

The RHP companion to

Working

with

Young

People

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School Based Youth Work

Parminder Kuar Puar and Leona White

Key Points

1. School based youth work can be extremely frustrating, challenging and a tiring form of delivering youth work, but without a doubt it is a unique opportunity to work with a vast number of young people, delivering many different styles of positive and educative youth work.
2. It may be impossible to work autonomously within a school based setting even though there may be only one full-time youth tutor. Communication and relationship building is imperative, not only with young people but also with the adult members of the school, in order to maintain and develop a vibrant youth work programme.
3. That all adult members within the school setting do not always understand youth work, is often a harsh reality. The youth tutor and their team of part-time youth workers must be clear about why they are there and what they are striving to achieve.
4. Youth work is ultimately about social education within a school context, youth tutors are in a perfect position to contribute both formally and informally.
5. Youth tutors within schools are an asset, particularly in relation to the relationships they are able to form and build with young people in both formal and informal settings.

Introduction

The policy of basing youth work on school sites offers a range of potential benefits to young people, schools and youth workers...Co-operation on the same site between the youth service, schools and colleges was advocated in the McNair Report (1944) and since then has been recommended in every major report on the youth service. Some LEAs within their community education policies locate youth work on school sites because they believe that their institutions should respond to the needs of all age groups in the local community. Others do so in order to optimise the use of the building and the equipment.

(HMI report, 1989-90)

This chapter is concerned with school based youth work, from the ideologies to the practicalities of working within a school based setting, viewed primarily from a youth tutor's perspective, though at times, aspects of the chapter reflect our personal experiences and working situations. We are two youth tutors based in secondary schools one of which is a school for girls and young women. Although one of the schools has a designated

space for youth work, youth work at both schools still requires regular negotiations about space in order to maintain and develop the youth provision.

Historical Development

School based youth work has evolved over a number of years, from an initial starting point that:

...In an age of limited resources, the erection of separate schools and youth service buildings used for a few hours each day, each week is indefensible, so that a merging and overlapping of their functions has become essential. Now that we have become so community conscious, the educational campus, incorporating provision for school, youth work and many other educational services is clearly the ideal means of serving a neighbourhood or geographical area. Educational, professional, economical and social conditions, therefore all point to a merging of youth work and the schools.

(Youth Service Information Centre, Davis, 1969)

The reasoning behind favouring a school based youth service seems incontestable, especially as

now in the new millennium the emphasis is heavily placed on raising educational standards. However, it is important to recognise that the school setting may not always be the most appropriate place to carry out informal education with young people.

Youth work is principally concerned with the social, personal and political education of young people, priority being given to those who are between 14 and 21. It aims to help young people identify and develop their own capacities, recognise and accept their responsibilities and evaluate the contexts in which they live. Young people's spontaneous or continuing interests are used as a means of achieving these goals, but this does require a great deal of careful planning and preparation by youth workers.

The role of the youth tutor in a school based setting is to provide activities, projects and groups that encourage social, personal and political education informally. This is likely to be far more effective if it takes place in a context where it is understood and valued.

Youth Work in Leicester City

In Leicester City, youth work is now in the newly adopted 'Lifelong Learning and Community Development' approach and located in the Education Department. Since local government re-organisation in 1997, youth work in Leicester City has continued to work to the Leicestershire Youth Work Curriculum Statement.

The Leicestershire Youth Work Curriculum Statement provides a framework for youth workers as educators to engage with young people on realities of their daily lives. It recognises the need and creates opportunities for workers to make a positive contribution towards the social, personal and political development of young people through learning. It also acknowledges the existence of young people and their issues. It recognises young peoples' lives within a multi-cultural society in which there are many forms of structural inequalities and discrimination.

We chose to work in schools because of our commitment to the philosophy of integrated youth and community education. Youth work in schools provides an excellent opportunity to work with a large number of young people utilising various styles of youth work i.e. drop in lunch provision, single gender work, work with Black (Asian, African

and African Caribbean) young people, sports etc. It seemed that the world was our 'oyster', a large captive audience on your doorstep, to which we could sell our 'wares', so to speak.

