

UNIVERSALS AND PARTICULARISM ENGLISH YOUTH WORK

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ABSTRACT

Trusting, open and voluntarily established personal relationships between youth workers and young people have been central to youth work since the 1960s, and youth work's educational traditions emphasize an optimistic and hopeful account of youth and young people. Recent changes in public services, broadly associated with neo-liberal political ideology, have led to a policy departure from youth work's informal educational aims. Youth workers are increasingly required to adopt a more instrumental approach to achieving auditable objectives, typified by targeted work with so-called at risk young people. The paper argues that this broad shift undermines youth work's educational centre of gravity and moves it from a broadly expressive to an instrumental register, threatening youth work's distinctive educational and social identity.

Keywords: *Youth, Policy, Professionalism, Education, Audit, Managerialism*

ABSTRAK

Sifat percaya, terbuka dan semangat sukarela telah menghasilkan perhubungan peribadi antara pekerja belia dan golongan muda sehingga menjadi keutamaan kepada kerja belia sejak 1960an, dan tradisi pendidikan kerja belia menekankan satu alasan optimistik untuk memenuhi harapan belia dan golongan muda. Perubahan terbaru dalam perkhidmatan awam, secara umum dikaitkan dengan ideologi politik neo liberal, telah membawa kepada satu perubahan dasar daripada tujuan pendidikan tidak rasmi pekerja belia. Pekerja yang muda semakin dikehendaki mengambil satu pendekatan yang lebih instrumental untuk mencapai objektif yang boleh diaudit, digambarkan oleh kerja yang disasarkan dengan apa yang dipanggil sebagai menanggung risiko bagi golongan muda. Makalah ini menekankan hujah anjakan luas yang telah melemahkan pusat graviti pendidikan kerja belia kerana peralihan ekspresif secara umum sehingga memberi ancaman kepada identiti sosial dan pendidikan kerja belia.

Kata Kunci: *Belia, Dasar, Profesionalisme, Pendidikan, Audit, Kepengurusan*

INTRODUCTION

Emergent Youth Work

This paper offers a brief historical overview of youth work in the second half of the twentieth century and, in doing this, suggests the central importance of personal relationships between youth workers and young people. The paper identifies current tensions between the principle of ‘universal’ youth work provision (i.e. that it should be accessible, in principle, to young people who wish to participate in it) and the increasing demand that youth work should be targeted to demonstrate its value and impact in relation to the regulation of specific groups of young people. To facilitate this range of audit practices has expanded across English youth work, which is currently gripped by a kind of moral panic (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Moral panic is always concerned with boundary crises, matters of classification and position. Currently, anxiety centres on an understanding that the work’s sacred value base is under threat in the context of severely diminished resources: a consequence of both economic recession and political ideology. A change in UK government in the last 18 months has led to a crisis in funding for English youth work with many local authorities (a key employment sector for youth workers in England) drastically cutting services for young people as well as youth worker numbers. The so-called commissioning of these services (i.e. their marketization) will further embed managerial and audit practices as funders seek certainty in relation to output. This transformation has the potential to radically alter relationships between youth workers and young people. It is unsurprising that high anxiety surfaces in such circumstances.

The tension between universal and targeted youth work is mirrored in a corresponding philosophical dissonance between youth work understood as an educational practice (Macintyre, 2002: 265) on the one hand and, on the other, a more instrumental approach to regulating youth transitions. Although youth work has always incorporated both expressive and instrumental dimensions, the latter increasingly overshadows the former. Youth work’s educational rationale (committed to a broadly Aristotelian idea of human flourishing constituted in processes of collective deliberation and captured in the distinction between praxis and poiesis) and its indeterminate ends cannot be easily contained in audit, what Power (1997) refers to as the ‘rituals of verification’. Audit techniques, emancipated from their location in financial accounting, have become adopted as the paradigm means of capturing the essence of work in a range of public and professional services, signaling diminishing trust in professional expertise. Audit denotes a particular and seductive discourse of accountability and control designed to alleviate the performance anxieties of day-to-day political and organizational life. Importantly, rather than evaluating or measuring ‘what’s there’, audit reconfigures and transforms the territory on which it is deployed. In a broader and cultural sense, of course, accounting and auditing are practices that constitute day-to-day life. They are part of the fabric of human culture and in that sense accountability systems are essential to social coherence (Douglas, 1982: 9).

