

YMCA
GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

YMCA

contexts: occasional
paper

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Preface

'Contexts', an annual publication of students work was developed because tutors felt that some of the work they were reading and marking should be available to a wider audience than just the college. We believed our students perspectives, experiences and ideas would be of interest and value to others working with young people and working within communities and neighbourhoods. Five years on we continue to feel this way; however Contexts has changed a little this year; it has gone from a printed publication to an on-line publication in order to make our students work accessible to an even wider audience than before. The criterion for selection of pieces however has not changed: work can be submitted from across the programmes that the college run and it should be of interest to the field of Youth and Community Work. Once work has been selected tutors work with the students to turn their assignments into articles appropriate for wider audiences.

There is no particular theme that students work has to conform to and therefore our Contexts collections are always eclectic, reflecting our diverse student body and the varied and rich practice that they engage in. There are however three themes that seem to pull this year's six articles together and these are challenging perceptions, compassion and community.

Kelly Wiltshire's opening piece is an exploration of football fandom and in particular the literacy practices of these fans. Kelly, not a football fan herself, became interested in finding out more about how football supporters demonstrate their commitment to the game following an incident between two young fans at her youth club. Kelly learns that there is more to being a fan than just liking football there is a special language, rituals and rules to follow which all come together to demonstrate loyalty, dedication and commitment to the footballing community and to your team.

Claire Nightingale Wade invites us to consider whether the dominant ideology of childhood as an idyllic period of happiness and innocence is really a universal truth. She describes two contrasting images of childhood, the caring mother and the young carer and explores how images such as those of young people caring for sick parents challenge the dominant ideology. She looks at how these images can help us to build our understanding of different experiences of childhood.

We journey with Jo Gaffney through her reflections upon and her analysis of the relationship she has with a student, Stephen, who attends the social centre at the college where she works. She questions whether her preconceptions of this student are contributing to the struggles she experiences in her interactions and work with him. By working differently can her interactions with Stephen become more productive?

Next Katherine Eveleigh discusses the relevance of compassion within our work to our effectiveness as helpers. Katherine explores her own experiences of being helped by professionals as a young person and considers what motivates her to help others through her

work. Using examples from her work practice Katherine explores when having compassion may make our help more effective and when compassion may be misplaced. She explores whether it is possible to offer effective help when you do not feel compassion towards an individual you are working with and questions how we can measure the effectiveness of our help.

Kimberley Morgan-Jones explores community education by looking at Henry Norris's vision of the community school. She discusses her own experience of attending a community school that Norris founded and her experience of working in a state secondary school. She looks at whether community education has disappeared from modern schooling and questions what we may be losing if schools no longer value or prioritise community education.

The final article is from Mark Chase who explores the notion of community and the role of the community educator. Mark describes how community is usually thought of positively but explores whether there is a negative side to community. He also asks whether the community educators' role is to promote young people's personal and social development or whether it is to promote social obedience and control. Mark looks at social policy initiatives and his own practice within the Pastoral Support Team at a Further Education College to help him analyse this question.

I would like to thank the authors for sharing their stories, ideas, insights and experiences. My thanks also go to the editing and production team and to Colin Williams whose original generosity has made the annual publication of Contexts possible.

Kate Reed

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The Contributors

Kelly Wiltshire

Kelly started her journey into youth work as a young person attending a project she later volunteered at, and gained full time employment as a youth worker for Norfolk County Council. Kelly was selected for good practice sharing trips visiting China, Mongolia, and Africa on behalf of the British Council and Australia and New Zealand on behalf of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. Kelly then went on to study at the YMCA George Williams College gaining a First Class honours two years ago.

When government cuts threatened closure of the youth club Kelly used to attend she sort and received funding to keep it going. She is now lead worker and also runs a Young Carers group. Recently she has secured a Lottery Village SOS grant to restore a derelict property next door to the village hall to be used as a community house and allotments.

Claire Nightingale-Wade

Claire has been working with young people since the age of fifteen, at first volunteering at the local youth centre and then working as a Youth Worker for Essex County Council, where she has been working for the last 15 years. As well as being passionate about youth work Claire also loves working with animals and completed a degree in Animal Science during this time. Claire then went on to teach at Writtle College, before starting a family with her husband Greg and they now have two children, Finlay and Lola.

Claire has worked in many different youth provisions including working in drama groups, in complementary education, in open centres, with young carers and young people with additional needs. More recently she has worked in partnership with voluntary groups in the community. Claire is currently in her final year of study on the distance learning Informal and Community Education BA Hons programme and has recently started a new position as a Professional Youth and Community Worker. Claire juggles working and studying with raising a young family and enjoys going to the gym, travelling and socialising.

Jo Gaffney

Jo was born and raised in Coventry. After meandering her way through school and Art College Jo dropped out of education at the age of 18 to spend time as a DJ working across the UK. At

23 Jo became a member of Cabin Crew and despite enjoying flying around the world she felt that she wanted to do something more worthwhile. At 26 Jo began work as a part time assistant youth worker at a local youth club. Jo quickly discovered a passion for youth work and left the airline to work as a full time youth worker at Henley College Coventry. Jo was encouraged by her manager and peers to enrol on the distance learning programme at the YMCA George Williams College and despite an initial struggle to adapt to studying Jo soon found her feet and discovered a new passion for learning, completing her degree with First Class honours in 2012. During her time with the YMCA Jo overcame a series of personal problems and also co-ordinated volunteering youth trips to Russia and Rwanda. Jo continues to implement the knowledge that she gained from her studies and previous experiences into her work, seeking new ways to challenge herself and the young people who choose to engage with her team. Jo continues to enjoy working at Henley College Coventry and hopes to participate in the MA programme with the YMCA George Williams College in the future.

Katherine Eveleigh

Katherine was born and raised in East London. After a period of rebellion, Katherine moved north at age 17. Inspired by the way in which her Education Welfare Officer related to young people she became a volunteer in an alternative education centre in Liverpool and soon discovered a passion for working with young people. Katherine then worked in a variety of youth work settings before returning to London, where she secured employment as a Lead Youth Worker for Barking and Dagenham Children's Services; working for many years with looked after children and care leavers. It was through this role Katherine was introduced to the YMCA George Williams College, progressing through three courses at the college to become a qualified youth worker with first class honours.

In more recent years, Katherine has been employed by UK charity Basti Ram, providing cross cultural educational opportunities to children in the UK and India whilst also working for Catch 22, providing one-to-one support to young people in schools. Katherine has recently been appointed by the Princes Trust and is excited to get immersed in her new role. Katherine is a single parent to one son, Frankie, and feels privileged to have been given the opportunity to study as an adult and is keen to progress to masters in the near future.

Kimberley Morgan-Jones

Kim has been working at St Paul's Church in Nuneaton for the past four years as their Youth Worker. During this time she set up and developed St Paul's Youth Project, which provides weekly youth groups, activities and projects for local young people. As part of her role Kim also works in the local secondary school doing mentoring with individual pupils. Kim became interested in youth work during a gap year when she worked as a volunteer alongside the local youth worker in Linton, Cambridgeshire. She also spent six months volunteering as a youth and

community worker at St Mark's Church in Keighley. Kim is in the final year of her degree at YMCA George Williams College and is a Distance Learning student.

Mark Chase

Mark, a former bar and restaurant manager, explored the possibility of working as a counsellor with young people after realising what he enjoyed most was listening to others from the other side of a bar. Having returned to education after a twenty year gap he gained qualifications in humanistic counselling before realising he had little or no experience working with young people. Mark was then fortunate enough to gain a position as a Trainee Youth Worker at a local college.

As part of his education in informal education and community development Mark's face to face practice has been underpinned by his progression from a level 3 qualification with the YMCA to recently completing his BA (Hons). Although Mark, at this time, wishes to continue working informally with young people he hopes that he eventually will return to his original ambition and become a counsellor who supports young people.

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Kelly Wiltshire would like to thank all her family, friends and colleagues (too many to mention individually) who have been there for her whilst she gained her Degree and who had faith in her when she didn't have it in herself. She would like to give special thanks to her college tutors Lesley and Hazel for their constructive criticism, guidance and encouragement; her supervisors Sam and Mark and her Mum, Dad and Sister for always supporting everything she does. She would also like to acknowledge and thank Ismail and Candy for their countless cups of tea, reassurance, patience, words of wisdom, spelling and grammar checks often given at hours or minutes before the assignment deadlines. Finally she would like to acknowledge Rhian, Ceri, Jo and Sue for always keeping her smiling.

Claire Nightingale-Wade would like to acknowledge and thank her husband Greg and her two children Finlay and Lola for their constant support and encouragement. Claire would also like to thank her mum and dad for always believing in her and providing help and support throughout her studies. Claire would also like to acknowledge her colleague and friend Emma Cavanagh, for always listening and giving great advice whilst at work and whilst studying for this degree. Lastly Claire would like to thank all of the wonderful young people she has worked with, who continue to surprise and motivate her every day.

Jo Gaffney would like to thank her parents for the unconditional love and support that they offer every single day (especially her dad who patiently read and re-read all of her assignments throughout her studies). She would also like to thank Tracie Coombs for believing in her and inspiring her to be the best youth worker that she can be. She would like to give a HUGE thank-you to her brilliant study group throughout the YMCA journey and to Jeff Salter for all of his wisdom and support. Finally she would like to give a special thank-you to her partner Ben who reminded her who she was when she needed it most.

Katherine Eveleigh would like to thank her son, Frankie, whom at age 6 has been incredibly patient whilst his mummy has studied since his birth, always sharing his genuine joy in her achievements. She would also like to thank her loving kind parents and the approachable staff team at YMCA George Williams College for a thoroughly enjoyable learning experience.

Kimberley Morgan-Jones would like to thank her tutor Linda Deer-Richardson for all her encouragement in writing this piece. She would also like to thank her parents Sue and Ivor for their support.

Mark Chase would like to acknowledge and thank Joni – his wife and inspiration.

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Goes without saying don't it

Kelly Wilshire

This article is about my learning journey into football fandom triggered by a conflict between two young men at the youth club I work in. I will look at the language, signs and rituals used by football fans and propose that these constitute literacy practices. Literacy, I will argue, is about more than reading and writing it is about how we recognise and understand language, signs and symbols and construct meaning in different contexts. I suggest that as youth workers it is important to understand the literacy practices of those we work alongside in order to be as effective as possible.

