1

INTRODUCTION: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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Introduction

The past ten years has been witness to significant expansion and change in work with young people. The field once occupied predominantly by youth services, social work and education now contains a wider network of agencies that seek to inter-vene in a young person's life. A qualified youth worker today is one who can be called upon to make a contribution to a number of agencies and organisations that, in many cases, did not exist ten years ago. In statutory youth offending partnerships and crime prevention teams, they work to prevent and reduce the reoccurrence of youth crime. In information, advice and guidance services, they undertake work to reduce the number of young people excluded from education, training or employ-ment. Through various health initiatives, they work preventatively in reducing the various health risks that young people face. Positive activities and structured pro-grammes of leisure, once the cornerstone of youth work, persist, but in a wide vari-ety of contexts provided by a range of statutory, voluntary and private agencies. This broad range of work with young people frequently takes place in multi-agency con-texts, where the disciplinary boundaries between professions are increasingly char-acterised as porous. As a result, the professional identity of a youth, health or social worker is somewhat under challenge as partnership becomes commonplace.

Many of the policy initiatives that have underpinned these changes have done so on the basis of a desire to improve things for all children and young people. In England, the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) framework offers five laudable outcomes for children and young people: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving,

making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being (DfES 2003). Similarly, the ambitions of the overarching *Youth Matters* and *Aiming High for Young People* strategies indicate both a desire to empower young people in the delivery of positive activities and for them to access high quality support in terms of advice and guidance (DfES 2005; HM Treasury/DCFS 2007). These positive messages are also evident at a European level: youth policy is governed by a commitment to advo-cating youth citizenship, promoting better participation and listening to the voice of young people (Williamson, Chapter 11).

However, such developments also invite wide-ranging criticism. The dominant message about young people is one of ambivalence: they are to be protected and improved through increased intervention, but simultaneously society must be pro-tected from some of them. They are active participants in public life, yet are increas-ingly excluded from public spaces through dispersal and curfew measures. They are held up as responsible for making decisions, yet are often characterised as lacking the necessary skills to exercise this responsibility in an acceptable way. All of which results in young people being labelled in neat, dichotomous ways that do not necessarily reflect the complexity of young people's real lives and contextual circumstances.

At the same time as funding the expansion in the numbers of workers with young people, policy has also become more prescriptive, specifying how their work should be done and introducing a wide range of targets to be met by agencies delivering this work. Practitioners are increasingly required to demonstrate how their work results in accredited learning outcomes for young people. These targets are under-pinned by an espoused commitment to evidence-based practice, though it is difficult to see the value of the evidence chosen. This is all the more surprising given the extent to which research and wider theory has increased understandings of young people over the past decade. The relationship between this growing body of research, much of it focused on young people, and the definitions and approaches found in policy is clearly not a strong as it could be.

This is a book about working with young people in this changing climate. It pro-vides an opportunity for those who work with young people to consider the theo-retical issues and wider theorising within which policy is formulated and their practice occurs. It considers some key theoretical and policy developments, and sub-jects them to a critical and timely review, inviting the reader to reflect upon the implications for the practice of working with young people.

Developments in theory and research

The study of youth and work with young people has seen advances in theoretical and empirical understanding over the past decade. Youth studies, itself a contentious area of research, has opened understanding of various aspects of young people's lives. Youth

itself is an 'artefact of expertise' (Kelly 2003) which is subject to intensive interrogation and expert representations of 'education, family, the media, popular culture, (un)employment transitions, the life course, risks and so on' (Kelly 2003: 167).

Exactly what is meant by 'youth' is open to question (see Hine, Chapter 3), though central to the concept is the notion of it being a stage in life between childhood and adulthood. The period in the life course that is defined as 'youth' is as much a social construction as it is a period of individual change: Mizen defines youth as a 'socially determined category' (Mizen 2004: 5) and in this respect, it is little use to rely solely on individual biological markers as a frame for understanding youth. In very simple terms, the cultural, social and political contexts into which young people grow, invariably shape definitions of what is childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Childhood is a contested and socially constructed period of the life course (Foley et al. 2001; James and James 2004). Like youth, childhood 'cannot be regarded as an unproblematic descriptor of the natural biological phase' (James and James 2004: 13). The experiences of a child growing up in the 1990s compared with that of those today will vary dramatically. Further complexity arises in any cross-cultural comparison of childhood, especially in the values ascribed to certain definitions of childrearing practices as compared to 'Western notions of what all children should aspire to' (Sanders 2004: 53). Such perspectives open up a challenge to claims of a neutrally defined 'normal' childhood since 'childhood as a social space is structurally determined by a range of social institutions and mechanisms' (James and James 2004: 213). These institutions and mechanisms reflect the dominant cultural and social adult expectations of childhood, either in response to the individual and collective behaviours of children or in the wide variety of macro determinates that influence the wider structure of society (James and James 2004).

