1 | Introducing youth work

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A lot of people call themselves 'youth workers'. They can be found in many settings – in churches and religious organisations, local voluntary groups and in large international movements such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and scouting and guiding. Schools and colleges, prisons, large not-for-profit organisations and state-provided children's and young people services also host what they describe as 'youth work'. New forms and locations are appearing all the time, and organisational boundaries have shifted at some speed in many countries over the last few years. Yet much of this movement, although significant, can serve as a distraction by encouraging us to focus attention on the way youth work is organised and managed instead of looking to its core features and what it does. For that reason we focus on practice – the judgements, values, ideas and activities that have consistently served to give it a discrete identity (Carter *et al.* 1995: 3–5). We attend to the ways in which youth workers think, feel and act, and what informs such processes.

What is youth work?

For over 150 years, five elements have fused to delineate what we now know as youth work and to distinguish it from other welfare activities. It is distinctive only when all are present. Remove one and what is observed may possess a resemblance to, but is unquestionably not, youth work. The five are a focus on:–

Voluntary participation. The voluntary principle delineates youth work from almost all other services provided for this age group (Jeffs 2001: 156). Young people have, traditionally, been able to freely enter into relationships with youth workers and to end those relationships when they want. This has fundamental implications for the ways in which workers operate and the opportunities open to them. It encourages them to think and work in rather more dialogical ways (*op. cit.*); develop programmes

attractive to young people; and to go to the places where they are (see, also, Davies 2005). In an increasingly regulated world that offers young people fewer and fewer genuine opportunities to exercise judgement – as opposed to being invited to participate and 'be listened to' – the chance to voluntarily engage with a worker or agency is a rare opportunity for them to act as citizens, and to meet with others.

Education and welfare. Historically, youth work did not develop to simply 'keep people off the streets', offer activities or provide amusement. Many early clubs grew out of Sunday schools and ragged schools, institutions that placed great emphasis on offering welfare and educational provision for young people (Montague 1904). The rise of the welfare state and expansion of state education during the late nineteenth to early and mid-twentieth centuries eradicated the need for youth agencies to provide mainstream welfare and educational services. With developments and changes in state support mechanisms, and the identification of other needs, the pattern of welfare provision shifted – but remains a significant element of youth work. Contemporary examples of this include support groups, counselling, careers advice and information and advice services relating to areas such as sexual health and housing. However, during the course of all these changes learning from being part of group life remained a key element. Over time the recognition of the value and importance of such learning was further enhanced as workers incorporated ideas and modes of practice developed to deepen practice not only within youth work but also within adult education and community work. Informal education (Brew 1946), social education (most notably Davies and Gibson 1967), experiential learning (Kolb 1976) and, more recently, social pedagogy are examples here. Each of these traditions encourages us to focus on learning through conversation, experience and relationship (see Jeffs and Smith 2005).

Young people. Although there have been shifts in age boundaries, youth work remains an age-specific activity. In Wales, for example, this is defined by a recent government strategy document as 11–25 years (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). While there may be problems around how we talk about and define youth – and around the sorts of expertise those working with young people can claim – there can be no doubting that many young people both view their experiences as being different to other age groups and seek out each other's company (Savage 2007). Youth workers have traditionally responded to this – and learnt to tap into the ways of understanding the world young people occupy and the nuances of youth cultures.

Association, relationship and community. 'Building relationships' has been central to both the rhetoric and practice of much youth work.

Relationships are seen as a fundamental source of learning and of happiness. The aim is to work with young people in community so that they might better relate to themselves, others and the world. Those within religious settings might well add in relationship to God. Association – joining together in companionship or to undertake some task, and the educative power of playing one's part in a group or association (Doyle and Smith 1999: 44) – has been part of working with young people from early on and was articulated in the Albemarle Report. It argued that encouraging 'young people to come together into groups of their own choosing is the fundamental task of the Service' (Ministry of Education 1960: 52). Historically, group work – the ability to enter, engage with and develop various types of social collectivities – was viewed as the central skill required of a youth worker (see, for example, Coyle 1948; Matthews 1966; Button 1974; Robertson 2005; Newman and Robertson 2006). Youth work is fundamentally about community; about working, as John Dewey (1916) put it, so that all may share in the common life. It is an activity of communities.

