

CHAPTER 10

COMMUNITY MUSIC AND YOUTH: DELIVERING EMPOWERMENT?

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed an increasing alignment between community music activity and youth. From the range of community music-style activities nowadays taking place across formal domains of youth provision, to the youth-oriented musical activities occurring within informal settings, many commentators have come to see community music activities as holding particular relevance and value in relation to youth. Importantly however, the assumptions lying behind the purportedly ‘special’ relationship between community music and youth – as well as their implications for the nature of much youth-focussed community music activity – too often go unexamined. This chapter therefore critically interrogates some of the key ways in which this relationship is commonly understood, before examining how these sit alongside the broader purposes and values commonly associated with community music.

Keywords

youth; community music; participation; empowerment.

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Introduction

In recent years and decades, the relationship between community music and youth appears to have developed apace. From the range of community music-style activities nowadays taking place across formal domains of youth provision (like education or youth offending settings), to the youth-oriented musical activities occurring within informal settings (such as youth, community or arts centres), many have come to see community music activities as holding particular relevance and value in relation to youth. Indeed, the establishment, in England, of the National Foundation for Youth Music, at the turn of the millennium, might be seen as just one amongst a number of broader initiatives premised on the distinctive value of musical activities both for, and to, young people. Importantly however, the assumptions lying behind this purportedly 'special' relationship between community music and youth – as well as their implications for the nature of much youth-focussed community music activity – too often go unquestioned and unexamined. This chapter therefore considers debates about the contemporary nature and meaning of 'youth' and explores their implications for the broader purposes and values typically associated with community music.

The chapter adopts the following structure. Firstly I consider the relationship between community music and youth, connecting this with broader agendas around youth

participation and creativity. Following this, the discussion moves on to a wide-ranging (although necessarily appended) consideration of the contemporary status of ‘youth’ as a social category, placing this in relation to a range of arguments about its social construction. Next I turn to the academic study of youth and ‘youth culture’ as a means of providing some perspective on a theme taken up more fully in the subsequent consideration of arguments about the contemporary nature and meaning of ‘youth’. What readers will hopefully glean from this is a fuller appreciation of some of the problems inherent in talking and thinking in terms of ‘youth’ today. Next I turn to a brief consideration of the key premises lying behind much contemporary youth development policy, before finally considering the question – highlighted in this chapter’s title – of possibilities for empowerment, and the place of community music in this.

Community music for youth

Over recent decades, much community music practice and related research has explicitly taken youth and young people as its focus. In many ways, such heightened attention upon the youth phase has emerged in tandem with a growing body of research highlighting the positive educational and social outcomes of arts programs for young people. From a North American perspective, Shirley Brice Heath’s work has emphasised the role of participation in arts programmes in young people’s development of language, collaborative, negotiating and organisational skills, arguing that the development of such skills can lead to increased self-confidence and self-esteem (Heath & Roach, 1999). Other contributors to the influential ‘Champions of Change’ collection (Fiske, 1999) identified the value of participation in the arts for the development of creativity, perceived self-worth, original thinking and other dimensions of personal development (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999; Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanga, 1999). In a similar vein, research from the UK has attested to

the individual and community value of arts participation within educational contexts (NACCCE, 1999) and of the enhanced learning achievable across the whole curricula where arts activities are privileged (Heath & Wolf, 2005). A number of reports have also heralded the capacity of arts activities for achieving a range of socially beneficial outcomes within deprived communities (Hill & Moriarty, 2001; Jermyn, 2001; Matarasso, 1997; Williams, 1997).

More recently, research into the everyday lives and music practices of young people from urban locales in Australia, the UK, the US and Europe (Bloustien & Peters, 2011) has demonstrated popular music's potential to contribute to the socio-economic inclusion of disadvantaged youth. Indeed, there exists a body of research exploring what Peters (2008) has termed "new national strategies focussing on youth music, arts and creative enterprise...developed to bring alienated and marginalized youth back into the economic mainstream" (p. 172). Such developments can be seen as part of a broader agenda, across more economically developed countries, to grow their creative industries and, in an associated way, "find ways of realising the creative resources of all young people" (Robinson, 1999, p. 5). This emphasis upon the role of creativity within young people's learning has received notable attention in the UK, for instance, where it has been seen as of key importance in securing future economic prosperity (NACCCE, 1999). Within debates in this area, both the actual and the potential role of informal learning in, and through, arts-based activities has also received attention (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2012), whilst in the England such thinking fed into the development of what was to become *Creative Partnerships*, a flagship creative learning programme funded by the UK government from 2002 to 2011, which sought to develop young people's creativity through artists' engagement with schools.