It is when these practices become institutionalized in particular forms, as now, that their consequences should be critically appraised. The paper suggests, ironically, youth work has become subject to a 'new universalism' constituted in part at least by the growth of audit practices designed to render youth work and youth workers accountable. Increasingly, the work itself is shaped by ideas of regulating the conduct of groups identified as risk-prone (Miller & Rose, 2008), rather than engaging in educational practice. Risk, of course, is a problematic notion that is contextually defined and culturally and historically specific (Kenway et al, 2006: 31).

English youth work is a practice (or a set of practices) that, until recently at least, has differed from so-called youth development, although there is growing interest in that practice in the UK. The latter, whilst having something of youth work within it, has been understood as a hybrid located somewhere between schooling and social work. It seeks to develop specific competencies or dispositions in young people (Saito, 1995) and, according to some commentators, it represents youth as a distinctively deficit category. English youth work has, at least since the 1960s, taken what its advocates see as a more informal, less programmatic and distinctively educational approach based on young people's voluntary engagement. Arguably, youth work offers young people a unique opportunity to choose to become involved in personal and helping relationships with adults. This suggests the importance of the concept of generation. Mannheim, the first sociologist to outline a comprehensive sociology of generations and youth, argued that during times of rapid social change (as in the present) youth is a "... revitalizing agent... a kind of reserve which only comes to the fore (in) quickly changing or completely new circumstances" (Mannheim, 1943: 34). Evidence of this lies in the tumultuous changes and events that have occurred recently in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. There, young people – including young women – have been in the vanguard of revolutionary change. Elsewhere, it should be acknowledged that there was nothing arbitrary about Anders Behring Breivik's decision to massacre young people at a summer camp in Norway in July 2011. Youth has consistently, as Mannheim reminds us, been situated on the boundary between constancy and change and, in that sense, is a liminal category. As such, youth is understood as potentially powerful and dangerous, an explanation of why so much attention is paid to young people, their conduct and wellbeing (Douglas, 2002; Turner, 2009). Generation relations (as relations of authority and deference) have altered in recent times. Many young people have access to cultural capital in the form of digitized knowledge that is often inaccessible to older generations, thus displacing the authority of adult elite. Declining trust has accompanied this loss of adult control and created an apparently widening cultural distance between generations, expressed in some young people's visceral hatred of adults who symbolize, for them, an illegitimate authority, whether police, military or the softer elements of state power (social workers and teachers, for example). This has led to a growing authoritarianism in youth policy.

The personal relationship and the intimacy that it cultivates between youth workers and young people have been central to youth work. However, that relationship

is in danger of becoming significantly altered. Of course, professionals like youth workers are afforded power (in the form of authority) by virtue of their position as professionals and this plays out in all sorts of ways, formal and informal. However, although youth workers and young people occupy different social spaces, relationships in youth work have characteristically been understood as occasions on which trust, reciprocity and co-operation can be cultivated in the pursuit of human flourishing and wellbeing, especially as young people participate voluntarily in these relationships. This demands an honesty, authenticity and ethics on the part of youth workers, in short a professional integrity (Banks, 2010; Banks & Gallagher, 2008). This can be located in the interstices of conduct (adherence to acknowledged standards), commitment (to do with values, motives and ethics that guide practice), and capacity (the reflexive capacity for sense-making in complex settings through the deployment of formal and tacit knowledge and the exercise of discretion). English youth work has embodied a commitment to justice, fairness, inclusion, and to individual and social change. For some practitioners this entails political commitments to resist dominant neo-liberal discourse that has characterized politics and welfare in the UK and elsewhere.

