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GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

YMCA

contexts: occasional
paper

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Preface

As a tutor, after marking a set of papers, I have often sat with colleagues and reflected that some of the pieces we read should have had a wider audience than ourselves. It was these reflections that were the inspiration behind pulling together these papers. In drawing up the criteria for inclusion we were keen that the work did not necessarily have to be academic and that it could be a self assessment or a piece of work produced on placement. Indeed the marks, where the pieces got marks, were across the range. The working criteria for selection was therefore that *'the piece of work should be of interest to the field of informal and community education'*.

Nominations could come from tutors, students or colleagues, although the majority of nominations from this collection came from tutors, something we will look at for next year. We were also pleased that the work came from across the board of the programmes we run, including both full time and distance learning students, and from both pre-graduate and graduate level programmes. Once nominated, a member of the academic staff was allocated to the author to help them work on their piece for publication. The aim of this was not to obtain homogeneity; indeed we were keen to preserve the different voices of the authors. Their support was instead intended to help them turn the piece of work from one aimed at the college to one aimed at a wider audiences, and to rectify any obvious typos. Consequently this is an eclectic collection, which we think reflects the diversity of the student body and practitioners, and, as in practice, is richer for being so. As such, I would like to thank Brian Belton for working with Mark Roberts, Barry Burke for working with Simon Hill, Mary Wolfe for working with

Kai Wooder, Jeff Salter for working with Natalie Bell, John Peaper for working with Stephen Nelson and I worked with Sally Wilson. Most importantly I would like to thank the students themselves, Kai, Sally, Natalie, Stephen and Robert for their work and contributions.

Simon Hill examines, what he calls, ‘the politics of antisocial behaviour’, centring on a critique of Peter Squires article ‘New Labour and the Politics of Antisocial Behaviour’ from *Critical Social Policy* 86 (February 2006). He considers government’s attitude and response to anti-social behaviour is punitive rather than restorative; reactive rather than proactive, and negative rather than positive. He examines the development of the concept of anti-social behaviour, tracing its origins in the gap between falling crime rates and public perception of safety. He highlights the importance of third party perceptions in both the conceptualisation of anti social behaviour and the implementation of orders. He believes that there has been a conflating of civil and criminal responsibility, privileging utilitarian concerns over civil liberties and rights. He propounds that we should instead seek to promote pro-social behaviour, with an emphasis on social inclusion, access to social goods, empowerment, the development of faith in institutions and a more reflective balance between individual and social responsibility.

Sally Wilson explores what we mean by ‘socially useful’ through her experience of motherhood. She explores the interaction between society and the individual and the role of the parents in mediating between them. She examines Shaw’s notion that modern society consists of people who are ‘*cognitively smart but emotionally stunted*’, contending that it is the parents’ role to counteract these tendencies, as their interactions with their children is a crucial influence in their acquiring the skills they will need to interact positively with others. They should promote the values they believe a society should have, such as justice and fairness, and to be active in developing the emotional intelligence of their child. In turn this will impact in society, noting Gordon’s view that good human relationships are at the centre of a healthy civil society. The

remainder of the piece outlines how she has fulfilled these responsibilities with her daughter.

Natalie Bell explores similar terrain, asking whether education is a force for control or liberation, and importantly, how we can distinguish between the two. She uses the example of how the term NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), arose out of concerns to control young people. However, she also asks informal educators to challenge themselves, tracing how our own terminology, such as reflection and dialogue, can be mystifications of common terms and that we should not forget that we are not the only educators in the community. She acknowledges the legitimate motivations of the worker to want to develop the potential of others, but asks us to be continually vigilant by asking why we are being asked to work in communities, and whether it is from a concern to control or to liberate. Natalie then explores her own practice and how she tries to preserve her integrity through the principles of voluntarism and being young people led. She leaves us with the challenge of what would happen if informal educators tried to set up alternative education, based on Illich's notions, in the modern era.

Kai Wooder, through her interest in both Buddhism and the supervision process, identifies a common language and theory that cross both practices. She begins by giving an overview of the development of both supervisory practice and Buddhism, exploring their origins, ideas and intent. She then focuses on the links between the concept of supervision and a number of Buddhist principles. In particular, her paper explores three key Buddhist themes of Cause and Effect, Mindfulness, and Love, Compassion and Wisdom and draws out parallels with supervisory processes, in that there are no endings; that the process is the reward and that self-analysis can support development. She draws on work from both the Supervisory field, such as Senge, Fromm and Rogers, as well as a number of Buddhist authors.

Mark Roberts offers a challenging critique of what we mean by a 'learning opportunity' in Informal Education, problematising the

concept of 'relationship' and questioning the use of the 'professional journal' as an aide to development. Through the example of a worker 'providing advice and information' he challenges traditional Informal Education conceptualisations of 'relationship', and its primacy. Building on the work of Taylor and Gilbert, Mark argues that the concept of relationship can be misused, and that we in fact create roles for young people that we can then work with as professionals. This in turn gets in the way of young people developing their natural capabilities. He develops this in the second part of the piece, using an example from his practice, to critique the notion of journal writing through the ideas of Sadaawi (Belton 2007). He argues that these conceptualisations are examples of a 'professional language' that inhibits communication and learning and feeds the process of individualisation.

As you will see, the final piece is an account of one practitioner, Stephen Nelson's, journey to becoming an informal educator. It is an interesting account of how he came to terms with his journey and was able to reconcile his culture, beliefs and faith with the principles of informal education and the realities of being an informal educator. We have started with a brief account of his journey, as he related it to John Peaper, as we think it contextualises his reflections. While all of Stephens work has been reflective, we give you some extracts from his final self assessment which we think will have resonance and serve as a point of reflection for all of us.

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The Contributors

Natalie Bell

Natalie has had a varied career ranging from running a fashion business to restaurant manager. Her career in community work began as an active resident of a Coin Street Housing Co-op (since 1994) running social events and a complaints panel! She is passionate about positive change in the Waterloo area and worked as a full time volunteer setting up the Family Links project in 2001, being a board member for the Waterloo Community Coalition, Coin Street Community Builders and the chair of The Friends of St John's Sculpture Gardens. She is the project director for SE1 United, an ambitious youth led charity which enables young people to set up their own large scale events and be an influential voice within their communities.

Simon Hill

Is the Senior Youth Worker for St Saviours Youth Project in Bournemouth and has been there since its launch in 2001. He has over seven years of youth work experience including centre-based, outreach and detached work. Having established a successful youth project, he now manages a GAP year scheme, with support from the Rank Foundation. As well as being a graduate from the YMCA George Williams College, Simon also has a music degree and teaches Piano in his spare time.

Mark Roberts

Mark grew up around the rural villages of Somerset, and his early influences included observing the care his parents showed to young people that came through their home. Mark then abandoned village life and the possibility of university and moved to Epsom, taking a random job in a sports shop. Realising that retail wasn't his future he began working as a volunteer youth worker for Generation Church and Surrey Youth Service, and this began his youth work career. He has had experience in managing a Youth Justice Board project in Wandsworth, and at present works part time running youth work activity from The Edge Youth Centre on a housing estate in Epsom. Along with his wife Hayley they home educate their three children collectively with Gypsy families. Mark is a passionate camper, and enjoys returning to his country roots on his family holidays, and spending time attempting to surf!

Sally Wilson

Sally was born in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, in 1972. She has taught in Spain, Italy, The Czech Republic and The Gambia and worked in Australia for Greenpeace. She currently works as a Learning mentor in a secondary school in Bristol and lives with her partner and their daughter in Bath. She enjoys travelling, sunshine and eating cake.

Kai Wooder

Kai has been working with young people for around 12 years. She feels the college philosophy on personal development and informal education has really steered her work with young people as well as her growth. Studying for the Certificate in Supervision pushed her to look at her own values and how they impact on her relationships with others, particularly within the profession of Supervision. She feels having the opportunity to write this paper then gave her the chance to express it.

She is currently the Outreach and Education Manager at Wirral Brook, developing and delivering courses around self-esteem, aspirations and sexual health. She loves the work she does, and her relationship with Brook and the College is very important to her.

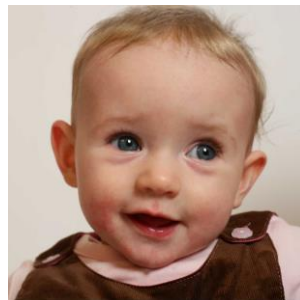
Stephen Nelson

Stephen's biography will come later, as it is an integral part of his piece.

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Acknowledgements

Kai would like to acknowledge Mary, her honest and inspiring tutor, Harriet, her friend and mentor and Alicya, her muse. Natalie would like to acknowledge Iain Tuckett, who opened a huge door for her and Aba Armah who kept her sane throughout her studies at the inspiring YMCA George Williams College. Mark would like to acknowledge Charlie, Emily and Dani. Much of the inspiration for Sally's essay came from reading about the wonderful work of the roots to empathy programme devised by Mary Gordon. She would also like to thank her mum, her daughter and the photographer, James Cheadle who took this photo.



For Josie

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‘New Labour and the politics of antisocial behaviour’ – A Review of Educational Research from an Ethical Perspective

Simon Hill

‘In Britain we have come to both demonise and fear our teenagers: the yobs, the hoodies, and the street gangs – the ASBO generation which terrorises neighbourhoods. ‘Kids hanging around’ is now regarded as the greatest social nuisance of our age.’ (Easton, 2006)

Introduction

There is no doubt that the issue of anti-social behaviour (ASB) has become a defining issue with this government. According to Tony Blair:

‘ASB is for many the number one item of concern right on their doorstep.’ (Tony Blair, 2003)

The issue of antisocial behaviour, whilst not exclusively a youth issue, has come to define a generation. But how big is this issue really? Are today’s youth more anti-social than previous generations? And what exactly does it mean to be antisocial? This paper considers these

questions and looks at the implications of creating hysteria around the issue for today's youth. It centres on a critique of Peter Squire's article 'New Labour and the Politics of Antisocial Behaviour' from *Critical Social Policy* 86 (February 2006).

Talking up the problem

'UK teens 'worst in Europe'' (Headline in the Sun newspaper, Martin, 2006)

In November 2006, the Institute for Public Policy Research produced a report comparing teenagers' lifestyle and behaviour with their counterparts in other European countries. It was headlined: 'British teenagers' social skills gap widens' (IPPR, 2006), alluding to the fact that British youth seem to spend a greater proportion of their time with peers rather than parents and other significant adults. It also highlights the fact that adults in the UK demonstrate a high degree of 'paedophobia' i.e. a reluctance or fear of addressing teenagers involved in criminal behaviour. Nevertheless, the report was overwhelmingly reported as the headline from the Sun suggests, and there was much discussion of youth in the UK being the 'worst in Europe'. This fits with a picture of the current generation of antisocial youth.

Squires suggests that the problem of antisocial behaviour has been talked up by the current administration. He quotes Tonry:

'by making antisocial behaviour into a major social policy problem, and giving it sustained high visibility attention, Labour has made a small problem larger, thereby making people more aware of it and less satisfied with their lives and their government.' (Squires 2006, p. 147-148)

There are several possible reasons for this, according to Squires. Firstly, he suggests that Labour aimed to modernise the legal system. One of their key election pledges was to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Squires, 2006 p. 163). This appealed to the middle-class

majority in 1997, and so they had to be seen to be tackling issues of criminality among youth.

