THE HISTORY OF YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE

Volume 5

Autonomy through dependency – Histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

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Autonomy through dependency – Histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work

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Council of Europe

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Preface

Jan Vanhee and Hanjo Schild

COMPLETING THE JIGSAW PUZZLE: FURTHER EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE

The fifth volume of our series on the History of Youth Work in Europe, *Autonomy through dependency – histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work* is a next step in bringing together pieces of a very interesting and complex puzzle. After having published the results of three workshops in Blankenberge, Belgium (2008 and 2009) and Tallinn, Estonia (2011) and of an international and interdisciplinary conference on the history of youth work in Ghent, Belgium (2010), this book documents the reflections that have taken place in a seminar in Helsinki 2014. While the first workshops had a strong focus on the histories of youth work in given countries, the Helsinki meeting was helping us to move towards a more thematic approach while looking specifically at the histories of co-operation, conflict and innovation in youth work. It can be seen as programmatic and forward looking when Lasse Siurala stressed in a concept paper for the preparation of the fifth workshop on history of youth work the following:

> "There is shared understanding that the true (?) identity of youth work must be about capacity to operate between private and public with a sufficient degree of autonomy – but definitely not without links to both private and public – hence the oxymoron: 'autonomy through dependencies'."

Discussing the issue of "autonomy through dependency" was timely when we look at the recent (and ongoing) debates on cross-sectoral/multi-agency co-operation. This debate is also about negotiating and creating the space for youth work – as a challenge and as a possibility. And at times where in many countries youth work needs to struggle with lacking resources it might be an option to link with other actors and other programmes – essentially a threat to the independence of youth work.

The Helsinki discussions were also enriched by bringing on board puzzle pieces with a geographic extension (speakers from the USA, Australia and South Africa) and by involving more young people, youth worker students from the University of Minnesota and Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland).

The work done in all the history workshops helped us a lot in finding some common ground for youth work in Europe. A lot of elements you can find back in the declaration of the second European Youth Work Convention (2015). But there is still a lot of work to do by bringing together some more puzzle pieces from missing countries in Europe; also the history puzzle pieces of European youth organisations, youth workers and youth social workers need to be written.

The idea of writing and presenting the histories of youth work of all member states of the Council of Europe is not given up and continues: experts have been contacted in all those countries whose histories are not yet drafted. Those papers which exist have been uploaded in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP): http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge-/-ekcyp. Stories of approximately 30 countries plus many thematic articles can be downloaded; others will follow.

Also the five books now published on the histories of youth work can be downloaded from the website of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/publications.

Those who want to help us to find and collect missing puzzle pieces and store them in the European Knowledge Centre of Youth Policy are invited to contact us. Thanks a lot for your efforts!

Part I

Making youth work matter: jammed strategies and blinks of hope

Introduction

Lasse Siurala

After reading everything about youth work, we (still) don't understand what we are talking about.

(Redig, forthcoming)

Youth work is about building identity and enacting it, it is about youth agency. Its historical roots are in youth movements, in ways of "being young together". The history seminars have looked at the different trajectories of youth movements, often within the context of school and social work. One trajectory is based on youth movements as social innovators and change-makers, having eventually led to the system of youth organisations and their strong position as the spearhead of youth work, notably playing the key role in the "magic triangle" of youth work. Another trajectory has been youth work developed under the influence of social work with a strong interest in integration, care and control. In many countries, youth work has become an instrument of political priorities to combat youth unemployment, juvenile criminality, drug use and marginalisation. As a result, youth workers, in the UK in particular, have claimed that youth work has lost the capacity to implement its ethos. A third trajectory has been leisure-oriented youth work, which has not always been able to hold its ground, partly due to lacking evidence of its outcomes, partly to reduced public funding and partly to lack of renewal. One reaction to youth work being "only about leisure" has been the integrated youth policies, which overall do not have a good record. The general impression of these histories has been a decline of youth work from a supporter of autonomous and innovative youth groups and movements of "being young together" to an instrument of government to integrate and control young people, and to a marginal field of service with low recognition.