We believe that youth work can be developed, by ensuring that the informal curriculum of youth work supports the formal curriculum of education and vice versa. It is important to value how the different styles of youth work make their contribution towards discouraging bullying, racism, and exclusions etc. The value of the life long learning process is engaging with young people as a whole person whose needs may vary depending on their membership of a family, community, culture, race and youth culture.

Youth Work Settings

Youth work on school sites takes place in three main settings. These may be categorised as:

1. Purpose built, or adapted youth work areas

On school campuses these are more often than not preferred, as they offer young people and youth workers an opportunity for autonomy. The young people and the youth workers have a space which is recognised as theirs, where information and posters can be displayed, furniture and equipment can be installed and so creating a more young people friendly atmosphere and a sense of ownership which is extremely important. It also allows the worker freedom to develop one-off pieces of work. Such a setting also requires less need to negotiate space for the work; instead the tables are turned where school staff negotiate the use of your space.

2. Allocated accommodation for youth work

In schools without purpose built or adapted areas for youth work, designated accommodation is allocated such as classrooms, a sports hall, or community room, in an effort to support the youth work programme. In these situations it is imperative that the youth tutor has a good working relationship with the principal, community vice principal, premises staff team and all those who

share or are responsible for the allocated space. In the absence of established effective systems of communication, youth work will suffer and be marginalised.

For youth tutors working within this type of setting a lot of time is spent negotiating space and equipment. At times, it can be extremely frustrating, as often it seems that work by everyone else is deemed to be more important than yours. An example of this is when the school has large functions such as parents evenings and open evenings that take precedence and then encroaches on the adult programme space, which in turn causes problems for the youth work programme.

3. Shared school accommodation

School accommodation such as classrooms, or sports hall may be allocated for youth activities at given times. The use of classrooms for youth activities is often quite difficult as young people may see it as a return to the classroom situation, which may not always be or have been a positive experience. As a result sessions often begin by moving furniture around in order to create a different type of space or environment. It is however extremely important to return the furniture to their original places, in order to keep the premises officers and teaching staff happy! Keeping people happy can be a very big element of the youth tutors' role.

Whichever types of setting the youth programme operates from they all have varying positive and negative attributes. The credibility of youth work differs greatly from school to school, which has a direct impact on how effectively spaces are negotiated. If the principal views youth work as a 'waste of time' then you are less likely to receive an equitable allocation of time and space within the school. It is highly unlikely that the youth tutor and the principal will interpret youth work similarly regardless of the support given. The principal may require the youth club to be a reasonably orderly activity, where young people can go and 'let off steam'. The youth tutor on the other hand, is often striving towards offering a space which encourages young people to share and take responsibility, make decisions with minimum rules and operate a more participative style of working. This may not always bring about that orderly activity situation required by the principal.

Furthermore, it is interesting to explore the types of youth work that may be valued by the principal and the school in general. For example a performing arts group, which devises pieces and performs on a yearly basis both at school and at National Youth Arts Festival is viewed as an excellent piece of youth work by the school, and because it has tangible outputs: the school can see it, evaluate it and often read about it in the media.

However, the small group of young people that have been meeting for the last three years, undertaking small projects and pieces of work, remaining together and developing solid relationships with their peers and the youth tutor, are invisible in comparison which begs the question as to whether this provision is viewed as equally excellent as the performing arts and to what extent is it valued by the school. The reality is that often those responsible for managing youth work and the youth tutor have very different agendas; the managers favour activities which look good with solid visible outputs as they add prestige to the school. Whilst it is nice to have quantifiable results, the youth tutor is less concerned with that but places more emphasis, importance and value on sharing the journey with young people.

For youth workers, their strength is in their commitment to foster participation of and enable and empower young people. In order to ensure that they fulfil their commitment, they too have codes of conduct or ground rules which are negotiated by youth workers and young people. We prescribe to the view that the conduct in the provision should be based on mutual respect as this provides a fundamental premise from which to move forward.

There may be some variations in what is deemed as acceptable behaviour, e.g. smoking during lunchtimes around the designated youth space would be unacceptable and in breach of school policy on smoking. Whereas, during activities outside of formal hours, smoking may not be so unacceptable. Negotiating such variations offers opportunities which not only challenge young people to arrive at decisions which they would be responsible for collectively, but also give rise to possibilities for examining the rules of formal education, the reasons behind them and their impact on informal education during and out of school hours.