Anti-social behaviour began to undermine the success of their other law and order policies, so that whilst crime statistics began to fall, the average person on the doorstep saw no significant change, and in fact was increasingly aware of nuisance in the neighbourhood. It subsequently became identified as one of the causes of crime by the government. They needed to make that case strongly and then introduce legislation to tackle it.

Secondly, the government has a strong social inclusion agenda and wants to reassert the value of society, and encourage communities to become involved in tackling problems on the doorstep.

Finally, anti-social behaviour not only undermines the law and order system and improvements to it, but has a wider impact on the country's social and economic regeneration.

These issues will be considered in this paper but first there is the problem of defining antisocial behaviour – what does it actually mean and how has the government started to address the problem?

Defining Antisocial Behaviour and the 'Tools' to tackle it

According to the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, anti-social behaviour is defined as 'acting in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household (as the defendant).' (Home Office, 2004) As such, the definition of antisocial behaviour is deliberately obscure, to allow for a whole range of offences to be grouped together and packaged for the individual. Consequently as Squires asserts, the definition of anti-social behaviour depends very much on the opinions of third parties:

'In effect, the reaction or perception, or likely reactions or perceptions, of third parties are central to the definition. In this sense certain actions or behaviour would seem to be essential but

it is the (potential) reactions of others to these which define their offensiveness.’ (Squires, 2006 p. 159)

Therefore, anti-social behaviour becomes defined by what is unacceptable for a community of people. From this point, a whole number of strategies can be used to deal with the problem. These appear to be:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts/Agreements (ABCs/ABAs)
- Parenting Contracts/Agreements
- Parenting Orders
- Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions (ASBIs)
- Crack House Closure Orders
- Demoted Tenancies
- Notice Seeking Possession for Antisocial Behaviour (NOSP)
- Eviction for Antisocial Behaviour
- Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBO)
- Individual Support Orders (ISO)
- Dispersal Powers

(Respect, 2007)

Of these strategies, the vast majority involve legally-binding restrictions placed on the individual and their family, enforceable by the police (informed by neighbours and other interested parties). The exceptions to this are the contracts (i.e. the ABC/ABA and Parenting Contracts) which are informal ‘agreements’ issued at an early stage. Sometimes these are put in place in line with other measures, or used as a pre-cursor to the stricter tools. The other exception is the Individual Support Orders, which contain ‘positive obligations which are designed to tackle the underlying causes of a young persons antisocial behaviour’ (Respect, 2007 p. 8). ISOs are a relatively recent concept, and according to the Respect report, 49 such orders have been issued between 1st May 2004

and December 2005. This compares with 7500 ASBOs over the same period. Clearly the emphasis lies in punitive rather than restorative measures.

Modernisation of the Legal System and its effects

‘Since the self reinforcing bonds of traditional community life do not exist in the same way, we need a radical new approach if we are to restore the liberty of the law-abiding citizen. My view is very clear: their freedom to be safe from fear has to come first. Yes, in theory, that is what is supposed to happen through the traditional court processes. In practice it doesn’t. We are fighting 21st century crime with 19th century methods.’ (Tony Blair, 2006)

In a speech primarily about antisocial behaviour, the Prime Minister of the time readily interchanged the terms ‘ASB’ and ‘crime’. This alludes to the blurring of civil and criminal responsibility and the gradual shift in focus from tackling delinquency to criminalising a generation. Squires notes that where youth crime was once seen as a result of ASB remaining unchallenged and so the link needed breaking, the situation has now changed to the extent that youth crime is considered only one aspect of a broader culture of behaviour. (Squires, 2006 p. 151) And so the modernisation of the legal system clouds the issue of rights for offenders, and starts to raise the profile of delinquent behaviour.

As we have seen, the government’s attitude and response to anti-social behaviour is punitive rather than restorative; reactive rather than proactive, and negative rather than positive. It focuses on removing the freedom of the individual if they refuse to comply with the majority opinion. This is due to the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ community, rendering previous legislation obsolete and ineffective, they claim.

This attitude of putting the concerns of the majority before the individual echoes the values of utilitarianism, which can be defined as:

‘...the ethical theory that the production of happiness and the reduction of unhappiness should be the standard by which

actions are judged right or wrong and by which the rules of morality, laws, public policies, and social institutions are to be critically evaluated.’ (West, 2004 p. 1)

The over-riding principle with regard to challenging ASB is how can we keep most people in the community happy? It doesn’t matter if we have to use severe measures to deal with them e.g. removing people’s rights to housing, benefits and even exclusion if necessary. This is justified in the cause of maximising happiness in the community. And the responsibility for this is taken at governmental level.

There is then, an element of utopianism here: that the government can, through tougher legislation, provide and promote ‘traditional’ community life once more. They can obligate people to comply with a social contract and use enforcement measures on those who refuse.

Enforcement

The strategies to tackle ASB promote a high role for what Squires calls ‘enforcement action’. It empowers communities to take action to deal with this new wave of delinquent behaviour. But Squires fundamentally disagrees with the notion that this issue is entirely new:

‘Whatever else ASB might be, despite some of the associated political rhetoric, it is not a range of uniquely new behaviours unique to late modernity which had hitherto evaded the attentions of lawmakers and criminal justice personnel alike. Rather ASB is simply a convenient term for a selected group of behaviours against which a more streamlined package of enforcement procedures are being adopted.’ (Squires 2006, p. 159)

Rather than some seismic shift in community life and attitudes, Squires argues that the government have lumped together several patterns of behaviour to create a framework for law enforcement. They use communities to help identify and deliver these enforcement measures. Each misdemeanour perpetrated by the offender may seem quite trivial on its own but when considered as part of a broader cultural pattern, it

suddenly becomes a matter for urgent attention. Squires considers this a convenience for the government with their agenda focused on the modernisation of the legal system and concerned with quick-fix solutions to reducing crime.

But does the motivation matter? If increased enforcement which empowers communities to tackle problems on their doorstep can reduce ASB, then surely that's a good thing, regardless of the government's higher plans? If the end result is a lower level, then does it matter how we get there?

From a utilitarian perspective, it matters little.

'The 'Principle of Utility' is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end: all other things being only desirable as a means to that end.' (West, 2004 p. 118)

We are working towards a greater good and empowering the 'moral majority' on the way. If some personal freedoms need to be sacrificed to get there, then that is acceptable and a necessary sacrifice. The aim is maximising the satisfaction and simple, quiet, enjoyment of life by as many people in the community as possible. So the measures associated with ASB seem entirely reasonable in light of this.

'Doing justice to victims has become a higher priority than doing justice to offenders.' (Squires, 2006 p. 151)

Many would consider that it is about time that the rights of victims were a higher priority than protecting the rights of those who cause such nuisance and misery to others. However, there is a counter argument:

'Many ethical writers, such as Freire and Gandhi, say that a good end cannot be attained by bad means; that means and ends cannot be dichotomised.' (Young, 2003 ch.1 p.3)

Where the rights of the offender used to be central to the justice system, protecting the individual, this seems to have changed significantly. The target of reducing crime is one that we would all share in, but the likes of Freire and Gandhi maintain that it does matter how you get there. There

should be some protection for the individual yet the grouping together of so many nuisance behaviours into the antisocial category can demonise a person and create a witch-hunt to deal with them. The problems of defining anti-social behaviour, and its subjectivity to the views of third parties makes for an unethical process where citizens are not treated equally and democracy becomes an exploitative process by those who understand ‘the system’:

‘...the criminal justice system is more explicitly becoming a criminal law service working for victims and the ‘moral majority’.’
(Squires, 2006 p. 151)

Here lies the problem with the utilitarian viewpoint – justice becomes secondary to widespread happiness:

‘...if considerations of justice are independent of considerations of utility, it is possible that the two could come into conflict, that an unjust social arrangement could produce more happiness than a just one.’ (West, 2004 p. 146)

Just because something is popular does not make it right. There is no denying the popularity of the ASBO process. However the use of such enforcement measures pays little regard to the welfare of the young offender and the causes of his/her behaviour in the first place.

Responsibility for the individual is taken away by the state which used to exist to protect their interests.

Justice Gap

Where once criminal and civil disputes were separate entities, anti-social behaviour brings the two together with increasingly tough enforcement strategies. If civil and criminal behaviour is not distinct anymore, and the boundaries between the two have blurred, then at the same time the understanding of the term ‘justice gap’ has also subtly shifted. Originally the term was used to refer to the:

‘...growing evidence of inequality and social exclusion in a society founded upon equal citizenship.’ (Squires, 2006 p. 146)

This understanding was based on the fact that every citizen was considered equal and yet some people did not seem to be able to access the same community resources as others. Squires claims that this understanding changed to focus on the need for criminal justice as social justice evaporated, especially in the most deprived areas. Now, however it refers to:

‘criminal justice system performance – justice through enforcement.’ (ibid.)

So the emphasis is not on social justice and equality but on forcing people to comply with a certain way of behaving. The justice gap comes to define those who have escaped the attentions of the legal system up till now. The redefinition of the justice gap creates a new division in our communities – not entirely of class but between those who are included and those who are excluded:

‘In terms of class divisions, it may be that there is no longer a definitive power elite; but at the other end of the class structure, some sociologists would argue that there is an ‘underclass’, defined by their economic and social exclusion.’ (Haydon, 2003)

The modernisation of the legal system has not only had the effect of blurring distinctions between civil and criminal law but has also created new divisions in our society.

Pro-Social Behaviour

If antisocial behaviour then becomes defined by what is unacceptable, perhaps it would be worth considering what pro-social behaviour looks like and thereby considering its opposition. A former political strategist for the Prime Minister, Matthew Taylor has since joined the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce (RSA). He has written a document entitled ‘Pro-Social Behaviour – The Future: It’s Up To Us’ which calls for:

‘...a fundamental shift in the way we view democracy and social change, from an us-and-them relationship between citizens and government to more of a partnership approach in which citizens make decisions instead of delegating that role to politicians.’
(Benjamin, 2006)

Taylor argues for social change where people at the grassroots are more empowered to change the social norms. He hopes to generate discussion about what it means to be a citizen and how to positively affect the communities around us. Maybe through a positive discussion of what the state expects from us, we can promote pro-social behaviour as an ideal? This fits with the Squires’ notion that the government pursues an agenda for Social inclusion which drives their rhetoric on anti-social behaviour.

Social Inclusion

‘Contrary to Margaret Thatcher’s infamous claim, for Blair, ‘there is such a thing as society’. However, New Labour’s commitment to social inclusion was always more qualified and conditional, subject to acceptance of a social contract imposing discipline and duties in stronger communities and now, apparently, requiring the expulsion of the ‘anti-social’’. (Squires, 2006, p. 150)

If the government has a policy for social inclusion then that comes at a price. People have the right to play an active part in their communities, yet as Squires highlights, this is conditional – based on an understanding of the welfare of all. Citizens have rights, but these must be ‘paired with responsibilities’ (Blair, 2006).