A disagreement at Youth Club between two young men (Brandon and Owen) over whose football team had played better sparked my exploration into how practices of belonging and rivalry amongst football supporters are communicated, adopted and passed on. I was surprised by the level of passion and thirst for rivalry their football support created. The incident between Brandon and Owen became very heated and one of the young men, Brandon, started singing a football song that contained swearing and racist lyrics. This disturbed me especially as the two boys did not seem to recognise the offensive nature of the song's lyrics; but through working with the young men around this incident I began to learn how they came to support the teams they did and as a consequence I learnt much more about these two young people, their backgrounds and their interests.

Following the incident we (the staff at the youth club) invited Brandon and Owen's parents to meet with us with the intention of gaining their support in tackling the boys' negative behaviour and use of language. I was shocked to discover a sense of pride from Brandon's father that his son had sung the offensive chant. When I queried if he was also a football fan, he pulled up his t-shirt arm to reveal a CFC (Chelsea Football Club) tattoo, grinned and said "goes without saying don't it". Brandon's dad stated he was very proud to be a 3rd generation fan of Chelsea Football Club. Brandon told me this is because his grandfather was born close to Stamford Bridge, home to CFC, and regularly took Brandon's father to their games. It could be argued that Brandon had little say in which team he supported due to family pressure; his allegiance was assumed not chosen. Owen on the other hand chose to support Arsenal, a team with whom he had no particular inherited connection. His selection was based on the clubs success and popularity. Owen used football to integrate himself into a friendship group after his family moved to the area when he was six years old. At this early age Owen could recognise the significance of his affiliation with 'the right' football club who were doing well in the league at the time; the association with a popular team would make him more accepted by his peers. When I asked Owen and Brandon why their support for their clubs was so important and questioned the

possibility that they could swap their loyalty to another team my comments were met with laughter and disdain. The ignorance of my comment sparked a degree of camaraderie between the two fans. The two young men were not only loyal to their own clubs but both boys were also members of the wider footballing community. I wanted to increase my knowledge and understanding as I wanted to work effectively with these young men and I wanted to understand their passion and affiliation to football; to me it was just a game. The football chant that Brandon sung and the lads stories about how they came to support their teams made me wonder about how people communicate and share their connection to the game, how they show their association and how they promote their affiliation. I wanted to understand the literacy practices of football supporters.

Literacy

Psychological and cognitive definitions of literacy might involve very general statements such as 'being able to decode words and reproduce written symbols'. One immediate problem with this kind of definition is that it ignores how literacy is used within a society and by different communities, culture groupings and context – 'you don't need to read or write to be a football fan' (Moss, 2011:3).

Literacy is often associated with an ability to read or write however literacy is about more than reading and writing, it is about how through language, signs and rituals we construct meaning in different social contexts. Literacy is a social activity in which language, context, meaning and social ritual are interdependent (Wolfe, 2010:4).

As a learner with undiagnosed learning difficulties until the age of 17, I was considered by the education system as having poor literacy and numeracy skills. I have a school report which said 'if Kelly could talk her way through exams, she has the potential to be an A* student however she struggles to concentrate in lessons and produce enough work to back up the knowledge she has shown during class discussions'. My History teacher knew I understood yet because of the school assessment techniques I needed to be able to demonstrate my learning in the format of written words and symbols. However this understanding of literacy is a very narrow one; Moss highlights through discussing the cognitive definitions of literacy and the uses of assessments in our current education system that there is a problem with many definitions of literacy because they ignore how literacy is used within society (Moss, 2011). What if we think about literacy in terms of football fandom as an example is Moss correct that; '*you don't need to read or write to be a football fan*' (Moss, 2011:3)?

Norwich City Football Club – A literate community?

Norwich City Football Club was formed in 1902. It is near on impossible to know exactly how many fans they have but the Stadium, Carrow Road, seats 27,000; only 2,500 of which are allocated to away fans. The club has global supporters groups in the USA, Scandinavia, Hong Kong and United Arab Emirates to name a few. They are easily identifiable on match days by the regalia they wear. This I would argue is a form of literate community.



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In 2011 Norwich City were promoted to the Premiership League. An article in my regional paper, the Eastern Daily Press, carried the sub heading *'40,000 people lined the streets to see a bus carrying the players and club representatives to celebrate this event'* (EDP's supplement (The Pink Un), 2011:2). The eight page supplement shows a footballing community in action, turning out in their thousands, wearing their uniform, singing their anthems to show their commitment; they are sending out a clear message of pride and belonging. The photographs have been reproduced in the newspaper reaching thousands of people across the county regardless of whether they have an interest in football or not. Another headline reads *'A City Celebrates'* (EDP Supplement, (The Pink Un) 2011:1); the photograph alongside it shows a diverse community waving flags and cheering the club bus. The photos steer away from the traditional images of football hooligans, I wonder if this has been done purposely to show how football now attracts fans from different social classes, ages, genders and races. The article states that the city's statues were draped in scarves and flags, and that City Hall took down the traditional red, white and blue Union Jack and replaced it with a green and yellow version. Norwich City football club is nicknamed 'The Canaries' or 'The Yellows' after the canary bird featured on the club badge and another headline announces *'The yellow army salutes its heroes'* (EDP's supplement (The pink Un), 2011:4). Yet these are not men returning from war, having lost limbs and comrades; these are men who get paid salaries for the privilege of playing a game. Why within this community are the players seen as such heroes and why are the fans so committed to their team?

Objectives, practices and priorities

In order to try and gain a better understanding of the passion, objectives, practices and priorities of the footballing community I asked 32 football fans to complete a short questionnaire. 26 were male and 6 were female, 13 responses were from young people aged 11-18, 9 were from adults aged 20-40 and 10 from those aged 40-60. Although all my questionnaire participants lived in the same local area they supported a wide range of local and non-local clubs who were in several divisions within the football leagues.

A key objective for football fans is enjoying feeling part of a larger organisation or club. Mutual fans consider themselves as being part of the same family. Fans enjoy surrounding themselves

with like-minded people, not necessarily from the same team but general fans of football. There is a desire to be around someone who will understand the passion and commitment felt, and understand your devastation when a referee sends your player off and the happiness if the team score. The EDP article (EDP's supplement (The pink Un), 2011) highlights how fans of Norwich football club were elated and showed their support for the team once they had been successful in gaining promotion.

One of the objectives of fans is to promote their club to potential supporters; working on the principal that more fans will not only increase the size of their community but also provide more revenue for the club. With this revenue they can buy better players leading to more wins therefore gaining trophies and points to finish high in the league to win the championships, achieve promotion or qualify for European competitions, and thus there is a continued feeling of happiness and success for supporters.

Practices include going to games (ticket revenue increases the profit of the club), and watching televised matches at home or in public places. There are radio and television stations, fanzines and online forums dedicated purely to football itself and individual teams, as well as multiple betting organisations which entice fans to use their football knowledge to predict results and win money. These practices are not only restricted to the team they support but also include international fixtures and tournaments such as the World Cup.

My research revealed that the most popular way of showing support for a team was to purchase replica football shirt (RFS). 63% of respondents brought a new shirt each year.

Figure 1: How fans publically show support for their team

Different ways to show support *	Percentage response
Annually purchase replica shirts	63%
Display artwork/posters at home	47%
Purchase club clothing	38%
Display merchandise in the car	28%
Tattoos	13%
Boot bags/rucksacks	29%

None	13%
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* Other responses included: golf equipment, replica footballs, pencil cases, work merchandise e.g. mouse mats and office mugs.

The RFS is also another way to increase revenue. Fawbert (2004) discuss the semiotics linked to emblems but specifically shirts. *'RFS are a way of putting their clothes in quotation marks and very self-consciously proclaim their allegiances and identities'* (Fawbert 2004:134). This suggests that RFS express oppositions and bonds. RFS are used to communicate non-verbally, membership of a particular cultural group, to both people inside of the group and outside. The representation of RFS becomes iconic as wearer's refer to themselves as 'the reds' or 'the blues' and others in their community instantly know what they mean (Fawbert, 2004:138). A reading of a RFS requires recognition of subtle differences; for example a Manchester United shirt and an Arsenal shirt are very similar in terms of both are red, both are made of similar fabric and have sponsors logos and the club badge on the front. You have to 'read' the shirts but not necessarily the words on the shirts, to understand the difference. Fawbert suggests RFS have other messages besides the wearer's loyalties to the club: *'Club badges, are designer labels, players' names and sponsors logos may not only be metaphors for social experiences but also as connotative metaphors for fashionable companies such as Sharpe, Vodaphone, and Umbro'* (Fawbert, 2004:138-9).



Ooh to be a goner by KetuGajjar, sourced from Flickr and reproduced under a Creative Commons License Attribution 2.0 Generic (cc by 2.0).

Traditionally fans wore RFS because they indicated something about their community. Images on the club emblem often represented a trade associated with the area. West Ham United's club emblem incorporates a pair of rivet hammers (tools used in the iron and ship building industry) and the club are sometimes referred to as the Irons or Hammers due to the iron works located in

the part of London where the club was formed. Now RFS, and those who wear them could be from anywhere in the world. At the time of writing the biggest selling RFS in the world was a red Manchester United shirt with Beckham and 7 on it (Kelso & Tremlett, 2003 Guardian article). Millions were sold in Japan and South Korea during the 2002 world cup. Fawbert suggests these fans are likely to switch their allegiance to other clubs if their favourite players switch teams or if other players become more popular.

Cohen (1985) suggests that it is a mistake to think that increased social and geographical mobility has brought about a decline in community. He states that:

Recent studies have suggested that this stance was not just premature but was also misplaced because ‘community’ is not something that should necessarily be bound by clearly recognisable geographical limits, but should be defined as communion or ‘shared meanings’ (Cohen 1985:187)

Football fandom can be seen as a community that is not bound by geographical boundaries.

I believe there is the possibility football fans in the Asian market buy RFS’s because they want to belong to a group but it must be more than this, because they don’t want to belong to just any footballing community. Kelso & Tremlett’s (2003) research specifies it was English RFS that were the most popular across the world despite there being successful teams in high profile leagues in Asia. Having travelled to many parts of Africa and Asia I have seen first-hand how locals have been bombarded, over many years with Western values and ideals. Clubs such as Manchester United have become global brands and these brands become a global language whether you speak English or not. These fans may feel that these high profile English football teams represents a degree of western society, which they aspire to. This could go some way to explaining why RFS sell in their thousands in Asia, yet unlike the fans I interviewed the wearers have no family tradition or locality links with the team. In the local context however my research revealed that the most popular reason for supporting a team was because of family influence, the second highest reason was locality; these were more important than individual player support or team success.

