Curriculum Debate:
The Youth Work Curriculum as Process, Not as Outcome and Output to Aid Accountability

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If ever I needed any reminders of just how contentious the concept of curriculum was in youth work, *Youth and Policy* Volume 84 containing responses to my original paper 'The Youth Work Curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work Agenda' (Ord, 2004) certainly provided me with one.

I thought it only right and proper that I replied to some of the criticisms of that paper, as well as continuing the debate, not least because I think my original argument for process as a necessary condition of the youth work curriculum is still valid.

A response to Tony Jeffs:

Dear Tony,
I read with interest your reply to my paper, and certainly no offence was taken. I would refer you to my reply below:

The Taming of the Tiger: The 'Youth Work' Curriculum
I was stuck with the task of trying to establish what the 'bottom line' was for Jeffs. What exactly is it that 'sticks in the craw' so much about the concept of curriculum in youth work? Jeffs is quite willing and able to equate youth workers with 'teachers' a parallel which I think only helps to further the confusion between formal and informal education. My suspicion is that many youth workers would have more 'affinity' with the notion of curriculum than they would with seeing themselves as 'teachers'! However I am not going to take Jeffs to task over the concept of teaching as I think quite rightly he has a particular notion of 'teaching' and his articulation of the dynamic role of an 'informal' teacher is clearly not inconsistent with the principles and practices of youth work. But the question remains, if he is so willing to think of youth workers as teachers why is he so unwilling to entertain the concept of curriculum in youth work?
I think the answer lies in his misconception of curriculum. Unfortunately he too conceives of curriculum as product. He states quite clearly that 'curriculum is the course to be run. It has a beginning, middle and end – it clearly has an outcome' (Jeffs, 2004:57). I argued that curriculum as product is the dominant 'ideology'. Curriculum is a contested concept and is not exhaustively defined as he describes. I would argue that curriculum as process does have an educational tradition. (Stenhouse, 1975, 1980, 1983, Rudduck, 1995). Furthermore curriculum as process does not presuppose a destination. More importantly curriculum as process is integral to the curriculum that has been produced in the field of statutory youth services (Ord, 2004).

A model of curriculum as process, was initially put forward by Stenhouse, in 'An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development' (1975). Stenhouse was an educationalist who, though writing about schools and formal education, had progressive views about curriculum. He died before the education reform act of 1988 and no doubt would have been appalled by the imposition of a national curriculum with rigid prescribed outcomes. He proposed that a curriculum based on a process model is more suited to education concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Unlike the acquisition of information and skills, knowledge is often controversial, and understanding can always be deepened so on both counts the achievement of pre set objectives or specific intended outcomes is less appropriate.

Interestingly there are also parallels between role of the youth worker and how Stenhouse saw the role of the teacher in the process model. He conceived the teacher not as an expert, but as a 'senior learner capable of offering something of value to the junior learners with whom he works'. The process model 'implies teaching by discovery or inquiry methods rather than by instruction' (Stenhouse, 1975:91). The teacher is therefore active in the learning environment, engaged in a process which, while having defined purpose, does not necessarily have specifically definable outcomes, at least not prior to its initiation.

Applying this principle to youth work , a youth worker might be working with a group of disengaged young people who are on the margins, involved in petty crime – in modern parlance they would be 'NEET'S' (not in Employment, Education or Training), and be a priority for intervention from a number of services. What objectives or outcomes would it make sense to set for an intervention? It would make no sense even to begin to specify outcomes to work with the group, until a worker could establish relationships with the group and engage them in a process. Applying the process model, it would not be necessary to set any pre-specified outcomes. Any talk of outcomes before engagement would be putting the cart before the horse.

Clearly there is a political context to the production of curriculum. 'An expectation to produce a locally agreed curriculum was placed on statutory youth services by Ofsted' (Ord, 2004:45). However I would take issue with Jeffs' analogy of this expectation as: 'jumping off a cliff to escape a tiger' (Jeffs, 2004:56). This both misrepresents and devalues what actually happened in the field. What Jeffs fails to appreciate is that the 'expectation' did provide an opportunity. Gone were the strict dictates of curriculum as outcomes, and though they would be subject 'at some point' to an inspection and comment by Ofsted, the lack of prescription did provide a space for documents to be produced and agreed locally. It is true that the documents would never have been produced without the pressure from Ofsted; that youth workers had never conceived of curriculum in relation to youth work before, that the long tradition of youth and community work bears little relation to curriculum, and youth work had survived previously without it. But just because youth work had never utilised the concept of curriculum does not mean that the curriculum documents that have been produced are worthless or that it is a bad thing that curriculum 'has gained currency amongst youth workers in the field' (Ord, 2004:50)