This account may be right, but many participants of the fifth conference on the History of Youth Work in Europe, held in Helsinki, Finland (8-10 June 2014) felt that many of the trajectories "offer no future project ... without a blink of solutions". Many agreed, as Howard Williamson argued, that there is "an over-reach of negative, regulatory and compensatory 'youth policy' and an under-reach of purposeful and positive 'youth policy'". How can we explore the ground for "solutions" and positive strategies?

This volume will provide a versatile look at the positive and negative strategies of youth work to promote its recognition. Integrated youth policies and the "magic triangle" represent potential ways for the youth field to establish recognition and influence. The integrated youth policies have not been a great success and the historical analysis indicates some of the reasons for this. However, there are also positive experiences, which have been hampered by a lack of research and peer learning. The "magic triangle" is a great concept, but not that much of a reality (see Manfred Zentner's contribution to this volume).

The history of youth work is a history of survival in the margins. The success strategy is not isolating oneself in that margin, but crossing the nearby borders, co-operating with other sectors and actors, searching for broader alliances and networking – "negotiating the interstitial space". Youth work is a derivative of the ways of "being young together" and on how young people today experiment and express their identities. These ways have dramatically changed, not only due to youth cultures, the Internet, social media and lifestyles, but also because of structural changes like unemployment and poverty. Youth work faces a necessary and unique opportunity to reconsider its working methods within this context of change – and finding new ways of working. Trying to understand youth work in a new context; "to understand what we are talking about". Another "blink of solutions".

REFERENCE

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Chapter 1

Crafting the space between either and or: attending to the role of words, young people and public will

Joyce A. Walker

The assignment for the concluding keynote at the Helsinki seminar (2014) that addressed issues of autonomy and dependencies in youth work was challenging: reflect on the seminar experience and the four History of youth work in Europe volumes and respond to them with questions, observations and an eye to the future. This paper builds on the seminar keynote and intends to tell some stories, share some reflections, and stimulate thinking in new ways. It proposes no blueprint for the future of youth work – only issues to consider as we move forward.

The remarkable collection of youth work histories that European practitioners and scholars have produced is truly an enormous contribution to the field worldwide. The history and context of youth work in its many forms in many nations over time – sometimes hundreds of years – is available to inform practitioners, policy makers and researchers. This work is incredibly thoughtful and articulate, and conveys a lot of heart and wisdom.

Reading and hearing the histories was exciting, because in the US we are dealing with so many of the same questions and issues. That's surprising since on the surface our youth work practice, systems, policies and context appear to be so different. The observations and critical questions discussed here may contribute to future thinking in European countries as well as in the United States. The ideas are organised around three themes: (1) the words we use; (2) the way we partner with young people and allies; and (3) the public will we need in order to succeed. In discussing issues of words, youth participation and public will, and citing examples of similar issues in the United States, the goal is not to get stuck in the dichotomies – the either/or polarities – that may be useful to clarify issues, but are seldom helpful in framing new solutions that seek a middle ground or a new ground moving ahead.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUTH WORK

Let me speak personally here so readers understand a bit of my history and stance. I draw from my own 30-year experience as a youth worker, a university teacher, applied researcher and community educator. I also draw on the powerful lessons of my inspiration and colleague Gisela Konopka. Gisa was a feisty German social worker who often told stories about her days as a youth worker in the 1930s to 1940s. One relates to a young woman named Ilse who was known for her enthusiastic social-ising with sailors in the Hamburg harbour area. She was picked up and referred to the youth authority. At this point in her storytelling, Gisa always burst into a smile and exclaimed, "Oh my, could she ever dance! Everything I know about dancing I learned from her! She taught everyone in our group and we had such a grand time!" Where the juvenile authorities saw only trouble, the young German youth worker saw possibilities. Where the authorities saw a shameless young girl dancing topless with sailors, the youth worker spotted talent and energy along with a big dose of problematic behaviour. To establish a connection, the youth worker asked the girl for some dancing lessons. And so it is in dance and in youth work that young people learn from us, we learn from them, we all learn from each other. We build on strengths. This is one of the fundamental truths about youth work.

