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Youth Work, Social Education, Democratic Practice and the challenge of difference: A contribution to debate.

Youth work in the UK has sometimes been recognised as having a significant contribution to make to education, whilst at other times being valued more for its supposed contribution to social order and the avoidance of riot. Most recently it was recognised as a part of education provision in the Nuffield Review (Pring, 2009). This paper presents a case for youth work as a potential contributor to networks of learning which are radical democratic and prefigurative of an education practiced otherwise than primarily through individualism, credentialisation and competition (Fielding and Moss, 2011). It argues for the significance of feminist insights to radical democratic practice, in order to redress the systematic marginalisation of girls and the attribution of a social pathology to working-class boys and other entrenched divisions which occur in much social education as well as to open up the whole terrain of difference as a source of transformation. As the purpose here is to contribute to a theoretical debate, empirical examples of youth work

practice are briefly indicated and referenced rather than discussed in depth. However the paper begins by contextualising the theoretical debate in the history of policy as it has framed and constrained youth work.

Youth work has been variously understood as a process of social and political education (Smith,1980; Ord, 2007), community education(Coburn and Wallace, 2011) and as informal learning (Batsleer,2008). However, it has also been subject to the same pressures as schools in the form of the imposition of targets in relation to social policy (such as those concerned with sexual health, teenage pregnancy and anti-social behaviour), credentialisation and formal accreditation of learning (with all engagement with youth workers by young people being awarded certificates where possible) and a short-termism in the funding of projects which has led to an emphasis on targeted and often individualised brief interventions rather than the building up of relationship and association. A renewed emphasis on the relational and the social in education will however not in itself be sufficient for youth work to contribute to a radical, democratic project. Traditions of social education in youth work historically were unconcerned with issues of power and empowerment. It was only the impact of thinking and practice rooted in various liberation and civil rights movements, encapsulated in the critical pedagogies emerging from the praxis of Paolo Freire, which challenged the social conservatism of much youth work practice. Currently, a renewed emphasis on individualism, combined with the imperative to reduce social costs consequent on the devastations of

austerity policies is evident in the report commissioned by UK Government 'A Framework of Outcomes for Young People' , with an ever stronger emphasis on measurement, of 'social and emotional capabilities' ,as a basis for funding youth work. (Mcneil, Reeder and Rich, 2012). In such models, the individual is understood as essentially a 'free agent' separate from their social context and social formation and more and more sophisticated assessment tools are devised to monitor and direct their development, within the context of what is assumed to be a separate and well-functioning society. The individual young person needs adjustment and it appears to be the job of educators to do that adjusting, not merely cognitively but socially and emotionally too. As the authors of the Young Foundations's 'Outcomes Framework' (2012) put it:

'At a time of financial austerity demonstrating how services improve outcomes and reduce costs to the public purse will be attractive to providers and commissioners alike. (.....)

'Individuals do not move passively through life. They are affected by, and must navigate, formal institutions (such as schools), peer networks, families and neighbourhoods, and what has been called the 'wider learning platform' (which ranges from friends to the internet). The challenge is to connect all these 'spheres of influence' together for a positive result, empowering young people to take an active role in achieving positive life outcomes.' (McNeil,Reeder and Rich: 4 and 14)

From the perspective argued here, the model of the social in the 'Outcomes Framework' is an inversion of reality. There is no sense of the social and personal as profoundly connected, as the basis from which all learning arises. Such individualist and neo-liberal perspectives have been challenged from within the UK youth work community by the 'In Defence of Youth Work' movement, which emerged in the New Labour period as a critique of target-driven models of youth work and which is being sustained currently by an alliance with public service Trade Unions to challenge both austerity cuts and models of practice which are driven by the State's agenda rather than by relationships with young people. The Durham History of Youth and Community Work Conference of March 2009 provided the platform for the circulation of an Open Letter which drew widespread support. It began:

'Thirty years ago Youth Work aspired to a special relationship with young people. It wanted to meet young women and men on their terms. It claimed to be 'on their side'. Three decades later Youth Work is close to abandoning this distinctive commitment. Today it accepts the State's terms. It sides with the State's agenda. Perhaps we exaggerate, but a profound change has taken place.....'

In place of this Tony Taylor's open letter proposed a renewal of support for:

- The sanctity of the voluntary principle; the freedom for young people to enter into and withdraw from Youth Work as they so wish.
- A commitment to conversations with young people which start from their concerns and within which both youth worker and young person are educated and out of which opportunities for new learning and experience can be created.