A peculiarly English tradition of youth work first emerged in the context of nineteenth century capitalist industrialization. Youth work's roots lie in Victorian England's yearning to render the working class "governable by reason" (Donald, 1992: 23) and is embodied in attempts to mold the character and conduct of working class youth. This work was originally located in a society characterized by deeply entrenched class relations and undertaken, largely, by civic-minded middle class reformers with a range of intentions for the working class young people they sought to influence through the sequestration of newly constituted spaces of leisure. Their objectives included the development of character and bodily fitness, the transmission of religious values, the acquisition of appropriate gender roles and competences under a rubric of social improvement and progress. Nineteenth century fears and fascination with the 'perishing and dangerous classes' have their contemporary expression in recurrent popular and political concerns about the underclass in the UK and the USA (Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996). Such outlaw groups populate English history, their conduct triggering the 'respectable fears' of an imagined majority (Pearson, 1983). English culture retains an overly pessimistic view of young people (whilst ironically celebrating youthfulness) defining them as 'at risk', having 'low self-esteem' or 'fragile learning identities', for example.

Until the mid-twentieth century, youth work remained a relatively marginal practice characterized by a tenacious voluntarism, focused on encouraging a minority of working class young people (youth work in England has rarely touched the lives of a large proportion young people) to participate in a range of adult-approved activities in their leisure time. During the Second World War, however, youth work was appropriated by the state and deployed in mobilizing the youthful population to serve the nation in the context of wartime emergency. A number of universities were supported by the state to offer courses of professional training for youth workers throughout the war

years, encouraging the view that youth work should be seen as a professional activity (Bradford, 2006). Post-war, youth work was absorbed into the network of institutions and practices that constituted the welfare state and, as part of the ‘triumph of the professional ideal’ (Perkin, 1989: 359), in which a model of ability and expertise rather than social class justified the acquisition of authority and privilege in the labour market, youth workers achieved some success in the professionalization of their work.

Early youth work’s objectives centered on managing aspects of class and class relations in England. However, youth work has also claimed a role in relation to enhancing solidarity and cohesion between generations, youth workers arguing that their work was set in ‘the community’, a metaphor for that solidarity. At a modest level, and perhaps implicitly, youth work has countered the anti-solidarity forces of modernity. Indeed, the personal relationship on which so much of youth work is built can be understood in precisely this way (Halmos, 1978; Lasch, 1991; Bradford, 2011). Youth workers have operated in the territories of trust, reciprocity and obligation and youth work can be seen as an intermediate institution that pursues the ethical, civilized and humane (Boswell, 1990).

Liberal and radical educational discourses

Since the 1970s the specific task of youth workers has been “... to provide social education...” as a service to all young people who might benefit from it (Department of Education and Science, 1982: 122). The concept of ‘social education’ and, latterly, ‘informal education’ has provided youth work with a relatively consistent centre of gravity, at least in its professional ideologies. Different nuances of this can be discerned and are located in specific historical points in the post-war period.

First, liberal-democratic accounts of social education – associated particularly with the 1960s and early 1970s - emphasize the (abstract) individual, and their relationships with others. Essentially romantic, humanist and person-centred (Halpin, 2007), this version of social education sought to enable the individual young person to become more conscious of and able to better understand self. One influential analysis suggested that social education could lead to an “... individual’s increased consciousness of himself - of his values, aptitudes, and untapped resources...” (Davies & Gibson, 1967: 12). Liberal social education aimed in part to develop an introspective, reflexive and active self, able to appraise, evaluate, and work on its constitutive feelings, dispositions, and opinions. For Davies and Gibson, social education in youth work was initiated in the context of the personal relationships which young people form with peers and youth workers, enabling them to “... know firsthand and feel personally how common interests and shared activities bring and keep people together and what causes them to drift apart” (ibid: 13). Thus experiential and participative dimensions to personal relationships emerge as youth work’s defining features. These can be understood as part of a pervasive romantic and expressive individualism set within the cultural scripts of northern European modernity. These

elements, also borrowing from 1960s European and North American counter-culture, persist in youth work's occupational cultures. Typically, youth work activities were (and continue to be) designed to maximize young people's participation in personal relationships, encouraging a pedagogy in which they reflect on these experiences that become both content and process of learning. The concern here is with the production of a particular kind of self, sensitive to mutual obligations, yet simultaneously active in developing its own self-defined potential. This is of prime importance in a liberal democracy (perhaps specifically so in contemporary capitalism where the values of individual enterprise and endeavor are especially cherished). Thus, social education aims to ensure that individual young people learn to govern themselves, to "... effect by their own means, various operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, and conduct... (and) transform themselves, modify themselves..." (Miller, 1987: 206-207) to better exercise responsible choice and freedom in the pursuit of good citizenship.

