

Youth Studies Ireland

Volume 2
Number 2
Autumn/Winter 2007

PRESS

Youth Studies Ireland is an initiative of the Irish YouthWork Centre, which has been resourced and/or financially supported by the following stakeholders:

Applied Social Studies Dept., NUI Maynooth

City of Dublin Youth Services Board

Irish Youth Foundation

National Youth Council of Ireland

Youth Affairs Section, Department of Education & Science

Youth Work Ireland

Editorial Board

Maurice Devlin (Editor),
Applied Social Studies,
National University of Ireland Maynooth,
County Kildare, Ireland.
Tel. + 353 (0)1 7083781
Fax + 353 (0)1 7084708
Email: maurice.devlin@nuim.ie

Paula Mayock,
Children's Research Centre,
Trinity College Dublin.
Tel. + 353 (0)1 8962636
Email: pmayock@tcd.ie

Sam McCreedy,
Community Youth Studies Unit/Centre for Young Mens' Studies,
University of Ulster at Jordanstown.
Tel. + 44 (0)28 90366457
Email: sh.mccreedy@ulster.ac.uk

Majella Mulkeen,
Applied Social Studies,
Institute of Technology, Sligo.
Tel. + 353 (0)71 9155354
Email: mulkeen.majella@itsligo.ie

Administrator/Secretariat

Fran Bissett,
Irish YouthWork Centre,
Youth Work Ireland,
20 Lower Dominick Street,
Dublin 1.
Tel. + 353 (0)1 8729933
Email: fbissett@youthworkireland.ie

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Youth Studies Ireland is published biannually by Irish Youth Work Press in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Youth Studies Ireland acknowledges the financial support from the stakeholders named opposite for the pilot phase.

ISSN: 1649-8747.

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Subscriptions (2008, 2 issues): individual rate (print only) €40; institutional rate €80. Electronic subscriptions for full issues and individual articles are available. Visit our website for more details: **www.iywc.com**

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Student discounts, single-issue rates and advertising details are available from:

**Irish Youth Work Centre, Youth Work Ireland,
20 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.**

Tel: + 353 (0)1 8729933

Fax: + 353 (0)1 8724183

Email: fbissett@youthworkireland.ie

Website: www.iywc.com

See the inside back cover for notes for contributors.

Cover and text design, typesetting and printing by:

Metaphor, Gandon House, Lucan Village, Dublin.

Tel: 01 6212007/6212008

Fax: 01 6212017

Email: info@metaphor.ie

Web: www.metaphor.ie

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What Do Youth Workers Do?

Communicating Youth Work

Jean Spence

Abstract

Youth workers are generally highly skilled communicators across a range of circumstances and contexts. Yet despite this, their perception is that the nature and potential of their work is not fully understood beyond the boundaries of their own profession. This manifests itself in central policy decisions which only partly account for the realities of youth work practice conditions. Drawing upon evidence from empirical research, this article argues that textually based, theoretical discussion relating to the processes of intervention with young people remains underdeveloped, particularly in relation to the necessities of informality and the informal educational perspectives of the work. Only if the discourses of theory and policy are coherently informed and challenged by the practice perspective will it be possible to build a discursive field which might more comprehensively and holistically communicate what youth workers do.

Keywords

Informal education; youth work practice; youth work theory.

Introduction

Youth workers have always been keen to communicate the distinctive benefits of their professional interventions for young people. They have done so in formal and informal settings and beyond their professional boundaries. Yet they seem generally unconvinced that their work is fully understood by policy makers, fellow professionals or the public at large (Crimmens et al, 2003; Spence and Devanney, 2007). Whether or not their perceptions are accurate, the anxiety of workers is evident in their need to constantly explain and justify their practice. This betrays a defensiveness which implies that despite their verbal dexterity, the problem of communication in the public sphere is real enough for them.

Partly the difficulty might be attributed to preferred forms of communication. Youth workers tend to rely upon verbal forms of communication in face-to-face situations. In a profession where conversation is the key to successful practice, where everyday realities are unpredictable, the dominance of talk is to be expected, but this is not without consequence. Talk tends to be present-orientated, anecdotal and relates primarily to the immediacy of experience. Within talk, reflection and retrospection derive largely from the practical problems and issues of everyday encounters. In

contrast, written or visual texts are produced within youth work mainly for functional rather than analytical purposes; minutes of meetings, reports and information-sharing are documents designed to service the organisation, whilst photographic exhibitions, newspapers and the like are part of the productivity of work with user groups. Such texts communicate the principles of practice only incidentally. Meanwhile, critical, analytical and theoretically informed texts about practice occupy only a minor role in the communication of youth work both within and beyond the profession.

This translates into a tension between theory and practice which is unhelpful in circumstances where youth workers in different national locations are striving to establish their professional credentials under different policy imperatives and with different emphases. Ultimately, the successful development of youth work in an increasingly interconnected world depends not only upon the parameters of national legislation and policy, or upon the ability of workers to establish international practice networks, but also upon the identification of those universally distinctive features which delineate it from other welfare and educational professions, and which therefore enable it to be transferable across particular policy environments.

The pre-eminence given to conversational communication in which experiential knowledge is largely transmitted through anecdote, is at odds with the dominance of textually based theoretical and research knowledge which informs policy making and decision making (Catan, 2002). The possibility of youth work perspectives being fully incorporated within political and institutional processes is therefore weakened. When research is aligned with policy rather than practice, the difficulty is exacerbated (Issitt and Spence, 2005; Hoggarth and Payne, 2006). This is seriously problematic insofar as governments look towards youth work as one possible means of engaging young people who are resistant to, or excluded by other more formal institutional interventions. For the emphasis in this context is inevitably informed by 'evidence' derived from a problem-orientated approach to young people, which is seldom attuned to the potentiality model of youth from which youth work takes its bearings (Davies, 2005). Unless the meaning and principles of practice are communicated to sponsors and politicians in terms relevant to practice, then the values which lie at the heart of successful youth work interventions will be continuously compromised in the process of submitting to the vagaries of political expediency and bureaucratic rigidity.

This article argues that the forms of communication need to be brought into a finer balance by increased attention to theoretically informed meaning-making analysing what youth work is. Only when such meaning-making reaches a 'critical mass' influential outside the immediacy of youth work practice, informing other approaches to young people, and transcending national policy concerns will youth workers be able to communicate effectively what is it that they do and thereby maximise their effectiveness. The creation of research-based, theoretically developed and practice-informed texts is necessary to the process of creating a discursive field in which the meanings, values and potential of youth work as professional activity might be effectively communicated.

To inform the discussion, this article draws mainly upon the evidence derived from research undertaken in the UK between 2004 and 2006 entitled 'An Everyday Journey: discovering the meaning and value of youth work' (Spence and Devanney, 2007).¹ The research process involved preliminary discussions with five groups of youth workers and

five of young people in order to identify the principal concerns of participants in youth provision. These concerns informed the questions which guided participant observation in 15 youth projects chosen to represent different geographical regions and a range of youth work approaches. During the participant observation, in addition to research diaries, researchers engaged in 51 'directed' discussions with youth workers, and undertook interviews with 105 young people involved in the projects. The insights derived correspond clearly with the evidence gleaned in other recent research projects which focus upon the question of youth work practice and the perspectives of youth workers (eg. Crimmens et al, 2004; Harland and Morgan, 2006; Yates and Payne, 2007).

Understanding Youth Work

Reflecting the structural powerlessness of the young people who are the main object of its attention (Lalor et al, 2007), youth work has been amongst the least well resourced, the most poorly represented, and its workers amongst the lowest paid of professional practitioners within the educational/health/social work field. Even when youth work has statutory support as it now does in Ireland, its weak position in the panoply of statutory services, retaining significant dependence upon the voluntary sector, is characteristic of powerlessness. And even when it attracts additional funding in response to specific social concerns and questions, as it has done in Northern Ireland where the 'peace dividend' in particular has offered specific opportunities for growth and development, the conditions for such funding are time limited and instrumental in relation to goals set outside youth work itself (Harland et al, 2005). Mainly youth work is perceived as supplementary to other educational and welfare services and its priorities are located in the margins of related provision.

As a consequence of its structural marginality, negative issues often dominate youth work agendas – exclusion, disaffection, young people's problems, conflict, social problems of youth. Positive youth work has been rendered inarticulate in this environment; its discourses are colonised by terms of reference derived from other professions. This is further reflected in negative expressions of what youth work is. Time and again, in the 'Everyday Journey' research, workers (and young people) described youth work mainly as *not* teaching. Harland and Morgan (2006:9) have made the same point about the perspectives of workers in Northern Ireland where 'there seemed to be more consensus on what youth work was not'. Even when workers describe positively what they do, they often use comparisons with other professions in order to give meaning to their own practice:

We don't have an agenda for them, like social workers would have, or teachers ... It's open. It's open and it gives them free space as well, that they don't get anywhere else (youth worker quoted in Spence and Devanney, 2007:72).

Ironically, it may be because youth workers are so verbally skilled that they experience difficulties in reaching any lasting consensus about what youth work *is*. Driven by the need to exploit funding opportunities wherever they can, youth workers adapt their language to conditions not of their own making. They perform for audiences who come with pre-determined agendas for their work in relation to pre-determined aspirations for young people. Thus for example, the concept of 'youth' which underlies the very existence of youth work is a universal category which is consistently

contradicted by the widespread adoption of the fashionable policy language of targeting and exclusion to communicate the worth of contemporary practice. Inevitably in such conditions, the public and private images of youth work often relate in tension.

Tensions can be managed if youth workers retain control over at least some of their practice conditions, but the effect of targeting and outcome-led processes of accountability which accompany increased involvement by the state, systematically colonise the space available for worker autonomy. As one worker in Scotland commented to Spence and Devanney (2007: 119):

There have been lots of changes in youth work in Scotland ... This shaped the way forward for youth work as part of Community Learning Development, and put them at the forefront of community planning and showed youth work as the front line partner to work with schools etc. This was nice as up until then youth work had been the poor cousin, but it was also scary as now everyone is looking at what youth work is doing. This has led to new tighter systems to justify the work.

If youth work is to thrive, it is essential that the public language of practice and the terms of reference informing policy at least complement the intrinsic nature of the processes of practice. This does not mean that there will be one way and one way only. Nor does it mean that priorities and concepts will be static. But it does suggest that discussion should revolve around a set of central reference points and that the boundaries of the youth work constituency should be recognisable. Mainly this implies developing a theoretical and policy language which is grounded in, emanates from and connects back to the realities of practice conditions.

It is tempting to think that such a language might be derived from clear and commonly agreed definitions of youth work methods, purposes and values. However, given the fluidity of the conditions under which youth work functions, it is difficult, as Harland and Morgan's (2006) research demonstrates, to achieve consensus around any standard definition. Definitions are apt to depend upon the particular historical and organizational context in which they are created and in themselves, they can never fully represent the richness and openness of practice which calls for constant re-working and re-framing of meaning. Fixed formulations of what youth work is or is expected to be are inevitably inscribed within formal frameworks for practice. For example, in the definition offered in the Irish Youth Work Act (2001, s. 3) youth work is identified as:

A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary involvement ... which is:

- a) complementary to their formal, academic and vocational training; and
- b) provided primarily by voluntary organisations.

This particular definition is determinedly structured and firmly situates youth work as a 'complementary' approach both in the framework of institutions and in the type of institution, thus confirming the relative, and secondary, status of the profession. Nevertheless, in its recognition that young people need to be voluntarily involved, it does leave a gap for the negotiated relationship between youth workers and young

people, which suggests that youth workers might maintain some control over the conditions of practice. However, the boundaries for this negotiation are restrictive, drawn in terms of curriculum planning and ‘training’. Whilst the definition might be particularly reflective of, and will certainly influence the bias of development in Irish youth work, the concepts which it mobilises are all contestable. It is only if such concepts are opened to scrutiny and critical analysis with reference to other – and perhaps competing – definitions operating elsewhere that the discursive field will begin to develop as an active process of communicating universal youth work principles. Definitions in themselves are inadequate for the task.

In attempting to move beyond the negative or relative representations of youth work it is particularly important to engage continuously with theoretical principles associated with the main themes of youth work. For example, education is clearly a central theme and the terminology of social education, non-formal education and informal education has been used at different times and in different places to identify the distinctiveness of the work in English-speaking countries.² An important task of building the discursive field of youth work and to communicate its meanings is to engage with the different theoretical dimensions of these related educational approaches.

Conceptualising youth work as ‘the social education of the adolescent’ (Davies and Gibson, 1967) came to pre-eminence after the second world war as means of helping young people ‘to develop socially during their leisure time’ (ibid:1). The ‘prime concern’ of social education ‘is with any young person’s meetings with others, with his capacity in these meetings to accept others and be accepted by them, and about the common interests around which these meetings may revolve’ (ibid:2). According to Davies and Gibson, the dynamic of social education is in relationships, and the primary objective of youth work is to enable young people to ‘discover how to contribute as well as take from his association with others’ (ibid:2).

Non-formal education refers to ‘... learning and development that takes place outside the formal educational field, but which is structured and based on learning objectives’ (Youth Service Liaison Forum, 2005:13, quoted in Lalor et al, 2007: 269), and it relies upon curriculum-based approaches and training. While the definition just quoted comes from Northern Ireland, this perspective seems to be shared by the Youth Work Act in the Republic. The dynamic of non-formal education lies in the ways in which young people participate in structures and programmes rather than in relationships and its objectives relate to organisational purpose as much as to the self-defined interests of young people. When the power to define the priorities of youth work is located outside the setting of everyday practice, non-formal education is promoted because it provides a framework to facilitate processes of accountability evidenced through targets, strategies and outcomes. However, non-formal education relies upon the informality of youth work relationship-building for its success, especially with those young people who are targeted because of exclusion or disaffection.

The language of informal education, ‘which is not structured and takes place in daily life activities within peer/family groups, etc.’ (ibid) is a more holistic designation of youth work. Within the ‘Everyday Journey’ research the terminology of informal education was most frequently used by workers to explain the dynamics of their relationships with young people. Informal education in the English context in

particular appears to have become the vehicle by which youth workers seek to positively differentiate their educational approaches from those of schools. Its emphasis upon the centrality of conversation emphasises the relational principles characteristic of social education whilst accommodating but transcending the structural limitations of non-formal education. Efforts towards delineating a conceptual framework for informal education have been pursued, notably by Jeffs and Smith (eg Jeffs and Smith, 1996; Smith, 1994), as a means of asserting the central values of youth work as a humanistic practice. Its principles have been succinctly expressed by Kerry Young who considers youth work processes to be primarily 'moral philosophy':

Education is the business of youth work. Enabling and supporting young people, at a critical moment in their lives, to learn and develop the capacities to reflect, to reason and to act as social beings in the social world. Not in any way they choose, but in accordance with the state of 'good faith' to which all human beings aspire. That state of living a life true to oneself (Young, 1999:1).

Young's definition is interesting for its acknowledgement that young people are social agents, not just individuals inhabiting a particular moment of the lifespan, and that the educational perspective of youth work involves invoking a set of ideals which transcend personal 'needs'.

Nowhere is *informal* education the language of policy. That English youth workers manage to maintain any commitment to informal education is partly due to unresolved tensions between policy objectives and practice realities and the inability of bureaucratic processes to deal with the dynamism and fluidity of the voluntary relationship between youth workers and young people. Within policy statements, there are gaps and contradictions. These reflect the necessity of pursuing instrumentally desired outcomes, but within conditions in the youth work field which are not in the control of policy-makers. The gap between 'planned programmes of education' and the 'voluntary involvement' of young people in the Irish Youth Work Act definition, is unacknowledged; but it is a gap which must be filled in youth work practice. Many of the young people who are the main subjects of youth work intervention would not engage voluntarily in their initial contact with youth projects if they thought they were to engage in 'a planned programme of education designed to aid their personal and social development'. Anyone attempting to uncritically follow the definition into practice, without reference to real relationships, would encounter serious difficulties.

To some extent, the tension around structure and informality is recognised in a recent pronouncement of the UK government:

The evidence ... showed that unstructured provision attracted the more disadvantaged young people. The real challenge therefore in working with disadvantaged young people is to introduce structure and greater organisation and supervision into the unstructured provision to which they are more likely to be drawn. Other evidence shows that youth work has a crucial role to play in supporting and challenging young people to try different things (Dept. for Children, Schools and Families, 2007: 22).

In this document, for the first time in decades, the UK government acknowledges that young people tend to access generic youth projects because they are seeking leisure opportunities, fun and recreational facilities and that it is in such an environment that youth workers can best contribute to 'positive outcomes'. Yet still, it remains unclear how the space between young people's desire for unstructured approaches can be squared with the government's desire for structure and curriculum except with regard to the 'support and challenge' that might be offered by youth workers. The source of the problem can be located partly in the underdevelopment of the discourse of practice processes and the difficulties experienced by youth workers in communicating their practice realities.

Developing a Discourse

Despite gaps and contradictions, the political acknowledgement of some key concerns of youth workers, including voluntary participation and the tension between structure and informality, is important. Possibly it indicates that the increased efforts of practitioners, educators and researchers in recent years to spell out and communicate what youth work actually *is* has been heard at policy level. Opportunities for developing the textual field of knowledge relating to youth work practice have been growing, facilitated by the increased attention to youth policy in the global context and by the growing international contact between youth workers, young people and academics (eg. Williamson, 2007). In addition, professionalisation has resulted in an expansion of youth work education which has brought into the field increased numbers of academics, some from related fields, and a widening of connections between youth work and related professions.

Development of *critical* understanding has been achieved mainly through the determined efforts of independent commentators to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to use independent media to pursue ideas and debates which challenge received wisdom amongst practitioners and policy-makers, and to pursue understanding which presents a wider vision for youth work than that normally inscribed within national policies. The declared intention of Youth Work Ireland of 'promoting the interests of young people and youth services by critiquing and commenting on relevant literature and social policy developments and engaging in advocacy and campaigning' should not be underestimated in this regard (www.youthworkireland.ie/strategic.asp). Analytical work which refuses to be intimidated by more powerful voices is crucial to the development of the discourse of professional practice, because it continues to question the philosophical and ideological basis of policy, to explore the limits and possibilities of practice, to engage in debate and present new and imaginative thought which draws from knowledge gained from an understanding of a dynamic and distinctive practice tradition.

In the pursuit of a theoretical discourse relevant to practice realities, the establishment of academically rigorous journals sympathetic to youth work is crucial. The recent establishment of *Youth Studies Ireland* is part of the trend, as too is the long-term survival (against the odds) of *Youth and Policy* and the recent revival of *Scottish Youth Issues*. These journals offer space for practitioners, researchers and policy makers to engage in analysis and debate which relates directly to youth work, which does not categorise it as but an offshoot of another profession, and which does not understand

youth work merely as a technique for delivering government policy. There is still some distance to travel before youth work journals and related texts achieve equal status to other academic publications, but the movement is in a positive direction. What is particularly important is that such journals offer the opportunity for the distinctive youth work voice to be heard, linking professional practice with policy issues through intellectual debate and discussion.

Youth and community work has been in the forefront in exploring and making use of the potential of new communications systems. These are particularly sympathetic to the informal conversational bent of youth work and to its responsiveness to young people's interests. The Informal Education Website (www.infed.org.uk) is making a major contribution to the reclamation of youth work history as well as to the communication of youth work theory and practice. The more recently created 'Critically Chatting' website devised in response to the interest in a series of seminars is in turn challenging conventional wisdom and pursuing a collective and critical analytical approach to policy and practice (<http://critically-chatting.0catch.com>). Meanwhile the websites of national and local agencies and organisations similar to Youth Work Ireland (www.youthworkireland.ie), such as the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (www.acys.info/), and the related sites of trades unions (eg. the British Community and Youth Workers Union, www.cywu.org.uk), and voluntary or specialist organisations (eg. Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association www.nidya.org.uk), are communicating a wealth of up to date information about activities, policies, practices, training and publications, contributing to an expanding arena for conversations about youth work and its meaning.

This emerging textual field, reflected and affirmed in the oral tradition by increased conference and workshop activity, speaks across the theory-practice divide. It pays attention to the realities of practice as much as to the intellectual challenges of theory; it points to the insights of history as well as to contemporary issues; it considers the meaning and criticises policy in addition to revealing issues raised in policy implementation. It is out of this range of work that textual authority for the narrative claims of practitioners might emerge. Such developments need to be nurtured in order to facilitate the growth of an assertive practice-based language in which the oral and the textual have at least equal weight.

Communicating Practice

It is no accident that *Youth and Policy* had the privilege of publishing a short article which might lay claim to being one of the best pieces of writing about youth work practice ever produced and which seems expressive of the development of a self-created professional discourse. It was written in 2004 by Jeremy Brent³ in response to the debate about the role of accreditation and curriculum in English youth work. Entitled 'Communicating what youth work achieves: the smile and the arch', the piece is drawn from Brent's long experience of employment in a youth club in Bristol. It is worth quoting extensively from the part about 'The arch':

Over the years, there have been a number of deaths of young people who have attended the youth centre: car and motorbike accidents, drug-related deaths, suicides, a collapsed trench on a building site, cystic fibrosis. Young

death is particularly hard to deal with, and deaths that occurred 20 or 30 years ago still bear a great burden of grief. So the idea grew of converting a scrap of land outside the building into a garden of remembrance with, in its centre, some kind of monument ...

The project employed a sculptor who engaged the young people in the design work. A design was chosen of a young man whose brother had died on Christmas day from a drugs cocktail. Brent describes the construction of the arch:

The project was very physical. One young man, whom I had seen self-anaesthetised with drink and drugs at the funeral of his brother (killed in a motorbike accident) was dripping with sweat as he sawed through chunks of steel to give the arch the fruit of his effort. This was doing something, creating something, not just talking about it. It was the first time that I think he had properly grieved.

The description of the creation of the arch is followed by a commentary on policy:

This has been a powerful piece of youth work ... The product did not get in the way of the process, and the project can partly be judged by its product. The value of the arch far outweighs the value of any accreditation that could have been given to young people for having taken part. In fact, accreditation in this context would have been demeaning. Certificates would have detracted from the importance of the arch as something worth doing for itself, and devalued the emotional depth of its content.

We could surmise the learning outcomes of the young people involved, but that feels almost sacrilegious. They were personal to them. I would not dream of asking them, let alone giving them a questionnaire to fill in. The project had, as so often in youth work, unrecordable outcomes, outcomes that cannot be encompassed by an evaluation form (Brent, 2004:71–72).

This piece finely illustrates both what youth workers do and the problem of formally communicating what they do. Using a practice-based story to make his point, Brent refers to deep emotion, to the personal, and to his own sensitivity towards the value of the project to the young people involved. So often these are the terms within which youth workers verbalise the meaning of their practice and so often these are the terms excluded from textual communication. It is instructive that Brent does not tell this story in a vacuum but with critical regard to a particular dimension of policy which he believed was impacting negatively upon practice.

There is a long tradition of youth workers using stories from practice to communicate the meaning of their work. A story told by a youth worker-coordinator of a young people's motor project lay behind the development of the 'Everyday Journey' research project. Based in a factory unit on a small industrial estate this project worked mainly with groups of young people defined as problematic and referred by schools. The arrangement between project and schools was formal, but the young people's participation was by agreement. Using old cars donated by local garages, the young people were taught basic safety techniques, the use, organisation and care of tools and how to strip down and repair car engines. In the process they

produced a portfolio of their work and received a certificate of achievement at its completion. This non-formal educational programme was supplemented by informal activities and outings. The co-ordinator was very proud of the formal outcomes and placed great emphasis upon the young people's portfolios. However, within informal conversation, his emphasis was completely different. He told a story of a girl working in a group which was otherwise all male, who was unable to relate to anyone and who constantly suffered verbal abuse from a stepfather. The girl attended regularly, but seldom communicated or even raised her eyes. Then the group was taken go-karting. The track was wet and slippery, and she skidded into a ditch. The workers ran to her to make sure that she was not hurt and found her sitting in the ditch, covered in mud, but looking up and laughing with her hands outstretched and cupped together. In her hands there sat a frog. The story ended there. No further explanation was deemed necessary. The narrator, communicating with an 'insider' knew that the fundamental meanings conveyed would be implicitly understood.

This story and its telling highlighted the gaps between the public presentation of the work which referred to its material and structured elements of learning, and the central meanings which were apparently located in the secondary and supplementary aspects of the project, in its accidental moments and in its emotional outcomes.

Inspired by this story, the 'Everyday Journey' research was designed partly with the intention of collecting stories from youth workers and young people in order to find a way of adding their voices authentically to the developing discourse of youth work. It was anticipated that in a collection of stories it would be possible to find commonalities and differences, to critically analyse them as 'texts' and in so doing articulate some of the key meanings and priorities which emerge in the real conditions of youth work practice.