- The importance of association, of fostering supportive relationships, of encouraging the development of autonomous groups and ‘the sharing of a common life’.
- A commitment to valuing and attending to the here-and-now of young people’s experience rather than just focusing on ‘transitions’.
- An insistence upon a democratic practice, within which every effort is made to ensure that young people play the fullest part in making decisions about anything affecting them.
- The continuing necessity of recognising that young people are not a homogeneous group and that issues of class, gender, race, sexuality and disability remain central.
- The essential significance of the youth worker themselves, whose outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice with young people.

This paper seeks to explicate the extent to which recent developments in discussions of social education/ social pedagogy can support such imagined counter-practices and how a feminist perspective in youth work might be connected to this democratic project. In order to further contextualise the discussion of the potential contribution of youth work to democratic initiatives it is useful to consider how the discourses of social education have been embedded in social policy. This brief survey makes evident the impact of under-theorisation of the social in social education, rendering youth work as a practice all too readily amenable to policy initiatives from elsewhere in the State.

Local Authority Youth Services in England, which were among the chief bearers in public policy of ideas of social education, were systematically dismantled and reconstructed into multi-agency Children's Services teams under New Labour and have now been abandoned completely in many areas as a consequence of the financial crisis and the Coalition's reductions in public spending.(de St Croix,2011 ; Davies and Merton,2009). Ironically, this was also the moment of rediscovery of ideas of 'social pedagogy' in early years and social care settings and the opening up of the idea of 'social pedagogy' as an element in discussions of 'the common school.' Policy formations consistently create constraints on radical visions. The long histories of social education in UK youth work have included performances of difference, including gender difference, which are far from being inspired by feminism. A brief summary of those histories will serve to highlight the tensions and contradictions continuously present in Youth Work.

Social Education: The professionalization and current deprofessionalisation of the field of youth work in England and the impact of social policy

`The Youth Service is an integral part of the education system, since it provides for the continued *social and informal education of young people* in terms most likely to bring them to maturity, those of responsible personal choice. It is now an accepted commonplace in education that the infant learns by play, and nursery and infant school teaching is based on this concept; but recreation can be as educative

to the adolescent as play is to the infant, and as important in promoting the physical, intellectual and moral development necessary to turn the teenager into the responsible adult citizen... Flexibility and tolerance are essential in the approach to young people in clubs and in the spontaneous, self-programming, single activity groups which we hope to see developed. (Ministry of Education 1960: 103)'

The Albemarle Report (1960)(quoted above) was swiftly adopted by Government, leading directly to the establishment of the profession of youth leader, to a committee to negotiate salaries linked to those of teachers, to a building programme for the work and to funds for 'experimental projects.' : a formation of a quasi-profession highly reminiscent of that proposed for 'pedagogy' as a field today (Smith,1996; Petrie,2009). Albemarle established the clear association of youth work with social education in public policy:

'The Committee looked to youth work to provide [*social education*](#) of the kind that has long been valued in the corporate life of those pursuing formal education in schools, technical colleges and universities' (1960: 52).

The crisis in the use of the term 'social education' from the 1970's onwards in youth work was coterminous with the crisis of the post-war social democratic settlement (Butters and Newall;1978; Hall et al,1978; Smith,1988). By the next period of significant investment in young people's services following the election of New Labour in 1997 the term had almost disappeared, being replaced by the term 'informal education.'

Indeed, youth work, post 1997, became a small partner in a multi-disciplinary approach adopted in 'Services for Young People'. In terms of the new 'modernising' policy settlement which characterised New Labour (described by Gewirz (2002) as 'neo-liberalism, authoritarianism and humanism.')

a series of key policies reshaped youth services. These were contradictory, embodying both an intensification of surveillance along with increased use of youth custody and a positive recognition of young people as citizens in the making (Milbourne,2009; Davies,2008). Positive encouragement to youth participation, building on the adoption of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, led in time to the appointment of the Children's Commissioner and strongly influenced the development of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES 2003). Following the work of the Policy Action Teams (PAT Teams) at the Social Exclusion Unit, the Connexions Service was established, accompanied by the development of the Personal Adviser role, work targets specifically aimed at NEETS (Young People Not in Education, Employment and Training) and a strong emphasis on individual case work. The specific policy papers *Transforming Youth Work* (2001) and *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (2002) formed the framework for policy in England with 'reach', 'participation', and 'recorded and accredited outcomes' being the preferred measures of success. As a result, universal aspirations for social education were now clearly and explicitly mediated through the performance management of targets for newly integrated Children's and Young People's Services, so that social education methods, with their roots in youth work practice, did indeed

become a vehicle for delivery of social policy with 'youth work methods' widely sought after for their effectiveness in meeting social policy agendas in relation to such targets as 'youth nuisance' and 'teenage pregnancy'. Participatory methods however were also further developed through V-Inspired (2006) and the Youth Opportunities Fund and Youth Capital Funds followed by the Children's Plan (2008). 'Services for Young People' were thus thoroughly re-shaped under New Labour. Despite all this, the success of youth work as a practice of social education was consistently viewed as 'under-evidenced'.