Davies and Gibson's account of social education is seminal. Its diffusion in different forms over the years has given identity and meaning to youth work, although its liberal individualistic stance has been subject to critique.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s liberal youth work (construed as social education) was radicalized. Liberationist discourses emerging particularly from the civil rights movement and from feminism, and drawing on the politics of gender, race, sexuality and disability, became embodied in youth work. The abstract subjects of 1960s and 1970s social education were discursively transformed into young women, young Black people, disabled or LGBT young people. Youth workers (as social educators) came to see themselves as responding to a range of issues that mapped out the material and symbolic domains of young people's lives, their life-chances and identities, for example. An appropriate youth work response could only be made to young people if they were understood as shaped by extant social forces: racism, sexism, unemployment, poverty, and so on. Youth workers became concerned with empowering young people, helping them to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to become active social agents, rather than society's passive victims. A more self-consciously rights-based and social justice oriented trajectory emerged in the 1980s, retaining an individual focus and concern with relationships but admitting the political and social background against which young people were illuminated.

In practice, different elements from the two modes of youth work – the liberal democratic and the liberationist - meshed. Youth work became a complex of sometimes-contradictory aims, techniques and initiatives drawing on both modes. A rationale described now as 'informal education' (Batsleer, 2008) is a consistent theme in English youth work. This retains continuities with earlier discourses of social education: a focus on the problematic nature of young people's transitions to adulthood, attention to experience as the well-spring of learning, a concern with the relationship between the individual and the collective, and an underlying aim of cultivating the autonomous

and self-regulating individual. Much of this work has become located in the relations between what Nancy Fraser (1997) refers to as redistribution and recognition: the acknowledgement and valuing of difference in a broadly egalitarian frame. For youth workers, this is set in a universalist paradigm in which personal relationships can be both means and ends. We should map this out clearly. Three main factors, research demonstrates, determine the relevance and effectiveness of youth work for young people. In each of these the personal relationship between youth worker and young person is central (Bradford, 1999; Merton, 2004).

First, youth work is characterized by young people's voluntary participation in a broad range of informal leisure and educational opportunities that youth workers introduce: arts and sports, health promotion, various forms of community involvement or just 'being there'. These may lead to opportunities for deliberation and creative learning through the relationships that are thereby established and which characterize these opportunities. The desire for something to do is an important factor in many young people's lives and activity programmes offered by youth workers can counter a corrosive boredom that accompanies many young people's lives.

Second, youth work aims to enhance young people's capacity to make informed decisions about their lives, to become critical and reflexive agents. This means that personal relationships between youth workers and young people are often the vehicle for the provision of relevant information (about health, educational opportunities or housing, for example) and in supporting young people in working out how to use information effectively. The latter entails the occasion for reflection. When offered in a sympathetic and confidential way, such informal support may enable young people to make wise decisions about their lives.

Third, youth workers offer safe and inclusive spaces in which young people can meet to establish sometimes-novel forms of collective life. This is especially important at a time when, for economic reasons, substantial numbers of young people have limited access to space in which they can meet with friends in an informal and sympathetic context. By offering accessible and responsive meeting places in buildings or on the street, youth workers can develop close relationships with young people and respond to them in ways that young people themselves define as important. In the context of safe, inclusive and secure space, they also support young people in their friendships and personal relationships, seeing these as enhancing and developing trust and respect amongst young people and adults. The acknowledgement of young people as active agents in the process of youth work is vital in achieving this.