Like the dance, youth work is a dynamic, not a simple service or function. Like youth work, dance involves movement, rhythm, creativity, discipline, history and tradition. Like dance, youth work demands engagement, responsiveness and co-creation. Good youth work often leads young people to places, experiences and learnings they never dreamed of before. I propose that youth work is a dynamic of learning and conversations and relationships. The youth work dynamic results from the synergy of young people, youth workers with a stance, and intentional interactions – the experiences, the programme, the focus of engagement.

Describing youth work as unique and important work, Larson (1989) captured this dynamic engagement in his doctoral research on young people in their daily envi-ronments. All the young people in the study carried beepers. They were contacted at different times of the day and evening and asked a couple of simple questions about what they were doing and how they were feeling. His conclusion was that young people are highly engaged with their friends, they are challenged in school, and they are both engaged and challenged in youth work and youth programme environments. We are talking about powerful and important encounters in this field of youth work.

In the US, youth work is not a common generally accepted term. Across the country, there is no consensus term to describe our work that is accepted by the general public, other professionals or our workers. This raises the question: Why is it so hard in this field to describe what we stand for, and so easy to resort to words that sound peripheral instead of essential? In an effort to explain it to the public, youth work is described as out-of-school time, after school, extended day, school enrichment, non-formal learning, youth programmes, community-based youth programmes, extracurricular activities, leisure, recreation and more. In Minnesota we do use the term youth work because that feisty German social worker, a product of the Wandervogel movement, came to the US in the 1950s, settled in Minneapolis, and founded a Center for Youth

Development and Research at the University of Minnesota. Konopka also espoused the term now very popular in the US: positive (or healthy) youth development. She is the first person I know to use the term youth development 50 years ago expressly in terms that went beyond existing theories in sociology, medicine and psychology.

Paraphrasing a policy paper she wrote for the US government in 1973, Konopka stated:

▶ We do not see adolescence or youthhood exclusively as a stage that human beings pass through to get from child to adult. It is one of many important segments of continuing human development over the life span.

▶ We reject the common notion that being young is solely preparation for being old except in the sense that everything before is preparation for what follows.

▶ We believe young people, like other people, are persons with specific qualities and characteristics who have a participatory and responsible role to play, tasks to perform, skills to develop. The degree or extent to which they experience such responsible participation will determine and maximise human development.

She spoke daily of youth work and youth workers – and we colleagues and students who worked with her adopted the term.

Gisa challenged us on important questions about youth work, asking, "So what do you want to be?" It is always a question of freedom for something and freedom from something. This fits the theme for this volume: What do you want to be autonomous for, and what do you want autonomy from? She often reminded us that dualist thinking is simplistic thinking. Avoid "either this or that" thinking: discover new ways. Listen to the young people! They have new and interesting ideas!

In her teaching and practice, Konopka emphasised developing a clear, grounded philosophy from which practical techniques could evolve. While social work was well grounded in theory, concepts and philosophy, she observed that youth workers placed too much emphasis on method, technique and tools. She reminded us to ramp up the philosophy and theory behind our work. In her later years, she questioned the tendency of the professions to assume the role of authorities who possessed wisdom and were in charge. She felt this professional drive in US social work and education prevented giving full recognition to youth work and young people. She was a passionate believer in social group work, and she never failed to acknowledge subcultures saying, "In a group we are all members" – or in her story, "In a group we can all learn to dance."