The curriculum documents have been produced in the 'space' provided by the lack of prescription from Ofsted, the NYA, and central and local government. This is evidenced by

the diversity of the documents in use. More importantly the curriculum documents became the arena within which arguments about what the work was about could take place. For example, I remember having a conversation with an officer from West Sussex in which he was describing how, now that they had anti racist work clearly identified in their curriculum document, it made it easier and more legitimate to undertake such work. He continued to explain how the new battle ground in West Sussex was now work on homophobia, the importance of which had not been agreed locally and was yet to be explicitly referenced in their curriculum.

Contrary to Jeffs' and Robertson's (2004) arguments, it is legitimate to describe the curriculum documents as 'bottom up'. In an important sense they are. For example between 1990 and 2003 Kingston Youth Service has had three distinct documents; all levels of the service were involved and consulted in their production. The ideas, concepts and frameworks utilised came from the knowledge and experience of the workers in the service. No external agency or organisation was used or referenced in the drawing up or agreement of the curriculum. All the decisions on content and format were taken locally and importantly, no external prescription, advice or guidance was either taken or needed. They were ratified by elected members and that has the advantage of adding legitimacy even though on occasion it can create problems.

Perhaps the litmus test for curriculum is who has the final say on content. The case of Somerset youth service can elucidate this point. Somerset has devised a 'curriculum development matrix' (CDM) (Somerset, 1999). It has the benefit of being able to plot the level of participation of young people in any given youth work session. However, Ofsted claimed that, 'the understanding and effective use of the CDM by youth workers varied widely and many found it too complex and mechanistic'(Ofsted Somerset, 2002 [b]). Clearly Ofsted would like it to see it changed. Somerset have introduced a curriculum strategy within their action plan to improve the understanding of their matrix, and have commissioned research into its effective use, but the CDM remains intact. The level of ownership and local agreement is strong enough to withstand the criticism, and it would appear that those within the service disagree with the Ofsted claim.

The youth work curriculum is clearly not 'bottom up' in the sense that the idea of curriculum or the importance (nay necessity) to have one came from the field, but it is 'bottom up' in terms of both what the curriculum has come to mean in practice and that there is ownership of the documents by youth workers in their locality. They are not as Jeffs describes them, anathema, at least not to practicing statutory youth workers.

Curriculum exists in the interface between youth work and the wider 'modern' world. Youth workers do not necessarily need a curriculum to talk to or agree with each other about the work (though I think it can help with this as well) but curriculum has gained a currency in the environment of partnership and modern local government with an emphasis on professional transparency, inter agency working and accountability.

That, I think, is Jeffs' real 'beef', not with curriculum, but with modern local government. It is patronising and disingenuous to describe local authority youth workers and managers as merely 'jumping through the required hoops' (Jeffs, 2004:55). There are many who choose

to battle on in a difficult context of competing priorities and agendas and who do make a difference to the lives of young people. Curriculum has not hindered that process. In one sense it has assisted it because it has enabled youth workers to have something to back up what they do, which has local agreement, with both youth workers and local politicians, as well as having national endorsement from Ofsted. This has helped erase the rather vague image of youth workers as people who 'just hang around and chat to young people with no particular purpose in mind'.

The question is, can a curriculum for youth work authentically describe the vibrancy and dynamism of the work. I argued that a sufficient condition of this would be an explicit reference to both product and process in equal measure. Jeffs informs us that youth work has a long tradition which does not refer to curriculum. But history shapes the future it does not define it in its entirety. Youth work in the statutory sector has changed and, like it or not, curriculum is a part of it. We can either complain from the sidelines or be part of the debate and influence the kind of curriculum we need.

As meaning is founded in use (Wittgenstein, 1958), a search for an authentic curriculum therefore must look to the use to which the statutory youth service have given curriculum. Importantly it is a distinct and unique meaning. It is a holistic concept which describes the whole of youth work. Unlike Wylie and Merton (2002), whose curriculum is a partial curriculum: 'the term does not describe all of youth work.'(2004:66). For a curriculum to be authentic it must reflect the 'meaningful' curriculum that has been produced in the field, as well as accurately reflect and describe youth work itself; a necessary condition of this would be an incorporation of the youth work process.

It is on this point that I must now return to Merton and Wylie.

Response to Merton and Wylie: What exactly did happen to 'Process' ?