It can help to encourage a sense of ownership to the designated space for youth work so that young

people may be able to express themselves more freely, and create an environment in the designated youth space which allows for listening to music (loudly), making use of mobile phones, taking part in an organised programme of activities, even

taking responsibility for certain areas of the programme and generally being able to chill out with friends and have access to youth workers and youth work resources.

Case study

On a Wednesday evening I have three different types of youth groups running simultaneously, attracting approximately 60 young people. The groups meet in various classrooms and lounges. These youth groups run alongside an extremely large adult education programme, 32 different classes with at least 230 adult students. Although, for the majority of the time, this situation runs fairly amicably, there are down sides. As the youth tutor, I feel that much of the time is spent 'policing the joint,' in order to ensure that the young people are behaving appropriately, both in their sessions and when moving around the school. If a school has a large adult education programme, with a lot of 'fee paying students', the last thing they want to be faced with is young people, being young people, in the corridor.

Often, what the youth tutor would deem harmless behaviour, is interpreted by other adults, as young people being rude, aggressive and unruly. In this situation the tutor is not only the person who is trying to encourage the young people to think about their behaviour and how it is viewed by adults within that particular environment, but also the peacemaker when things go wrong. I often spend my evenings apologising to adult students, regarding noise levels, young people playing football in the corridor, which, if the young people had their own space, would not be a problem. Although sometimes it feels like a chore, I do recognise the importance of integration in relation to young people and adults, as both hold very set ideas and views about each other, which are all too often negative. I think it is extremely important for adults to see young people undertaking positive and educative activities on a regular basis and using the same spaces as they do responsibly, i.e. the coffee bar. These types of dynamics would not occur so easily if the adult students and young people did not share the space.

Role, Diversity and Marginality of the Youth Tutor

Youth tutors need to wear many hats.

This is a comment often heard, but which does not even begin to sum up the intrinsic diversity of the role.

For youth tutors, there are three major strands to their role:

1. Developing working links within the college and surrounding areas.
2. Development and maintenance of youth work, including face to face work with young people and communities.
3. Developing and supporting part-time and voluntary youth workers.

Alongside these principal areas of work, come a series of other job related tasks. These can vary from typing consent letters, undertaking risk assessments, buying table tennis balls, getting publicity for youth groups, shopping for the snack bar, counting endless amounts of loose change from subs or snack bar, to buying £400 worth of shopping for a residential trip.

In most situations youth tutors are required to be educators, teachers, administrators, counsellors, facilitators, trainers, providers, supervisors, caretakers, fund-raisers, mini-bus drivers and of course youth workers! Not only is there an expectation to undertake all of these roles, also attached is the expectation to be effective in at least three different settings; the school, the youth provision and to some extent the community. The expectation for a youth tutor to be everything to

everyone is unrealistic and can make fulfilling the role somewhat difficult and even frustrating.

Although youth tutors are based in schools and despite carrying out a multitude of roles, quite often they are not seen to be 'professional' members of staff. This is quite ironic considering that the majority of youth tutors are highly qualified, up to Degree or Masters levels. This erroneous perception is compounded by the fact that staff meetings, heads of year meetings, senior management team meetings, governors' meetings, etc. only reflect the perceived priority of the statutory educational requirements. There is thus very little emphasis on youth work often leading to the further marginalisation of youth tutors.

Whilst some senior managers and teachers say that they value the contribution of informal and social education, the vast majority fail to recognise the true educational value of youth work. As a result this does not only make the youth tutor feel invisible, it accords youth work with low status which then lowers the morale of workers. The youth tutors' skills and youth work style can make an extremely positive contribution to the formal curriculum in areas such as PSE (personal and social education). However the best practice takes place where there is an initial understanding and acceptance by youth tutors and teachers of the differing attitudes and methods of working. It is important that youth tutors are involved with the overall development of the programme and not just expected to deliver curriculum areas which teachers find difficult to do or to manage pupils which the school finds difficult to cope with. In the formal setting of the classroom there should be an understanding by teachers that often, youth tutors have very different relationships with the young people that are present and this should be recognised and valued.