Within the many reports and studies exploring youth-oriented arts activities, the terms ‘at risk’¹, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘marginalized’ are often given some prominence (e.g. O’Brien & Donelan, 2008). Indeed, ‘at risk’ youth are typically considered to amongst those liable to benefit most from community arts activities. A number of studies have thus highlighted how, for example, out-of-school performing arts programs can provide rich learning contexts and a sense of agency for disadvantaged and ‘at risk’ young people (Hughes & Wilson, 2003), or engagement in arts practice can promote confidence, resilience, communication skills and connectedness to others (Thiele & Marsden, 2003). Also commonly noted within discussions of ‘at risk’ youth is the potential for arts and cultural programmes to develop young people’s ambition and a stronger sense of identity (Burton et al., 1999; Heath & Smyth, 1999), as well as creating valuable opportunities for youthful self-expression (Holloway & LeCompte, 2001). In their research on young offenders participating in community music activity, Baker and Homan (2007) draw particular attention to the ways participation can result in gains such as feelings of pride, enjoyment of the freedom to explore ideas and the construction of a more positive ‘creative self’. Further research has also pointed towards a growing appreciation of the value of creative activities for young people with behavioural and psychological problems (e.g. Magie & Miller, 1997) and there exists an increasing acknowledgement of the role that arts can help to play in reducing re-offending and addressing broader risk factors (Baker & Homan, 2007; Miles, 2004; Ruiz, 2004).

Also worthy of note, in terms of the developing relationship between community music participation and youth, especially since the early 1990s, is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989. While priority had been previously given to children’s rights to protection, the UNCRC laid particular emphasis on children and young people’s rights in terms of participation and provision. In the UK, where the UNCRC was ratified in 1991, ‘youth participation’ has subsequently become increasingly central to

the agendas of policy-makers, agencies and organisations concerned with the well-being of young people (Badham & Wade, 2005; DCSF, 2008). Indeed, over the last 10 to 15 years there has been a notable growth in UK-based activities that seek to involve children and young people in various forms of decision-making within participatory contexts, many of which might take the shape of educational, voluntary and arts-based initiatives (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003). Although some commentators have highlighted the need for caution in equating the rhetoric around youth participation with genuine benefits for young people (see Bessant, 2003), scholars from a variety of disciplines have nevertheless remained keen to highlight the range of positive outcomes achievable through engaging young people in participatory activity; from upholding their rights and improving decision-making and democratic processes to empowerment, enhancing skills and developing self-esteem (e.g. Hart, 1992; Tisdall, Davis, Hill & Prout, 2006). Given its longstanding commitment to encouraging young people's participation and their involvement in decision-making relevant to that participation, community music activities undoubtedly connect meaningfully with numerous aspects of the youth participation agenda encouraged by the UNCRC (Rimmer, 2012). Indeed, involvement in decision-making has been presented as a key driver of many of the positive outcomes of young people's engagement with community arts activity (Matarasso, 1997; Williams, 1997).

While none of this is to suggest that community music always approaches 'youth' and young people in a manner which sets them apart from other groups, as the aforementioned discussion suggests, the tendency for community music and indeed broader arts initiatives to be seen as especially appropriate for, and to, young people is nevertheless apparent. The sheer prominence and funding provision of the aforementioned National Foundation for Youth Music (which spends approximately £10m annually engaging those below 25 years of age in community music activities) certainly offers some testament to the noticeably youth-

centred nature of much community music activity in contemporary England for instance. What typically go under-explored in instances where ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ are discussed in relation to learning or developmental outcomes however, are the important ways in which the very category of ‘youth’ often brings with it – in spite of its apparent simplicity – an array of understandings and assumptions. As the ensuing discussion aims to illustrate, any failure to attend to and scrutinise such understandings has important implications for the ways in which community music initiatives might ultimately approach and engage with ‘youth’.

