CHAPTER 7

Youth Work, Faith, Values and Indoctrination

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> *There is a legitimate concern that workers who have a religious allegiance may use opportunities that arise in their work as human services {op. cit} practitioners to seek to persuade vulnerable people to adopt their . . . religious points of view.*
>
> (Moss, 2005: 21)

> *There are a worrying number of books that operate from a non-dialogical basis. That is to say, their writers are neither generally willing to entertain that their knowledge . . . may be flawed or wrong.*
>
> (Doyle and Smith, 2014: web)

Should youth workers promote their own values when these are based on a personal religious faith or should they remain neutral and operate in such a way so that young people are free to make up their own minds? This chapter attempts to set that question in a British youth and community work context and examine the relationship between the notions which lie at the heart of it – faith, values and indoctrination.

At the outset, it is worth clarifying that the term faith is being used here to refer to religious faith of all kinds found in the UK, including Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc., although the argument developed seeks to highlight similarities between religious and secular worldviews. It is also worth acknowledging that two key assumptions underlie the position developed herein: firstly, that young people do not (and cannot) acquire values entirely independently of adults or their peers – they can (and do) learn them from both; and, secondly, that youth work's purpose (at least in part) should be to contribute to a more just and healthy society. On that basis, this chapter will:

- examine the concept of values, drawing a distinction between those which have an ethical, moral basis and those which do not;

- examine first the relationship between religious belief and values and then youth work and values, arguing value neutrality is neither possible nor desirable within a youth work context;
- clarify what is, and is not, indoctrination, and suggest that the greatest protection against indoctrination is to maintain a dialogical approach to youth work practice;
- identify a way forward for youth work practice and some lessons for youth work training programmes in the UK.

Values – moral and non-moral

So, what do we mean by values? According to Moss (2007: 1) 'At its simplest, a value is something we hold dear, something we see as important and worthy of safeguarding'. However, we need to be clear as to what we mean when we say we 'value' certain things. We may value concrete things or physical objects, like a car or house. They are prized and important to us. But other things we value are more abstract, like tolerance or compassion; or they may be expressed as personal qualities – things that people can be, or fail to be (e.g. tolerant or compassionate) – or as rules (e.g. don't tell lies).

Graham Haydon (1997: 34) draws a useful distinction between what he calls 'non-moral' values and 'moral' values. Saying that somebody's belief in horoscopes is wrong, may only be to question its factual truth, which is different to saying that believing in horoscopes is morally wrong. There is a difference between advising a young person to listen to classical music rather than pop music because classical music may have *aesthetic* value and advising them that they *should* not listen to pop music because of *unethical* lyrical content. Conflict most often arises when our values become things that we think others *should* adopt. The focus here will be on this type of value, what Haydon calls moral values – i.e. those with an ethical dimension, such as 'it is wrong to have sex before marriage'. These are the values that often create the most debate and dissention, and pose thorny dilemmas for youth workers around whether they should seek to persuade young people to adopt these values too.

Religious belief and moral values

It is conceivable for someone to believe there is life on other planets and for another person to believe there is not. Neither can prove their assertion, although they may seek to marshal supporting evidence. It would be

unusual, though, for a discussion between the believer and non-believer in this case to escalate into violence. Religious faith usually involves a deeply held set of beliefs (such as in the existence of a divine being or in reincarnation). These beliefs may amount to commands from God to be obeyed unquestioningly, or represent the basis of an ongoing dialogue or a process of emergent understanding through revelation. For the religious believer, believing that an act is against the divine order of things may be sufficient to make it ethically wrong.

In turn, the religious believer's values (what they see as important and worth safeguarding) may be informed and strengthened by their beliefs. Faith provides the overarching meaning in which these values are situated. Values begin to define people and become part of their identity. Difficulties come about when the road divides between 'secular' values and traditional religious values around, say, sex and sexuality. The question then arises as to whether secular values, supposedly rooted in reason and rationality, have in themselves more value than so called religious values which, being based on beliefs and faith, can be seen as inherently irrational. However, this question is not resolvable in those terms because the 'truth' of moral values cannot be objectively established in the same way as the factual truth of science or mathematics. Whilst it could be a fact that I value sexual chastity (subjectively), it is not a fact that sexual chastity has value (objectively). Values are not states of affairs in the physical world.