As line managers of the youth tutor, the principal and the community vice principal need to support and promote youth work as a credible practice. Without the commitment and high priority to youth work, the work of the youth tutor will be a continuous struggle and marginalised within the school. It would be very easy for youth tutors to fall into the trap of continually explaining their role to teaching staff in order to gain acceptance and be part of the status quo but we do not prescribe to this way of working. We share the view that although it is important to promote the work youth

tutors are not there to legitimise the work to staff who often think that youth work is about 'hanging out with the kids'. An integrated youth and community education provision is the philosophy of all school based youth work but what has that really come to mean in terms of the economic, educational, social and political aspects? And in any case, who is integrating with whom?

Delivery and Evaluation

Youth work provision in school is as different as the people that manage it. Although in principle, youth workers deliver services shaped by a youth work curriculum statement, there is no uniformity in service provision. Also, despite the framework there are no clear signals from the service managers as to what **must** be provided. Thus, the actual provision depends largely on and reflects the specific skills and interpretation of the worker. In the absence of more direct central line management of workers' provision has tended to stagnate and often does not really reflect the needs of a multi-cultural society where there are structural inequalities and discrimination.

As part of an educational establishment, the focus of youth work in schools may tend to lean more towards social education. School based youth work must be able to demonstrate the educational nature of the social education process which requires planning, reviewing and evaluating work with young people. Such a process usually involves work in small groups, which are targeted specifically. School based youth work, requires youth workers to accept as their contribution, that working within a school based service requires a commitment to the development and support of the school curriculum. Youth workers need to understand the nature of the teacher/student relationships and its relationship to the principles of youth work.

Youth workers need to be aware of the distinct differences of mutual respect and trust, which contribute to the relationships that exist between teacher/student and youth worker/young person and the nature and circumstances under which they are developed. Whilst in their effort to support young people it is important that they remain mindful of the fact that they are not setting young people up. It is all too easy to be influenced by either one's own experiences or even today's reality

of education. Young people need to be equipped with the tools, which enable them to make informed choices about the realities of their own experiences in education. Throughout their school life young people may experience many different types of relationships with adults, the majority being with teachers.

The teacher/student relationship is based on respect and authority along with other attributes, which are not debatable. As a result, there is very little mutual dialogue between the teacher/student as to defining the kind of relationship that they may have. On the other hand, youth workers are in a unique position to contribute towards those many different types of relationships, with adults whilst at school, which are based on mutual respect and trust. We are not totally free from authority, we recognise that we hold positions of power in our relationships with young people, but are able to offer opportunities to have positive and meaningful relationships with adults.

Our youth provisions operate as voluntary associations and the young people participate in the provision on a voluntary basis. We feel that this is a significant element, which contributes to the uniqueness of youth work. Our youth provision, as any other provision offering a service, is required to provide to all staff clear guidelines with reference to policies, structures and systems, which aim to support the organisation of youth work. On the whole, we are expected to adhere to all school policies, but arrange our own structures and systems of operation.

The provision is heavily reliant on the enthusiastic and committed endeavours of part-time and volunteer youth workers, many of whom work on a sessional basis usually for only two and a half hours per week during term times. Recently there seems to be an increasing demand (rightly so) from service managers that youth work is monitored, reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis, especially in light of the variations in local authority expenditure on the youth service. As a result, the focus is once again on the ability to deliver services of high quality in an efficient and effective manner. So as local youth services stake their claim to resources they are expected to demonstrate the benefits of social education.

Most youth tutors already struggle to monitor the work due to pressure on their time in fulfilling the intrinsic diversity of their role. Within their

limited contractual hours, many part-time youth workers are also expected to plan, deliver, review and evaluate their work with young people. This has resulted in increasing demands on the part-time worker whose main attraction to the work may have been the principles and purposes involved in the face to face element of the work with young people. The rest may be deemed to be the responsibility of the youth tutor.

Many part-time youth workers undertake youth work in addition to their main job. So, whilst they are extremely committed to the work, they are often unable to become involved in the debates about any current national agendas and its impact on the work.

Integrating Youth and Community Work Principles

There are also opportunities in school-based settings to contribute to areas of the curriculum where youth work knowledge and skills can make a particularly valuable contribution, e.g. school student councils. These can be developed utilising youth work processes.