In their exploration of inclusive community programmes, Bentley, McCarthy and Mean have identified three goals of social inclusion: access to social goods, empowerment and institutional trust. (Bentley, McCarthy, Mean 2003)

Access to Social Goods

According to Bentley, McCarthy and Mean, all people should have access to 'basic social entitlement' e.g. housing, transport, schooling, hospital and welfare systems to feel included in society. These could be considered to be their natural rights as citizens.

Social inclusion as a New Labour policy, according to Squires, focused on 'sink' estates and marginalised communities initially (Squires, 2006 p. 152). In these areas, significant leverage could be applied to residents who were overwhelmingly in receipt of public housing and state benefits. There was a recognition that these communities were excluded, yet enforcement measures such as removal of benefits and housing seem to reinforce this position. Thus, a chicken and egg situation emerges where people who act anti-socially become excluded from society yet this may be the cause of their behaviour in the first place.

Blair's pairing of rights and responsibilities, invokes a social contract. In his 18th century treatise *The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed that people have natural rights which are not contingent on human actions or people's beliefs but are inherent in their very nature as human beings. (Rousseau, 1762).

It may be that a social contract attempts to define what natural rights look like for each citizen. However, if these are conditional, then they are not really rights at all. Any kind of contract or charter is therefore a counter-productive measure. Thomas Paine, in *The Rights of Man*, declared that,

'It is a perversion of terms to say that a charter gives rights. It operates by a contrary effect – that of taking rights away. Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants; but charters, by annulling those rights, in the majority, leave the right, by exclusion, in the hands of a few. ... They...consequently are instruments of injustice.'

(Foot and Kramnick, 1987 p317)

Perhaps the idea of a social contract is not as important as defining, understanding and communicating the rights we all share. Rousseau, maintained that an ideal society was one in which there is a contract. However, this was not to be between man and government but between man and man. (Rousseau, 1762)

It is not the role of government to tell us how to behave, but rather communities should be empowered to define that for themselves. Access to social goods involves our basic rights which should not be conditional upon a set of behavioural standards dictated by the government.

Empowerment

Empowerment means communities become less dependent on government to tell them how to behave, and more capable of generating their own solutions, thus enabling people to act autonomously.

This involves putting trust in people. Kant believed that what is reasonable behaviour can be universally understood. The 'Categorical Imperative' means that every individual's actions should be informed by the principle: that we should all act in the same way in similar circumstances i.e. as if it was a universal law. It leads to the question: if my actions were to become universal, what effect would this have on society? However, in an increasingly individualistic culture, I wonder how realistic it is for people to make this connection. Blair wants us to reconnect with society and his fear is that people no longer respect each other and take their feelings into account:

'Respect is a way of describing the very possibility of life in a community. It is about the consideration that others are due. It is about the duty I have to respect the rights that you hold dear. And vice versa. It is about our reciprocal belonging to a society, the covenant that we have with one another.' (Tony Blair, 2006)

This perhaps echoes the sentiments of Kant – that we should treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. Blair goes on to talk about methods for restoring respect in communities. If respect is an issue in our communities, then so is our confidence to challenge the behaviour of others, perhaps because of fear. The IPPR report (IPPR, 2006) suggests that adults feel powerless to intervene in situations where young people are engaging in criminal activity. Maybe this is due to the hype around anti-social behaviour, and the perception that all youth are out of control.

Yet the solution to the problem of ASB has to come from within the community. Kant's belief suggests that responsibility lies with individuals not governments.

‘...if we are to have values at all, we must value (respect) the existence and endeavours of rational beings. In this way autonomy prescribes its own limit. The constraint on our freedom is that we must respect the freedom of all: how else can our freedom issue in universal laws? It follows that we must never use another without regard to his autonomy; we must never treat him as a means.’ (Scruton, 1982 p.86)

Whilst Blair talks about the reciprocal relationships we have in a community, the tools and strategies for tackling anti-social behaviour are such that individual responsibility is diminished. Enforcement becomes the enemy of empowerment.

A typical example of this in action can be seen in this letter to a local newspaper entitled ‘Hood and Evil’:

‘I am writing to announce my enormous disgust with a wave of evil that is currently washing over our youth. I am talking about hoodies. Where I live... one cannot make a simple trip to buy one's groceries without being ogled at, or worse still, jeered at by these urban menaces. Something must be done. David Cameron may urge us all to ‘hug a hoodie’ but I'm afraid my only inclination is to give them a thick ear. Obviously, this cannot be

done so it is up to the government to do something. And fast.’
(Murch, 2007)

Institutional Trust

The final goal of social inclusion concerns faith in the system – the ability to trust the government and other agencies that act to promote and protect the welfare of all in the community. Over the last few years, a huge increase in legislation and intervention into our daily lives arouses suspicion of the powers that be. Increase in CCTV technology, and evermore draconian measures to tackle ASB erode the civil liberties that we used to take for granted.

In their article entitled ‘Shared Leadership’, Doyle and Smith identify the key principles of ethical leadership as inclusiveness and elevation (Doyle and Smith, 2001). That is to say that everyone should be involved in the decisions made, or at least represented, with their views heard and feelings considered. Furthermore, by being involved, they should feel better and wiser or elevated as a result. This of course requires participation at all levels and builds trust in those who make decisions. Squires’ scepticism in the motivation of the government at tackling ASB represents a lack of faith and trust in the political system. This seems to be regarded as a fairly widespread phenomenon at the moment with declining numbers exercising their democratic right to vote. If we lack faith in our government to solve the problem of anti-social behaviour then we must look elsewhere for solutions. This has a wider impact on our perception of life in the community.

Autonomy of Youth – A Cultural shift

In our society, the view we have of children is changing and how much we hold them responsible for their actions.

‘Family members are encouraged to behave more as individuals and families themselves tend to be seen, rather as institutions

providing opportunities for their various members.’ (Smeyers and Wringe, 2003 p. 314)

In an increasingly individualistic culture, the attitude of parents is shifting to allow their children to make their own decisions. Nevertheless, there are also conflicting demands and expectations on parents to provide increasing opportunities and to enforce good citizenship in their offspring.

‘Such conflict may generate a partial retreat or even total withdrawal from responsibility on the part of the parents’, (Smeyers and Wringe, 2003 p.315) especially since the state seems ever more eager to intervene in the role of parenting with the onset of extended schools provision for example. Smeyers and Wringe argue that parents may even begin to feel powerless to decide what is right for their children. Hence the social gap between the generations widens:

‘As is well known, many children possess their own rooms, radio and TV sets, CD players, computers, individual bank or savings accounts, phones and so on. To lead one’s life independently as early as possible has almost become an educational aim and as such is consistent with the prevailing social climate.’ (Smeyers and Wringe, 2003 p.315)

With the lowering age of criminal responsibility, what demands are we placing on our youth? They are expected to act like adults, taking sole responsibility for their behaviour from an early age. If they do not behave in a certain way, government intervention will follow. Children as young as 10 have been ‘named and shamed’ and given ASBOs (Shifrin, 2005). Surely there are better methods of intervention for ones so young. And yet, an increasing focus on anti-social behaviour distracts us from considering other issues that affect young people. Squires notes that ASB is entirely about behaviour – symptoms and not causes:

‘Motivation and intention are largely irrelevant which explains why ASB control is unconcerned about mental health problems, learning difficulties, addictions, domestic violence and other

potential problems that are common features of ASB cases.’
(Squires, 2006 p. 157)

We continue to see an increase in social inequality as those who refuse to behave in a certain way are continually excluded from communities. The growing social discord is further exacerbated by the extreme targeting focus of government strategies and funding dependent on measurable outcomes. With reference to the Youth Service, Squires can see how the shift in emphasis from all young people to those ‘at risk’ of ASB forces youth provision to work with minority groups:

‘In this way a universal service becomes a potentially divisive and selective service working to crime prevention targets rather than youth citizenship and inclusion.’ (Squires, 2006 p. 154)

Surely this situation gives rise to a sub-culture of ASB rather than encouraging positive integration of young people and communities.

This generation has come to be defined as antisocial – the worst in Europe. As Squires notes, this has a knock on effect for our social and economic future, with community cohesion threatened (Squires, 2006 p. 147). If antisocial behaviour itself was a problem for communities then the measures used to tackle it fuel further division in our neighbourhoods. We are criminalising a generation and the real danger is that the subsequent effects will not be noticed until it is too late.

Conclusion

Central to Squires’ argument is the assertion that measures to tackle anti-social behaviour are driven by political factors and not in response to some new social ill that threatens community life in Britain. Indeed, he argues that antisocial behaviour has always been with us in some form.

However, with its obsession with modernising the legal system, New Labour is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Driven

by a utilitarian vision of life in Britain, an increasing justice gap emerges. This is unethical as justice becomes secondary to popularity.

Secondly, their attempts to promote social inclusion actually creates a new social divide, not of class, but of attitude and behaviour. The idea of a social contract actually takes away people's rights, making them conditional on behaviour. This is patronising and creates greater division between young people and the government.

Enforcement measures disempower communities to take responsibility for problems on their doorstep and trust in the government to solve our problems is eroding. The government should be less concerned with increasing legislation but instead invest in community infrastructures and youth provision which understands the local issues and builds relationships between community groups.

The wider impact of the current cultural climate is that young people are expected to be adults far too quickly, forcing a shift in the way youth provision and education are delivered. Consequently, we have a culture of anti-social behaviour among a new generation often demonised in the press. The criminalisation of youth has potentially huge implications for our future.

In a radio interview, Conservative leader David Cameron called for a 'revolution in responsibility'. He claimed that:

‘...measures like anti-social behaviour orders (Asbos) have been counter-productive, because they allow people to abdicate responsibility for their actions.’ (BBC, 2007)

Whilst Cameron may have a point, it is difficult not to see this as further political rhetoric concerned more with electioneering than a real concern for the youth of today. He presents no alternative solution and so the politicisation of ASB looks set to continue. Whilst this issue is used as a political football, the actual welfare of young people comes much further down the agenda.

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What is socially useful?

Sally Wilson

I have recently become a mother. The experience and activities relating to having and raising a child are huge and I could never describe them to the reader fully. I do, however, believe that there are certain aspects of motherhood which suit the criteria of being socially useful. To do this, I will need to establish what I personally understand as being socially useful, and why giving birth to Josie is this. I understand that the question of what is socially useful is very subjective and that my views on this are bound to be affected by my cultural background and maybe by the fact that I am an agnostic.

As a starting point, Winnacott (1990) states that

“A parent’s job of seeing their children through...provides the only real basis for society, the only factory for the democratic tendency in a country’s social system.” (1990:124)

As Josie is a baby, she is at what Erikson (1995) would describe as stage one of development. She is utterly dependent on me as a mother to fulfil her needs. Her task at this stage, Erikson argues, is to establish trust. Winnacott describes my meeting this request for trust as an *“immense contribution to the individual and society that the ordinary good mother with her husband in support makes at the beginning, and which she does simply by being devoted to her infant”* (1990:124). I could also argue that by giving birth, I am furthering the human race, and that as a possible taxpayer of the future, she may help to create a good economy for the country and provide for, and support, both the old and the young. If she were a taxpayer, though, would this necessarily mean that my having her has been socially useful?