Youth work and values

Because values grounded in a religious faith can come to define a culture and provide a sense of belonging, any threat to those values can be experienced as intimidating and a potent source of conflict. The presence of conflicting value systems in close proximity over time can become increasingly problematic. For some, this leads to the conclusion that communities with different value systems should lead separate lives. When in a minority, or surrounded by others with a different value base, life can feel lonely and threatening. Youth workers can often end up working with young people in that lonely and threatening space, both physically and psychologically. If workers want to avoid conflict, they may see their role as preparing young people for a world with a plurality of values, and where difference is celebrated and valued in itself. This is partly reflected in the inclusion until recently, of 'spiritual' development as a separate standard within the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work in the UK.

> *This standard is about working with young people to explore ethical, moral and cultural values, addressing the need to respect the beliefs and values of others. It includes exploring where young people are on their journeys through life and encouraging them to see themselves in terms of their relationships with others and the environment around them.*
>
> (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008: 1.1.4)

Whilst it has since been removed as a separate standard, it is still recognised as an aspect of youth work. In the UK then, there is already a clear expectation that youth workers will engage in activities with young people that challenge them to explore and develop a sense of their own and others' beliefs and values. Processes of 'values clarification' (Kirschenbaum and Simon, 1973) can be seen as part of that effort. Here we are dealing with attempts made to simply make the implicit explicit, to reveal to young people what values they already hold and why, so as to bring those values under greater critical control. Although value clarification is a useful and often powerful exercise when working with young people, it masks more fundamental realities that, if we fail to recognise them, will confuse our thinking in this area. Such a position seems to take a neutral stance on values development. Young people are enabled simply to understand themselves better – what answers they arrive at remains at their discretion. According to this view, educators should not therefore express a view or seek to 'influence'.

But any process that seeks to engender in children and young people the values of, for example, telling the truth, keeping promises, tolerance, fairness, listening and respect (which in turn lay the bedrock for democratic debate, dialogue and the development of autonomy) is one which the child does not necessarily choose to adopt. We as parents, carers and educators will often make that choice for them in what we decide is in their (and society's) interest. All *socialisation* processes (assuming we are seeking to develop desirable habits of conduct) require the parent, carer, teacher or worker to present these as desirable. We can present them as possibilities rather than a *fait accompli*, but with young children this still inevitably requires, amongst a range of approaches, the use of behaviourist methods of reward and punishment and role modelling until powers of reasoning are sufficiently developed to allow more autonomous decision-making. Any parent will confirm that the enterprise of moulding or forming a child into a socialised adult sometimes requires elements of a behaviourist approach and a small child in particular may not be given a choice, or be fully able to understand the reason for his/her parents' decisions. The use of a degree of adult power to instil a sense of

value within this scenario is unavoidable. This creation of a 'primary culture' is necessary to provide a coherent structure from which the child can understand the world and develop capacity for moral reasoning in the future. It is of course, not the same as an educative process, at least as youth workers would understand it. The youth worker's role when working with teenagers is to both build on this basis whilst at the same time developing young people's ability to autonomously critique that primary culture.

The idea that those working with young people can somehow be neutral when it comes to values quickly evaporates on even a cursory analysis. The key values believed to underpin youth work are clearly articulated in the National Occupational Standards and taught (indeed promoted) on current training courses. These standards represent the outcome of the profession coming together to agree a set of values. Others (e.g. Merton and Wylie, 2005) have promoted the creation of a youth work curriculum – which has inherent within it the notion that that we *should* value certain educational outcomes. Furthermore, the radical perspective of so-called 'de-schoolers' such as Ivan Illich (1977) reminds us that the existence of a 'profession' itself suggests that we value the placing of 'professional' adults alongside young people – and prompts us to question the value of that in itself. How professionalism is conceived within youth work and whether youth work can be considered a profession at all, remains hotly contested (Koehn,1994). Traditional models of professionalism which assume a dispassionate distance between professional worker and young person do not sit easily with conceptions of the youth worker as an informal and moral educator (Young, 1999).