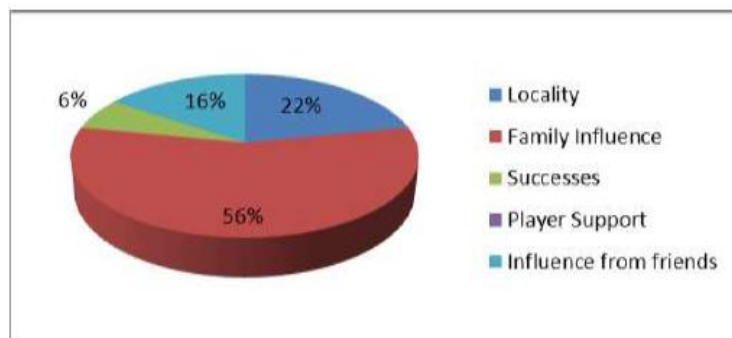


Figure 2: Why fans chose to support their football team

Signs, symbols and rivalry

Fans identify each other by showing a club emblem or logo seen regularly on memorabilia. This social hieroglyphics means that if you are 'in the know' you can do a quick visual check around to see if you are in the company of fellow supporters or whether you are outnumbered and may experience some jibes or abuse towards your choice of team. The badge is not only restricted to RFS, it can be on any footballing merchandise and is a sign that clearly communicates your allegiance.

The badge itself is very important to the footballing community group (for example on RFS's the badge is usually situated in the same place as your heart). As mentioned previously the club emblem can tell you a lot about where the club is from and what the history surrounding the club is. This suggests the badge on club merchandise signifies much more than a trademark. Nicknames and numbers of favourite players on the back of shirts show popularity. People want to show affinity towards their team and fellow supporters but they also want to send a clear signal to rival supporters. Young people could be open to ridicule if they are seen with a losing team's lunch box, pencil case or bag. At the same time this can aid them in making new friends if they find an associate with the same logo. But what happens to those young people who do not support either? They are often excluded from this community altogether for not knowing the codes of conduct. Disagreements often occur when opinions differ over which team is better as occurred with Brandon and Owen. There is a darker side to the game which can involve bullying, harassment and hatred of rivals.

The power of signs and unwritten texts (semiotics) used in football fandom is very important. Emblems are placed on merchandise sold by the club and this merchandise is aimed at every age group. Clubs have found more innovative ways and commerce to promote their organisation to help increase popularity and boost funds. As demonstrated earlier (in figure 1) the fans I interviewed showed support for their team by buying all manner of merchandise from RFS to pencil cases, from posters to computer mouse mats. Some dedicated fans do not only limit their passion to club products, they will name their pet or even their child after a team, player or manager. I have worked with a number of young people called 'Chelsea' and my assumption that they have been named so after the football team their parents support, when I have enquired, has usually been confirmed.



Cock by Wonker, sourced from Flickr and reproduced here under a creative commons attribution – 2.0 Generic (cc by 2.0).

Some fans choose to make a permanent declaration of affiliation by inking themselves with a tattoo. 13% of my respondents had done so and hundreds of thousands of photos are available on-line of people who felt so strongly for their club they engraved it into their skin. What would happen if they wanted to change their team later in life, or the team failed over a number of years? My research shows that this is unlikely, once people choose their team before or during their teenage years they tend to stay with the team as ‘a lifelong fan’. Fans, unlike players, managers or directors have not signed a contract with the club, they are free to leave when the team does badly, yet fans appear more loyal to the clubs than those who receive a salary from the organisation. Supporters often describe their team saying “we had a great win Saturday, did you see our goal?” Was it ‘their’ win or ‘their’ goal or did it belong to the team on the pitch? This could be described as a form of neo-tribalism and the need to belong to a community. Therefore tribal elements are displayed to let rivals know you are stronger than them; a ‘pack mentality’ develops. The popularity of football and its practices can have a negative influence on fans who seek to defend their club. Sometimes this rivalry can lead to hatred between fans and organised football violence, with fans believing whichever group comes out on top will be seen as superior.

“If Everton were playing at the bottom of the garden, I’d pull the curtains.” (Bill Shankly OBE Liverpool Manager 1959–1974). The thirst for rivalry highlighted in Shankly’s quote and in football supporting practices raises concerns for me. Many aspects contribute to the degree of rivalry and hostility among teams, such as religion and location. My research reveals that 75% of fans questioned had experienced harassment when attending games such as missiles thrown at buses, being attacked and racist taunts. However, most of the other comments were regarding the ‘banter’ exchanged between friends; and I can think of very few other community groups where you swear, shout and sing abuse at friends in the pub for 90 minutes and then at the sound of a whistle go back to talking about mundane aspects of life.

Communication of Practices

One of the ways belonging is communicated is through language use. I have in the past listened to fans speak about football in what appears to me to be a secret code. This code is a form of jargon that differentiates those within the community (those who understand the code) from those outside the community (those who do not understand the code). I went into my local pub when I knew a ‘big’ game would be showing in order to try and learn a little more about the language of football through engaging in a social setting where fans gather.

As my village pub is very small I knew it would be very easy to overhear any conversations held by fans. I watched the body language of those coming in to watch the game, how rival fans greeted each other and how supporters of the same club sat together. I heard how they spoke and realised how none of it made much sense to someone uninterested in football. The spectators were mainly men, wearing RFS. I asked two men if I could document part of their conversation for my research. I discussed with them why they enjoy football and they told me it was because ‘it’s exciting’ ‘its unpredictable’ ‘it’s never ending because there’s new hope each

time a new season starts' and 'it feels good to know there's thousands of people who want the same thing as you'. The conversation included words like 'FIFA', 'Winger', 'Offside' and a 'block buy' which meant very little to me. This indicated there was yet another literacy practice used by this community – football terminology. Wolfe discusses literacy events using the following example: *'if a stranger came into a situation to what extent would he/she be limited by unfamiliarity with the social language?'* (Wolfe, 2011: 4). I researched the words for which I had no meanings using it as an activity with the young people at youth club to help me to decode the conversations I'd heard. A stranger to football would quite possibly have no idea of terms and expressions used by the two supporters. To be part of the football community relies on an ability to understand the code in order to take part in this literacy event.

In some communities (e.g. religious communities) singing and chanting is considered a form of worship. In a similar way football chanting displays a worship of the club and can create a sense of belonging as large numbers of the community stand together singing in union. However chants are not only about worship they are also about disdain; press revelations and rumours about football player's personal lives can lead to tens of thousands of fans chanting and ridiculing players during matches.

Fans also hang banners from the terraces during the matches that display slogans and words of encouragement. I asked my brother, an avid Chelsea fan, why and he explained that fans often bring banners to communicate messages with the intention to show their feelings or opinions towards stakeholders, to help rally support from others in the crowd and from those watching elsewhere, in order to 'mobilise troops' into making club decisions or reminding an opposing team how many times they have been defeated at the ground. In 2011 Blackburn fans were banned from bringing in banners by stadium security, so a group of supporters clubbed together to hire a plane to fly a banner over the stadium during the game to express their feeling that the manager should be fired (www.metro.co.uk, 06/11/2011).

The jargon, the chanting and the banners are examples of literacy as a social activity. *'When we describe literacy as a social activity, we are highlighting the conversation, context and social rituals which tend to accompany much of the reading'* (Wolfe, 2010:4). Wolfe argues that literacy is not a solitary experience; she describes dedicated literacy activities such as reading a book on a train as an exception to 'being literate' rather than the norm. Football supporting is far from a solitary experience, it is a group experience, but to be part of the group you need an understanding of the language and images used. As mentioned earlier Moss argues that *'you don't need to read or write to be a football fan'* (Moss, 2011:3) and although it can be seen from many of the practices of football fans described above that this is the case, reading does for many fans form part of a broader interaction process. All of those who completed my research questionnaire received written information regarding their team and half the respondent's forward information on to others. As I stated earlier one of the main objectives is to increase membership to the organisation.

Footballing Passion – 'A matter of life and death'

"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that." (Bill Shankly OBE Liverpool Manager 1959–1974).

Many people feel football is the most important thing in their life. John Major (1992:212-221) discloses, when being elected as an MP he had concerns his constituency would be in an area which would rival his Chelsea support, and how relieved he was when he was placed in East Anglia, where the two main football teams (Peterborough and Cambridge) were lower league offering no compromise. Major describes how as Prime minister his mind would sometimes get side tracked when he knew Chelsea were playing. He made sure game results were available wherever he was in the world.

Belton (1997) demonstrates Shankley's opinion of the significance of football throughout *Bubbles, Hammers, & Dreams* – a story of fictional characters alongside factual events. Chapter by chapter he talks about West Ham's rise and demise in football leagues alongside major world events. Following West Ham's journey into 2095 with high expectations for the club he speculates how our world will change. Belton's characters highlight that for some football is not just happening at the same time as the world's struggles but that these games are equally as important as major world events, if not more so. These games provoke similar feelings to fighting battles and struggling.

In Hornby's (1992) autobiographical novel he writes how his practices of support for Arsenal football club during the 1980's influenced his career as a school teacher and his relationships with those around him. Hornby describes the relationship his fandom helped build with some of his pupils and how the dedication and level of support for 'his' football club almost cost him his relationship with his pregnant girlfriend because she felt he cared more for Arsenal than for her and their unborn child.

For non-football supporters it may seem bizarre to describe football as being more important than life and death, to let it influence where you chose to live, to compare the struggle to the top of the league to going to war, or to consider attendance at games as more important than spending time with love ones but it would seem that these feelings are shared by hundreds of thousands of football fans. One of the purposes of my research was to try to connect with and understand a community which was important to some of the young people I work with.

Holman (cited in Bull, 1992:41) writes about how he used football in his work as a youth worker. He explains how after failing academically, he continued in education and went to university as a result of being an integral part of school sports teams. He calls football the '*neighbourhood workers friend*' (cited in Bull, 1992:46). He states it helped him work with communities at varying levels from playing football at the youth club around the table tennis tables and the coffee bar, honing skills of tight ball control, to playing semi-professional with fathers of the youth club members. He describes using his knowledge of football as a tool to engage members of the community in a Glasgow adult education project.

My lifelong love affair with the game has benefited me educationally and socially... I must not exaggerate its importance. Obviously skills in organising youth activities apart from football- advising on welfare rights, accompanying parents to children's hearings, counselling... Nonetheless, knowledge of football does offer insight into a culture which becomes a basis for communication in the neighbourhood. (Holman cited in Bull 1992:46).

