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The Process is the Product:

Is There a Need for Measurement in Youth Work?

By

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"You have to run twice as fast as you possibly can in order to remain where you are".

Lewis Carroll.

Introduction:

Lewis Carroll was not talking about youth work when he scribed this sentiment. However, there seems to be a concerted 'attack' on the fundamental principles and practices of youth work that suggest, either directly or indirectly, that what has taken place in the past does not count presently. Early pioneers of youth development would be horrified to think that there are elements in society that have bought into the measurement of everything we touch at the expense of human relationships and human contact. Indeed these are difficult times in terms of money and resources but that does not mean that we ought to shoehorn everything into an 'audit' culture, for in doing so we cement the belief that if we can't measure the outcomes the process has no value.

What, I wonder would Aristotle's approach to this be; what consideration or validity would he visit upon the culture of audit and the constant need for measurable product in relation to human development and growth?

We contend that there is a need for some analysis of those external forces that are insidiously influencing and shaping current youth work practice and thus consequently the lives of many of the marginalised and disengaged young people that youth work seeks to

serve. We also contend that youth work practice is qualitatively different from teaching and schooling and that the process used in youth work identifies that difference. We also contend that the inchoate nature of the youth work profession is militating against addressing some of these complex issues that are challenging the essential essence of youth work practice.

The central tenet of this article is predicated upon a belief that there is a need to link both the formal with the informal/non-formal sectors without at any point compromising the strengths of either. The analysis within this article deconstructs the ideology and philosophy behind the perceived dominance of the formal sector over the informal youth work sector. It suggests that both worlds need not collide but that they can and should work more closely together in the interest of their common denominator, the development of young peoples' potential.

The youth work process and the human rights of young people.

"If the real work is to stay together then we are the best and only resource to move into this future".

Wheatley.

Let us consider the premise that human rights are central to the collective notion of both youth work and practiced as an integral part of engagement with marginalised youth. The authors acknowledge that human rights, as observed by Beck and Purcell (2010) are complex in nature and contested. They state that it is important to view such rights as part of a social debate rather than the answer, as means to an end rather than an end in themselves, arguing,

"...rather than uncritically accepting an imposed set of standards devised outside the local community, which may not necessarily take into account that community's own values, culture and history, any statement of human rights becomes a starting point for critical reflection and action." Beck and Purcell (2010:44)

They conclude by observing that **human rights must come from the bottom up** and should be about praxis rather than an imposition undertaken by the powerful on behalf of the weak. They take the position that,

"... the ideological pigeonholing of human rights as a hegemonic instrument rather than an arena of political struggle overlooks an important aspects of human rights as praxis; that is as an instrument to challenge social power relations! "

Beck and Purcell (2010:14)

However, human rights, if they are to be used wisely and inform young people, need to be understood, disseminated and considered by young people, who, we would argue have to see the benefits of such rights in their lives. Living in poverty, deprivation and violent communities will not change due to the presence of a charter for human rights, without cognizance of how this piece of paper impacts on the lives of young people and how they see their lives. Suffice to say that youth workers are, at least at the coal face with marginalised young people implementing, intuitively and organically many de facto human rights. This suggests to us that the rolling out of 'real' human rights can be achieved through **the process of engagement** in meaningful dialogue with young people around issues that they can identify with. Making the process more important than the product and a dimension of youth work that suggests they [*youth workers*] need to be advocates for young people as they establish the relationship and steer the conversations towards meaningful understanding of human rights.

As outlined within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; rights coalesce around civil, social, political, economic rights and communities responsibilities. Further to this the National Occupation Standards of 2008 for youth work calibrate with many of these macro universal rights. According to Beck and Purcell, (2010:49), the key purpose of such occupational standards is

"...to enable people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential."

We further contend that the engagement of young people, by youth workers, is an essential starting point for the beginning human rights based upon real dialogue that takes cognizance of the context in which they live.