The social construction of ‘youth’

In recent years, ‘youth’ has become a term subject to increasing levels of contestation. As Bennett has put it, “*youth* is now increasingly a discursive construct and, consequently, a term overlain with multiple and, in many cases, conflicting meanings” (2007, p. 23). Indeed, conflicts at the level of the meaning of ‘youth’ can be seen to reflect a range of different political and ideological perspectives. It is therefore apt to approach questions about ‘youth’ in a manner which recognises both the social construction of the term and its position within a range of discursive processes (including not only social commentary and analysis but also public policy and research), since it is through such processes that particular sets of assumptions, norms and beliefs are affirmed, propagated and maintained. Indeed, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously contended, “youth is just a word” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.143). In making such a statement, Bourdieu sought to draw attention to the fact that the social differences between those typically classified under the rubric of ‘youth’ are simply too great to sustain the idea that such an age group really exists. ‘Youth’ might therefore be more appropriately understood as a constructed structural position within the social order rather than a life phase whose ‘essence’ (if such a thing can be said to exist) should necessarily

overwrite the significance of other factors relevant to people's lives. Indeed, given Bourdieu's (1998) assertion that *any* social group's position within the social order needs to be understood as a result of historical power struggles over particular visions and divisions, the category of 'youth' should always be approached with a heightened awareness of questions of domination and inequality. Rather than being a discreet stage traversed by those who go on become 'adults' then, 'youth', along with the discourses which circulate about it, might more appropriately be understood as part of the ongoing regeneration of a social order, where the relationship between categories such as 'youth' and 'adult', or descriptors such as 'young' and 'old', is fundamentally constitutive.

In relation to questions about the discursive framing of 'youth', it is worthwhile considering those terms with which it most often intersects and the common associations upon which it draws. Here we might note that the term 'youth' is often used interchangeably with others such as 'adolescent' and 'teenager'. While neither of these stands as a perfect proxy for 'youth', they each nevertheless summon particular associations and projections as they point towards an age-defined grouping. 'Adolescent', for example – a term often employed within psychological, psychiatric and other scientific literatures (e.g. Shaffer & Kipp 2010; Thompson, Hooper, Laver-Bradbury & Gale, 2012) – tends to be used to foreground age-specific developmental concerns. As such, it is commonly linked with notions of physical maturation and (turbulent) identity processes. These feed into what might be considered more everyday usages of the term, where, for instance, 'adolescent' may be used in a pejorative sense to suggest a lack of appropriate maturity ('you're behaving like an adolescent now!') or point towards the psychological turmoil understood as characteristic of this stage of life. 'Teenager' on the other hand, tends to be used both within different contexts and to signal alternative concerns. Through its use in the plural ('teens') it is often employed in relation to trends or 'fads' but also, more positively and widely, to place young people in a

certain relationship with fashion, lifestyles, magazines and attendant age-linked consumption practices. The term 'youth', on the other hand, tends to be more commonly employed where discussions consider young people in relation to the public sphere, and especially their behaviour within it (e.g. Roche, Tucker, Flynn & Thomson, 2004; Whyte & Wyn 2013). We therefore often encounter the term 'youth' employed alongside 'culture', but also – and by virtue of the link back to public behaviour and cultural activity – with terms such as 'crime' and 'policy'. There is also a certain degree of gendering to take into account when considering the terminology associated with 'youth'. That is, while terms such as 'disaffected youth', 'at-risk youth' or 'marginalised youth' tend to conjure visions of young males on street corners behaving in 'anti-social' ways², 'teenage' comes with more 'feminine' associations such that preceding the words 'magazines', 'fashion' or 'pop', with 'teen' or 'teenage' will invariably suggest not only a particular age demographic but also a relationship to young women in particular (e.g. McRobbie, 1994).

While such distinctions might already alert us to the weight of the semiotic baggage associated with the nomenclature of 'youth', what is perhaps more pertinent to the current discussion is a consideration of what the above terms have in common. Most immediately evident in this regard is the implication that any 'youth', 'adolescent' or 'teenage' issue up for consideration (be it crime, angst or fashion) is of a transitory nature. The further implication is that these matters are of less depth, urgency and overall significance than their adult equivalents. Such terms therefore reify the distinction between youth and adulthood and reinforce "the idea that young people are marginal members of society" (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 13). Also implicit in the figure of the youth/adolescent/teenager and its aforementioned distinction from the 'adult', is the idea that the former are unfinished or incomplete versions of the latter; the period of youth is seen as primarily concerned with learning, development, exploration and preparation (hence its relative triviality and lack of

seriousness, not to mention the risky behaviours, ignorance and incompleteness of those embroiled in it), whereas adulthood is characterised by its supposed seriousness, fixity, coherence and the sense of one's having, at last, 'arrived'.

