# *YOUTH-WORKER TRAINING: TEACHING AND LEARNING FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*

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*ABSTRACT: This article examines the development of youth work as a profession in Australia, from its early days when Australia was a British colony to the present day. The paper then outlines how this historical heritage has influenced the types of youth worker training that have been developed at the college and university levels. The article concludes with a brief overview of the field and a comparison of youth work and training opportunities in the UK and Canada on the one hand and in Australia on the other.*

*Key words: Australia, youth work, training, international, comparison*

Youth work and associated training occurs in a variety of countries across the world. This paper focuses on three English-speaking countries, the UK, Canada, and Australia, each with a long history of working with youth. These particular countries were chosen for two major reasons: first, because of the ease of accessing related materials available in English; and second, because the three countries have fairly well-defined routes to a youth work qualification. However, future papers of this kind should attempt a similar comparison among formal youth work programs offering work qualification in other countries and regions such as, for instance, The Commonwealth Youth Program in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific and a variety of programs in Europe that train Social Educateurs.

This overview is of a broad nature, which will unavoidably blur some of the finer details. Also, in highlighting the similarities and differences for reasons of comparison, there is no intention to suggest that any one model or approach is superior to another; the intention, rather, is to see how youth work educators can learn from each other.

My focus will be on the country I know best, Australia, whilst my comparisons with the UK and Canada, dependent on articles and other sources of documentation, are less detailed and often second-hand. My initial interest in the comparison with Canada arose from being a summer school Child and Youth Care faculty member at the University of Victoria a number of years ago. At that time, I was challenged to investigate whether youth work concepts and approaches developed, at least partially, in Australia were valid for the North American context, especially for Canada. That challenge has continued to this day as I now lecture to youth work students from Canada who have chosen to come to Australia to further their education in youth work.

# THE YOUTH WORK FIELD IN AUSTRALIA: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Youth work in Australia draws strongly on its British heritage, which is characterized by a longstanding tradition of the government as a key provider of youth services. Because of our early history as a convict colony, there was a strong reliance on the government to provide all the basic necessities for the convicts and for their descendents. As the non-government sector gradually grew stronger, there remained this sense of reliance and entitlement to government resources and funding.

This British heritage led to a number of recurring themes in the history and development of youth work in Australia. Much of the youth work of that time was based on the fear that working-class young people, if left unsupervised and undirected, would pose an increasing threat to the security, values, and lifestyle of the ruling middle and upper classes.

Thus, many of these early attempts at organized youth work, both in the U.K. and in Australia, were based upon the thinly disguised self-interests of the expanding middle classes which strove to protect their own interests and to pass on, to those seemingly less fortunate, their own middle-class values and conservative life-styles. Young peoples' problems were identified as being emotional or moral in nature, sometimes the result of their parents' or their own sins. In many cases, volunteers, guided by their own religious and personal values, adopted this approach, which manifested itself in two types of child-saving interventions. One approach was the rescuing of young women from moral danger and attempting to prevent young men from committing crime or becoming victims of crime. The other approach was that of providing recreational and educational opportunities for young people. These two types of intervention are outlined in more detail below.

## *Removal from Moral or Criminal Danger*

During the early stage of colonization in Australia, the streets of Sydney were overrun by large groups of children and young people, the product of liaisons between soldiers, sailors, and convicts and the female convicts and aboriginal women of the area. The first type of intervention attempted to remove young women in "moral" danger from the streets, brothels, or other "unsavoury" environments and to place them in workhouses or other training institutions. Similar attempts at removal or diversion were also undertaken with young men who were seen as being in danger of being drawn into a life of crime by their peers or by their environments.

Thus, during the 1850s, through legislation, reform schools and other institutions were set up by the government and non-government organizations for the care and protection of young people. For the first time, it was seen as an appropriate role for the government to intervene directly in the behaviour, and direct the morals, of not only the criminal and abandoned adolescents but all adolescents. This emphasis has continued well into the 20th century.

*Education and Activities*

The second approach to saving children involved the education, aspirations, and activities of working-class young people. The earliest interventions were effected through the establishment of Sunday schools to educate and to provide religious instruction to young working people who were not able to attend school. This initiative later led to the founding and expansion of the YMCA and the YWCA as well as the Scouts, Guides, and Boys Brigade in the 1850s. Settlement houses, the predecessors of today's neighbourhood and community centres, were established in the 1880s by the middle classes that sought to give the "labouring poor" the opportunity to learn "more civilized" habits.

The concern of these middle-class leaders was to guide young people towards healthy leisure and physical activities based on Christian values and morality. The hope here was that such interventions would turn potentially delinquent youth into law-abiding, responsible, hard-working adults who knew their place in society. They were to take their place, assigned by God, and not question it. Both of these strands continued to expand into the early 1900s.