Being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity. Youth work has come to be characterised by a belief that workers should not only be approachable and friendly, but they should also have faith in people and seek to live good lives. In other words, the person or character of the worker is of fundamental importance. As Basil Henriques put it (1933: 60): 'However much self-government in the club may be emphasised, the success of the club depends upon the personality and ingenuity of the leader.' The head of the club, he continued, must 'get to know and to understand really well every individual member. He must have it felt that he is their friend and servant' (*ibid*.: 61). Or as Josephine Macalister Brew (1957: 112–113) put it, 'young people want to know where they are and they need the friendship of those who have confidence and faith.' The settings workers help to build should be convivial; the relationships they form should be honest and characterised by 'give and take'; and the programmes they are involved in should be flexible (Hirsch 2005).

When thinking about these five elements it is also important to recognise the context in which they were forged. Since its inception youth work has overwhelmingly been undertaken by volunteers and workers operating in the context of local groups and clubs. These groups, in turn, are often part of national and international movements. Scouting and guiding provide a very visible and constant example of this. Youth work was born, and remains fundamentally a part, of civil society – that space located betwixt the realms of the state and the market, wherein individuals and collectives seek to serve and provide for other citizens. Civil society is the

domain of religious organisation, family and, above all else, the voluntary association that allows citizens, as opposed to consumers, customers and clients, to exercise their freedom and through voluntary endeavour give expression to the deeper meanings of citizenship. In Ireland where youth work is defined in law, this is recognised. It is to be provided 'primarily by voluntary youth work organizations' (Government of Ireland 2001; see also Devlin 2008). The more the state becomes involved in the detail of youth work and seeks to direct practice, the more it risks destroying the work and the benefits it brings (Jeffs and Smith 2008). As Benjamin Barber explains, it is within the realms of civil society that we can find the alternatives to 'government gargantuanism and either market greed or identitarian parochialism' (1998: 44). Voluntary youth work for approaching two centuries has been one of those 'alternatives' serving and validating the intrinsic worth of civil society and the public domain.

The long trail of history and the dominance of the voluntary sector are often overlooked. Much contemporary comment is focused on the problems and travails of the statutory or state sector. The 'trade' press is enthralled by the Beadledom and bumbledom of state agencies seeking to micro-manage practice from afar via circulars, regulation and an unremitting flow of short-term funding initiatives and franchises. Yet, the broad-base of voluntary effort carries on regardless. As with the oft-cited iceberg, the greater part of the edifice still lies beneath the surface, and therefore all too often out of sight. It is crucial that due care and attention is paid to the voluntary sector. Partly this is necessary to focus attention upon the need to protect it from the backwash caused by the floundering of the state-sponsored work, but also so that practitioners do not become needlessly pessimistic regarding the future health and well-being of youth work.

It is doubtful if any other welfare sector now possesses anything approaching a similar balance between paid and voluntary workers. Health, social work, schooling and social housing are each dominated by professionals directly employed by the state or by agencies predominately reliant on central or local government funding and therefore dancing to the tune of their outcomes and outputs. This singular difference makes it far easier to be confident regarding the long-term survival and vibrancy of youth work as an activity. Voluntarism provides, over time, a cushion against the vagaries of state funding, the inconsistencies of policy and the negative impact of economic upheavals. It gifts a promise of continuity.