REFLECTIONS ON WORDS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND PUBLIC WILL

While youth work language, practice, research and policy are not identical in the United States and Europe, some common themes emerge as relevant. In the context of autonomy and interdependencies, three challenges stand out: (1) clarifying the divergent perspectives on definition, dimensions of practice and accountability; (2) addressing the value of translational scholarship bridging science and complex practice; and (3) being strategic about the importance of leveraging systems support for field building (Walker et al. 2011). Youth workers, young people, researchers,

policy makers and the public at large have a stake in dealing with these topics. This section of the chapter explores autonomy and interdependency issues in terms of clarifying language of philosophy and practice; forging new partnerships with youth and allies; and reigniting the public will to understand, value and support youth work.

The words we use – youth work, youth development, non-formal learning, youth policy – are directly related to issues of autonomy and dependency in the field. The question, "So what do we want to be?" leads to a discussion of freedom to be something and freedom not to be something else. Youth work in Europe faces the same identity issue as the youth development field does in the United States. It has been said that youth work is an all-purpose weapon. The challenge for youth work today is to determine what we are and what we are not. It requires articulating our philosophy and principles for work with young people as well as naming the proven research-based methods and techniques that make sense in light of our goals. Is youth work an action, a philosophy or a methodology? Is youth work a social service delivery mechanism, an allied educational system, a community recreation programme, a problem prevention scheme, a client service system of case management, an intervention unit to pull out when something goes wrong, or a service on the side of young people? The public and young people need to understand precisely what this "youth work thing" is about. Words are important. Agreement and consistency on crystal clear language is critically important as we deal with the identity of our field. And identity is key to autonomy and to forging healthy interdependent relationships with other systems and in the community. The challenge is to find straightforward words to describe our philosophy, to distinguish our dynamic practice, and to identify why this work matters for young people today.

Youth development/youth work

Consider this example of indiscriminate overuse. In the last 30 years in the US, some consensus has developed on why youth work exists; it exists to promote positive, healthy youth development. Most in the field believe this is accomplished through learning experiences and organised opportunities to contribute that benefit individuals and civil society. In our enthusiasm to cast away the label as those who fix youth or prevent problems, we got accustomed to the term "youth development". The term became our answer to everything. Youth development described our work, our goals, our impacts, our programmes (Hamilton and Hamilton 2004). Because we need a word to describe what young people do, we say youth development is what young people do. Youth develop. They own it and they do it. They will develop with or without us. European writings have a much better, quite beautiful term for it: Young people being young together. Because we need an interdisciplinary word to describe our philosophy and pedagogy – a distinctive term for our way of working – we call it positive youth development. It describes a way of seeing young people in the lived world. And because we need a descriptor for non-formal learning programmes in the community, we speak of youth development programmes and organisations. We might say that girl scouting is a youth development movement.

Is it possible that the field in Europe has a tendency to overuse the word youth work in much the same way we have overused the term youth development? What do

YOU mean when you say youth work? Is it an action? A delivery system for social services or education? A philosophy? A pedagogy? A general word for youth activities? Maybe it's the label of a professional field. Perhaps it's an umbrella term (Taru et al. 2014) or an essential dynamic, as I suggest, or the term for a subset of social work? By giving one term layered and multiple meanings, we confuse people and ourselves. We alienate those trying to understand our work and undercut our own desire to be understood.

The public and young people need to understand precisely what this "youth work thing" is about. Public will and youth participation are essential to our being and our success. We want their support and engagement. So this is a plea to find new and straightforward words to distinguish what young people do, what our philosophy is, and what the dynamic practice is called. Taru et al. (2014), and Jeffs (2014) both suggest that while we may not develop a single universal vocabulary, we can identify common threads with common terms.

Non-formal learning

In the European history volumes on youth work, the terms non-formal learning, non-formal education and informal education are often used interchangeably. In pursuit of more precise language, in Minnesota we have generally adopted the term non-formal learning to describe our pedagogical stance. We embraced this term because it distinguishes the learning terrain between the formal education programmes of the schools and the informal or less intentional learning that goes on in families, in front of the television and with friends. Nobody likes the term – but once explained, they get it! They resist it – but they need it. It places youth work on the educational continuum understood by large numbers of the public.

