

THE CONTRIBUTION MADE TO THE
YOUTH SERVICE
BY THE INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES
OF PART-TIME YOUTH WORKERS

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Although Ministerial conferences have focused attention on the curriculum of the youth service in recent years, there has been both implicit and explicit concern with what the youth service is teaching young people; from the Albemarle Report in 1960 onwards - and probably before.

The Albemarle Report wrote of "preparation for adult life" (HMSO 1960, §202), and made many references to activity groups, sporting activity, music and dancing. In "Youth and Community Work in the 70s" (HMSO 1969), there was a section headed "Development Towards Adulthood", and references to community work, counselling and "Personal Development", and activities noted as being a means to an end (§7,9), and in Survey 13 of the Welsh Office (HMSO/Welsh Office 1984), "Personal and Social Growth" was mentioned (§10,1,1), and there were descriptions of formal and informal classes.

The inference being drawn here is that, although the reasons for providing young people with a range of activities may change and develop, the use of activities as a basis on which to build youth work has been constant, and is likely to remain so. There have been, and are, a variety of ways in which activities and interests can be, and have been, used to the benefit of young people. There is instruction to a high level of skill, which, in sports for example, enables young people to compete at national or international level.. This can be seen as an end in itself, or can be seen as a means of encouraging personal development through self discipline and other qualities necessary for success. There is instruction to a level of competence which will allow young people to experience a degree of success, but which may also introduce them to interests which will continue into adult life. An example here is outdoor pursuits, where most young people will tend to start from an equal basis in new activities, and where leisure interests which may become family activities can develop. There is 'taster' instruction, which introduces the young people to a variety of activities which they might like to pursue, and which may develop latent talents. Often art and craft activities fill this role, with initial short term introduction leading on to a longer lasting interest. There is instruction which, at any of the above levels, is used as a means of making contact with young people so that issues of relevance to them can be discussed, or so that a friendly helping hand can be offered. This is different from the programmed discussion groups which may arise from such contacts, and which may be led by trained experts; and from the expert counselling of young people whose problems are of a deeper nature.

Given, therefore, that much youth work is based on activities and interests, and that much youth work is delivered by part-time youth workers, - and Survey 13 gave numbers of youth workers in Wales in 1984 as 186 full-time field workers to around 2,800 part-time employees (i.e. those who had completed an initial training course) - (HMSO 1984, §7,1,1), in addition to the many unqualified or volunteer workers - the next question to be asked appears to be how well equipped part-time workers are with interests and activities, and how well these are used.

The discussion which follows, and which attempts to answer these questions, is based on the responses made to a questionnaire sent to the 164 part-time youth workers who participated in the Mid Glamorgan part-time course leading to the Certificate of Qualification for Youth Work between 1986 and 1989. Responses were received from 101 people, of whom 43 were male and 58 were female.

Respondents were asked to enter which activities they had "relevant experience" of prior to entering the course, under the headings of sport; outdoor pursuits; art & craft; drama, music, public speaking etc., and other activities; and to indicate the level of this experience, for example the holding of coaching qualifications, "O" and "A" levels, practical experience, or specialist certificates. The form of the question was deliberately left open, as it was hoped that this would elicit the widest range possible in the responses. However, it is possible that some respondents did not enter certain interests which could have proved of use because at the time they did not perceive the potential usefulness; or that there were different interpretations of the question which could, for example, have led some respondents to omit an interest because they did not feel confident enough to introduce it to young people. Such considerations could have influenced the male/female proportions in the responses, if the female respondents were less confident on the whole than the males. It was not possible to check on such factors.

Many respondents had some experience of activities which would be of use to them as youth workers, and some were able to offer a range of skills.