Youth work, through its practice, holds a mirror up to society, in terms of reality rather than idealism, implementing, we contend, real human rights, doing what Beck and Purcell argue they should do in using tactics that,

"Shift the focus of analysis from solely what institutions do to the people, to a more balanced view that incorporates how people respond to promote their own perceived interests."(Beck et al 2010:35)

Put simply youth work uses tactics that suit the needs of *real people*. There is a vital imperative contained within this message and it is for youth workers **to hold and maintain their focus on 'everyday life'**, rather on how schools continue to shape the notion of what counts as 'education', and to continue to work with people and in particular, disempowered and disengaged youth.

Ominously though, Beck and Purcell warn that,

"... tactics may or may not challenge the hegemonic view of the world and are more likely to be driven by false consciousness than promote critical consciousness"

Beck and Purcell are alluding to the central tenet of this article, i.e. that the overarching hegemonic influence for delivering a product [measurable outcomes such as accredited courses] is **a serious challenge to the process driven and advocacy role of youth work.**

The influence of curriculum.

"Except our own thoughts, there is nothing absolutely in our power."

Rene Descartes

What is determined and defined as curriculum is hotly disputed, except within the formal education and schools setting, where its definition has been prescribed and settled upon. Harte (2001). In any attempt to accept this premise we leave ourselves open to a very real danger of adopting and utilizing not dissimilar models that will eventually form and shape subsequent youth work practice and delivery mechanisms that emanate there from. While students go through a process of learning to achieve the curriculum outcomes most of the curriculum is predefined and therefore not up for discussion or indeed change. **Harte (2001)**

A youth work curriculum, is neither predefined nor prescribed, as it is impossible to predict the needs of each young person in different contexts. For example one young person might be struggling with their sexual orientation while another is concerned with bullying. The youth worker will create opportunities for young people to work through a process of reflection, information and discussion around issues that they are interested in. The importance of this central core of interest cannot be overstated. Young people will have a higher propensity to engage in a process of learning *'if'* the topic is real rather than the prescribed school curriculum. Youth workers have to shape a curriculum for their young people based on conversation and issues that directly relate to their lives and community. This 'thinking' on

the hoof is a valuable skill that defines youth work as a reflective process based on dialogue and discussion with young people. It is de facto a real curriculum delivered through a process of engagement, discussion and reflection established through trusting relationship building.

Common to these and other descriptions of curriculum, the importance of the relationship between goals and subject matter can be observed. It is thus distinguishable that these descriptions give rise to an understanding of knowledge as a commodity which is external to the learner, and which is to be consumed towards the ultimate aim of mastery. Furthermore this fundamentally positivist epistemological basis for the construction of curriculum gives rise to the powerful notion that learning can be, and will be, *measured*. We would contend that the youth work curriculum is indeed measured but in more 'real' terms. For example, the development and understanding of self-awareness, resilience, coping mechanisms, knowledge and understanding of issues that affect young peoples' lives leading the change and subsequent independence. A youth work curriculum comes from the relationship between young people and professional workers in the context of their lives in a give environment.

As a consequence of using a measurable curriculum, we may fail to recognise the potential that **outcomes** may lead the **process**, consequently leading to the situation where content and the learner become secondary to delivery and testing processes. Harte 2001.

As cited by Harte 2001 Barnes and Seed observe the following:

'Examination papers ... offer to the teacher and the taught are the most persuasive arguments about what model of the subject is appropriate, what should go on in lessons, what knowledge, skills and activities should be emphasised and what can safely be ignored' (Barnes and Seed, 1984: 263).

On from this Harte 2001 present the view that current formal educational policy colaeses around the belief that there is a need for constant and rigorous testing and offers into the evidence the following

Pupils are assessed by national tests at the ages of 7, 11, and 14, at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3. These tests are designed to help teachers assess pupils' strengths and weaknesses and to determine what pupils understand about a subject` (DFEE, 2000).

In the use of a measurable curriculum model it can be argued that formal institutions control not just the model but consequently what is learnt and what is not learnt.