House (cited in *Bull* 1992:145-15) describes how he used his knowledge and love of his football team to aid his work as a pastor. Stating how he has used the football club successes and failures in sermons relating it to life's struggles. It has influenced many weddings and funerals he has conducted, from the colours of flowers, music played, and poems read as part of services. He reflects on how some of the congregation are just as committed to the local football club as they are to the church; because of this they have redesigned the church banner and kneelers to include the robin which is pictured in the local football clubs badge.

Conclusion

Football plays a major role in many individuals and communities lives. Certainly as educators who work in informal settings, we need to understand the interests and passions of those we work with. We are not free from the impact of literacy in the environments where we work, on the contrary, it plays an essential part in social interactions and, in common with other uses of language; its importance often only becomes obvious when it goes wrong (Wolfe, cited in YMCA, 2011:4). Following the incident between Brandon and Owen where racist and other offensive language was used it became important to me to understand literacy in the footballing community. In any community group you need to show a willingness to understand and become part of the group. By showing an interest and an understanding of the language, rituals and practices you gain acceptance; information is shared and you can then begin to have an impact.

As a community, football support is limitless due to developments in new technology which now allows fans to stay in touch with 'their' team without ever having to attend a match. 25% of supporters I questioned had never actually attended a match for the club they support. Football support is continuous due to new seasons starting each year and international competitions scheduled in summer breaks. New generations are recruited by the existing community and so support always exists. Supporters belong to an imaginary community of those that follow the same club. They may not encounter fellow fans, or attend games, yet the sense of community is undiminished. Brandon and Owen had never attended their teams' matches yet their loyalty to their clubs was incredibly strong and evident.

As a result of exploring the issues that arose with Brandon and Owen I have a greater understanding of the importance of the game to many young people I work with and how practices of belonging and rivalry are communicated, adopted and passed on. I have enabled people to mobilise their own and others resources within community network systems, I have engaged with local social organisations that offer football themed projects and I have promoted opportunities by signposting young people to other projects such as 'Midnight Football' and 'Playing for Success'.

To make the obvious point, literacy is much more than a set of reading and writing skills – literacy is always about something and it is a language. It cannot be separated from the content or the linguistic forms of the texts, or the social and pedagogic politics of their production and reading (Rockhill, cited in YMCA, 2011:8).

Semiotics seem fundamental to football fandom. You do not need to be able to read or write to be literate in football practices; you only need an understanding of the subject so that you can

recognise signs and symbols and understand social activities, language, rituals and practices. Even if these forms are not considered by some to be 'real' or 'proper' forms of literacy, I feel without them you would not be able to be a part of this or any community. If you are not part of a community and its people, how can you expect to work within it effectively? I have learnt to take time to understand people's passions and connections as only by participating in and embracing a community can we contribute to the development of that community.

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Hidden carers

Claire Nightingale-Wade



Mother and Child Sculpture by Mattlemmon, sourced from Flickr and reproduced under a Creative Commons License Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Introduction

This article analyses and explores different perspectives of childhood through two contrasting images of caring. The images I have used to help me explore ideas of childhood and caring have been constructed for advertising purposes; the first image is on an American website advertising a paediatric clinic. The second is part of an advertising campaign to raise awareness and understanding of the role young carer's play in society.

Within adult-child relationships adults are traditionally seen as care givers and children as care receivers however the image of a young carer challenges this view and I want to explore how our perspectives of childhood are confirmed and challenged by media and advertising images, the significance images of childhood have for children and the impact they have on the work I do as an informal educator. The experience I have gained from working in partnership with Crossroads Care, a charity who run a group for young carers, has inspired me to write this article.

Images of Childhood

The first image was constructed for marketing purposes and advertises a children's (paediatric) clinic by presenting a traditional childhood scene with a mother caring for her child. The photograph depicts a woman holding and looking at an ill child. The photograph shows a blanket laid over both the child and adult and the child is looking up at the adult for reassurance and love. The photograph is powerful and portrays a sense that the child is being cared for and supported by an adult. The photograph also gives the impression that the adult can make the child feel better with love and support. Images are set up and constructed by adults for specific purposes, in this case for marketing purposes. The perspective of childhood that is being communicated is one of love, of a parent caring for a child and of the innocence of the child. It is a classic image of childhood and a 'normal' scene that you expect to see between a parent and child, communicating the idea that children need love and support to grow, develop and be healthy.

The second image is a photograph showing a young girl caring for her mother. The photograph shows a young girl giving her mother medication by an injection in her left arm. The photograph gives the impression that this is a regular and normal process and when I saw it I had the feeling that the mother had been ill for some length of time. This image has similarities to the first in that it shows a caring and loving relationship; however this is not a traditional image of a caring relationship like those found in glossy magazines, on the television, in children's books or in family photographs. This image was taken as part of a BBC day of coverage on child carers, to raise awareness and understanding of the role young carer's play in society.

This image may shock some members of the general public who are unaware of young carers and the valuable support they provide. Gittins (1998:7) feels that '*we usually think of childhood as innocent, hopeful, angelic.*' and goes on to say that '*childhood is seen and represented as idyllic, carefree and happy...*' This photograph does not show any of the defining characteristics of childhood that Gittins (1998: 7) identified; instead the photo is emotive it turns the traditional image of child-adult caring relationships on its head and makes us question our assumptions about childhood as a stress free, ideal time.

Conceptions of Childhood

Childhood is represented in books, the media and on television as being an idealised time of innocence and happiness. Everyone has a sense of what childhood should be based on their own experiences, theories and culture. Most often stories, poems and images portray children as constantly happy, without difficulties or hardship. This is not a realistic image of childhood. Wells (2009:67) argues that '*the reality is that children's lives cannot be separated from economics, location, gender, race, class or from the expectations of adults and adulthood*'. Giddens (2006:175) states that children are '*influenced by cultural differences and also by the material circumstances of people's lives in given types of society*'. Children do not live in a perpetual state of happiness they are affected by everything that goes on around them.

The media has become an important and everyday part of our lives with images of childhood being shown on TV and the internet and in magazines and newspapers. These images affect the way we think about childhood and help to form our understanding of childhood. An image or picture can never tell a whole story; their meaning is constructed first by the author and then interpreted by the audience (YMCA George Williams College, 2001:11).

The Implications of Images of Childhood for Children

Images are very powerful and we remember them for longer than we remember the written word (Holland, 1992:172). Images can influence our lives and they can also be interpreted in many different ways. The image of the mother caring for a child, is a traditional image that can have a different significance and meaning for individual children. For many children they will be able to relate to the image as a familiar and normal experience which they may have experienced when they were unwell, whereas for others it may have a completely different significance and implications. For example a young female who attends a session at the youth centre lost her mother in a road traffic accident when she was very young. For her, this image may make her feel different from her peers, with a longing for her mothers' love and a feeling that she has never had this experience.

These feelings can make children feel extremely sad or angry and at times it is hard for them to communicate with adults to tell them what has upset them. Children want to fit in and be the same as their friends and it must be difficult for children who are for example, in care or that have been abused to see images such as this one on a regular basis. It is important to remember that a 'normal' family does not exist, families come in all shapes and sizes and not all children will experience love and care from parents or other adults (Giddens, 2006).

The image of a young carer can be emotive and induce concern for the child but why is this? Heron feels that:

Young carers are at risk of having a lack of opportunity for social contacts, leisure time and education and [experience] stress factors such as isolation, emotional problems, conflict of needs and being overworked (Heron, 1998:175)

Many people will feel that it is not fair on the young child to have responsibility to care for an adult at such a young age. However Heron also tells us that it is:

Important to remember that caring is not necessarily a negative experience for children. Some young carers feel proud of the responsibilities they undertake, view themselves as more independent and mature, and enjoy being needed and useful to someone they love (Heron, 1998:177).

Images of young carers can enable children to understand that carers are not always adults. In many countries it is a way of life for children to look after siblings or adults in their family. However, it is only recently that children with caring responsibilities have been formally recognised by the government in the UK. *'A young carer is someone aged 18 or under who helps to look after a relative who has a disability, illness, mental health condition, or drug or alcohol problem'* (NHS, 2011). The majority of young carers look after a parent, brother or sister. Young carers have to help at home doing cooking, cleaning and washing along with providing emotional support and

guidance. The media and advertising have a huge impact on children and young people and images such as those of a young carer are thought provoking and informative.

The Implications of Diverse Perspectives on Childhood for Informal Education

In my own experience, working with a large group of young carers, I feel that there are many ethical issues surrounding being a carer and that young carers do require additional support and guidance to help them lead a life for themselves away from caring. One young male who regularly attends the group, expressed himself as “out of the ordinary”, “feeling different from other children” and said that he does not “fit in”. He also believes that no one understands what it is like to be a young carer. Can images of young carers be used to increase the awareness of the lives of young people who care and the valuable role they play in society? This is a tool I use in my own practice when working with groups of young people at the youth centre.

It is important to have an open mind and not to be influenced by stereotypes or make assumptions about other people’s lives. This is especially important when working with young people who may be vulnerable or at risk. At my work many young people talk about their home life and family and worry about not having a ‘normal family’. The problem with the idea of the ‘normal family’ is that many families do not meet these expectations (Roche et al, 2004:193).

Conclusion

Brooks (2006:333) feels that *‘We need to improve children’s media literacy, while finding non-hysterical ways to control advertising to children’*. There may need to be tighter controls over advertising to children however some images may enable us as informal educators to explore with young people and adults how they understand childhood and the assumptions they may hold.

Children respond to the environment they are born into. Children need to be made aware that the way the media and images portray childhood is not accurate and everyone has different upbringings and personal experiences. Images represent what adults would like to believe childhood should be like and are often unrealistic; portraying children as happy, sad, vulnerable, in pain, caring or loved when it suits them and, often in order to make a profit.

Exploring media images of childhood has led me to work with young people to develop their media literacy. Encouraging young people to ask questions about what they watch, hear and read can help them to develop their own opinions and understanding of life.

We cannot change the images of childhood that are seen in books, on television or in the media. However, we can use a range of images when we work as informal educators to show a broad spectrum of families. Images of childhood should be motivational and informative to increase awareness of everyone being different and having different circumstances. This can help show a more honest picture of childhood and prepare children for adolescence and adulthood in a more positive way.