Not as many stories were collected as anticipated. This seemed to be related to the semi-formality of the research situation and the expectations which youth workers have of the role of research vis-à-vis policy. Nevertheless, the stories told had a clear function. They were mobilised largely to legitimise claims that youth work interventions could be critical in changing the lives of young people. There seemed no other means of communicating the full meaning of critical moments of change because these would seem either mundane or inappropriate if translated into more formal language. Making eye contact, smiling, or grieving can find no comfortable place within a set of directives which stress 'life and social skills' or 'sex education'. Yet youth workers want to communicate that when a young person cannot usually smile, the mundane act of smiling becomes hugely significant. The critical interventions of youth workers can make a mundane nothingness into something extraordinary.

What usually appears ordinary, must be always open to question for youth workers. For example, the following extract is from a young mother who talked to the researcher about the effect of the young women's project on her life:

Researcher: *And what sort of changes were you starting to see?*

Laura: *Well just being able to go out the house. I mean I couldn't get on buses. I couldn't even go to the corner shop whereas I was starting to take little steps to go to different places like that. And now I can go on a bus, I can go on the train, I mean I can't do it by myself, well I probably could do it by myself because I would challenge myself to do it.*

Young people articulated their understanding of what youth workers do and their gains from youth work according to their particular circumstances. Always this was relevant to their personal needs and interests, and always it added to the stock of happiness in their lives as *they were at that moment*. Undoubtedly this would have consequences for the future, but young people are interested in their own here and now as much as in their transition to adulthood (Anderson et al, 2005). A young man from Northern Ireland expressed this very clearly:

Craig: *It's really different, cos it's really laid back and relaxed, it's more about what we would want to do and things we enjoy doing. Like I absolutely adore skating and since we came here it's all been centred about that, and it's been what we want to do in the skating. It's just been thoroughly enjoyable from the start, like two and a half years and I haven't been annoyed once; I've never come out of this place angry. It's always been a cheerful mood and I can't wait until next week.*

What Craig does not reveal in this extract is how, from the participation in skating, the young men involved were enabled to meet young people across the community divide, were kept safe, discussed the need for public provision for skaters, worked alongside local councillors to achieve that, and in so doing began to learn the arts of democratic engagement. All these things were relevant to the skaters and of long term importance for their democratic participation, but far and away the most important to them in the immediacy of their everyday lives is 'I've never come out of this place angry'. It was necessary to establish this before anything else could be pursued; creating and maintaining the conditions for its achievement were the first and principal concerns of the youth workers, underpinning all other development.

The oft-repeated youth work mantra of 'starting where young people are at' is a phrase which rather clumsily covers a complex, sensitive and highly skilled process of intervention. Starting there creates the conditions in which some young people will voluntarily and actively engage with a youth project, eventually communicate positively with youth workers, and through them learn to actively participate in wider social issues. This process of intervention involves understanding the socio-economic, institutional and cultural context of young people's lives in a general sense whilst simultaneously having the capacity to respond sensitively to the differences between individuals and groups on an inter-personal level. The primary skill which is used to 'start where young people are at' is that of listening. Because youth workers listen in an informed but open way not only to words, but to silences and absences, conversation and dialogue can emerge. The following exchange is between the researchers and a group of young women involved in a youth project sited within a school:

Researcher: *Can you say a bit more about what you think youth workers do?*

Mary: *They keep people off the streets.*

Chrissy: *They're like teachers, they teach us but in a more fun and exciting way and they respect us.*

Rosie: *And they listen to you when you want to talk to them.*

Leanne: *Teachers are boring.*

Mary: *And they shout at you.*

Researcher: *And you think youth workers are different to that then?*

Rosie: *Yeah.*

Chrissy: *Maureen [the youth worker] listens to us and helps us.*

The following is from a young women's project:

Researcher: *What about the role of the workers, what do you think the workers do and what do they help you with when you come to the project?*

Jane: *Dead friendly, always friendly every time you come in. Always smiling.*

Katie: *Always smiling.*

Kelly: *Dead supportive and encouraging really I think.*

Helen: *And if you need somebody to listen to you they're always there to listen to you.*

Katie: *If you need help with anything you can always just phone them. Like you know they're not going to be funny with you, they're 'I can help you do this and do that'.*

Jane: *They just seem interested.*

Researcher: *So like having time for you and that sort of thing? I mean is that different to your other experiences or ...*

Katie: *And they treat everybody equal.*

The process of making young people happy, of being friendly, involves youth workers in a whole person experience in which the personal cannot be entirely separated from the professional. Their professionalism of necessity involves communicating something personal. In order to commit their trust, the young people need to believe that the youth worker cares about their welfare not just as a professional matter, but at a personal level. And just as significantly, most of the youth workers involved in the research believed this too; just as they believed that 'relationships' were at the core of their practice. Yet youth workers also know that personal and relational language is a deeply problematic area of public communication. So for instance, in response to declarations of friendship from young people, workers needed to explain that they could not be a personal friend, that they were just 'like' a friend. One worker talked apologetically about the importance of 'love' in her work:

Claire: *It's giving them that sort of, love's probably the wrong word to use these days, because it's taken far too much out of context but they do get that to an extent. One of the main things folk need and it isn't just young folk it's everybody, they need that certain extent of love and somebody that's really caring for them. I know so many people like, 'I'm going to kill myself, nobody likes me', and some of them are just making it up; but other ones maybe there isn't actually anybody there. They've maybe got friends but maybe they can't interact that well with their friends and they need that.*

Susan: *It's acceptance isn't it? And it's also about, you're accepting that person. And sometimes you'll pull them up because you'll see aspects of their behaviour are unacceptable but it's not about saying you're not acceptable.*

Ultimately, it is in this difficult area of relationships, love and friendship that the language of youth work is most underdeveloped. In the professional discourses which flow from statutory support, the language of emotion is ruled out of court. It is too messy for bureaucracies and policy makers, too unruly for power brokers, and too disruptive for the rationalities of academics. Yet it is in this untamed area that the heart of what youth workers do in their work with young people is to be found. For youth work to be fully recognised as a professional activity, it is essential to create a language to express this. This implies a critical challenge to the dominant meanings of professionalism and of the definitions of youth work associated with policy.

Conclusion: What can be done?

In order to communicate effectively what youth workers do, a number of significant issues need to be addressed. These are not exhaustive, but they are crucial to the future of the profession as informal educational practice.

Firstly, although information about the dimensions of what youth workers do is already in the public domain, some key elements of meaning are silenced in that domain. Structured and formal elements of intervention are easily understood in the public sphere and are prioritised in the formal discourses of professionalism. It is necessary to address silences, to adopt a critical approach to policy language and to develop more fully the language of informality. Here, real relations of power are at stake, for the language is representative of such relations. It is therefore necessary to consider the way in which youth work is constituted in systems of power between fellow professionals and policy makers.

Secondly, youth workers need to reclaim and develop their own intellectual and practical history. No activity can claim professional status and public trust if it does not have a body of historical knowledge to give authority to its current actions and to inform current debates and discussions. There are important classic texts, research reports, recordings, films and archives which speak of a coherent and international body of knowledge which is underused as youth workers attempt to deal with the pressing realities of the present and perform for the latest policy priority. Historical texts often use a language of practice which is not only relevant to former times but has universal validity. The reinstatement of the textual history of youth work is crucial to establishing the claim to a distinctive professionalism and to the communication of a dynamic professional identity. The gap between theory and practice in youth work must be bridged and it behoves the academics associated with youth work education in particular to pursue the intellectual task and to enthuse their students to consider practice, theory and the pursuit of knowledge to be indistinguishable in furthering the interests of the profession. Reflection in itself is insufficient.

Thirdly, those connected with youth work have a responsibility to engage critically with policy to encourage a dialogue in which politicians are consistently reminded of the realities of the practice situation. Without a direct debate with politicians, the work

will be shaped according to a version of reality which does not take into consideration the views and perceptions of those young people who are most excluded from the benefits of citizenship, participation and positive social relationships. Youth workers do not need researchers to communicate the values and meanings of their practice. They can do this themselves but a first stage in affirming the value of what is meaningful in practice involves youth workers communicating with each other and acting collectively. Time must be made for such activities outside the pressures of the everyday isolated situation.

Fourthly, reading and writing for the youth work journals can help build a critical mass of intellectual dialogue. It is necessary to consider too the value of related texts from other professions and within other media in communicating the values and processes of youth work. Youth work is not self-contained. There are disciplinary fields which overlap with it and with which it is necessary to communicate in language which can be commonly understood. Only by recognising the possibilities and priorities of related professions will it ultimately be possible to be clearer about the professional boundaries and challenges of youth work. Only by communicating with fellow professionals on an equal intellectual level will it be possible to situate youth work equally in the panoply of educational and welfare professionals.

Finally, it is imperative that the emerging professional discourse should not be distorted or imbalanced by ignoring the affective, emotional and interpersonal aspects of the work. Addressing these requires energy, time and great skill. There is a language of practice, at present implied in the anecdotes of workers and hidden in the pages of historical texts which is crucial to the health of the profession. In contemporary discourses such language is to be found mainly in faith-based approaches: it is allowed in that context. If youth work is to flourish, such language must also be embraced and asserted in the secular field. Otherwise, what is central to the youth worker's identity is displaced. And ultimately without such language, communicating why youth work is useful and beneficial for young people will become simply a matter of accident dependent upon the personality, charisma and bravery of individual workers. Without the affective aspects of practice which such language expresses, youth work does not and cannot work.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Mary Mescal for giving me the opportunity to speak at the conference of the Ossory Youth Service, Kilkenny in September 2007 which stimulated the thinking behind this paper.

Notes

- 1 Funded by the UK's 'Big Lottery' and undertaken between 2004 and 2006 in partnership between Durham University and the voluntary youth organisation, Weston Spirit.
- 2 In the European context, the language of social animation and social pedagogy are also important. See www.infed.org.uk for further discussion.
- 3 Jeremy Brent died in 2006. See obituary in the Guardian and Rapport.

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Biographical Note

Jean Spence teaches Community and Youth Work at Durham University and is a member of the editorial group of the journal *Youth and Policy*.

Address

Jean Spence,
Durham University,
Elvet Riverside II,
New Elvet,
Durham DH1 3JT
England.

Tel.: +44-191-3341502

Email: jean.spence@durham.ac.uk

Emergent Issues in Ethnic Youth Studies

A Historical and Ethnographic Study of the Vietnamese-Irish Experience

Mark Maguire

Abstract

This article traces the history of the Vietnamese-Irish minority ethnic community from their initial resettlement to the present day. Attention is paid to the structural dimensions of resettlement and the pattern of integration that emerged. The central focus is the second and third-generation Vietnamese-Irish. Through an analysis of schooling, family, identity and work/home life I suggest what life is like for minority young people in this context. However, the article aims beyond the specifics of the case study. The broader question is: what can we learn about ethnic minority youth issues in Ireland today through a close, longitudinal and ethnographic exploration of the Vietnamese-Irish example?

Keywords

Vietnamese-Irish; refugees; minority; ethnicity; youth.

Framing the Issues

Data from *Census 2006* present an image of Ireland transformed by immigration. The number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland stands at close to 420,000 persons, or ten per cent of the population. Central Statistics Office (CSO) predictions suggest that, if present trends continue, by 2030 Ireland will have an 18 per cent foreign-born population – greater than that of the USA or Germany. While the majority of those in Ireland who were born in another country are from the EU, there are now significant numbers from Asia (55,628) and Africa (42,764). The large increase in migration from the recently acceded states is also notable, with Poland alone accounting for 63,090 individuals. There is, of course, great diversity within these migration flows, from North American high-tech workers to Eastern European migrants to the agricultural labour sector, and from elite sojourners to refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, *Census 2006* only provides a snapshot of a fast changing and complex migration situation – a picture distorted by enumeration difficulties.¹

Almost every aspect of Irish society is facing the challenges presented by immigrant incorporation, and many are looking to the future to anticipate the ways in which the economy, social institutions and cultural life will respond to and be reshaped by new versions of Irishness. Significant work has already begun on understanding the youth studies dimensions of the immigrant experience. This was the topic of the 2007 North

South Intercultural Forum, where it was noted that by 2030 up to five per cent of the Irish population may lay claim to membership of a 'minority ethnic group'. Research in the emergent area of ethnic youth studies has largely been framed through either policy work or research on diversity in educational contexts (see Watt and McGaughey, 2006; Lodge and Lynch, 2004). While a number of exemplary studies have been carried out (see for example Devine and Kelly, 2006; see also the important work of Phillips, 2006 on separated children seeking asylum), it is important to note that the 'agency' of immigrant youth is still absent from much of the research literature. Breda Grey has described this as an ironic lack of 'attention in policy documents and integration programmes to how migrants themselves adapt' (2006: 1).

While one may argue that greater attention must be paid to the lives of immigrants in research on incorporation, one must also be mindful of the fact that when one attempts to take a picture of life it may often be a partial one, limited in scope and limited by time – a snapshot. Research on ethnicity in Ireland must also take account of the historical and contemporary dimensions of diversity, and see identity itself as always emergent, changing and fluid. This in turn demands closer attention to minority ethnic youth, for it is in this field of study – in terms of how the identities of young people intersect with and are produced by a variety of social institutions – that the contours of a new Ireland will be shaped.

This article discusses contemporary ethnic youth identity through a historical and ethnographic study of an older ethnic minority, the Vietnamese-Irish. Herein I trace the cultural history of the reception, resettlement and 'integration' of a small number of refugees from Vietnam from the 1970s to the present day. This ethnic population has an established second generation and a growing third generation. The ethnographic account of their stories, world views and hopes for the future may well, as more and more research is carried out, compare or contrast with the experiences of newer immigrant groups.²

Conditions for the Creation of Minority Life

In 1978 harrowing stories of the exodus from Vietnam of hundreds of thousands of so-called 'Boat People' were regularly featured in the international media. In May of 1979 the Irish Government, in part owing to their visibility as president of the (then) EEC, offered 100 resettlement places. The opposition spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Jim O'Keefe of the Fine Gael party, captured a widely held view that the offer was parsimonious when he noted, 'the government would receive the least number of refugees which would enable them to save face abroad' (*Irish Times*, 8 August 1979: 4). From this point until the arrival of the first refugees in Dublin Airport in early August of 1979 the national newspapers became increasingly obsessed with this issue. Members of the public frequently asked questions like, 'did anyone ever stop to think who these people are?' and suggested that the charitable-minded '... look closer to home and cease pontificating about the need and indeed the nobility of helping the Vietnamese' (*Irish Times* 18 July 1979: 10, and 26 July 1979: 11).

The State also came under pressure from the Catholic Church in the form of Bishop Eamonn Casey. He denounced the 'meagre response' and demanded an increase in resettlement places in order to keep pace with the UK – an intervention described by one journalist as 'an Episcopal hand across the pass' for the Government

(*Irish Times*, 4 August 1979: 3). Despite this, when 212 Vietnamese refugees finally did arrive little more than an *ad hoc* resettlement process greeted them. Describing his arrival to *Magill* magazine's Chris McIvor, Quang Van Vu remembered that:

... none of us knew very much about where we were going or even exactly where it was. When we arrived in Dublin Airport we thought it was only a stopping off point. We did not believe that a national airport of a country could be so small (McIvor, 1987: 44; see also RTE, 1979).

The reception phase of the resettlement process fell under the remit of the Irish Red Cross (IRC) and they initially housed the refugees in a private wing of a Dublin Hospital and in a Christian Brothers' school. This phase was not without problems, and the reports of the IRC that were circulated to other non-government organisations at the time are suggestive of an attempt to build an efficient administration of the situation without consultation with those being administered – according to one memo that detailed attempts by the refugees to organise themselves, 'because we had got to know them and their devious methods, control was maintained' (Irish Red Cross, n.d.: 4).

The few hundred refugees who arrived in Ireland represented identities as diverse as ethnic Vietnamese, Thai, Sino-Vietnamese, Hmong and Cao Dai, not to mention differences in class and religion. Reducing refugees to flat categories of identity is, therefore, always problematic and tends to be underwritten by what Lissa Malkki (1995) has termed the national order of things. In other words, one must be careful of assigning the homogenising label of 'community' onto a population such as the Vietnamese. In the same way, to talk today of a Chinese, Polish or Nigerian community in Ireland is to miss the heterogeneity that such labels cover over. This is important for youth studies also: for young Vietnamese-Irish people it is family background and interactions with society that are of the greatest importance, as we shall see.

Following their initial reception the refugees were dispersed to 'strong provincial areas'. In an unpublished postgraduate thesis completed in 1990, Frieda McGovern quotes a governmental working party that argued it was 'desirable to try to ensure that refugee families did not congregate in one small area in such a way as to diminish the incentive for them to integrate quickly and fully into the community' (1990: 170).³ While many Vietnamese-Irish people look back on their early years in Ireland with great fondness, dispersal did prove to be traumatic for many, particularly the younger generation. A Vietnamese-Irish man in his thirties spoke to me at length about his experiences 'down the country' in the 1980s. 'When I was a child', he noted,

there were no other Asian children in the school and I thought I was the only one in the country! I spoke no English and would sit in class with the teacher saying things I couldn't understand. When I got homework, I had to take out the dictionary to understand the questions.

He further recalled that 'every break, when the kids went out to the playground they would all gather around me, hundreds, in a circle and eat their lunch watching me—I was an alien to them!' These memories would certainly find a resonance with the experiences of others who participated in this research project. Indeed, an early newspaper *exposé* by Ronit Lentin suggested that the dispersal approach was something of a disaster when it came to integration. 'Ireland's 303 Vietnamese are housed, but not

settled, not hungry, yet not integrated,' she noted (*Irish Times*, 25 April 1984: 11). By the mid 1980s most of the Vietnamese had re-migrated to Dublin's poorest neighbourhoods. This was facilitated by their entry into the Chinese fast-food business, where the more mature young people provided much of the labour. This often required the children to absent themselves from school or, at the least, assist in the family businesses on a part-time basis.

One of the key problems facing this minority was language proficiency. Circa 1980 an early resettlement report noted: 'Formal instruction in English ceased when the refugees left the reception centres. It is not considered that schoolgoing [*sic*] children will need further special instruction in English' (Sub-committee on Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees, n.d.: 3). Simply put, the older generation received little or inadequate language support; the younger generation often received none as they were required to attend school classes populated by children considerably younger than them until their language skills improved. On top of this, many young people had to contend with learning the Irish language together with acquiring English, and this from a starting point at which many were functionally illiterate in their native language. According to one Vietnamese-Irish adolescent interviewed by Frieda McGovern:

We were all told when we came here that we would have to learn English, change our customs ... in order to get on. Well some of us have learnt English and have changed our customs, and nothing much has happened to us. All my brothers who have left School ... are on the dole (1990: 186).

McGovern's unpublished thesis was primarily concerned with language support and the policy of holding children back in junior classes until their English language competence improved. Borrowing the phrase from a Government memo, she described this as a 'sink or swim' policy (1990: 196). She carried out research in four secondary schools, and her conclusions make for grim reading:

There were only 9 Vietnamese pupils in the four second-level schools in ... 1989-90. Of the remaining 18 Vietnamese pupils between the ages of 12-18 in the study areas in 1989, 1 was in another secondary school (1990: 205).

By the late 1990s, according to one report, only 50 per cent of Vietnamese-Irish judged themselves to have functional English language abilities (O'Regan, 1996). But language support is just one dimension of the range of supports that ethnic minority young people require. Much springs from the educational philosophy that surrounds how schools, in particular, manage diversity. In the Vietnamese-Irish case, ignoring differences seems to have been the approach taken. To take but one example, when discussing the intersection of religion and education in her school one young Vietnamese-Irish woman (aged 17 at the time of this recorded interview) described her youth to me thus:

My family are Buddhists but they sent me to a Catholic school. I even did my communion. Other Vietnamese-Irish girls did that as well, I know my cousin did. She said that she was Irish and all the Irish girls did it, so why not? Then the school wanted me to do my confirmation and I said, 'No, I can't, I'm Buddhist' - and that's the first they knew about it! My other cousins are 'Catholics' now as well. ...

A number of countries have come to realise that respect for the history and identity of the children of migrants means far more than compliance with a ‘multicultural’ policy: it is a positive act of encouragement for diversity of all sorts, and a mark of recognition for the relationship between culture, self-esteem and educational achievement (see Lee and Zhou, 2004, and Bankston and Zhou, 2002; and for a contemporary discussion of equality policies and cultural diversity in Ireland see Crowley, 2006). As we progress and see further qualitative evidence of how Vietnamese-Irish young people interacted with the Irish education system it will become clear that the experience of the young woman just quoted is not an isolated example.

The Vietnamese-Irish Population

The 1999–2000 *Annual Report of the Refugee Agency* gives the following data on the Vietnamese-Irish population:

Table 1: *Basic Demographics*

Year	Intake	Family Reunification	Birth	Death	Emigrants	Total
1979	212		1		4	209
1980			16	1	4	220
1981		36	7	2		261
1982		20	12		3	290
1983		12	13		7	308
1984		8	10	1	1	324
1985		7	10	2	4	335
1986		4	12	2	10	339
1987		3	8	2	33	315
1988		58	10	2	13	368
1989		47	9	2	19	403
1990		19	9	3	1	427
1991		15	9	3	8	440
1992		10	10		8	450
1993		38	15	2	2	500
1994		32	11	2	1	526
1995		30	12	1	15	561
1996		18	10	4	6	577
1997		21	8	2	8	604
1998		4	8			616
1999		180		1		795
2000		29		1		823

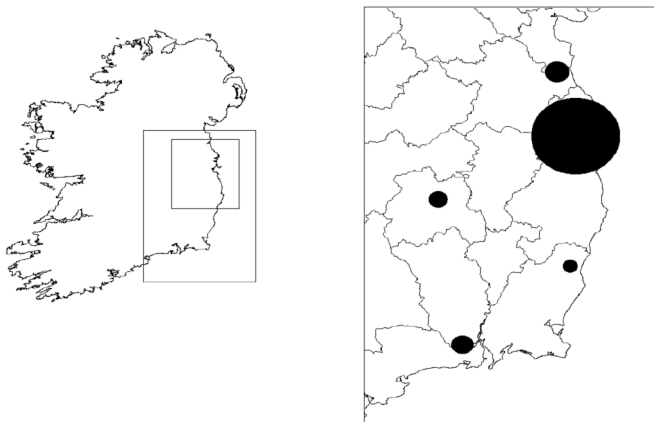
Source: *Refugee Agency Annual Report, 1999–2000*

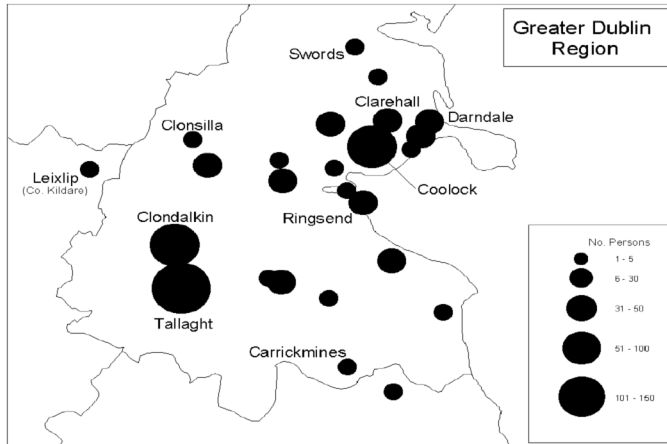
The annual reports of the Refugee Agency (now Reception and Integration) remain the only officially generated source of census-style data on the Vietnamese-Irish. Furthermore, the table above outlines the last year for which new data was added to records. This owed to the fact that it followed a period (1999) during which a large number of family reunification claims were processed, and it was envisaged that few such claims would be made in the future. Thus, growth in the Vietnamese-Irish population would be accounted for by natural increases, i.e. the birth of Vietnamese-Irish citizens whose affairs were beyond the remit of care of the Refugee Agency.

There are a number of reasonable judgements that may be made about the above data. Firstly, we may note that the bulk of the population, 591 persons, arrived through the Family Reunification Scheme. The rounded average number of secondary admissions from 1979 to 2000 was 27 persons per annum. The average birth rate per year between 1979 and 2000 was 9 per annum. One may assume that this will remain steady until the second generation begins to produce a significant third generation, giving rise to a multiplier effect. If we assume that our estimates of the birth rate are probably low rather than high, and if we think about the emergent third generation, then a conservative estimate would put the current population well over the 1,000 mark and likely over the 2,000 persons mark.

In the research project on which this article is based, the author had the opportunity to build up a database on 527 individuals across 99 household units. This data consisted of census-style information, which became the basis for the interviews quoted from in this article. It quickly became clear that the Vietnamese-Irish were a largely Dublin-based population living in and through large familial networks. The basic spatial pattern is represented below:

Figure 1: *Settlement Pattern*





As we can see, the majority of Vietnamese-Irish persons are living in the Greater Dublin region. Within Dublin, the majority reside in areas such as Clondalkin, Tallaght or Coolock and Clarehall. Many live in local authority homes, while others have purchased private homes. With the tendency towards large families, residence is in extended units, with a mother, father and children often living with grandparents or the spouse of a young adult in the same house. House sizes then have an effect on household composition, with families spread out across several homes in the same geographical area, or across Dublin city depending on upward mobility.

