

Different World:

how young people can work together on human rights, citizenship, equality and creating a better society

This report – commissioned by City Parochial Foundation and written and researched by Gerard Lemos and Francis Bacon of Lemos&Crane – sought to answer the questions as to how young people can work together to make the world a better place, and what help and support they need in that endeavour.

Key findings

- ▶ There is a huge range of government policy designed to impact on young people – some is geared towards turning young people into good citizens, but much is designed to restrain and punish them for bad behaviour.
- ▶ The state is taking an increasingly active role in promoting the positive concepts which underlie progressive social change, such as human rights, citizenship and equality, even though concepts such as citizenship and human rights seek to limit state power.
- ▶ Programmes which attempt to tackle these issues can be broadly classified according to their content: raising young people's awareness of risk; encouraging tolerance; encouraging involvement in decision-making and participation; and facilitating young leadership for change and peer influence.
- ▶ Outside the classroom, there is a pathway of increasingly intensive methodologies: informal learning linked to enjoyable activities; creative learning; interactive learning; and peer learning and leadership.
- ▶ Compatibility between delivery style and the message is the hallmark of successful projects.
- ▶ Youth work needs a new purpose. Resources must be directed towards programmes which deliver structured content and method, and focus on the themes of identity and power, as well as promoting peer leadership and positive peer influences and activities.
- ▶ Technology-based methods for working with young people on progressive social change are rare.

Background

Are young people our brightest hope for a different and better world in the future or are they leading selfish and disengaged lives? Do young people need to be punished or helped to learn? Should young people be understood less and told what to do more, or should adults be trying to listen and understand?

Social attitudes to young people swing alarmingly across these contradictions and paradoxes. Government policy, instead of seeking to resolve these confusions into a coherent set of approaches to services and resources, has become fragmented and incoherent.

The fundamental purpose of youth work, the principle concern of this report, remains unresolved. For one group of people the purpose of youth work is to facilitate young people in personal and social development, emphasising working in a holistic, person-centred way. For another its role is helping young people to get and keep a job.

Young people themselves see it differently, too. Increasingly reluctant to vote and participate in traditional institutions and often feeling unsafe on the streets, in schools and even at home, they are nevertheless growing up in a prosperous, technology-rich world full of opportunities and possibilities.

Even though national domestic politics seems for many a noisy but empty vessel, young



people are bothered about some of the negative things going on in their communities and they are very concerned about some of what is happening in the international arena.

Out of all this confusion and uncertainty a new consensus is emerging on the purpose and content of youth work, as well as its method and structure – the matter as well as the manner of youth work.

The two most important concepts addressed in this report are citizenship, defining the relationship of the individual to others and to the state, and human rights, setting out universal and inalienable entitlements which stretch across state boundaries.

This report is about how these concepts – which still seem dry and technical – can be made to come alive by youth workers and others who work with young people to lift them out of the court room, not just into the class room, but also into pubs, clubs and homes. In other words how citizenship and human rights, and the progressive social change they promote, can become part of the culture.

In making that journey, this report suggests, government cannot and should not retain control of the definitions and practice of citizenship and human rights. After all, both these concepts have as their *raison d'être* the limiting of the power of the state over people.

That progressive governments have taken it upon themselves to become the principle advocates and enforcers of citizenship and human rights – concepts which, if properly promoted and enforced, limit government's freedom to act – is only another paradox which this report seeks to unpick.

Types of projects

Practitioners working on youth matters deliver programmes which can be broadly classified according to their content as follows:

- ▶ Projects which seek to raise young people's **awareness of risk** – such as the consequences of guns, knives, drugs, pregnancy, truancy etc.
- ▶ Projects which **encourage tolerance** between diverse communities.
- ▶ Projects which help young people to become involved in **decision-making and to participate** in the institutions and structures of mainstream society.
- ▶ Projects which facilitate and develop young **leadership for change and peer influence**.