Adulthood is also subject to social categorisation. What is meant precisely by adulthood is highly contested. Economic indicators would suggest full and continuous participation in the economy and the acquisition of property (Faulks 2000). Normative social indicators may include the formation of stable family units, characterised by the reproduction and socialisation of the next generation of children. Civil indicators would suggest political and civic participation. All of these claims though can be subject to dispute. For instance, if full economic participation and property acquisition are indicators of responsible adulthood, then the increase in uptake of higher education and its associated debt mean that many young people are effectively deferring the responsibilities of adulthood.

What is known for certain is that young people in late modern societies are characterised as leading immensely complex and fragmented lives. Their social identities are subjected to far-reaching, diverse and interconnected influences. These range from changing macro forces arising from globalisation (Aubrey, Chapter 4) and the risk society (Kemshall, Chapter 13), to more constant issues of social stratification relating to class, gender, race, disability, sexuality and so on (Chouhan, Chapter 6).

Two strands of recent research are worthy of exploration here since they have direct implications for the significant changes in work with young people over the past ten years. The first examines expanding knowledge about youth transitions in a markedly changing and complex world. The second undertakes to review the inter-play of risk and resilience in young people's lives.

Changing, complex and extended transitions

Young people are frequently referred to as being in a state of transition, of moving between the life stages of childhood and adulthood: a stage termed adolescence or 'youth'. Age boundaries are often applied to this stage and are embedded in legislations related to education, voting rights and marriage, but in the modern Western world a range of economic and social indicators of adulthood are primary signifiers of the tran-sition. In the discussion above, the idea that childhood and adulthood are problematic concepts was put forward. In any discussion around transition as a journey, one perhaps must accept some sort of a destination. For Coleman et al., adolescence is 'best under-stood as a complex transition between the states of childhood dependence and adult independence' (2004: 227). The extensive study of this transition period has provoked much recent empirical and theoretical interest, not least because of the complex changes associated with the risk society. Such research has been useful in considering:

- The interaction between personal capacity, biology and personality ('agency') and the systems and structures that influence young people ('structure').
- The ways in which institutions, social policies and systems intervene within a key stage of the life course.
- The ways in which other problems or situations emerge, particularly at the point of transi-tion from education to employment. This is of particular interest to policy makers, often concerned with the interconnectedness of 'social exclusion'. (Bynner 2001: 6)

While there has perhaps always been a great deal of confusion over what constitutes arrival at adulthood (Coleman and Warren-Anderson 1992), transitions that were once understood to be linear are now recognised as fluid, changing and increasingly without a fixed end-point (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). Consequently, young people growing up in the modern world 'face new risks and opportunities' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007: 8) perhaps only glimpsed by previous generations. It certainly makes one's own reflections on childhood in many cases redundant.

Regarded as 'as important phase in the life cycle' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007: 34), the lineage from education to employment is one such example. Pathways from post-16 education are now beset by a range of further training opportunities, increased uptake at higher education and new uncertainty in traditional, skilled and unskilled labour (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Government recognition that the nature of the labour

market has shifted towards a 'knowledge economy' ultimately means that more young people are required to attend further and higher education and training for longer periods. Indeed, at the time of writing, developments in the UK suggest that the statutory school leaving age will rise to 18 from its current age of 16. One consequence of fragmented employment patterns and extended education is the changing relationship that young people have with their immediate families. In the UK for instance extended periods of financial dependency on parents and carers may mean home ownership takes place increasingly later on in the life course.

Key indicators for arrival at 'adulthood' are the acquisition of features that denote a shift from dependence on parents and family to independent living, including obtaining employment, forming a relationship and family, and moving into accommodation. These are the indicators chosen by Bynner (2005) in his description of 'capital accumulation' by young people. His findings show that across Europe there is a trend towards the achievement of the markers of adulthood coming at a later age now than previously, the concept of extended transitions, but he goes on to conclude that in the UK:

> … over the 24-year period examined, the most dominant feature was growing polarization between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Emerging Adulthood was very prominent in the former, but the traditional accelerated routes to adult life were still as common as ever among the rest. (Bynner 2005: 377)

This work found that the social and economic changes leading to extended transitions for the majority of young people who are living in reasonable or affluent circumstances have not had the same impact on the lives of young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Involvement in extended education and training delays the onset of employment and the life features that depend economically upon that, but rates of such participation are lower for the more disadvantaged, with higher levels of early parenthood and early entry into work. The findings confirm the importance of addressing all the dimensions of youth identified by Hine (Chapter 3), particularly the historical dimension, as contexts change rapidly.