The list of all the different activities mentioned by respondents amounts to the

Number offered	Number of respondents		
	SPORTS	O.P.	ART/CRAFT
0	40	69	58
1	21	20	18
2	17	5	13
3	17	3	8
4	2	1	3
5	1	1	1
6	2	1	.
7	2	1	-

TABLE 1
Activities offered by respondents (N = 101)

surprisingly large total of 99. Some were mentioned by several respondents, for example, football (18), swimming (15), darts and rugby (11 each), and cookery (10); others such as sign language, chess, scrabble, computers, face painting, clay modelling, origami, flute, and model making, figured only once each. In between were activities such as drama (7), snooker (5), public speaking (4), and guitar (3). The list may have been curtailed by respondents' perceptions of what might prove relevant in youth work, but the impression conveyed was of a very wide range of interests, all of which could contribute to the development of young people, and the making of relationships with them.

An impressive number of respondents had an interest in more than one sport or art/craft. There seemed to be a number of people with all round capacities coming forward for youth work.

Of the sportspeople, 17 said they had an interest, 31 were good participants, 11 (9 of them male) had coaching certificates, and 2 were referees. Twelve of the 40 who did not offer sport were male and 28 female. The preponderance of male respondents who had a background in sports may indicate that the image of the youth service attracts such entrants. However, it is possible that females generally are, or portray themselves as, less interested in sports. While it seems healthy for the youth service to offer the whole range of activities, there is an imbalance in role models if male workers were seen as sporting and females as less active. This imbalance is also seen in outdoor pursuits:

No. OF ACTIVITIES	NIL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MALES	27	10	3	2	-	-	-	1
FEMALES	42	10	2	1	1	1	1	-

TABLE 2

Numbers of Outdoor Activities offered by male and female respondents (N = 101)

One male and one female respondent held Mountain Leadership Certificates or Basic Expedition Awards, two males and one female had canoeing or sailing certificates. The outdoor activities ranged from walking and family camping to expert water sports, climbing and caving.

Although, where safety is concerned, there has to be an insistence on proper qualification, there seemed to be here a large number of individuals who could introduce young people to sporting or outdoor activity, or, at the very least, motivate them to take part. These adults could demonstrate the enjoyment of participating or of the countryside, without the competitive stimulus which can be a disincentive. It may be that an expectation of instructional ability by curriculum planners overlooks the role which could be played in this way.

Only three people, one male and two female, had experience in art and craft which could be said to amount to teaching or coaching qualification. Perhaps this is because there is less social pressure in these activities to demonstrate ability, or to pass on skills from parents to children, and no governing bodies to arrange courses; or perhaps it reflects school experience, and the relative emphases placed by schools on sports and art and craft.

The same number of males and females (29) entered no experience in art and craft, but 14 females to 4 males indicated interest in one art/craft subject, otherwise the numbers were approximately equal in the level of activity.

Drama and music were less well represented. Only 14 people, 8 of them male, had experience of one such activity, 3 of each sex had two and one male had three, and the levels of qualification were in the area of "O" and "A" levels. However, several people said they had been involved in amateur drama productions, and formal qualifications in this category are not widely available. The question is prompted as to whether there is a case for making training available - or for publicising better what is available. Certainly, as will be seen later, these activities appear far less on youth service programmes in the maintained sector than do the sports. The reduced extent of other activities than sport both among respondents, and, as will be seen

later, in the programmes of youth centres, may well be reflecting attitudes in the social background to the youth service in the area, where there is dominant respect for the physical sports, as exemplified by the status of rugby.

The question arises about the contribution all these activities actually make to the youth service, and a comparison was made with the activities offered in the programmes of the county youth service, using an internal computerised survey of part-time staff appointments undertaken by one of the team of officers in 1989/90. It has to be treated with some reserve, because the headings do not necessarily indicate the nature of the activity. Thus, for example, "minor games", "indoor games", "games" and "sport", could often include many of the same activities. Also, a name of a programme could mean a session of anything from one and a half to three hours. Some workers in small centres offered several activities, such as "minor games/craft/community work", and the survey did not give information about the distribution of time among activities. Some workers worked at two or more centres, not always offering the same activities.