The benefits of youth work

Youth workers have rightly tended over the years to be suspicious of the quest for immediate outcome. As Brew (1957: 183) put it, 'A youth

leader must try not to be too concerned about results, and at all costs not to be over-anxious.' Informal education and the forms of 'being there' for young people that are involved in youth groups and clubs are based, essentially, in hope and faith (see Doyle and Smith forthcoming; Halpin 2003a, 2003b). Such an orientation is more likely to find a home within religious and community organisations and groups than within the target-driven culture of state-sponsored provision and some trust-funded work. However, it is possible to identify the benefits of local youth work. These can be grouped around five main headings. Locally organised, community-based provision offers:

Sanctuary. A safe space away from the daily surveillance and pressures of families, schooling and street life is one of the fundamental elements of successful local youth organisations (see McLaughlin *et al.* 1994; Doyle and Smith forthcoming). Barton Hirsch (2005) found such organisations were attractive to young people in significant part as they provided a second home. They are often places where workers care and young people are valued, respected and have choice (Spence *et al.* 2007: 43). This is all the more significant as current policy concerns with 'joined-up services' and with monitoring young people are eroding such space within state-sponsored provision and, more generally, public space. The emphasis upon the collection of data within state-sponsored services discourages some young people, who are anxious to retain their privacy and autonomy, from engaging with workers. Almost certainly it results in others opting to avoid 'disclosure' on the justifiable grounds that what they say will not be treated as confidential. It also represents a major attack on the rights of young people. Three of the major databases affecting children and young people in England, for example – ContactPoint, the electronic Common Assessment Framework and ONSET – were found by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to be 'almost certainly illegal under human rights or data protection law and should be scrapped or substantially redesigned' (Anderson *et al.* 2009: 5). Finally collecting and processing data severely erodes the time available to workers that can be devoted to face-to-face contact and the sustaining of relationships. Research indicates that in some projects even before the introduction of mass databasing between a fifth and a quarter of the workers designated time was devoted to handling data (Crimmens *et al.* 2004).

Enjoyable activity. This activity ranges from hanging about with friends through participation in arts and sports to organizing the group itself. As Spence *et al.* (2007: 134) concluded, 'It is the open informality of youth work which encourages the engagement of young people who refuse other institutional participation.' Ahmed *et al.* (2007: xi) similarly found that the young people in their study 'especially valued creative and

informal approaches, which enabled them to have a say'. Studies of those participating in more open forms of youth work have consistently shown that young people particularly value the space for social interaction and for hanging about with friends and peers (earlier research includes Bone and Ross 1972; Department of Education and Science 1983). However, a significant number of young people seek out, welcome and benefit from involvement in more focused activities and the opportunities for enjoyment and development they offer (Feinstein *et al.* 2007). Structured programmes of activities are not without problems though. As Hirsch (2005: 135) found, they have the potential to diminish the quality of inter-personal relationships, and can lack fit with the culture of settings. When there is too much focus on what others judge to be what young people need to learn, it 'can easily turn into a deficit organisation, which is not what young people need or expect in these settings'.

Personal and social development. Social and personal development is seen as a core purpose for youth work by many commentators (see Merton *et al.* 2004). The annual reports of clubs and projects are often illustrated by little case studies of work or of changes in individuals; and the language of workers is full of references to personal development (see Brent 2004; Spence *et al.* 2007). However, for those using local groups opportunities for personal development are seen as an important aspect of their participation only by a small, but still significant, pro-portion (see, for example, Gillespie *et al.* 1992: 66–67). Assessing the impact of the work in this area is fraught with difficulties – and suffers from a certain amount of exaggeration where a target-driven culture dom-inates. However, there is evidence of personal and social development from reflective personal accounts (see, for example, Rose 1998: 127–133; Williamson 2004) and survey work and interviews (Merton *et al.* 2004). Merton *et al.*'s evaluation of youth work in England found that around two-thirds of young people in their survey claimed that youth work had made a considerable difference to their lives (2004: 46–51). The little long-term cohort research that we have confirms that involvement in uni-formed groups, and church clubs and groups 'tend to be associated with positive adult outcomes' (Feinstein *et al.* 2007: 17). In contrast, this same research found that attendance at what were described as 'youth clubs' (defined as out-of-school-hours clubs for young people, 'typically run by local education authorities' but separate from schools (*op. cit.*: 6)) tended to have 'worse adult outcomes for many of the measures of adult social exclusion' (*op. cit.*: ii). This echoes the findings of research undertaken in the United States (Osgood *et al.* 1996) and Sweden (Mahoney *et al.* 2001) during the preceding decade. These results may well reflect, to a significant degree, the social background of those using these different

forms of provision – but there could also be issues around the nature of the provision itself.