There are also clear patterns specific to the second generation (a term referring to the children of at least one foreign-born parent in a given country). As noted above, the 1979–2000 figures published by the former Refugee Agency suggest that the majority of the Vietnamese-Irish population migrated through the Family Reunification Scheme, as secondary admissions. This would suggest that many young adults were born in Vietnam or, perhaps, in refugee camps and that they migrated to Ireland after 1979. My own data, drawn from a sample of 527 individuals, indicates that there are 279 persons of 35 years of age or less within this sample; 64 are under 18 years of age. The relatively small numbers under 18 years of age suggest that the sample is not as representative as it might be. Nonetheless, one may distinguish between those born in and outside of Ireland as a meaningful set of categories, a point underlined in the words of the people themselves. When discussing education one Vietnamese-Irish man noted:

My eldest kid is nearly 30. He was born in Vietnam. I have 3 boys and one youngest girl of 12. The two youngest children are in school. The eldest, he starts working now in the takeaway. ... [The] younger one is in final year: he going to college in year. Other boy doing Leaving Cert.

My kids tell me that they wouldn't like when they grow up to be in Ireland. When they get a job they tell me they want to go somewhere else. They getting on in Ireland very well, they have friends here you know. To me it is a different culture. ...

My eldest son he never like school and he always want to work. He was only a kid when he came to Ireland but he thinks he is Vietnamese. I would love to take ... him to Vietnam to see. He [would] like to go and see what it's like, and he wants to see how different it is – people eating snake and that kind of thing. My other kids speak English; they have Dublin accents, just like the Irish. I not worry about their English; I worry about their own language. They cannot speak Vietnamese.

Thus, even within one family we may see a spectrum of identities. This is important to note because there remains a large social-scientific literature that sees culture as a hard-shelled identity into which immigrant minorities are sealed (see recent work in the Journal *The Future of Children*, for examples), and as children mature in a new society they inevitably come into conflict with the more static world-view of their parents. Clearly, there are not just two worlds for Vietnamese-Irish people, sealed into their own particularity; rather the 'Vietnamese' and the 'Irish' intersect with one another while displaying great internal diversity.

The notion of cultural conflict is related to the notion of intergenerational conflict. In a great variety of texts within migration studies and sociology the ethnic minority family is seen as a site of conflict, as if the minority family is in need of therapeutic intervention *a priori*. However, one may well ask whether the tensions found in Vietnamese-Irish homes are of a greater level or intensity than those found in the majority of homes in a city like Dublin and whether the issues over which conflicts arise are particular to those homes? If one carefully analyses the above quotation one can observe a complex view of raising children in Ireland. For the parent, his children are at one and the same time integrated into Irish society through friendships and somewhat disassociated from society, as expressed through their desire to migrate elsewhere. The youngest children identify with being Irish, while his eldest child, a man of 30 years of age, owing to his early upbringing in Vietnam, manifests a more diasporic world-view and a stronger link with the standard Vietnamese-Irish enterprise of the take-away business.

Nuances of identity associated with age and family structure are in dialogue with the environment in which these families live and work. For example, one Vietnamese-Irish father whose children included a boy of 12 and two girls aged 15 and 17 respectively, was clear that arguments in his household had as much to do with the neighbourhood in which he was residing as anything 'cultural' or generational:

There is so much drinking here, and the area I live in has drug-taking as well. When they go out ... with their friends I get worried because there is so much drinking and drug taking. I always tell my kids to remember that their parents are the most important thing – we stay up late worrying about them ...

Thus, what first may be perceived as cultural differences in terms of ethnic identity may often have much more to do with the particulars of locality. As I have noted, the Vietnamese-Irish were a population that engaged in a secondary migration to Dublin's poorest neighbourhoods in the 1980s. While a small majority of families now own property, most families acquired homes in neighbourhoods that are still disadvantaged. Integration for them is a daily journey through a challenging socio-economic environment, which has very discernable effects in terms of how they see Irish society and their own families. This was expressed to me in numerous conversations, such as

when a young mother living in a fairly disadvantaged Dublin city suburb, explained to me that her children simply did not interact with others in the neighbourhood. My kids are ‘not open wide in themselves,’ she remarked. This is consistent with much of what is known about so-called ‘model minorities’ in other contexts. For example, James Watson’s classic study of the overseas Chinese in the UK noted that a nexus between involvement in the catering trade, residence in poorer neighbourhoods and reliance on large familial networks, which promoted educational achievement and a strong work ethic, tended to produce a minority with voices that were muted in society and a presence that was invisible in localities (Watson, 1977: 181–214).

But these are the voices of parents. What of the younger generation? How do they see the worlds of part-time work, education and family? Hereafter, I will discuss second-generation Vietnamese-Irish people’s lives through their own words. My focus here is on how the different domains of Vietnamese-Irish life connect with each other rather than looking at each separately. What emerges from this approach is an image of the cultural world in which Vietnamese-Irish young people live – an image that can offer an insight into the particular ways in which they behave in school, choose careers or relate to family members.

Vietnamese-Irish Young People

As one might expect, during weekends – the busy times – Vietnamese-Irish takeaway businesses often draw on the labour power of young relatives. This is sometimes given grudgingly. As one younger generation girl (aged 15 at the time of the interview) noted:

They tell you to study, but you’re supposed to be working as well. I don’t mind helping out but it’s just that it’s, like, all the time ... You go to work in the afternoon and you’re back in the middle of the night. And if you’re not working you’re supposed to be studying. The last time I went to the cinema with me mates I was snoring after the lights went down!

This tension between fidelity towards one’s family and a slight sense of injustice in the light of the experiences of friends and peers in school was evident in the words of several young people in the study. As a further example, a young woman of 17 described her part-time work in a takeaway as she grew up thus: ‘it was never about us, about being, like, an ordinary part-time job for pocket money. Everything I made I gave to my mother’. These businesses draw from the resources of labour across the lines of age and gender; they make use of the family, and without the family they could not operate. But fidelity towards one’s family is not just tested by feelings of exploitation. For most Vietnamese-Irish young people with whom I spoke (informally or in formal interview) much of their identity and sense of difference was sharpened against the verbal and physically threatening world of fast food catering in Dublin’s poorest neighbourhoods. The following are the words of a young Vietnamese-Irish woman who was aged 18 at the time of the recorded interview:

When I was in school I worked part-time in my family’s restaurant – all the time really. ... My cousins, uncles, my father of course, sisters, brothers, they’re all in the takeaways. Not that anyone complains. ... I started work when I was fairly young, just messing around really, behind, in the kitchen, and then, as I got older, I learned

how to work out in the front at the counter and I did that for most of the time I was growing up. When I learned to drive [a small engine motorbike for deliveries] I used to do the deliveries as well, or at least I used to help out. ...

Working on the counter was horrible at times. Some drunken people are ok, but some of them are just horrible really. There was this one guy, he was fairly old, and he used come in to the shop every day nearly. I didn't know him but I used to see him there all the time and he was always trying to get me to give him stuff for free. I'd say, 'I can't', and then he'd get all grumpy. But the worst thing is the kids: they're always hanging around. ...

The effects of such interactions on young Vietnamese-Irish people are difficult to gauge. Tensions between responsibilities to family and the threat of racial abuse or violence were ever present. The same young woman conveyed her thoughts in the following words:

But you see that's where we work and make a living in our family, so no matter what the hassle is you just go back. One time when I was working some guy jumped the counter and robbed the place, after the police left we continued working and the next night I was back working at the counter – you just can't be scared of them. It's the same with the kids. I give out hell to them! They're always hanging around, and I just shout at them. Now most of the kids know not to try anything when I'm there. One night a friend of mine came in and said that she couldn't believe how different I was when I was at work – that I am normally so quiet. ...

But you have to play them at their own game. When one starts messing – they're always in groups, and they never cause trouble on their own – I just cancel the order on all of them until they say sorry.

The world of part-time work certainly demands that young Vietnamese-Irish people negotiate their way through the categories on either side of the hyphen in dramatic ways. Particularly interesting in the above quotation is the way that the young woman recalls the shock of her friend on seeing her in a different context, as if she maintained different relational identities in two different domains. This was not unusual: Vietnamese-Irish identity, more than anything else, is a result of such negotiations.

In the schools attended by Vietnamese-Irish young people the more attuned teachers noticed that the students most saw as 'polite', 'neat', 'quiet and well behaved', acted in this way because of forces beyond the gates of the school. One teacher noted that 'the pressure of society is such that they keep to themselves ... they are harassed outside the school because they are hard-working and are viewed as managing to make a go of their takeaway vans ... there is jealousy in the community' (Sheridan, 2004: 1). With newer immigrants arriving in these same neighbourhoods in the 1990s the situation became even more complex.⁴ In an interview jointly carried out by this author and the journalist Kathy Sheridan one 24 year-old Vietnamese-Irish woman recalled the racism she suffered in her youth taking on new dimensions:

Oh yeah. They'd call you names, throw stuff at your house; climb up the back walls. Maybe it was just because we were kids but they used to give us loads of abuse. You still find a few like that.

[More recently] *When my brother and I went to inquire about car insurance, I showed the woman my passport but she still wanted to know had I a card ... a card to show you're entitled to live here.*

However, the more generic descriptions of going to school in Dublin were of a time dominated by hard work, interacting well with others – if infrequently so – and enjoying the limited freedom from the regime of family life. As one young woman of 18 years of age noted:

I really enjoyed school. The kids were really nice. I think it was because I was different, or something like that. They were much nicer to me. I used to keep to myself a lot as well and stay quiet. It was the same with my cousins they said that they got on well in school and that every one treated them well, and that they just kept to themselves mostly.

Looking back on what it was like to grow up in Dublin City schools in the 1980s and 1990s young Vietnamese-Irish persons recall being treated differently but not badly. People saw them as quiet, hardworking and different, and frequently they saw themselves in the same ways. The resource of the family was for many something that could be held in the background and something that enabled interaction with others to be rendered easier by the knowledge that family stood just out of view. Family, in this sense, was comprised of the cousins that one might meet at lunch time or walk to or from school with; family was the ‘friends’ that were both a part of the fabric of home life and a part of school life:

My cousins lived next door, so I always saw my own home as being normal, because when I went to my friends I went to my cousins and their home was the same as mine. I did have friends in school, but I didn't think that their lives were that much different to mine – but I sometimes thought that they were afraid to come to my house because things were different there. There was different rules and different food in my house. And when I went to their house they were, like, ‘are you ok with just sausages?’ And I'd have to tell them, ‘that's fine’.

For many young Vietnamese-Irish people school was a site where the first close relationships were formed with people who were outside of the family. Obviously, it was also a site where the first relationships with the opposite sex began. Four years ago I met a young Vietnamese-Irish man who was working in a takeaway business in Dublin's North Inner City. In a brief conversation about his childhood and school days he pointed out that many Vietnamese-Irish families asked siblings to check up on each other. When groups of boys and girls would delay going home from school to spend time with each other, word would inevitably reach his parents. ‘They'd eyes all over the place,’ he noted. ‘It was like Big *bleedin'* Brother.’ For others a sense of being ‘good’, particularly for Vietnamese-Irish girls, meant that relationships with the opposite sex were late occurring and regarded as something to be avoided in case ‘trouble’ was caused. One young man offered a less than moralistic explanation, however. He suggested that because neighbourhoods were often ‘bad’, thus requiring children to go home straight from school, and because most spent their spare time in part-time work, even in adolescence most Vietnamese-Irish simply didn't have the time for a

relationship. Thus, memories of 'rebellion' often seemed to disappoint those who recalled them. Take the words of one 19 year-old Vietnamese-Irish woman:

My family did take a lot of interest in my school. They didn't check my homework or anything like that but they were always asking me what was going on and how I was getting on. My parents were strict though. I remember them getting mad when I got my ears pierced.

Somewhere between leaving school and completing third-level education most second-generation Vietnamese-Irish men and women who are in relationships met their partners. Almost invariably, partners are not Vietnamese-Irish. As one young woman commented:

I have an Irish boyfriend. My parents are far easier than other parents. They don't mind me going out with an Irish boyfriend. In fact nobody really minds that. It's more to do with who they are, like, for my parents – like their background, their character and who they are.

The Spectre of 'Race'

Over several years of cultural history and ethnographic research I met few Vietnamese-Irish young people under 18 years of age who were not in full-time education, and many of those aged between 18 and 24 years are now in full-time third-level education. Those who I know who are in full-time third-level education have tended, with few exceptions, to pursue courses of study in the sciences and in subject areas such as information technology, business and accounting. This bias towards the more 'pragmatic' areas of study has often been influenced by the expectations of parents and their desire to see their children in professional careers.

However, few second-generation Vietnamese-Irish people that I have come to know have actually begun on a professional career path. The weight of expectation placed on the educational system has not yet produced the results that so many Vietnamese-Irish parents have hoped for. Many of those who have recently graduated from universities and colleges are seeking work, are in part-time employment before beginning post-graduate studies or are travelling to visit relatives in countries such as Australia. Much of what the future is and means has been calculated *vis-à-vis* the prospect of children becoming professionals and being a 'success'. Should the individuals concerned find difficulty in meeting such expectations or should the education system not take them in the desired direction quickly enough there will likely be severe problems.

The trends are not fully articulated in practice yet. For many second-generation Vietnamese-Irish the 'Chinese' restaurant and takeaway business has remained a feature of their lives. While some will follow the path towards professional careers and work in business outside of the family, others will choose to make their living in the ethnic food niche, and some will have little choice. However, it is noteworthy that in discussions of family, school and education the topic of racism seems to lurk in the background. For Vietnamese-Irish people from the younger generation their identity intersects with stereotypes and with racism throughout their lives. In simple terms, some younger people still find it difficult to persuade people who don't know them well

that they are Irish – the ‘yes, but where are you *from*?’ syndrome. But this is not the full story, and one is forced to ask: how can the Vietnamese-Irish example be brought to bear on the wider issue of minority ethnic youth integration in Ireland?

Conclusions

By looking back on the cultural history of an older minority in Ireland it is now possible to learn important lessons. Some of these lessons are straightforward: this example has demonstrated that fears over so-called ghettoisation resulted, as elsewhere, in a misguided policy of dispersing refugee populations. That policy has since been abandoned in favour of a more structured and community-centred model – though not without its own complications (see Halilovic-Pastuovic, 2007). Also, short-term inaction over language support resulted in long-term costs being incurred, from economic costs resulting from welfare dependency to social effects in terms of lack of incorporation into mainstream society. This is worth situating in the context of language support programmes today: the 2007 North South Intercultural Forum asked participants to reflect on data suggesting that since 2004 the numbers of minority children in schools needing English language support have increased by 30 per cent. It is an indictment of early failures to record that today many older Vietnamese-Irish do not have a functional level of English.

In terms of ethnic youth issues there are also clear lessons. The Vietnamese-Irish example certainly shows us schools ill prepared for dealing with cultural differences. But too often schools become the machinery for acculturation, and criticisms of already disadvantaged schools are more properly directed towards the State and society at large. In 1990, when Frieda McGovern interviewed young Vietnamese-Irish students, one noted: ‘we were all told when we came here that we would have to learn English, change our customs ... in order to get on.’ This is not an education policy; this is a failure in society.

However, the Vietnamese-Irish example is also important in offering a more measured and longitudinal view of migration to Ireland. Many of the challenges posed by migration to Ireland are perceived to be entirely new – most are not. The story of the Vietnamese-Irish is a story of people who left behind war and forced migration – some with tales of torture and loss beyond belief – and who resettled here and raised families. For those new generations the label ‘Vietnamese-Irish’ seems almost redundant: they are Irish. Above all else, what we can learn about ethnic minority youth issues in Ireland today from the Vietnamese-Irish example is that new versions of Irishness are here to stay and demand a response throughout society.

Notes

1 *Census 2006* data is problematic for discussions of migration beyond general patterns. And, when discussing specific populations the difficulties are compounded. Firstly, within the broad subject reach of Migration Studies the approach normally taken is to trace populations and carry out research on specific questions by examining the movement of peoples across borders. Categories of 'nationality', 'ethnicity' or, indeed 'race' within census data tend to be treated with caution. The voluminous literature on the Irish diaspora is a case in point. When Donald Akenson came to write his seminal *The Irish Diaspora* he noted that of the 34 (+) million who declare an Irish ancestry the majority are Protestant Irish-Americans – having arrived first, Protestants from the south as well as the north of Ireland have produced more generations and are, thus, a larger element of this ethnic group. And, yet, Irish-Americans are assumed to be Catholic, and the ethnic category of 'Scots-Irish' shows up on the census, but doesn't account for the numbers. Akenson demonstrated with this example the great problem of the census: it only gives answers to the questions it asks. Secondly, enormous disparities exist between the *Census 2006* data and other sources. For example, the *Census 2006* indicates that there are 25,181 persons living in Ireland on the night of the census who were born in the USA; the census also suggests that 12,475 classify their nationality as USA. The problem is clear: are the 12,706 returned Irish-Americans? If so what weight has the category at either side of the hyphen? Also take into account the fact that as far back as 1999 the US Bureau of Consular Affairs put the number of people living in Ireland with a US passport at 46,984, while the US Embassy suggests that 'real' number of persons with US citizenship in Ireland is 100,000.

The US example in an interesting link to one of the data sources much quoted in recent research on immigration into Ireland, PPS numbers. One should not assume PPS numbers to be a 'clean' data source. For example, US citizens of Irish ancestry are provided with PPS numbers in order to claim inheritance – they may never set foot in Ireland. Workers in the 'informal' economy may never register for a PPS number, or register and return to their country of origin.

In sum, while *Census 2006* may give some insights into general trends the data in itself has a limited utility (see Martin Ruhs, 2005 on PPS numbers; Piaras MacÉinrí, 2007 on enumeration problems; and Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, 2006 on the *Census 2006* 'ethnicity' questions).

2 This article draws on an extended period of fieldwork carried out between 2001 and 2004 and funded by a Doctoral Research Fellowship from the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in National University of Ireland, Maynooth. During the first years of that period I spent several days every week learning Vietnamese and informally discussing life in Ireland with former refugees and with those who migrated to Ireland through the Family Reunification Scheme. This work took place in the Vietnamese-Irish Centre in Hardwick Street, Dublin and, occasionally, at the more informal locations of the Chinese-Vietnamese Association in Clondalkin. As the research progressed my attention turned to the youth dimensions of Vietnamese-Irish identity. 2004 marked the 25-year anniversary of the first refugees to arrive in Ireland, and many senior figures in the Vietnamese-Irish community volunteered themselves to assist my research in an effort to mark the occasion with a 'record'. Thus, throughout 2003–2004 I held numerous informal and formal interviews, 25 of which were taped. I was also introduced by people in both associations to members of their family, particularly to members of the younger generation. As a part of this process I drew on the community's own records (the names and addresses of 527 individuals across 99 household units) to build up a database that recorded census-like information, ranging from age to occupation and religion. This data was confirmed by my own visits to many of the households listed and through checking and cross checking the information as I had conversations and held interviews with participants. This data is now the property of the Vietnamese-Irish Association.

3 Across the various examples of Western countries that resettled Vietnamese refugees, from France to the UK and the USA, the policy adopted was generally one of 'dispersal'. There are a variety of reasons, but, more often than not, policy papers are suggestive of an economic logic of lessening of pressure on services in any central area of migrant concentration and reducing the chances of so-called 'ghettoisation' (on the UK example see Robinson and Hale 1989). In the Irish context, perhaps more so than others, the reliance on non-government support was extremely heavy. Therefore, dispersal was to locations of particular NGO and community strength and to locations that could provide ready accommodation.

- 4 Older migrant populations such as the Vietnamese-Irish now share public spaces and neighbourhoods with newer waves of immigrants, and emerging hierarchies are observable in such situations – particularly as many Vietnamese-Irish are now multiple home owners and landlords. Little has been said on this topic in the literature on migration in Ireland, but one of the ways in which Ireland will likely articulate this issue in public culture is through notions of the so-called model minority. For a treatment of this issue in the Vietnamese-Irish example see Mark Maguire (2007; 2004).

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Biographical Note

Mark Maguire PhD is a lecturer in Anthropology in NUI Maynooth. He recently edited a series of the international journal *CITY* on social change in Ireland. He is author of *Differently Irish* (Woodfield Press 2004), and, with Lawrence Taylor, is editing a book on Dublin city for Lilliput in 2007/2008.

Address

Dr Mark Maguire
Department of Anthropology,
National University of Ireland, Maynooth,
Maynooth, Co Kildare.
Tel.: +353-1-7083984
Email: Mark.H.Maguire@nuim.ie

Recreational Drug Taking Among LGBT Young Adults in Ireland

Results of an Exploratory Study

Kiran Sarma

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study of drug taking (excluding alcohol) by LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) young adults aged 18–26. A three phase research methodology was employed that incorporated interviewing (n=12), focus groups (n=32) and a web-based survey (n=173). Results point to high levels of drug taking with 65 per cent of young LGBT adults in the study having some experience of drug taking and 21 per cent having systematically used drugs. Eight per cent of drug takers reported that ‘something to do with their sexuality’ led to their first encounter with drugs. When asked about the consequences of drug taking, 49 per cent had experienced blackouts, 46 per cent had engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse and 11 per cent had been sexually assaulted while ‘incapacitated’. In this paper these and other findings are set in the context of interview and focus group testimonies provided by LGBT young adults.

Keywords

Drug taking; drug prevention; LGBT.

Introduction

There has been growing concern in recent years that recreational drug use by teenagers and young adults in Ireland is having serious social, psychological and physical health consequences. Particular concern has been expressed in relation to drug taking by young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people with youth workers noting that anecdotal evidence points to increasing levels of problem substance abuse. This resonates with anecdotal evidence from the LGBT community in general (i.e. of all ages) and with empirical research from abroad which consistently reports higher levels of drug taking among gay men and lesbians than those who identify as heterosexual.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted abroad that probes levels of drug taking and routes into drug use within the LGBT community. Yet there is a complete absence of comparable research here and we are left with a rather vague notion that there is a serious problem, rather than the type of sophisticated appreciation that emerges from systematic research and that can be used to formulate policy and initiatives.

This paper represents a preliminary effort to address this knowledge vacuum. It does so through a mixed-methods multi-stage research design that deals with three core research questions. What is the extent and nature of drug taking among LGBT young adults? Second, what are the routes into drug taking as reported by research participants? Finally, what are the reported physical and psychological consequences of drug use?

Explanations for Drug Use within the LGBT Community

While useful to some extent, traditional causal models of drug use may be of only partial utility in understanding drug taking amongst the LGBT community, which may experience many specific stressors that relate, directly or indirectly, to their sexuality. Being part of a marginalised community, an attempt to escape from negative personal experiences relating to homophobia, fear of 'coming out', conflicts in self identity, reduced family support, fear of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, underlying feelings of depression and social isolation and normative influences within the gay sub-culture may all play some role here (see for instance McKirnan and Peterson, 1989).

In psychological terms, one key predisposition would appear to derive from difficulties incorporating 'homosexuality' into personal identity and the damage this has on self-esteem. Cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality creates negative prejudices. It is suspected that as a result some young gay men and lesbians often fail to fully accept their sexual identities and thus have personal vulnerabilities, insecurities and a dominant fear of rejection (Pachankis and Goldfried, in press). This is manifest as a sense of inadequacy due to being homosexual, deflated self-esteem, a lack of self-confidence and social anxiety. Drugs and alcohol, it is increasingly accepted, allow individuals to artificially circumvent their personal insecurities, bolster their self esteem and thus allow them interact socially and sexually in society (Ghindia and Kola, 1996; Lau et al, 2004). This can often lead to a deterioration in ability to function in social gatherings without a drug-induced affect (i.e. psychological dependence on drugs), with normal social skills falling into disuse (Bacon, 1973). It seems reasonable to assume that young gay men and lesbians are particularly at risk of this identity-formation/self-esteem predisposition.

Others have intimated that drug taking is normalised within gay culture and there is certainly some evidence in the international literature to support this assertion (Bochow, 1998). It would appear that this reflects attempts to enhance atmosphere and experience at gay events (Lau et al, 1998) and reduce tension prior to and during social gatherings (McKiernan and Peterson, 1989). However, it is important to point to the significant sociological debate and research that has probed the normalisation of recreational drug taking within adolescent culture in general (Parker et al, 1998; Blackman, 2004) and it is not at all clear to what extent identity-specific drivers exist.

Levels of Drug Use

Research from abroad tends to suggest that gay men and lesbians are between two and five times more likely to take drugs than the general population (Murnane et al, 2000; Dwyer & Lockett, 2003; Lau et al, 2004; Thiede et al, 2003). In the US 52 per cent of gay men stated that they had used drugs, 17 per cent frequently (Stall et al, 2001). In

Australia 62 per cent of young LGBT people had used cannabis, 30 per cent speed, ecstasy or LSD and 11 per cent had injected drugs (with some admitting to sharing injecting equipment) (Hillier et al, 1998).