What is revealed by such a consideration of the discourse surrounding 'youth' is, in effect, a kind of essentialism built around age. Yet such essentialism can be highly misleading in any attempt to understand the contemporary condition of 'youth'. Indeed, as has been noted by, for example, Osgerby (1998), 'youth' is less a fixed stage in people's physical and psychological development than a category whose nature varies considerably across both culture and time. To better understand the nature of the discourses which circulate around 'youth', it is important to recognise how its public perception can be influenced by a particular – and often sensationalised – style of media reporting. As Bennett (2007) notes, such accounts should be approached with notable caution, especially since they “are primarily the work of forty- to fifty-something journalists, and are informed by particular interpretations of youth, these being grounded in the specific historical and ideological milieus of the journalists themselves” (p. 27). Liable to feed into prominent contemporary discourses around 'youth' then, are a particular set of understandings which may well draw more upon certain historical images, conditions and circumstances of 'youth' than ones pertinent to today's world. Before exploring the latter in more detail, it is worth considering images of youth from recent history, especially given the way in which certain prominent accounts have informed – and in many ways continue to inform – scholarly approaches to youth and youth culture.

The study of youth and youth culture

'Youth' is often interpreted as a notably twentieth century phenomenon (Bennett, 2007) and one rooted in the socio-economic changes taking place in the west after the end of

the Second World War. While it would be inaccurate to trace the emergence of ‘youth’ – as a particularly perceived and classified category – back to this specific moment, the period following the Second World War certainly signalled a shift in the ways in which youth both saw themselves and were, correspondingly, seen by others. A number of factors came together at this juncture. Firstly, the post-WWII baby boom had the effect of bringing a larger-than-usual segment of the population into their early teen years by the 1950s. This was combined – beginning in the USA but eventually reaching across Europe – with a growth in the levels of affluence relevant to all social classes. Finally, and crucially, came the widespread development of the consumer industries, something which took place alongside notable advances in the mass production technologies of the day. Beginning in the 1950s then, advertisers and marketers sought to capitalise on the profits to be made in responding to the growing demand for youth-specific commodities (Hine, 1999; Savage, 2007) as more and more products explicitly targeting youth reached the market. One consequence of this was that ‘youth’ became, in both economic and cultural terms, a more significant social category than had hitherto been the case.

As youth-oriented consumer goods such as fashion and music came to be appropriated and inscribed with symbolic meanings by post-war youth, subsequent years witnessed the emergence of notably style and music-oriented youth groupings, from the teddy boys of the 1950s (Jefferson, 1976), the mods and rockers of the 1960s (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1976), punks and skinheads of the 1970s (Clarke, 1976; Hebdige, 1979), on to the ravers of the 1980s (Thornton, 1995). Given the way post-war youth came to be seen as capable of generating norms and values distinctive to themselves, over this period ‘youth’ increasingly came to be seen as a ‘culture’ or ‘subculture’ in its own right. Whereas previous usage of the term ‘subculture’ in youth-oriented research had tended to apply it within analyses of deviancy and delinquency (e.g. Becker, 1963; Merton, 1957), by the 1970s, and with the

publication of work issuing from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), youth subcultures came to be seen more in terms of a decidedly cultural and stylistic response (especially on the part of working class youth) to the socio-economic conditions of their class position. This was figured by CCCS scholars as ‘subcultural resistance’ (Hall & Jefferson, 1976), whereby the supposedly deviant behaviour of youth subcultures had to be understood as collective responses to socio-structural problems. The subcultural theory of the CCCS scholars was thereby explicitly political, locating subcultures and their associated rituals as attempts, on the part of their members, to resolve problems inherent in the wider parent culture.