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Compassion in the community

Jo Gaffney

Introduction

Working with individuals is an integral feature of my day to day duties. Young people often approach me to discuss any issues, problems or events that are happening in their lives. As I am writing this article Stephen is a 17 year old man studying at Henley College. He often uses the Social Centre during breaks and lunchtimes. I have begun to develop a relationship with Stephen over the last two months. I used a reflective journal to explore our interactions and to help to try and develop our working relationship.

Stephen

Stephen is a member of a small group of young people who often gather in the Social Centre during breaks and lunchtimes. The group are loud and boisterous often getting into fights with other students and even each other. All the young people in the group started college in September, although I was immediately aware of them and often had to approach them to request that they “calm down”, it probably was not until late October that I learned their names. Stephen soon became one name that I used frequently “Stephen, could you please not wave the pool cue around, someone might get hurt”, “Stephen, could you please put the pool balls back on the table, you have ruined their game”, “Stephen, you have to wait your turn” and most frequently used “Stephen, please don’t talk to people like that”. I noticed early on that Stephen tended to shout orders at people opposed to talking to them; “get me change” was often Stephen’s way of asking me to change one pound into two fifty pence pieces so he could play pool. I repeatedly asked him to use manners when speaking to people but this very rarely happened. The first time that I banned Stephen from the Social Centre was in October, a month after he had started his college course; it was due to him slapping a student called Anne in the face when she asked him to move out of her way. When I tried to discuss why he did this he refused to engage in conversation and laughed in my face. I informed him that it was completely unacceptable behaviour, that he would be banned from the Social Centre for two weeks and asked him to apologise to Anne, Stephen continued to laugh, barged passed me and left, returning three weeks later and refusing to discuss it further.

After this incident, Stephen became more aggressive towards other students and was banned from the Centre more frequently. Whenever I challenged him about his behaviour he took pride in his reputation as a bully and often said that he wanted everyone to be intimidated by him,

even me. Taylor identifies Stephen's behaviour as that of an *'Aggressive Bully'*, common traits include seeing themselves as *'fearless and tough and they are inclined to use violence. They need to dominate and may exercise power'* (Taylor, A. M. 2003: 68). In my case study, Stephen emphasises this with his intimidating approaches and on one occasion shouting "I'm the baddest" at me when questioned why other students do not like him.

Banning young people from the Social Centre is something that I do not enjoy, but I do feel that it is important for young people to understand the consequences of their actions. I discuss incidents with young people before banning them to ensure that I get all of the information about what happened. Once the ban is over, I meet with them again to give them opportunity to reflect on their behaviour. Eventually, I limited my interactions with Stephen, often just approaching him to say "Get out and come back next week". There were no before or after discussions and I found myself avoiding him altogether: *'The worse our view about another person's character, the easier it is to justify avoiding them'* (Stone, D., Patton, B. and Heen, S. 1999: 48).

Recording and Reflecting

I chose to analyse my work with Stephen for this piece rather than other individuals with whom I work because I had recognised that I was avoiding him, I identified that I did not like him due to a clash in our values, I perceived him to be an aggressive bully and I was growing deeply disappointed in my own behaviour towards him. As a youth worker, I feel that I should try to see the good in everyone, or at least try to understand them. I recognised this exploration of my work with Stephen as a way to motivate- or more honestly- force myself to interact with him. I knew that I could create more stress and work by choosing Stephen; however, I also felt that it would be a good way to challenge myself. My line manager also felt that I was giving myself additional work, even wishing me "good luck" and I had to agree as I have had to ban him so often that I probably would not be able to get two months of reflection out of our interactions.

I began recording and reflecting upon my interactions with Stephen on the 8th February. Unfortunately, before lunchtime I had asked Stephen to leave the Social Centre due to fighting with Tom, a peer on the same college course. I was under a lot of pressure due to the Mayor and reporters from the local newspaper coming in to the Social Centre to launch a 'Be Healthy' campaign that I had organised. During the reflection processes in my journal, I became more aware that both young people were seeking attention by acting up and play fighting. I did give them several warnings before banning them but I can confidently identify that I played an active role in the altercation, I became stressed with frustration at their attention seeking behaviour at the launch of an important event and I snapped, kicking them both out of the room and banning them.

Had I prepared for the event better, managed staff and visitors more effectively and ultimately remained calmer, would the situation have been different? I can only speculate that it probably would have. I also realised, during reflection, that I treat individuals differently. Had that been two different students, I probably would have acted differently, I often offer warnings to other students when they are play fighting; I have never had to ban them for it. My expectations of Stephen and Tom due to the history of our interactions lead me to make a particular reaction -

ban them. Were Tom and Stephen merely seeking attention and acting up in the only way they know how to get it?

An initial act of deviance or normative diversity, is defined as being worthy of attention and is responded to punitively. The deviant group is segregated or isolated and this operates to alienate them from conventional society. They perceive themselves as more deviant, group themselves with others in a similar position, and this leads to more deviance (Cohen, S. cited in Brooks, L. 2006: 263).

Responding to Stephen's attention seeking by banning him, I am isolating him and giving him opportunity to perceive himself as more deviant. This is possibly why his behaviour continued. Until someone has positive attention they will continue to seek it negatively and therefore become labelled as a bad person. The next time I saw Stephen was a few days later on the 11th February, neither one of us mentioned what had happened. I always aim to discuss incidents with young people before and after the ban, however with Stephen I have not done so for a long time. I reflected that this is due to him having the ability to 'wind me up' and possibly due to me feeling a little intimidated by him. This is not effective youth work; by banning someone without discussing the behaviour reaffirms the 'deviant' label and will do little to alter things '*telling someone to change makes it less rather than more likely that they will. This is because people almost never change without first feeling understood*' (Stone, D., Patton, B. and Heen, S. 1999: 29) How can I help a young person commit to change if I do not seek to do so myself?

I closed my first reflective journal entry by writing that I want a "bit of peace and harmony" which leads me to question; is my problem with Stephen really a problem with the chaos that he seeks for attention?

Children who express their vulnerability through antisocial behaviour, crime and violence are primarily considered a threat to social order and to the formation of economically productive citizens. The majority of interventions are based on society's needs- for conformity, obedience, a future workforce- rather than their own (Brooks, L. 2006: 262).

Maybe my feelings towards Stephen are due to him not conforming to how I want the Social Centre environment and he is a threat to my view of 'social order'. The need for this is my need not his. Is banning him an effective way of making him conform? No, as it has not actually prevented him from being antisocial, however, by forcing myself to interact with him I will be more able to identify his needs and the needs of his peers.

Using my reflections in practice

To rectify my personal contribution to altercations with Stephen, I decided to actively seek frequent interaction with him '*The way to establish a beneficial and significant relationship with an aggressive child is to persist*' (Biddulph, S. 2002: 126). I began to approach him and his friends to make small talk and discussed several incidents between him and a peer that he was having trouble with. I am surprised at how both of our attitudes changed, almost immediately; he became politer and I began to have genuine concern and empathy for him. I continued to make an effort to engage with Stephen even asking him for project ideas. This all seemed to be having

great effect and I was extremely pleased with myself, however on the 10th March I damaged the progress that we had made. I jumped to conclusions and assumed that a fight outside was between Stephen and his friend instead of two other young people. I was quickly informed that this was not the case by witnesses and I apologised to both but recognised my judgements, although justifiable, had damaged the developments we had both made.

This tendency to develop unconsciously biased perceptions is very human, and it can be dangerous. It calls for a dose of humility about the 'rightness' of our story, especially when we have something important at stake! (Stone, D., Patton, B. and Heen, S. 1999: 37)

Not surprisingly a few days later Stephen became involved in another dispute with a peer. Had my assumptions re-labelled him as a deviant? I actively sought to rebuild our relationship and discussed the incident with him; through my reflection on our discussion, I began to question whether people actually are "out to get him" as he often suggests. Before I could explore this further, I again jumped to conclusions and assumed that another incident was Stephen's fault in the Social Centre. I jumped into a situation without any information, judging that Stephen and two friends were acting aggressively toward another student as I walked into an incident without finding out what had happened and tried to ban them, when in fact they had all actively helped a volunteer youth worker who was being threatened by another young person *'However real and right our assumptions about other people's intentions may seem to us, they are often incomplete or just plain wrong'* (Stone, D., Patton, B. and Heen, S. 1999: 46).

I have reflected previously that I am a very judgemental person; however I always felt that my judgements are flexible and open to being continually adapted and changed. I understand now that this is not always true. If someone's actions have led me to judge them negatively, I find it very hard to change this into a positive judgement when it is tested and I will assume the worst. This is not appropriate in challenging situations. In the book 'Difficult Conversations' Bruce, Patton and Heen suggest using the 'Disentangle Impact and Intent' tool to ask myself three questions before taking action:

1. Actions: "What did the other person actually say or do?"
2. Impact: "What is the impact of this on me?"
3. Assumption: "Based on this impact, what assumption am I making about what the other person intended?"

(Stone, D, Patton, B. and Heen, S. 1999: 53)

I immediately recognised that I was completely wrong to have judged the three young men. I thanked each of them for their help- which reinforced the positive attention I would like to develop further, I apologised and emphasised that I made a mistake. I feel that it is important that the three young men understand that not only am I able to make poor decisions, I am also open and honest enough to admit it. I also added that I would aim not to jump to conclusions without knowing the facts in the future.

In working with others to promote their own emotional, social, spiritual and physical well-being, we as practitioners become, in crude terms, facilitators. It means decreasing the number of judgements we make without proper evidence (Smith, H. and Smith, M. K. 2008: 36).

However, it also could be argued that my assumptions and judgements can on occasion be beneficial to a situation:

Work with the prejudices (prejudgments) we bring to encounters... rather than trying to put prejudgments to one side, we need to appreciate how they can assist us in becoming involved in what's being said. They can give us starting points. However, we do need to know they are there and put them to the test. (Smith, H. and Smith, M. K. 2008: 61).

The incident fortunately worked out well. Stephen seemed to respond well to me admitting fault in my own actions.

When good intentions are entangled with moral superiority it can be twice as dangerous. This mixture can encourage the recipient to feel worthless and third-rate; seeing us as 'good' and himself as 'bad' (Brandon, D. 1976: 56).