We do avoid using the term non-formal education because in our state and country the schools have the almost exclusive ownership of the word "education". Also, education places the emphasis on the system whereas learning connects the action to a learner. After 20 years of involving experienced youth workers in our Youth Development Leadership master's programme, we have several hundred of them out in the community using the term non-formal learning casually and intentionally with their staff, their organisation leaders and their partners. It is catching on.

Policy and public will

In the US, policy is yet another term used inconsistently and applied to anything from rules to guidelines to good ideas to legislative proposals. I'm less clear about the level of consensus here. To explain policy in our teaching and conversations, we're falling back on a story we refer to as "The Prudential". It goes like this: One of our faculty colleagues recalls growing up in St Louis, Missouri where once a month a man in a suit came to his home to take 50 cents and a signature from his mother. When asked what this was about, his mother said, "That man is from the Prudential and that 50 cents is for our policy. If I pay, if anything happens to your father, we will have some money to live on." A policy is a contract, an agreement, simple and straightforward. And what is public policy? It is a social contract or a social mandate,

an agreement shared by the public and designed to achieve its goals. What is required to have a social contract? Public will! Your histories speak eloquently of deep reservoirs of public will through the years supporting non-formal learning supports and opportunities for young people. The social mandate you describe generally recognises and supports the individual and civil function of youth work. Still, we have to talk clearly, coherently and consistently about what it is and why it is important – even to strangers.

Clarity of words and common understandings are core to forging productive partnerships, coalitions, networks. Certainty about our essence – our bottom line – helps other agencies, departments, organisations know who we are, what we stand for, and what we cannot negotiate away. Consensus around core language can be used to build public understanding and public will and to generate funding. It can attract and draw in young people.

Is it possible to forge tight and precise common ground around the why and what of youth work and at the same time open the door wide in accepting the how, when, where? This was Konopka's idea of one driving philosophy made real by many different methods, techniques and approaches. Establish youth work's "true north" – its non-negotiable mission and purpose – and we have our fundamental autonomy and identity. When we accept some variations in strategies and methods within our local systems and practices, we are likely to strengthen local public will and our responses to the important issues of local young people. This might be a useful trade-off: unity on the why and what combined with flexibility on the terminology for the how, when and where of practice.

CRAFTING SPACE FOR NEW WAYS OF RELATING

Meaningful partnerships with young people, with youth work's closest allies and with the "magic triangle" may look different once the identity issue has been addressed. Nonetheless, the context for youth work in the world today is not the same as it was even 10 years ago. As we move to the subject of partnerships, think first of interdependencies rather than dependencies. Think partnerships and collective action rather than dependencies. Dependencies seem more one-sided, imposed not negotiated. Second, think about adopting language that is comfortable and widely understood by professionals and the public. Last, consider whether our field can tolerate a flexible messiness that stimulates responsiveness and innovation over time. What if we focus not on choosing between a tidy, rational system versus a divided, fragmented system, but rather on creating a system that expresses our values clearly to young people and the public, embraces youth work principles, binds the field together but does not require conformity in all strategic and methodological matters.

Looking ahead, three topics related to partnerships demand attention in Europe and the United States. They can be uncomfortable, challenging topics, but they deserve serious consideration. Each has its own challenges, risks and benefits. They involve re-envisioning partnerships with young adults, with our closest allies, and with the "magic triangle".