Developing approaches to learning

Outside the classroom, there is a pathway of increasingly intensive methodologies for learning:

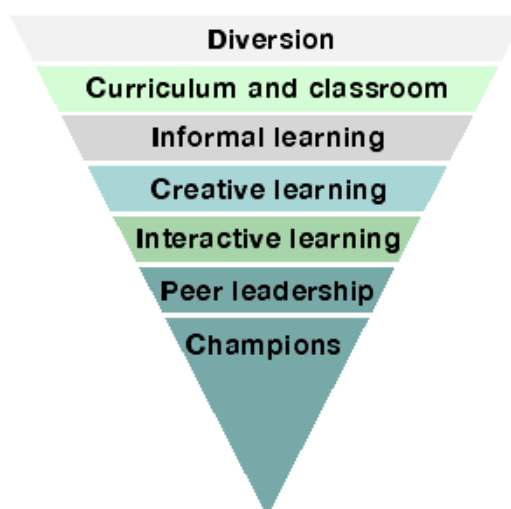
- ▶ Informal learning: programme delivery hooked to an enjoyable activity, such as photography or sport (e.g. *Photovoice*, *Haringey Warriors*).
- ▶ Creative learning: reflection and expression through artistic media (e.g. *Young Voice*, *ICAR*).
- ▶ Interactive learning: role-plays and interactive games which explore advanced concepts and critical scenarios (e.g. *Children for Peace*, *Leap Confronting Conflict*).
- ▶ Peer learning and leadership: delivering a structured programme to develop peer leadership, campaigning and influencing skills (e.g. *YouthAct*, *Your Turn*, *Envision*).

Analysing practice

Drawing on the experiences of projects and activities working with young people on citizenship, human rights and social action for justice an overarching analytical framework was created. It describes how projects can be broadly categorised according to their programme content and delivery method (see diagram opposite).

In terms of content, different projects can be laid out to create a 'pathway' or 'journey' which increasingly devolves power to the participants.

The report also links different activities for engaging young people into a set of increasingly intensive methodologies for learning and engagement. At the lowest level are activities which divert young people from risk or bad behaviour. Above that are formal educational activities and then more informal and creative learning methodologies (see panel above). At the highest level are methods which support the development of peer leadership and help young people become champions for action in their communities and in the world.



This analysis stresses the importance of congruence between method and message and recognising young people as sources as well as recipients of learning and development. 'Power' and 'identity' are the two themes which underlie these programmes: those with the strongest positive identities are also those who can use and share power most effectively. That applies as much to those that work with young people as to the young people themselves.

Conclusions and recommendations

While the state certainly can promote progressive social change on human rights, citizenship and many other subjects besides, the final settlement on what freedoms we want and the extent of equality we seek is a matter for the people, not just through parliament, but in civil society, debated and acted upon in all the arenas outside the family and below the nation state.

Young people should be developed as agents of change in all those arenas, particularly with a view to positively influencing other young people, using all the technological and cultural tools available. The job of youth workers and others who work with young people is to prepare young people to be leaders of their peers engaged in making a different and better world for their own futures. (*continued over*)

(continued) The report recommends new approaches to commissioning, inspecting and evaluating youth services which promote peer leadership and action for progressive social change. It recommends that independent funders should seek out more innovative projects and activities to fund, again with an emphasis on peer leadership and progressive social change, but also with an explicit focus on using new information and communication technologies for positive peer leadership.

At the moment, ICT (information and communications technology) seems principally to be used by young people for consumerism and social networking but there are plenty of

possibilities for using the digital revolution more productively.

This report suggests a new template of skills for youth workers with a particular emphasis on developing the interpersonal and facilitation skills to deliver structured, content-rich approaches and activities in the service of a new, more detailed and explicit purpose for youth work. This new purpose can be summed up as:

Building awareness of risk, encouraging tolerance, supporting participation and developing leaders to positively influence other young people.

Methodology

In conducting the research a database of more than 200 organisations that work predominantly in the Greater London area with young people on elements of progressive social change was first assembled. A questionnaire was sent to these organisations and from the responses, in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with staff from more than 40 organisations.

These work in a variety of community and educational settings, including schools, youth clubs and work with socially excluded groups.

Following that 17 participants were invited to attend one of two focus groups. Several projects were also visited and these receive more lengthy treatment in the report.

The full report *Different World: how young people can work together on human rights, citizenship, equality and creating a better society* is available from City Parochial Foundation, contact details below, or can be downloaded in PDF format from www.cityparochial.org.uk/publications

About City Parochial Foundation

Established in 1891, City Parochial Foundation (CPF) is one of the largest independent charitable foundations in London. It aims to enable and empower the poor of London to tackle poverty and its root causes, and to ensure that its funds reach those most in need.

Occasionally, CPF funds research – as with this report – when it increases knowledge of these areas of work or

other aspects of poverty in London. A particular interest is in work which has a clear application to policy and practice.

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About Lemos&Crane

Lemos&Crane develops and disseminates knowledge and innovation on social policy through research, web sites and conferences. Its projects help professionals to take informed action to improve lives and communities.

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