In parallel with these developments, the invocation of social pedagogy as a field or domain with a distinctive theory, daily practice with children, formulation of policy and the training and development of workers was of particular significance in the UK in 2007-10 in the reshaping of policy in the Department for Children, Schools and Families. In these years training in social pedagogy was seen to have the potential to unite disparate practices from children's services, early years, youth offending teams, work with secure units, youth work, residential childcare, fostering and playwork. It offered a means of grasping a unity of care and education which had eluded policy formation in the UK previously. However, this appeared to happen in almost complete ignorance of the already constituted field of youth work, with its own theory, daily practice with young people in community settings, as well as forty professional education and training courses at degree level across the UK. (QAA, 2009). Nevertheless, in youth and community work education, the term 'social education' had long denoted much the same territory as that mapped by

'social pedagogy'. The persistent contestation surrounding the professional identity and status of youth work (Tucker, 2006) is one measure of both its marginality and the political forces which drive through it.

Coussee's (Van de Walle, T. Et al, 2010; Coussee, F. 2010). periodisation of the field of youth work in terms of relations between classes and class fractions suggests that a crisis was reached in relation to the new social movements in the 1960's and 70's, especially in relation to the issue of hierarchy in education. As well as being marked by social class, youth work was marked by gender. Batsleer (2010) has proposed a similar and related periodisation in relation to the question of gender and youth work in the UK. During and after World War Two a theory of youth clubs and democracy had developed to include an emphasis on citizenship for girls (Jephcott, 1942). In 1950 the National Council of Girls Clubs became National Association of Girls Clubs and Mixed Clubs with the 'charm school' of femininity in youth work, paradoxically occurring alongside strong female professional leadership. During this period the explicit recognition of presence of girls in youth work was first marginalised and then erased. Josephine McAlister Brew, pioneer of social groupwork as a vehicle for social education, was also the originator of the McAlister Brew courses on Good Grooming for Girls. The emergence of the secular (that is post-Christian) profession of 'youth leader' was accompanied by a marked tendency to render invisible all specific histories and identities including those associated with gender. From this perspective, the 'Albemarle moment' of professionalization coincided

with the final erasure of female gender in the name of the charitable organisations whose long history had been that of youth work with girls: in 1961 the *National Association of Youth Clubs* was named and for the first time since 1911 the word 'girls' was no longer in the name of the organisation. (Butterfield and Spence (2005); Turnbull(2001) ; Tinkler (1995)). The crisis-to-come for such secularised and depoliticised models of professional practice was immediately apparent.

During the 1960's/70's, in the context of the international resonance of the US Civil rights and anti-War movements, emerging second-wave feminism challenged the new invisibility of girls in youth work. Jalna Hanmer's (1964) 'Girls at Leisure' report commissioned by YWCA and London Union of Youth Clubs was the first 'straw in the wind', pointing to the re-emergence of feminism as a force in youth work and to the need to resist the rendering invisible of women and other marginalised peoples under the 'neutral' guise of secular professionalism and later of managerialism (Spence,2010). Images of an abstract universal 'young person' and their accompanying 'youth leader' remain normatively masculine. They have shaped the practice of youth work from the Albemarle moment onwards. The new policy settlement proposed by the Coalition Government in the UK is one which sees no room for the professional youth worker, being content to rely, in its 'Positive for Youth' offer, on the services of volunteers for The Big Society. (Davies,2011). Social education re-emerges as a space for conjuring, through the National Citizenship Scheme, a neo-pastoral version of England, in which

the leaders and their followers undertake 'team-building' activities rather than urban disturbances during the summer holidays. (deStCroix,2011).

During the Albemarle period, during the New Labour Period and now under the current Coalition discussions of youth policy, the cost of any policy settlement and the associated allocation of resources has been silence: silence about the conflicts and contestations which the policy settlement in part seeks to suppress.(de St Croix, 2011). Just as girls were rendered invisible in the moment of professionalization of youth work in the early 1960's, so gender-neutral or apparently gender-free language was used throughout the New Labour period. This silenced contestation about gender (especially the alleged flexibility, adaptability and pro-sociality of girls and the anti-social nature of boys). So too silence about difference is the cost of the resolute 'positivity' that surrounded youth policies in the New Labour years and surrounds them still in the austerity of Coalition policies.