Harte (2001)

Hoffmann (1995) would postulate that for any model accurate development and delivery there is an incumbent duty to consider, “**what is relevant, useful, etc?**”

As has been witnessed, since the inception and introduction of a set curriculum based system, formal educationalists seem to fall into the trap of **rating examination over process**. Harte (2001) Examinations, he argues, now *dictate* the curriculum, rather than underpin understanding. It is almost a learn to forget system whereby if we take the image of the jug and glass, the teacher pours water in a glass and then requests that the student consequently return the same liquid from the glass back into the jug. It is knowledge for the short-term to meet set requirements but fails to ingrain that knowledge that it might become experience and knowledge for development and life.

Thus it is argued that curriculum is discriminatory and oppressive, and this is at odds with the ideology of informal education and of youth work, as we will discuss. Moreover, such oppression and discrimination which curriculum produces is not an *unwanted but a necessary by-product of education*; it is, in fact, a creation intended to maintain hegemony and power for the rich elite at the expense of the learners' liberty. As Illich discusses, *'curriculum has always been used to assign social rank'* (Illich, 1973: 19), this social rank has changed little in the past centuries, where the majority of education is controlled by curriculum.

Ord (2007) also holds to the belief that thinking that emanates from the formal system is influencing the debate around what measurement or learning means and how this enters the subconscious. A curriculum based on pre-specified targets (*formal education*) argues Ord, leads to intended learning outcomes and attempt at behavioral change. He further contends that there are some unfortunate consequences for a curriculum based on such pre-specified objectives as it may,

“actually be illogical and therefore flawed to even begin to try to set objectives for certain types of learning.”

What does this mean, in practical terms, for youth workers and youth work practice and importantly can such a contention find sustainability against the background of outcome driven policies and funding led aims and objectives and how does youth work respond? For Ord observes,

“...the process approach does not therefore start with the end products- what is to be learnt, rather its starting point is how learning is best facilitated.” (2007:32)

Ord (2007) outlines what he and previously Stenhouse (1980) saw as **curriculum as process**. He observed that though Stenhouse believed that schools did value the emancipation of their pupils (2007:33) he challenged the inappropriate intrusion of a, **‘product making mentality’**, into the social realm. (2007:33) For Ord and Stenhouse, knowledge centered on the **lived experience**, as an integral aspect of a person’s life and was not something that could be measured by setting supposedly **‘objective’** outcomes. (2007:33)

Ord postulates that

“On this basis therefore the curriculum must be based on the process by which the students can best be facilitated in acquiring of knowledge and understanding of the topic in question.”

He raises a major problem, that of content: Stenhouse’s model, according to Ord (2007:34) was not adopted by mainstream education because,

’...the process model is essentially a ‘critical’ model and not a ‘marking’ model’

What does this mean? Youth work if we believe it is about, the process of development, engagement and learning, means starting where the young people are at in terms of building self-awareness, self-esteem, resilience, giving information and creating safety and warmth...among other things. Can a curriculum be developed around these aims without losing the essence of **‘going through’ a process** rather than reaching an end product?

Youth work practice is therefore fundamentally different from the subject-led school curriculum and as such should be developed outside this system, consequently, with young people getting the necessary coping skills necessary to benefit from a more formal experience either later on or in tandem with their own personal development.

Can it be acknowledged that youth work is about the personal development of young people within a 'lived' social context? The belief that young people have to go through a process to arrive 'somewhere' has been explained above. Ord (2007:38) admits to a **major problem for process driven curriculum**. He argues that it is the responsibility of those who are working within the process based curricula to make explicit what they mean by development and further to this what is its value base? (2007:38). Are not all attempts at curricular content or selecting objectives value choices Ord (2007:38). Indeed what are the end points of a youth work curriculum? Ord (2007:38).

Ord's (2012) recent contentions appear, on the surface, to be indisputable in terms of using experiential learning as a process for 'learning'. However, without a contextualisation of the learning process it seems to us to be rather aspirational rather than real. Ord acknowledges that learning should be more widely understood as being concerned with the 'problem of living' more generally (p66) and that education is concerned with providing the experiential capacity to make sense and to overcome the problem of puzzlement (p67). Again without the contextualisation of this learning process it is difficult to see how, at least in the formal sector, experiential learning can reach its optimum when the curriculum has already been set.