Young people as full partners, co-creators and advocates

The warrant and justification for the existence of youth work rests on the partnerships and the engagement we establish with and on behalf of young people. Youth work has no reason to exist unless young people are present, participating and powerful. It's not clear how to do this, but it can and must be done. Young people expect to be present, participating and powerful. In a world of the Internet and social media, smart devices and apps, young people's capacities to connect, influence, organise, learn and socialise have exploded – and no longer rely on coming to youth work for help. There is no youth work dynamic without them. This goes to the heart of who owns youth work. After all, who do youth workers work for? Konopka identified eight requirements for healthy development that many agree hold up across cultures and time. It's our job to determine how they play out as basic needs for young people today.

1. Feel a sense of safety and structure.
2. Experience active participation, group membership and belonging.
3. Develop self-worth through meaningful contribution.
4. Experiment to discover self, gain independence and control over one's life.
5. Develop significant quality relationships with peers and at least one adult.
6. Discuss conflicting values and form their own.
7. Feel pride of competence and mastery.
8. Expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible.

Who could have predicted how technology is changing the ways in which young people belong, gain voice, seize power, make decisions and forge relationships both personal and political? In the US, we have for too long told young people, as we have told new immigrants: behave, be patient, queue up and your time/opportunity will come. What if they decide not to wait? Or they decide that our youth work systems operate in snail time, are inflexible or unresponsive or perhaps even ignorant of the world they live in? Nowadays it is increasingly common for young people to go around institutions and systems in order to accomplish their goals.

Try to imagine a flexible, nimble framework, adaptable to communities, with plenty of room for the presence, voice and leadership by young people. How might we open the doors for young people to staff and lead youth work efforts and activities, not just respond as recipients or passive partners in the endeavour? Consider reframing youth work as the community-based movement that partners with people of all ages, and as a scaffold for young people's learning experiences, which builds social capital, and advocates for their involvement in matters that impact them? No one else seems to be filling this role, certainly not the large, established government systems in the US. How can youth work position itself as the innovative field responsive to the needs, interests and future aspirations of young people? Again there's no simple answer, but Europe seems to have an advantage or incentive to embrace a collective ethos. The US increasingly exhibits an ethos of individual success and freedom above all, something that slows down efforts to build solidarity under the best of circumstances.

Youth work as a family of practices forged with close allies

Once we define who we are and agree on a common purpose, how can we broaden the scope and presence of youth work? The notion of a family of related practices is much discussed in the US as is the idea of youth worker expertise and how to achieve it. One of my bold colleagues stood up at a meeting and asked, "Can't we just embrace this 'glorious mess' that is our field and get on with it?" She challenged those of us who like order in our systems to accept and embrace the inconsistencies and variety at the heart of this work over hundreds of years. What gets in the way of partnering closely – or even uniting – with our closest allies, those whose values and work are in principle so close to our own? Is it possible to resist the dichotomy of professional vs. volunteer? Traditional vs. marginalised audiences? New ways vs. the old? Transit or forum? Could we unite our closest allies – the many forms of youth work – under one large tent?

Jeffs (2014) and others have suggested building a family of practices or a family of professions. My university colleagues increasingly describe youth work as a craft with deep expertise that is manifest in reasonably varied practices and differently configured systems. The family of practice image implies that not every aspect of youth work is done by a youth worker, and not everything a youth worker does is clearly understood as youth work. In any site or community, you might need a mix of roles, not a dozen professional youth workers, to meet youth and community needs. Or one might claim the youth worker identity based on philosophy, ethos, pedagogy and world view even while employed at a school. Expertise is most commonly acquired over time, on the job and through education and training, but in some instances a university degree may be required to take on certain jobs.

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) is a successful example of professionals uniting under the banner of related practices which share a closely related mission and vision of their work. The AEA evolved from a similar debate on identity, mission and vision: Who is a researcher? Who is an evaluator? What does it take to legitimately claim one of those titles? Ultimately they came together in a partnership where each practitioner self-proclaims their expertise, interests and contributions to the field. Now all work together in topical interest groups within a very successful professional organisation bound together by a code of professional ethics based on quality, integrity and expertise in practice.