Shifting rationales in English youth work: From the universal to the particular

Despite achieving some professional recognition, youth work has remained an ambiguous practice, pressed in different directions at different times by different interests and displaying a peerless fluidity and mobility. It demonstrates a capacity to

appear in diverse settings and to shift its identity in response to varying conceptions of youth need, either self-defined or specified by policy-makers or politicians. In one guise, for example, youth work is aimed at the careful management of young people's leisure time. In another, it assumes semi-therapeutic form in supporting youth workers in counselling and information services. Yet other settings provide opportunities for youth workers to take on explicitly educational work, helping young people to understand matters connected with health, sexuality or citizenship. Underlying all of these lies a professional commitment to voluntary and participatory relationships between youth workers and young people. Youth workers argue that it is the intimacy of these relationships, freely chosen by young people, which increase their potency. For some youth workers, and their advocates, it is precisely this voluntary dimension (and thus, the efficacy of these relationships) that is threatened by current policy developments in England (Bradford, 2011).

As well as being its strength, youth work's flexible nature is a potential weakness. It has never been able to colonise a distinct territory of its own (accounting for its relatively limited success in achieving professional status), and youth workers have been forced to occupy the spaces left by other institutions: social work, the justice system or schooling for example. However, during the last decade, youth work became increasingly deployed in work with young people variously considered to be at risk who emerged in the spaces opened by social inequality and exclusion, and whose public visibility has sustained social and political anxieties about the menace of unregulated youth (Squires, 2008; Millie, 2009). Incorporation into regulatory mechanisms raises dilemmas for some youth workers of whether they are to be understood as agents of social control or educators seeking to engage collaboratively with young people, as if this is a zero-sum game. Youth work has become, perhaps inevitably, incorporated in a network of institutions and practices whose task is to ensure the stability, harmony, growth, and care of population: to contribute to the government of modern societies and, as part of that, to manage the exigencies of growing up (Foucault, 1991: 102).

However, English youth work currently operates in a radically altered social, institutional and policy climate. The background to this is well known, but it includes growing social inequality and evidence of young people's declining wellbeing, especially as youth labour markets in the UK and continental Europe have all but collapsed (Roberts, 2009; Brooks, 2009; United Nations Children's Fund, 2007; Child Poverty Action Group, 2009). The institutional climate has included fundamental changes to the fabric of the welfare state (Barry, 2005; Newman and Clarke, 2009), and moves towards a range of new service configurations, especially those emphasizing 'partnership' or 'multi-agency' approaches (Banks et al, 2003; Anning et al, 2010) in which youth workers have become required to work with allied professionals. The UK policy framework has, for the last decade or so, privileged discourses of social inclusion and exclusion (Levitas, 2005). Within all of this, youth workers have come under increasing managerial scrutiny. Audit regimes have led to a preoccupation with

outputs (for example, numbers of young people contacted, certificated achievements, decreases in pregnancy rates, etc.) entailing a growing political demand to identify specific young people to be targeted and specific behaviors to be changed, rather than retaining a commitment to youth work as a universal service for young people. The instrumental rationales of managerialist regimes have challenged the somewhat fuzzy rationales (and indeterminate outcomes) of education-based youth work, increasing the underlying tension between universalism and targeting.

Despite commitments to universalism by many youth workers (that is, a commitment to an education-based service that can be accessed by young people who choose to do so), managerialist and performative cultures (Ball, 2008) have increased the emphasis on outputs. The idea that youth workers should target young people considered to be at risk (itself a contested notion) is persuasive and accords with contemporary political priorities. In the UK enormous symbolic significance has been attached to various risk populations that have fallen under the popular and political gaze: the so-called underclass, young single mothers, drug and alcohol abusers and young people who have ‘disengaged’ with learning. There is a problem of generalization from these specific cases to an entire generation, youth becoming a screen onto which a range of anxieties about social change is projected (Davis, 1990). Youth workers and youth services have been drawn into a substantial role with such groups, exacerbating the tension between the principle of universal provision and targeted interventions.