In North West Lanchashire 43 per cent of gay men stated that they used drugs 'frequently', a prevalence rate six times that of the general population (HPU, 1998). Comparable levels of drug taking were reported in the *National Sex Survey* of gay men in England by Weatherburn et al (2000). A similar survey conducted in Ireland in 2000 found that 55 per cent of gay men had used drugs in the 12 months preceding the research (Carroll et al, 2002). McKiernan and Peterson (1989) note that while drug use within the general population tended to be lower among females than males and declines with age, neither of these trends occur amongst the LGBT community, where the sex-role stereotype was not adhered to and age-related role changes do not as readily occur.

Lau et al (2004: 19) found that participants took a variety of different drugs during a night out, 'varying the type, timing and sequence to achieve a desired effect at specific times during the night'. For instance, some reported alternating ecstasy and Gamma hydroxy butyrate (GHB), with the former creating an 'upper' and latter a 'downer'. Similarly cannabis, in its various forms, is used to mellow out a mood following taking ecstasy and others reported taking cocaine the day after to deal with the depressive symptoms of the ecstasy come-down.

Consequences of Drug Taking

In terms of the consequences of drug use, one of the main concerns is that certain types of drug use can lead to high-risk sexual behaviour (Lau et al, 2004). While the relationship between the two behaviours is likely to be complex, it would appear that drugs lower inhibitions about sexual contact and unsafe sexual intercourse and increase the likelihood of having multiple sexual partners (Greenwood et al, 2001). Obviously this has serious ramifications for sexual health and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases within the population as a whole.

The potentially serious mental health problems that can be triggered by drug taking are also of concern. Research has consistently linked use of a range of hard and soft drugs with irritability, sleep disturbance, severe anxiety, paranoia, depression, schizophrenia and a range of other conditions (New York University, 2006). Commentators have suggested that this has contributed to high levels of suicide within the LGBT community (Saunders and Valente, 1987). Drug taking is also linked to a range of other potentially problematic outcomes including hampered performance in educational and vocational settings, involvement in criminal behaviour, strain on interpersonal relationships and in particular with family members and partners.

Drug use by young LGBT people is of obvious interest to those involved in drug prevention. The social impact of use is likely to be higher, with underperformance in second and third level education potentially irreversible and with knock-on effects (Miller & Plant, 1999). Young drug users are also more vulnerable to victimisation, particularly sexual exploitation, and there is an increased likelihood of involvement in criminal behaviour (Tyler et al, 2004). Finally, there is a physical impact with drugs triggering psychological imbalances at a time when the young person is often most vulnerable (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2006).

With the exception of the *Vital Statistics Ireland* report, no comparable research on drug taking within the LGBT community has been conducted in Ireland, nor is there any qualitative data dealing with experiences of use or routes into use. Such research would aid in the identification of user networks and environments and of psychological, group-dynamic and experiential antecedents to use. Moreover, findings could aid in the formulation of harm-reduction education programmes and provide focus and direction to policy setters, governmental decision makers and agencies working with the LGBT community.

As a preliminary step towards addressing this knowledge vacuum, this exploratory study into the extent and nature of drug use amongst LGBT young people in Ireland was conducted. It involved a three stage data gathering process. In Stage 1, interviews were held with LGBT young people to explore their attitudes towards and experience of drug use. This was followed by a series of focus groups (Stage 2). Finally, an on-line questionnaire was designed and administered through LGBT websites (Stage 3).

Three broad research questions are posed here: What is the extent and nature of drug among LGBT young adults; what causal explanations for first-time and on-going drug taking are proffered by drug takers; and what are the consequences of drug taking as reported by drug users? It is important to stress at this early juncture that comparing levels of drug taking across communities (i.e. gay versus 'straight') is not an objective of this research and that inferences can only be made in relation to drug use within the LGBT community.

Method

Participants

Twelve LGBT young people participated in interviews and 32 in focus groups. 198 respondents completed the on-line survey. Of these 18 reported that they were 'straight' (and did not identify as transgender) and a further 7 were either above or below the target age range of 18–26. This sub-group of 25 respondents were excluded from further analyses leaving a core sample of 173. Of this cohort 84 per cent (n=144) were male and 16 per cent (n=28) female. Three per cent (n=6) identified as transgender. Seventy-four per cent stated that they were gay (n=124), 10 per cent lesbian (n=17), 11 per cent bisexual (n=19), and 4 per cent (n=7) were 'unsure' of their sexual orientation. The average age of our sample was 22 (SD=4). Where the total sample numbers in this report fall below 173, the shortfall is due to non-responses (i.e. respondents electing not to provide an answer to the item).

Materials

The on-line questionnaire contained 34 items: 11 dealing with background information; 14 with alcohol and drug consumption during the respondent's life; 6 with alcohol and drug consumption on the respondent's last night out and; 2 dealing with drug-related service provision issues. Pre-test instructions stressed the confidential nature of the research and gave an approximate time required to complete the questionnaire. Post-test instructions provided respondents with contact details for youth workers with experience in LGBT issues.

Procedure

Interviews and focus groups with LGBT young people were organised through youth groups and projects, with further participants recruited by word-of-mouth recommendations ('snowball sampling'). Following transcription of these sessions, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted. Taking cognisance of the themes emerging from this analysis, and of the international literature, a questionnaire was designed and administered on-line between August and September 2006.

The questionnaire was hosted by a web survey service provider. Websites for a number of LGBT representative groups publicised the survey and provided links to the survey site. Based on pilot testing, the questionnaire took between 4 and 15 minutes to complete depending on the number of applicable questions that each respondent was required to answer. For instance, a respondent who reported having never taken drugs would have been able to complete the questionnaire within 5 minutes but others who had experience of both drug and alcohol consumption would have required more time. Minimum quotas for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender respondents were reached after 3 weeks and in total the survey was 'live' for 10 weeks.

Representativeness of Sample and Predictive Utility of the Research

The problems encountered by researchers in attempting to recruit a representative sample of the LGBT community have been examined elsewhere (see Sarma, 2004; Herek, 1992; Berk, Boyd & Hamner, 1992; GLEN, 1995; Paul et al, 1991; Greenwood et al, 2001). Suffice to say here that as an exploratory study, the approach adopted here gives at least a good snapshot of drug taking by LGBT youth and that the qualitative stages provide a real-world overview of the lives of drug takers.

The strengths and weaknesses of on-line surveys have also been discussed at length (see for instance Couper, 2000 & Manfreda et al, 2002). The primary problem is the potentially divergent demographic characteristics of those with access to the internet and those who do not. Conversely, on-line surveys are inexpensive to administer and with increasing broadband penetration there is growing confidence that on-line surveys are increasingly attracting more and more representative samples.

Results

The overall picture emerging from the research is that drug taking by LGBT youth is widespread. As illustrated below, the vast majority have taken drugs at some stage in their lives and for many drugs have become part of the routine of socialising. Others report frequently taking large quantities and mixing drug types. Of the 173 survey respondents, 150 answered the series of questions relating to drug and alcohol taking and percentage figures provided here are based on this sub-sample. Of this group, 89 per cent (n=134) reported that they had been offered drugs at some point in the past and 65 per cent (n=97) said that they had wanted to try drugs at some stage in their lives.

Sixty five per cent (n=98) of young LGBT youth have had some experience of drug taking with 21 per cent (n=31) having systematically done so – using drugs on more than 60 occasions. Approximately one in five (19 per cent, n=29) had taken drugs on fewer than 6 occasions and could be labelled 'experimenters'. Most of our sample (60 per cent, n=90) had taken drugs over the preceding 12 months with a significant minority (8 per cent, n=12) having done so on more than 60 occasions in that period.

Forty per cent (n=60) had used drugs in the past month and 29 per cent (n=44) in the seven days leading up to the survey.

Table 1: *Headline findings from the BeLonG To web survey*

	%
Had been offered drugs	89
Had wanted to try drugs at some stage in the past	65
Have taken drugs	65
Systematically take drugs	21
Have taken drugs in preceding 12 months	60
Have taken drugs in preceding month	40
Have taken drugs in preceding seven days	29
Have taken cannabis	56
Have taken poppers	44
Have taken ecstasy	33
Have taken cocaine	32

Participants were asked to identify the types of drugs they had taken in the past. Somewhat predictably cannabis was the drug most likely to have been taken with 56 per cent (n=84) of our sample having tried the drug at some period in their lives. Poppers (44 per cent, n=66), ecstasy (33 per cent, n=49) and cocaine (32 per cent, n=48) were also prevalent in the report statistics. When asked specifically about the last night out during which they took drugs, 39 per cent (n=58) of our sample had used cannabis, 17 per cent (n=25) ecstasy and 11 per cent (n=17) cocaine.

Twenty-one per cent (n=19) of those who reported a history of drug taking stated that they would ‘frequently or always’ take more than one type of drug on a night out. A further 30 per cent (n=26) engage in polydrug use occasionally. When asked about their last night out, for instance, of those subjects who reported taking drugs, 27 per cent (n=24) stated that they had taken more than one type of drug with combinations of ecstasy, cocaine and cannabis being most common.

These findings are largely in line with testimony provided by focus group and interview participants, most of whom had some experience of drug taking, and a number of whom took drugs systematically. As with the survey results, cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and poppers were the most common drugs taken and most of our participants reported moderate levels of drug taking typically characterised by occasional drug use during nights out. In the main this cohort tended to use drugs when they were offered by friends, but were unlikely to actually approach a dealer to purchase them. They were also unlikely to take more than two ecstasy tablets during a night out and tended to place greater emphasis on alcohol. Sean provides a typical example of this level of drug taking.

Well I suppose I would be more likely to take them [ecstasy] after a few drinks and just before going to the club. I wouldn't have to go looking for them ... to a dealer or anything ... but one of my group would always have enough for us all ... so I'd take

a couple over the course of the night. That would only be sometimes ... a lot of the time I just wouldn't bother 'cause we wouldn't have any and couldn't be bothered looking for a dealer.

Others, however, reported alarming levels of drug taking. Peter's 'last night out' illustrates the typical night out for drug taking at the high end of the spectrum.

Peter: *Well, this is what happened the last night out. I went over to a drug dealer, his name is Anthony, and I asked him for three [ecstasy tablets]. I gave him the money and he said come back in a while for them. Then I went over to another drug dealer and I said that Anthony said he would come back to me, but I don't want to wait, so will you give them to me now and Anthony will give them to you when he gets back?' He gave me three. Then Anthony came back and gave me his three. I took them all in one go.*

Interviewer: *All six?*

Peter: *Yea.*

Reasons for First-time Drug Use

Those who had taken drugs in the past were asked a series of questions relating to the first time they had done so. Fifty-six per cent (n=51) had been under 18 years of age when they had first tried drugs and 18 per cent (n=17) under 15 years old. Cannabis (78 per cent) and ecstasy (9 per cent) were the most common drugs taken during this first encounter. When asked to describe the reasons for taking drugs on this occasion, curiosity (80 per cent, n=74), a desire to feel high (30 per cent, n=28), a desire to 'be like others' (22 per cent, n=20) and to overcome feelings of boredom (14 per cent, n=13) were the most common explanations. Eleven per cent (n=10) linked their first experience of drugs with a need to bolster their self confidence and 8 per cent (n=7) blamed 'issues to do with their sexuality'. Most had obtained their first drug through a friend (75 per cent, n=65) and one in five (20 per cent, n=17) had obtained them through a 'dealer'. Sixty five per cent had consumed more than 6 units of alcohol on that occasion and just 16 per cent (n=14) had not consumed alcohol.

Echoes of these survey findings were present in the accounts given by interview and focus group participants. Sean, like many of our other participants, first experimented with cannabis, which later proved to be a gateway drug for further experiences with other substances.

Sean: *I remember being with a girlfriend and she was way more advanced than I was and she used to have mostly cannabis ... and we'd smoke it.*

Interviewer: *What age were you then?*

Sean: *15 I think.*

Interviewer: *Where would you smoke?*

Sean: *Well we would go to her place and we would smoke in their garden sometimes ... later we took Es when we could get them ... we used to buy petrol in a coke a cola bottle sometimes and sniff that too.*

For others, however, experiences directly or indirectly related to being gay appear to have led to drug taking. Mark provides an example:

It was hard being gay and growing up in a rural area. Particularly for someone like me who is prone to introspection and depression. It was depressing. You are going to use drugs and alcohol more than you would if you were in a healthier environment. You would be called names and people made jokes when you are younger.

Reasons for Sustained Drug Taking

Interview and focus group participants were asked to comment about some of the causal factors that led to sustained drug taking – as opposed to motivations for first time drug use. In the main these explanations centred on positive first experiences of drugs that led to habitual recreational drug use and the normative and widespread use of, and access to, drugs that has resulted in high drug taking in Irish society in general. In very few instances were factors relating directly or indirectly to sexuality identified, although two such accounts were narrated by Mark and Thomas.

Mark: *I was attacked one night by some guys. I was terrified for about a year afterwards and wouldn't leave the house. I drank and took a lot of drugs at that time. I wouldn't leave my house and eventually moved to Dublin.*

Interviewer: *And do you think that the experience got you further involved in drugs?*

Mark: *Yea. It did.*

Thomas had a particularly tragic story to tell.

Thomas: *When I moved I worked for a while as a 'house boy'.*

Interviewer: *Explain that to me.*

Thomas: *Well it's the same as a rent boy, but I was over 18 – but I looked a lot younger. I didn't stand on corners either, I was advertised through an internet service. I used a lot of drugs at that time.*

Interviewer: *Why*

Thomas: *To numb myself. I would do three each week [clients] and it wasn't always sexual. But it did damage me and I did use drugs to numb me from what I was doing. Ecstasy, cocaine, a lot of cocaine, grass and hash ... It would make you feel awful about yourself ... I would end up back in strange houses ... One time in Dublin I woke up naked on a bed and there were seven people in the room and it was mortifying. I can't remember what happened.*

Others reported taking drugs to boost their confidence when going out on the scene, particularly during the initial period after coming out.

Peter: *Yes it gives me more confidence. It really does.*

Interviewer: *Why is that?*

Recreational Drug Taking Among LGBT Young Adults in Ireland

Peter: *Well coming out on the gay scene was difficult for me. I was scared. Just being around other gay people ... Ecstasy helped me. Obviously I wasn't me on it, but if I didn't have it I would just hang my head. It's different now. Then I lacked confidence. I couldn't have a good night without them.*

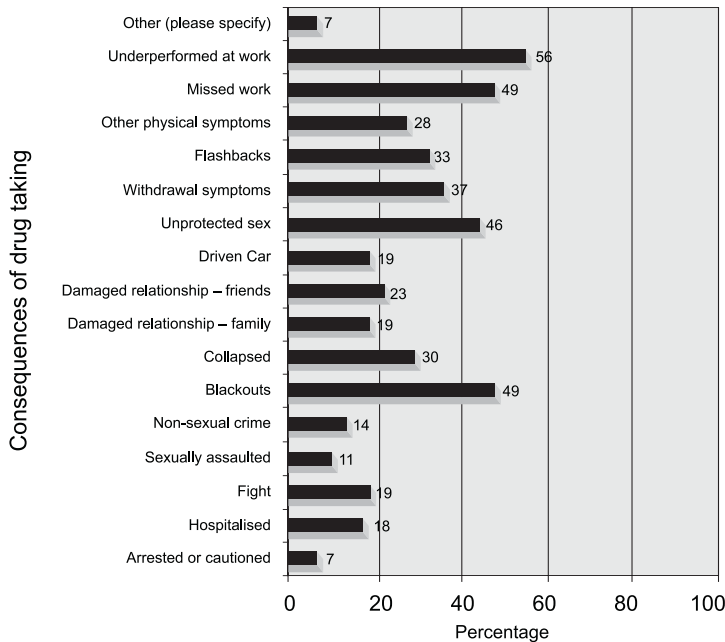
Interviewer: *What would go wrong for you if you didn't have them?*

Peter: *I wouldn't talk to people. I wouldn't, em ... be dancing. I would just stay in the corner all night.*

Problems Associated with Drug Taking

Those who had taken drugs in the past were asked about negative experiences arising 'directly or indirectly' from drug taking. Just 57 subjects were willing to answer this question and the small sub-sample size means that percentage results provided below should be viewed tentatively. This said, the range of side-effects and experiences reported by LGBT drug takers makes for dramatic reading. Almost half (49 per cent, n=28) experienced blackouts (becoming unconscious), 46 per cent had engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse (n=26) and 11 per cent had been sexually assaulted while 'incapacitated due to drugs'.

Figure 1: *Consequences of drug taking as reported by drug takers (n=57)*



During interviews and focus groups some participants readily acknowledged the problems associated with their drug use.

Sean: *I would be in bits the next day. They call it come downs. Your skin feels different and you feel fragile and you get depressed about stupid*

little things. You think back and say 'Oh God, I made a show of myself again'. Depression. I would get really depressed. Depressed about stupid things. Things that happened from the night before. Other things. Just thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking.

The issue of safe sex was also discussed during the interviews and focus groups and the testimony provided below illustrates the potential for drugs to reduce inhibitions and expose young people to high risk sexual behaviour.

Paul: *Yea. It's kind of funny when you're on ecstasy because you are aware of what you are doing, but not aware at the same time. You remember everything, even though you don't know at the time what exactly you are doing. I woke up next to a stranger twice. I don't think I had sex, but I don't know ... It does pose a problem for safe sex and I know people who it has happened to. It doesn't bother me much because in my group of friends we look after each other.*

Mark had a particularly serious experience.

Mark: *It happened once out in [Dublin]. I was 20, I had been out with a few friends. I got very drunk and [had] taken two ecstasy pills as I was leaving the pub and walking down the laneway. I went to the next pub and I remember sitting at the table and my friend saying to me 'are you all right'. Next thing I remember is going to the toilet and then I blacked out. When I woke up there was a man having sex with me in the toilet. I think I must have been getting sick over the toilet when it happened. I pulled away. I had always been so careful in relation to safe sex, but I had no control.*

Interviewer: *Did you report the incident to the Gardaí?*

Mark: *They would have laughed in my face because of the drugs and drink they would have said it was my own fault.*

Discussion

Among the on-line sample of LGBT youth, the headline statistics are that 65 per cent have taken drugs at some stage in their lives, 60 per cent have done so in the 12 months preceding the survey, and 40 per cent in the 'last month'. Fifty-six per cent had some experience of taking cannabis, 33 per cent ecstasy, and 32 per cent cocaine. These prevalence statistics are significantly higher than those reported in similar studies investigating drug taking amongst the general youth population in Ireland (see European Commission, 2004; National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 2006), although the absence of a heterosexual cohort in the present research makes comparisons across groups difficult.

Traditional explanations for *systematic* (ongoing) drug taking within the LGBT community were by and large rejected by interviewees and focus group participants. 'Raves', they argued, were rare and the 'dance' scene is apparently in decline. While some do regularly take drugs in pubs and clubs, most drug taking appears to be occurring in private houses and at the beginning and end of the night out – and with gay and straight friends.

Respondents accepted that peer pressure issues to do with their sexuality may have played a role in their first encounter with drugs, but stressed that it played no part in ongoing drug taking. Similarly they agreed that some LGBT youth might take drugs to boost their confidence during first and early encounters with the gay scene, but felt that this was of little importance thereafter. Overall they felt that their motivations for taking drugs were comparable to motivations amongst the heterosexual community and revolved around a desire to 'have a good time'.

One important finding here for those working with the LGBT community is that a relatively small but significant minority of LGBT youth (8 per cent) report that 'something to do with their sexuality' played a role in their *first experience* of drug taking. Thus almost one in ten LGBT drug users in this study first experimented with drugs because of some form of fear, or other negative psychological state, that was linked to their personal and sexual identity. It is also possible that young gay people experience the 'normal' motivations towards drug use (curiosity, a desire to feel high, conformity pressures and a desire to boost confidence) but simply do so on a more potent level and resulting from a greater need to 'fit in', a lack of confidence on the 'scene', a desire to escape reality and a deflated self esteem.

Another possibility is that these factors in some way interact with one another leading to a cluster of determinants that together create the major predisposition towards drug use. However, without further research, involving large sample sizes and utilising questionnaires designed to identify predictive models through regression analysis, these suggestions cannot be explored further and a definitive explanation for the findings will remain elusive.

In terms of the types of drug taken, cannabis, poppers, ecstasy and cocaine were the drugs of choice amongst the research participants here. This is in line with international research and studies of the general population. Worthy of consideration is the 44 per cent of LGBT youth who had taken poppers in the past and 32 per cent who had taken cocaine (just one per cent less than had taken ecstasy). Poppers are liquid chemicals (amyl or butyl nitrate) that are usually sold in small bottles and the vapours from which are inhaled through the nose. Once in the blood stream blood pressure drops and heart rate increases leading to a 'high' that lasts approximately five minutes. During this time drug takers report enjoying music more and, for some, intensified sexual experience. Others feel dizzy, nauseous and can blackout. When ingested in liquid form poppers are highly poisonous.

Poppers are legal in Ireland and can be purchased at health stores and sex shops. There is anecdotal evidence that they are increasingly being used by young teenagers who experiment with solvents and stimulants, and recent research from the UK reported that seven per cent of 11 to 15 year olds had used poppers at some stage in their lives – a doubling in prevalence rate since 1999 (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006).

Use of cocaine by young people in Ireland has been on the increase year-on-year since the late 1990s. In 2001 Maycock reported increased visibility and use of cocaine here, particularly by recreational drug users and in night clubs and pubs (Maycock, 2001). SLÁN (2002) reported that almost twice as many males had used the drug in 2002 as had done so in 1998 and among females the prevalence rate had more than trebled. There is also evidence that cocaine plays a prominent role in the polydrug use

culture in Ireland (Maycock, 2001). These findings are certainly in line with the current study which found that cocaine was a drug of choice on the 'scene'.

According to those interviewed during this research, cocaine is increasingly easy to purchase, and in some areas is now in greater supply than cannabis. The cost of cocaine has also decreased dramatically and it can now be ingested for between €5 and €10 a 'line', meaning that it is affordable for those in lower paid or temporary employment. Finally, interviewees and focus group participants felt that cocaine had developed a reputation as being non-addictive and low-risk – in comparison to ecstasy, for instance, which had been directly implicated in a number of sudden deaths of drug takers and led to others engaging in self-harm behaviour such as jumping from windows. (However, this research took place before a spate of drug-related deaths in late 2007 generated significant media coverage of the dangers associated with cocaine use.) Most participants rejected the suggestion that cocaine had become associated with the LGBT drug 'scene', arguing that it formed an integral part of drug taking for all drug taking networks.

A range of side-effects to drug use were reported by interviewees and survey respondents. Approximately one third had collapsed (30 per cent), experienced flashbacks (33 per cent) or withdrawal symptoms (37 per cent). Almost half (49 per cent) had blackouts and just under one in five (18 per cent) had been hospitalised. The fact that almost half of the participants (46 per cent) attributed having 'unprotected sex' to being on drugs is obviously a very serious concern for those working in sexual health promotion roles. Finally, drugs are clearly very detrimental to the working lives of LGBT young people with 56 per cent of respondents having underperformed at work and 49 per cent missing work.

The research has a number of implications for policy setters and service providers. There is certainly a need to promote awareness of LGBT issues among drug workers and medical practitioners. Young people require a comprehensive and non-judgemental service from professionals who show a sophisticated appreciation of the risk factors for drug taking. More education on drug issues for LGBT young people is also required, focusing in particular on the impact of drugs on disinhibition (sexual and physical) and vulnerability to victimisation, and also including resistance skills training and information about services and supports available.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on research commissioned by BeLonG To Youth Project with funding provided by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Pobal. A more extensive report on the research was published by BeLonG To in May 2007.

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Biographical Note

Kiran Sarma BA PhD is the clinical research coordinator for the D.Clin.Psych programme at NUI Galway. He previously worked for An Garda Síochána as a lecturer in forensic psychology and crime and policy analyst (2000–2004) and more recently held a teaching post at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick (2004–2007).

Address for correspondence

Dr. Kiran Sarma,
School of Psychology,
Floor 2, Woodquay Court,
National University of Ireland Galway,
Galway,
Ireland.
Tel.: +353-91-524411 ext. 5715
Email: kiran.sarma@nuigalway.ie

'Not that I wouldn't trust them, I trust probably two of them ...'

Exploring the Information Worlds of Ethnic Minority Adolescents in Ireland

Jean Henefer

Abstract

Recognition of the need to provide for the social inclusion of all young people was demonstrated by the Irish Government's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the drafting of the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children. The focus of international literature regarding the integration of ethnic minority children tends to concentrate predominantly on educational issues such as the acquisition of host country languages. However it is clear in this body of work that integration is more effective when educators and library/information specialists work in partnership to this end. Exploring the information needs and information seeking behaviour of ethnic minority adolescents can contribute to the development of policies that can be used co-operatively by educational and library services to expedite their successful integration. Findings from this study suggest that both ethnic minority and indigenous Irish adolescents have a range of information needs and information behaviours arising from membership of both the 'small world' of adolescence and 'small worlds' related to their social, cultural and/or economic circumstances.