As we rethink our role, we must consider that our vast menu of offerings and programmes – our delicious diversity – could be a strength in establishing our sphere of influence (autonomy) and the partnerships (interdependencies) we need to rethink if this work is a movement, a field, a system, a sector of a larger field such as education or social work, or something entirely different. Are we a "force to be reckoned with" or a regulated profession? Are we a movement or a system, a sector or a field? What's the difference?

Vision of staffing that goes beyond professionalisation

To unite under one big tent requires a ruthlessly rigorous rethinking of how youth work is led and staffed. It requires a stance that is not "either/or". This is a difficult

discussion for me after spending more than 20 years focused on academic degree programmes and community-based training programmes for youth workers, but I have learned that people don't stay put. They move up, over and sometimes out of a field. I've come to think that the more we prescribe the requirements for a youth worker and require pre-service credentials, the more we restrict entry into the field and the more we distance ourselves from volunteers, partners and young people.

▶ Can we envision room for three kinds of staff, all considered qualified and a crucial part of the team: (1) the professionally credentialled, (2) the trained apprentice, journeyman and master youth worker model taken from the crafts and semi-professions; and (3) the talented volunteer of any age vocationally motivated to be a caring leader and advocate?

▶ Can we envision young people playing active roles in these different staff positions? We need to appreciate more fully what they have to give and also how we intentionally or naively hold them back from engaging to the fullest extent.

▶ Is keeping our identity, our presumptive status and our job security at odds with being an advocate for young people, for innovation, for creative staffing, and for change in the system?

"Magic triangle" partnerships maintain our credibility

There are many opportunities and tensions inherent in the "magic triangle". Research, translational scholarship and good public policy generally work best when they hold practice and young people closely in their vision. When the "magic triangle" works best, partnerships are forged on the basis of clear, mutual self-interest. In reality they are often forged on the basis of convenience, finance, political pressure, self-interests of leaders, desire for non-duplication, efficiency, pressure from funders, attempts to save money, etc. There are multiple, often conflicting agendas. One strategy is to avoid having policy debates and research discussions that are too far removed from the realities of practice. Without a presence at the table, youth work practice and the professionals on the ground often suffer.

Here's an example of how a research protocol inserted into government funding requirements with little or no consultation with practitioners caused problems for youth work practice on the ground. Emily, a highly experienced sexual health educator and master's student, was elated when the Bush era policy of funding only abstinence-based sexual health programmes ended and the Obama administration renewed funding for broader approaches to pregnancy prevention and spread of STDs. Then she discovered that federal funding now mandated that funded programmes adopt one of a short list of approved curricula that had been evaluated in random control studies and required replication with full fidelity. She felt her authority as an educated, experienced youth worker blocked her long-standing priorities to work with sexually active, street-wise young women at a teen outreach clinic. The narrow options challenged her autonomy, expertise and experience to act in the best interests of certain young people. An important lesson is that when we borrow research models from other fields to guide our practice, the model must be applied to practice mindful of the context and needs of the young people involved.

Evidence-based practice in medicine, the discipline generally credited for the idea, does not unilaterally apply research results in practice without considering the context, the knowledge and expertise of the attending physician and the wishes of the patient.

BUILDING PUBLIC WILL IN CHANGING TIMES

One powerful message resounded through the dozens of national stories described in the four previous history volumes co-sponsored by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Despite the great variety of practices over time that have existed to foster young people being young together, there appears to exist a deep reservoir of public goodwill for youth-driven associations, experiences and positive opportunities in the community. There is also a resilience of the field, an affirmation of its importance and contribution, now and over time. There is a coalescing around the values of youth-centred learning and contribution to the civil life of the community despite the debates on how to do this and that, and how to make it all work. While it's unlikely that we will chart our new directions by looking back in time, the future looks bright, albeit filled with ambiguity and new ways of operating.