Histories of the definition of social education in youth work

Within this policy history, the term social education has been used consistently to indicate a distinctive theory and practice for youth work. Although the term 'social education' was widely replaced in academic discussion by 'informal education', 'social education' remained a powerful term in distinguishing the curriculum processes of youth work from those of schools. The most widely used short definition of social education remains that developed by Mark Smith in his early work, 'Creators not Consumers':

‘Social education is the conscious attempt to help people gain for themselves the knowledge, feelings and skills to meet their own and other people’s developmental needs.’ (Smith, 1982).

The traditions of holistic, person-centred approaches on which Smith built had been articulated throughout the twentieth century by leaders and theorists in the field of UK youth work such as Pearl Jephcott,(1942) Josephine McAlister Brew,(1957) Bernard Davies and Alan Gibson (1967). These were later supplemented and critiqued by informal educators working in community contexts drawing on the critical, emancipatory pedagogies of Paolo Freire . Smith was instrumental in developing an alternative theory of ‘informal education’ because of the perceived weaknesses in the term ‘social education’, especially its disregard at a theoretical level of issues of power and politics. Re-emerging discourses of measuring social and emotional capabilities and related ubiquitous accounts of youth and community work as ‘building social capital’ still remain oddly disengaged from power as a dimension of the social. (McNeil,Reeder and Rich,2012). Practices of ‘youth voice’ and ‘(social) participation’ have been considered among the more progressive aspects of youth work practice. (Podd,2010; Thomas and Percy-Smith (eds) 2010) However, the long standing criticisms of youth work as merely enabling better manners and a certain amount of social order reappear in the critiques of ‘youth voice’ projects (Butters and Newall, 1978; Milbourne,2009;). They suggest that it serves to reinforce existing inequalities, operating as it does, even with a radical ideology of empowerment, under severe constraint. However in the second part of

this paper I argue that an analysis of difference drawing on feminist social theory and in particular on the work of Luce Irigaray enhances the theoretical basis for practice otherwise than directed by policy. Whilst theories of critical pedagogy with their roots in the work of Paulo Freire have enabled strong critiques of the objectification of 'youth' and have pointed to the fundamental necessity of dialogue in education, they have sometimes neglected to analyse the extent to which educators themselves, including critical educators, are ambivalently caught in webs of power and control. The recognition of the situatedness of all educational practice (and both the losses and gains associated with it) is a significant contribution of feminist thinking about practicing otherwise.

Proponents of an alternative vision of youth work as a conversation 'without guarantees'

have been accused of being 'romantics' by those who designate themselves

'principled pragmatists' in the field of youth work(Wylie,2012). From a feminist perspective

however there are other issues with romantic accounts of 'starting where young people are' and with a 'low level of power' which 'tips the balance of power towards young people' (Tiffany,2007; Davies,2010).

Whilst rightly seeking to remove the field of youth work from direction either by the State (and so becoming para-teachers or para-police officers) or the market (and becoming sportswear sales people or labour

market manipulators), such discussions frequently fail to acknowledge the power-charged practices which constitute the social even in the absence of either security guards or teachers marking its boundaries. The requirement for theories of social education to engage with power and difference within the social (and not merely as an external constraint from policy) is necessary to the development of positive accounts of radical democratic practice. The term 'difference' here refers (following Luce Irigaray and other theorists of sexual difference) not to the already named and commodified markings of the 'other' but to an opening out of the social to new and yet to come difference in which the social is already constituted. (Grosz, 2005). Democratic practice inherently holds a promise of transformation. Without such an opening to the new, youth work, like other educational practices, is doomed to repeat and intensify the inherited patterns of social division and inequality. Luce Irigaray's (1932-present) critique of the representation of sexual difference as a binary structured in a 'mirror-image' (Irigaray, 1985) opened up a space for rethinking an ontology of social practice which offers significant support to new visions of democratic education. Feminist resources can do more than pose questions and critique. They can propose alternative starting points. Irigaray, has argued, in many contexts, (eg Irigaray, 2000) that acceptance of difference whilst living on common ground involves at least the following:

- A non-reducible commitment to the expression of difference within the human and across the boundaries of the human with the animal and the human with the machine...

- A recognition of the non-reducibility of 'the other' to the 'the same' and at the same time a recognition that it is in this way that speech comes to be possible
- A foregrounding of a process of becoming subject in relation to others rather than a training of the subject by means of knowledge
- A respect for life and the existing universe rather than an education in the rule of the subject over the world
- The learning of life in community rather than the acquisition of skills
- Construction of a liveable and more cultured future rather than submission to a tradition.

This ontology of learning can be recognised as present and emergent even whilst subject to the grids of control directed by the State and the market. As Irigaray argues, 'A change of perspectives of this sort leads to respecting women as mature citizens and to the enrichment of the community with values which it needs: the practice of intersubjectivity, the sense of the concrete, concern for the future; and to enabling co-existence between women and men, not only on the instinctual level- with all the forms of violence which the institution of the family modestly conceals- but on the level of civilisation.' (Irigaray,2000:105).