When addressing this question should I also consider the current political climate, reflected by government policy. Many would argue that having and raising children is not given the level of respect and attention by the government here as it is in, say, France, for example. There, the birth rate is healthier and parents of three children or more are given 1000 Euros a month to care for them. In contrast, the English Government encourages us to start saving for our child's future by issuing a £250 Trust Fund Voucher. No financial help is given to parents who want to stay at home to care for their children in their formative years. So would the government actually see my role as socially useful? We also need to be mindful that Government policies worldwide may not reflect an agenda of what is useful for society, as extreme examples of dictatorships show, however cleverly marketed their ideologies may be. Gramsci (YMCA: 2004) argues that school, for example, is an institution used to promote the state's aims; this doesn't mean then that schools are necessarily for the good of society.

How I raise my child is another way of judging whether I can be deemed to be carrying out a socially useful task. It is a particular element of this that I plan to focus on here. There are many factors other than my approach as a parent, which may affect a young person's development, such as environmental and financial factors. Some studies on child development argue that nature and nurture "interact continuously to guide development" (Atkinson & al, 1996:71). It is the nurturing element of this that I am concerned about. However, I can see, partly as a result of my work, that the experiences that I am responsible for creating for Josie during 'sensitive periods', may shape her future course of development in a manner that would be difficult to change later. (Atkinson & al, 1996:72)

When addressing the question of what is useful for society, it is also important for me to look at my perception of society. Shaw complains that American "*society has spawned an entire generation of cognitively smart but emotionally stunted children who can't appreciate the feelings and needs of other*

people.” (2003:10) It could be said that this could be said of English society too; a symptom, maybe, of a postmodern age, influenced by capitalism and rapid industrial and technological progress. Whilst I don’t necessarily agree with Shaw’s generalisation, it is true to say that in my practice I am often concerned by the lack of empathy I witness in many of the exchanges that take place between students, and between students and teaching and support staff.

Our values “guide our conduct” (Reich, 1982:19) and as a parent I am keen to promote such values as justice and fairness. So what is my vision of a society that I wish Josie to be a part of, and to contribute to? For me it is one that “*embraces serenity, compassion, free-spiritedness and happiness*” (Biddulph, 2003:281) *Where members of society “support the interests and needs of others as well as their own”* (YMCA, 2005:25) Alphonse Amolo describes my vision perfectly in his depiction of the ethos shared by the community groups in Kisumu, Kenya. They “*promoted the habit of supporting one another in the community by fostering close human relations by working towards an environment that promotes the growth and development of every human being living interacting within the neighbourhood.*” (YMCA, 2005:42) This philosophy, and the way of life it encouraged, managed, in Amolo’s view, to counteract the negative effects of urbanisation and capitalism that we, in the western world, have sadly become accustomed to.

I believe that I cannot work towards this philosophy without recognising that developing Josie’s emotional intelligence is the most important task for me to undertake. For it is this skill which enables babies to “*manage their moods, have empathy for others, and become social beings who can develop and maintain good relationships*” (Gordon: 2005 pp 33). Gordon goes on to describe emotional literacy as something which creates a capacity for “pro-social behaviour” (2005:33). She states that this is because “*the more aware the child becomes of his own emotions and their effect on him, the more he is capable of recognising emotional states in people around him and is aware of the effects created by different emotions.*” (2005:33). Empathy is the most important

building block for creating strong and caring relationships, wherever in the world you are.

“Emotional fitness is not something parents can take for granted – it has to be taught. And we have to start early.” (Hogg, 2005:48)

How I interact with Josie is already, then, a crucial influence in her acquiring the skills she will need to interact positively with others. Indeed, the relationship I share with Josie is one of the first she will ever have and I have a responsibility for it to be *“a template for positive, empathic human relationships.”* (Gordon, 2005:6) as *“personal relationships are such a crucial part of our heritage as social beings.”* (Rutter and Rutter, 1982:3)

Good human relationships are what Gordon calls “the centre of what creates a civil society” (2005:6) by building these skills I am laying the foundation for how my child interacts with others as a citizen and maybe as a parent herself. By doing this, I will be helping Josie take “key steps towards collaboration and civility” (Gordon, 2005:8). The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative states that *“when you look into a baby’s eyes and smile you are triggering a biochemical reaction which will cause its social brain to grow”*. I am already building her social skills by smiling at her then, and what an enchanting and unforgettable experience this is! When Josie gurgles and babbles away in her own language I can see that more often than not, she is trying to engage my attention and it is, as Hogg argues, crucial that I connect with her and take part in this “social and emotional dance” (2005:71). When I smile or respond by talking or laughing, I am already modelling social interaction and showing her that I am there for her and can be trusted. “With each emotional moment, and each appropriate response, you build up a reservoir of trust” (Hogg, 2005:72); it is trust that “lays the groundwork for your baby’s emotional fitness in the coming years” (Hogg, 2005:72).

Many of the young people I have worked with have had this trust betrayed at an early age and they have certainly struggled emotionally. Even the smallest interactions Josie and I have shared are therefore vital.

It is not always easy, or convenient, however, to respond to her when she cries or speaks to me. There are so many other demands on my time, such as writing this report, for example. Sometimes when I leave the room, Josie's babbling gets louder and more persistent, and when I return she rewards me with a cheeky smile! She has also cried before, when I have broken off a conversation with her to turn off the oven, for example. I often struggle with guilty feelings as a result of this.

By saying things such as "it is okay Josie, I guess you are tired and a bit grumpy, you have had a long day," "okay love, are you bored now?" or "I am going to wash your face now, it may be a little bit of a shock, but it is important to get it clean." I am already acknowledging, respecting and naming emotions for Josie, modelling empathy and recognising her individuality. As Gordon, (2005) says:

"The give and take of reading and responding to cues lays the foundation for the emotional learning that allows empathy to take root and flourish." (Gordon, 2005:34).

In terms of being socially useful, Josie has brought so much happiness to so many people already, from an elderly man walking past the pram to a sick patient in hospital. I discovered this very quickly, and it was most apparent when she spread smiles throughout the hospital ward my Dad was in. When people talk or smile at her, she responds instantly and intuitively to this human interaction. I can see that she relishes all of the countless new experiences she is presented with, especially those in which she meets new people. As a baby, the emotions she shows are spontaneous and natural. They are not controlled by socially constructed barriers. She "loves without borders or definition." (Gordon, 2005:7) She is ignorant of differences as defined by society, such as racism, classism or sexism. This, I find, is awe inspiring. Josie is a powerful and earnest teacher.

I have already startled her by singing too loudly when playing a game with her; she screamed out and then started to cry. Was this the first time she had shown fear? When she cries, I feel a range of emotions

myself, so closely are they tied up with hers and it is at these times that I am most conscious of the all consuming power of the parent child relationship. So my 4 month old is already expressing a range of separate and distinct emotions. I am gradually learning to recognise these and, from them, her emerging personality. She makes repetitive “ugging” sounds when she is bored, shrieks red-faced when she is hungry, and cries desperately whilst flailing her arms and legs about when she is tired. Within this report I hope to have shown that I have learnt just how crucial my role is in developing Josie’s emotional intelligence and empathy, even at such an early age and how the smallest exchanges of communication are essential parts of this.

And what of my empathy? How has this experience informed my own understandings? As an older parent, who has shared childbirth and parenting with a supportive and loving partner, I am now in awe of single and young mothers. I have to agree with Winnacott, who states that in the spirit of a sense of community and citizenship that I have already alluded to, *“someone must act for the young mothers who are having their first and second babies and who are necessarily themselves in a dependent state”* (1990:126)

Accessing many shops and restaurants has been difficult and at times impossible with a pram. I have, now, a small inkling of how it is to be a wheelchair user. As a mother I have felt, at times on trial in a sense, observed and judged, whether it is on the bus, with relatives or in the supermarket. So many people have strong opinions on parenting and are not afraid to express them; mothers in particular are often vilified in the press. Motherhood is demanding both physically and mentally, its relentlessness does not necessarily allow for changes in circumstances or emotional frailty. Unfortunately, the confines of this report do not allow me to elaborate on this.

Of course, building Josie’s emotional intelligence and capacity for empathy is a process that I have only just started; this report’s real conclusion is a long way off. I would however, like to conclude with the

words of Gordon, who expresses the wonder of Josie's potential perfectly, and recognises that this is rarely acknowledged:

“There is an unexpected magnificence in our children and an unestimated power in their ability to change our world for the better...we have managed to harness the power of the wind, the sun and the water, but have yet to appreciate the power of our children to affect social change.” (Gordon, 2005:9)

I hope to have illustrated that I am keen to and have already started to equip Josie with the skills she may need to contribute to this should she wish to.

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[www.Babyfriendly.org.uk/maling/updates/News Update from Unicef UK
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Is Community Education A Myth?

Natalie Bell

Introduction

Education is generally viewed as a positive idea but almost 30 years ago Holt described 'education' as rather sinister:

Education...is the deepest foundation of the modern and world wide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and 'fans', driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy and fear. My concern is not to improve education but to do away with it'.
(Holt, 1977:8)

His words are reminiscent of Illich who attacks the school system stating that it 'instils in the pupil the myth that increased production will provide a better life' and is 'a method of social control'. (Illich, 1996:74). Although I may see my work as challenging injustice in society, I am being supported by public funds and agencies who arguably want evidence that I am helping to control the behavior of 'difficult' young people for the benefit of the state.

I have realised during the research for this assignment I am both naïve and ignorant of the context in which I operate as an informal educator. Perhaps I have felt uncomfortable when thinking about the meaning behind the career and society I have chosen to be in. I sadly feel that most educators would struggle to commit to the following challenge:

Can we, the post-Thatcherite generation indulge in political education? Have we the courage, the ingenuity, the revelatory potential for such a project? Perhaps that is the most profound

question for the professional who, unavoidably works by and for the rules of the state- through its various formal and informal agencies that it directly and indirectly funds- to forward its interests and protect the investment of those who most profit by its continuance (Belton, 2006:12-13).

For the purposes of this assignment I will define the community as Gilchrist does, where a 'community' can be residents in a specific 'geographical' area, 'a collective brain' or a group who emerge from 'oppression' or meet for social reasons. The informal education which happens in this community setting can range from conversations leading to 'fresh insights and innovative ways of working' to 'transform(ing) people from being angry, but helpless, victims to becoming agents of their own liberation'. (Gilchrist, 2004:109-110).

In the broadest sense, community education is learning outside a classroom, where the student is discovering new concepts through their own evaluation, choice, reflection upon experiences and with the input of dialogue with others. I will explore several aspects of community education being a myth in the context of being a youth worker working in a typical setting and will endeavour to come to some relevant conclusions for our practice.

Who do community educators exist for?

There are a number of perspectives worth considering. Community education is often seen as valuable to those who do not engage with formal learning settings, for example, teenage parents, young offenders, refugees, and truants, individuals with special needs or in circumstances which do not allow the individual to access the mass route to education. School is seen to be the starting point of learning for most and can be a place of exclusivity and hierarchy where individuals must fit the mould or face exclusion.