New ways of funding

With regard to funding for youth work, a variety of funding partnerships is essential. Youth work's autonomy – even existence – depends on a fluid and varied funding base. Ideally, public funding partnerships are fundamental for continuity and general operations. Private funding partnerships provide for targeted, responsive innovation and independence. In the US we've learned that you can't put all your eggs in one basket. This may seem obvious, but we also know the rules are changing. Some of the summaries and chapters in the history volumes reflect a sense of betrayal of government priorities, a frustration that marginalised young people do not seek the services of our system, and annoyance or disappointment that the public and other systems do not understand our worth and work. This is understandable because not only priorities are changing but also the whole world of government funding, both private and non-profit. Two trends in philanthropy prevalent in the US and perhaps in Europe as well involve direct giving and collective impact. In the US, private individuals are financing space and oceanic explorations, and private companies are exploring business ventures previously in the sole purview of governments.

One major change is the trend towards direct giving. Consider the Helsinki grandmother story. At the 2014 Helsinki history conference, it occurred to me that with a couple clicks of the computer, over breakfast coffee, a grandmother living in Finland can contribute 100 euros to the Minneapolis Public Schools and direct the money to the third grade class at Lucy Craft Laney Community School where her grandson attends. It's done in just minutes. People with disposable wealth increasingly reject giving through intermediaries, foundations and public trusts to distribute their money. They ask, "Why would I give it to you? What added value can you provide?" Whether motivated by generosity of spirit or a passion for a good idea, they want to set their own priorities, find their own promising projects/people, and give directly, cutting out the middle man.

The second trend is funding for collective action. Among NGOs and non-profit organisations in the United States, there is increasing collaboration motivated by a desire to contribute to a common outcome in a regional area or community. A group of private funders can join together to require different organisations to demonstrate the same accountability standards or proof of impact in return for financial support. In this instance, it's particularly important to know who you are and what your role can be; otherwise, you risk becoming an all-purpose weapon for others to direct to their own purposes.

In the US, the United Way, a non-profit vehicle for community philanthropy, solicits donations from individuals, companies and corporations and then redistributes these funds to community agencies based on United Way's understanding of community needs and priorities. But donors are increasingly questioning the "added value" of United Way and electing to donate directly and easily online. When asked to suggest some exciting new directions for United Way youth funding, a colleague said, "You have a record of giving to organisations that do good work as they have long done but it is all within the old system. It is not innovative; it breaks no new ground. Be innovative. Talk about collective action on the part of young people, and open the doors for them to begin to devise solutions to some of the pervasive problems/ challenges in their lives – and give them the resources to institute change. This will threaten traditional recipients of United Way funding, but isn't it only a matter of time?"

Perhaps youth work should take a clue from this – leap out as a collective action place that supports investments in truly innovative opportunities for groups to support young people as they make responsible contributions to civil society. The younger generation is going to have to address/solve the problems of today so why not get them started now! Youth work could give them that head start. Experimenting with new system approaches does raise the question, "What is it about our field that is suspicious of entrepreneurial initiatives and resists bureaucratically imposed ones?"

European conversations often focus on the threat of diminished public funding; in the US we increasingly find our best chances for new and increased funds depend on partnerships with private local businesses and large corporations in conjunction with state and local government funds, private foundation grants, fees and gifts. While partnerships with businesses, new ventures and large corporations seldom yield ongoing long-term financial support, they provide significant start-up support for high profile events, new programme initiatives, capital equipment and educational opportunities aligned with the company priorities. These business partnerships often stimulate incentives, matches and leverage from other community funders. The key, of course, is a genuine alignment of interests and priorities between the funder and the youth work effort. It has to be a win/win for all the partners.

Significant field building by intermediaries

An intermediary is an independent organisation or agency that gives leadership to field building and serves as a resource hub for agencies, networks and organisations that are allied with youth work. Intermediaries play a major role that contributes to public understanding and field building. They sponsor research and publish studies and research in accessible forms so it's out there for public discussion. They convene