I believe that hearing me say that I was wrong helped Stephen to see me as a person, someone who makes mistakes instead of someone who is superior to him. Stephen was also seen to be a hero by other people using the Social Centre. Stephen has even suggested that one of his peers, Roger, sees me as a support to him through a time of stress. I ensured that I listened to Roger with 'non-judgemental warmth' otherwise known as 'Unconditional Positive Regard' (Sanders, P. 2006: 70), I suspended my judgements of him and simply listened intently, although I did not agree with some of the comments that he made, I acknowledged his feelings and helped him to map out points to change. I am good at supporting young people, listening to them and helping them to identify ways to make change. The knowledge that Stephen sees me as someone who may be able to help gave me more confidence in my work with him. We have both become more open to banter in our conversations and Stephen is now beginning to open up about his life, hobbies and ambitions.

Conclusion

I found the process of keeping a journal to explore and deepen my interactions with young people extremely surprising and rewarding. I had expected some changes in my relationship with Stephen but for the first couple of weeks I had imagined that the changes would be superficial or negative, not for one moment did I imagine that we were to begin to build a positive relationship. Also, my relationships with Stephen's peer's improved greatly, Roger has since been to see me several times, although he has not committed to making the changes in his action plan yet, he does give me regular updates of situations at home and in his studies. By reflecting on all of our interactions, I was able to identify my role in the pattern of behaviour that led to Stephen's many bans from the Social Centre. Looking back over my journal before

writing this piece helped me to understand my own learning processes through the developing relationship. I can see more clearly that I have an active involvement in all of the interactions that happen around me and as a youth worker, I also play a big part in influencing the outcomes of these interactions with the judgements that I make.

In the book “The Art of Helping Others” Smith and Smith suggest six key aspects in the process of helping to make change possible:

1. building communities of truth
2. engaging in helping conversations
3. nurturing moments of reflection and connection
4. teaching and speaking to the condition of others
5. encouraging informed and committed action
6. evaluating what has gone on

(Smith, H and Smith, M. K. 2008: 111)

Although I was sceptical about the processes of change that would occur between myself and Stephen, I can positively identify each of these aspects at some point in our interactions. By acknowledging my mistakes when jumping to conclusions, I feel that I have made a path for more honest exchanges to take place in the future, I am becoming more frequently engaged in helping conversations with Stephen and his peers and I have had more discussions about his behaviour, reflected on my own and evaluated the developments that have been made. I have encouraged informed and committed action with Stephen and Roger and I am hopeful that the relationships will continue to flourish; I am committed to the changes that are occurring.

I feel more confident in my approaches and am open to new techniques of working which help me to make change possible in myself and also others:

We have to wrestle with our personal desire to have things our way. We have to learn a genuine respect, based on compassion rather than pity, for our clients no matter how dirty, disorganised, aggressive or rejecting they may seem. Out of this respect can flow good helping; help for us as well as them. (Brandon, D. 1976: 46)

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Which comes first: compassion or authenticity?

Katherine Eveleigh

Introduction

In this article I will explore the following quotation in light of my own practice-based experiences:

‘The real kernel of all our help, that which renders it effective, is compassion’
(Brandon, 1990:6)

I will first establish my understanding of the key terms. The ‘kernel’ is that which is central to our help. ‘Help’ or ‘helping’ refers to the *‘process of assisting or coming to the aid of someone’*, (Smith and Smith, 2008:15). Compassion is defined as *‘sympathetic pity and concern with the sufferings or misfortunes of others’* (Oxford University Press: 2010). Whilst I cannot dispute the definition, pity is not what I immediately associated with compassion. In his chapter on compassion Brandon identifies it’s meaning as pointing towards *‘commitment, involvement, caring, love and generosity of the heart’* (1990:48). It is commitment, involvement and caring that are my instantaneous affiliations with compassion. Kottler (2000) believes compassion entails passion and commitment and this encompasses my interpretation of compassion. I am more inclined to feel pity for one whom I consider to be unkind. Love and generosity of the heart are feelings that may follow later.

In this article I have drawn from my own experiences as a young person and reflected upon my motivations for becoming an informal educator. I will argue that there are other values that render help effective besides compassion, including the importance of personality as a main tool when working with young people. I consider how authenticity and integrity are also important factors in building trusting relationships, and how having an interest and having compassion are different.

I will explore the risks of acting with compassion and the danger of projecting perceived problems onto young people and how this could encourage dependency. I will touch upon what other skills are important when I am working with a young person I do not feel compassion for. This discussion highlights the challenges in measuring effectiveness.

Compassion

To consider the relevance of compassion within my role as a youth worker I will begin by reflecting on my motives for entering the profession. As a young person I experienced a period of personal struggles and rebellion, particularly at school. I was angered by the confrontational way that teachers and pupils communicated. I refused to go to school on a regular basis. It was experiencing difficulties that leave me with empathy for young people. This is not to say I know how they feel as this would be *'metaphysically impossible'* (Egan, 2002:76) but I do have some understanding.

As a result of my absconding from school I was assigned an education welfare officer, Claire. Claire visited me for many home appointments. In the beginning I approached these meetings with caution. But I soon found Claire to be interested and interesting, engaging, approachable and open. We had long conversations and Claire shared her fascinating experiences as a foster parent. Claire succeeded in her aim in my returning to school but this was by no means her only focus. In school I regularly found myself seeking Claire's company, I found her authenticity deeply effective. As Davies and Gibson (1967:175) identified in their studies of social education, *'The contribution of the social educator must be made in personal terms: his personality is...the tool above all others which he will use in his practise'*. Claire left me impressed by her personality, identified by Smith & Smith as *'our best tool'* (2008:47). I started thinking that maybe one day I could help a young person the way Claire had helped me. This, alongside no desire to enter office based employment is what led me to become an informal educator.

Returning to Brandon's idea that compassion is central to our effectiveness as helpers raises a number of questions. I could interpret Brandon's quote as implying that to work without compassion renders us ineffective, yet my memories of Claire are her authenticity and integrity. Claire refused to act *'buried under a veneer of professionalism'* (Smith and Smith, 2008:47). I can also draw upon Roger's theory around the importance of relationships in education. As Rogers expressed:

a leader or a person who is perceived as an authority figure in the situation is sufficiently secure within herself and in her relationship to others that she experiences an essential trust in the capacity of others to think for themselves, to learn for themselves (Rogers, 1969:188).

Claire was a secure person, sharing her knowledge but trusting my abilities. She empathised but rarely sympathised. If I refer back to the dictionary definition of compassion synonymous to pity then Claire could be considered as working without compassion. As Brandon (1990:51) expresses, *'pity is one part arrogance and one part sympathy. Unlike compassion it sees others as unequal, inferior'*. To put this into context within my role, I feel if I were to assume pity upon the young people I work with, it could hinder our relationships as I adopt a position of power and judgement.

I feel it is having an interest that is central to my values as an informal educator, and showing interest and showing compassion are different. By *'valuing each individual'* (NYA, 2004:6) my interest is in getting to know each young person, being interested in them and their journey and

using our relationship as a tool. I will give two examples with which I intended to evidence the differences between compassion and interest.

In one encounter with a young woman I work with after she had lost her unborn baby and was very sad it was appropriate to respond compassionately by way of personal affection (Brandon, 1990:59) and a degree of sympathy. Another encounter required me to respond when a care leaver (DT) I have worked with requested I support him in his army application. Despite my concern at his decision being the right one for him, which we discussed in depth, I supported him. In the first instance this type of help appears to be practical and one based on interest. By researching Brandon's meanings of compassion I have discovered this encounter could be considered full of compassion at its highest level '*without any purpose or intent*' (1990:50). I did not judge the young man, nor did I attempt to force change, but I was able to share my fears through an honest discussion. My input has not influenced DT's decision, his application was successful and he awaits his training date confirmation.

I feel my responses to both situations were based on authenticity. The notion of authenticity is about being real, true and genuine (Taylor, 1991). Put simply, I am me and my responses are real. I have told the young people that they can call on me for help. Smith and Smith identify '*if we present the idea that we are someone who can be trusted and relied on, then we need to be exactly that*' (2008:49). This is crucial to trusting, effective relationships.

If I feel compassion for all young people I work with then I could be assuming that all young people I encounter are suffering and in need of my help. I do not believe this. At work I was requested to complete pre-CAFs on 24 Duke of Edinburgh participants on the basis that the youth support services CAF targets were not met. I challenged this request. As identified by Smith and Smith, '*There is the constant danger of our projecting things onto them*' (2008:16). If I plant a seed of there being problems do I set the foundations of a self-fulfilling prophecy? I could be seen to be '*more interfering than intervening*' (Smith & Smith, 2008:16). As their informal educator it is my role to build relationships with the young people by being consistent and committed. I then respond to their needs as they arise by '*being open to what they say and express in their lives*' (Smith & Smith, 2008:16).

This example shows me signs of misplaced compassion. If I propose needs then this is not young people led. This is when I consider compassion becoming dangerous as I run the risk of creating dependency. I have witnessed dependency from young people being sought by needy workers; a worker I know has the constant company of vulnerable young people. Smith and Smith identify this as an issue as we are not encouraging individuals to differentiate what is of their concern and what is the concern of others (2008:90). I believe in cases like this the worker actively encourages young people to need them in order to fulfil their own insecurities, to the detriment of the young person. Brandon (1968:33) makes a bold statement, '*helping and caring for others can be a very effective way of concealing desperate personal needs*'. This can create a situation which renders the worker to be in a position of control. This is what the Dalai Lama (1998:92) has identified as compassion being confused with attachment, '*the feeling of controlling someone, or loving someone so that person will love you back*'. This is motivated by self-interest and not '*genuine compassion*' (Dalai Lama, 1998:92) for the individual.

In considering the risks of misplaced compassion, the notion that compassion is that which renders us effective (Brandon, 1990:6) is debatable. For example, I have worked with a Duke of Edinburgh participant, CW, for years and I struggle to feel compassion towards her. It could be argued that to see CW with compassion I would see her as *'complete and without a need to be changed'* (Brandon, 1990:60) and this is not so.

CW often lies and seeks attention, particularly from workers. I struggle to experience compassion towards an individual that often doesn't help themselves. I feel that to treat CW with compassion or sympathy could feed her negativity and render me ineffective. Nevertheless, I hold interest in CW's wellbeing and believe I act with authenticity and integrity. Smith and Smith define that to act with integrity is to *'handle people's emotions with sensitivity and care, and choose to act with good intention'* (2008:50). I communicate with CW in a way I feel appropriate because effective help can differ according to each individual, authenticity and integrity play an equally important role in our source of commitment to young people.