Of course, such theorisations did not necessarily inform either the mediated representations or broader (‘adult’) social attitudes towards youth (sub)cultures in the post-war period. Typically more prominent within the media representations of the day were what Cohen (1972) terms ‘moral panics’, which saw youth subcultures labelled as ‘deviant’ and portrayed as a threat to the moral order of society. Although Cohen’s thesis focussed on the media’s prominent treatment of mods and rockers in the 1960s, subsequent panics (based around youth and music-related subcultures) have been invoked in relation to a number of other subcultures (e.g. Laing, 1985; Redhead, 1993). In more recent times, the perceived usefulness and conceptual purchase of ‘youth subcultures’ – as a way of understanding the relationship between popular music-related style groupings and young people – has proven unsatisfactory for many. Indeed, the work of the CCCS subculturalists faced criticism almost as soon as it had come to light, with much of this centring on how their work focussed on only a narrow range of ‘spectacular’ forms of stylistic expression – as typically exhibited by white, male, working-class youth – to the exclusion of the experiences of girls and women (McRobbie, 1980) or racial and ethnic minorities (Hebdige, 1979). Others, meanwhile, have taken issue with the degree of coherence and fixity attributed to youth subcultures by the

CCCS scholars, with Thornton (1995) noting, for instance, the problems inherent in drawing sharp distinctions between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘subcultural’ within cultural analysis.

More prominent over recent years, in terms of academic theorisations of youth in relation to culture, is work falling under the banner of ‘post-subcultural theory’ (e.g. Bennett, 1999; Miles, 2000; Redhead, 1997). Informed by postmodern theory, this perspective downgrades the contemporary relevance of socio-structural constraints (such as class position) for youth and questions the supposedly ‘political’, ‘subversive’ or ‘oppositional’ dimensions of subcultures (as theorised by the CCCS). Instead, post-subculturalism places greater emphasis on young people’s individual agency and freely-willed cultural choices, as – so it is argued – previous connections between style, musical taste and identity have become increasingly fluid, if not completely undermined in recent times. For the scholars working in this area, contemporary youth identities should be understood as reflexive lifestyle projects in which young people appropriate and combine cultural resources from a variety of sources in line with the “unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterise late modern consumer-based identities” (Bennett, 1999, p. 605). Echoing such a stance, those such as Chaney (2004) have argued that the decidedly ‘modern’ forms of culture, social organization and identity examined by the CCCS subculturalists have since been subject to significant diversification and fragmentation. Such a move therefore brings ‘mainstream’ youth (largely ignored by the CCCS scholars) into the purview of post-subcultural approaches, as the supposed ‘specialness’ of earlier subcultures came to be replaced by a recognition that the sorts of youthful cultural investments previously studied were, in fact, “becoming more general” (Chaney, 2004, p. 37). There is thus a clear sense, within the ‘post-subcultures’ literature, that, as much as anything, times have simply changed. Indeed, this has been noted consistently by scholars concerned with the broader nature of ‘youth’ within the developed west today.

‘Youth’ today

There are two key sets of issues meriting attention in relation to a consideration of the nature of ‘youth’ today; firstly, those relevant to the contemporary status and conditions of young people’s lives, and secondly, those bound up with the contemporary meaning of ‘youth’. In respect of the first, an issue commonly noted within the academic literature is the extent to which young people’s lives have changed over recent decades. Importantly, the various transitions characterising the shift from youth to adulthood (from education to work, from the family home to independent living), today take longer than in the past (Furlong, 2009) and are typically characterised by a series of stuttering steps forward, pauses and reversals (Bradley & Devadason, 2008). Nowadays, young people in the west tend to spend longer in education (with more going on to post-compulsory education), are dependent upon their parents for longer, and face more notable challenges in securing financial independence. For Arnett (2004), such shifts effectively point towards the arrival of a new life stage which today stands between youth and adulthood: ‘emerging adulthood’ – effectively a moratorium on adulthood. In line with these changes, researchers have also argued that young people born after around 1970 have simply gone about ‘growing up’ differently, fashioning a ‘new adulthood’ of their own in the process (Blatterer, 2007; Wyn, 2004). Such themes also resonate with the commonly held belief that contemporary youth increasingly reject the responsibilities and commitments that come with adult independence (e.g. Cote, 2000).

Related to, yet at the same time complicating, such shifts in the nature of contemporary experiences of youth across western societies, it has also been argued (e.g., Bennett 2007; Blatterer, 2010) that ‘youth’ and its associated meanings no longer remain the sole preserve of the young. Often given prominence in this context are the new sensibilities of ageing that have emerged in recent years; sensibilities which have led to greater continuity

across generations in terms of lifestyle and leisure. Thanks, in no small part, to the ascendancy of social identities today based in people's consumption practices (rather than the production-based identities of bygone days), 'youth' has come to be figured less as a category circumscribed by age than 'a way of feeling'. The widespread diffusion of media images valorising the vitality, energy, beauty and freedom of young people have effectively served to install a quite selective image of youth as both an aspirational goal and a set of meanings which, when harnessed to individuals' identities, are capable of enhancing life chances. In effect, "the cultural project of youth has", as Bennett notes, "in many cases metamorphosed into a template of ideas and ideals which many continue to apply in their adult lives" (2007, p. 26). Indeed, such a phenomenon is perhaps nowhere more evident than in relation to those popular musical genres (e.g. hip-hop, electronic dance music and punk), which, while having been previously viewed as the almost-exclusive preserve of young people, today attract notably cross-generational followings.