As described in great detail in *Youth In Society*, I feel that we are involved in a complicated 'game' that young people are led to play alongside us. It is true that I feel that as a worker I am encouraged to distinguish the young people I work with into 'different groups and individuals as "suitable for treatment" (Tucker, 2005: 82). It is the policy makers who tell us how to deal with which young people and how. I have only been a youth worker for a few years and I recognise many of the youth initiatives and themes brought in by the government listed in *Youth Work: a Manifesto For Our Times*: teenage pregnancy, NEET, drug abuse, social cohesion, youth offending.....I find it alarming that youth work initiatives are often the result of a 'panic' which :

not surprisingly, have tended to focus on the behaviour of working class young people (often young men), located in socially and economically deprived inner city communities. In addition, media scrutiny has been applied to specific aspects of youth activity.... Work with young offenders is frequently couched in terminology of 'soft options' and 'treats for bad boys' (Tucker, 2005: 84-85)

I empathise with the issue that youth work is not measurable in timescales, products and numbers. How can we measure 'greater self realisation' and the maximisation of an individual's potential? It is hardly surprising that non youth work professionals can be left 'unclear and at worst sceptical about what youth workers do' (Merton, et al 2004:34). Community educators exist for individuals who want their services and for the powers which pay for them to exist. They deal with the 'problem' citizens and those who are vulnerable. Some community educators exist out of pure compassion for others and out of a need to 'do good'. I know of many individuals who work tirelessly with young people for no financial reward in order to 'give back' and feel more valued themselves.

Does the language of community education have any meaning outside of the professional sphere?

It may appear that the jargon used to describe processes in community education is elitist and belonging to a special method of learning. This is actually not the case at all. 'Reflection' is not a new practice. In many religions it is the method of making sense of one's self and one's actions. We cannot learn from the past and improve our future unless we analyse and learn from experiences both positive and negative.

'Dialogue' or conversation is merely the act of speaking with others. The experiences and emotions of others can reveal a lot of valuable learning which can inform us deeply without having to go through certain experiences ourselves.

As pointed out by Mary Wolfe:

through conversations we seem to free our own particular ideas and thinking from the existing limits of our current understanding. In such instances, real, human participants build on each other's contributions, acknowledging or refining the part each plays so that they work together with an increasingly shared resource.
(Wolfe, 2004:129)

I have retained most of my learning about young people through interaction, enjoying the intensity of learning which is energised by raw experience and reliving of a real situation.

Thinking in and on action is something anyone in a highly responsible position should do. Woods sums up the benefits of thinking in and on action as 'a very common way in which we all obtain new insights, learn new theories or revise old ones about how the world works.' (Woods, 2005: 216). Anyone who has to make important decisions which carry risk and have direct impact would have to be able to think about situations in a careful 'what if' and 'what could have been better?' manner rather than in an emotional reactive way.

Who are community educators?

So who are community educators? Are they a new phenomenon? Many religious figures, political leaders, rebels and philosophers could be seen as informal educators- individuals who questioned and criticised opinions, beliefs and values. In this society where communities are complicated, ever changing and there is often communication breakdown it is obvious that the government would place community education as a necessary structure to enhance the services provided to society. Depending on the new 'panic', community educators are youth workers, Connexions advisors, workshop leaders, teenage pregnancy advisors, mentors.... and so on.

As stated by Easthope the school system originates from a 'hierarchical social structure based on power that maintains stability'. I believe that informal education such as youth work has its roots in a:

'contract community' where 'individuals are celebrated as individuals, but where stability and order remain important and a mystical concept in the realm of ideas, the 'general will' or the 'collective consciousness', binds the society together'. (Easthope, 1975:12)

In my view, youth work funded by public funds is not set in the 'communitas' which gives 'no importance or attention to social structure or values'. (Easthope, 1975:12). Educators in this field are the ones we study and aspire to find inspiration from and tend to be political in their approach, for example Friere, Nawal al-El Saadawi, Illich. Youth workers have to follow the many government policies and guidelines and be regulated whether they believe in them or not.

Why am I a youth worker?

I want to enable young people to have access to opportunities so that they can reach their full potential. I despise young people being held back, not offered chances, being stereotyped and patronised. I am

concerned by the apparent lack of awareness young people have about politics and culture. I recently visited a club where the young people had celebrated Black History month by simply watching Greek dancing at school and had no knowledge of the country Vietnam! I agree with Bruner's statement:

‘what is the point is the procedure of enquiry, of mind using, which is central to the maintenance of an interactive community and a democratic culture. One step is to choose the crucial problems, particularly the problems that are prompting change within our culture. Let those problems and our procedures for thinking about them be part of what school and class work are about’. (Bruner, 1996:98).

Selfishly I hope for a positive future rather than a bleak one. If young people are not holistically supported in becoming healthy minded citizens then society will suffer as a whole. My main concerns for young people today include the media, capitalism, loss of self awareness and respect for others.

Conclusion

I do not feel that my role is to tell young people what to do or how to behave, but to ask young people to look at themselves and see if they could be stronger, more confident, happier, healthier, think before they speak or act and have self control. As my workplace, SE1 United, is youth led, I feel lucky that I have this aim to pin all my practice on. I would find youth work much more difficult if I had to work in a highly structured setting which is output driven with strictly set agendas. It seems criminalizing and patronizing to reduce young people to numbers and letters in order to earn the opportunity to do positive projects. It is also unfair of government policy to expect 30% of youth work to result in ‘accredited outcomes’. These views are echoed in an article in Young

People Now where Dillon Hefferman, UK Youth Parliament member stated that his concern was that young people were not consulted about government decisions about youth clubs stating:

We asked young people about this and their response was, ‘we’ve been at school all week, we don’t want to go along for two hours more on Friday night’.....I know there’s a place for informal learning, but when clubs are being closed down questions have to be asked. (see Appendix 1, para 9).

I was relieved to see that young people’s feelings and development of ‘emotional intelligence’ are a priority in the manifesto by Bernard Davies. The SE1 United project also meets most of the statements in the elements of configuring youth work such as ‘voluntary participation, seeking to tip balances of power in their favour,respecting and working through their peer networks’ (Davies, B 2005:18). I would find it personally difficult to work for an organisation doing youth work that is not youth led.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if youth workers ran an informally taught ‘school’ or learning centre in partnership with teachers or without traditional teachers, and whether young people would go to school at all if it were not compulsory. Will Illich’s ideas of learning webs with skill exchanges and directories of educators be a reality sooner rather than later? With new technology and globalization learning is becoming more flexible. As Ling suggests with reference to the ever changing world we live in and its education system:

We as educators cannot rely upon past approaches, nor can we bury our heads in the sand and pretend that the new era is not upon us. Radical action is essential. (Ling, 1998:211)

Youth work, as well as schooling systems, need to change to suit needs more appropriately. The main issue is the time it takes to ensure change happens appropriately and that we can all keep up. Perhaps the

‘extended schools’ agenda will begin this process of complementary holistic processes.

Community education is not a myth in a micro sense but could be construed as a myth when seen in the macro sense due to its hidden agenda when government controlled. It may be perceived as immeasurable, elusive, clumsy, misunderstood and patchy but will always be vital to the maintenance of a fairer, healthier, resilient society. Even if there were no government funding available for strategic projects, I believe there will always be exceptional individuals who will strive to make life a better experience for others in need in both a local and global arena.

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Mindful Practices: Buddhism and Supervision

Kai Wooder

Synopsis

Through my interest in both Buddhism and the supervision process I can identify a common language and theory that cross both practices. I will focus on the links I see between the concept of supervision and a number of Buddhist principles. In particular, my paper explores three key themes of Cause and Effect, Mindfulness, and Love, Compassion and Wisdom.

I will explore how using a Buddhist approach can add to or shape our professional practice of supervision. I begin by offering an outline of the processes which underpin Supervision and Buddhism in order then to highlight key approaches and understandings which inform both practices.

Supervision

Supervision is a process that positively encourages us to reflect on our professional practice, exploring attitudes and values and how they impact on our actions and interventions. The role of a supervisor is to enhance another person's ability to reflect critically on his practice so that an understanding of the basis for action can be developed.

According to Christian and Kitto, the first recorded supervision session happened when a man in battle apparently lost his nerve. The story indicates that a 'supervision session' began between the warrior and his charioteer. Through exploring questions about behaviour and duty, the warrior finally develops the clarity needed for him to decide on his next

course of action, saying, 'My delusions have been expelled. My mind stands firm. Its doubts are ended (Bhagwad Gita, (1944) Mentor. 2.130). What stands out in this story, in terms of the development of supervision principles, is that we learn nothing about the supervisor. No words of wisdom or advice are given, only a description of questions that encourage the warrior to reflect on his fears and enable him to develop a rationale for his thinking and a route for psychological movement.

Christian and Kitto describe supervision as both 'a particular kind of work and a particular kind of working relationship'. In supervision, the supervisor works with the other person to encourage him to think better about his work and actions: it is essentially a process that exists to benefit the supervisee, who remains central to a process in which the development of professional practice is the primary aim. The supervisor is required to control any temptation to push the discussion down a particular route or promote personal values and ideas - this is both a complex and a difficult task to achieve. It requires reflection-in-action of the supervisor at the same time as encouraging reflection-on-action from the supervisee. It is the role of the supervisor to enable the worker to understand his own working situations and 'to hold onto our needs, whether they are clever or good or helpful, in the interests of understanding' (Christian and Kitto, 2003:10).

It follows that, for supervision to be successful (that is, to operate to the benefit of the supervisee), the supervisor must exercise self-discipline to ensure the process stays true and meaningful. Persighetti describes how self-image and self-awareness can influence the supervision process. She argues that our notion of self is heavily influenced by how we think others see us. In this way, there is a danger that supervision can become a performance upon which the supervisor perceives she will be judged. This can involve constant personal questioning and a readjustment of behaviour that can take the supervisor away from really feeling, hearing and experiencing the process. Persighetti also believes that the more we

engage with an issue or discussion the less we think about ourselves and our image, thus allowing the process of supervision to become more effective.

This draws parallels to the Buddhist notion of Mindfulness. As a supervisor, I have experienced times when being pre-occupied with self-doubt has jeopardised meaningful engagement with the issues the worker has raised. This has led to an ineffective session, which itself re-enforced notions of self rather than the focussing upon the supervision process. Making a conscious commitment to engage with the supervisee's issues can, and does, support the supervisor in being 'on purpose'.

Buddhism

Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development that is said to lead to insight into the true nature of life. The practice was developed by a man named Siddhartha who was said to have gone on a journey of self-discovery and who, through reflection and meditation, achieved a level of personal insight which he called 'Nirvana' meaning 'Enlightenment'. Siddhartha was so inspired by his experiences that he spent the remaining 45 years of his life promoting spiritual development to others.