Relationship and community. Local groups and organisations provide settings where friendships and relationships of different kinds can flourish and grow. Central to this is the relationship between workers and young people. In terms of mentoring, neighbourhood-based youth work can compare well with other initiatives; 'the exceptionally large amount of time spent together, the willingness to have fun as well as educate, and the involvement of staff with the youth's family' all contribute (Hirsch 2005: 132). Furthermore, they are settings where young people 'connect with broader social institutions and the wider adult community' and provide non-familial settings in which 'societal rules for conduct are learned and integral to their emerging sense of self' (Hirsch 2005: 54). In other words, their associational nature helps to cultivate social capital and community (Smith 2001a; Robertson 2000, 2005).

Appreciation. Local activity involving local people is often better regarded by young people than provision linked to schools or state institutions. As McLaughlin *et al.* (1994: 5) found in their study of the role of neighbourhood organisations in the lives of 'inner city youth' in the USA, these were more likely to appreciate the realities of young people's lives and interests. Too often programmes and initiatives from 'outside' disappointed as they were 'developed by people unfamiliar with the daily rhythms, pressures and ferocity of the inner cities' (*op. cit.*).

The benefits associated with youth work based in civil society raise serious questions around the direction of many current policy preoccupations (Jeffs and Smith 2008). Youth work based in civil society tends to entail long-term, open-ended work defined by local needs and local people. They tend to look more to relationships and the enjoyment of each other's company (conviviality). Such work is also more communally focused and associational. Furthermore, those involved – both young people and workers – are often suspicious of state involvement, especially where it takes the form of specifying content and monitoring the individual young people involved.

The changing context

Sixty years ago overcrowding and the poor quality of the housing stock occupied by working-class families meant most young people were obliged to leave the house in order to undertake hobbies, meet friends and generally enjoy themselves. All but a tiny proportion were in full-time employment by the age of 15. In addition, many young men were conscripted into the armed forces 3 years later. At home young people

usually shared unheated bedrooms with siblings, and the downstairs room with parents and not infrequently grandparents. The street was their playground with the youth club, cafe or dance-hall serving as a welcome refuge and alternative. Except at special times of the year the home was not often a place of entertainment nor somewhere to relax in comfort. Youth workers had a remit to work with these young people in their leisure time, to offer them informal and social education. Some sought them out in the streets (Paneth 1944; Goetschius and Tash 1967), others ran uniformed groups, many managed or worked in youth clubs that provided a range of activities and somewhere warm and welcoming where young people might gather and spend time with friends and friendly adults.

Buildings were then an essential feature of youth work. In urban areas it was not uncommon to find clubs that counted their membership in the hundreds (Jeffs 2005a). But irrespective of whether the young person lived in a rural, suburban or inner-city locale most had a variety of youth clubs, organisations or facilities they could affiliate to or casually engage with (see, for example, Reed 1950). Assumptions relating to the roles in society of men and women meant much youth work was single-sex and highly gendered, that workers and organisations alike operated according to long-standing beliefs as to what was, and was not, appropriate provision for a young man or a young woman. Therefore, a high proportion of the youth clubs were single-sex, likewise unformed groups, with the exception of the Woodcraft Folk (Davis 2000). There was no sign above the door of these clubs or huts mentioning that these agencies provided informal or social education but that was the underlying raison d'etre for their existence. Unambiguously many assumed their prime responsibility was to offer provision for those employed or in their final year of schooling. To provide those young people during the years of transition from school to employment, and from their parental to their married home, social and informal education, a safe place to meet and limited welfare provision relating to advice about careers, further education and relationships. They gave young people the opportunity to engage in group life and enjoy associational encounters that could draw them out of self-absorption and privatism and induct them into the grown-up amphitheatre of civil society. It was a service overwhelmingly provided by volunteers and paid part-timers for nationally the number of paid, full-time qualified youth workers was probably less than 1000 – far too few to offer anything more than a skeleton service.