What is implied by the combined effects of the aforementioned moratorium on adulthood and the semantic expansion of 'youth' (as validated contemporary lifestyle attribute) is a broader "de-differentiation of youth" (Blatterer, 2010, p. 72), whereby the link between 'youth' and actual young people appears to be weakening. It is important to note, however, that far from hollowing out 'youth' as a source of meaning and identity, this de-differentiation actually brings quite paradoxical consequences. These stem from the high degree of selectivity evident in the valorisation of certain characteristics of 'youth'; a situation which inevitably sees many other characteristics denigrated. So while the supposed energy, freedom, flexibility, up-to-dateness and creativity of youth tend to be promoted as desirable attributes within the lifestyle marketplace, when we turn to the public sphere and everyday social life more generally, far more prominently linked to 'youth' are themes of irresponsibility, unpredictability, 'risky' or 'anti-social' behaviour and fear.

Identifying and solving the ‘youth’ problem

As is evident from the aforementioned moral panicking around post-war youth subcultures, the framing of ‘youth’ in terms of a social ‘problem’ is not a new phenomenon. ‘Youth’ is intermittently taken up by politicians, media commentators and moral entrepreneurs who, in elaborating the ‘problems’ and putative remedies, are most usually keen to further their own agendas (Irving, Maunders & Sherington, 1995). Here issues of age, gender, race, ethnicity and class have typically been brought into consort with social issues (such as educational failure, unemployment and crime), resulting in a series of problematisations of youth. Thus in their wide-ranging biographical study of youth transitions in the UK, Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomson (2007) note both how “the perception is that youth delinquency levels are rising and that the morals of young people are in some way eroding” (p. 59) and that “youth violence and crime occupies a large space in the imagination and policy agenda” (ibid). Yet while one mode of problematizing ‘youth’ portrays it as a potential threat, a second can also be clearly discerned; one which frames young people as social minors who are vulnerable and in need of protection from a range of hazards (possibly including their own behaviour). In this way, various problematisations of youth over time can be seen to “have oscillated along the care-control continuum” (Presdee, 1999, p. 639).

Alongside such ongoing problematisations of ‘youth’, recent years have also witnessed the emergence of a discourse (mentioned above) around ‘at risk’ youth. This is a group identified through an assessment of factors said to predispose them to particular problems (such as unemployment, substance abuse, leaving school ‘early’ etc.). For some commentators (e.g. Bessant, 2003), the appearance of ‘youth at risk’ discourses has been important at the level of policy development, since by focussing on ‘risk’ factors rather than

'deviant' behaviours, they add greater legitimacy to governmental concerns about 'anti-social behaviour' and youth delinquency without ostensibly pathologizing those concerned. Such a framing of youth in terms of 'risk' has nevertheless led to youth participation policies which are "invariably directed towards remedial or preventative action" (Bessant, 2003, pp. 88), thereby serving to increase the governance of youth. Of course 'youth' are not always portrayed and considered in terms of either problems or risks. For De Roeper and Salvesberg (2009), 'youth' has also been conceived as both a 'national resource' and, linked to this, as representing 'the future' of societies. Despite its more positive tenor though, this figuring of 'youth' ultimately provides no less of "a rationale for monitoring and controlling young people's lives" (White & Wyn, 2008, p. 105) than do discourses of risk.

Whether framed as assets and resources, or as 'problematic' and in need of specific interventions, the broader paradigmatic heritage of which many governmental policy responses to 'youth' have formed, can be broadly considered as a 'youth development' approach (Wierenga, 2003). While much of the grounded work taking place under the banner of 'youth development' may be valuable, as a conceptual framework it nevertheless remains problematic in several important regards. Firstly, it emphasises the end point of 'youth development' as properly formed or well-adjusted adults. As such, the approach implicitly sees 'youth' as being in deficit, as not-yet-fully-formed, a work-in-progress, or as Lee (1999) puts it, as 'becomings' rather than 'beings'. Consequently, rather than look first to what young people are like now, and what they might contribute or teach the rest of us (Wyn & White, 1997), a youth development approach assumes that adults are best placed to determine young people's roles and encourage their adjustment to pre-existing norms and institutions. This connects to a second common criticism of 'youth development' approaches: namely, that they are (and have been historically) about the imposition of top-down initiatives, rather than starting from where young people are, or from where their concerns and interests lie.