For social education and social pedagogy to cease to be complicit in the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities and the violence inherent in them, a change of perspective is indeed required. Thinking such as

Irigaray's offers a framework and a ground for hope for an educational vision of youth work.

Feminist critiques: questions for democratic practice

The practice of 'normalising' as a significant strategy to counter negative labelling or pathologising approaches is often presented as a positive aspect of social education practice (Petrie et al,2009). However, 'normalising' approaches need to be considered in the light of the forms of subjectivity which accompany them. 'Done hair and nails, now what?' was the title of the first project of Feminist Webs, a youth work initiative based in the North West of England, which has deliberately set out to build on the inheritance from the 1970's and 80's of feminist practice in youth work and to question what is taken as 'normal' with regard to the desires and dreams of young women.(www.feministwebs.com).

Many youth inclusion projects – which promote for example motor vehicle workshops for boys and hairdressing and beauty for girls – provide an 'education for society' which completely write out significant contestations concerning, for example, gender and racialisation.

Engaging those labelled as NEETS, enabling young women and young men to become active citizens, to volunteer, to negotiate skilfully and self-reflectively the challenges of a flexible labour market and then enter courses or jobs in beauty or health and social care for young women or construction for young men does little to challenge or even open up conversations about the existing forms of class and gender relations.

Project designs which have been directed by the State cannot really be

regarded as democratic even when young people are engaged with voluntarily and through conversation. The valorisation of positive male role models which underpins projects aiming to reduce 'anti-social' and promote 'pro-social' behaviour mobilises heteronormative models of family dynamics, specifically of mothering and fathering and enacts what are frequently militarised forms of masculinity accompanied by a mourning femininity. In this way social education does not 'practice otherwise' but reinforces and entrenches existing social relations.

Because of its emphasis on real-life experiential learning and learning beyond the cognitive, social education has also all too readily been co-opted as a theory of education for the 'less able', the 'lower bands' and those most easily directed to vocational streams and alternative 'vocationally-based' work-experience programmes (Davies,1978). It is important that it cease to be positioned as the 'other', the less valued partner, of academic education and, alongside this, that it ceases to simply reproduce gender norms unquestioningly. For this reason I argue that critical democratic practice in youth work must be in dialogue with the development of democratic practice in schools and colleges.

Difference

In tension with closed agendas derived from social policy targets, advocates of critical and democratic youth work propose a sense of the

'unfinished' in education. A precondition of this is the rejection of relationships based first and foremost on roles and functions and measurement. Instead, co-creativity, shared enquiry and personal and communal narratives, the sharing of life-worlds, are emphasised. All these are threads within discourses both of social pedagogy and social education.(Petrie et al,2009;Batsleer,2008; Batsleer and Davies,2010; Wood and Hine,2009).

However, there is no escape into 'Common Ground' or the imagination of such person-centred, common spaces of dialogue and relationship without the yet-to-come encounter with difference. Inspirational speaking and writing from the world-wide women's movement affirms this and some feminist and other critical youth workers have engaged with this from the period when Audre Lorde's poetry and speeches became widely available as part of youth work training and education in the early 1980's:

`Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.` (Lorde. 1984)

In this context the commitment to engage in imagining relationships of equality across difference which are not based on the pseudo-equality of

the marketing of difference is an essential element in any re-visioning of the social education tradition. Resources for such re-imagining are present in feminist social theory which invites a vision of the social as a space for improvisations within and at the moment of constraints. (Haraway, 1991; Butler,2004). The social is envisaged as a space of process, of multiplicity, of difference, not of one-ness but of more than one-ness. This offers the starting point needed as we seek to establish what it means to live, prefiguratively, in relationship and on common ground. In this framework, sexual difference (and all difference) becomes a horizon, an open question, not a pre-given set of 'known attributes' associated with gender. I will illustrate these claims about the 'openness' and 'power-charged' nature of the social in what follows. I draw on the suggestions by Fielding and Moss about key democratic practices to show how embracing difference within processes of social education might contribute to the work of radical education and the common school. The understanding of 'dialogue' which is proposed in all democratic education is critical to this. Dialogue which does not seek to assimilate or overthrow difference is what is being imagined here.

Utopian Projects?

