



Introduction to Working with Young People

The Factory: academic perspective

In the Factory project we see a different perspective on work with young people. The project is based in the area of Loughborough and the thing that we thought was particularly exciting about this project was firstly it's an outreach project and that's quite a challenging form of work with young people, there's no base to start from, there's no building that you can use to get young people to come in. You're actually going out on the streets and trying to engage them in conversations and gain their interest, so that's particularly challenging in itself. The other aspect to it is this is primarily with Asian young men, and this is one of those hard to reach groups that would rarely come into a youth centre, so the challenge is to engage an audience who traditionally have not participated in youth work activities. So the aim of Andrew and his colleagues was to get out on the streets and try and engage Asian young people and see what their interests and concerns were, and start from there. So what they did was literally hang about, meet people, talk to them, ask them questions, find out what was going on for them, and then start to build up a series of activities which engaged their interests, and allowed them to have the kind of conversations where they found out more about those young people and ways in which they might be able to help them. They're able to offer a range of opportunities from going bowling to outdoor activities, but they're also engaging the young people in aspects of their lives that are more tricky, and one of those is the problems they've been having with stop and search by the police, so what Andrew was able to do was set up a meeting with the police, the young people and the police, so they could actually talk about this and how they saw it. So that the police were learning from that and the young people were feeling that they were able to influence the kind of society they lived in. And he was also able to set up a conversation with locally elected councillors where they could bring their own perspectives and their own experience of their lives, and let councillors know about that, and again that was something that enabled them to see that they could be participants in society rather than just victims of it.

What you'll notice is that Andrew as the main youth worker here, he's white and older than the people that he's talking to, and that clearly raises particular issues to do with the kind of conversations and communications that he sets up. And one of the things you'll notice about the way he works is that he sees himself as somebody who's there to learn from the young people, he wants to learn about their culture, about the kind of issues and concerns and ambitions that they have, and he makes that quite clear which helps to make him a more accessible person, and these are key features of anybody who's doing educational work with young people.

We also see Kasem and Akkas who are young people who came through the project when it first started and, as Andrew terms it, one of his aims was to grow youth workers through the project, so they're people who are now part-time youth workers working alongside Andrew, and one of the ways in which they operate is to allow young people to take on increasing responsibilities and try and fade out of the picture themselves, so having given those responsibilities to let the young people get on with it. And again we see with this project we get the different perspectives from Andrew and Kasem and Akkas, but also from the people who were involved directly in the project in terms of what it is they get out of it, so we try to represent this as not just what the workers are trying to do, but the experiences of young people in terms of outcomes for them.

I think what we see in the Factory case study is an example of how the values and principles and approaches of work with young people can be effective in engaging young people in purposeful activities, taking these young people on their own terms and being available to them as a listener and somebody who can help with the things that they're most interested in, the kind of issues and concerns that they're bringing here and we see, for example, Andrew working with one of the young people who's trying to fill in an application to university, it's

street-based work but there are many different kinds of possibilities that are opened up through that.