The concept of risk (and its surrogates) has become central to UK youth policy and practice discourse. Much youth work (particularly with young people regarded as troublesome) is now informed by the rationale that some young people are at risk rather than simply dangerous, reworking the idea (implicit in many early accounts of youth work) that vulnerable young people can, without the right intervention, all too easily become dangerous. By identifying young people’s at risk status (that is, their vulnerability to circumstances), early diversionary or preventive intervention becomes a rational strategy. Rather than privileging characteristics that are thought to be part of an individual’s make-up, the concept of risk concentrates attention on concrete and abstract factors (background, home life, place of residence, contacts with professionals, reputation, life-expectations, behaviour, feelings, etc.) that constitute an individual’s at risk identity. Calculating risk and constructing the risk-prone individual (or group or community) is part of what Hacking refers to as the process of “making up people” (Hacking, 1986: 222) and almost anything can be plausibly incorporated in a risk biography. Risk offers limitless possibilities for identifying and justifying new sites for intervention in the social and material worlds (Castel, 1991: 289). The concept’s utility lies in its capacity to render aspects of the domain in which the young person is situated apparently open to the rational calculus of professional evaluation and intervention. As such it greatly facilitates the expansion of regulatory activity and underlies an approach to young people that has become increasingly authoritarian.

Work defined under the rubrics of targeting and risk is open to audit and managerialist practices that have flourished in the UK and elsewhere (Power, 1999, 2007; Strathern, 2000). Targeted, rather than universal, provision provides opportunities for the identification of auditable outputs, as well as for the deployment of seemingly unambiguous performance indicators in measuring these. Arguably, these practices focus more on the regulation of young people than supporting their education and learning. Audit's second-order activities also become potential ends in themselves, obscuring the work's educational importance. This means that the qualitative nature of personal relationships between youth workers and young people is obscured (or ignored), as achieving auditable output (behavioral change, for example) becomes the work's primary rationale. In principle, the qualitative dimensions of these relationships might be audited but these have become subordinated to the requirements of behavior modification.

Political commitments to English youth work as a component in the regulation of youth transitions in the UK has become embodied in various policy narratives that define central government requirements of youth workers. These are prominent in government consultations on what is referred to as a 'Positive for Youth' agenda and can be seen as a further divergence from mid 20th century educational traditions of youth work. Current political and service agendas depart from this in a shift from expressive to instrumental domains (Parsons, 1951). Traditional youth work had mainly expressive purposes (emphasizing the possibility of emotional engagement, achieving self-fulfillment, seeing personal relationships as a good in themselves and offering spaces in which young people can convey and work with their own and others' emotions). So-called modernization (often an alias for marketization or privatization) in UK public services has entailed a much stronger instrumentalism accompanied by attempts to achieve a functional authority for youth work emphasizing its capacity to achieve particular goals, a focus on task performance and a pre-occupation with effectiveness and efficiency. Underlying this is a view that young people are an essentially problematic and deficit social category requiring careful regulation. This relies on a notion of youth as no more than a transitional status in which trajectories into adulthood and their associated shifting relations and statuses from dependency to an assumed autonomy have become the defining features of youth in late modern societies (Jones, 2009). Thus, young people are significant only insofar as they are construed as problematic: incomplete proto-adults suffering cultural deficit and subject to the exigencies of an uncertain, risky and dangerous world as well as their own determining psychobiology. Such a view makes intervention designed to render the transition to adulthood successful (in terms of young people acquiring the right cultural competencies, capitals and dispositions) in young people's lives appear entirely necessary. The discourse of transition, rather than being construed as metaphor, is understood literally and taken for granted (Webster et al, 2004: 2). There is little that can be isolated to ascribe a unique transitional status to youth: not their location in education (which they share with children and mature students), neither their dependency on family (shared with many others), nor their non-participation

in the labor market (experienced by other generations). Age relations are the key aspect of rendering youth a coherent and intelligible social category (Mizen 2004: 8). However, in instrumental terms, the discourse of transition offers a firm rationale for the management of growing up.