Keywords

Ethnic minority; information needs; public libraries; social inclusion; adolescents.

Introduction

Prior to the rapid growth in information and communication technologies (ICTs), Daniel Bell hypothesised that society was on the verge of an evolution to what he termed 'post-industrialism' in which information and knowledge would play central roles. Describing the economic emphasis on services in a post-industrial society, Bell argues that 'what counts is not raw muscle power, or energy, but information' (1976: 127). In recent years, the 'Information Society' has become accepted as the term to characterise this societal evolution.

The Government embraced this evolution with the creation of the Information Society Commission in 1997 and the drafting of *Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: An Action Plan* (1999) that set forth strategies to develop and deliver electronic

government and public services to the citizens of Ireland. Of late, the Information Society Policy Unit (ISPU), established by the Department of the Taoiseach, lists amongst its responsibilities the 'development of an inclusive Knowledge Society' (www.taoiseach.gov.ie), thus mirroring the trend in other countries for policy makers to 'link the "information society" and "inclusive society" discourses' (Selwyn, 2002: 2) when developing social policies. While it is apparent that providing access to wide and varied information resources through the continuing development of ICTs can contribute to a more inclusive society, there is, alternatively, the potential for the technology to exacerbate social exclusion (Baum et al., 2004; Selwyn, 2002; Valentine et al., 2002).

Just as in today's society, those who do not have homes and jobs are at risk of social and political exclusion, so in the future those who are unable to make effective use of information resources will also risk exclusion unless social, economic and educational policies are introduced to maximise opportunities for participation and contribution (INSINC 1997, as quoted in Valentine et al., 2002: 298).

The realisation that having access to information resources and being able to use them effectively is critical in ensuring that the ongoing development and adoption of ICTs does not further the marginalisation of particular groups within society, has led to a range of initiatives to address the 'digital divide'. In terms of young people, the creation of the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) in 1998 and *Schools IT 2000* (albeit inadequately resourced) provide a framework and a mechanism to ensure that all young people leave school with the necessary literacies and skills to function in a world increasingly dependent on information technologies. Similarly the importance of developing children's information literacy has been highlighted in the changes made by the Department of Education and Science within both the primary and secondary level curricula.

The impact and role of information in the lives of individuals and society, as well as the question of whether the Information Society will be socially inclusive or more exclusive than before, makes this a rich area for investigation. This paper will report aspects of a research study (Henefer, 2007) that explored one element of the phenomenon, that being the role of information in the lives of a particular group of young people living in Ireland. The study set out to discover and describe the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents in Ireland.

Library and Information Science Research

The theoretical basis of the study is located in the body of Library and Information Science (LIS) research referred to as 'User Studies'. The theoretical approach to this area has shifted fundamentally during the last thirty years from what has been described variously as a traditional, system-oriented, or bibliographic paradigm (Kuhlthau, 1991: 361) to a cognitive, constructivist, or sense-making paradigm (Morris, 1994: 21). Drawing upon consumer research based in psychology, communication, and marketing, researchers and practitioners of LIS have recognised that it is essential to assess and understand the user's needs and satisfaction with the service provided. Thus, a growing body of research has moved away from emphasising the system and

the measurement of its use to a primary focus on the user, endeavouring to understand the user and his or her needs and motivations in all their complexities. By making the user the focus of the research question, it is believed that a more accurate definition of information needs can be discovered, leading to the delivery of a better service through improved systems.

Many researchers in User Studies have become interested in Information Behaviour (IB) research. Fisher, Erdelez and McKechnie (2005: xix) define information behaviour as 'how people need, seek, manage, give, and use information in different contexts'. Researchers in this area have investigated a range of activities within a variety of contexts in an effort to develop theories or explanations for the phenomenon of human information behaviour. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from other disciplines, including the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1983), the Principle of Least Effort (Zipf, 1949), and educational constructivist theory (Dewey, 1933; Kelly, 1963), IB researchers have worked towards developing a theoretical foundation for this aspect of LIS.

This exploration of the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents draws upon Brenda Dervin's Sense-Making model (Dervin, 1999). Sense-Making describes information seeking as a pro-active response to an individual's recognition of a gap in their knowledge. Additionally, the theoretical foundation of the study was informed by Elfreda Chatman's Theory of Information Poverty (1996). Acknowledging the relationship between information and culture, Chatman argued that the individual's information behaviour must be viewed from the context of their membership in a distinct socio-cultural group or 'small world'. Small worlds are inhabited by individuals who share common attributes such as language, traditions, values, beliefs, and who agree upon collective standards of behaviour within their world. Chatman's theory contends that individuals living small-world lives, because they are marginalised or socially excluded from the larger world, often encounter barriers and experience gaps in their information worlds. Chatman's theoretical framework is useful for the exploration of the everyday life information behaviour of groups like ethnic minority adolescents in Ireland.

IB research has focused predominantly on adults' information needs and information seeking. Studies of children's information behaviour are problematic, because children lack a developed framework from which to recognise their needs and often the means or tools to articulate those needs, if indeed they are aware of them. A number of studies have been conducted on adolescent information behaviour. The majority of these have focused on academic information seeking, retrieval and use (Gross, 1999; Kuhlthau, 1994; Limberg, 1999; McGregor, 1994; Pitts, 1994). While contributing to the development of theory, these studies are frequently concerned with the creation of programmes for the teaching of information literacy skills to students. Increasingly researchers of Youth Information Behaviour (YIB) have investigated young people's 'everyday life information seeking' (the term comes from Savolainen, 1995; see also Latrobe & Havener, 1997; Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Shenton, 2002; Todd, 1999) with a focus on the provision of more effective information services for adolescents' personal, non-academic needs. Within the developing body of YIB research a few studies have been concerned with ethnicity (Chu, 1999; Walter, 1994). For example, in her investigation of the information behaviours of immigrant children

mediators (ICMs), Chu found that the adolescent participants relied on people within their ethnic communities for their information seeking and did not engage with external, formal information systems to resolve their information needs. Chu's findings support Chatman's Theory of Information Poverty (1996) in that her participants did not leave their small world to find information. Studies outside LIS (Baum et al., 2004; Mossberger et al., 2006; Valentine et al., 2002; Van der Meer & VanWinden, 2003) indicate that ethnic minorities are amongst those groups most at risk of information poverty, and therefore social exclusion, in the Information Society.

Context of the Research Study

The Central Statistics Office reported that, between 1996 and 2002, the number of foreign-born individuals living in Ireland had increased fourfold and findings from the 2006 Census indicate that 10 per cent of the population is foreign born (420,000 compared to 224,000 in 2002). Information concerning the number of ethnic minority children in Irish schools is elusive. Ethnic minorities make up approximately three per cent of students in secondary schools (*Irish Times*, 25 February 2003). No such figure is available for ethnic minority pupils attending primary schools in Ireland.

In Ireland, recognition of the need to provide for the social inclusion of all young people was demonstrated by the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the drafting of the *National Children's Strategy* (Dept of Health and Children, 2000), the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children, and a range of other measures dealing with social exclusion among young people, including the Youth Work Act 2001, the *National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007* (Department of Education and Science, 2003) and various measures in the *National Development Plan 2007–13*. The focus of international literature regarding the integration of ethnic minority children tends to concentrate on educational issues such as the acquisition of host country languages. However it is clear in this body of work that integration is more effective when educators and library/information specialists work in partnership to this end (Champion, 1993; Skeele & Schall, 1994). Exploring the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents can contribute to the development of policies that can be used co-operatively by educational and library services to expedite their successful integration.

This investigation of information worlds is an extension of an earlier study of the information needs of ethnic minority children (Henefer, 2001). The latter sought to identify what were the particular information needs that children in primary schools had because of their ethnic and immigrant characteristics. The subsequent study expanded the focus of investigation from information needs to individuals' information behaviours when faced with both academic and everyday life information needs as well as their own interpretations of the role of information in their life worlds. The study set out to explore whether the participants, in addition to inhabiting the small world of adolescence, also have membership in other small worlds related to their ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, and legal status. Once identifying membership in multiple small worlds, the study aimed to explore the impact of this phenomenon on individual information behaviours, with implications in the short term for access to information, and in the long term for social inclusion. Different facets of information behaviour were identified as critical for the investigation including the

identification and analysis of their information needs, the sources they consult and the barriers they encounter.

While the focus of the study was information behaviour, the role of formal information providers in the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents was investigated. The contribution of libraries in enabling immigrants to integrate has been demonstrated in countries that have a longer tradition of immigration than Ireland. Caidi and Allard (2005) argue that provision of information is an essential element of social inclusion, defining social exclusion as an 'information problem' in this way:

... it has not been previously considered that social exclusion may also be an information problem: those without adequate access to information are socially excluded, and those who are socially excluded may also lack access to mainstream sources of information or the proper social capital (Caidi and Allard, 2005: 303).

Internationally, the public library has enshrined the fostering of children's learning as integral to its role as a public service. Therefore, as public agencies, it is generally accepted that libraries can contribute to the education and the integration of ethnic minority children into the host society. The view that the public library service in Ireland should address the needs of ethnic minorities was documented initially in *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1998), and subsequently in An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's *Joining Forces: Delivering Libraries and Information Services in the Information Age* (1999). An Chomhairle Leabharlanna has continued to address the role public libraries should play in developing an inclusive society as reflected in its report to the National Economic and Social Forum Project Team on Cultural Inclusion, *Realising Potential: The Public Library Service and Cultural Inclusion* (2006).

Research Design and Methods

In constructing a framework for the study, a multiple case study approach was selected. In order to extend the scope and depth of the findings and to contribute to the scientific rigor of the study, a triangulated methodological approach was developed. Child-centred investigations of information behaviour are frequently conducted in the participants' schools (Cooper, 2002; Gordon, 1996; Gross, 1997; Henefer, 2001; Large, Beheshti & Breuleux, 1998; Moore, 1995; Moore & St George, 1991; Pickard, 1998). Schools are seen as settings conducive for research because they can provide the researcher with access to a large group of young people with varied abilities, personalities, and resources who additionally share common characteristics. Similarly, the school setting can provide evidence about some information needs, how information seeking is influenced by the school itself, and it allows the researcher to work with children who are not library users, as well as with those who do use the library. This study was conducted in two secondary schools each with an extensive enrolment of ethnic minority students. The two schools were approached at the recommendation of an NGO working with immigrant groups. Data was collected in three phases over one academic year.

The first phase of the study concentrated on gaining the insights of adults who had professional expertise in the needs of ethnic minority adolescents. Once permission

had been received from both schools’ principals, all members of staff were invited to participate in the research. Adults who volunteered to contribute to the study included nine teachers and two Home School Liaison Officers from the participating schools as well as a Senior Librarian from a public library in the schools’ locality and the Health Information Officer of an NGO supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each in order to gain their ideas about the characteristics of the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents, both from observations of their experiences with these young people as well as their professional viewpoints.

The second phase consisted of a questionnaire intended to gain a perspective on the information behaviours of young people, aged 12 through 18, both ethnic minority and indigenous Irish.¹ Provided with a list of information needs and information sources derived from previous surveys of young people’s information needs and sources (Latrobe & Havener, 1997; Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Shenton, 2002), respondents were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of these needs or consulted any of the sources during the past year. A total of 379 students aged 12 through 18 in the two schools completed the questionnaire. For purposes of analysis, respondents were allocated to broad categories of nationalities: thirty-five countries were identified by participants as their country of birth as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Questionnaire Respondents’ Places of Birth*

Place of Birth	Number of Students
Ireland	257 (67.8%)
Africa	54 (14.2%)
Eastern Europe*	44 (11.6%)
Asia	11 (2.9%)
Middle East	6 (1.6%)
European Union	5 (1.3%)
North America	1 (0.3%)
Central America	1 (0.3%)

**NB: At the time of the study, these countries of origin had not yet obtained membership in the EU.*

The third and final stage of the study consisted of a triangulated, qualitative exploration of the information worlds of twenty four young people in the two schools, twelve ethnic minority and, as a control group, twelve indigenous Irish students. While each school had richly diverse student populations, both schools’ senior management played a role in recommending the students who participated in the qualitative phase of the study. Nevertheless, it was anticipated that it would be possible to identify small world membership amongst the twelve ethnic minority participants as they shared common ethnic, socio-economic, and legal status characteristics. Meetings were held with the students in order to provide them with full information about the study and to obtain their own and their parent/guardian’s informed consent. By gender,

participants were equally represented in the study. The twenty four participants were generally aged sixteen to seventeen years, two students having recently turned eighteen at the time of the study. Amongst the ethnic minority students, five were unaccompanied minors, without refugee status. The ethnic minority adolescents included individuals who had lived in Ireland for up to five years as well as those who had arrived within six months of the study.

To initiate this final phase of the research, the student participants were given diaries in which they were asked to keep for a period of two weeks a daily record of:

1. Information needed for school
2. Information needed for life outside school
3. Sources they consulted for the information
4. Their feelings at the beginning, middle and end of the search process
5. The success of their search
6. How they might change their search strategy in future.

On completion of their diaries, semi-structured interviews were held with each of the students in order to explore in more detail the data offered in the diaries and to expand the investigation of their information needs and behaviours beyond the two week timeframe. As the final stage of the interview, participants were given an A2 sheet of paper and a range of felt tip markers. Each created a map of their personal information worlds, reflecting the sources they consulted; relationships or linkages between any of their information sources and the barriers they encountered in searching for information.

Information Needs and Behaviours within Small Worlds

While data from all phases of the study revealed a rich and detailed range of information behaviours, because of space limitations this paper will focus predominantly on information needs. These can be broadly categorised as Scholastic Information Needs, Survival/Safety Information Needs, Psychological/Emotional Information Needs and Social/Cultural Information Needs.² Table 2 presents the range of information needs selected by the 122 ethnic minority respondents to the questionnaire.

Comparing the selection frequencies across the range of information needs, those related to scholastic matters feature strongly. Those needs specifically associated with school work (assignments, tests/examinations) and future careers are dominant. Information regarding universities/colleges is the least frequently identified of these, perhaps because of the broad range of ages represented.

Survival/safety information needs are less evident with only health information selected by more than fifty per cent of the respondents. While seventy two (59 per cent) of the students identified a need for information related to personal health, only thirty nine (32 per cent) indicated a need to find information about health services. Similarly, two thirds (N = 81, 66.4 per cent) of the ethnic minority students did not require information concerned with government/social services nor had information needs related to money or part-time work (N = 80, 65.6 per cent). Of all of the survival/safety categories, information needs concerned with drugs and/or alcohol was the most frequently 'not selected' amongst ethnic minority adolescents (N = 101, 82.8 per cent),

Table 2: *Ethnic Minority Adolescents' Information Needs*

Information Need	Selected n (%)	Not selected n (%)	Total n (%)
Scholastic			
tests/exams	80 (65.6%)	42 (34.4%)	122 (100%)
assignments	73 (59.8%)	49 (40.2%)	122 (100%)
future careers	81 (66.4%)	41 (33.6%)	122 (100%)
universities/colleges	61 (50.0%)	61 (50.0%)	122 (100%)
Survival/Safety			
money or part-time jobs	42 (34.4%)	80 (65.6%)	122 (100%)
health	72 (59.0%)	50 (41.0%)	122 (100%)
housing	49 (40.2%)	73 (59.8%)	122 (100%)
medicine	55 (45.1%)	67 (54.9%)	122 (100%)
government/social services	41 (33.6%)	81 (66.4%)	122 (100%)
health services	39 (32.0%)	83 (68.0%)	122 (100%)
drugs and/or alcohol	21 (17.2%)	101 (82.8%)	122 (100%)
current events	41 (33.6%)	81 (66.4%)	122 (100%)
politics	22 (18.0%)	100 (82.0%)	122 (100%)
Psychological/Emotional			
family relationships	62 (50.8%)	60 (49.2%)	122 (100%)
religion	64 (52.5%)	58 (47.5%)	122 (100%)
relationships with friends	80 (65.5%)	42 (34.4%)	122 (100%)
Dating and relationships	46 (37.7%)	76 (62.3%)	122 (100%)
Social/Cultural			
sports	81 (66.4%)	41 (33.6%)	122 (100%)
entertainment	83 (68.0%)	39 (32.0%)	122 (100%)
travel/holidays	64 (52.5%)	58 (47.5%)	122 (100%)
extracurricular activities	60 (49.2%)	62 (50.8%)	122 (100%)
fashion/beauty	51 (41.8%)	71 (58.2%)	122 (100%)

with information about politics also selected infrequently by respondents (N=22, 18 per cent). The latter might be interpreted as supporting the findings of previous research relating to young people's general disaffection from politics (Lalor, de Róiste & Devlin, 2007).

Amongst the information needs that were later categorised as psychological or emotional, relationships with friends was the most frequently identified (N = 80, 65 per cent) on an exact par with the number of students who had identified preparation for tests or examinations as a need. Nearly the same number of students (N = 76, 62.3 per cent) indicated that information about dating/relationships was not a need.

Social/cultural information needs feature strongly in the information worlds of the respondents. Taken as a whole, over half the respondents indicated needing information in these areas (M = 68, 55.6 per cent), with sports and entertainment on a par, or higher, than scholastic information needs. Overall the most frequent information needs identified by ethnic minority respondents were in the areas of entertainment (N = 83), future careers (N = 81), sports (N = 81), preparation for tests or examinations (N = 80), and relationships with friends (N = 80).

In addition to the questionnaire data, an analysis and comparison of the qualitative data identifying information needs was conducted from the ethnic minority students' diaries, interviews, maps and the interviews with the adults. The qualitative data provided a rich complement to the statistical findings, in some instances supporting trends about certain information needs and behaviours, and in others offering alternative perspectives.

Both the adult and adolescent participants concurred that scholastic information needs were of utmost importance. The most critical of these were information about the education system, the need for English language skills, and having the resources to obtain educational materials. Both adults and the adolescents also emphasised the need for clear information about how the educational system in Ireland works. According to the adults, ethnic minority adolescents are often unaware that they must be enrolled in secondary school for three years prior to third level entry in order to qualify for educational grants. Many adolescents expressed concerns about obtaining necessary information in order to make plans for their futures. Despite consulting a variety of sources, they still believed that they needed additional information in this area. One adolescent described her experience at an Open Day in this way:

It didn't give me the answers I wanted. The people there can't wait to get rid of you. If you ask too many questions they just answer a few and then ignore you. They just want to get on to the next person. They try to say as little as possible.

In terms of scholastic information needs, all of the adults spoke of the need for English language skills, particularly in the context of functioning within the classroom. One teacher described language acting as a barrier as follows:

They can't verbalise what they are trying to explain because they just don't have the words. They get frustrated and end up saying 'Just forget about it'. If they aren't confident they can explain what they are looking for they will just say there's no point in even trying.

Some students reinforced the adults' view that while their oral English was competent, they continued to have difficulty with their written skills. Those who discussed this need indicated that they were all in mainstream classes and were not receiving language support in their schools. Another major scholastic information need was related to resources. The cost of textbooks required for the Leaving Certificate was considered excessive with examples provided of students unable to afford required materials.

In terms of seeking information to address scholastic information needs, there was a difference in perception between the adults and the adolescent participants, the female students in particular. The adults concurred that teachers were an important source in the information worlds of ethnic minority students. This view was not shared by adolescent participants, one student stating:

I wouldn't ask the teachers here. Some of them are not really, how can I put it, approachable ... you wouldn't go asking ... they wouldn't be my first ... they would be the last resort.

While the majority of students did not have access at home to the Internet, several participants indicated that despite feeling that they lacked adequate navigational skills, they relied exclusively on the Internet for resolving their scholastic information needs. One student explained her dependence on the Internet in this way:

Most of the time I just go straight on to the Internet. I don't know why but I do. The teacher was talking about abortion and I wanted to find the definition. So I went on the Internet. Maybe talking to somebody might have helped. But who would I talk to? That's the problem. I don't know.

Survival/safety information needs were discussed readily by the adults including ethnic minority adolescents' need to acclimatise themselves to their new environment, navigating their new surroundings, and locating things. The adolescents confirmed the adults' view, especially in the first weeks after arrival, that there is a need to learn about one's new environment. One student described his experience in this way:

I didn't know anybody. I would stay in my room for the whole day, I wouldn't see the daylight. I didn't know where to go. I was given a map, but I can't just be going out following a map because I would get lost. I was afraid.

Despite having lived in Ireland for some time, many of the students stated that they still had trouble navigating outside their local area. One unaccompanied minor said that during the six months he had been living in Ireland he had never gone outside of his immediate locality. He explained that he was afraid that leaving the area in which his hostel was situated would have a detrimental impact on his asylum application.

The adults discussed information needs related to the asylum seeking process including the need for straightforward information about social welfare entitlements and how the health system works. All of the unaccompanied minors spoke during their interviews about needing information about entitlements. In the absence of parents or family, they needed not only to identify what they were entitled to, but how to apply for entitlements. One participant related his ongoing difficulties obtaining his Child Benefit as follows:

I filled the form and sent it back to Social Welfare. They sent another form and I filled it out and sent it. But they never replied. I have been doing this for the past two years now. Most of the information I got was from friends I made in the hostel. But they didn't tell me that I had to get someone to claim it for me, they just told me to get it and send it in.

Similarly, participants discussed the need for information about the asylum process, in particular the steps one should take if the initial application has been turned down. One student described his needs in this way:

I would love to continue my studies, but there is no way for me to go on unless I get Leave to Remain. I don't really understand what it all means. I don't know about the people making decisions. I don't know what is going to happen.

Economic survival was identified as a need by some students when they included the need for information about part-time employment in their information worlds. Several needed information about part-time work because of their families' economic difficulties in Ireland.

Gatekeeping emerged as an information behaviour within participants' small worlds. Their activities ranged from finding the meaning of English words for their parents, negotiating the health system, gathering information about places in schools for themselves and younger siblings, as well as accessing legal services for asylum applicants and refugees. One participant recalled the following incident:

My dad, a few years ago he gave me the address of a kind of lawyer thing and he asked me to find information on our case. I talked to the people there. And then I brought back whatever they said to me there. Because you know his English is not very good.

Survival/safety information needs feature strongly in the information worlds of the adolescent participants and were also perceived by the adults as critical. The sources that adolescents, particularly the unaccompanied minors, consulted to resolve survival/safety information needs often seemed limited to those located within their small world. One participant summarised this trend in the following way:

It is hard to know anything but what your friends know. It's all based around the people you are staying with. You know what they know. If they give you information, if it is right or wrong, it's what they know, so that's what you know as well. If the information is, like, it is the one you have to be happy with.

Despite receiving inadequate or inaccurate information from within their small world, participants continued to rely on these sources for subsequent information seeking.

In discussing ethnic minority adolescents' psychological/emotional information needs, the adult participants tended to make distinctions about well-being associated with events in the past, present, and future. One teacher explained his concerns as follows:

I think a lot of them are damaged when they arrive and I don't know if they get any help or are just put into the system. Some of them definitely don't get anything. What happens at Christmas ... where do they go, what's happening, who is looking after them?

The adults described ethnic minority adolescents' need to feel wanted and valued by the school community. This was not as evident from the students. Apart from a few participants who discussed their continued interest and involvement in extracurricular activities at school, most seemed somewhat detached from the school community. One student expressed her own feelings as follows:

I try to keep it separate. I don't know if that is good or not but I don't talk a lot about my life with people at school. Not that I wouldn't trust them, I trust probably two of them, but I have friends outside I rely on.

Adults also spoke of information needs related to adolescence as a developmental life phase, but with particular meaning for ethnic minority young people either because they have to be overly dependent on parents in their new environment or because they must assume too much responsibility as a gatekeeper or because of their unaccompanied circumstances. Data from both the adults and adolescents suggest that psychological/emotional information needs can be exacerbated by the individual's asylum status. It is difficult to make future plans when one's status remains unresolved. Being left in a state of limbo, with no indication of how long the process will take, particularly for those who are unaccompanied, can have an immediate and long-term impact on their emotional well-being. Added to the sense of uncertainty and impotence inherent in the asylum process is the daily anxiety some adolescents experience over their possible deportation back to the place which represents the original source of trauma.

In terms of social and cultural information needs, the majority of adults spoke only of the latter, focusing on the issue of integration. Some viewed integration as a one-way process while others shared the following view:

Integration for both groups ... the Irish aren't very quick to integrate either. I don't know if that can be done within a school. They don't see their own culture except in their own homes. They don't see any sign of it in school.

Only one teacher indicated that ethnic minority adolescents needed information about recreational outlets, such as sports teams, clubs and entertainment. In contrast to the adults, findings from the adolescents demonstrate that social/cultural information needs feature strongly in their information worlds. Some spoke of cultural information needs, but this was more to do with reinforcement of their own ethnic cultures than finding out about the workings of Irish culture. The majority of students, compared to the adults, identified a need for information about social and recreational activities. Because most of the adults who participated in the study were professional teachers, they may not have given full consideration of the everyday life information needs of their students and therefore did not identify social or recreational information needs.