Lastly, it can be noted that a youth development approach also implicitly assumes that it is only young people who need to grow and change. As previous research has shown however (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001), for young people to be able to participate meaningfully in their communities, adaptation and change is likely to be required of not just young people, but also of adults.

Although some have advocated a move away from ‘youth development’ towards what is termed ‘positive youth development’ (e.g. Pittman, Irby & Ferber, 2001) – an approach which advocates viewing young people as partners in work involving them, rather than as being ‘problematic’ – it has been argued that the distinction between these two approaches is based more in the competition for funding opportunities addressing particular problems or groups than in their goals and practices *per se* (Partee, 2004). Indeed, far from overcoming the problems of ‘youth development’ approaches, some (e.g. Smith, 2003) see ‘positive youth development’ as playing into governmental concerns about ‘at-risk’ youth. Perhaps more pressing a concern for those working with young people across western societies however, are the broader and widely reported trends – within the context of economic austerity – towards both high youth unemployment and sustained reductions in public funding, including that destined for youth provision and services (Nelson & O’Donnell, 2012). In terms of work with young people, this has led to an emphasis on both shorter-term interventions and those targeting disadvantaged youth. Such a narrowing and diminution in the scope and extent of youth provision may well in fact have only served to amplify the widely noted ‘instrumentalisation’ of cultural policies, through which arts participation has increasingly come to be seen by as valuable by policy makers, across a range of national contexts, as a means of achieving particular – decidedly political – ends (e.g. Gray, 2007). The wider instrumentalisation of much youth-focussed arts activity have important and problematic implications for community music practice, especially given the latter’s longstanding concern

for cultural democracy (Braden, 1978), the equalisation of power between project participants (Kelly, 1984) and the empowerment, through creative expression and participatory practices, of those it engages (see Rimmer, 2009 for a fuller argument).

Summary and implications

Having surveyed a range of debates relevant to both contemporary understandings and realities of 'youth', let us turn to consider their implications for community music and the kinds of questions to which they should alert us. Immediately relevant in this regard is the point that if 'youth' can be identified as a distinct group with particular needs, then the case for community music interventions would appear to be strengthened. Yet, as we have seen, a number of voices have argued that recent years have witnessed a de-differentiation of youth, whereby both its meanings and supposedly characteristic challenges have become increasingly relevant, in the west at least, to older groups. It therefore cannot be assumed that people belonging to the same generation or age group will necessarily face equivalent challenges or share a characteristic mode of thought and behaviour. Not only is it the case that young people's experiences are hugely diverse (and will be differentiated according to variations in class, gender and education, amongst other things), but also that 'youth'-ful attitudes and practices (especially in relation to culture and music) are nowadays commonly maintained into 'adult' lives. The aforementioned moratorium on adulthood further muddies the waters in terms of disaggregating 'youth' from other groups. Nor, indeed, are many of the rationales lying behind work targeting young people (e.g. 'at risk' status, issues around unemployment, crime, drug use or 'anti-social' behaviour) peculiar to that group. Taken together then, these issues would appear to undermine the idea that 'youth' really can be identified as a distinct group with particular needs.

Following this, it is worth considering how the framing of community music activity around ‘youth’ might set the stage for the adoption, within projects and programmes, of particular kinds of roles (for both participants and practitioners) or otherwise circumscribe the opportunities available for young participants. One matter of some importance in this respect is the often implicit hierarchy of positions and responsibilities available to those involved. That is, to what extent might these serve to limit the opportunities for participants’ involvement in decision-making and the broader delegation of power and influence (if and when these are sought)? Further, to what extent might youth-focussed community music initiatives play into the separation of youthful cultural experiences and activities from their ‘adult’ variants, within the communities in which they operate? We might note here, for instance, how understandings of ‘youth’ do not typically position it as a basis either *of* or *for* ‘community’, since the latter – despite being a notably contested concept – is nevertheless traditionally framed along the lines of either geography and place, or else interest and identity (such as ethnic origins, sexual orientation or religious belief), neither of which necessarily implies any need or desirability for demarcation along the lines of age or life-stage (e.g. Crow & Allen, 1994; Willmott, 1986). If community music activity is concerned with the creation and sustenance of community, what, we might ask, are the implications of hypostatizing ‘youth’-‘adult’ distinctions between potential participants? Shouldn’t community music be looking more to build more upon shared experience than base initiatives around assumed generational responses?