Most of these traditional voluntary-sector youth movements based their organizational structures on the existing class model--the ruling-class patrons and sponsors forming the executive, followed by a middle-class leadership, and finally, the working-class clients. Thus, child and youth work in its infancy in Australia, alongside growing state education and social welfare institutions, was providing, in many instances, a way of keeping working-class youth under control and diverting their energies into less disruptive pursuits. At the same time, such early child and youth work was also providing an opportunity for upwardly mobile young people to "better" themselves.

However, not all youth work of those times was based on the middle and upper classes imposing their values and preferences upon working-class young people. Middle and upper class young people were also socialized into a particular value system through the direct and indirect influence and activity of the Church and the private school system.

Rarely, there arose youth organizations at least partially committed to more working-class leadership and values. An example of such a working-class youth organization was the Young Australia Football League, founded in 1905, which supported high protectionism, anti-imperialism, and pro-Australian policies as well as Australian-made goods, the Anglo-Saxon underprivileged population and the principles of white supremacy (Ewen, 1983).

On the whole, most of these early youth movements embraced a rescue mentality, neither seriously questioning the status quo, nor attempting to challenge social inequality, nor yet effecting changes in the interest of young people. Whilst many of these movements did genuinely alleviate some of the worst effects of poverty and provided activity-based programs, it seemed to be generally accepted that youth work was apolitical,

and it was not its role to remedy the root causes of young people's problems.

This middle-class heritage also placed a heavy emphasis on working with males while largely, and this until recently, ignoring the needs of young women, except in regard to issues of "moral danger". This same middle-class heritage also strongly emphasized a Protestant work ethic, often to the detriment of creative responses to the past and present unemployment crises, and prevented examination of alternative systems of redistributing income.

It may seem, on the surface, that the approach to working with young people has changed over time in Australia and elsewhere, especially from the 1950s onward. In some way, changes indeed have been made but, at the same time, many aspects of that inappropriate, middle-class heritage of the 1800s keeps resurfacing in different guises. Youth work, from the 1950s on in Australia, with some notable exceptions, has continued to be concerned with symptoms rather than with causes and with band-aiding rather than with social, as well as with personal, change. The major trends in youth work and youth policy have tended to focus on entertainment, participation, empowerment, and entrepreneurship. These trends are outlined in more detail below.

*Entertainment.* After the end of World War II, in the 1950s and early 1960s, an approach focused on recreation was developed emphasizing a basic belief in entertainment and diversion as a means of redirecting youthful excesses or providing temporary relief from environmental distress.

*Participation.* Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, an approach to youth work developed which was based on the elimination and absorption of young people as a separate entity through token attempts to get young people (mainly from the middle class) politically involved. This was an attempt to diffuse the growing solidarity amongst youth and their leanings toward social revolution at a time of growing affluence and the hippy and anti-war movements.

It seems that youth work in the 1980s consisted of a combination of these previous threads--a mixture of welfare, "bread and circuses activities", and token participation in the social and political spheres. Also during the 1970s and 1980s, the traditional voluntary youth organizations had, on the whole, become less relevant to the current needs of older adolescents and, at times, almost by default, the government tended to have a larger role in youth affairs, a role which before was limited largely to custodial and protective functions. These voluntary organizations then withdrew from providing services to the older teenagers and primarily engaged with the under-fifteen age group; they became, mainly, children's organizations and have continued to make a valid contribution to that younger age group.

*Empowerment.* During the 1970s and 1980s, activists from the hippy and anti-war movements began to make an impact on the government and non-government youth services as bureaucrats and workers, and there appeared, for a brief period, services with a strong emphasis on

empowerment and social justice. Such initiatives included youth shelters, employment schemes, and youth health programs which dealt with those slightly older adolescents, fifteen and over. Some of these programs, government and non-government, espoused a philosophy of not only participation but also empowerment and social justice. In many instances, this philosophical stance was nothing more than rhetoric, but some organizations, especially some of the coordinating peak organizations, maintained this stance. In some instances, this lead to the withdrawal of state and federal funding to peak organizations who were quite critical of government inertia in many areas of youth needs.

*Entrepreneurs.* Most recently, under a growing economic rationalist agenda during the 1990s, the government began to withdraw from many of the direct service provisions it previously had undertaken from the 1950s through to the early 1980s. This gap in services was again being filled by the voluntary sector. However, its role was quite different from the previous one. This sector was now beginning to operate more as a business and a corporation rather than as a charity.

This market-driven approach has also led to a growing number of for-profit, "user pays" organizations, which see young people more as economic units of production and/or as consumers competing alongside of the charity sector. This has given rise to the age of entrepreneurs in organizations, and government policy is attempting to equip young people as entrepreneurs in order that they might compete more vigorously in the market-driven economy.