Consistent with audit culture, youth work has become managerialised in order to secure its own accountability. Rather than engaging with young people in ways that young people themselves (at least partially) determine, youth workers now operate in a range of centrally defined pre-set targets, standards and performance indicators. These practices signal a marked shift towards a range of second order activities associated with audit practices (for example, completing arcane audit returns that account for and represent the work). The logics of audit transform the work itself, potentially displacing professional judgment and supplanting it with technical accounts. In such performative cultures it is those who are most able to frame achievement in convincing narratives (in whatever form demanded: numbers, measurements, personal stories and so on) who will be most able to attract funding in a competitive market. These narratives offer technical or formal representations of what youth work's professional cultures have hitherto identified as an informal (and indeterminate) process. They embody practical and procedural rationalities intended to contribute to the efficient management of youth work and young people at practitioner or manager level. Particular outputs may by chance coincide with interpretations of youth need defined either by young people themselves or in conjunction with youth workers. However, spaces for intervention opened up by pre-determined indicators are intended to facilitate the management of a repertoire of largely pre-determined outputs rather than starting from personal relationships in which young people are active agents.

CONCLUSIONS: ESTABLISHING 'NEW UNIVERSALS'

This paper has considered youth work's development as part of a range of initiatives designed to manage the exigencies of growing up. The significance of social and informal education, its role in encouraging young people to govern their own conduct and experiences and its deployment in dealing with contemporary concerns about young people have been discussed. Some difficulties associated with the universal provision of social and informal education and the political and practical utility of the concept of risk have also been highlighted.

In the context of the managerialisation and modernization of UK public services, youth work has been drawn into a range of new settings, altered institutional and organizational arrangements and novel practices of audit and accountability. The historic commitment to universal practices (a commitment to educational work with young people who choose to participate, for example) has diminished markedly and youth work has moved into initiatives explicitly designed to target specific groups of young people, particularly those thought to be in some way at risk.

However, these developments should be seen as part of another universalizing process occurring across the public services. The commitment to a pragmatic and technocratic approach resonates with ideas of 'what works' and 'evidence-based policy and practice' and constitutes a move to universal standards, in so doing greatly increasing the capacity for centralized accountability and control. These standards, performance indicators and outputs offer codified specifications that can be used to secure accountability through establishing norms and drawing on comparisons between services, interventions and practitioners. Performance indicators with their universalized criteria eschew the tacit and local knowledge that have, until recent times, characterized a humane public professionalism. As a consequence, the personal relationship between young people and youth workers risks becoming hollowed out to become a 'zombie category' (Beck, 2004). The development of a 'common assessment framework', an 'outcomes framework' and the incorporation of aspects of youth services into complex policy architectures further embeds these tendencies as will the impending marketization of services through 'commissioning'. Instead of offering reflexive account giving as a form of cultural dialogue (Douglas, 1999: 226), current audit seems to rely on little more than empty and formal ritual. A further irony surfaces here. Audit emerges in societies where trust is problematic and distrust is rife. However, if its accounts of the world are partial and inadequate representations of complex practices, we should ask why audit should, itself, be trusted. Perhaps audit contains the seeds of its own destruction. Clearly, critical work should be undertaken to develop ways of securing appropriate forms of accountability in contemporary service organizations.

Broader developments in the public professions under audit regimes have already begun to disrupt existing relations and structures of professional life, effectively re-defining what counts as professional knowledge and professional work. Developing forms of knowledge (contained in common assessment protocols, for example) represent new cultural capital that professionals – like youth workers - have to deploy in their struggle for legitimacy in the context of multi-agency and partnership work (Newman and Nutley, 2003: 560). How this will turn out for youth work is unknown. It is clear that youth work in its sometimes-utopian educational forms retains a hope and optimism for and about young people, embodied in the personal relationships that characterize youth work. This, in the UK at least is vulnerable to practice that understands youth in largely problematic terms. Interesting questions are raised about how youth workers will create opportunities for resistance and for exploiting the possibilities of hybrid spaces, identities and activities for educational work. Youth work may have to become a significantly more subversive activity if it is to preserve its optimistic educational stance and sustain its modest but important contribution to young people's wellbeing.

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