In 1989 Lord Elton chaired the Committee of Enquiry into Discipline in Schools. During the Enquiry the committee also recognised the gap in the education process in regard to the role that students can play within their own school community:

We consider the main advantage of school councils is that pupils are able to discuss school policies openly and make positive suggestions. This encourages a sense of collective responsibility.

(School Councils, starter pack supplement, 1989)

However, on the whole, student councils have been misused. Co-ordinators of the student councils have generally tended to concentrate on the challenges and problems that every day school life brings, i.e. improving standards of behaviour, fund raising, improving the image of the school. Whilst these are important, it is equally important to listen to and deal with issues of specific concern to students in their daily school life, i.e. the impact of a behaviour policy, bullying, racism etc.

Youth workers involvement with the student councils can ensure that the process is educative, participative, empowering and promotes equality of

opportunity. The student council offers young people an excellent opportunity to air their views, discuss issues and to participate in some of the decision-making processes of the school. Teaching staff should aim to ensure that the process of electing student representatives is an enjoyable and an empowering learning experience for young people involved. Whilst ensuring this process, it is equally important that the teaching staff and all others with responsibility for the student council share this common purpose. Conflicts in the purpose can cause difficulties for adults, who are unable to adjust their relationship with young people from their being simply a student to their becoming a young person who is actively involved in the life of the school community. As a result, young people often find themselves being patronised, which negates the young person's experience as an active member of the school community.

Positive contributions are also made by youth workers when working with young people who have been excluded or are at risk of being excluded from school. Although the school and the youth workers are committed to the learning needs of young people, the way in which these commitments manifest themselves may vary. The school's primary concern would be to deal with the perceived difficulty and to remove the young person from the establishment, whereas youth workers would aim to establish strategies and mechanisms to ensure that the young person remains within the school system. Almost immediately there is a situation which gives rise to conflict, especially when the school may consider their responsibility at an end when arriving at the decision to exclude. Although youth workers make no formal links with the schools on the issues associated with exclusions from school, we recognise that despite some of the challenges this area of work may bring in schools, many youth workers are active in their commitment to support those young people who are either excluded or find themselves at risk of exclusion.

Resource and Funding Implications

Let us return to some of the main features which helped to determine why school based youth work was deemed to be an ideal way forward for the delivery of youth work. One is the ideology that on

a school campus there is a captive audience of young people aged 11–18 years. The large number of young people is hopefully representative of the community and obviously this is an extremely good starting point from which to begin work. There is now in schools a greater move towards social education and an understanding that young people should be 'partners in their own education'. From this premise school based youth work looks undeniably attractive.

The availability of the school campus itself was a major reason for placing youth work in schools, where youth work's limited funding and shortage of resources contrasts with the:

Great deal of capital and plant available on the school's campus...

(Youth Service Information Centre, Haywood, 1969)

It made sense to utilise schools for youth work, instead of having a number of free standing youth work provisions, which would have to be resourced. Schools have an abundance of space, equipment, purpose built areas such as sports halls, computer suites, cooking areas etc., which even the most resourced free-standing centre provision is unlikely to have. Funders might argue: what more could you possibly want?

The reality of youth work within a school is not so simple. Yes, youth work is often placed in schools, which are highly equipped and very well resourced but how often does our service really get to fully utilise the resources? Almost immediately you become the 'poor relation'; how important is your work viewed within the school and does your work take priority over a mainstream school activity or even a fee-paying group? Who gets priority on usage of the sports hall or the drama studio? Often, the end result is that we are in a well-resourced building to which we have limited access, which then limits the range of youth work provision that we can offer. Once again, communication and a good working relationship with all those who share or are responsible for the space is essential in order to ensure that you are able to gain adequate access.

Moving away from looking at the school building as a resource and focusing on what else the school setting has to offer to youth work, things begin to look a little brighter. The school holds a repository of information on young people, their circumstances and their communities, and this in

itself is a very powerful tool of support and resource to youth tutors. Although, we have stated previously that our perceived role by school staff within the school can sometimes be a hindrance, the sheer volume of staff that a school requires, with all the skills and knowledge that they have individually is a great resource to be utilised.