We are also seeing the rise and expansion of many large faith-based organizations that are absorbing, replacing, or out-maneuvering many of the smaller community-based, grass-roots, youth organizations. At the same time, there has been a rise of small for-profit residential care organizations that operate on a fee-for-service basis, offering basic baby-sitting for troubled adolescents that have "worn out their welcome" in the smaller, community-based organizations. These for-profit organizations often have minimally trained staff and offer little in the way of recreation, counseling, or life skills programs. They contract with the government to "baby-sit" and to isolate troublesome young people from the mainstream, with little in the way of long-term strategies for the care and empowerment of such young people.

This has come about because, in part, compared to North America, in Australia there has been far less emphasis on the therapeutic treatment of young people in residential centers. In Sydney, for example, with a current population of around five million people, there are only two or three government-run therapeutic treatment centers for adolescents and the same number of private, for-profit treatment centers--in all, maybe six to ten centers. Once the large-scale children's homes were finally abolished in the 1950s and 1960s, no large treatment centers arose to take their place. If "difficult" young people could not be handled in a community care, they often ended up in state psychiatric hospitals or juvenile justice institutions.

This lack of treatment centers is a mixed blessing. The up side is that it is much harder to get a young person labeled as "sad or mad", and so they are often managed in small community settings, which don't operate on a medical model. The down side is that if they are indeed sad or mad, it is much harder for them to get appropriate help, especially if they have a dual diagnosis of mental illness and addiction problems.

Currently, there is no national body representing the needs and views of youth workers, though some states do have small youth-worker associations. As previously indicated, there used to be a peak body representing youth services, workers, and young people, but it was de-funded by the federal government for "biting the hand that feeds it". This peak body has been replaced by a youth advisory group of selected, often middle-class, educated adolescents to provide advice to the federal government.

## YOUTH-WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA

The predominance of a community-based setting for practice has in turn influenced the type of youth work training that staff looked for and that was provided by training bodies. The first accredited training in Australia was provided by a YMCA college initially based in Sydney and which later moved to Melbourne. This college training was eventually taken over by what is now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, one of the five Australian Universities currently providing youth-worker training. Thus, unlike Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, where the need for training initially came from workers in hospitals and children's institutions, formalized youth-work training in Australia first came about through a community-based organization, the YMCA. Because of this community orientation, the curriculum did not have a primary therapeutic focus.

Thus, the focus of youth-worker training in Australia is a combination of one-to-one, group, and community work-skills development; in-depth programming, and therapeutic and treatment skills development are less prominent than they are in Canadian courses. The small size of these non-government community-based settings has also had an impact on the type of course content presented in our university courses. Many of these largely government-funded services employ only two to five staff and are governed by voluntary, part-time boards, or management committees, as we call them. Thus, the paid staff in many Australian youth services necessarily have to learn a wider range of skills than do staff in the larger community-based organizations found more frequently in North America. These skills include a basic knowledge of finances, fund raising, public relations and media skills, submission writing and policy development, political analysis, and lobbying. In many instances, the workers have had to learn skills to "manage" their voluntary management committees. In the larger organizations, these skills often reside in the bodies of the specialist financial manager, the publicity person, or the fundraiser. So our student graduates often have to be jacks (or jills)-of-all-trades; they are specialized generalists, as is the case in the United Kingdom.

Formal youth-worker qualifications in Australia can be gained in two main ways: through our Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), which are, in many ways, similar to the training in Community Colleges in Canada; and through private education providers. The TAFE colleges offer a variety of mainly one- and two-year qualifications in youth work. Students entering such courses can be as young as 16 years old. Such TAFE courses can articulate with a variety of youth courses offered in universities around Australia. Alternatively, there is a small but growing number of private education providers who can also run some of these TAFE type courses in youth work. Up until now, the content of TAFE courses has been class- and practicum-based and largely content/curriculum-driven and fairly easy to assess in terms of articulating with university courses. However, over the next few years, these courses are to be developed into competency-based courses with far less classroom hours and a focus on competency outcomes that can be assessed in a wide variety of ways.

In theory, such an approach can give a much more tailored, individualized learning experience for students but, in practice, for university educators, it will prove to be a nightmare to try to give appropriate accreditation and to articulate with our courses due to a lack of common course content, as was the case in the past. What will probably happen is that we will tend to play it safe and give less credit than in the past, thus risking repetition of material rather than throwing students into the deep end with materials to which they have had no prior exposure.

In Australia, whose population is around 20 million, there are currently five universities offering undergraduate as well as some postgraduate courses in youth work. The majority of the students commencing our youth work courses are under 20. Most of these courses at the university level have a major focus on adolescence and, unlike Canada, provide only a limited exposure to child-related issues. There is often a second, related focus on community work and community development. Unlike the four year course offered at the University of Victoria, B.C., our courses tend to be three years in length with a possibility of a fourth honour's year. If interested in continuing their studies, students will often come back to do a Masters, a post-graduate certificate or diploma, or a PhD. Many will also pursue further study in social work, law or psychology, building on their youth-work qualification.