Despite this, youth workers in the UK (at least in theory) are conceived as professionally trained workers who seek to educate young people in such a way as is of value to society as a whole as well as the individual. State funded youth work has, to a large extent, set out its stall in this regard. Youth work as a profession in the UK does not currently and has never worked on the basis that moral values are entirely relative or merely about subjective personal preference. If it did, entering into debates about values with young people would have no purpose beyond that of entertainment or the aesthetic pleasure that that debate brought about. As citizens, we may feel that some matters should be about personal choice – e.g. sexual behaviour – and choose to attach no morality to it. But youth work does not do this in all cases, such as those involving child abuse or oppression. If a young person with learning difficulties was being bullied within a project, are there any conceivable circumstances where a worker would consider it appropriate to not intervene or express a view – or,

at the very least, to intervene in such a way as to encourage young people to articulate the basis of their actions? Although conceptions of the 'good' may differ, workers are generally encouraged to aim for the 'good' of both the individual and the good of society as part of their stated purpose. As such this precludes the idea of value 'neutrality'. In reality we need to acknowledge that professional youth work values are such that there is no ambiguity or relativity around certain values. Workers are not expected to remain non-directive or neutral on such matters as injustice, discrimination and oppression or unethical and abusive behaviour.

Huge emphasis is placed within the youth work discourse on creating environments where young people can learn to make their own decisions. The desire of the worker to respect the autonomy of young people and, at the same time, the needs of the wider community, is in itself a choice based on values. Stressing the need for a young person to make free choice as to his or her values or encouraging young people to question their beliefs involves inculcation of that questioning as valuable in itself (presumably without the young person's permission). There is therefore a fundamental paradox within any notion of non-directive, neutral value clarification. This is a 'worldview' too – a way of looking at the world. As such it could also be viewed as a form of primary culture that therefore has the potential to be culturally specific too. By virtue of living in Western society, we unconsciously adhere to certain legal, ethical and philosophical positions that are grounded in liberal democratic viewpoints (e.g. notions of Rawlsian procedural justice, individualism, freedom, etc.); market and consumerist ideologies; and faith traditions that we have not freely chosen. In fact some of these notions we consider our 'gospel' and as the grounds for our professional practice as youth workers (such as democracy and autonomy) are viewed and experienced entirely differently by other cultures.

Perhaps most pertinently, whether driven by a religious faith or other secular worldviews, workers may also feel it is legitimate as part of their professional activity to seek to persuade young people that certain values should take precedence over others; for example, criticality and creativity over materialistic consumption (Smith, 1982). Moreover, some conflict between people due to opposing values could be viewed as positive because of its potential to lead to progress and change, as with the abolition of slavery or the enfranchisement of women. Change such as this arises because of the presence of a vocal minority that seek to change the status quo, sometimes through violence (e.g. freedom fighters in South Africa).

Indoctrination and dialogical practice

So what of the concern that 'workers may use opportunities that arise in their work as human services . . . practitioners to seek to persuade vulnerable people to adopt their [worker's] religious points of view' (Moss, 2005: 21)? Is there a heightened risk of indoctrination if workers allow their own faith-based values to encroach on their practice? How is one to distinguish the indoctrinator from the one who seeks to persuade and influence others to value certain things?

R.S. Peters (1973: 71) defines indoctrination as 'getting children to accept a fixed body of rules by the use of techniques which incapacitate them from adopting a critical autonomous attitude toward them'. Similarly, Michael Taylor (1985: 25) claims that 'indoctrination interferes with the ability to be self-determining with regard to beliefs and judgments'.

The indoctrinated mind then, is one that is not open to alternatives and will not engage in dialogue to justify its own values and beliefs. It has been hoodwinked or deceived into believing and valuing only what the indoctrinator wants it to believe and value, and has no control over that process.