Merton and Wylie (2004) claim I make three key points. But I think that misreads and selectively interprets my article. I suspect those points are the ones that it is felt can most easily be countered – perhaps regarding a slight historical inaccuracy. I should like to make it quite clear that I am making one central key claim:

> *That the concept of youth work curriculum (Merton and Wylie, 2000; DfES, 2002) does not sufficiently account for the central 'process' of youth work and is therefore fundamentally flawed.*

Interestingly this point is not new. Bernard Davies in his paper 'Whose Youth Service Curriculum' (1991) made the same point in response Michael Howarth's original attempts to define 'curriculum as outcomes' (NYB, 1990). His central point echoes my key claim that the youth work process is being undermined by the formulations of curriculum whereby:' "outcomes" were talked up, [and] "process" was systematically (and at times quite disparagingly) talked down or even simply ignored' (Davies, 1991:5). Importantly at the time Davies argued for 'vigilance' and 'resistance' to this systematic undermining of core principles. This is as relevant today as it was in 1991.

Process is an accepted educational principle of youth work (Smith, 1988; Deer-Richardson

and Wolfe, 2001; Jeffs and Smith, 1996; Young, 1999) and as I have outlined above, has a philosophical and educational validity in the work of Stenhouse. Yet though Merton and Wylie make cursory reference to it in their reply to my original article 'yes, you see, we do recognise the process!'(2004:65), they have chosen to supplant it in their conception of curriculum with the notion of 'pedagogy of educational groupwork'.

I argued that this represents a fundamental change in their conceptions of curriculum, from earlier notions such as that found in 'Developmental Youth Work 2000' (Wylie, 1997). But they have kindly drawn our attention to other material which they have produced which also evidences this claim. For example in 'Effective Youth Work' (DES, 1987), they describe youth work in a way which gives centrality to both processes and products of youth work, giving significant reference to the importance of the youth work relationship, as well as implicitly recognising the centrality of process.

Smith describes 'Effective Youth Work' as 'one of the last English government reports to promote open youth work' (Smith, 2003 [b]:1). Davies summarises 'Effective Youth Work' as showing:

- *That what is distinctive about youth work is its process*
- *That it is neither possible nor desirable to prioritise between 'content' and 'process'*

(Davies, 1991:6)

An emphasis on 'pedagogy of educational groupwork' as opposed to the products and processes of youth work would certainly appear to be a significant recent change.

Merton and Wylie's response to my claim that educational groupwork was not a legitimate methodology for youth work has been to refer me to work of additional authors such as Batten, Button, Klein and Milson. I do not regard this as a sufficient explanation of what Merton and Wylie mean by educational groupwork in the context of a contemporary curriculum for youth work. The question still remains. Why is the term educational groupwork utilised instead of the first principle of youth work, the 'process'?

Do Merton and Wylie regard them as synonymous and identical? Do they think educational groupwork sufficiently accounts for the 'process' of youth work?

If they do regard them as synonymous why the preference for the term educational group work? If they are identical why has educational group work supplanted the accepted and embedded concept of process in the principles and practices of youth work?

If Merton and Wylie do not regard educational groupwork and process as synonymous, what is additionally provided by educational groupwork which is not accounted for in 'process'? What cannot be accounted for by process which is explained more fully by educational groupwork?

Specificity to 'Outcomes'

I can only assume that the terms are not regarded as synonymous and that the preference

for educational groupwork and the reason behind this preference is the following key difference. Unlike the traditional youth work process, pedagogy as educational groupwork has what I would describe as: 'specificity to outcomes', i.e. the outcomes are specifically related to the inputs. Merton and Wylie are keen to avoid the claim that they are advocating an outcome or product model of curriculum 'we consider such a mechanistic and routinised approach would be the kiss of death of youth work' (2004:65). Yet I see little within their writing, or in the Transforming Youth Work agenda, which explicitly highlights a methodology like the original process of youth work which necessarily has the outcomes as indeterminate at the outset and is open ended in its conception.

I am not saying that all youth work is indeterminate. Some of the work is very clearly outcome focused. Perhaps youth work needs to be even clearer about articulating its outcomes. Nor am I saying that the process of youth work is aimless and that youth workers do not need to be clear about the outcomes that emerge from the process. But what I see occurring in the new agenda is a wholesale emphasis on outcomes to the detriment of the process, and a formulation of a methodology in pedagogy of educational groupwork which is determinate and specific in the relationship between inputs and outcomes. In their attempts to 'tighten up' the work and make the relationship of youth work to its outcomes more distinct, Merton and Wylie have 'thrown the baby out with the bath water'.