Often youth work is based within schools without sufficient funding to run the youth work programme. Most schools have one full time youth tutor, which realistically is the largest resource in relation to youth work. Although the local authority gives the school money to provide adult education, which includes youth work, the bulk of the money is paid to schools for overhead costs such as heating, lighting, caretaking and in some cases, administration. Each school is allocated a part-time youth worker's budget in the form of salary hours, which is all too often inadequate. As a result very little 'hard' cash remains to develop the work.

As with the rest of the youth and community services, school based youth work is becoming increasingly reliant on external funders such as the Lotteries Board, the Prince's Trust, Crimebeat and so on. Unless you are in a school which is fairly affluent and considers youth work a priority, there is very little choice but to look outside for funding to support new initiatives and projects. In the past, local authorities were able to support new initiatives and projects but with persistent and regular financial cutbacks each year, it is no longer possible to rely on this as the sole means of funding such work.

The new millennium has brought with it an abundance of new initiatives and funding bodies all working for and on behalf of young people, in line with the national agendas which are ultimately about raising educational standards and the skill levels of young people, for example, the *ConneXions* Service. Without a doubt there are more opportunities for obtaining money to undertake projects within schools, but whose agenda do you have to work to? Many funders have set criteria which have to be met in order to qualify for their awards, so that it is possible to meet criteria but not really address the needs or the wants of the young people you are working with.

The request for collaborative work between different agencies is also on the increase and in some cases an expectation, if there is to be any chance of qualifying for funds. This may place

youth tutors in a compromising position, as all too often with different agencies comes a clash of ethos, working styles etc. However, this is not to say that we should not collaborate with other agencies but funding should not be the driving force for collaborative work. The new national agendas, initiatives or strategies are not really that new, they are issues that have been under the spotlight for a number of years, and merely use different terminology. In an ideal world, where youth work was funded adequately, and valued and viewed as a professional area of work, many of the current debates on the position of young people would be significantly different.

Conclusion

School based youth work is particularly effective when the following is accepted:

1. Where youth work is understood and valued within the school context, especially in relation to line managers, senior management and the governing body, and youth work issues are discussed at the highest level.
2. Where school based youth work is supported by the local authority, in relation to youth work policies, the curriculum and relevant training needs.
3. Where the youth work policy is linked with the overall school development plan.
4. Where the youth tutor is able to demonstrate the educational nature of the social education process i.e. evidence of planning anticipated outcomes and evaluation mechanisms.
5. Where there is an enthusiastic and committed team of part-time youth workers whose status is clearly important and valued by all members of school.
6. Where there is a clear commitment to youth work by the school, which is reflected in its approach to the education of young people.
7. Where youth tutors accept that working within a school based building requires a positive commitment to this context.
8. Where the youth tutor's role contributes to areas of the curriculum, and where the youth worker's knowledge and skills make a particularly valuable contribution.

Key Questions

1. Why choose school-based youth work?
2. How does the work of a youth tutor based in a school differ to that of a youth worker in a free standing centre?
3. How will you work within an environment which often has little understanding of your methods and styles of working?
4. How do you develop partnerships and collaborative working with colleagues in a formal educational setting?

As two youth tutors we have attempted to give the reader an insight into our working lives, the ups and downs, frustrations and challenges of working within a formal educational setting, where the prime objective is that of educating young people formally, preferably to academic level.

Whilst writing this chapter we were painfully aware that at times there were lots of negatives. It is important to stress that although there are many difficulties when working within this type of environment, the positives i.e. types of work which can be developed, the relationships formed and developed with young people far outweigh the negatives. As youth tutors we are in a unique position and in a sense have the best of both worlds because we are able to place ourselves in a position where we can build relationships and undertake youth work in both the formal and the informal setting.

Young people have the opportunity to work and converse with us both during the school day and straight through into the evening. As a youth tutor we are a non-threatening adult who young people can confide in, have a laugh with and gain support in relation to their lives and aspirations. We often have the added bonus of watching young people develop into young adults, in both settings. Youth work is ultimately about working with young people and even in complex situations such as a school setting, the work can still be undertaken positively and consequently be extremely rewarding to all those involved.

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