The production of difference either benignly as 'inclusion' or malignly as 'threat' is the problem which has haunted the policy frameworks for youth work. Any proposal to develop educational practices which do not commodify difference, therefore, requires an explicit utopian commitment. (Fielding and Moss,2011). This cannot easily be reconciled

with either marketised/philanthropic agendas or social democratic ones. Many of the critical issues about pre-figurative counter-practice in schooling are also of central importance in the development of democratic youth work at ease with difference. In practical terms, the possibility of such youth work initiatives as discussed here being located in relation to networks of co-operative schools is one initiative which is currently under discussion. The key elements of practicing otherwise considered here are: practices of democratic meeting; the young person understood as rich in potential; and personalism and dialogue (in which the work of Luce Irigaray in contact with youth work practice is considered in more depth.)

Practices of Democratic Meeting.

Much practice of radical education has involved processes of democratic meeting and of 'open democracy' and both emancipatory and postmodern approaches to student voice share with feminist approaches an insistent commitment to social justice, a public form of advocacy, an involvement with communities beyond and outside school and an impetus towards international engagement. (Fielding, 2005; Cruddas, 2006) This is being explored once more post the 2011 summer disturbances in England at a civic level beyond the context of discussions of the 'common school' and the 'club meeting' or 'project meeting'. The most serious question for a feminist perspective is whether these 'general meetings' or 'city-wide forums' will override other meetings such as those based on chosen rather than assumed and designated identifications of difference, of which sexual difference may be among the most significant and how such

'general meetings' are to be conducted in the light of irreducible difference.

During and after the summer of 2011, youth workers who were observers of the disturbances in Manchester gathered together with young men and women to explore the question 'We (heart) Manchester but does Manchester (heart) young people?' They combined footage taken on mobile phones with images from television to create montages and presentations to communicate with city council leaders some of their experiences of the summer and their sense of the lack of value they were experiencing. The importance of these communications which were facilitated but not instigated in a context in which the City Council had abolished its directly provided Youth Service lies in their capacity to speak outside and beyond the terms set by the widely supported 'clean-up' and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services/British Youth Council 'Not in Our Name' campaign. Young women training as youth workers took the lead in these initiatives alongside small voluntary youth projects which form the network Voluntary Youth Manchester. The public forum (which was continually debating whether it could 'pledge'. 'guarantee' or 'offer' anything to young people) was challenged momentarily to engage with a different form of gathering and meeting, where young women were leading and insistently posing the question of the value of their lives in the corporate and heart-logo-ed city.

The image of the young person as rich in potential.

Just as for radical education, one of the fundamental questions for critical social education is the image of the child or young person by which it is underpinned (Fielding and Moss, 2011). Social education has characteristically sought to position itself against 'deficit' models of young people (Griffin, 1993) whilst at the same time being curiously attracted to and implicated in them. Jeffs and Smith (1999) referred to this as the Janus face of youth work:

` When pleading for funds they tend to emphasize both the dangers posed by unmonitored youth as well as the failings and inadequacies of young people. They have often embraced the concept of 'underclass' and exaggerated the negative, conjuring up a collection of euphemisms for inadequacy such 'status zero youth', 'at risk', 'disaffected', and 'excluded' (Jeffs 1997). The face offered to young people and colleagues is different. Here the talk is of empowerment, engagement and participation - not control and inadequacy.' (Jeffs and Smith, 1999). The project of compensating for the perceived deficit in 'sociality' among those defined spatio-temporally as liminal, in transition or 'in limbo', deemed no longer child and not yet adult, able to occupy neither the spaces of adult life nor those of childhood, remains powerful in UK culture and social policy. Such discourses led, during the first decade of the new century, to the invention by British aerospace engineers and subsequent marketing of 'mosquito alarms' designed to repel groups of teenagers from gathering in public and even domestic space. They continue to be marketed, despite calls by Children's Commissioner to ban them as an infringement of children's human rights.

There is little that is positive or affirmative in neo-liberal accounts of 'youth' or of the role of the 'youth professional'. So youth workers are seeking alliances with other educators who want to deconstruct this negative account of the young person through democratic practice. Instead of starting from a 'deficient' and curiously ahistoric and neutral young person full of anti-social potential, critical social education might start from a sense of the rich young person, rich in potential, rich in resources and therefore rich in difference, not flattened in being by the neutrality of policyspeak. The Muslim Youth Work Foundation Conference in Bradford 2006 had one focus on work with girls and young women. In defiance of expectations of discussions of forced marriage and patriarchy, youth workers from Bradford explored their focus on working with young women who were organising an international journey which would culminate in a climb of Mount Kilimanjaro (Khan,2006).