This process is in stark contrast to the educational and youth work ideals of democracy, open-mindedness, rationality, critical thinking, autonomy and dialogue. Through dialogue, as Socrates argued, we move closer to truth. Dialogue can be understood as a form of *truth-seeking* where both worker and young people identify themselves as learners as well as educators and are continually ready to join with the other in exploration, with a preparedness to change their own thinking. To work with young people so they stop struggling and thinking would be the essence of indoctrinatory (and non-dialogical) practice.

Haydon argues that there is a distinction to be drawn between the religious and non-religious person.

> *The secular moralist, aware of how much people can differ in their values, may always maintain some room for the thought that others may be right after all. But the believer who has a quite unshakeable religious faith may by the same token have the strongest possible conviction of the correctness of certain moral positions.*
>
> (Haydon, 1997: 47)

Presumably Haydon is referring to the religious believer. But could not atheists be similarly committed to their non-belief in God and similarly passionate that others should subscribe to their beliefs and values? Is it not possible to be a

fundamentalist, evangelical atheist (*a la* Richard Dawkins, 2007)? Do we not all seek to persuade and influence others to adopt our own perspective or values to some degree? The more pressing issue is how we use our power and authority over others, particularly over those who may be overly susceptible to influence. Religious believers may include fundamentalists but it does not follow that subscribing to a religious faith precludes doubt and therefore dialogue. Any fanatic (according to Christian existentialist theologian, Paul Tillich) replaces doubt with certainty because of the existential angst lurking beneath the surface of the psyche.

> *He flees from his freedom of asking and answering for himself to a situation in which no further questions can be asked and the answers to previous questions are imposed on him authoritatively. In order to avoid the risk of asking and doubting, he surrenders the right to ask and doubt.*
>
> (Tillich, 1952: 56)

Organised religion may have a violent and conflict-ridden past but there is nothing inherent in a belief in God that prevents the acknowledgment of different or opposing beliefs in others, any more than a belief in the non-existence of God. Furthermore, there is no reason for the history of religious intransience and intolerance to dictate the present or future. A more likely explanation of such intolerance is the role that religious belief plays in the behaviour of those who are living in polarised or deprived and oppressed communities and the way religious belief can become a hook to hang ones grievances against the 'other' (Said, 1978). Where religious communities are located in countries where some plurality of values is tolerated, we can often observe a greater degree of what Haydon terms 'cross fertilisation' (1997: 47) i.e. a process by which different values come to influence the religions practiced within that culture.

Atheistic and politically committed practitioners cannot claim to be acting in an entirely non-directive way. To question the legitimacy of work infused with faith-based values and yet strongly defend the right of workers to engage in political education is, at the least, problematic if not contradictory. Seeking to engage young people in existential questions such as the search for meaning and purpose, or even to promote what might more accurately be called 'spiritual' or values such as peace, forgiveness, sacrifice, hope, human connectedness, is arguably as equally valid as the promotion of such values as trust, respect, collectivity, civic courage, perseverance, and open-mindedness.

At times within professional debate, it appears that whereas these secular values are viewed as entirely appropriate, those that may emerge from a faith-based or spiritual worldview are not – presumably because these faith-based values are themselves, valued less.

It is of course important for individuals to be clear about their own values and the significance they have for them because without this kind of understanding dialogue is not possible. But, as we have seen, seemingly neutral notions of value clarification are in fact value laden (i.e. it is 'good' to clarify your values). Can one consistently espouse the need to criticise and question certain moral values and yet at the same time espouse unquestioningly others? For example, as workers we unquestioningly defend the idea of democracy as 'good' in comparison with anarchy, despotism, etc., and seek to foster the valuing of it through experience. In our defence of democratic education, is it possible that some workers are in danger of taking a less than dialogical approach to that debate and even seeking to indoctrinate others into their own worldview?

A way forward for youth work practice

Young people need opportunities to make choices about their values and they cannot do this without engaging in dialogue. Workers can seek to promote certain values and work in non-indoctrinatory ways as long as they conceive of themselves as *truth seekers* rather than *truth holders* seeking to win an argument. Dialogue is only possible, however, if we state what we value and believe to be true at that time and then seek to understand what the other values and sees as true, likewise, at that time. Dialogue does not mean that we should not share what we value with young people or engage in some kind of descent into moral relativism. The process of declaring your values, convictions and beliefs does not become indoctrination as long as it is accompanied by a commitment to listen to and learn from the values, convictions and beliefs of others. In the Socratic dialogical tradition, it is this process, including even the juxtaposition of 'true' and 'false' that has value in itself and enables us all to develop. Workers are not engaged in indoctrination when they state what they personally believe in and value, even when these beliefs and values entail a moral, ethical or spiritual dimension.