The focus on the notion of transition is accompanied by the view that young people are adults in the making, and thus do not have the awareness or competencies of adults. This view is informed by the dominant developmental perspectives of childhood presented by psychologists such as Piaget and Inhelder (1969). Children are seen to develop adult attributes gradually over their early and adolescent years in an additive and linear fashion, with normative age bandings identified as significant for the acquisition of particular competencies (the biological dimension in Hine Chapter 3). Where children do not achieve these attributes by the prescribed ages this is deemed to be problematic and to signify the need for professional involvement and resolution. Where children perform better than, or not so well, as the system requires of them at particular ages, such as in education, this creates difficulties, both for the system and for the child.

It is argued that recent times have seen significant changes in young people's transitions, because the nature of the world in which they live has changed dramatically (e.g. Bynner 2005; Spence 2005). In this new world young people have greater opportunity but less certainty about their futures, requiring them to be more reflexive and make more reasoned choices about their futures (Beck 1992). At the same time, a range of social and economic changes have meant that transitions can be more difficult for young people to achieve and that this transitional phase of life has becoming longer and more complex (Valentine 2003), though as noted above, these changes have not affected all young people in the same way, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds tending to have different patterns of transition than those from more privileged backgrounds (Bynner 2005). At one time aspects such as class, gender, ethnicity and disability may have been more predictive of likely futures for young people, although these features are also likely to have masked wide ranging experiences of becoming adult. Thus the assumed commonality of experience of transition is increasingly being questioned in the era of individualisation, in parallel with increasing concern about the futures that young people will have.

Young people, risk and resilience

> Nowhere is the tension between the need to prevent risk and the necessity of learning to manage and take calculated risks more apparent than in the process of growing up from childhood to adulthood. (Thom et al. 2007: 1)

Certainly, young people are leading lives of increasing uncertainty and 'heightened risk' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007: 8) an idea located within the now well-rehearsed framework of the 'risk society' (Beck 1992). Life is literally prone to risks that once did not exist and 'people are seen to both cause risks and be responsible for their minimalisation' (Lupton 2007: 12). Whether these risks are the consequence of seemingly uncontrollable forces (such as global warming) or understood within the more localised or personalised experiences of the population (health related risky behaviours such as smoking, for instance), the overwhelming consequence is an increased feeling of insecurity and a desire for risk prevention and protection (Beck 1992; Kemshall 2002; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). This 'culture of caution' (Thom et al. 2007) leads us ultimately to see risk through a negative lens.

The youth/risk dynamic is prominent in relation to young people's social activities and debates around youth welfare, criminal justice, employment and sexuality (Mythen and Walklate 2007). The expanding knowledge base about young people's personal and social risks is driven by research that gives increasing attention to young people as problems: sexual behaviour (Hoggart 2007), substance misuse and 'binge' drinking with grand but contested claims about alcohol misuse (see France

2007: 137–138), and the links between truancy and long-term social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit 1998) are just three examples. This concern with risky behaviour drives a desire to predict it and stop it, using the idea of 'risk factors': literally what key determinants impact upon whether young people will grow up as integrated members of society, or as somehow deviant (Hayes 2002). This knowledge base has undoubtedly had strong influence on policy (Kemshall, Chapter 13).

This growing body of work also seeks to understand 'protective factors' and the idea of 'resilience' to address the question: what capacities do young people 'need' in order to ward off risk? Resilience is not simply located at the level of individual agency but is increasingly seen as a cultural and structural concept. Particular approaches to building resilience through community youth development (Perkins, Chapter 9) and social capital (Boeck, Chapter 8) demonstrate that to see young people as sites only of individual (in)capacity does little to address their wider social contexts: an issue further explored in the conclusion.

Developments in policy

Throughout history, youth policy has always responded to different political, public and social imperatives, since 'youth has always been under the microscope and of central concern to adults and the state' (France 2007: 1). The question of what to do with young people is beset by a curious mix of anxiety, fear, hope and aspiration and is always dependent on the changing social and political context in which young people are located: an ambivalence that can be found at the heart of policy messages about young people.