As anyone reading the preceding paragraph will be aware during the course of the intervening years the situation it describes has changed radically. Take the home. It is now the norm for young people to have their own centrally heated room within which they will have a games console,

television, 'music system' and, of course, a mobile phone. On average they spend around four and a half hours a day in front of a screen of some sort – more than they spend in a classroom and that spent with their parents. Significantly those living in the lowest income households are more likely to have their own television than their more prosperous peers (Mayo and Nairns 2009). Overall, as the home has become evermore the place of entertainment fewer and fewer young people spend time on the streets or public spaces (Valentine 2004). They have less need to do so in order to meet with friends (they see them at school and college and can be constant contact with via electronic mediums) and because they are discouraged from 'hanging out' by parents, the police and others (Measor and Squires 2000).

As the home has changed so has the relationship of young people with education and work. Within the lifetime of the grandparents of the present generation of young people the school-leaving age will have effectively risen from 14 to 18, and the proportion entering higher education immediately after completing their schooling risen tenfold. In the mid-1920s there were 29,275 (8376 of whom were women) studying at English universities (Mowat 1955); today there are over a million and a quarter over half of whom are women. Whereas approximately 80 per cent of young people entered work as soon as they legally were able to when the Albemarle Report was published 50 years ago, the figure now is in the region of 5 per cent. This lengthening of the process of transition to independence has had, and will continue to have, a profound impact.

With the overwhelming majority of young people in full-time education up to the age of 21 youth work intervention will increasingly be incorporated in, hosted or managed by educational institutions. Despite attempts to revive the free-standing youth club via initiatives such as *MyPlace*, the decline in the viability and number of such institutions that has been taking place for over 30 years is unlikely to decelerate. Not least because friendship networks will be overwhelmingly formed within education settings rather than neighbourhoods. Such a falling away also reflects demographic change – there are simply much lower concentrations of young people in most localities. This reflects in part the long-term fall in the birth-rate and a rise in life-expectancy. Now, for the first time, children and young people are outnumbered by those aged over 65.

Just as the re-drawing of the demographic profile will require a restructuring of youth work, so will social changes. The changing position of women in society, the shifting ethnic and cultural mix of the British population, the growing acceptance of gay and lesbian lifestyles, rising levels of economic inequality alongside growing affluence (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), increasing levels of family breakdown and the weakening of community that has accompanied growing individualisation and

the power of consumerism (see, for example, Sennett 2006; Barber 2007) have all impacted, and will continue to impact, on young people and youth work. These as well as economic and environmental challenges that are impossible to predict, along with technological advances in relation to digital communications, for example, that we can scarcely imagine (Loader 2007) will demand that agencies and practitioners must, like those who went before, be adaptable and responsive.

Changing policies and structures

For over a century in Britain what we now know as youth work flourished without significant state involvement. This situation changed in a matter of weeks following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The era of 'total war' – with rationing, evacuation and bombing – created an urgent need for state funding and guidance to ensure universal provision (Jeffs 1979; Bradford 2009). Significantly, the British government was also desperate to avoid earlier models of state youth work established by totalitarian states such as Russia, Italy and Germany. At a time when the nation was locked into a struggle to sustain democracy it was essential that state youth work itself should foster democratic values and practices. Little or no innovation was needed here as there was a rich tradition of associational life, participation and democratic practice within many of the clubs and groups associated with churches, settlements and voluntary youth movements. Many of the established guides to practice (e.g., Henriques 1933) were quickly augmented by new texts that were self-consciously about youth work (most notably, Brew 1943; Rees 1943, 1944; Armson and Turnbull 1944). For these writers and others the role of the state was, predominately, to support what was occurring within civil society, augmenting provision where there were gaps and encouraging collaboration between agencies that had, in some cases, a history of mutual antagonism.

