship, to free association and critical conversation is in continuity with the hopes of the nineteenth century pioneers; that its understanding of the significance of gender, race, sexuality, disability and class in young people's lives is a tribute to the influence of the social movements in the 1970's and 80's; and that its stress on the autonomy of the improvisatory, yet disciplined youth worker embraces both volunteer and professional alike. In the face of Positive Youth Development, which seeks to impose programmed order upon problematic youth, we need to revive a pluralist alliance in praise of voluntary and open youth work.

2. Doing so means we will have to engage with the prevailing orthodoxy that youth work ought to be concerned primarily with preventing an array of anti-social behaviours, largely pursued by recalcitrant minorities, who require a policed regime of positive activities. This will be difficult as major actors within youth work, for example, the National Youth Agency

and the CYWU have overplayed the card that less youth work equals more troublesome young people. We are obliged to affirm that youth work's aspiration is to contribute to the emergence of critically involved young citizens across the board. Such democratically inclined young people might well, in the eyes of the powerful, undertake negative activities! Put simply youth work is education for democracy, for which there are neither tick-boxes nor guarantees. Democracy is the politics of hope, a belief in the potential of human creativity.

3. In forging an alliance for youth work, where do we stand on the post-Albemarle professionalisation of work with young people? Within the UK the CYWU is at the forefront of believing that a regulated and certificated vanguard of graduate workers, bonded by licence and a unique set of values and skills is the way forward. Indeed to question such a craft mentality is to be accused of political backwardness. Yet, in essence youth work is but a particular expression of the overarching, centuries old, humanist project of imagining and making empathetic and egalitarian relationships in all the corners of our lives, be we parents, members of the local community or whatever. In this context youth work has no proprietary claims to what are widely held values such as respect and equality or to widely held skills in communication. To suggest otherwise is an excess of hubris. Youth work is not a cluster of corporate values or professional skills. Rather it is a distinctive site of practice, a negotiated space of voluntary interaction, where ideas and values are argued about. Professionalisation harbours protectionism, excluding thousands of volunteers and part-time workers from the ranks of the anointed, even though these lesser mortals have the most direct contact with young people themselves. At the very least, following Lorenz (2009), we need to debate what might be the relationship of the 'people' professions to the belief that the emancipation of the *demos* must be the work of the people themselves.

4. Linked intimately to the dilemma around professionalisation is the status of training . Training is too easily taken for granted as being a good thing. Yet training in the institutions can lag behind imaginative developments in practice or, in defending a critical perspective, can find itself in advance of a stagnant or regressive practice. This tension is exacerbated further by the character of in-service training, which can complement or subvert the philosophy promulgated in Further and Higher Education. The rise of the entrepreneurial consultant and trainer has opened the door to the short-term introduction into the work of all manner of psychology-led fads and fancies. All of this needs unravelling.

5. Within the UK the major political parties all jockey for the Centre ground. Major ideological conflict is a relic of the past. In this context the unwritten allegiance of youth work to the social-democratic tradition, to the Labour Party, is past its sell-by date. From now on any political party has to be analysed anew - with scepticism, but with a sharp eye for the opportunities thrown up by a political and bureaucratic class in crisis. In the coming period we need to resuscitate our collective imagination and autonomy. Organising independently our ranks will be composed , hopefully, of both utopian romantics and principled pragmatists. In the struggle to defend and extend youth work as critical pedagogy, we will need each other, both on the streets and in the corridors of power.

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