In the last 2,500 years Buddhism has manifested itself in many different forms and individual schools of thought. Much has been written and discussed as a way of understanding Buddhism: some call it a religion, others a philosophy for life. Some work to Buddhist rules or codes of conduct whereas others see Buddhism as being about individual and human experience and therefore exempt from fixed definition. What is clear is that Buddhism is concerned with the ever-present and inescapable phenomena of everyday human experiences and emotions: love, fear, hate, sadness, passion, pride, anger and how these feelings and emotions can shape our interactions with others. The basic principle of

Buddhist teachings is clear: nothing is fixed or permanent, we all have the ability to change, and all actions have consequences. Buddhism also offers practical methods, such as meditation, chanting and reflection in order for people to develop their own experience and apply this within their lives. Through its teachings and practical methods, Buddhism encourages those involved to have respect for self, to have respect for others and to take responsibility for their own actions (Raula, 1999). There are over 350 million Buddhists worldwide, following many different forms of practice and traditions. All Buddhist traditions are characterised by non-violence, lack of dogma, tolerance for difference and usually, by the practice of meditation.

Neither Buddhism and Supervision lay claims to be exact sciences and so perspectives on either are best understood as opinions and explorations based on personal experiences and theory. Both practices involve a series of understandings or events that embody social, environmental and reflective practices. This gives the practice of either Buddhism or supervision a unique and individual opportunity to offer a process which is fluid, flexible and changeable. At the same time, both practices can be perceived as problematic since they cannot provide participants with rigid definitions. It seems that the underlying roots of both practices lie in an individual relationship with a process rather than an end result. Within both Buddhism and supervision, judgement can only come from within. There is no Manager or Deity or Enforcer to tell us what is right or wrong or indifferent, it is our role as participants in the process to develop our own thinking about our own actions. It is precisely this focus on thoughtful action as a focus which links together supervision with Buddhism. Indeed, within this view of a process of thoughtful enquiry, various Buddhist principles can be seen to inform supervisory practice.

Cause and Effect

The linking of Cause and Effect is central to an understanding of informal education in general. Youth workers often do not see the benefits of their interventions with young people at the time of engaging with a particular group or individual. This does not mean that the worker hasn't made a clear decision about a course of action in order to encourage a specific effect. This is also true of supervision, in that Effect is often separated from the Cause by time. We then have a continuum of making new Causes whilst living out the Effects of previous ones and in this way it is difficult to determine where the Effects originated. The role of the supervisor is to work with this continuous loop of learning, to encourage the supervisee not only to work with uncertainty but to embrace it as fundamental to his work.

At the heart of the supervision process is the question of whether the supervisor's intention is to encourage the supervisee to reflect on his own actions within Cause and Effect or to make decisions and interventions that cause intended effects with the supervisee. In order for learning to take place we need to do both, but in doing so the supervisor has to be clear that the reasons for interventions are rooted firmly in helping the supervisee to think better about his practice.

Peter Senge describes the impact of Cause and Effect on organisations as well as individuals by saying 'we learn best from our experience, but we never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions. We tend to think that Cause and Effect will be relatively near to one another, thus when faced with a problem it is the 'solutions' that are close by that we focus upon. Classically we look to actions that produce improvements in a relatively short time span' Senge, (1990:23).

This can also be the case within supervision. It is common for a supervisor to want to see results, a change in thinking or a tangible outcome within a very short space of time. In a climate driven by the

attainment of targets, it feels natural to link achievement to definite outcomes. The supervisor wants to know that interventions have been successful and have made a difference but in trying to force the process into measurable outcomes we actually devalue the whole point of supervision – the process. In terms of Buddhism, this would be viewed as an ‘Ego’ situation, in that we are all driven by personal desires and these can at times impact negatively on our intentions towards others. Supervisors need to recognise that their Effects can be based on personal ego, the results of which develop unintentional causes and effects within the supervision process.

Buddhism views Cause and Effect as a process of change. As in supervision, the change is not seen as being brought about by chance and is certainly not seen as chaotic – it results from actions based on intentions. Within Buddhist language, Cause and Effect is also known as Karma. The philosophy is that all actions should be made from a place of positive intentions. We may never learn the outcomes of our actions and nor should we need to - it is the process of acting from good intentions that a person should be most concerned with. To the Buddhist, knowledge of self should be obtained through one’s own reasoning and experience; faith, scriptures and revelations are not considered to be infallible roads to truth. The process of supervision gives the same opportunity for change. Both parties enter the process in a conscious way, using interventions (actions, or Causes) as a way in to personal truth and to effective change.

Mindfulness

The moment just before a person conceptualises a thing, an object, a feeling, is known within Buddhism as absolute Mindfulness. It is a moment of pure awareness without judgement or critical analysis. It reflects what is happening in real time and space and allows for a focus

on the here and now. Some people liken this feeling or focus to meditation, having the ability to be where they are mentally, physically and spiritually without any external factors interrupting their thoughts.

Mindfulness involves paying attention to being ‘on purpose’, making a conscious direction of our awareness. This is not to say that we will develop a Zen like state of mind or trance or that during a supervision session our minds won’t wander into thoughts unrelated to supervision. Being ‘on purpose’ or mindful means having the clarity to notice these distractions and then re-focus on the session in hand. Developing this focus within Buddhism is said to support the process of meditation (through contemplation or chanting), resulting in clarity and the ability to be open to troubling issues. ‘Once you begin to chant, you won’t be able to think about very much other than trying to pronounce the words correctly. After this has been accomplished most people find that anything that is concerning them will quite naturally surface in their minds. As chanting activates the wisdom of our Buddha nature, we will find that we gain some insight into our difficulties’ (SGI-UK: 2002).

Learning to be mindful through meditation or chanting is said to help develop the skill so that it can be used when not meditating, freeing our minds to focus purposefully on specific issues. It is a practice in itself and should not be confused with ‘awareness’. Being aware that we are listening is not the same as listening mindfully. The supervisor or supervisee who is ‘on purpose’ will deliberately notice the other person, observe their expressions, tone, words and emotions, will notice if their mind wanders and purposefully bring their attention back.

Purposefulness is a very important part of mindfulness; it means we are actively preparing to shape our state of mind. Being prepared for a supervision session ensures that the supervisor’s focus is central to the supervisee. There are some practical ways that we can encourage mindfulness within the supervision process. The YMCA George Williams College returns to the classical elements of Time, Task and Territory, as a way of helping the supervisor to understand her role and

her task. This supports the supervisor in getting prepared to be mindful by creating an environment supportive to listening and learning.

Preparing physically for a supervision session will support the mental preparation needed for mindfulness. Maslow argues the physiological needs described in time, task and territory need to be met before a person can open themselves to learning. We all need to feel that our practical and physical needs will be addressed. In very basic terms: if we are hungry then it can be difficult to concentrate, if we don't know where the exits are then it can be difficult to concentrate and if we are not sure when the meeting will end it can be difficult to pace oneself. The supervisor's role is not only to meet these needs for the supervisee, but also for herself.

Peter Senge refers to Personal Mastery or the Buddhist principle of Mindfulness when he comments that; 'People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never 'arrive'. Sometimes language, such as the term 'personal mastery' creates a misleading sense of definiteness, of black and white. But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a life-long discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, and their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see the 'journey' is the reward' (Senge, 1990:142).

Smith likens Senge's ideas to those of Scott Peck (1990) and Fromm (1979) who also demonstrate the discipline involved in developing personal vision, a commitment to truth and use of the sub-conscious. Their writings echo the principles of mindfulness and Buddhism in that there is no final destination; the process is the 'reward'. The same can also be said for supervision, it is not a process of absolutes, no right answers to be sought and no ending point for reflection. It is about searching for the 'truth' of a situation and applying that learning to practice.

Love, Compassion and Wisdom

The principle of love is cherished within Buddhism. In supervision, there is a parallel valuing of acts of humanity. Within supervision one can feel compassion, a need to understand the others person's point of view and gain an understanding of their experiences and beliefs. The great strength of supervision is the emphasis on process, as perhaps being of more significance than the individuals involved. Although few supervisors – and even fewer theorists – refer to this as a relationship of love, nonetheless there is a recognition that positive intentions, such as awareness and compassion, are necessary elements of fruitful supervision.

In my own experience of supervision I have been supervised by someone I didn't like. I thought she was a good and clear supervisor and I gained a lot through the sessions – but I just didn't like her. At first I thought this would be a problem, I couldn't see how I could open myself up to a process with someone I didn't connect with warmly, but by observing her professionalism and focus I learnt that it was the process of supervision that was important and not necessarily the personalities involved. I've had similar experiences with young people that I've worked with, some I just haven't liked, some I have liked and some I have loved. These feelings can be difficult to manage and the ability to reflect in action is certainly important here.

Rogers (1982) claimed that if he had a magic wand he would cause all teachers to forget they were teachers and instead they would hold the attitudes and skills of a facilitator. Within Buddhism, too, wisdom is not measured in terms of academia or having a general knowledge of the history of Buddhism but in terms of learning from life experiences and the ability to share these with others who choose to want to know. This is an important factor; a person must be willing and wanting to listen – if not, the conversation is pointless. As Buddhism is not evangelical in its approach, the sharing of knowledge is linked to supporting a person who wants to learn more about themselves rather than encouraging an

alliance with a religion or philosophy. Within supervision, wisdom is viewed in the same way. Supervisors are not tutors and are not required to assess academic arguments or impose deadlines, instead they become involved in a process of learning through discussion. The ability to ask questions of the supervisee in order for them to reflect on their own practice and interventions requires a certain form of wisdom. Is the timing right? Is the question clear? Why am I asking it? Is it being answered or avoided? Using wisdom in this way comes from work and life experience and ability to self-reflect. As in Buddhism, a supervisor can only work with a person who wants to work with her; the right to choose is essential, especially as it is the supervisee who leads the session. This is a refreshing view of wisdom as it bypasses age, gender, religion, race and sexuality.

Wisdom is integral to both Buddhism and Supervision but in a very particular way. As the Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama: 2000) reminds us ‘Sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck’ Wisdom is having the ability to look beyond a presenting situation (which may have been difficult) and develop an understanding of the learning opportunities that have taken place. Being optimistic is not enough; wisdom entails a search for the truth of what has happened and the benefits that this has brought.

In conclusion, there are many principles common to both Buddhism and Supervision. The underlying principles rooted in the processes of both practices include the notion of no endings, the process being the reward and that self-analysis can support development. In the end, of course, the view presented here can only be that, just opinions based on experience and this is because neither practice has, or probably ever will have, a final definition with which to compare itself. And for that, I’m happy. The benefits of both practices are that they are about relationships between people and in that way cannot be measured by outcomes or targets. I don’t believe that anyone can tell me that my perspectives on Buddhism are wrong and at the same time they cannot

tell me that I'm right. That's exactly what I value about supervision, the only person who can say if the session was a success or not is the supervisee because it is their relationship with the process that is the journey. T.S. Eliot's words in *Little Gidding* in *Four Quartets* sum up my relationship with both Buddhism and Supervision:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.*

We explore our journeys of self-discovery and thankfully, we never reach the end.

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Learning opportunity? The ‘joy’ of the professional journal

Mark Roberts

Introduction

This chapter will seek to introduce a couple of contrasting theories that will help describe and analyse the process of what is being called a ‘learning opportunity’. I will look at Smith and Smith (2006) who argue that relationships are fundamental to the process and contrast this with Illich (1980) who argues that professionals get in the way of people’s natural capability.