The model forged in the war years remained largely intact until the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed the last clear 'government' statements of youth work in its classic 'democratic' form can be found in the Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education 1960) and *Youth and Community Work in the 70s*, frequently referred to as the Fairbairn-Milson Report (Department of Education and Science 1969). The former famously talked about offering young people opportunities for association, training and challenge, the latter openings for participation, self-determination and political engagement. These documents now bear little meaningful relationship to contemporary state practice. With the fading away of the 'Cold War', the virtually unchecked progress of globalisation and the rise of

market values and consumerism, successive governments have 'opted' to set different priorities. At the same time their ability to impose those priorities has increased markedly in many areas. This has been linked to the decline of key social and autonomous political movements and groups, and an enhanced capacity to monitor behaviour. In England documents such as *Every Child Matters* (H. M. Government 2003), *Transforming Youth Work* (Department for Education and Skills 2002) and *Youth Matters* (H. M. Government 2005), in Wales *Young People, Youth Work, Youth Service* (Welsh Assembly Government 2007) and in Scotland *Moving Forward* (Scottish Executive 2007) had none of the depth and rationale of their predecessors. They were simply prospectuses for the delivery of mostly already agreed priorities and policies. The twin priorities were public safety and economic productivity (and thus, private profit). The needs of the market came to dominate, and the well-being of civil society a matter of governmental indifference. Significantly, the one paper in recent years that had a fuller discussion and exploration, the English *Aiming High for Young People* (HM Treasury 2007) did not have youth work as its focus but rather 'positive activities' for young people.

Overall, current state policies around work with young people in Britain reflect a shift from voluntary participation to more coercive forms; from association to individualised activity; from education to case management; and from informal to formal and bureaucratic relationships (see Jeffs and Smith 2008). In England this process has been further exacerbated by the use of commissioning, and the development of integrated children's services and the disassembly of youth services within them. The effect has been a radical reshaping of work with young people within state-sponsored sectors. Instead of youth workers we more commonly find practitioners – with various titles – who lay claim to an expertise in working with, on and alongside young people. They are hired by agencies seeking to manage young people's behaviour and to promote 'positive transitions'. Within the English children's trust frameworks these workers often have new job titles like children and youth worker, youth development worker, youth support worker, social pedagogue and adolescent worker. Within schools and colleges they might have behaviour management, mentor or extended schooling in their titles.

A further twist came late in 2008 with the collapse of key elements of the global banking system, significant economic disruption and long-term pressure on government finances. Economic crisis and recession have historically pre-figured a sharp decline in central and local government investment in youth services and an equally marked fall in philanthropic support (Jeffs 1979). Rising unemployment and a shrinking tax-base inevitably lead to expenditure being focused on 'essential

services' and a decline in the funds made available for marginal services such as youth work. The length and depth of recessions are obviously impossible to predict with any degree of precision; however, we can expect that what state funding is available will, for the coming decade, at least initially, be directed towards individualised work and targeted groups who threat to be 'socially disruptive'.

The way forward

The current shifting orientations in work with young people across Britain have, on the one hand, introduced constraints on the ability to engage in local, open and relational practice. On the other, the movements have opened up new spaces for exploration and engagement, and reopened some old ones – for example, within schools and further education colleges. There is, we believe, still room for groups of workers and for individuals within state-sponsored arenas to develop open, relational work with young people. Those operating firmly within civil society have considerable space for innovation and exploration – but face different issues. Here we want to highlight some of the opportunities and issues.

First, we have found that workers and managers generally impose boundaries on the work that are overcautious in terms of what might be possible in their situations. There are all sorts of reasons for this including the fear of being reprimanded, the desire for an easy life and the scale and complexity of the policies, procedures and paperwork that confront them. However, if we can get over these, there is often imprecision and slackness in systems and organisations that can be exploited to make space for more open and relational practice. For example, the lack of a management framework within some faith groups can be used to open up space for such practice. Similarly, the long line of reporting, the need in each layer of a bureaucracy to present its work in the best light and the amount of effort involved in channelling 'wayward' workers can also operate in the favour of those wanting to push and test boundaries (see Smith and Smith 2008).