## THE YOUTH-WORK FIELD AND YOUTH-WORKER TRAINING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

As already indicated, the history of youth work in Australia has many close parallels with that in the UK. However, there are also some fundamental differences to which I will refer below.

At the present time, in comparison to Australia, there is probably more dependence in the UK on direct government funding for youth

services, though I suspect that, under economic rationalism, this source of funding may decline over time.

Compared to Australia, the UK also has much stronger youth peak coordinating bodies; the National Youth Agency and the Community and Youth Workers Union both have a major role in accrediting courses and maintaining standards in the training and employment of youth workers. Also, they both have a major role in lobbying government over youth issues and service provision.

A strong stream running through the British youth work scene has been its focus on working only with those who voluntarily attend, join or ask for help. Therefore, many of the British youth workers would say that they cannot or should not work with those who are mandated clients, that is, those who are compelled to attend or receive a service (Nicholls, 2003). So, in the UK, under this narrow definition, workers in juvenile justice centres and some treatment centres and residential care cannot be classified as youth workers. Workers in such mandated centres are often called residential care workers.

In the UK, a student commencing youth-work courses is, on the average, 30 years old (Nicholls, 2003). This older age in the UK partially reflects the types of courses offered and the type of student selected for the 65 plus youth-work courses in the UK. Only a few of these UK youth-work entry courses are of a stand-alone Bachelor's undergraduate type, as most of the entry courses count toward an undergraduate Diploma of Higher Education (Dip.H.Ed.) which can build into a Bachelor's degree. UK students with a relevant undergraduate degree or experience can undertake a postgraduate qualification, certificate, or diploma that can often be developed into a Master's degree. The length of this initial youth-worker qualification differs across the UK--two years in England, three years in Wales, and four years in Scotland (Nicholls, 2003). The majority of these students come through a "non-traditional entrance" route with a large percentage not having completed high school qualifications (Nicholls, 2003).

The title of such qualifications is often "double-barreled": Youth and Community Work, Youth and Community Development, Community and Youth Studies/Work. As in Australia, none of the courses contain the words *child* or *children* within their title, indicating their primary community focus (PAULO, 2002). Such youth and community workers see their training and philosophy as quite different from that of other allied professionals such as social workers and psychologists. Probably, youth workers, in many instances, identify most closely with the profession of teacher/educator. Some youth workers define themselves as *informal educators*--the George Williams YMCA College in London, as an illustration, runs an informal education qualification for youth workers.

## THE YOUTH WORK FIELD & TRAINING IN CANADA

Here, I will only make some very brief observations and comparisons and hope that future papers explore in more detail the similarities and differences between Australia and Canada in the child and youth care fields.

Canada has a youth-work system with a number of similarities to the Australian, yet has other characteristics more closely aligned to those of the United States. The main similarities with Australia are in the political structures and funding arrangements for youth services as well as in the training in youth work available at the college and university levels. On the other hand, Canada is more similar to America in the number of its child and adolescent treatment centers and larger-scale youth organizations, many funded by charitable foundations.

Also, as I have already indicated, for its size, compared to Canada, Australia has a much larger number of youth-work graduates coming out of universities. However, the number of students completing studies in Child and Youth Care in Canadian community colleges is proportionately larger than the number coming out of Australian Technical and Further Education Colleges.

The Canadian child and youth work courses at the college and university levels seem to be longer in duration in some provinces and have a greater emphasis on children than is the case in Australia. The converse is true when comparing the courses in terms of emphasis on community work, Australian courses having a stronger emphasis in this respect.

Interestingly, out of the four and a half pages of Mattingly, Stuart, and VanderVen's (2001) "Proposed Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Personnel", only the last competency, *community engagement,* seemed to specifically focus on the aspect of community development in youth-work intervention. However, a more obviously community-based intervention approach is found in the detailed, approved program standards for child and youth worker courses delivered by the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2000). However, I suspect that such a community focus may also underlay many of the other competencies when viewed from an ecological/systems approach, and that the language used hides many similarities. Thus, there may be a greater emphasis at the community college level on the therapeutic treatment approach which later, at the university level, is balanced and expanded with a broader focus on community interventions, human rights, and social justice.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have outlined some of the similarities and differences among youth work services and training in Australia, Canada, and the UK. I invite the readers of this article to respond to me (v.bowie@uws.edu.au) with their observations so that their "insider" perspectives can better inform any future articles I may write. Based on

this more informed international insider perspective, it may be possible to continue learning from each other as young people, direct care givers, service managers, and youth work educators.

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