Finally, we might consider the extent to which ‘youth’-oriented community music programmes risk accommodating – and thereby implicitly reifying – ‘deficit’ narratives of youth. That is, given the apparent interconnections between those discourses which variously problematize ‘youth’ and the policy interventions and emphases which tend to issue in their wake, might community music activities aligned with such policies³ (by, for instance, seeking

to access linked funding) find themselves inadvertently buttressing the falsely essentializing distinctions between young people and adults? Such a scenario could ultimately see community music activity employed as part of a broadly remedial effort, whose effects is, however unconsciously, to reinforce the kind of stereotypes of 'youth' which ultimately set limits on the possibilities for their empowerment.

Following the arguments presented here, it seems possible to conclude that in the twenty first century, 'youth' presents community music with as much in the way of challenges as opportunities. Notwithstanding the selective valorisation of 'youthful' attitudes and values by some sectors of society, in many ways 'youth' remains a relatively denigrated grouping, with those considered part of it being frequently positioned as not just *standing* to benefit from adult-led initiatives, but, in a number of cases, actively *needing* to. Yet behind such a framing of 'youth' lie a number of (sometimes paradoxical) assumptions and understandings, the cumulative effect of which may well run counter to some of community music's core values, and especially those which set greatest store by processes of empowerment. Indeed, community music initiatives' common adherence to such values would seem to position the practice ideally in terms of helping to challenge some of the more negative framings of 'youth' and its largely unjustified demarcation from 'fuller' conceptions of citizenship or community membership. Yet doing so may well involve a greater willingness, on the part of those provisioning community music activities, to work with funders, cultural policy makers and other potential supporters to envisage young people less as members of a distinct and potentially 'problematic' grouping and more as - quite simply - full members of their communities. In this way, the dethroning of deficit conceptions of 'youth' implicitly holds out the potential to better connect young people's creative cultural capacities and activities with the lives of others within their communities. Such a process not only implies greater possibilities for young people to take on evermore active roles and

greater responsibilities within their community music activities (thereby contributing to their empowerment), but also by challenging negative perceptions of young people and ‘youth’ at local levels. As this chapter has shown, these issues, opportunities and challenges merit continued attention on the part of anyone concerned with the broader flourishing of young people today and would, indeed, appear to deserve particular attention by those seeking its realisation.

Reflective questions

1. To what extent should the kinds of rights claimed for young people vary according to the needs and interests of particular groups of young people?
2. How much – and in what ways – do ‘youth’ oriented community music programmes risk accommodating – and thereby implicitly reifying – ‘deficit’ narratives of youth and hypostatizing ‘youth’-‘adult’ distinctions?
3. How might youth participation policies better empower young people, provide greater opportunities for youth-led decision making, and avoid increasing the governance of youth?

Additional sources

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Notes

1. It should be noted that the term 'at-risk' does not have a consistent definition across different national contexts. Although it tends to be primarily associated with educational failure in North American contexts, in the UK it is generally associated with 'those assessed as not in education, employment or training (NEET) or who are at risk of, or who are already fall into the following categories: teenage pregnancy, drugs, alcohol or substance abuse or offending' (DfES 2002: 16). That said, in 2008, the National Foundation for Youth Music offered a broader definition, encompassing "...children and young people with difficulty accessing activities that will help them grow and progress. This means social, economic, cultural or geographical disadvantage or a combination of these factors" (Youth Music, 2008, n.p.)
2. As Jeffs and Smith (1999) highlight, welfare provision and services pre-fixed by the term 'youth' have historically been male-oriented.
3. One issue which emerged clearly within my own recent research on community music in the UK (Rimmer, Higham & Brown, 2014), concerns the extent to which youth-oriented community music programmes and activities, in their efforts to attract governmental or local authority funding, risk abandoning (or at the very least downplaying) some of the values and processes which practitioners have long seen as fundamental to the practice.

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