To conclude we would contend that the school system is 'subject-led' and that youth work is 'young person-led' based on their needs in terms of the context in which they find themselves. The prescribed school curriculum shapes the learning process and tends, normally speaking, to become a formative process related to grades rather than 'learning'. Youth work, on the other hand, because of its relational process and more flexible 'curriculum', linked to real life issues, can use experiential process-driven learning.

Youth work and curriculum.

Any philosophy of informal education observes Harte (2001) proposes that the world is full of potential educational opportunities, indeed, 'The greater part of one's education is acquired, not at school, but in life' (Tolstoy, 1967: 24 cited in Harte 2001). Consequently, he, asserts that anyone engaged in the role of informal educator performs an essential role as a facilitator or gatekeeper to these opportunities. That is, they are an assistant in the learning process of individuals, rather than the master of other's learning (Holt, 1970; Illich, 1974 cited in Harte (2001).

For Holt, as subsequently observed by Harte (2001) there is a clear belief that everyone has within them what can be termed, , a drive or disposition towards learning, whilst formal educational process acts to reduce or remove this drive (Holt, 1969).

As observed by Jeffs and Smith,(1999) the art and action of conversation lie as a central and essential skill in the role and engagement of the informal educator. Any conversation is clearly a tool of engagement that seeks a way in and subsequently seeks to develop and attain a level of shared understanding. (Smith, 2000; Freire, 1970, 1985).

Such conversation will, if properly engaged in, encourages the development of an interventive and shared relationship built upon equity, diversity, acceptance and trust. There will be a focused and open coming together and this will rely on the aforementioned acceptance and congruent acceptance of the other and where they find themselves at a given moment of time.

For Burbules, cited by Smith (2000) such characteristics coalesced around the themes of ; *concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope* In accepting this position, the authors posit the opinion that the level and style of education that the informal practitioner engages in must be secure in what Harte observes in citing Burbules, as, "*the context of an authentic social relationship that engages its participants with informal education occurring spontaneously when teaching does not take place.*

Conversation, it is consistently observed, creates opportunities and a situation, *`where each individual has an effective equality of chances to take part in dialogue; where dialogue is unconstrained and not distorted`* (Smith, cited in Harte 2001).

Harte (2001) argues from the position that mutual trust, respect, a willingness to listen and to risk one's opinions are fundamental in dialogical conversation and are thus key to the work of informal education. Here the authors concur and likewise share his view of informal education as, *`a powerful regulative ideal that can orient our practical and political lives`* (Bernstein 1983: 163 cited in Harte (2001). In real terms the authors are of the strongly held belief, shared by Harte et al, that Informal education is a tool for authentic social change that will ultimately liberate and free those who participate and engage freely with its processes (Freire, 1970, 1985).

As observed by Harte et al, over time there has developed, in this position a real possibility of contention and conflict that could explode between the exponents of each tradition of

thought , formal (school based practice) and informal (youth work based practice). The potential for any conflict is based upon the notion of power (Harte. 2001)

If we carry on with our earlier observations then clearly conversation, as practiced and engaged by the informal practitioner within the informal education setting is pivotal to successful engagement with the young person. It develops and encourages a true sense of ownership and social responsibility that ultimately fosters, what Harte terms democracy which consequently enables, *“individuals and groups to challenge social hegemony and address their own oppression, conversation can therefore be seen as empowering”*. (2001)

Curriculum has the adverse effect as it seeks to ,*“limit individual freedom, that Freire refers to as ‘formal’ or ‘banked’ education, i.e. ‘... that which ‘deposits’ information into the learner ‘does not engender curiosity, creativity, or an inquisitive spirit, but assists in the creation of indoctrinated clones, accepting rather than challenging the current social hegemony* (Freire, 1970 Cited in Harte (2001).