Using this backdrop I will suggest that individuals are creators of the learning opportunities and my role is to provide the materials for this. I will go on to analyse the notion of a ‘learning outcome’ before using practice examples to show how I have achieved the following:

- Established appropriate working relationships so that individuals may explore and clarify their needs, rights, risks, strengths, responsibilities and resources
- Worked with individuals to set goals and develop plans of action
- Provided information and advice to individuals

I will analyse the notion of ‘providing information and advice’ using the work of Taylor (2008) and Gilbert, (1993) I will suggest that this is related to society creating roles for young people that we can then work with as professionals. In the second part to this assignment, I will

introduce the idea of journal writing using Smith. I will go on to use ideas of Sadaawi (Belton, 2007) to argue that these ideas of learning are part of our ‘professional language’ and encourage individualism.

After analysis of an example of how my practice has developed from journal writing, I will offer a critique of journal writing suggesting that rather than enriching my life, it can inhibit communication. In conclusion, I will look to what my future may look like as a ‘professional’ working with individuals.

Creating learning opportunities with individuals

The term ‘learning opportunity’ is a somewhat awkward term to define and is associated with a particular set of processes. The Vines expository dictionary has a helpful definition of ‘learn’: *‘to learn by inquiry or observation’* (Unger and White, 1985:360) and ‘opportunity’ is defined as *‘a fixed and definite period, a time, season’* (Unger and White, 1985:449). The idea of inquiry and observation puts the emphasis for me on the learner as the creative person, rather than one who gains knowledge or skills (see Collins, 2000: 318).

Firstly, I will describe the process associated with ‘learning opportunity’ described by Smith and Smith. They emphasise the role and place of relationships in learning, they state that, *‘relationships are the basic source of learning’* (Smith and Smith, 2006: 39). They go on to explore the meaning of relationship as: *‘a link between people and it involves interaction’*. There is some truth in the notion that I can learn through my relationships, however I also learn a lot through reading and watching films; I can learn by being locked-up alone in a cupboard! So the idea that this is the ‘basic source’ puts me (the learner) in a position where I seem to rely on someone else for my learning rather than my own creativity.

Smith and Smith also suggest that to *'improve the quality of peoples' relationships we can enhance the hopefulness required to remain curious and open to new experiences'* (Smith and Smith, 2006: 39). This seems to assume that I/we know what a 'quality relationship' is; who can make the decision for someone else regarding what a 'quality relationship' is? And assuming my relationships are of the required quality and I then am able to make a judgement about how I can improve someone else's, does this make me an 'expert' in relationships? The example taken from practice develops this point:

Working with young Gypsies has often left me feeling a bit stressed as often they do not appear to be listening and seem in conversation to all talk at the same time as each other. My response to this could be to step in as the professional and 'improve' their relationship skills.

Alternatively, I might choose to inquire or observe the order and form of their relationships. For instance, I had a meeting with the parents of the same young Gypsies and the way they interacted as a group was very similar to the manner in which their children conversed. There was the occasional 'shut up', but that seemed to be acceptable to restore some order to the discussion. The order and form of my social / working relationships tend to proceed by one person speaking at a time.

However, this apparent politeness can also mask more authentic feelings. Duck supports this, *'social conventions occasionally encourage us to be polite (which is an interesting form of dishonesty in some sense), present images, or manage impressions or conceal embarrassing facts'* (Duck, 1986:70).

It is also worth considering the reason I may feel 'uncomfortable' in the situation with Gypsy families. I suspect is something to do with society's and quite possibly my own, suspicion and fear of particular groups. Smith and Smith say we deal with this by *'classifying ourselves as normal'* (Smith and Smith, 2006: 44) covering the impact of our own fears and insecurities when working with individuals. But do we create these contrasts in order to gain strength and power in situations when we feel threatened?

Other approaches raise questions about the process that involves me, the ‘professional’ worker.

Ivan Illich writes about the ‘professional’ and argues that this ‘agent’ seeks to interfere with what individuals are capable of achieving without them. In his essay ‘War on subsidence’ he states ‘*growth orientated work leads to standardisation and management of activities*’ (Illich, 1980: 6). We become dependent on the professional or expert.

An example of this in my own practice would be the growing field of ‘health and safety’ policy. This can be starkly seen in a case where police community support officers failed to try to save a drowning boy in Wigan (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk>). Even when the decision involved life or death, they were instructed to wait on for a qualified person.

Defence against the damages inflicted by development, rather than access to some new “satisfaction” has become the most sought after privilege. You have arrived if you can commute outside the rush hour....*The under classes are now made up of those who must consume the counter productive packages and ministrations of their self appointed tutors, the privileged are those who are free to refuse them.* (Illich, 1980:3)

I was working with two young people who were involved in music production. They refused to follow my ‘professional advice’. I was quite keen to get ‘a learning outcome’ so I was asking them if they wanted to learn how to programme their own beats. They said they did but in their own way. In this way, these two people created their own learning opportunity and I become the provider of the materials and resources rather than the creator of this opportunity. The following example emphasises this point, it is taken from a novel about three young people who form a rap group:

Mr Lang stretched out his arm out over the desk to shake Marga Man’s hand. ‘Pleased to meet you, I have heard about you. I heard that you helped the boys to record a CD and that you’re

being a great inspiration to them.’ ‘Not really’, Marga Man replied modestly. ‘They get on and do their thing and I just hold it all together. They create the beats, they write the raps, and it was they who decided to form de cooperative, so they are de creative force, I is just like a spectator throwing in comments from the side line.’ (Zephaniah, 2004: 117)

Given the above, we can summarise what may be described as a process of creating learning opportunities. The process involves the individual as the creator of their own learning and that relationships become part of this, but not central to it. But perhaps I see myself as more on the ground staff team, rather than a spectator; they prepare the football pitch for the players (the creators) but they may also never interact with the players. As such, relationship (as we might understand it in a common sense way), even interaction, is not *necessarily* needed for learning opportunities to arise. Indeed, they might arise sometimes not because of interventions but in spite of them. Equally, professional interventions might be understood to prevent as many learning opportunities as they might create.

It is worth considering how this understanding might impact on my understanding and delivery of the ‘learning outcome’. If the individual is the creative person in the process of learning, then I can no longer see myself as someone who can produce any outcome that I desire from the individual. Perhaps this in itself is an action that cherishes the dignity of the person.

Appropriate or appropriation?

What do we mean by an appropriate working relationship? I will work with a positive assumption that in an appropriate working relationship I am caring for the welfare of the individual and managing myself by understanding and working to policies and guidelines set out by my employee e.g. child protection policy.

I worked with C (a volunteer at a children's club) who had formally been a member of the children's club. When she reached the club's age limit she asked if she could continue coming as a 'helper'. This is how our 'working relationship' was established. We worked together in the club, but how did I help her explore her needs? I did take the time to speak to her about her concerns, therefore identifying her needs (she wanted the club open more often). But another way of looking at this could be that she was helping me explore my needs by asking me about the youth club. The learning outcome could have applied to both of us.

Two young people responded to an advert from Connexions (an agency that provides careers advice to young people). I was expecting unmotivated young people with low self-esteem (however that might be measured). But the young people who came to the meeting to discuss the project made their way from outside our borough, to a building they had not been to before, and to meet with a group of strangers; this feels like quite a show of confidence to me. I would argue that these young people were the creators of their learning and I/we the youth worker provided the materials (activity, transport etc).

Whilst meeting with the young people, there was a discussion about eating habits. One of them informed us that she consumed a large amount of crisps every day and this was an opportunity for some information and advice. However she recognised that she had to cut down and so she did. I could have responded with a healthy lifestyle chat instead I praised her strength of character in giving up.

Angela Taylor categorises the time of life these young people are going through she applies the familiar (yet imprecise) label 'adolescence'. She sees adolescence as a *'trying, confusing, and stressful time'* (Taylor, 2003: 2); she goes on to say that it is an opportunity for *'giving support by combining interpersonal skills and basic counselling skills with practical advice'* (Taylor, 2003: 3) However, the assumption here is again that all the knowledge lies with us and all the problems lie with the young person. I agree there is a lot of change going on for a teenager, but how do we judge their lives as

being confusing? The young people that take up much of my practice seem clear about what they want, and I am the confused one. What isn't a confusing time of life anyway? Getting into 'mature' long term relationships can be confusing, retirement and old age can be confusing. Middle age (so I'm told) is a confusing time for many. We have names for these confusing times too (the 'seven year itch', the 'male menopause' etc.)

The term adolescence is a relatively new idea, as we shall see. Gilbert explains it like this:

If in our recent history it was the industrial revolution which first identified the group which has now come to be known as adolescents, then in the twentieth century it has been a spin off from that industrial revolution – marketing and consumerism – which has created a whole adolescent or youth culture, and coined the word 'teenager' to boot. (Gilbert, 1993:13)

So in some respects, does this not call into question the work we do? What are the motives behind our 'service', if marketing and consumerism are behind the notion of 'youth culture'? What are the motives behind the media's attention on 'Hoodies' (Clothing worn by young people and adults!), 'ASBOs' (Anti Social Behaviour Order) and 'youth gangs'? Are these the sort of headlines that secure funding and create a job market?

My work with young offenders sets these questions in context. In particular, we try to set plans of action around their involvement in the youth club issues, but they also make their own plans, even in the most challenging of situations.

My position / role seems to be quite powerful. It would therefore be preferable to be thought of as someone who sees the capability of people rather than their incapability rather than abusing that power? Can someone overcome the 'obstacles' that face them without my advice (or without me defining life's happenings as 'obstacles?') But I do believe

that I do have a place as a provider of the ‘fabric’ that can be the raw material for people to become the creators of their learning.

Exploring and deepening your practice through journal writing

The word journal is ‘*a daily record of occurrences, experiences and observations*’ (www.dictionaryreference.com) - so why keep a journal? It has been put forward that there a variety of motives for writing a Journal, for example ‘*a journal is a friend that is always there and is always a comfort... It reflects back to me things that I can learn about my world and myself*’ (Smith, 1999, 2006).

This concept of journal writing has to a certain extent been accepted then developed into a professional practice by adding the term ‘learning’. Smith goes on to suggest that ‘*all journal writing must involve learning*’ and finally there is a method to it! Terms like ‘reflection’ and ‘deepening’ are used. This seems somewhat prescribed and perhaps can underline the professional language that Belton describes in his writing about Nawal El Sadaawi:

This process of developing professional words creates a reliance on academics and professionals to interpret the world. These are the elites with a direct stake in often-oppressive systems. Understanding is mediated through a group of people with little experience of poverty or hard laborious work – they do not know what it means to work hard on machines. The process masks the character of reality that can only be realised through the experience of people in the process of loving and living. (Belton, 2007:50)

Writing a journal is not a new experience for me. I have kept a journal at different times to write down my emotions, questions, thoughts and what this does for me is help me remember what happened. However, I think that it only is of use if I act on this in some way. On occasions, I have let others read bits of the journal; this I would consider creating a

learning opportunity for myself as questions arise from this and perhaps it also keeps some reality to it.