If this is not the case, why have Merton and Wylie chosen to utilise 'Assessment' as the third part of their curriculum progression. Assessment only makes sense if it is assessing the content which has been inputted into the youth work session, and delivered through educational groupwork.

Process Outcomes as Indeterminate

Process explicitly has the possibility of being indeterminate. It does not necessarily know what is going to arise out of it. It is creative and dynamic; there is a freedom to it. Brent (2004) eloquently articulates the subtle interplay of product and process, as well as how powerful outcomes arise out of the youth work process which could not have been foreseen, at the outset, in his account of 'The Arch' (2004:71)

The work starts with an idea based on a perceived need to acknowledge the death of young people connected to the centre: 'So the idea grew of converting a scrap of land outside the centre into a garden of remembrance with at its centre some kind of monument'. The idea grew and they: 'employed a sculptor with a wide brief to design and construct, with the young people, something for the garden'

The process was participative and young people become involved in the embellishment of the arch. 'The project took on its own energy'. The process of working on the arch became a vehicle for grief itself. For 'one young man, whom I had seen self-anaesthetised by drink and drugs at the funeral of his brother,... It was the first time I think he had properly grieved'. The project took on a meaning for the young people that could not have been predicted at the outset. It became their project and their expression: 'it was young people who explained about the deaths and the purpose of the arch'.

How does one even begin to apply Merton and Wylie's description of curriculum to this piece of work. What was the 'content'? Was it the idea to produce a monument? Was it the monument itself? Was it the number of deaths associated with the centre, was it the unresolved grief? What assessments of the delivery of educational groupwork are being made? Yes, a group of young people are being worked with, but not in a crude sense of the delivery of content, the effectiveness of which will later be assessed. Perhaps most importantly, outcomes of the project emerged out of it and many, in particular the level of genuine grief that was articulated through the construction of the arch, were certainly not intended or conceived of at the outset.

The truth is the Merton and Wylie model of curriculum (2002) does not adequately explain or do justice to, both this type of youth work, or many others like it. That is because it is work which involves a process; in the example of the arch a very powerful process. The process was initiated with the idea of producing a monument and this process was followed through with some skilful intervention of youth workers.

The outcomes are not achieved with any degree of specificity to the content or the inputs. They are often not planned at all. For example, the grieving that was enabled through the production of the arch was neither as a result of the educational groupwork nor the provision of any content. It emerged out of a process, not least because of young people's own commitment to and involvement in the project.

Residential youth work also illustrates the indeterminate nature of the youth work process. It offers an invaluable and distinctive process by providing the experience of living together in a new and perhaps challenging environment. This is in itself a sufficiently good reason for undertaking youth work with a group of young people in a residential setting. The variables which the process offers between young people and workers, amongst the young people themselves and between young people and the environment provide limitless 'grist for the mill' in the process of personal and social development. Who knows what opportunities taking young people out of their own environment will 'throw up'?

One may choose to focus the learning specifically and organise the process to maximise specific learning. For example: If you want to confront the sexual stereotypes between a mixed group, you may chose to organise a programme which challenges the boys' perceptions of the girls, and emphasise the need for the boys to undertake traditionally female tasks such as washing up and cooking. Or if you are working with a group of drug users you would want to emphasise abstinence as a prerequisite and perhaps organise a programme for generating 'alternative highs'.

But should a pre requisite of undertaking a residential necessarily be that the workers' have specified an intended outcome? The workers would have relationships with the young people they are taking on the residential and will therefore know them as well as some of their agendas, and no doubt they will have tried to do some work with them before going about what they wanted to 'get out of it'. Clearly there would be an issue if the workers had no idea why they were going, but there is a wealth of difference between having a general aim and the work being purposeful and having a specific intended outcome. More importantly if a youth worker was so concerned with the achievement of pre set objectives

and intended outcomes they would miss numerous opportunities for learning which would arise spontaneously out of the process.

Perhaps the importance of the youth work process is best exemplified by looking at that often 'mis-used outcome – the growth in confidence'. How often have youth workers stated 'young people grew in confidence' as the recorded outcome of their work with young people after a particular session, as a result of undertaking an abseil, or assisting with the coffee bar, learning new skills like DJ-ing or cooking, or learning how to produce a C.V.? How authentic are these claims in relation to confidence? One could be forgiven for thinking that confidence is the kind of thing that young people are filled up with, like empty vessels with a deficit of the right substance and youth workers can quite readily give them a top up! Not that I blame youth workers, they know that what they have done has been worthwhile, but they are told they need to produce a specific outcome of each session.