To the authors then the example and the philosophy of the Wood Craft Folk strikes a very real and attractive chord whereby they view informal participation and education as that which educates children into thinking for themselves and in doing so challenges them to look beyond the known and examine the world in which they find themselves in order to understand it so that in adulthood they will have developed ways of changing it. (Salt and Wilson cited in Harte 2001)

Ultimately the **curriculum serves one purpose in youth work**, that is to **control and enable measurement of process** and of outputs. In doing this, youth work becomes as controlling as formal education, limited in usefulness and indeed shifts away from being informal education at all. Moreover, curricular based youth work falls into the same trap as formal education in treating young people as homogenous, when diversity and difference should be acknowledged and celebrated. Contemporary youth work is becoming engulfed in an obsession for measurable outcomes and outputs that threatens its very purpose and long term existence!

The influence of schooling.

“Never try to compel others to change; leave them free to change naturally and orderly because they want to.”

Christian D. Larson

We would contend that there are some learning theories that help understand not only what learning is about but how youth work can begin to develop its own epistemology of 'education' that makes it unique from the formal sector and indeed other professions that use informal youth work practices and principles. Hodkinson and Macleod (2010); when writing about contrasting concepts of learning suggest that learning does not have a clear physical and reified identity in the world rather it should be a concept constructed and developed by people to label and thus start to explain some complex processes that are important in our lives (p174). They argue that in using the term 'learning' in particular ways, we are constructing what learning is and to whom (or what) it applies. If we take this idea into the youth work context we should be able to distinguish what goes on in the 'real lives' of young people from that which is '*learnt*' in the formal sector or at least what is expected to be learnt. Hodkinson and Macleod (2010:174) concur and observe

"...when different concepts of learning are used, the processes/activities they apply to also differ."

This suggests that the more subject-led curriculum within the school system is not congruent with that outside the school, in particular, the youth work setting. Hodkinson and Macleod explain this by stating that learning can be understood by two contesting metaphors of 'acquisition' and 'participation'. Acquisition focuses on learning as a process whereby commodities such as knowledge are acquired (p175). The acquisition metaphor is further explained as,

"... focussing attention on that which is learned.....understanding the process of learning in relation to such outcomes. It therefore tends to emphasise learning that is intentional, with an explicit objective in view. This fits well with the concerns about formal education learning, including how well students achieve the intended learning outcomes."

Participation learning on the other hand is much more informal – simply an integral part of everyday life (Hodkinson and Macleod. 2010:175),

"As such, the focus of attention switches from cognitive processes within the person to the socio-cultural practices of living in particular situations. Outcomes can, and frequently are, considered but as an integral part of complex learning processes, not as an important end-product to be achieved."

What is interesting about the two metaphors is that they resonate with learning in schools and learning within the youth work context. The former about a subject-led measurable

curriculum and the latter about a **'process' of learning** that is related to real issues that are affecting young people and often inhibiting their acquisition learning.

However, the main point emanating from the suggested dichotomous learning metaphors help, in some way, to differentiate between learning that is an integral part of living and learning that is more cognitive relating to a prescribed curriculum which may not bear any relationship with the lives of some disengaged young people. In fact the learning in a youth work context is indeed about the experiential needs to young people while the school, on the whole, measures the cognitive ability of retention of knowledge and information about disparate subjects.

Is youth work a profession?

Primarily, we contend that youth work is a contested profession? What does this mean and more importantly does it influence why youth work, as a profession, is having difficulty addressing issues relating to learning and education as outlined previously? Schon (2002:40) observes,

*"... the view of professional knowledge that has most powerfully shaped both our thinking about the professions and the institutional relations of research, education and practice –and professional activity, consists of instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the **application of scientific theory and technique.**"*

We have highlighted the **'application of scientific theory and technique'** to suggest that the influence on the youth work profession, from a scientific perspective, is insidiously used, consciously or unconsciously, by policy makers to impose unrealistic expectations on those who work with young people. This means that while youth workers work in a quasi-qualitative environment those who shape policy and indeed quality assure the profession are firmly rooted in a more quantitative world as expressed by outputs, targets and expected outcomes.