However, this journal writing seems to have aspects of ‘the self’ attached to it, for example in the quote used, ‘a journal is a friend’ – this suggests self-indulgence. Belton again referring to the work of Sadaawi argues:

For her, the notion of ‘self’ separates people into an artificial individuality, replacing the broad range of ‘real’ human relationships based on interdependence and mutuality with notions of ‘personal dependence’ and ‘autonomy’. (Belton, 2007:50)

How does this help me explore and deepen my practice? Firstly, I won’t assume what we mean by the term deepen. If we look at alternative words from the thesaurus (www.thesaurus.reference.com), ‘deepen’ can be used as a word for ‘worsen’ (complicate, exaggerate, magnify) or to ‘develop’ (advance, broaden, cultivate). In this instance, I will take the positive notion that we are looking at how it can ‘develop’ my practice.

During July 2007, I wrote in my professional journal; *‘I felt I was honest with her and said that I hadn’t managed the situation well.’* This is something I have continued to practise, being honest about my feelings and reasons for my actions. Having then continued this honesty about why I had to close a youth club session, I have explored how I manage myself. I have an understanding of my limits. The young people and I are then faced with having to deal with the consequences of our behaviour.

Why is writing a journal not a good idea? I found an article on writing journals and it was called ‘The power of the pen’;

Writing a journal can literally be life changing ... it is the key to discovering your own unique inner world. It lets you read your own life and see the world around yourself more richly, more deeply (www.theage.com.au).

The article was backed by medical research about how writing in this way can improve your health and well-being. However in the suggested

list of journals to read the first was Kurt Cobain.... *This collection of notes, lyrics, sketches and letters was drawn from 20 notebooks written by the Nirvana front man from the late 1980's until his suicide....* I could make an assumption that journal writing wasn't a comfort to Cobain in the way I have discussed.

It highlights to me that the assumption that writing a journal is 'enriching' maybe true for some people at some times. However, I feel my practice is enriched or made more meaningful by the communication I have with others. The nature of the work I do perhaps makes it even more important that I communicate with others on a personal, face-to-face and verbal level. I recently discussed the issue of 'communication' in a professional group. I learned that despite 'great' technology, I can be poor at communicating, for example in the contact I have with others in the group. Journal writing seems to further exclude others from my world this doesn't feel so comforting!

Conclusion

As I wrote this chapter, it seemed to come to life when I began to see myself not as the 'creator' of learning opportunities, but a person who prepares the ground for learning and one who makes sure things are in place for the individual to create (I am the 'groundsman' of learning). This feels like something more authentic than seeing myself as the manager on the sidelines ordering or making strategic decisions for the 'benefit' of the team under my management.

There is also the part communication plays in the process of learning opportunities and keeping journals can be a barrier to this. The points made above about professional interference can bring a sharp reality to what we think we are and do.

In terms of the future, my ideal would be that I could practice not using individuals as 'targets' or to try and 'measure' them to a prescribed 'outcome' but with honesty attempt to step aside to allow them to see 'what they are' to our profession and if they still want to work with me then I can supply them with what they might need to create!

But it flourishes, releases its energy, and acquires its adequate and classical form only where the worker is the free owner of his tools and resources; only then can the artisan perform like a virtuoso.
(Illich, 1980: 6)

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A Journey

Stephen Nelson (forward and postscript by John Peaper)

Forward (John Peaper)

The following profile relates to a student who studied with us from January 2006 – July 2007. During this eighteen month period, he was successful in gaining a Level 2 Certificate in Introductory Studies and a Level 3 Diploma in Youth Work (Foundation Studies). For the purposes of this paper, I would like to offer an account of the student's background and an outline of how his studies have impacted upon his career development.

Stephen Nelson was born in Barbados where he spent most of his childhood years. At fifteen, he came to England with his grandparents and settled in Archway, North London. After completing his last two years of mandatory education, Stephen embarked upon a career in banking. Moving up through the ranks, he became a bank manager at the age of thirty three. He continued his banking career for many years beyond, before finally taking early retirement in 2005.

In addition to his full time employment, like many youth workers, Stephen was an active volunteer in various church-based youth projects linked to his own faith. During this time, he gained a wealth of knowledge and experience in working with young people. This prompted Stephen to consider the possibility of accessing a youth related course in order to gain a professional qualification. As a result of his retirement, Stephen was in a position to pursue this goal and enrolled at the YMCA George Williams College in January 2006. Upon completion of his studies, Stephen was successful in securing full-time

employment as a Learning Mentor in St Bonaventure's School in Newham.

In terms of the impact that his studies has had in relation to making the transition from volunteer to paid worker, Stephen attributed much of this success to the learning gained during his studies, examples of which are evidenced within his self assessment of learning. From reading this document, you will no doubt agree that Stephen has undergone a steep learning curve which has allowed him to completely change his career path.

In relation to his current post, Stephen emphasised that the new skills that he has acquired as an educator, complement those gained through his time spent in banking. This, set in terms of his faith base, has allowed him to become a well rounded and confident worker. Stephen is very enthused by his role within the school and brings a lot of energy into his practice. Stephen was keen to highlight that the new school based 'mentors project' has had a very positive impact within the school, which is duly recognised by the head teacher and staff team. When I posed the question of whether he envisaged himself in this position three years ago, he replied "no way".

Stephen Nelson's self assessment of learning

I started the Introduction to Informal Education course in January 2006, and as stated in my interim self assessment, I was unsure as to whether I would be able to continue through to the next stage. I am now some six months down the line from then and I believe that things have changed significantly. For example, my worries about completing the course have gone and have been replaced with joy and excitement that I am nearing the end of this journey of studies. I am looking forward to graduating.

Since starting the foundation course, my understanding of youth work has broadened. I would say that I no longer work with tunnel vision. The reason for saying this is that before starting this course, my youth work was primarily faith based, with young people from a British or Caribbean heritage. However, over the past year, I have also been involved in a wider spectrum of youth work, being employed as a sessional worker in Newham. This has given me the opportunity to interact more closely with young people and workers from broader community and ethnic settings.

This has helped me to not only focus on personal reflective practice, but to train and encourage other workers to do the same. Before doing this course I had not given much thought to the area of reflective practice. I saw it as time consuming and unimportant and I felt that it was more of an opportunity for some people, within the team, to moan and criticise.

The course has helped me to see the positive benefits of reflecting on practice. I am now more confident in undertaking reflective practice, and I find that its advantages outweigh the disadvantages. I also realised that it is better to reflect sooner rather than later, when events are fresh in the mind. Reflecting has led to improvements, which would otherwise have been missed.

According to Jeffs and Smith, as informal educators, the actions which we take within various practices, are driven by our sense of “core values”. such as, “respect for others”; “The promotion of well-being”; “truth”; “democracy” and “fairness and equality” Sometimes the values of the young people at the different agencies where I work can be in conflict either with the values of the agency, the core values of informal education, or with my own personal values. For example, although the policy at our agency states no “swearing”, it appears to be almost second nature for some of the young people to engage in this kind of behaviour.

This is in conflict with my own value system, where young people would never swear in the presence of an adult. Having studied the 'living with values' system, I have come to realise that this will happen on some occasions, however I also realise that it is important not to let my personal values cloud my judgment, or effect the way I respond to the youth under these circumstances. This did not mean that I had to alter my values, it meant reviewing the policy and thinking of ways in which I would get the young people to think of the impact that kind of behaviour has on the younger members of the agency and the wider community. By having discussions with them, I also realised that, in some instances, their home value system supported this type of behaviour. The cycle can only be broken through persistent dialogue, and only in the last resort by imposing sanctions such as attendance bans.

It is acknowledged that working with young people as an informal educator is different to the mainstream (formal) education system, where more structured training and learning takes place. Despite the fact that informal education is not structured, with specific learning outcomes, I have been able to play a role in assisting the learning process. This is based on developing relationships with the individual, and since beginning my studies, I have been able to recognise the difference between formal and informal education, which helps the young people to develop outside of the formal environment. However, the informal learning process does not occur as a matter of fact. The atmosphere still has to be created that will facilitate this process. I have helped the process, by creating the following factors within the agency:

- not forcing young people to attend the centre.
- creating a friendly and relaxing atmosphere.
- having no strict timetable or classrooms.
- having basic regulations, agreed by them, to encourage health and safety, complying with statutory regulations.
- allowing the young people to work in teams,

- putting together different projects.

Some of these projects include concerts, talent days and Christmas parties. In undertaking them, the young people learned about planning and organising, time management, budgets, communication with other service providers etc. I have been able to help them in the planning process, particularly in the area of setting budgets, which many young people did find hard to grasp.

Within informal education settings, there are sometimes problems associated with the provision of equipment and resources. This is usually because of the shortage of funding for some areas within youth provision. This obstacle can have an adverse impact on our ability as informal educators to provide the quality programmes and activities that I feel that the young people deserve. To be able to offer the young people the best facilities, it is important that we secure funding for the resources. I have been able to do this on a number of occasions.

In order to get the funding to purchase equipment, I organised a survey with some of the group to establish what was needed. Through this we were able to identify the essential equipment and resources needed to do arts and crafts and to replace broken equipment. I have helped the young people identify other resources from other agencies. This has been achieved by working collaboratively. I have helped to get used equipment, such as computers, office desks and chairs and filing cabinets. For special one off projects, such as the concert, we were able to secure help from volunteers by stressing the fundraising nature of the project.

Planning and organising is also another important area for me within the context of informal education. This is because the process involved not only impacts on the actual setting, but there is also a knock-on effect on my personal life and all the things which I do outside the project. This is a two fold process. I have been involved in getting the young people to plan and organise various events. At times I was working to very tight deadlines, which then had an adverse effect, bringing pressure on my

private and social life. In order to assist me in my time management and planning process, I have had to introduce a personal planner, and write my schedule in it.

Through this process, I have been able to focus more on the important issues and events. This process has also helped me to be more selective when asked to take on other projects. This has helped me significantly. However, within the last couple of weeks I have allowed some social and domestic issues to side track me from my schedule. Positively, I was able to overcome these and have regained the necessary focus for completion of my studies.

Within informal education, I realised that the saying “No man is an island” is not just a saying, but a reality. To be successful as a youth worker, it is very important that you not only utilise the skills, experience and knowledge of your colleagues, but that you are aware of the variety of services which are available from other relevant service providers and stakeholders. It is important as informal educators that we form links with other organisations, so that we can continue to provide the young people with as broad a range of activities and services as possible.

Since starting the course I have identified areas for improvement, within our agency, communication being one such issue. By introducing a staff notice board and having action points from staff meetings, staff agree that they are better informed, and feel the team is more effective. I have also engaged with the wider community on projects such as drug awareness workshops.

In undertaking this journey of studying informal education, there are many areas where I have gained additional knowledge, building on what I already knew e.g. planning and organising and team building. There were also areas where my knowledge was very little such as understanding the difference between formal and informal education and the acceptance of our value base and the impact they have upon others. I feel that to date my greatest experiences since joining the

course is remembering to step back from the daily routine and buzz, and spend time planning, evaluating and reflecting. Although I was well aware of this area of work, I usually found it easier (due to time restraints) just to get on with the next activity or session, once one was completed. I could only then evaluate or reflect if particular problems had occurred.

Postscript (by John Peaper)

To conclude, I feel that this profile sums up the range of exciting learners that we attract here at the college who bring with them such a diverse and varied range of life experiences. On a personal level, I have enjoyed the time that I spent with Stephen and wish him all the very best throughout his new career.

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