Second, many of those working with young people have lost touch with, or not been introduced to, the rich tradition of thinking, practice and example that has developed within youth work (hence our focus here). The scope of training has been narrowed with diminished opportunities to study the historical origins and philosophical core under-pinning practice (Jeffs and Spence 2008). Newer generations of workers with young people have been increasingly socialised into defining their identity and activity around the narrowing concerns of the 'positive transitions'

agenda, and more programmatic and outcome-oriented ways of working. Employer-controlled Foundation degrees and the expanding range of 'on-the-job routes to qualification' deliberately set out to lower horizons and replace education with training. While some may find comfort in these more formulaic approaches, many others, in our experience, find such ways of working unsatisfying and worrying. They seek the space wherein they can engage with young people in sustained and creative ways that place the emphasis on relationships and routes to informal educational encounters.

Third, there is increasing evidence that the dominant managerial orientation to social policy involving central target setting, and the delivery of services through a mix of state, non-profit and commercial operators is running itself into the ground. This can be seen, for example, in the developing debate around primary schooling (fuelled in part by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation/Cambridge University *Primary Review*); the inability of the National Health Service to convert increased resources into a comparable improvement in health care (Wanless *et al.* 2007); and the growing opposition to excessive testing in secondary schools that has already led to reforms in Wales and Scotland. Just as the central planning model for economic policy fell apart in the late 1960s, now major cracks are appearing in the 'delivery' model for social policy that has dominated the last decade or so in the United Kingdom. Both state and business have failed to develop and provide social and educational services that actually address people's needs and aspirations. Policy for poor communities, and those deemed marginalised or disadvantaged:

> . . . tends to be driven by a deficit model that focuses on the deficiencies of individuals and communities, rather than building upon the individual, associational, and institutional assets and networks that already exist.
>
> (Siranni and Friedland 2001: 11)

Schools, health and care providers can more easily plough on regardless of the damage they inflict. However, in the end deficit models of welfare and education fail. They cannot do what is necessary to effect lasting change. They do not engage with people in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, as John McKnight (1995: 106) has commented, 'As the power of profession and service system ascends, the legitimacy, authority, and capacity of citizens and community descend. The *citizen* retreats. The *client* advances.' The current situation in welfare and education has the look of a 'tipping point' – a moment when thinking and actions cross a threshold and rapid change occurs (Gladwell 2000).

Fourth, in the current context small disruptions to systems, micro-actions and locally improvised initiatives can bring about significant

gains (Siranni and Friedland 2001; Speth 2005). We may well be approaching a moment when 'little things can make a big difference' (Gladwell 2000). By making the case for more open, local and relational ways of working, offering different examples of practice, and emphasizing the crucial significance of civil society, there is a chance of wider change. We know, for example, that when considering social innovation the most lasting and largest impacts are often not the result of organisational growth. Rather they 'come from encouraging emulators, and transforming how societies think (with new concepts, arguments and stories)' (Mulgan *et al.* 2007: iv).

In conclusion

As we have seen, in recent years the policy context in which youth work operates has been volatile and often incoherent. New agencies and funding streams appear and, often with equal rapidity, vanish. The funding structure has become chaotic and time consuming. As the Audit Commission found, around 28 per cent of staff time is now consumed writing bids for money and providing documentation for funders (2009: 76). Understandably, given this context, a certain despondency has infected state-sponsored youth work. Yet a lot remains that is vibrant and healthy and will undoubtedly survive and develop – much as youth work has weathered previous storms. Without adopting a sham optimism it is possible to rationally retain a faith in the buoyancy found in the chapters that follow. The writers offer accounts of how they and others have been able to carve out space to develop relationships, engage in conversation and build communities with young people. Our task is to ensure that what thrives is worthy of doing so and what is lost will not be missed. This book is an invitation to explore the contribution that youth work can make towards building happier and more fulfilling lives and communities.