Finally, thought provoked from Brandon's (1990) quotation on compassion is how effectiveness is measured. To be effective is to be *'successful in producing a desired or intended result'* (Oxford University Press: 2010). The worth of informal education is hard to determine due to the holistic nature of our work. The concept of lifelong learning is *'highly individualised'* (Smith, 1996) and poses some difficulty in specifying outcomes.

For example, the success of Duke of Edinburgh within my organisation is measured by the accredited outcomes achieved. In her arguments about such targets within youth work undermining the authenticity of relationships, Smith (2002) claims that whilst it could be the case that young people are achieving a vast quantity of outcomes as a result of youth work interventions, what is needed is that workers can demonstrate clarity in the direction of their work and intended outcome. This can create a conflict of interests. Whilst my organisation is concerned with accreditations, I am more concerned with relationship because of its purpose to foster learning (Biestek, 1961). The activity is also another tool. An outdoor expedition becomes a learning experience for the young person because of the challenges the environment presents and I consider the effectiveness to be in the process rather than the product.

Conclusion

Exploring the meanings of compassion, the relevance of it within an informal education context and relating this to my own values within my role as a youth worker has encouraged me to identify my motivation for working with young people. In particular how authenticity and integrity are of higher importance than compassion. If our personality is our main tool it is crucial that we remain true to ourselves and others.

Compassion can be a motivation but as an educator I must be very careful not to misplace this or pity others. If I do I run the risk of creating dependency and this is to the detriment of those I aim to support. I have learnt that there are many values that are central to my help and effectiveness is an individualistic notion.

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Who needs community education and why?

Kimberly Morgan-Jones

This article will explore one question about community education: Who needs it, and why? I will be focussing on one aspect of community education: how formal education in a secondary school could be linked to the community, thus providing a certain type of community education. This topic is of great interest to me as I currently work in a secondary school for one and a half days a week and I also attended a secondary school that was based on the values of community education.

The article will attempt to discuss the aims of community learning, as well as briefly mentioning the funding priorities and the role that the government has played in community education. I will also give an example from my own practice of when my value position differed from that of the school I work in, and how tensions may have arisen from this. Ultimately I will attempt to answer the question “who needs community education and why?” by exploring the benefits of community education through schooling.

To begin to see what the aims of community education might be, it is useful to look at an example of community education being founded and promoted. During the 1920s Henry Morris, working within the Cambridgeshire Education Board, shared his vision for a community school, or village college as he called them, and began to make his vision a reality. Henry Morris’ vision for community schooling is particularly interesting to me because I attended a school that he established, Linton Village College, from 1998 to 2003. Working within Cambridgeshire, Morris saw that there was a huge divide between schooling in the affluent city centre and the poor rural villages (Jeffs 1998:25) and decided that schooling within rural areas should be a priority. Tony Jeffs tells us that ‘*Morris argued that a new institution – the village college – could play a significant role in regeneration*’ (Jeffs and Smith 1998). Morris saw a problem with the village community as a whole, and felt that having the right school could begin to tackle this problem. He said that ‘*we should picture a town or village clustering around its educational buildings, with its hall, library, and recreation grounds, where young and old not only acquire knowledge but are inducted into a way of life*’ (Jeffs 1998:44). It seems clear that Morris had two aims in mind for his community education vision: for young people and older people to learn together and from each other, and also to lessen the divide between the rich people living in the city centre and the poor living in the rural villages. The values and aims of inclusion and equality stand out clearly here as important in Morris’ vision of community education.

When I attended Linton Village College sixty-one years after it had opened, there were still visible signs of Henry Morris' vision throughout the school site and life of the school. Firstly, the village library was located on the school site, as well as a public sports centre and a nursery. Throughout the day, members of the public would use these facilities, as well as attending adult evening classes which took place at the school. There were also various traditions which involved the local community in the school life, such as an annual concert by the school orchestra in the local church and hosting a Christmas lunch for residents of the village's old people's home. As a pupil at the school I did not realise the significance of these events and how valuable they were to community life, both of the school and of the village. During the time that I was attending the school the public library closed and moved to a new location within the village. This was quite a significant action as it took away an element of the link that the school had with the community. Over the past few years we have seen, understandably, an increase in security around schools. The school that I now work in has an eight-foot spiked fence circling the perimeter. Visitors have to speak to a member of staff at the gate before being let onto the premises. I cannot help but wonder what Henry Morris would make of the situation we now find ourselves in of excluding everyone who is 'external' from the school site. I agree that there is a need to protect our young people within schools. But is the eight-foot spiky fence keeping too many people out, and dampening the spirit of community education by physically separating the school from the community that it is meant to be part of? I do believe that the aims and values of community education can be upheld while still ensuring the health and safety of our young people. It is not essential for schools to shut themselves off completely from interaction with the community surrounding them.



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As we have seen from Henry Morris, one of the aims of community education and learning is to bridge the gap between schooling and the community, and to make pupils more aware of their place within society by learning from and interacting with other people within their community.

Through my experience of the schools where I live and work, I worry that this is no longer a concern, or even a thought, of many schools today. In September a 'Studio' school is opening in our town. The idea behind these schools is for pupils to experience the world of work, business and enterprise by operating in working day hours and replacing school uniform with 'business wear':

The Midland Studio College – Nuneaton, which is now in the pre-opening stage, will accept a maximum of 300 students across Years 10 to 13. Specialising in Advanced Transport Systems and Enterprise, the new school will focus on developing employability skills and will have a close connection with local employers who will be involved in all aspects of its innovative curriculum. Key employers and partners involved with the school include MIRA and Triumph.

Young people at The Midland Studio College – Nuneaton will study GCSE, BTEC and HNC qualifications and spend between half a day and two days a week in the work place. Students will also benefit from personal coaching to help them develop their confidence and softer skills including communication and teamwork (<http://www.studioschoolstrust.org>).

Within formal education and secondary schools, we appear to be seeing a growing trend in preparing young people for the world of work and through this perhaps instilling within them an individualist ethos. Pupils are taught skills that they need for employment and industry. Social skills such as communication and teamwork are being seen as 'softer skills', as shown by the Studio College's mission statement. This appears to be in conflict with the vision of community education, which encourages the individual to look beyond their own perspective of the world.

I believe that schools can do both. Schools can prepare young people for the world of work and develop them as an individual as well as making them aware of their place in the community and learning from other people. As Brian Belton tells us, *'It is very important to learn from each other; from young people and the community itself to benefit [other] people and ourselves'* (Belton 2009:142). Community education has benefits both individually and corporately for each person involved in it. As Smith also points out, *'Humans are social animals. Connection and interaction both widen and deepen what we can achieve, and makes possible our individual character'* (Smith 2001). It is through our interactions with each other, through mediums such as community education, that we become a better version of ourselves.

When discussing community education, we cannot escape from the fact that the government has a part to play in shaping and defining community education itself. As Lyn Tett tells us, *'community education can be difficult to define as its focus varies over time in response to changing local, national and global education priorities'* (Tett 2010:2). Ten years ago it appeared to be the case that the government could see the potential benefits of community education within schools. In 2004 Catherine Ashton, then Minister for Extended and Inclusive Schools, said *that 'schools providing services needed by local people become the focus of the local community and boost community pride and involvement'* (Ashton 2004 cited in Smith 2004). Two years before this statement was made, the government had sponsored twenty-five 'Local Education Authorities' to develop 'extended schools' projects, (Smith 2004) which shows that there was a priority within their funding (at that time) to try and create a school that extended into the community. In my, albeit limited, experience of working

within schooling and education it appears to be the case that funding priorities in education have changed because of the increase in, often privately-funded, school 'Academies'.

In May 2010 there were 203 Academies and in May 2012 there were 1807 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>). These Academies have much more say in their own budgets and can decide for themselves how their money is spent. With a change in government in 2010, we also saw a change in funding priorities for schooling, with an emphasis on individual schools taking responsibility for their own financial agendas. This trend within education means that it is increasingly difficult for the government to implement changes within schools and education if they wanted, for example, to include more community education in the agenda of the school. It is becoming more and more likely that the school itself will have to choose its own priorities, if it has any, for community education. With individual schools making their own decisions about what community education means to them, and whether or not they should do anything about it, there will be even more uncertainty about what community education actually means than there is already.

But funding and finances are not the only factor dictating whether or not a school should be interested in community education; the values and principles of the school and of the senior members of staff also play a crucial role in this process. Within my own practice, I have experienced a difference between my value position and that of the school that I work in with regards to community education. Perhaps as a result of my personal school experience, I believe strongly in the connection between schools and community. As mentioned, the secondary school that I attended used to, and still does, host a Christmas dinner for residents of the local old people's home. I made a suggestion, to the deputy principal of the school I now work in, of something similar that the pupils could do. Every month the church where I work hosts a 'Lunch Club' for local elderly residents and I suggested that a few pupils from the school could come and help at the lunch club and meet some of the elderly people. Perhaps it is the informal educator in me, but I strongly believe that there is value in speaking to people from a different area of life to your own, and I felt sure that the young people from school would enjoy meeting some older local residents as much as the members of 'Lunch Club' would enjoy meeting the pupils. I was told by the deputy principal that the school was not in a position to be doing things within the community at this time.

Through the conversation between myself and the deputy principal, I felt that there was a clash in our value positions. This experience made me think that perhaps there are schools, organisations, and importantly, government bodies that recognise the potential positives and benefits of community education, but are less willing to actually make this happen. As Belton points out, *'we seem to frequently talk about the 'need for change' but rarely do we articulate change from what to what'* (Belton 2009:30). Perhaps another important aim, therefore, of community education is to be clear about your intentions and to take action. Lyn Tett reminds us of the importance of being confident and sure in our values of community education when she says *'those that are engaged in the practice of community education need to be clear about how they are defining community and the relationships within communities because these definitions have strong implications for action'* (Tett 2010:13). Our values and beliefs move our work forward, putting ideas into action, and if these values differ from those of people that we work with, then we will experience tension in our practice.

It is important to keep the positive aims of community education at the forefront of our work despite disagreements and misunderstandings.