Contrasting Information Needs and Behaviours within Small Worlds

They are at a disadvantage. The Irish have grown up in the system. It's new to the children who come in. Their needs would be very different. Development needs are the same but in terms of information needs, theirs would be much bigger (teacher).

This study set out to investigate whether the information worlds of ethnic minority adolescents were different from those of their Irish peers. Comparing data from both ethnic minority and Irish participants suggest that while there are facets common to both groups, there are also significant differences.

A major difference between the information worlds of the two groups is in terms of the range of their information needs. For both groups these needs are prompted by both contextual determinants related to their social, cultural and/or economic circumstances as well as developmental determinants associated with their adolescence. Like their ethnic minority peers, Irish participants identified information needs related to school, future careers, recreation, and maturation. The most commonly shared information need category identified by all participants was scholastic. In describing their information seeking to fulfil scholastic information needs, many Irish participants indicated that they had limited access to information technology. Common amongst participants, regardless of ethnicity, was the identification of inadequate information literacy skills as an information barrier. The Irish participants concurred with their ethnic minority peers that they felt frustrated using electronic resources because they believed they lacked adequate navigational skills.

Apart from needs related to stages of adolescent development, there was little indication that psychological/emotional needs featured as strongly in the information worlds of the Irish participants. For example, few alluded to a need to establish plans for the future in order to have a sense of well-being as compared to all of the ethnic minority participants. Irish participants were more relaxed in their information seeking about third level education, as demonstrated by one Irish student who stated:

I don't see much point in worrying because I've got loads of time to choose. I can pick a college course later on when I do the Leaving Cert. We have been given information on it, but I just don't listen. I suppose I am kind of lazy and I will let it flow and wait till the last three days and then panic. That's the plan really. Some people already have their whole thing planned out, but they are a rarity in the class.

In contrast Irish participants shared with their ethnic minority peers the social/cultural need for information related to recreation. It was clear from the data that young people in Ireland, regardless of their ethnicity, are in need of activities and outlets in which they can socialise with people their own age. Similar to their ethnic minority classmates, half of the Irish participants, residing in inner city neighbourhoods, described their lack of experience with and knowledge of the world outside their own locality as an information barrier. One of the Irish students explained his small world in this way:

I keep my private life and my school life completely separate. I am best mates with young fellas here but I don't see them outside school. It's a completely different world. I never would call them and ask them to go to the pictures or something. I could walk to them but I have to keep around my area. Because I have friends in my area, so if I ever wanted to go to them, they would be like 'you are moving away from your friends ... it's not very nice'. Stuff like that.

Several of the Irish participants abandoned plans to pursue a particular career because it entailed leaving Dublin and subsequently had explored no other options. Inner city Irish participants discussed anxiety about travelling outside their locality, some adolescents expressing a fear of getting lost. In this way, they shared the same concerns of some of the unaccompanied minors who were reluctant to move outside their own small world environment.

Despite some variation in the nature and extent of their needs, those identified in this study suggest that both indigenous Irish and ethnic minority adolescents have a range of information needs arising from both membership in the small world of adolescence and small worlds related to their social, cultural and/or economic circumstances.

Discussion and Conclusion

The range of information needs identified during this study and the nature of the information seeking behaviour among ethnic minority adolescents in particular contexts, support the premise that these young people live what Chatman (1996) would characterise as small world lives. However, this study goes further in demonstrating how an individual's membership in multiple small worlds can affect the nature of their information world. The information needs of the ethnic minority participants in this study are extensive and varied because they not only must make sense of the outside adult world from their adolescent small world, but also, equally, are required to make sense of the larger world of the host community from their ethnic minority small world. Additionally, the nature of their information seeking and their ability to construct personalised understandings are also determined by their membership in these two small worlds. In this study, the ethnic minority participants' information needs and information behaviours are products of adolescence coupled with their personalised social contexts, in these cases determined by ethnicity, familial circumstances and legal status.

The findings demonstrate that ethnic minority adolescents limit their information seeking from human sources primarily to other members of their small worlds, whether they are fellow residents of their hostel accommodation or individuals who belong to the same ethnic network. Participants in this study avoided using human sources who would be considered members of the larger world (Chatman, 1996; Pendleton & Chatman, 1998). They continue to restrict their searching within the parameters of their small world, even though, on occasion, they have had the experience that the information they received was biased or inaccurate or insufficient. Some participants avoided approaching outsiders for information by relying on the Internet for most of their information seeking, even in situations where they knew that the information would be more accessible from an outsider. For these students information technology, while providing them privacy, acts to further isolate and marginalise them. Their reluctance to consult human sources, including other adolescents, who were not members of their ethnic small world, supports Chatman's 'Propositional Statement 5' that members of a small world will not go outside their world to find information. Participants spoke of not trusting individuals outside their minority networks and their impression that outsiders were not approachable. Anecdotal data from the adults suggested that ethnic minority adolescents, particularly those who are seeking refugee status, are often reluctant to reveal needs. This secrecy,

defined by Chatman (1996) as a self-protective behaviour, in part, is related to concerns about possible consequences particularly with respect to obtaining asylum. Thus, in terms of information seeking in both academic and everyday life contexts, the participants are affected by both the social norms and self-protective behaviours of small world lives. However, many of the adolescent participants did seem willing to adopt a different strategy when they felt that the information need was critical and not one that could be resolved in their small world. A common example of this was their willingness to consult with representatives from third level institutions about future educational options. Because they are motivated to take advantage of the educational opportunities in Ireland and to build solid futures for themselves, they were able to risk going outside their small worlds to gain the information they needed to fulfil their long-term life goals. Within both the adolescent small world and the ethnic small world, this type of information was perceived by members collectively as critical and unavailable from sources within the small worlds. This finding supports elements of Chatman's Theory of Life in the Round (Proposition 6) in that information seeking outside the small world will be deemed an acceptable behaviour when the information need is identified as essential.

By exploring how individuals inhabit their information worlds, IB research can contribute to the development of information services that more effectively address the needs of users. For example, this study illustrates that access to ICTs varies among adolescents in Ireland depending primarily on the individual's socio-economic circumstances. Similar to earlier studies (Valentine et al., 2002), this research demonstrates that access to ICTs alone will not eradicate information poverty. Ethnic minority and Irish participants in this study stated that they were often frustrated in their electronic information seeking. This was the result of a lack of information literacy skills. Despite investment in equipping all schools in Ireland with ICTs and Broadband, there is a need for educators and LIS practitioners to work collaboratively to ensure that students are able to develop their information literacy skills.

Research into the unique information needs of diverse social groups is necessary to determine the nature and degree of information services that should be provided. However, the research can only be productive if there is the will to support the provision of appropriate services. The findings from the exploration of ethnic minority adolescents' information worlds confirm previous research indicating that there is a lack of communication, co-ordination, and co-operation between the range of agencies that offer services to asylum-seeking and refugee children in Ireland (Whyte & Byrne, 2005). While it is important to acknowledge the work of non-formal educators in providing young people in Ireland with information (through the National Youth Information Network supported by the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science), schools also have a clear responsibility not only for the education but also the integration of immigrant children and adolescents. Many schools are expected to do so without adequate funding or resources. By investigating the information resources that are freely available, for example those that can be found in public libraries, schools may find these challenges more achievable. There is clearly a need to create a more robust co-operative relationship between secondary schools and the public libraries in order to enhance the information worlds of all young people in Ireland.

Notes

- 1 It is recognised that 'indigenous' and 'ethnic minority' are not mutually exclusive categories. For instance it is widely accepted that the Traveller community forms a longstanding indigenous ethnic minority in Ireland. However, given the very significant recent inward migration in Ireland this research focuses specifically on the information worlds of foreign-born ethnic minority adolescents.
- 2 These categories emerged during the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data once all three phases of data collection had been completed.

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Biographical Note

Jean Henefer has worked as an educator, librarian, and researcher in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and North America. Since 2001 she has concentrated her research interests on the developing field of Youth Information Behaviour with a particular focus on marginalisation. This work has been based in the School of Information and Library Studies, University College Dublin. Research for her doctoral dissertation, *The Information Worlds of Ethnic Minority Adolescents in Ireland*, received the support of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Office of the Minister for Children.

Address

Jean Henefer,
6 Carlton Villas,
Novara Avenue,
Bray,
Co Wicklow.
Email: jean.henefer@gmail.com

Research Digest

Management and Motivation: The Views of Professional Youth Workers

Findings from an Exploratory Study

Deirdre Bigley

Introduction

This paper presents findings from a small-scale qualitative study (six in-depth interviews) designed to elicit the views and perceptions of professional youth work staff of the way in which they are managed and of the impact of management (and other aspects of their organisational structures and processes) on their motivation and performance (Bigley, 2006). While the theoretical framework for the study was influenced by a range of key thinkers in management theory and the study of human motivation (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg et al, 1959; McClelland 1988; Geen, 1995), the interview schedule was structured specifically to reflect the ideas of Linda Ford (2005) on 'motivation engines' and of Dean Spitzer (1995) on 'demotivators'. Ford was directly influenced by Spitzer, and motivation engines – as the term suggests – are conceived as being the opposite of demotivating forces and factors.

In the following pages each motivating engine or demotivator is very briefly introduced and the experiences and opinions of the respondents are then summarised, with extensive use of verbatim quotation. While this is an exploratory study which makes no claim to being representative of the youth work sector as a whole, or even of paid employees within the sector, it does provide an insight into the circumstances and perceptions of one group of staff at a time when issues related to management and supervision, professionalism and professionalisation, and the implementation of quality standards are increasingly of concern to employers, providers and practitioners.

Profiles of the respondents

Respondents will be referred to using the anonymised and abbreviated form YW [youth worker] 1, 2 and so on. YW1 is female and has been working within her organisation for almost eight years – this has been her only employer in the sector. She works with a small locally-based team, in separate offices to those of the organisation headquarters from where her manager works. YW1 works with young people aged between 8–25 years from socio-economically disadvantaged areas and she sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW2 is female, has been working in the field of youth work for over seven years and is with her current employer for just under a year. She works with a small team, is based in the same building as her manager and her work with young people is located

in separate buildings. YW2 sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW3 is male, has over eighteen years experience working in the sector in both a voluntary and paid capacity, has worked with five previous youth organisations and has been working with his current employer for under a year. He manages a small team and works directly with young people aged between 8–25 years. He is based in the same building as his colleagues and his work with young people is located in separate buildings. YW 3 sees himself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW4 is male, has seven years experience in the sector, has worked with one previous youth organisation and has been working with his current employer for over six years. Supported by a small number of volunteers, he works with young people between the ages of 12–18 years. YW 4 is based in the building he also uses for youth work purposes which is located a number of kilometres away from head office, where management is based. YW 4 does not see himself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW5 is female, has over twelve years experience in the sector, has worked for two previous employers and has been working with her current organisation for five years. Supported by a small number of volunteers, she works with young people aged between 12–18 years. YW 5 is based in the building she also uses for youth work purposes which is located a number of kilometres away from head office, where management works. YW5 sees herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

YW6 is female and has been working with her current employer for just under eight years – she has worked with no previous employer in the sector. She works with a small team and with young people aged 7 – 18 years. Her offices and youth work space are in the same building as her manager. YW6 does not see herself working with the same organisation in five years time.

Ford's engines of motivation

Lynda Ford's (2005) motivation engines provide a practical and valuable model which identifies triggers that drive employees to want to succeed. These engines arise out of eight major desires – activity, ownership, power, affiliation, competence, achievement, recognition and meaning. The data collected in the in-depth interviews with youth workers is presented below using Ford's framework.

Engine of ownership

This relates to the desire to establish ownership of both tangible and intangible possessions as well as the need to have a sense of safety, security and commitment from one's employer. It encompasses terms and conditions of employment, working conditions, clarity of role and levels of autonomy, quality of relationship with management, the extent to which an employee feels listened to and the extent to which an employee feels their input is valued.

Terms and conditions of employment and working conditions

All six interviewees have job descriptions and contracts of employment and all are satisfied with their current remuneration. Health and safety issues are a major concern for four of them. Issues raised include ventilation, lighting and heating, hazards arising from buildings poor state of repair, overcrowding and dampness. Respondents

referred to heating, ventilation and lighting as *'wholly inadequate'*, *'dangerous'* and *'risky'*. One of the respondents indicated that no health and safety policy was in place, claiming that *'having young people there, I feel I'm really taking a chance'*. In all other cases, health and safety policies were in place; however outside of their own premises, the respondents' employers did not apply such policies or strive to adhere to their own standards and procedures.

The respondents also found the building where they carried out their youth work practice to be unsuitable. Room sizes, overcrowding, multiple use and noise are the principle problems. One respondent found her workspace *'too small for the required purpose of running group work with young people'*. Another stated that her youth work space was constantly interrupted by external sources making large group work *'almost an impossibility at times'*.

Work spaces are also felt to be inappropriate and their keyholders lay down conditions which create great difficulties for youth work practice. Hostility towards young people with perceived challenging behaviour, refusing to allow certain activities to take place and unreasonable demands regarding noise levels are all encountered. One respondent said that art and crafts work is prohibited and art work is not permitted to be displayed on the walls – *'the caretaker complains about blue tack marks on the walls, he can be quite cranky at times- in fact I think he is allergic to children!'*. Another keyholder has barred a number of young people from entering the building although they are members of the group targeted by the project. Another respondent has to restrict activities as their sessions take place simultaneously with a prayer group.

All felt that they were making the most of their respective premises and that that they had to, in the words of YW 5, *'shut up and put up'*. Each felt that there was no point in complaining because there was no other option available to them.

Clarity of role and level of autonomy

All respondents felt clear about their role within their organisation. All respondents also report high levels of autonomy in designing and implementing their work plans and programmes of activity with young people. They all felt that the restrictions they encountered arose from factors outside the control of their management such as those imposed by the buildings hired for work space, compliance with insurance policies and inadequate funding.

Quality of relationship with management, the extent to which employees feel listened to and the extent to which they feel their input is valued

All but one of the respondents feel listened to by their manager in most cases and regularly bring issues and concerns to their attention; however, this does not always lead to such issues and concerns being addressed, as management may be either unwilling or unable to offer a solution. Physical proximity to their manager is considered an advantage by one third of respondents with one third experiencing delays in communication because they are based in a separate building. One respondent stated *'because I work in the same building [as her manager] my issues are dealt with immediately, I have the opportunity to discuss things as they arise'*. Another who works in a different building stated *'sometimes she [referring to her manager] takes a long time to*

get back to you and you can get the feeling that you have been forgotten so you need to send constant reminders to get something done’.

Respondents perceived that length of service and local knowledge influenced the extent to which their issues and concerns are taken on board. One respondent stated: *‘I live in the area and I been working in the area for many years – any time I make comments or have an opinion I am most certainly listened to’.* Two felt that their input had greater effect when presented from the team rather than just on their own. One respondent said *‘As a team ideas are presented and accepted – however – on an individual basis, no. I don’t really feel listened to – people power makes the idea stronger when presented by the team’.*

All of the respondents felt that they had decision making power in their work, with each responding that they had responsibility for deciding the programmes and activities that they implemented with their young people. One stated that although sometimes programme ideas were suggested by management, the decision locally as to how it should be run was decided by the local team because *‘obviously materials have to be adapted to suit each particular group’s needs’.* All of the respondents also mentioned that the young people that they work with have an input into the programmes and activities that they participate in and they considered this to be important.

Engine of significance

This engine is driven by the desire to contribute to the greater good, a desire to see one’s role within a larger context as well as a need to feel appreciated and proud. It encompasses a clear sense of organisational vision and mission, a feeling of being part of a bigger picture, the extent to which an employee feels valued and supported and the extent to which an employee has a sense of organisational pride.

Clear sense of organisational vision and mission

Five of the six interviewees were not able to state their organisation’s vision and mission but believed themselves to have a general understanding of what it entailed with respondents referring to having a *‘general grasp’* of what their organisations wanted to achieve. All felt that a mutual relationship existed between their work and their organisation’s mission. YW6 stated that *‘We had a staff training event recently and no one was able to articulate the mission, however I know it has to do with young people and is relevant to my work’.*

One respondent felt that the lack of a collective understanding led to an absence of a shared vision and mission and this had been highlighted during a recent organisational evaluation. She did not feel confident to adequately represent her employer’s mission and vision in public:

I have my own understanding of what the vision is. We have recently undergone an evaluation and this was one of the issues identified that needed to be addressed – the fact that we all have individual understandings but there is no shared vision of what the organisation’s mission and vision is. I would not be able to speak publicly in a confident manner about the organisation’s larger vision.

Another said that a vision and mission existed within her organisation, however she believed that it was not implemented and felt it was just *‘a mission on paper’.* One of the respondents was very familiar with his organisation’s vision and mission and he attributed this to the fact that he was *‘part of the working group who helped to develop it’.*

Feeling part of a bigger picture

All of the respondents felt part of a bigger picture. Four thought that this was due to the fact that their employers are regional branches of a national body and that they have a sense that through their work they are empowering local communities. Two of the respondents believed that the good reputation of their organisation at local level and the role it plays in the development of communities gives them a sense of connectedness with a greater endeavour. One respondent said *'I feel part of change within the community and I think that there's something good happening for everyone'*. Another respondent felt that her direct youth work practice and the satisfaction she derived from her work was a crucial factor: *'in reality I work with a specific target group of young people and I work towards bringing those excluded young people back into the mainstream'*.

The extent to which an employee feels valued and supported

All of the respondents struggled to respond to the question about feeling valued. All felt that their organisations could do more to make staff feel valued and that their employers are missing out on opportunities to celebrate the skills and abilities of their employees. One respondent stated: *'staff members are not as valued as they should be, I feel this is a lost opportunity within the organisation'*. Respondents talked about feeling some sense of value however this sense arose more from their direct work with young people than from management. They also felt that external agencies valued them and their work more than their own employer and they received more positive feedback from these agencies than from their own management. This sometimes resulted in opportunities outside of everyday work and two respondents valued the positive feedback this gave them – *'sometimes I get opportunities to do stuff outside of my job, staff training for instance, and this gives me an opportunity to use other skills which is great'*. Five of the six thought that they were valued by their own team and they felt the strong support of colleagues but felt that management did not do enough to foster this type of support and appreciation right throughout the organisation.

Two interviewees made specific reference to their boards of management and felt that the board did not understand the nature of the work. One respondent stated:

I don't feel valued by my management committee; I think they have unrealistic expectations. For example, they have an expectation that we would work a set number of hours in the office and this is unrealistic, because the young people require more time and this expectation makes us unavailable to them. Some management committee members are also volunteers and this can cause a conflict with the professional – for them it is a hobby and they can find it hard to understand why we don't have a 24/7 availability. Ultimately I think they lack respect for our profession and our professionalism.

Four interviewees indicated that they received most of their support from their employers through formal supervision. In each of these cases it was carried out in a formal setting by their manager on a monthly basis, and according to one of the respondents *'it is probably the only time things are taken very seriously between us'*. Supervision was generally thought to be work-task oriented, with the focus on *'solutions rather than problems'*. Two of the respondents felt that an opportunity to reflect on practice and on new skills would be of greater benefit – as one respondent said, *'sometimes just to have the space to talk would be great'*.

In one third of cases supervision was offered in an ad-hoc fashion and one of the respondents said they had formal supervision only twice in the last three years. Sustained support in the form of supervision is not a priority and can be cancelled or postponed by either party at a moment's notice: 'supervision is treated as a luxury and a movable feast where I work'.

The extent to which an employee has a sense of organisational pride

Respondents had given little thought to this issue and had difficulty responding. One referred to feeling proud of the young people with whom they worked and their own personal achievements but they found it difficult to state that they felt proud of their whole organisation. One of the respondents was clear that despite not always enjoying her job or finding it easy she always had a sense of the potential her organisation could achieve: *'Even throughout the bad times I always had a sense of the organisation's potential – this is reinforced by the tremendous goodwill from the board and volunteers associated with us'*.

Engine of belonging

According to Ford, for many the workplace is a crucial part of their social network and it may meet or entirely frustrate the desire to belong, to feel part of a group and connected to others. The fulfilment of such a desire is determined largely by the culture within the workplace and arises from policies and measures designed to promote and nurture good collegial relationships and team work as well as the nurturing of a culture intolerant of bullying, harassment and exclusion.

Promoting a culture of teamwork and good collegial relationships

Four out of six interviewees considered the relationship which management strove to develop with staff to be caring and responsive. One said that he was *'aware that the management is respected by the staff and staff members are respected by management, and I think that's very important'*. Another said that *'management are seen as very approachable but they're not always aware of what's happening. I feel that I am listened to eventually but things don't always happen as fast as I would like them to'*.

Two interviewees thought that there was significant room for improvement in staff-management relationships: *'relationships are very difficult and communication tends to be one way only – I feel we are continually talked at – relations have always been strained'*.

Another respondent felt that it was not possible to develop a good working relationship with her manager:

He seems to be very busy and wears too many hats. It really worries me to see him so overworked. It makes me hold onto issues for longer than I want to so that I will not overload him – I can see that he has 10 plates in the air!

The concept of teamwork was very important to all of the respondents – one stated that *'teamwork is crucial to the work we do – not only in terms of working with the young people but in terms of providing support to each other particularly during difficult times'*. Two respondents felt that teamwork development processes were necessary to accelerate the building of new teams but these processes were not promoted within their organisations. *'Our team is very new and we are cautious and hesitant about working things out together. We need to undertake some training together to move this on much faster and management have not taken this on board yet – but I'll keep pushing it!'*

All respondents felt that a culture of mutual appreciation and support was absent from their organisations – the emphasis was on caring for and respecting the ‘clients’ but this same approach was not promoted internally by management and developed from the efforts of individual employees. One respondent stated: *‘I think we are trying to be a small intimate friendly team but in practice, I think we can feel very isolated – I often end up feeling that I am on my own’.*

Promoting a culture intolerant of bullying, harassment and exclusion

All of the respondents indicated that their organisations have written policies on the prevention of bullying and harassment in the workplace, but that these are not applied in a thorough manner. One respondent said that she had no memory of anyone undertaking awareness raising or training events on anti-bullying or dignity at work:

We have a written policy like many other organisations – it’s quite a standard one – but there has never been any effort to raise the issue or sensitise all of us to the issue and how it can manifest itself – my sense is that it would be extremely difficult for any of us to address such a problem with management if it arose.

Another respondent felt that there had been a huge tolerance of bullying behaviour in the workplace for a number of years and a refusal on the part of management to address the behaviour of a colleague:

She was incredibly difficult to work with and treated all of us with utter contempt – she had been allowed to do this for so long that her impact on the organisation had become all-pervasive and very destructive. The problem went away only when she left but I feel that we have missed out on the opportunity to build our capacity to deal decisively with this behaviour – I do not know how we would deal with it today if it cropped up again.

Engine of recognition and achievement

Ford believes that the achievement of a set goal offers a sense of pride and accomplishment and when accompanied by external recognition can prove a powerful motivating force. It involves effective performance management and appraisal systems; opportunities to take on challenging or new tasks; public recognition for work and celebrating achievements.

Effective performance management and appraisal systems

None of the respondents’ organisations have a performance management and appraisal system in place and all of them felt that they would benefit from such a system. General goals and targets are established for the overall organisation but no specific goals or milestones are set with individual employees. Appraisal is *ad hoc* and conducted in the absence of concrete goals and respondents all found such appraisal and feedback very unsatisfactory. One respondent stated that she had *‘no idea whether I am improving at what I do – I don’t have a sense that I am identifying my weak areas and working on them or improving my strengths – I do not have a sense of making any kind of steady progress in my profession’.* Another two respondents indicated that systems are in the process of development and they were keen to see them implemented. One respondent indicated that *‘sometimes I feel I need more direction’.*

Opportunities to take on challenging or new tasks

There was a mixed response to this particular question with one of the respondents stating that she did not think there were such opportunities, but was not sure if she should place the blame for this on her organisation or on herself. Another of the respondents too wondered if this was a responsibility of her organisation stating that any challenging new tasks that she took advantage of she created for herself. One youth worker felt that she was *'constantly challenged to be innovative'* in her work with another stating that *'as there are poor facilities, weak infrastructure and little support within the organisation that this in itself could be seen as challenging!'*

Public recognition for work and celebrating achievements

All but one of the respondents stated that they received thanks informally *'as part of a general conversation'* but there was never a formal recognition of an individual's contribution to the work. YW2 worked under the assumption that she was doing alright and felt that management *'would be quick enough to tell me if I was doing wrong'*. Another was thanked both formally and informally and gifts were given to staff at Christmas time acknowledging the work they were doing. She felt that this was very important and contributed to her having a sense of value within the organisation.

All of the respondents felt that their organisation needed to recognise the achievements of smaller and locally based teams – while teams celebrated their own victories, these were never acknowledged by the wider organisation. In general, respondents thought that their employers were better at celebrating the achievements of the young people and the contribution of volunteers than those of staff members.

Engine of power and authority

Ford believes that today's manager must work at transforming the systems and structures of their organisations, ensuring that such systems and structures reinforce empowered employees rather than allowing policies, procedures and regulations to control and disempower. This includes providing opportunities for advancement; fostering empowerment and ensuring policies and procedures are not unnecessarily restrictive.