The perceived tension between youth work and faith is borne out of a nervousness around the exclusive claims to truth posited by certain members of faith groups. It is undeniable that in many parts of the world and throughout history, such a non-dialogical approach to truth has led to violence and

injustice on a global scale. Workers who are members of faith groups, make exclusive claims for the Quran or the Bible, deny that there may be truth in anything other than their own tradition and seek to convince young people to believe the same, are operating in opposition to youth work principles. Work with young people in any religious faith context that seeks to evangelise and convert young people needs to be recognised as an activity that those with such convictions can legitimately seek to do, but must be distinguished from education and youth work. Blind disregard for professional principles and a refusal to engage with matters that cause doubt or inner conflict, or an excessively judgmental approach to young people has no place within the profession. In this sense, it may be that we need to be employ a further paradox, the 'paradox of tolerance'.

> *Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.*
>
> (Popper, 1945: Chapter 7, note 4)

The problem with not tolerating intolerance, of course, is that some young people that workers engage with are exactly that – intolerant. Young people who have, often through the indoctrinatory activities of others, come to have sympathy with fascist politics or religious violent extremism can pose a stern challenge to democratically minded practitioners. In this context, youth workers' intolerance should not equate to a refusal to engage with young people with such beliefs and values. It is through meaningful dialogue with these young people that change becomes possible. Such dialogue involves the use of both powers of reason and influence, to confront irrational beliefs as well as inter and intra-faith dialogue (i.e. between and within faith communities) around how sacred texts are interpreted and understood. Relationship and rapport-building skills remain key if workers are to get alongside these young people and bring their influence to bear. In the face of such a challenge, faith in God or simply the underlying potential of young people, or the goodness of human nature, is at times invaluable as a motivating and sustaining force.

There is a long tradition of faith-based work that respects the emphasis on autonomy inherent in youth work (Milson, 1963) and many educators with a personal faith would be anxious to avoid indoctrination (Tan, 2003). Atheistic

practitioners with strongly held political convictions or with a strong commitment to a particular worldview (could we say even a 'faith' in an ideology such as communism, socialism, feminism or anarchism?) should be equally anxious too. Any pedagogy, whether faith-based or politically-based, that seeks to inculcate the same and uncritical worldview in others through the use of power, particularly with young people whose relatively restricted levels of awareness and experience could leave them overly vulnerable to influence, could quite rightly be described as indoctrination. Matters of religious faith seen in this light therefore become irrelevant to this discussion. It is dialogical practice that is key and offers the best protection against indoctrination of whatever sort. Clearly, where young people are particularly vulnerable to suggestion and influence, workers need to be vigilant as to how they are exerting their influence. But in most cases, the chance of youth workers indoctrinating young people is actually quite low, particularly in the context of all the other influences in young peoples' lives. Young people (more so than young children) can choose to adopt values as their own and still retain the ability to defend their view and think about its limits. A young person choosing to commit to a religious faith or to become involved in political or protest movements does not automatically imply they have been indoctrinated. Denying young people the chance to be exposed to political, religious or spiritual values out of a desire to avoid influencing young people, takes away from them the opportunity to make autonomous choices about their beliefs and values.

If we revisit our definition of indoctrination as the inability of the young person to be critical, justify their values or be open to alternatives, then as long as workers engage in dialogue, are clear about the possibility of alternative viewpoints, encourage young people to articulate the basis of their values and do so themselves, they are not denying young people autonomy. It is also possible to seek to exert influence around certain values whilst, at the same time promoting a critical awareness too. We may seek in Western democratic states to promote liberal values (or from a faith perspective, certain spiritual values) whilst also developing awareness that other cultures may emphasise other values. Youth and community projects and clubs provide fertile environments for this debate as young people from different backgrounds encounter different political and cultural value systems. In essence, we need to equip young people with the critical capacity to question and develop their values. This process of joint truth seeking has the capacity to bring people together, not divide them. Attempting to break down barriers between communities does not require us to first abandon our own truth and traditions, rather a

commitment to understand them more fully, followed by a commitment to learning from the truth and tradition of others.