However, sports activities in this internal survey accounted overall for 241 sessions by male workers, and 103 by female ones. In many cases these sessions would be conducted by someone with a coaching certificate or by a qualified teacher, but categories like "minor games", "indoor games", "pool", "keep fit", might be more flexible, and open to "graduates" of the initial training course such as those who responded to the questionnaire. These accounted for 127 sessions.

In a similar way, while a specialist qualification would be necessary for canoeing, campcraft need not present the same sort of safety problems. Given that a number of respondents to the questionnaire indicated an interest in walking and in family camping, there seems to be a case for using their services, although it might be difficult to motivate youth centre members to take part in an activity which could seem uninteresting unless it were part of a wider exercise, such as a community project.

The programmes in the computer survey offered 192 art and craft sessions, 66 conducted by male workers, 126 by females. The range included "cooking", "floral art", "model making", "mural" "hair and beauty" under various names, all of which were mentioned by the respondents to the research questionnaire. "Craft" appeared 75 times, and experience of the youth service shows the content could be anything from making soft toys to glass engraving. Since 53 of the workers were female, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was intended that most of the topics would be more likely to appeal to the girls. Although in some cases posts are known to be filled by qualified art and craft teachers - and there is a case for offering young people confirmed expertise - there are many opportunities here for adults who have found satisfaction from a hobby to pass on their interest to young people. In a society which tends to be increasingly competitive, perhaps there are also opportunities to demonstrate in a practical way to young people that it is possible, satisfying and personally rewarding to enjoy interests and hobbies at a level that does not demand qualifications or public demonstration of competence and in a way which is not subject to the pressures of competition or the attainment of immediate results.

There is expertise available in the part-time workforce of the youth service to offer role models for such positive intrinsic enjoyment of activities.

Most of the other activities which appear in the survey appear relatively few times, but worth noting are "spontaneous activities", appearing 72 times. (43 male, 29 female), and special work with girls or boys, which appear in a variety of guises.

"Spontaneous Activities", (something of a misnomer) was used by programme planners in Mid Glamorgan to cover a type of general youth work based on motivating young people to try out a variety of activities, most of which needed careful advance planning by the youth workers, but which might appeal spontaneously to the young people.

Another way of ascertaining how interests are used is through the activities actually offered by former course members. Unfortunately, this question was not asked in the questionnaire, and to extract full information from the county lists of those employed proved impossible. For example, a "W Jones" might not be the one who attended the course, although William Shakespeare would have been instantly identifiable. Female workers who had married since completing the course would be concealed by their new names. However, a rough check was made for recognisable names, and the following appeared; girls activities, spontaneous activities, (3 each), art and craft, badminton, dance, disco dancing, (2 each), boys' sports, general sports, games, indoor games, minor games, football, table tennis, volleyball, contact through art, craft, detached work, drama, project, and supervisory assistant (one).

Thus there would seem to be evidence that there is a wide range of interests and abilities available to the youth service through the interests of part-time workers, and that these interests and abilities are often recognised through the programming of the youth centres. Part-time workers will also be contributing their experience through the informal part of the curriculum, in their contacts with young people. However, the breadth of interest may not be reaching the young people because workers can be modest about offering their skills, and programmers remain unaware of them. It is a pity also if the youth service does not take credit to itself for all the experiences which widen the horizons of young people which it is able to offer, and also which it does offer but in informal and unprogrammed ways.

Whether activities and interests are used for wider purposes in the youth service, or whether they are introduced for good reason as ends in themselves, as was discussed at the beginning of this paper, there exists a healthy range of interests and abilities in the part-time work force which is available for the widening of the curriculum, and which appears to be underused and in some ways hindered from development because of restricted perceptions by both the owners of the expertise (who may fail to realise where they fit in to the whole) and programme planners, (who are rightly concerned to offer to young people only the best and the safest, and equate these with formal qualifications), of the ways in which they could facilitate good youth work.

M J Howells
A Donald

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