Personalism and Dialogue

In the context of a remembering and re-imagination of radical democratic practice, it is important to note that the insistence on dialogue from the beginning of any practice has been central to radical traditions in youth work, with sharp questions posed about the terms in which dialogue can be established. A story told by a recent young participant in a Feminist Webs event illuminates the continuing issue of situated languages, translation and interpretation. Returning to school after taking part in a Feminist Webs residential which was focussed on young women's

resilience in the face of violence she was pleased to see her teacher taking a very active part in challenging the bullying which had been happening in the classroom. 'Are you a feminist, miss?' she asked. 'Oh no!' came the horrified reply. 'I'm married with children.' The problems of working with the understandings of young women, of other professionals, and of feminist activist communities challenge the informal educational conversations of feminist youth workers at every turn. On another occasion, discussing 'heroines', the focus of attention turned to Katie Price (aka Jordan) : a successful business woman, the girls said, who cared for her little boy and who had used her assets to full advantage. Only a recognition of the partial and situated nature of all perspectives and a willingness to not too easily dismiss the desired femininities of working-class girls against an apparently 'superior' feminist version keeps such conversations and the visibility of the feminine which emerges with them, alive.

Returning to the vision of dialogic social learning rooted in the work of Luce Irigaray discussed earlier it is possible to give a practical account of the kinds of orientation to youth work which a feminist vision might bring. It might involve, for example, ..

- an unsettling of assumptions about the values in a youth project of playing with cars, working in a motor vehicle workshop, or tending to the horses or chickens on an urban farm....an openness to exploration of what difference might mean and a playfulness in challenging existing boundaries....what would happen if youth

workers offered boys the chance to tend the chickens for a day or do hair and beauty for the day and offered girls the chance to ride motor bikes? There was a flourishing of such alternative projects during the 1980's (Batsleer, forthcoming) and it is possible that they might emerge again in the context of experiments with vocational education in studio schools formed on a co-operative model.

- a genuine openness to diversity within experiential learning and therefore to the speaking of a range of different languages within the processes of relationship building. For example, young people from refugee communities in contact with detached youth work teams are supported in sustaining their mother tongue as well as in learning English through for example a Roma_Somali football league; the music of 50 Cent and the performance art of Lady Gaga forms the basis of projects, conversations and performances about the future in informal projects with young people just out of prison; arts and creativity projects linked to significant cultural institutions (theatres, galleries and museums) are seized on not for the accreditation they provide but in terms of opportunities to develop and celebrate the creativity of young women and young men. The multi-lingual contexts of contemporary urban setting are the rich contexts for project practice which is street and cafe based like The Men's Room Manchester (Batsleer, 2011) working with young men who are vulnerable in the City Centre out of a barbers shop in the gay village; or for work which recognises young women's friendship networks in the outdoor spaces of smoking

(Cullen,2010). Such projects can explicitly recognise the connections of the local and global in urban as well as virtual space and are driven mainly by desires for connection and mutuality rather than control. In this sense they contribute to conviviality and the re-vival of the public spaces in which democracy might flourish (Iveson,2006). In such contexts hard conversations can emerge: about the control and violence in many young men and young women's lives and the ways of negotiating this differently.

- Relationship - rather than mastery of knowledge and facts to be passed on- is at the core of informal learning in youth work and the sense of equality in relationship must be genuine and not feigned for the purposes of 'fitting people in' to existing designated social categories. An image of community in youth work is of groups of young people and adults walking and talking together, whether in the countryside or the city streets, in movement, and open to change, not fixed by the identity-boundaries of any given community. Young women in the disabled young people's project at Forty Second Street,Manchester, who have been part of a project called 'Imagination Bubble' regularly use Forum Theatre with professionals working in social care, in housing and teaching to challenge them about the kind of conversation they have with their young clients who have difficulties and dreams beyond those created by their disablement. Youth Workers in M13 detached youth work project (based in inner-city Manchester) use a method of street-based courageous and authentic conversation to support

young women negotiating decisions about the nature and ethics of inter=personal violence in their lives. Such conversations are described by practitioners who have developed the project and have worked in the area for fifteen years as life-affirming and rooted in their relationships with families over more than one generation.

- Respect for life rather than mastery and rule/ a building up of community.....can we rethink the goals of autonomy so that women can learn to respect their own lives and men can learn to value interdependence ? Can we re-invent the traditions of the general meeting and the open space in ways that prevent them being dominated by a few very powerful voices? The forums which have been created for young people's participation are often led by young women (described sometimes as 'the can-do girls') following existing patterns of representative democracy, for example the Youth Parliament. In contrast to this, low-threshold youth work methods, such as the establishment of young women's spaces in local areas have been developed to highlight the issues facing young women and their need for space away from family responsibilities of various kinds. In this context, an outdoor education project based on an urban canal, the Water Adventure Centre, has used participatory methods of decision making and learning to celebrate International Women's Day and to identify the key issues facing young women for the last thirty years. (Batsleer,forthcoming).