Lessons for youth work training

For youth workers in training, what is required is a similar space for the development and critical appraisal of the socialised self. For sure, the profession demands adherence to a set of professional values and in certain areas these could come into conflict with deeply held personal convictions. Becoming aware that others hold different views and that (more importantly) certain views are considered 'unprofessional' can lead to the suppression of those views. For workers, this could mean they simply seep out later in practice. Where personal or communal beliefs and values clash with professional values, simply burying them and concealing this struggle from young people has limited educational value, dilutes authenticity in the relationship and can leave workers feeling paralysed. An approach that allows exploration of these convictions with an expressed value of openness to others (indeed, as a professional expectation) should pave the way for effective teamwork and more productive personal and professional relationships. Students should be encouraged to explore each other's journey and examine the foundations for the differences that inevitably arise. All meaningful dialogue starts with and is enriched by a level of self-awareness. Time to reflect with others both, of a similar and dissimilar mind, within a faith community can, when facilitated in a 'safe space', produce a more developmental dialogue with those who have a different perspective. By encouraging deeper reflection on one's own journey, the ability to imagine the journey of others is increased, not deterred.

The student who better understands why he/she believes what he/she does is better placed to understand why others feel the way they do and may also be better placed to make changes to that belief system if it no longer meets his/her needs. In order to detach oneself from socialisation and become more autonomous, the shared experience of discussing how this socialisation occurred eases the process of critique.

In summary

The relationship between youth work, faith, values and indoctrination requires careful thought and not just a knee jerk response. Here we have focused on faith in its religious manifestation, but faith – if in nothing else, then in young people themselves – that they can be more than they may be when we first

encounter them – lies at the heart of secular youth work too. Faith in the possibility of human progress motivates many workers with either a religious or political worldview and abandoning any discourse of such faith weakens the potential power of our work. Working towards the 'common good' and the alleviation of at least some of the social problems we face in society requires more than legislation and values clarification. It requires a value and moral transformation – a 'change in hearts and minds' (Sandel, 2010: 245).

Society's greatest reformers were often motivated by faith. Religions by no means have the monopoly on attempts to indoctrinate the young.

Youth work, at its best has a strong sense of purpose and the common good. Definitions of what 'good' and 'human flourishing' mean within a youth work context have long been, and continue to be, discussed (Jeffs and Smith, 1990). To detach ourselves from that aspiration would be to impoverish our discourse. Youth workers cannot and should not avoid moral values. Such an approach does not prepare young people for the reality of diversity. An absence of values – or a vacuum – will be filled with the prevailing hegemonic value system in society. Faith, in all its guises including the religious, can give a sense of meaning and hope to young people – particularly in a world that increasingly values the 'wrong' things (e.g. materialism, celebrity, consumption and unbridled individualism). Good workers have strong convictions and seek to cultivate values in young people, which could include those of a *spiritual* if not exclusively religious hue such as, compassion, mature love, fellowship or being able to see the universal significance of events. Strong religious convictions do not preclude tolerance and dialogue; and dialogue does not require neutrality or impartiality. Where disagreements arise we can be central to the process of increasing understanding and mutual respect. Value judgements have a place in society – however diverse – and in youth work. Faith-based youth work that seeks to work with young people so they come to value solidarity, mutual responsibility, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness, commitment to social justice, etc., shares a deep commonality with 'secular' youth work that seeks to do the same, as long as it is critical and dialogical in its nature.

If both young people and workers are encouraged to take an active part in their learning; if learning relationships are structured to create dialogue and critical engagement, and to enable young people and workers to delve into their own systems of meaning then there is both clear commonality between the two and an opportunity for real transformative practice. The real tragedy lies in the fact that far too often this commonality is lost within an academic and professional debate that is based on flawed philosophical thinking.

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