Confidence and self esteem are the most elusive and complex of human characteristics. How difficult it is to have a genuinely 'grounded' level of confidence that can withstand the regular knock-backs of everyday life, never mind attempt to confront the many hardships with which young people are forced to grow up. Genuine self esteem is what young people need, a depth of belief that they have a worth that is not dependent on having the latest trainers or jeans, haircuts or shirts.

How does one instil that kind of confidence? The answer is it is very difficult. But over time engaging in a process with young people youth workers can 'be with young people' through ups and downs of their daily fortune and misfortune, pointing out the positives, supporting them through the negatives, challenging their perceptions of themselves, allowing them to see the injustices of which they are victim. Gradually, slowly 'a depth of confidence' may emerge, not one that is dependent on the support of others but one that is based on a belief in themselves.

The Importance of Relationships

In my original article I argued strongly for the importance of relationships within the youth work process and that this was fundamental to both explanations of, and the effectiveness of, youth work practice. I gave what I thought were well worked examples of how the quality of relationships affects the quality of even the most pre-planned and specific of youth work settings like a drug education awareness session. These examples were dismissed 'as set up by him [Ord] as straw men to be dismissed' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:65). Merton and Wylie should refer to 'some of their own work', 'The Revised Ofsted Framework for Inspections' (Ofsted, 2001[a]) for further reasons why the centrality of relationships within conceptions of youth work should be reinstated.

Assessments of the quality of the relationships youth workers have with young people are an integral and important part of youth work. So much so, that they are an embedded part of the revised Ofsted Framework for Inspections (Ofsted, 2001 [a]). Reports on youth services will specifically and consistently make comments on the relationships youth workers have with young people as part of their assessment of the 'Quality of Education Provided',

in how they '...establish and sustain positive relationships with them...' (Ofsted, 2001 [a]:8). Some recent examples include:

Quality of Education Provided (point 2)

In most provision youth workers had good relationships with young people (Bradford Ofsted Report, *Ofsted*, 2002 [a]).

Quality of Education Provided (point 4)

Staff were caring, patient and committed to the development of young people. Their relationships with young people provided a firm basis from which they could challenge and encourage (Cornwall Ofsted Report, *Ofsted*, 2001 [b]).

Quality of Education Provided (point 4)

Experienced and tenacious staff, including many who work part time have, over time, developed very good relationships with young people (Manchester Ofsted Report, *Ofsted*, 2003).

Quality of Education Provided (point 3)

Relationships with young people were always good. Outreach and detached youth workers were particularly skilful in engaging with vulnerable young people and developing a level of trust that enabled them to offer support and guidance to those at greatest risk of social exclusion (Wirral Ofsted Report, *Ofsted*, 2001 [c])

Some reports also make reference to relationships when assessing the 'Educational Standards Achieved', for example in the inspection of Wirral Youth Service:

In all projects and units, their relationships with youth workers and with each other were very good (Wirral Ofsted Report, *Ofsted*, 2001 [c]).

Merton and Wylie make us aware that they 'successfully managed the Inspectorate's youth work team between 1985 and 1994' (2004:1). So as former inspectors I am sure they are aware of the importance of relationships in assessing 'quality of education provided' by youth workers. Again this raises questions as to why relationships do not figure prominently in their recent formulations of curriculum. If relationships are sufficiently important to be identified by Ofsted as bench-marks of the quality of education, why are they not sufficiently important to be identified in their concept of curriculum?

As Smith (2003[a]) has also argued there is a move away from relationships in the conceptions of youth work within Transforming Youth Work, as 'workers face losing "relationship" as a defining feature of their practice' (Smith, 2003 [a]:48).

The process as young people's passage 'through' and 'over' time

An important though often implicit and understated aspect of the youth work process which also needs to be emphasised for its lack of acknowledgement within Merton and

Wylie's notion of pedagogy of Educational Groupwork is 'time'. The youth work process necessarily takes place over time. The youth work process cannot be understood and therefore youth work itself cannot be understood without reference to a concept of time – not the time spent with youth workers in terms of the number of sessions or hours in some crude calculation; but genuine appreciation of a 'development through time'. Youth workers work with young people discovering aspects of both themselves and their past and perhaps helping them to come to terms with both who they are and where they have come from. They explore issues in the present and responding to what is relevant in their daily lives as well as helping young people formulate plans for the future. Only a concept of 'process' can account sufficiently well for this concept of personal and social development over time.

Importantly, though the quotes from Ofsted are in their own right powerful indictments of the importance and centrality of the youth work relationship, they also offer further evidence of the continuity of the youth work process over time. Relationships can only be achieved if care and commitment are demonstrated to young people, patience and tenacity are required by the workers, and a quality of support and guidance is essential. These factors underpin the formation of relationships and can only be achieved over time. Relationships are necessarily 'built over time'. Trust is hard won and easily lost. Only a concept like process can account for this dynamic.