Key themes in policy development over the past ten years include the prominence of risk based social policy over traditional welfarist models. This includes an increasing emphasis on fostering conditions that promote 'self-reliance' and 'responsibility' (a theme discussed by Kemshall in Chapter 13 and Wood in Chapter 12). For young people in particular, there has been an increase in strategies designed to ward off social exclusion through the use of early intervention strategies. In some cases, the preoccupation with risk has led to a widening of the criminal justice net (Yates, Chapter 14). Services that were not traditionally classed as within the criminal justice arena find themselves increasingly contributing to outcomes related to the reduction of the risk of offending. What this means for competing paradigms (the value of social education, for example) is an interesting and ongoing debate, explored throughout this volume.

Another key driver has been the focus on child protection. High profile cases have inevitably always shaped social work and criminal justice policy; with media and public reactions leading often to a 'culture of blame' (Kemshall 2003). The failure by key child welfare and protection agencies to respond to seemingly obvious warning signs of abuse in a key case led ultimately to the formation of the Every Child Matters (ECM) policy framework. The five outcomes are now commonplace and

can be found across merged children and young people's services, and even have close connection with the funding grants available to the voluntary sector.

Dealing with young people for what they might become

In any welfare system, resources are prone to economic rationalisation, and targeting offers a politically attractive option for addressing the most pressing social problems (Kemshall 2002). The argument suggests that the more entrenched a difficulty becomes, the more costly and less effective interventions become. So policy responds by seeking to address early warning signs: the truancy, rather than the long-term exclusion from school; the cigarette smoking rather than the diseases that plague the individual in later life; the healthy eating of children in schools rather than the health consequences of obesity. The approach is often argued as commonsensical: if it is known that someone is more likely to do X, if they are displaying Y, then surely one should intervene? As former Prime Minister Tony Blair observed:

> Where it's clear that children are at risk of being brought up in disadvantaged homes where there are multiple problems, then instead of waiting until the child goes of the rails we should act early enough to prevent that. (Blair 2006 cited in The *Guardian*)

This emphasis on risk factors and precaution have ultimately led us towards a focus on the potential futures of young people via targeted policy and away from universal, open access welfare that deals with problems in the present (France 2008). Risk factors serve as 'targets' helping to identify 'populations at risk' (Schoon and Bynner 2003).

Early intervention is realised through a number of policy measures. All children and young people have access to universal education and health care, with minimum standards in both. But those children and young people who embody certain risk factors face greater levels of state intervention. Families in the most deprived communities in Britain are the targets of specialist, multi-disciplinary Children and Family Centres that seek to address the interconnected problems of health, education, child development and parenting. In criminal justice, the expansion of programmes of structured activity and the development of youth prevention services are targeted at those areas with higher crime rates in the hope that such programmes will divert potential offenders. Similarly, those young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) may find themselves subject to a raft of initiatives such as alternative curricula and dedicated personal advisers, both on compulsory and voluntary terms. The last ten years has seen a prioritisation of engagement in education, in whatever new forms it takes hold, including most recently through private enterprise seeking to offer alternative qualifications for those children most at risk of exclusion. Education merely becomes functional and not liberating (Chouhan, Chapter 6), seen solely as preparation for work (Armstrong, Chapter 7).

But a causal approach so often comfortable in science is not easily applicable to the understanding of human behaviours and relationships. Further, such 'pathological' approaches to individual motivation and risk taking do not tackle deeply entrenched structural issues: matters taken up by the contributors in this volume.

From entitlement to conditionality

A key theme in social policy has been the reframing of welfare from one of entitlement to one of conditionality (Dwyer 2004) putting at the centre the balance between individual rights and obligations. Increasingly, welfare is based on the 'something for something' society (Blair 1998) where the expected duties of the individual are more clearly prioritised. Welfare reform then is more than an economic imperative: it literally becomes a 'remoralizing' exercise, redefined as a system that encourages active participation of its citizens over passively dispensing compensation to those in need (see Kemshall 2002: 111–112).

The theme of rights and responsibilities is then witnessed through a number of policy initiatives, and when seen in terms of a broader social framework can be applied to almost all aspects of youth policy. Rights in this case are often framed as a right to participate, with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children often underpinning the rationale for encouraging the 'duty to consult'. Recent youth policy in the United Kingdom seeks to engage young people in the process of formulation, e.g. through *Youth Matters* consulting the views of nearly 20,000 young people. As Fleming and Hudson (Chapter 10) discuss: the more fully young people are enabled to participate, the more responsive and effective services can be in supporting young people.