This means that youth work does not have 'hard' concrete outcomes as expected by most other professions, e.g. medicine, engineering, law etc etc. Thus leading to what could be termed 'fuzzy' or 'soft' outcomes. Field and Schuller (2002:210) suggest that the 'fuzzy' nature of soft outcomes creates problems if they are used by Government to achieve certain political objectives. This is important to youth work in that many of the outcomes, such as, raising self-esteem, increasing young people's confidence, building relationships,

challenging values and beliefs etc., are perceived as soft outcomes. Field continues by saying that it is unlikely to be one that ministers or civil servants feel confident using in their capacity to develop clear criteria for judging success (or failure). He cites an example of reducing non-participation among adults in lifelong learning, saying,

“...while utterly admirable in itself; the difficulties in reaching an agreed definition of ‘non-participation’ is likely to prove formidable...”

Field and Schuller’s work (2002), while focusing on lifelong learning, has some resonance with youth work. Youth work is based on outcomes that are often termed ‘soft’ and difficult to measure. Governments will fund programmes that can offer transparency, measurable outcomes and quantifiable outputs. Field et al say that governments will only offer small amounts of finance partly because of the difficulties faced by government in establishing whether the results offer value for money. For Field et al (2002:211) intangible factors invariably present policy makers with measurement problems. He says that pursuing soft objectives through partnerships with non-governmental actors also lays government open to the charge of throwing money away (Field et al. 2002:211).

Field et al outline a few reasons why these types of projects, that have difficulty with measuring outcomes, are still prevalent in government policy:

- a. They normally have considerable legitimacy and are therefore ‘safe’ in political terms. Who is going to say that additional resources for youth work would not be welcome?
- b. They represent a relatively easy field for non-regulatory types of intervention. Much responsibility for implementation and delivery will rest with relatively low status and local actors. Partners can be won over through incentive funding and the prospect exists of hard short-term targets.
- c. Governments like to be seen as having faith in the human capital approach to human resource planning. The point is that ‘schemes’ that address aspects of human capital (qualifications led) are looked favourably upon by government ministers at policy level.

What therefore are the implications for youth work in terms of short-term funding, ‘safe’ programmes, non-regulatory approaches that have difficulty with measuring specific outcomes? We contend that this type of approach brings into question the very essence of ‘being’ a profession if, the end product, is so obscure and intangible, that practitioners cannot name it and certainly cannot measure it. At least in terms understood by those who fund the formal school sector with their clear outcomes albeit problematic in other ways.

Glazer 1974 (Cited in Schon 2002:40) elaborates on the point of professionalism by stating there is a difference between 'major' and 'minor' professions,

"The major professions are 'disciplined by an unambiguous end - health, success in litigation, profit – which settles men's minds' and they operate in stable institutional contexts. Hence they are grounded in systematic, fundamental knowledge, of which scientific knowledge is the prototype, or else they have 'a high component of strictly technological knowledge based on science in the education which they provide.'"

Further to this Glazer contends that the minor professions suffer from shifting ambiguous ends and from unstable institutional contexts of practice, and are therefore unable to develop a base of systematic, scientific professional knowledge. He goes on to say,

"How can a profession ground itself in science when its ends are confused and unstable?"

One could legitimately argue that **Glazer is talking about the youth work profession** when he says **there are shifting ambiguous ends** within **unstable institutional contexts of practice**.

Moore (1970 cited in Schon's article 2002) develops the idea further by stating,

"If every professional problem were in all respects unique, solutions would be at best accidental, and therefore have nothing to do with expert knowledge. What we are suggesting, on the contrary, is that there are sufficient uniformities in problems and in devices for solving them to qualify the solvers as professionals...professionals apply very general principles, standardised knowledge, to concrete problems...."

What, therefore are the general principles and standardised knowledge used by youth work professionals. We would contend that **the process is indeed the product** and that the need for policy makers to 'see' 'hard outcomes' hides the essential and important role that the process plays for many young people in terms of self-awareness, resilience, coping mechanisms as central components of the wider term 'personal development' as a central core of youth work. Youth workers could state that they have 'expected outcomes' (Morgan et al 2007) that result from engagement with young people but that the scientific expectation that suggests that outcomes need to be concrete masks the very essence of human

interaction and creates, for many youth workers, questions that they have difficulty answering in terms that suit this quantitative agenda.