The Paradox of Process

Another reason why I contend that Merton and Wylie prefer educational groupwork to process would be that it enables them to have a structure of the learning which is 'linear'. Their curriculum (Merton and Wylie, 2002) equates with a notion of a specific progression. Whilst they maintain 'we do not think, as he [Ord] suggests, that we are proposing a strict application of the outcome model' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:65), I see no other way of conceiving of their curriculum. They have a starting point 'A' with the specified 'Content', through the provision of 'B' the delivery of 'Educational Groupwork', and arrive at an end point 'C' with the 'Assessment'.

The learning in youth work is generally not like this. I am not saying that it isn't ever, but importantly much of the most important learning through personal and social development isn't. This is why the process is so important. Within the notion of process, outcomes are 'emergent'; they emerge out of the process and are not necessarily related to any one particular intervention or series of interactions. Learning in personal and social development is certainly not linear. Outcomes cannot be reduced to specific inputs. In Ord (2004) I used the example of the human kindness which illustrates this point. However, as this was dismissed (erroneously I would argue) by Merton and Wylie as a 'straw man' let us

reconsider the example illustrated above of 'confidence'.

Whilst it makes sense to say a youth worker is working towards building the confidence of the young people s/he is working with, how would we apply Merton and Wylie's concept of curriculum as Content, Pedagogy of Educational Groupwork and Assessment to this legitimate youth work aim? What would the content be like? What miraculous educational groupwork session could 'produce' confidence? Yes a youth worker could do the sorts of things that are intended to 'build confidence', and over time, all things being equal, they should. But there is an important distinction. Confidence is not a tangible 'thing' which is taught. It is not produced through the subtle manipulation of group dynamics. It can't be assessed like the skill of DJ-ing.

Confidence is not a skill at all, though it often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly (Berry, M. 2001; Huskins, 2003), wrongly referred to as one. That is the problem. Confidence is a human attribute, or characteristic, not a skill. According to Ryle (1949) this would be described as a 'category mistake'; a conceptual error, based on a misconception of what it means to be a person, which belies the problem. It makes sense to say in a given situation one is feeling confident or not. One may say one is either a confident 'person' or not. One can learn to be more confident, but one does not acquire that confidence like one acquires skills. The same models or methods of teaching the acquisition of knowledge or skills cannot be applied to learning in personal and social development. The benefits of personal and social 'development', which are characteristics of a person cannot fit into a model of learning skills.

Confidence emerges out of the youth work process; it is not reducible to its inputs. Brent (2004) echoes this conception of learning in his description of 'The smile'. Kelly first attends the youth club as a 'shadowy appendage of her boyfriend. She looks miserable and unhappy, ... Gradually she gets to talk a bit... she starts confiding to one staff member' (2004:70). Kelly begins to explain her problems concerning her school, home life, eating, 'Problems for which we have no solutions.' Youth workers attempt to formally intervene to find her a flat, but this does not appear to be the real issue and it is quickly forgotten. Over time she begins 'to smile' a transformation appears to have taken place and 'she throws her self into the life of the centre'.'There has been no product, no target met, no plan completed, yet all the evidence points to there being a profoundly important personal outcome for Kelly.' (2004:70) To what can the smile be attributed? This is the important point. It makes sense to talk of youth workers taking an interest in her well being, offering her support etc., in a broad youth work sense, within the concept of a process of engagement. It certainly does not make sense to start reducing the outcome to any one or a number of interventions.

This conception of the process is evidenced further by the recent analysis of self esteem contained in 'Self Esteem and Youth Development' (Richards, (ed.) 2003). This is a collection of papers from the seminar held at the Brathay Institute which contains analysis of, and responses, to Emler's research: 'Self Esteem: the costs and causes of low self esteem' (Emler, 2001).

Guidance is offered against the search for immediate outcomes in relation to objectives

such as self-esteem:

> *When we adults attach ourselves too strongly and focus too closely on the behavioural outcomes then we fall into the trap of missing the relational opportunities offered by process work which is fundamental in enhancing self esteem* (Smith, B. 2003:83)

Likewise in relation to facilitating changes in self-esteem the importance of the relationship is highlighted:

> *the major factor that enables positive change to take place is the quality of the relationship between teacher and pupil, young person and youth worker* (Peel, 2003:57).