Providing opportunities for advancement

Half of the respondents saw no opportunities for advancement or promotion of any kind within their organisation and this was a frustrating factor for all three. One stated that for her *'there are no promotional prospects – the organisation encourages employees to challenge themselves but does not really offer any opportunities to do so but the work itself on the other hand – working with young people – certainly offers challenges!'* All three said that the lack of promotional opportunities would prevent them from staying with their employers in the longer term. The other three respondents felt that their employer did hold out real possibilities for advancement and this was very important to them.

Fostering empowerment

All respondents felt that having the autonomy to make their own decisions and freedom to make mistakes was very important. All perceived that they were empowered to an extent by their respective organisations and had control over the work they did. They felt that this allowed them to grow both professionally and

personally. Conversely two of the respondents felt that empowerment was a double edged sword: *'the downside is that when things go wrong – and indeed badly wrong – this results in there being no soft place to fall'*. Another stated that having control meant that he was *'left with the trouble that this might generate'*. One third of respondents felt that the greatest restriction on their sense of empowerment arose from a lack of information about finance and few or inadequate training opportunities.

Ensuring policies and procedures are not unnecessarily restrictive

The research confirmed the importance of workplace policies and the generally supportive role that they played in each of the organisations. One respondent stated when questioned that the view of the staff towards the existence of policies was that they were *'revered'* and are referred to as *'the Bible'*. One respondent felt that only very basic policies were in place and she welcomed the recent establishment of a work group to *'move them from being merely guidelines to becoming an integral part of the work we do'*. There was a sharp divide about organisational policies between those respondents that were part of the process of developing them and those who were not. Where staff had an input in designing policies, they felt they were *'alive'* and gave them a sense of ownership. Three respondents felt that to some extent organisational policies were *'just books on the shelf'* and although they did not necessarily experience them as restrictive, they had no sense of ownership of them or desire to implement them fully.

Engine of competency

Ford's engine of competency focuses on the self esteem promoted by awareness that one is competent and skilful at one's job. It includes access to training and development and encouraging the realisation of employees' potential.

Access to training and development

The research confirmed that access to work related training was considered important to each of the participants and valuable in terms of supporting them in their work. One respondent said that her employer carried out a training needs analysis with all staff annually and internal and external training opportunities were made available. One third of the respondents stated that there is no strategic approach to training and development in their organisation and training may be offered when a need arises and tends to favour those with seniority. Five of the respondents expressed a desire to do further training in a variety of areas.

Encouraging the realisation of employees' potential

All six interviewees thought that they were not realising their full potential in their roles – they felt under-utilised and all felt they had more to offer. One respondent said that as there were no promotional prospects within her organisation she felt that this limited opportunities to develop further skills as well as utilising existing ones. Two of the respondents felt that the lack of deliberate and strategic development of new teams left them feeling frustrated and stressed. Another respondent felt that extra funding would allow her to develop more challenging programmes and free up her time currently spent on fundraising.

Another respondent felt the poor infrastructure and lack of team support frustrated her own and her colleagues' potential. Finally another felt that since completing her Master's degree she had developed new areas of interest that her current role would not allow her to develop and this would be a deciding factor for her when looking towards the future.

Spitzer's deadly demotivators

Former academic and consultant Dean Spitzer (1995) believes that the true source of demotivation lies in the systems and in the implicit and explicit values that are built into an organisation. Such influences inhibit and undermine performance in a myriad ways and although they can be remedied, they are difficult to identify as they pervade the normal operations of how an organisation functions. He originally identified ten such demotivators which have been condensed into six key negative influences for the purposes of this research.

Demotivator 1 – politics and unfairness

Spitzer believes that employees are aware of and frustrated by unwritten rules which reward those who 'play politics'. In addition, unfairness which manifests as preferential treatment and special favours disbursed on an unequal basis can have a demotivating influence on a whole workforce.

Unwritten rules

Four of the respondents were satisfied that progression opportunities and routes as well as decision making procedures were open and transparent. They expressed trust in their management and had seen evidence within their organisations that '*playing politics and currying favour*' did not produce results. Two respondents recounted incidents which had occurred with employees who had continually underperformed for a period of some months and compensated through striving to 'suck up' to the manager. In both cases, they were impressed with the professionalism shown by management when disciplinary proceedings were brought against both employees. One respondent said: '*I really respected what they [referring to her management] did and I think this whole incident demonstrated to all of us that it is the quality of work that you do which will advance you in our organisation – you cannot pull the wool over their eyes*'. Another respondent said that she was really impressed when she saw how management dealt with a colleague who refused consistently to work cooperatively and to take responsibility for her own workload.

For years, she had made her own rules and she had instilled fear in her team – they did all the work and she took all the credit. It was really galling to see her get away with this for so long. The new director took this whole situation on board and for the first time addressed it head on – she did everything according to the book and applied the same rules to her as to the rest of us. In the end that colleague left and while I think that was a good result, the best thing that has come out of it is that we really trust that our management ultimately is fair.

Two interviewees were most unsatisfied with the transparency of progression routes and decision making procedures within their organisation. There were no explicit policies in

place for progression and they felt that senior posts were not identified in a strategic manner but were created in response to the needs of employees whose main priority was to 'stay on side' with management. Both respondents recounted incidents where senior posts were created overnight and they felt that the staff members were appointed to them on the basis of their relationship to management rather than their abilities. One respondent said:

It was so unfair. This post was never advertised at all – we were simply told that this staff member was now in a new role. This incident more than anything else has completely undermined any confidence I have in our management – when we speak of transparency and accountability and fairness now, I cannot help feeling really cynical and I know that many of my colleagues feel the same.

Preferential treatment and special favours disbursed on an unequal basis

Just one respondent thought that all systems and procedures were clearly designed and consistently applied throughout their organisation. Policies were applied equally to all staff and there was an openness to adapt procedures or develop new ones as needs arose. Three thought that although systems and procedures were in place, they were inconsistently applied and implemented on what they felt to be an unfair basis. One respondent felt that her organisation had a lackadaisical approach to record keeping, planning and evaluation and the high standards applied by some employees received exactly the same response as the poor standards applied by others. She stated: 'There is no recognition of the effort it takes to comply with our own policies – it is as though they don't matter and I sometimes wonder why I bother at all!' Two respondents thought that systems and procedures were very inconsistently applied. One stated: 'Sometimes they matter and sometimes they don't and it is not clear to me where the priorities lie'.

Demotivator 2 – unclear expectations and constant change

Incompetent change management and ambiguous and ill-defined expectations were identified by Spitzer as significant demotivating influences.

Incompetent change management

Two of the respondents were satisfied with some aspects of change management within their organisation. They felt that change was well identified and that there was adequate consultation in relation to implementing changes but there was room for improvement in the speed at which such changes were introduced. One stated: 'You get all fired up and then nothing happens for ages – it makes me feel a little less enthusiastic each time we have these kinds of discussions'.

The remaining four respondents felt there was an *ad hoc* approach to identifying and implementing change – according to one respondent 'sometimes good, sometimes bad'. These respondents felt that consultation and communication about change was inadequate in their organisations. Two of the respondents felt that the manner in which their management went about implementing change demonstrated a lack of understanding of the process involved. As one said: 'They tend to agree on changes themselves, with no consultation, then signal them up very late in the day, literally impose the changes and are then shocked to find that they are meeting with resistance – I think there has got to be a better way'.

Ambiguous and ill-defined expectations

Just one of the respondents felt clear about the goals attached to each specific project for which he had responsibility. He also felt very clear about the expectations which his management had of him. The other five said that while overall strategic plans were in place, they felt the need for goals and targets for their own performance and did not feel clear about the expectations which their management had of them.

Demotivator 3 – dishonesty and lack of transparency

According to Spitzer, poor communications, withholding information, providing false information and refusing to admit and learn from mistakes has a destructive impact on employees' desire to perform.

Poor communications

All respondents perceived the communication procedures within their organisations to be very poor with responses ranging from *'could be much better'* to *'really terrible'*. Two respondents felt that there was an over-reliance on informal communications and inadequate mechanisms in place to facilitate formal communications. One respondent stated: *'We find out about things in our organisation through word of mouth and we have very few staff meetings where clear information can be passed to everyone at the same time'*. In relation to communication between management and staff, half of the respondents said that it was very good while the other half believed that it could be much better. One commented: *'If we were to be compared with a for-profit organisation we would fall way under the mark'*.

Two of the respondents stated that they had good communication between staff members and four were not happy with staff communications. While individual relationships between staff members were good, respondents felt that more needed to be done to create the space for new teams to build up their capacity.

Withholding information, providing false information

Three respondents thought that information on all matters was widely available to staff and that they were *'generally kept in the picture about new issues or issues relating to finance'*. The other three felt that their organisation released information on a *'need to know'* basis or that information was revealed in an inconsistent manner. All three had experienced incidents where information relevant to all staff was revealed to some and concealed from others.

Refusing to admit and learn from mistakes

All respondents thought that project staff had the freedom to innovate and make mistakes and all had experiences where management were supportive in helping to find resolutions. However, all respondents felt that when mistakes were made by management, they were not acknowledged, never admitted and they felt that this had an unhealthy effect on the whole team and deprived the organisation from learning. Two of the respondents referred to appointments which management had made against the advice of other staff. Ultimately these appointments did not work out and a number of them ended badly and had serious consequences for the organisations. Management has never acknowledged the mistakes made in these cases and one respondent said that she was *'worried that the whole thing could easily happen again – it's like a kind of denial'*.

Demotivator 4 – discouraging responses and being taken for granted

Little or no recognition of employees' contributions, contempt, ingratitude and disregard for their input over time will undermine and demotivate employees.

Lack of recognition of employees' contributions

All respondents thought that while they received thanks and recognition for their work from the communities in which they worked and from outside agencies, there was little or no formal expression of thanks or recognition of work well done from their own employer. On an informal basis, they received praise and thanks on occasion, but they felt that there was a difference between this and a public acknowledgement of their contribution. All of the respondents said that there were no recognition and reward systems or procedures in place to encourage best practice or a job well done and all felt that even a basic system would have a very beneficial influence on both staff morale and the quality of work.

Contempt and disregard for employees

All respondents felt that they were valued to some extent by their employers and none recounted any incident where they had experienced complete contempt and disregard. Two respondents felt that consultation and their inclusion in the building of the organisation was frequently tokenistic. One respondent said: '*Sometimes we are consulted but most of the time our opinion seems to be ignored and change happens regardless*'. Four respondents thought that when they did receive discouraging responses or when their ideas were undermined, it was due more to financial constraints rather than disregard for their opinion. All respondents thought that inadequate resources forced them to work beyond their job description and this remained unrecognised in all of their organisations. All of them felt that this needed to be rectified as '*resentment will definitely build up over time*'.

Demotivator 5 – unproductive meetings

Unnecessary, unfocused and disorganised meetings make individual employees feel powerless and produce a collective lethargy in a workforce. All of the respondents felt that in general their meetings were effective and in addition, two of the respondents had received training in this area.

Demotivator 6 – being forced to do poor quality work

Employers who have poor quality standards and provide insufficient resources leave employees feeling overstretched and robbed of the opportunity to take pride in their work.

Poor quality standards

All of the respondents thought that they were producing good quality work. Two of the respondents referred to a national quality standard towards which their organisation had recently begun to work and they thought that this was having a very positive influence on performance. Two others said that procedures for ensuring quality standards were currently being developed. The remaining two respondents thought that there was a need to establish quality standards within their organisations but they felt that management did not see this as a priority.

Insufficient resources

All respondents thought that their organisations were inadequately resourced both in terms of finance and staff. While they thought that this was a feature of the sector in general and did not necessarily attribute blame to their own management for such under-resourcing, they felt that management were not always aware of the compensations which individual employees had to make as a result. They cited poor promotional prospects; no financial incentives; no sick pay or contributory pension schemes, poor work spaces and conditions and overstretching due to inadequate staffing.

Conclusion

The findings summarised in this paper present a mixed picture of the perceptions of professional youth workers of how they are managed and of how this influences their motivation, and an equally mixed picture of other aspects of organisational cultures, structures and processes. Respondents were all satisfied with their terms and conditions of employment, but less so with their general working conditions. Significant health and safety concerns were raised regarding the buildings in which some of them worked. Management were generally perceived as being approachable and as 'listening', but organisational communications in general left a lot to be desired (and there were reported examples of relevant information being deliberately concealed). Perhaps not surprisingly given the nature of youth work employment overall, half of the respondents could see no opportunity for advancement within their current organisations, and there were some criticisms of the procedures for creating and filling senior posts.

None of the respondents' organisations had a formal performance management or appraisal system, and experience of the frequency and adequacy of supervision was variable. While all the respondents' organisations have written policies on bullying and harassment, in no instance were they perceived to be implemented in a thorough manner. The youth workers reported a high degree of inherent job satisfaction and pride in their work. All said they felt appreciated by young people, by the communities in which they worked and by outside agencies; but also said that recognition, thanks and acknowledgement of effort could be better within their organisations. Young people's achievements appear to be regularly (and properly) celebrated in youth organisations. In the interest of motivation and good management, the achievement of staff members should also be celebrated. This is all the more important since all the respondents in this study thought they were under-utilising their skills and not fulfilling their potential; and only half expected to be staying with their current employer for more than a few years.

Finally, the fact that in four out of six cases no quality standards were currently in place in the respondents' workplaces (although two of these reported such standards to be in development) confirms the potential benefit of a framework for the consistent implementation of quality standards throughout the sector. Although inevitably the source of some apprehension in the field, the pilot scheme being implemented in 2008 under the auspices of the Assessor of Youth Work is a welcome start to this process.

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Biographical Note

Deirdre Bigley MA worked as a youth worker for a number of years in both rural and urban settings before moving to her current role in management of the national crime awareness programme, Copping On. Although she no longer works directly with young people herself she continues to work alongside those who have a responsibility for working with young people at risk, and believes that satisfied and well motivated staff ultimately have a positive influence on the young people with whom they work.

Address

Deirdre Bigley,
Copping On,
Westside Centre,
Unit 1,
51 Main Street, Leixlip,
Co Kildare,
Ireland.

Tel: +353-1-6104384

Email: deirdre@coppingon.ie

Voices of Young People

'Choices and Constraints, Risks and Opportunities'

Some Perspectives from Young People in Kilkenny

Emma Butler, Kieran Casey, Bridie Devane, Lauren Lennon, Patrick Lennon, Samantha Mguni.

Introduction

On 25th September 2007 a conference took place in Kilkenny at the initiative of the Kilkenny Youth Coordination Committee, an inter-agency group representing a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. The purpose of the conference was twofold:

To provide an opportunity for youth and community workers to reflect on their youth work practice, to identify supports and resources necessary to improve service delivery and to identify gaps in provision.

To provide an opportunity for funders and service providers to identify and critically examine approaches used when working with young people in Kilkenny.

Among the contributions at the conference was a paper delivered by Jean Spence which forms the basis for an article in this issue of *Youth Studies Ireland*. Maurice Devlin also gave a presentation on the theme of the 'choices and constraints, risks and opportunities' confronting young people in contemporary Ireland. The main points of this presentation were made available in advance to a group of young people involved with Ossory Youth, the regional youth service organisation, and they too provided perspectives on this theme, drawing on their own direct experience. Below we reproduce in full the presentations of Emma Butler (15), Kieran Casey (16), Bridie Devane (15), Lauren Lennon (15), Patrick Lennon (16) and Samantha Mguni (14).

Kieran

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Kieran Casey.

A question I would like to ask everyone here is what choices do you think teenagers in Ireland have? I would like you to consider this while I talk about what I think my choices are.

A teenager might not think that they get to make many life choices but they do get to make some very important ones. The choices I do get to make include:

- What kind of person should I be?
- Should I smoke, drink or take drugs?
- What kind of job should I aim for when I am older?

Of course my parents, relations, friends and teachers can help me make some of these choices but they can also cause me to make choices that are not completely right for me. For example, my parents might push me towards a career that I wouldn't choose on my own or peer pressure from my friends might get me to start smoking, drinking under age or even taking drugs.

Making choices as a teenager can be extremely difficult, sometimes I will make the right choices and a lot of other times I will make the wrong choices, but I can learn from these mistakes and in the future I can make better choices.

Because people are basically the same wherever they live teenagers in other parts of the world will have some of the same problems as Irish teenagers. However they might have more opportunities because of better facilities or opportunities to work part-time. There are not many work opportunities for me because of a lack of jobs I could do and also because many companies don't want to hire teenagers. Opportunities for education might not be the same for all teenagers because some people have money to spend on private schools or grinds and others do not. Here in Kilkenny there are not many places where a teenager might hang out without getting into trouble.

There are many sporting and leisure activities I would like to try but can't because there are no opportunities to try them here in Kilkenny. Teenagers don't have much money and free recreational facilities such as gym halls, swimming pools or arts facilities would give them the opportunity to do activities that would help keep them out of trouble.

The main difference between teenagers in Ireland is that although everyone has some opportunities, some people have more opportunities than everybody else.

I am the kind of person who has high expectations of life. I would expect that in the future I'll get a good job, have a house and be married with kids. Everyone is different and these are just my expectations, other people might just want a job and live in an apartment for example.

For the moment all I expect is to have fun with friends and get a part-time job but I feel that I can achieve what I want in the future and maybe more if I really work for it. The things I like about being a teenager in Ireland are having the chance of a better education than teenagers in many other countries, the freedom to do a lot of things, having the chance to do things such as going on foreign exchange trips and being able to get help with many things if I just ask.

The things I don't like are the lack of facilities for teens, not having places for myself and my friends to hang out without people complaining and of course I don't like the weather.

Teenagers sometimes think that they can't make important choices, but a lot of the choices they are able to make can have a big effect on their futures. Making the right choices can help us achieve what we want from life.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my speech.

Lauren

Hi my name is Lauren and I am 15 years old.

I make choices everyday of my life, we all do. I choose to go to school, do my homework instead of watching that extra bit of television, take part in after school activities, meet up with my friends and help out at home but there are some things we can't choose like what school we go to. My parents decided what primary school I would go to because they probably thought I was too young to decide what's best for me. I think as we get older and as we gain experience we become more and more independent and get to make our own choices. Although my parents and family members still help me come to a decision, I rely more on what my friends have to say. I will pick what I want to do when I leave school, the subjects I want to do and the friends I will make. The personality type can help or hinder your decisions like if you're shy, outgoing, reluctant or willing to try new things. This plays a big part in decision making.

I live within walking distance from Kilkenny City and I think this benefits me greatly because it means that I am not reliant on others to make sure I get home. I believe that where you live does affect what opportunities you're given. For example, I think that living in the town offers more opportunities than living in the country because there are more things to get involved in and you don't have to worry about transport. I also don't have to plan what I'm doing before I go out, like some of my friends. This means that I can be more flexible with my time and I don't have to think about whether I'll be able to get into town or not at that time of day.

My expectations for the near future are to finish school. I hope to get a good Leaving Cert and get the points I need to go to college and train for the job that I would love to do. This I will hope to achieve because I am determined and self-motivated. My parents' don't pressure me to do well because they know I do my best and I don't have an older bother or sister so there is nobody to compare me too but I know for some of my friends it is different, even if their parents don't put pressure on them to do well, the thoughts of how their elder brother or sister did in their exams is in the back of their mind so they have to strive to do as well as them. For now I just want to have fun and enjoy myself. I want to continue the way I'm going in school but still have time to go to the youth clubs I go to outside school.

At the moment, I am too young to get a job but several of my friends who have already turned 16 are finding it hard to get one. A lot of the jobs have been filled by foreign nationals willing to work for little pay and employers would rather hire someone who has more experience in the workforce so this means that when, in a couple of months, I am looking for a job it is quite possible I won't get one.

What I don't like about living in Ireland is that it is in our culture to go out and drink every weekend. This happens at most family occasions like christenings, weddings, birthdays and even funerals. Even the media supports it. Drink companies support sports and in soaps the main place the characters go to meet up is the pub. Usually people are disgusted with the sight of teenagers falling around drunk after the Junior Cert all over the papers but we're just copying what we see every Saturday on any street in the local town and if society doesn't start changing its ways there is a risk that many teenagers will become alcoholics by the time they're in their late 20's or have serious liver damage.

Overall I like living in Ireland. In the area I live lots of opportunities are available to me. My friends and family help me make choices without pressuring me to do something I don't want to do. I expect to do well in life because of the opportunities given to me, the choices I have made and the type of personality I have and at the moment I just want to have fun and enjoy myself. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me and I hope you all enjoy the day.

Bridie

Hello, my name is Bridie.

For me, life in Ireland is very different from where I was brought up. I was born in England but I have lived in Ireland for nearly ten years now. It was a really big change for me but I didn't get a choice in it. I left behind my family and I haven't seen them since. I moved to a place called Claremorris in County Mayo but it's a dump there. I lived there for five years and finally moved here to Kilkenny.

When I moved here I made loads of friends. We get into trouble sometimes but it's worth it because you only live once so you might as well have some fun.

I hated the school I went to. I was going there for four years and those were the worst years of my life. But the one thing I did enjoy was art. I hated Irish, even though I got an 'A' in it for the Junior Cert. I got eight honours, one pass and one fail. Even though I failed English, I am still proud of what I got.

I have decided to apply for an arts & crafts course in Kilkenny Employment for Youth because I am too young to work even though I have left school. Schools are different in England compared to here. Like in England, you finish school at 16 years old.

I love my best mates, they are so much fun. They nicknamed me 'Bubbles' because I am so much fun to hang around with. There is nowhere for us to hang around. We always get into fights with the boys we hang around with because they think boys are better than girls in every way but it's not true. Like, I love cars and I would love to design them. I know cars like the back

of my hand, body kits, flippaint, engines, spoilers, rims – the whole lot. People think that is a boys' job but it's not. Boys think they are better than girls no matter what, whether it's their physical strength or appearance. Everyone in the world has the same opportunities. It doesn't matter if you are male or female and for people to think that boys have a better chance in life than girls is very wrong.

Do what you want while you can because if you don't live for today, you might regret it because tomorrow may never come. Life is for living and taking risks. If you don't take risks you will end up thinking back to maybe if I took a risk my life would be better but you don't know and that's what risks and life is all about. *Thank you.*

Sam

Hello, my name is Sam.

As a young person in Ireland I think that I have a lot of choices with what I want to do in life. I feel that I have control of what I do and when I do it... within reason. I think that I have a good social life because I live in town, which makes it easy for me to know more people and to do a lot of things unlike some young people that live in the country. I socialize with people through school, sports or friends.

I think that education is important in my life because I think it helps to know what you want to do and to have the qualifications to back it up. I think that going to a mixed school is better because it helps you to develop your social skills better with boys and girls in your class. Having said that I go to an all girls' school, which at first I found hard to get used to but two years on I don't really mind it. But I'd still prefer going to a mixed school.

Sport is a big factor in my life because it takes four nights a week. I choose which sports I play and what club I play for. I enjoy playing sports because I have a laugh with my friends and getting my exercise at the same time. Nowadays I think that there is a lot of pressure for young people to do well in sports, especially if your team gets to a final. The training becomes intense and a lot of hard work has to be put in.

I think that there is a lot of stereotyping around young people today. If you dress a certain way, you are immediately put into a group to fit society. I think that it's wrong and unfair because when you go shopping you don't buy the clothes that you would normally because you're conscious of what people might say.

I think that every young person faces the same risks no-matter where you're from or who you are. Some young people may not be as exposed to them as others. For example – drinking, smoking and so on. Of course I have friends that do these things, what teenager doesn't? But it doesn't necessarily mean that I do them as well. I think that we do have a choice whether to put ourselves in these situations or not.

Emma

Hello, my name is Emma Kelly and this is what it's like living in Ireland for me.

As a young person I feel I have many choices and opportunities for my life. I think there are a lot of choices for careers. Even if I don't go to college I can do courses or apprenticeships. But I have to do my Leaving Cert before I can make that choice. There are endless opportunities to do sport. If somebody is not into sport, there is nothing much else to do, except maybe debating or something. I've been on our student council for the last two years and it's been really good. Like the locks on the toilets never seem to be working but when we bring it up they are fixed. They listen to us, which is the main thing.

I expect to be treated fairly and not to be stereotyped but sometimes that doesn't happen. For example, me and my friend were recently just after walking into a clothes shop in town and my friend went to try on one skirt and the older woman in the next dressing room was there for a good while trying out outfits and looking around. But we were kicked out just after five minutes after trying on one thing and we weren't making noise or a scene. I wish that people weren't so stereotypical about young people. There are maybe a few who cause trouble but we all don't misbehave.

A typical Saturday for me is to spend it shopping and spending the whole day in the park. There's really not much else to do. Sometimes I go to the cinema on Saturday night. That sounds ok but if you keep doing it every Saturday it kind of gets boring. It would be nice to have a place to go and not get kicked out of, somewhere out of the rain.