For youth work the ends are problematic. However 'if' the ends are imposed on the youth work profession in terms of accredited courses, information given to participants, how many take part, etc the ends could be seen as 'scientific' similarly to the 'ends' being imposed on the schools, e.g. those who achieved 5 GCSEs or go to university etc. **Therein lies the difficulty for the youth work profession** that posits the view that the process is central to the development of young people while being told by policy makers, funders and inspectors that the ends can indeed be measured and, more worryingly, that if they [the youth work professionals] do not come up with their own 'ends' or 'concrete outcomes' they will be imposed on and for them.

Can indeed the youth work profession deliver hard outcomes expected by policy makers/
Schon (2002:48) says,

*"In the varied topography of professional practice there is **high, hard ground** where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and **there is a swampy lowland** where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical resolution."*

He goes on to say,

*"The difficulty is that **the problems of the high ground**, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, **whereas in the swamp are the problems of greater human concern**. Shall the practitioner stay on the high, hard ground where he can practice rigorously, as he understands rigour, but where he is constrained to deal with problems of relatively little social importance? Or shall he descend to the swamp where he can engage the most important and challenging problems if he is willing to forsake technical rigour?"*

Many youth workers are 'in' the swamp but are currently being coerced or forced to move to the higher more understandable high hard ground [in terms of measurable outcomes allied to a formal notion of learning and measurement through the development of a 'curriculum']. For example, research by Morgan et al (2007) on youth work in schools investigated how youth workers were being moved into schools to deal with perceived problematic behavioural issues. The aim of the youth worker in the school was to raise self-awareness, personal and social development. The aim of the policy makers was to use the youth workers to complement the school system and hopefully increase the number of pupils

leaving with 5 or more GCSEs [an obvious scientific statistical meaningful measurement] rather than the youth work process [in the swampy ground] that had unclear outcomes although relevant expected outcomes. The authors would like to pose a question about using 5 GCSEs as a measurement of success in schools in Northern Ireland. Firstly the English education system has decided that the GCSE is not robust enough and have decided to change to either a Baccalaureate or the 'old' O-Levels. Secondly why undersell our young people with a minimalistic expectation rather than aim for 8 or more GCSEs at levels A or B? Who decides on the measurement of 5 GCSEs at level C and where is the empirical evidence for this decision? As this is a 'measurement' of 'education' in the formal sector what is the underpinning educational rationale driving this thinking as it is influencing, both directly and indirectly, youth work practice, particularly in schools.

The tension between the youth work and the teaching profession was obvious in this research (Morgan et al 2007). While schools have been given their outcomes the youth workers now found themselves '*buying into*' these outcomes thus, we would argue, moving onto the harder higher ground that teachers have been forced to occupy.

Schon believes that there are those who deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through. Research by Harland, Morgan and Muldoon (2005) found that youth workers had difficulty articulating their practice beyond the relationship building although **they acknowledged the importance of the process** into which and through which young people moved. Often ingredients in the youth work process are shaped and led by the 'real' needs of young people rather than imposed by policy makers and funders and inspected by those who view growth through a scientific lens rather than a more humanistic process that may not, at all or any time, need to be measured in terms that reflect a more scientific model. The swampy ground is not a place that youth workers want to occupy but while there are problems that do not have a 'magic bullet' approach there is a need to understand what youth workers are trying to do when they put a young person through a process or more precisely allow a young person to go through a process that is tailored to their own specific needs rather than the needs of those on the 'high hard ground'.

Conclusions.

“The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that, human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives”.

William James.

One of the major issues underpinning this article is that youth work practice is under the spotlight regarding the perceived need to measure outcomes. There is an observation, by Schon (2002) that most work with people is indeed not measurable and should not be measured, at least in the same manner or within the same philosophical framework by which we recognise the concept of ‘*measurement*’ in the formal school system. We suggest and hold firmly to the belief that **there are aspects of youth work practice that should *not* be measured**, what we would refer to as the central core and that the process is indeed the product.