Social responsibility is a more complex policy development. Obligations on young people are either quite specific (children will not truant, or they/their parents will face financial penalties) or rather more ambiguous (increasing 'respect', for instance). In whatever form they take, the desired moral and social behaviour of young people is increasingly determined by policy and instructed through education and welfare services. As Armstrong notes in Chapter 7, education policy ensures that each person has a place and knows that place and its boundaries. This is an important theme throughout the book and social responsibility is examined in relation to the youth service, criminal justice, welfare, education, active citizenship and broader social policy.

Implications for practice

The start of this chapter indicated that work with young people in the UK now offers a more diverse employment market driven by new and expanding policy intentions. This market includes housing authorities, the police, youth offending

teams, health services, education, and welfare and guidance services. Much of the work is prescriptive and targeted, but creativity and diversity still flourish: practitioners do indeed seek to empower young people and develop meaningful relationships built upon increased trust (see for example, Yates' discussion in Chapter 15).

The guiding principles of youth work have in recent tradition been bound to those of informal education: an emphasis on voluntary association, starting from where the learner is at and encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences (Jeffs and Smith 2005) in order to engage in a process of moral philosophy (Young 2006). However, these principles are under challenge: how, for instance, to ensure voluntary association in a court ordered programme for young offenders? Or does a youth worker cease to be a youth worker when joining such a system? These matters are taken up in this volume, with discussions around principles and ethics (Banks, Chapter 5 and Chouhan, Chapter 6), and the purpose and expectations of work with young people (Payne, Chapter 18 and Tyler, Chapter 19).

What is clear from the changing knowledge and policy landscape is that those with a training in youth work can contribute much to these newer contexts, perhaps offering creativity in working within these new frameworks and changed agendas. They can play a significant role that re-examines the problems that young people present, and attempt to negotiate more holistic problem definitions and solutions. It is therefore important to see the picture as far from gloomy.

Practitioners are increasingly promoting ways of engaging young people in influencing and shaping their social worlds and many chapters illustrate practical ways in which this can be achieved. The increased attention to active citizenship and social capital offers a gateway to an alternative focus on young people as agents who can shape their social contexts with the support of trusted adults (Boeck, Chapter 8 and Wood, Chapter 12). This relies however on learning the lessons from research and practice where young people's views actively shape adult understanding of their worlds (Hine, Chapter 3 and Fleming and Hudson, Chapter 10). It also requires practitioners to restate their values and ethical positions so that these can act as lamplights in a complex and challenging set of environments – the notion of the principled pragmatist explored by Tyler in Chapter 19.

This book

The debate about the purpose, principles and practice of work with young people is therefore the subject of this book. Developments in theory, research and policy are critically examined and related to questions of practice. The key inquiries that guide this book include:

- What is known about young people, where does this knowledge come from, and to what extent has this knowledge changed?

- What is youth policy, what drives it and what does it seek to achieve?
- How can practitioners working with young people contextualise these develop-
  ments in relation to professional work?

This volume offers a timely contribution to the debate. The contributors are all specialists in their respective fields, drawing on the latest research and practice to illustrate the debates about work with young people in changing contexts. Some of these arguments require outward thinking, in ways that require a reframing of understandings of both young people and youth work. Others invite a restatement of values, whether in commitment to working from where young people 'are at' or in recognising and challenging the inherent oppression and discrimination fac-ing different social groups.

Any contribution to the debate will not cover all of the ground; nor should it try to. This volume reviews only some of the threads that together form the basis of modern work with young people.

Structure of the book

This book is organised into two sections. Part One (*Theory and Practice*) attends to some key aspects of understandings of young people, both in terms of their social construction and in the experiences they define themselves. Attention is also given to some key aspects of practice theory and how these apply to changing contexts of work with young people. Part Two (*Policy and Practice*) discusses key policy develop-ments both in terms of policy drivers and the changing nature of services that work with young people. This necessitates attention to macro and local determinates, and how policy responds to complex social and personal issues.

Throughout the book, the authors make links to the practice of work with young people and reflective questions at the end of each chapter are designed to support the reader in relating the ideas to professional work and development. Reflective practice is an essential component of effective work with young people, and the questions are designed to stimulate only the beginning of what should be an ongo-ing interrogation and reflexivity.

Each part is preceded by a short introduction, and the concluding chapter criti-cally reviews some of the key themes that emerge from this text.