So can community education work within the context of secondary schools, despite the differences in value positions and the changes in government funding priorities? I believe that it can, and that schools would soon see the benefits of it. Ultimately the aim of a school is to educate young people, but this does not have to be just 'formal' education with no room for 'informal' education too. As Brian Belton notes, *'the apparent belief that formal and informal education have almost completely independent purposes and aims seems at least mistaken'* (Belton 2009:23). We have somehow constructed an idea that education falls into one of two categories, formal or informal, and that the two forms of education can only take place within certain contexts. Lyn Tett shows us that *'the practices that come under the umbrella of community education operate at the 'meso' level between the individual and the state, the local and the global, the personal and the wider society'* (Tett 2010:14). Being involved in community education means that we get to stand between these paradigms, in the 'grey areas' between the black and white, which puts us as youth workers and informal educators in a unique and brilliant situation. Tett goes on to tell us that community education *'involves a blurring of traditional boundaries and an emphasis that grows out of people's experiences and the social interests that are generated within communities'* (Tett 2010:1). This quote shows us that community education should not be confined just to school years, but should carry on after leaving school at the age of sixteen, as individual experiences and interests continue to develop. Within my role in the local secondary school I am in the fortunate position that I do not need to 'formally' educate the young people in the school, but can work alongside them to bridge the gap between the school and the world outside of the spiky fence.

Community education needs to be about more than just preparing an individual for life in the world. Recently my line manager, a vicar, took a funeral service of a prison officer who had spent his life working with prisoners to help them turn away from a life of crime. When he told me about the funeral it made me think about the purpose of community education. Are we educating our young people in the ways of society and community, just so that they become 'good' people who work in an office and don't break the law? Or are we giving them the tools that they need to build a positive life for themselves and others around them by learning from other people and working alongside them? To attempt to answer the question of this assignment – who needs community education and why – my answer would be everyone does so that we can learn from one another and learn to work together for the good of each other, both individually and corporately. The Studio College opening in Nuneaton later this year will teach young people how to work within a business to make money for themselves and their bosses. The schools that Henry Morris founded taught young people that there is a wider context to their lives than just themselves and to be aware of other people around us and how to talk to them and learn from them. Community education needs to have a balance of both of these elements – learning for the individual to create a successful and positive life for themselves but also learning about the wider context of their community and how to make positive contributions to those people around them. As Henry Morris said "a social laboratory like the Village College [could be] capable of achieving on a small-scale what eventually might be secured on a larger-scale. Places where a new concept of citizenship linking men and women of different social classes could be initiated" (Jeffs 1998:15). Community education is a grass-roots, small-

scale operation with the big potential for uniting people both locally and nationally through individual and corporate learning and education. Community education defies the boundaries between classes, ages, religions and political stances, which makes it something that is worth implementing in everyday life.

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A Nosey neighbours or here to help? An exploration of the role of the informal educator within a social policy context.

Mark Chase

What follows is an exploration of community and the role of the informal/community educator. Community is a difficult concept to define due to the wide variety of ways the term is used; however despite its multiple meanings in most cases community has positive connotations. I will explore whether community also has a negative side – promoting exclusion and divisions. I will go on to look at the function and purpose of the informal/community educator. I will look at how the work of the community educator is influenced by national legislation and policy and how the role is impacted by pressure and expectations of policy makers and employers. Am I a pawn that is used to create control and compliance? I will use examples from my work practice in the Pastoral Support Team at a further education college to help me explore how an informal/community educator works with integrity within this context.

Community and the Community Educator

It could be argued that there is no ‘definitive list’ of responsibilities of the community educator, and nor should there be. Community means different things to different people and therefore as a consequence the roles and practice of professional community educators will vary in substantial ways and so it becomes impossible to suggest a specific way of working.

Fulcher and Scott (2007: 498) state that community has many different meanings and has been used in countless different ways and therefore it is difficult to define. However, they do propose that a community will have one or more of the following characteristics:

- *Common situation* – this could be location of residence, ethnicity, class, religion or some other feature

- *Common activities* – involve all round relationships between people for example, not limited to work, politics or any single activity
- *Collective action* – a sense of common interest and may organise an activity around that interest
- *Shared identity* – a sense of belonging, an identity that has an emotional charge and maybe loyalty

Consequently, the role of the community worker necessitates him or her to understand the community they are working within whatever context that may be. Rogers and Smith describe this appreciation as ‘local knowledge’ (2010: 8). Belton (2009) suggests that our work benefits from and is made effective by exploring what draws people together. It could even be argued that a successful community educator by nature is also a cultural and social anthropologist as they are required to recognise ‘*what people do and why*’ (Belton, 2009: 80).

Bauman (2001) states that ‘community’ conjures up feelings of solidarity, commitment, shared understanding and trust. When I asked a variety of people what community meant to them and how it made them feel every individual had a positive response similar to the characteristics Bauman describes – belonging, safety and a place with friends and family were a few of the descriptions offered. But is this always how community is experienced?

A community worker also needs to consider that there can be disadvantages to a community and understand that by its nature a community implies a boundary and therefore can exclude those who do not conform (Rogers & Smith, 2010: 16) or who are seen to be ‘different’; ‘*you are not like us, therefore you do not belong*’ (Belton, 2009: 5).

Furthermore, what is seen as one community can house smaller communities. An example of this within my practice became clear from discussions I had with local young people. Locally near where I work there are two major towns, and both have ‘crews’. Yet within each crew there can be divisions depending on where somebody lives i.e. subgroups have formed whose membership is based upon the housing estate the young people live on within the town.

Function and Purpose of the Community Educator

Informal or community educators are encouraged (among other things) to provide ‘social education’ (Jeffs & Smith, 2005: 136), ‘personal and social development’ (www.nya.org.uk) and to ‘promote democracy’ (www.communities.gov.uk). Our work has always been driven by various national policies and legislation. The Albermarle Report of 1960 for example, was commissioned in part by fears of a growing ‘youth problem’. The Albemarle committee were concerned that young people were evidencing ‘a kind of selfishness which will not yield itself to any demand outside its own immediately felt needs’ (1960: 33-34).

The Every Child Matters initiative arose, at least in part, from the death of Victoria Climbié and the failure of various services to prevent her death. In the years that Every Child Matters existed we were told to work with children and young people in a way that ensures that they are healthy, safe, that they enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing.

Often new policies and guidelines are introduced to combat what it perceived as ‘social deviance’ (Belton, 2009: 22). If the government believed that everything was satisfactory they would probably concentrate on something else. When the Government of the day commission reports such as the Albermarle (1960), Younghusband (1959) and Gulbenkian (1982) or develop new social initiatives such as The Big Society (2010) and National Citizen Service (2011) it is a result of trying to influence change. It is as a result of what is highlighted as a ‘loss of community’ (Lee & Newby, 1989: 52).

The community worker is recognised by the state as a tool that can ‘shape and change young people’ (Belton, 2009: 36) and to step in when they encounter unacceptable behaviour (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). The community worker can also be described as a more subtle means of promoting social order. This is the case within my practice: Since the college introduced the Pastoral Support Team four years ago the overall retention rate of the students has risen by six per cent. Although it is difficult to prove that our teams work is the sole reason for the increase all evidence suggests that it has played a vital role in this outcome. It would seem that a pastoral, non-directive approach can produce the outcomes requested by the governing body.

Targeting certain groups of young people for intervention can be counterproductive as it can lend itself to ‘labelling’ (Roche & Tucker, 2002: 161). For instance, every student at college that is on a level one course is automatically placed on the college’s ‘at risk’ register because they are, in theory, more likely to fail. When we label we inevitably run the risk of supporting a group in creating a negative perception of themselves built on that label. Berne (1964) highlights this point by suggesting that we are all born a prince or a princess but if you tell a prince often enough that he is a frog, eventually he will believe you. This is of concern if young people are most often depicted as deviant or ‘a problem’. The Independent newspaper carried out research into the media portrayal of young males and discovered that generally a young male would only be spoken of in a positive light if he died and more than half the articles across the press over a period of a year were about crime (www.theindependent.co.uk).

Nosey neighbours or here to help?

What is the role of the Informal or community educator in sustaining this deficit model of young people?

As the majority of community/informal educators are paid by the state (either directly or indirectly through different funding streams) this could present various ethical and moral dilemmas. Whose agenda do we promote: young peoples, the states or our organisations? For example, in my practice, do I support a young person to leave college half way through the academic year to accept a very good job? Or do I persuade him/her to stay and help the college’s success statistics? I am employed as an informal educator and I have to work with integrity and therefore I will try to support the young person in exploring all the options and encourage them to make a choice that is appropriate ‘for them’ after s/he has considered as many different options as possible.

Various policies discuss the need to produce responsible members of society (Albermarle, 1960) or encourage better public involvement (Ofsted, 2011). By using words such as shape, promote,

educate these reports inadvertently suggest that young people are not currently having a positive impact on the community, that they need to be shaped into or taught to become positive community members (www.direct.gov.uk). However, The National Youth Agency (2004) uses phrases when describing working in the community like ‘choose to participate’ and ‘encourage society to be responsive to young people’ (www.nya.org.uk). It is written in a way that places the lead on the community and the people within it rather than the state leading through more subtle forms of persuasion.

Definitely here to help

The aim of the community educator should be to support any local group in making desired change. This can be managed in various ways. Belton explores how by ‘seeking similarity and promoting forms of mutual participation rather than difference’ (2009: 10) community members are more likely to achieve their chosen goal. We must remember however that we should also embrace individuality and have ‘respect for the individual’ (Richardson & Wolfe, 2007: 64) within each community.

Roche and Tucker consider that the preferred way to work is by ‘encouraging young people to govern their own experiences’ (2002: 252) while Frith examines that ‘peer groups, in short, support young people’s initial steps out of family life’ (1984: 22). Therefore it is essential that we remain conscious of the ‘influence’ (Weimann, 1994: 54) that a group can have on an individual, especially an individual who may be seeking the shelter and safety that community or group can offer. Consequently we need to continue to work within our own ‘ethical’ framework and offer young people support and help them to consider a variety of options rather than telling them how they should act.

It is also important to remember that educators must constantly review their practice (Wringe, 1988). By doing this a reflective practitioner will be able to evaluate and monitor the role they play within a community and be able to understand and appreciate why local people do what they do (Richardson & Wolfe, 2007). They will then find themselves in a position where they can alter their practice with the fluidity that is required for them to remain successful.

Conclusion

The informal/community educator can be used as a tool by the government to help shape young people’s behaviour and promote social order. This can be seen to be based in a deficit model of youth where young people are generally seen as a problem. This can cause ethical problems for the informal/community educator. However by working with integrity, by developing an understanding of the community in which our work takes place and working in an open and non-directive way the young people we work with will be in a better position to make choices for themselves based on what is right for them. We should not be duped by the positive connotations that community evokes, we also need to be conscious of the exclusionary potential of community. We need to discuss with those we are working how we are able to prevent boundaries being erected and how individuality and difference can be embraced within the community.

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