As a young person, I have to face certain risks everyday. Like if I don't wear the right clothes or say the right things I can be excluded from what everyone else is doing. I don't drink but some of my friends do and sometimes that means I'm not in on the joke. Sometimes, I wonder is it safe to walk down certain streets in Kilkenny. There's also the risk of failing. I did my Junior Cert and I didn't realise how much pressure was on me until I went into 4th Year. If I didn't do well, I would have been disappointed with myself and I know my parents would have been disappointed. It made me realise that I need to work harder for the Leaving Cert.

But not all things are bad about being a young person in Ireland. I know we have many more benefits than other countries or people do. We have education, shelter and support. Overall, I like being a young person in Ireland because there are plenty of opportunities for my future and plenty for me to get involved in.

This is just my opinion, thanks for listening.

Patrick

Hello my name is Patrick Lennon,

Just the other day I was day-dreaming in my careers class when I was rudely awoken by a sudden jab in the ribcage. After a moment's thought I realised the question 'what will you put down on the CAO?' was being posed to me by a very irate careers teacher [the 'CAO' is the Central Applications Office for third-level entry]. It was then that I came to the sudden realisation that now was the time in which I had to decide the rest of my future and all at the tender age of 16. Suddenly all thoughts of freedom and fun left my adolescent mind and I had to resign myself to the fact that the choices I am forced to make now really will make or break my future. After this I will become just another number in the bleak world of the Leaving Cert points race and the CAO. Just last year my sister studied and studied so she could finally achieve her lifelong aim of becoming a primary school teacher. Yet when her results came out I watched as she was crushed by missing out on her course by five points. If the candidates were chosen by interviews I'm sure she would have been first pick. Now, even before I begin my Leaving Cert study I feel under pressure to do well. I think this is too much unnecessary pressure for myself or any other teenager to handle.

Therefore I find it extraordinary that it is the general consensus that young people in Ireland are a privileged group. I am constantly being told how lucky I am to live in Celtic Tiger Ireland. I agree of course that we are wealthier. And fortunately we have never faced the difficulties such as emigration, unemployment and poor educational opportunities as experienced by our parents. But are we really any further away from the survival of the fittest society in which our parents and ancestors lived? In my opinion? No. Now the race for survival is cleverly disguised as the Irish education system. This system effectively predetermines a person's future and position in society from the results achieved in a hectic two week period of exams at the end of June. Even the very intelligent get left behind if they do not react well to the immense pressure of the exams. What frustrates me even more about this system is the way in which the children of wealthy parents effectively buy a head start in life by attending fee-paying schools. These schools can attract the best teachers in the country all with the promise of huge salaries. This means that the pupils here are much more likely to succeed in exams, not because of effort but because of wealth. Surely in Ireland's democratic society this favouritism should not be allowed to occur.

Transport is often considered a problem which solely effects those who commute to and from work, but it is also a barrier which must be overcome by teenagers. I attend school in St. Kieran's College here in Kilkenny and therefore the majority of my friends live in and around the city. This then is where I must come, in order to see my friends at weekends. But because I come from a rural area, eight miles from the city, I am always at a social

disadvantage due to the problems with transport. The obvious option is to take a bus into town but the Irish public transport system is extremely limited and it is almost impossible to work around the infrequent appearances of the bus. When I finally do make it into town, then the real problems arise. Finding a place to sit down and chat with friends is almost impossible without attracting unwanted attention from security guards. And general shoppers seem to have an instinctive mistrust of the younger generation. Then myself and my friends go to a café or restaurant, but unfortunately problems are soon encountered here too. Non-ordering companions are always asked to move on and 'stop taking up the chairs'. Of course this is well within the proprietor's rights to do, but how come the same rule is not applied to that group of middle-aged adults across the room, only one of whom has ordered?

My favourite thing about being an adolescent in Ireland is the GAA. No other country has such a well organised sporting body which is so involved in the community. The value of the GAA to a rural teenager, such as myself, is immense. It's great being able to go and meet up with the lads twice a week and enjoy myself in a village which otherwise has very little to offer in the form of teenage entertainment.

So the next time a careers teacher asks the question 'what am I putting down on my CAO form?' I think I'll take all this pressure off myself and choose *jam making*. With only 25 points required on the CAO it seems like quite a bargain!

Thank you.

Scottish Youth Issues Journal



The Scottish Youth Issues Journal provides a forum for reflection on policy and practice and for the dissemination of research on issues affecting young people – from education, health, housing and culture to employment, criminal justice and politics. Drawing mainly, but not exclusively from Scottish papers, policy analysis and book reviews. It is aimed at academic specialists, researchers, practitioners in a range of disciplines and to those involved in decision making policies affecting young people.

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Reviews



Maurice Devlin and Deirdre Healy (editors)

Work in Progress: Case Studies in Participatory Arts with Young People

Dublin: National Youth Arts Programme/National Youth Council of Ireland, 2007. 172 pp. €10.00

Jim Cathcart

Visual artist and youth and community based arts consultant

This publication ‘offers youth workers, artists, policy and decision makers in the fields of youth work and participatory arts practice a range of possible approaches to working with groups of young people through the arts, and a rationale for the value of participation in the arts to young people’s general development’.

The core section of the publication is a collection of ten case studies, in the main provided by students of the NUI Certificate in Youth Arts course. These are preceded by a section of scene setting and analytical forewords, introductions and reflections, written by individuals who are connected to the course as organisers or course tutors. The case studies are aimed to inspire and to provide transferable models of practice. The publication also aims to identify common principles underpinning good practice in the experiences represented and to outline the impacts on both participating young people and practitioners.

The introductory section provides a useful description of the wide arena in which the projects described in the case studies take place. The background, contexts and diverse approaches to the work are examined as well as some of the key challenges and surrounding debates. In the editors’ introduction, a set of common principles emerge from a detailed and considered analysis of the case studies. These form a credible and cohesive statement on relationships, product and process, celebration, enhanced roles and the intrinsic value of art which experienced practitioners would, in general, recognise and welcome. The building of relationships is given a key place and this is something that runs in a very strong thread throughout the case studies. The age old debate on the primacy of product or process is briefly but deftly dealt with by positing the case for a healthy dialectic between the two.

I hope we would all agree with the editors when they argue for a holistic approach to youth work which includes the arts as an issue of rights. However, an area for debate opens up when they contrast the notion that ‘arts have their own unique and inherent value as part of human experience’ with what they describe as an ‘instrumental’ view of the arts which sees them as a ‘tool’ in the hands of youth workers or educators. If they are saying, as many of the case study authors would, that there should be primacy of aesthetic over personal or socially developmental aims then that is a valid position which needs to be respected and made clear when preparing for and negotiating a project. I would take issue, though, with the idea that the intrinsic value of art automatically disappears because a project comes about for social reasons. That will

depend on a number of variable factors. Also, in many cases the starting point for young people's meaningful engagement with arts is through the arts based methodologies of community youth work.

In their reflective piece, *Certificate in Youth Arts* tutors Rebecca Bartlett and Majella Perry offer a positive perspective on the dual and complementary benefits of youth art experience. When talking about increasing recognition of the value of the work, they say:

Within the sector itself, there is a sense of increased confidence in the artistic, aesthetic and personal impact of this creative endeavour....It is also evident in the value that is placed on arts projects as a means of developing the capacities for original thinking and throwing up more and more robust challenges to those of us who want to offer individual and group connections to a particular art form.

The editors also make a good job of extracting concise considerations of what practically contributes towards successful outcomes. This sits well with, and references, other available resources. Bearing in mind however that a lack of adequate documentation in this area of work is identified as a problem, perhaps a little bit more encouragement could have been given in terms of this.

The case studies themselves are situated in a variety of locations such as Youthreach, youth work, youth theatre and festivals with the resulting range in the profile of young participants. They provide us with a sense of the very wide range of art forms and approaches that are currently in play. There are fascinating stories here through which some of the passion, energy and dynamism of the initiatives can be glimpsed. This is not an easy task for the re-presenter by any means. The contributors are impressive, not only in their considered approach to the planning, preparation and executing of the projects but in the honest relating of the experiences and their own learning.

This is a collection which more than repays careful reading and re-reading. It is difficult to highlight any particular project or event because like a good album, the narratives and their detail register differently with each reading. On the last dip in, an incident from Carol Kavanagh's photographic project at an equine centre stuck in my mind. While photographing horses from the ground, the young people, energetic and enjoying themselves, wanted someone to get up on a horse to be photographed. The appropriate equine staff back-up wasn't immediately available to allow this safely so Carol had to pull in the reins on this idea (sorry, couldn't resist it). This small anecdote seemed to illustrate the immediacy and dynamic nature of art and young people and the constant minding needed of participants' well-being and the integrity of the processes they are involved in.

The impact of the *Certificate in Youth Arts* course is, not surprisingly, present in the case studies and along with other aspects of the National Youth Arts Programme's work is clearly contributing positively to the professional development of the correspondents. It would be interesting to know what a set of case studies produced by practitioners not fortunate enough to be able to attend the course would look like. It also raises questions for another day in terms of what other training and supports are currently making a genuine impact on the work and what else needs to be addressed.

One of the stated aims of the publication is to present case studies which can inspire and there is no doubt that it delivers in this. An additional outcome is that the case studies, in addition to telling their own intriguing stories, provide interesting models

of retelling. In terms of other aims, it does identify and articulate a set of common principles and good practice factors, and is none the worse for these containing points for further debate. It also does a good job in outlining the impacts on both young people and practitioners. I'm not sure however if it does provide transferable models of practice. The editors provide a more realistic description of purpose when they express the hope that '*students and practitioners, whether artists or youth workers, will...find that it contains transferable points of learning*'.

In fact, I would have been surprised had I been convinced that replicable models were presented. The question of models in participatory arts is an awkward conundrum. On the one hand, as this publication illustrates, there is much useful learning to be garnered from documented and evaluated experience that is of value to others embarking on loosely similar projects. On the other however, the devil is in the detail and to produce replicable models we would need to see ways of adequately detailing practical aspects such as specific roles and responsibilities within developed and understood frameworks based on clear factors such as location and approaches to participation etc. As this area of work develops maybe it will be possible to do this in a way that it has not proved possible in the past.

There is a sense of growing confidence and worth expressed throughout the publication, but this does not obscure an underlying sense of need for more sustained and resourced development. In fact the introductory section outlines a compelling argument for this which is supported and expanded by the testimony of lived experience presented in the case studies. In conclusion, this publication makes a solid contribution to the long awaited and much needed body of evidence on participatory arts with young people. As it was a substantial undertaking recently completed, it may be too early for those involved to hear this but I am already looking forward to volume two.



Paula Mayock, Karl Kitching and Mark Morgan

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the Context of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE): An Assessment of the Challenges to Full Implementation of the Programme in Post-primary Schools. Full Report.

Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency and Department of Education and Science, 2007. 267 pp. Available as a free download from Crisis Pregnancy Agency: www.crisispregnancy.ie

Mary Crawford

Manager,
Brook Advisory Centre, Belfast

In the mid-1990s those of us in the North involved in sex education and the provision of services were extremely envious of our colleagues in the South because of the introduction of their Relationships and Sexuality Education programme. This was seen as a major move forward in providing information and knowledge that would allow young people to make informed choices with regard to their sexual health. The scope

and possibilities were viewed as a positive forward thinking piece of work by the Department of Education and Science. We all looked forward to positive outcomes for young people in the South.

Historically the island of Ireland has often been viewed as a virtuous, religious and holy place, which has belied the real experiences of sexual expression of all generations and in particular young people. In reviewing this research report it is important to remember the social context in which the programme is delivered. As Professor Phil Scraton (Queens University) suggests, young people are living in a popular culture obsessed with heterosexual relations and the messages they get are confused, in a society where:

... young people are expected to remain passive onlookers locked in a kind of unquestioning childhood innocence. It is as if their age confers immunity from matters sexual, that by some mysterious process they will know the right time to ask appropriate questions and receive informed answers. Meanwhile, as adults in waiting they need protection. Protection from strangers, protection from evil, protection from impure thoughts, protection from moral degeneration and crucially protection from their own bodies, the very potential of their personal physicality (Scraton, 2007).

Scraton believes that this obsessive moral crusade represents a politics of denial, that it 'ensures that children and young people systemically and institutionally, are denied access to information and knowledge concerning their physical and sexual development and its broader social and cultural context'. It is with this in mind that I read the report, looking to be informed of the impediments and enablers to the implementation of the RSE programme.

The report is laid out in five sections: the literature review and research methodology; the findings from the survey questionnaire; perspectives on the implementation of RSE from Government, national and regional respondents; the case studies of individual schools and finally the conclusion and recommendations. While this is a long report it is laid out in such a way that readers can easily identify the topics they are interested in and will be able to dip in and out of it.

The aims of the study were to build on existing research on RSE in Ireland by investigating the extent to which RSE policy is now implemented and the RSE curriculum delivered in post-primary schools nationwide; to explore the factors and processes that impact on RSE delivery within schools and to identify barriers and facilitators to RSE implementation and delivery. The researchers lay out the contemporary context of school-based relationships and sexuality education in the first section, in chapter one, by reviewing both Irish and international research on adolescent sexual behaviour and sexual health. This is informative in laying down the basis as to why RSE is important. It is acknowledged that schools are not the only place for young people to receive their information but because young people for the most part attend schools they are a captive audience. Furthermore, there are trained facilitators in terms of the teaching staff, a curriculum is already in place and RSE can be slotted into it and both parents and young people are supportive of schools delivering sex education.

The next chapter gives an account of the introduction of RSE into the school system and identifies the guidelines and actions that were designed to assist the development and implementation of school policy. The detail of this chapter will be useful as supporting material for schools that face obstacles in moving the programme forward. The role of leadership is identified as a key factor in the implementation of programmes which have been placed on the curriculum by the Department of Education and Science and the authors acknowledge the difficulties of change management when changes are imposed from above.

It is in chapter three that the aims of the quantitative survey are laid out:

1. to ascertain the level of implementation of RSE in schools;
2. to gauge the extent to which there were differences in implementation in different kinds of schools e.g. boys' vs. girls' schools;
3. to identify individual schools with high/medium/low levels of RSE implementation with a view to further intensive investigation through case-study research.

This chapter also includes the qualitative aspect of the study, designed to assess policy and practice issues that impact on RSE implementation and delivery from the perspective of those involved in the Government, national and regional aspects of the programme. The inclusion of these strategic groupings as well as those at the coal face makes the overall research comprehensive and inclusive. The authors state in this chapter that the case study research of nine individual schools 'uncovered many inconsistencies in RSE delivery both within and across the nine schools'.

The next section (Section II) presents the survey results. The overall findings of chapter four show that most of the schools were implementing the RSE programme to some extent although more were doing so in the junior years than the senior years. The following indicators were used: whether a policy was in place; the number of years that the programme had been taught and the number of classes devoted to RSE. From these indicators it was noted that boys' schools tended to be less likely to have a policy in place and also devoted less time to RSE. The findings also showed that in 40% of the schools outside facilitators were used as well as teachers in the delivery of the programme. Successful aspects which were mentioned by schools include the participation of pupils in RSE and the support from parents for the provision of the programme. Schools said the pressure of examination subjects and the overcrowded curriculum acted as an inhibitor, preventing a full implementation of the programme. The discomfort of the teaching staff was also raised as an inhibitor. In terms of the differences between schools it was found that rural schools were more likely to use outside facilitators, were less likely to have a policy in place and had a better implementation of the programme than when it was first launched.

In Section III, which examines the perspectives of Government, national and regional respondents, chapter five places the introduction of RSE and the early policy developments in context, explaining that RSE was to be an integrated module within Social, Political and Health Education (SPHE); and chapter six documents the current RSE implementation levels, schools policy development and the support available to schools. The issue of partnership work and some of the dilemmas involved with this are discussed as are concerns over the in-service training aspect for teachers. The final

chapter in this section examines how schools are seen to manage, organize and deliver RSE. In the conclusion to the chapter the authors state that the implementation of RSE is qualitatively different to other areas of curricular change and requires specific attention from the Department of Education and Science if full implementation is to be achieved.

In Section IV – the case study of individual schools – the report confirms what many of us have come to believe but did not have robust evidence for. In particular chapter eight presents an excellent table (8.2) showing a ‘continuum of implementation/delivery’ of RSE in post-primary schools, from ‘low level’ to ‘high level’ on a list of eight ‘core characteristics’ that influence how RSE is viewed, approached and delivered. These characteristics include level of coordination of SPHE/RSE, degree of parental involvement, status of the programme within the school community, extent of teacher training to deliver the programme, and so on. The table will enable practitioners to begin to navigate their way through the complexities relating to the inclusion of RSE within the school system. The authors reiterate the importance of key people, most notably school principals, in supporting RSE and providing the means for its implementation. Given that this is a long report I recommend that if you read nothing else you study this table. Also very helpful is Figure 9.1 (in the next chapter) which shows a model of effective RSE implementation based on one school within the study. Effective leadership is identified yet again as crucial to the success of RSE.

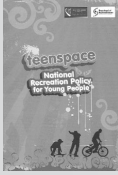
In Section V the conclusions and recommendations are presented. Chapter eleven states clearly what the data have revealed relating to implementation levels, the facilitators and barriers to RSE implementation as well as other factors and processes that impact on RSE delivery. The views of parents, young people and teachers are summarised. Chapter twelve includes 38 recommendations related to various aspects of RSE and directed specifically at the Department of Education and Science or schools as well as at all stakeholders.

Does this research succeed in its aim? Absolutely. This is a fine example of robust research. It outlines the need for the study, presents and analyses previous research and describes and defends its methodology. The layout of the report makes it easy to find chapters that are of particular interest to the reader. In particular I found the quotes interesting and they successfully broke up what is of necessity a long report.

This report is essential reading for all of us involved in providing young people with information and understanding of relationships and sexuality. The issue of young people’s sexuality is all too often discussed in an atmosphere of moral panic. But learning about sex and relationships is a normal part of growing up. Denying young people information and choice isn’t the answer. This research provides us with a picture of the situation in a number of schools, it allows the voices of young people, parents, teachers, principals, policy makers and educationalists to be heard and provides an analysis and a framework for enabling a full and successful implementation of RSE to be achieved.

Reference

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Office of the Minister for Children, Department of Health and Children
Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People
 Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007. 166 pp. €5

Clive Stone

Youth Development Officer,
 Youth Work Ireland.

The *National Recreation Policy for Young People* is the second phase of actions arising from the *National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives*, published in 2000. It builds upon the commitment from Government to provide community based play, leisure, recreational and cultural activities for children and young people. Also titled *Teenspace*, the policy details a clear strategic framework for the promotion of better recreational opportunities for young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen. An important element to the development of this policy has been the visible consultation process with young people, the public consultation process, and input from various government departments and agencies.

The first chapter outlines the context for developing a recreation policy for children and young people, acknowledging that the absence of recreation facilities and activities was the most pressing issue raised during the public consultation. The ten year Framework Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016* identified the importance of recreation, sport and physical activity for the balanced and healthy development of children. The co-existence of the National Recreation Policy and the National Play Policy (2004) represent the Government's aim to provide amenities for younger children and youth-friendly and safe facilities for older children and young people.

The overall objective of *Teenspace* is to provide appropriate, publicly funded recreational opportunities for young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Importantly, it strengthens the case for strategic direction and development amongst government departments, local authorities, City and County Development Boards, the youth sector, the community and voluntary sectors, and other interested parties to expand and develop recreational opportunities in an appropriate youth-focused manner.

The second chapter focuses on the barriers and motivators to participation in recreation, and provides detailed statistical information compiled from public consultation processes and the findings of independent research (see De Róiste and Dineen, 2007). It presents a picture of what young people want to do in their spare time, what they currently do, and the barriers and supports experienced in accessing recreational opportunities. Different categories of constraint are identified: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. As regards *intrapersonal* constraints for example, there is a clear correlation between teenage girls' participation in physical recreational activities and the perception of body image. Friends and enjoyment are key *interpersonal* motivational factors in young people engaging in recreational activities. Lack of facilities, lack of money and poor transport infrastructures are the main *structural constraints* for most young people. Structural barriers are the foremost constraints experienced by young people from minority groups: those with physical disability and sensory impairments, early school leavers and young people from the Traveller community.

Chapter 3 identifies the six guiding principles that underpin the National Recreation Policy for Young People. They are similar to those underpinning the National Play Policy. They are:

- Centred on Young People: young people should be active participants in the planning and implementing of recreational programmes and facilities. The interests of young people should be the primary focus of planning publicly funded recreational opportunities.
- Family and community orientated: recreational facilities should support and empower families and communities.
- Equitable: target investment should be aimed at communities most in need, and have equality of opportunity and access for all young people.
- Action orientated: the focus should be on facilities that demonstrate specific measurable results in a targeted and cost effective manner.
- Integrated: facilities and programmes should be delivered in a co-ordinated manner that reflects local needs analysis and policy planning.

The remainder of the policy sets out seven distinct objectives and associated measures.

Objective 1 expresses a clear commitment to *give young people a voice in the process of designing, implementing and monitoring of recreation policies and facilities*. Strong responsibility is placed upon local authorities to develop structures to involve young people, with specific actions to enable young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or with a disability to have a voice in local matters that affect them (see also Objective 4). The Department of Health, Office of the Minister for Children have responsibility for the development of Comhairle na nOg (city and county youth councils), and will be promoting the opportunity for young people under the age of 18 to be represented on the voluntary youth councils to be established under the Youth Work Act.

Objective 2 sets out a number of measures to *promote organised activities for young people* and gives a clear mandate for examining ways to motivate young people. Strong advancement has been achieved in this area. Notably the Arts Council will take a lead in promoting a partnership approach with local authorities and the youth sector to further develop arts provision opportunities for young people.

Objective 3 specifies that actions should be in place to *ensure that the recreational needs of young people are met through the development of youth-friendly and safe environments*. The need to ensure safe physical environments for young people will be incorporated into all designs for new community facilities. Youth Cafés have become more popular at Government level, and as a result further funding is anticipated to advance the establishment of dedicated drop in centres for young people. Research is taking place to ensure that the plans for introducing Youth Cafés adopt fundamental principles of youth work and partnership working with key agencies engaged in meeting the needs of young people.

Objective 4 aims to *maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or have a disability*. Commitment has already been given in the National Spatial Strategy, the National Rural Development Programme and expenditure under the National Development Plan to ensure that social and community structures meet the needs of all young people. Actions under Objective 4 include the following measures: access to facilities for young people in rural areas, the development of RAPID and CLAR, further research into motivating young

people to engage in positive activities, developing best practice with regard to young people from ethnic minority groups, and consulting with young Travellers through the Young People's Forum (Office of the Minister for Children).

Objective 5 complements the youth work sector's strong commitment to the protection of children through *promoting relevant qualifications/standards in the provision of recreational activities*. A co-ordinated approach amongst government departments will ensure that children and young people are protected from harm. Transparent systems will be publicly available through the provisions of a Department of Health website providing information on child protection and the requirements of the Children First guidelines. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform will strengthen the process of Garda Vetting, and explore proposals for legislating criminal history vetting. Adventure activities will become regulated through an appropriate body, overseen by the Department of Transport. Appropriate training for staff and volunteers working with young people will be jointly managed by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

Objective 6 focuses on 'joined up thinking' and aims to *develop a partnership approach in developing and funding recreational opportunities across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors*. Emphasis is given to ensuring that local government level needs and provisions are represented at interdepartmental/interagency level. City and County Development Boards will be encouraged to lead on the preparation of multi-agency recreation strategies, advanced by the Children's Service Committee (*Towards 2016*). Networks within local authorities will be established under the County and City Development Board process, with the youth work sector named as a representative for consultation on best practice and sources of information.

Finally, **Objective 7** provides a set of actions designed to *improve information on evaluation and monitoring of recreational provision for young people in Ireland*. One of the outcomes from consulting with young people at the 2006 Dáil na nÓg was the agreement to develop a website to provide young people with information on facilities and activities in their locality. In addition using the world wide web appears to feature as a means for imparting information to young people with the Health Service Executive, National Play Resource Centre, Vocational Education Committees, local authorities and the youth sector all committing to develop youth friendly sites to inform young people.

Although *Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People* is concerned specifically with recreation, it strengthens the principles and values that youth work has been embracing and advocating amongst policy makers for decades. Youth and community work ethics have always stressed the active and positive participation of young people in issues that directly affect them, and recreation is one of those issues. *Teenspace* provides a real opportunity to bring professionals from the statutory, community and youth work sectors around the same table to listen to young people and plan for their ongoing and continued development. It is important that the opportunity is taken immediately because children and young people are not just 'our future', they are here *now*.

Reference

Áine de Róiste and Joan Dineen, 'Young People's Views about Recreation and Leisure: Findings from a National Study', *Youth Studies Ireland*, 2(1), 2007.

Youth & Policy



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Tel: 0116 242 7350 Fax: 0116 242 7444 E-mail: nya@nya.org.uk
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Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People

Published by:

PRESS

ISSN: 1649-8747

Irish Youth Work Press

20 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1.

Tel: + 353 | 8729933

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Website: www.iywc.com