We would acknowledge that some aspects of youth development can easily be evaluated but in terms that make sense to the participants, as opposed to the education system, e.g. examinations and awards as indicative of ‘*learning*’. Further to this we concur with the opinion that separation of the component parts of youth work into measurable and non-measurable, does not detract from the holistic process of engagement in youth development through personal and social development.

The challenge for practitioners and indeed those tasked with evaluating youth work is to measure what can and should be measured and view elements of practice, through the process of engagement with young people, as the ‘glue’ that holds interventions between adults and young people together. The challenge itself demands that a model of measurement, that pertains specifically to youth work and youth work practice, should evolve from that practice and that any evaluation should not be shoehorned into the current formal education model, which abjectly fails to consider the informal sociology and philosophy of youth work practice as a separate identity from its formal counterpart. Consequently any inspection or measurement falls down as it is based on an ill-informed and misconceived idea of what youth work and youth work practice is. We argue it would be like trying to put boxing gloves on an octopus.

This article has highlighted some of the issues and thinking that is shaping youth work practice in a rather insidious fashion. The debate about outcomes are strident and robust but as indicated by Schon have their roots in a more scientific and medical model which is

detached somewhat from the *'real lives'* of many marginalised youth that youth workers come into contact with. The concept and nature of learning, again championed by and through the school system, is hard to challenge as they continue to turn out applicants for high level courses at Universities, however, the learning that is experienced by many marginalised young people is another story as the subject-led curriculum forms and plays a small part of their *'lived lives'*.

However, the ends and means to ends, in the formal system are awards and grades which mask the learning process which is assumed to be measured by a formative final mark. Youth work is more about *'expected'* outcomes that arise from engagement with young people based on personal and social development and awareness. It is about sowing seeds that will grow at the pace of the individual within their life and in their time and not over a falsely constructed period of engagement dictated by expected attendance and any formal system of attainment. For we believe aspiration and attainment run concurrently based on the individual lives and abilities of young people.

The subject-led curriculum in schools is at odds with the ***student-centred and process-driven curriculum and focus of youth work***. Youth work has to become a more robust profession allied to 'some' aspects of scientific rigour. The core of youth work has to be articulated and described in terms that resonate with funders and policy makers. The essential tenets of youth work practice based upon relationships and opportunities for process-driven learning have to be presented in terms that resonate with the hegemony of the formal system in order to differentiate the process of learning in both the youth work and school worlds. While both worlds can work together youth work is in danger of losing its unique identity as a process for learning based on the *'lived lives'* of young people at the expense of product driven outcomes.

In the final analysis this is the story of each unique young person's development, vision, hope, aspiration and attainment; it is about the process that permits all young people to become aware of the potential that lies within in order that they may draw it out, *in their time and at their pace into their daily lives*, social, familial, educational, professional and personal so that they may make an honest and true impact on the communities and society in which they live and to which they contribute on a personal and a shared level.

Such a process is forever evolving informed by nuance and individual personalities, gifts, talents, abilities, physical, social, personal and communal. It is influenced by generations of experience, belief and of aspiration to reach beyond that which society determines shall be the lot of young people in a particular age and environment. It is quite simply too vital to

obstruct, too important to limit within a set of quantitative statistics or measurable outcomes. It is too important for such a limited horizon of consideration. The process cannot be contained in such a way and youth development cannot be determined by such an erroneous set of criteria and practices.

The process in which young people choose to engage with youth workers is organic, frustrating, challenging and real, determined by real wants and needs, true experiences and histories. This personal and unique process, determined by them and their lives will determine what each individual will produce and how and what they shall become unencumbered by the baggage of limitation to their opportunity and choice. As observed by Mary McLeod Bethune, "*There is a place in God's sun for the youth 'farthest down' who has the vision, the determination, and the courage to reach it*". Ultimately such a process outlives and outshines muddled efforts to make it measurable for a particular time and place, **for the process remains the product that we all aspire to attain.**

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