The lack of specificity of process to its outcomes, the indeterminate relationship between what the youth worker does and the young people's learning, exemplified by the examples of 'The Smile', the analysis of 'confidence', and the recent work on self esteem, is described by Smith as 'incidental'. 'A central consideration has been the apparently incidental manner in which learning may occur in informal... situations' (Smith, 1988:127).

This indirectness of end product or outcome to the youth work process has always been seen implicitly as a problem. Smith (citing Brookfield, 1983) is quick to assure critics that the indirectness is not accidental and that the learning arises from 'much that is purposeful and deliberate' (Brookfield, 1983:12-13). The youth work and informal education field has always been defensive about this state of affairs and the educational merits implicitly have been downgraded as a result of this lack of specific relationship between input and outcome; as is evidenced by the currency of terms like 'woolly' to describe the work.

Far from being a weakness the 'indeterminedness' is a necessary condition of 'process' learning in much personal and social development. In fact as well as being indeterminate, paradoxically for the process to be successful, it is often necessary to specifically NOT focus on the end point or the desired outcome to enable its achievement.

In our example of building confidence or in the example of Kelly's smile, the focus is on 'the person', not the end point of increases in self confidence or the production of a smile (or for that matter increases in Kelly's well being). The relationship is developed, the engagement with the person is genuine, interventions and interactions purposeful and meaningful and over time outcomes emerge. Importantly it is only possible to achieve those outcomes if one doesn't focus directly on them. Clearly the interventions and interactions must be the kind of things that would ultimately support the development of those characteristics but the outcome is incidental to the process of achieving it, and it occurs specifically because one does not focus directly on its achievement.
This kind of philosophical paradox is not new. A number exist which appear to underlie the circumstances of 'being human' (or our phenomenology), which illustrate this point. For examples John Stuart Mill was the first to identify a paradox in relation to the achievement of happiness:

> *But I now thought that this end [one's happiness] was only to be attained by not making*

> *it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness[....] Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness along the way[....] Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so* (Mill,1909:94).

Similar paradoxes exist in relation to success, self-realisation, hedonism etc. The point is that in certain aspects of our humanity whether it be happiness, well being, success or confidence, the achievement of it arises incidentally, as a result of engaging in a process. The process is instrumental in bringing about the end point but the focus is not on the end point in its achievement.

Thus the youth work process can be seen as paradoxical; not therefore as loosely articulated and lacking in clarity, but in actually accurately describing something uniquely and necessarily human. If Brent (2004) had specifically set out to make Kelly smile, or achieve 'a profoundly important personal outcome for Kelly', it would have been impossible to achieve as focusing on that end would have derailed the process, not least because a lack of genuineness would have been apparent to Kelly.

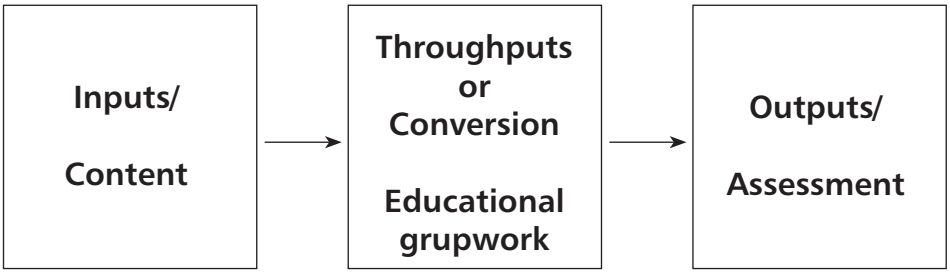
Curriculum as Output

Why did this model come to be utilised as a conception of curriculum? In my article I concluded that it must have been the DfES that put pressure on the NYA, and this appeared the only plausible explanation for the change from process to product based curriculum. But clearly Merton and Wylie are adamant that this did not happen: 'this charge is close to being actionable' (2004:64). That it is solely the enterprise of the NYA, I find even more perplexing. Why should the body promoting and supporting youth work be reformulating the work and removing one of the key principles: the process. Perhaps the answer lies in a perceived need to make youth work more accountable.

There are striking similarities between Merton and Wylie's model of curriculum and the models of performance management utilised to aid accountability. For example through Systems Management Theory (Cole, 2004) which utilises a model of production, which in its simplest form can be shown as:

This theory has its origins and is embedded in the practices of private sector business management. It is a way of framing the management of production to maximise performance. That is, input of raw materials is converted through manufacturing into outputs or products for sale. It has been applied to the public sector in an attempt to improve performance and accountability; and applied specifically to youth work through the work of Ford Management Partnership (2003). Importantly it puts an emphasis on the progression of inputs through to outputs upon which accountability rests. One can quite easily see how Merton and Wylie's conception of curriculum (2002) as content, educational

groupwork and assessment is comparable to this model:



The content is inputted into the youth work session, converted through the delivery of an educational groupwork session into outcomes in terms of increased knowledge or skills, which are subsequently assessed. For example: in a sexual health awareness session, the content of knowledge and skills about how to use condoms is inputted into a groupwork session and converted into increased awareness in young people about contraception, as well as a concomitant output of a reduction in teenage pregnancies.