- A sense that education is a here-and-now and co-created event rather than a fixed body of knowledge which the young must learn. Arts-based creative practice is a necessity, enabling improvisation and provisionality in enquiry. In the second phase of the Feminist Webs project, young women created art works based on their understanding of the oppressive coercive nature of current technologies of body enhancement in young women's lives. Many curious and wonderful installations were made, but the 'travelling question mark?' made of patchwork and images of women endures as a symbol of the questioning. (Lee and Withers,2012)
- A non-violent ethic will be fundamental to the work and the stories that are told will foster a more creative future. The issue of coercion and compliance versus voluntary and free relationship has long been central to the debate about youth work practice. In inviting young women to freely choose to be part of projects which set out on an open-ended investigation of the possible meanings associated with being a young woman it is possible to investigate in some depth the ethics of care and of rights which are often claimed to underpin emancipator education. This can include care for themselves and for one another, as in a fund-raising project for Rape Crisis supported by a young women's group associated with a school sixth form centre, which followed on from the groups participation in the Million Women Rise March. In seeking to work non-coercively, the equal participation of young women and young men in the planning and development of the 'curriculum' of group

work, in terms which are negotiated with adult workers, is always a significant aspect of practice which potentially distinguishes youth work from other practices in the Children's Workforce which aim to support young people through forms of militarised practice.

Pre-figurative practice: youth work within the common school?

Such youth work practice occurring alongside a neighbourhood community school would enable the development of an inter-generational democratic force in local areas. In the face of the policy contexts discussed earlier, it is only with an explicit commitment to counter-practice, with strong community support, and with strong international connections, that such youth work can be sustained and hope to flourish.

The model of pre-figurative practice of the 'school within a school' offering a radically alternative approach to education could be supported by and offer support to feminist and other democratic youth workers.

The case for working closely with schools is being made particularly clearly by community education experts in Scotland in the context of the 'Curriculum for Excellence' offering a sign of hope for those in England depressed and alarmed by the direction of Coalition policies. (Coburn and Wallace, 2011). All this involves an attention to narratives pointing to what might emerge, what is coming into being (Braidotti, 2002).

The Feminist Webs project started as a process of oral history and these methods have continued to be used since the projects inception. Telling

the stories of earlier feminist incursions into youth work, of Greenham Common, of the founding of Women's Aid, has created, albeit at a local level, myths, and operational fictions, what we might call significant stories. Power both negative (prohibiting and constraining; for example in the exclusion of boys and men from significant youth work spaces) and positive (in the inspiration drawn from stories of how women workers for example have encountered and negotiated the witnessing of violence in young women's lives)- flows through such stories. The telling of stories and sharing of memories supports the creation of counter-practices and counter-narratives which embrace difference rather than supporting the 'preferred narrations' of 'value for money' and 'NEETs into EETs' of policy agendas (Batsleer,forthcoming).

The stories of TINA and There is No Alternative to ever-more fixing of young people as if they were a broken machine can be countered by these alternative histories and stories of social education and it is for this reason that participants in the radical In Defence of Youth Work movement are seeking to generate stories told on 'our own terms' about the value of youth work.(IDYW,2011). Critical Social education in youth work is a space for the making and telling of these counter-myths, including the myths of feminist-inspired practice, but it will not and cannot survive without making alliances and common cause with all advocates of radical democratic education .

Conclusion

Social education as a form of social control, including insertion into traditional gender roles, has predominantly been seen as shoring up social conformity. Practices of democracy which embrace the possibility of change and difference, including feminist democratic practice, require an openness to letting go of what has been assumed to be the case, a process of unlearning by communities and adults in relation to new discoveries led by young women. If social education is to be seen as a prefigurative practice of a democracy to come, they need, therefore, a capacity to embrace the loss of inherited, traditional assumptions. Part of the embrace of difference as constitutive of the social and the rejection of the patterns of exclusion created by social norms is loss. Exploration of sexual difference as an open horizon involves the abandonment and loss of traditional gendered practices. It may sometimes mean the loss of the single common meeting as currently structured to amplify some voices and silence others. Yet this is a source of its creativity and hopefulness. Requiring a continual loss of assigned identity rather than its shoring up, an openness to the undoing of its social policy driven limitations of 'concern with teenage pregnancy' or 'anti-social behaviour' gives hope for a democratic practice to come.

In making claims for the possibility of a democratic practice of social education in youth work in the UK, this article has sought to excavate a tradition and to account for its threatened demise in the context of the intensification of neo-liberal approaches to practice. It has sought to open up discussion of the possibilities for renewal of a democratic social education in the light of feminist accounts of difference. In proposing a

future discourse of social education (rooted in a reading of the social which is alert to the emergence of difference) it is seeking to make a connection beyond the practice of youth work with those who propose the democratic alternatives of radical education and the common school.

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