Interestingly in utilising 'assessment' instead of outcomes in the their curriculum, this enables Merton and Wylie, and subsequently the NYA and DfES in practice, to introduce assessments of outputs, as well as outcomes, initially in the guise of accreditation (DfES, 2002) and latterly the assessment of the amount of time a youth worker has with each young person; as 'contact'.

Merton and Wylie say they want to avoid 'some kind of Fordist production line with a fixed body of knowledge, skills and intended outcomes' (Merton and Wylie, 2004:66), but that is what their curriculum has ended up looking like. This I would contend is the real story of the youth work curriculum and the Transforming Youth Work agenda: that youth work has ended up with a model of curriculum which is not based on the educational principle of 'process', but is founded on a model of performance management. In their attempt to 'win sufficient resource from the public purse' (2004:66), they have formulated a methodology of youth work, which relates inputs more directly to outputs and outcomes, and enables greater accountability. They have not as they would claim 'put the learner – not the worker – at the centre' (2004:65), they have actually put the manager centre.

Conclusion

Merton and Wylie are adamant that they have remained true to the core principles of youth work proclaiming that, 'Effective youth work practice is an expression of human artistry deploying both imagination and radical feeling... [it] entails nimble footwork to build on the ebb and flow of young people's interest and enthusiasm' (2004:66). They also assert that 'some of the better youth work is done "on the wing": that is improvised from the day to day situations in which youth workers and young people relate and interact' (2004:65).

Like the laudable 'Youth Work Values' the 'Local Authority Pledge to Young People' contained in Transforming Youth Work (DfES, 2002: Annex 1 and Annex 3), Merton and Wylie's commentary is not inconsistent with certain principles of youth work. However, it

should be remembered that despite these statements, based upon which Merton and Wylie would have us believe there have been no significant changes to the conception of youth work, this is not the case. What is at issue is both the 'methodology of youth work' and the methodology contained within the 'curriculum'. We now have a prescribed curriculum which does not make any reference to the process of the work.

In addition according to Merton and Wylie we now have two distinct types of youth work:

- Youth work based on Merton and Wylie's Curriculum
- Youth work 'on the wing'

This is a simplistic and erroneous distinction and does not do justice to the reality of youth work in action. For example which category would Brent's 'The Arch' (2004) fall into? Is it 'curriculum' or 'On the wing'? Answer: neither provides a sufficiently good account. That is because 'The Arch' is purposeful youth work, which has the elements of process and product embedded within it, and like a lot of good youth work it will have both planned and spontaneous interventions.

Interestingly according to the definition of curriculum (Ord 2004), which is based on the curriculum documents in use in the field, 'The Arch' is encompassed by curriculum and that is because the definition of curriculum in use is a holistic concept, a necessary condition of which is the youth work process.

It is unclear exactly what Merton and Wylie regard as youth work on the wing, but if it is seen in contrast to their curriculum it will be the less explicitly planned and targeted work. Perhaps they are utilising the notion of work 'on the wing' to avoid the criticism that they have entirely removed 'open' youth work.

We do not need a new distinction at the heart of youth work between 'curriculum youth work' and 'youth work on the wing'. All youth work is purposeful and involves a process, and the process accounts for both planned and unplanned work:

> *Process: one of the strengths of youth work is a dynamic nature which allows youth workers to respond appropriately to the needs of young people through a range of planned and unplanned approaches*
>
> (West Sussex Youth Work Curriculum, 2000:8)

And importantly where is 'youth work on the wing' in the Transforming Youth Work agenda (DfES 2002)? To divide youth work up into two specific types is a dangerous precedent. One thing is for sure, once we only have a partial, product based model of curriculum for youth work, which is based on planned content and assessed outcomes and outputs, embedded in a government document with no explicit reference to open and process based youth work, this will have significant detrimental effect on the nature of youth work in the future.

Merton and Wylie admit that 'There is a danger that any attempt to conceptualise the curricular tasks of youth work risks misrepresenting its approach...' (2004:65). Unfortunately I think in their case it is clear that this has happened.

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