Youth workers as critical entrepreneurs?

Tania de St Croix
Background: Youth work in England

- Spaces for informal education – learning through conversation, activity and relationship
- Young people are involved on a voluntary basis (not compelled to attend)
- Young person centred
Youth work and entrepreneurialism

How does entrepreneurialism work in youth work policy and in youth work practice?

Can youth workers be ‘critical entrepreneurs’?
“How do we make this country a really brilliant place for setting up a new charity, a new social enterprise, for opening up the provision of public services? ... It’s actually enterprise, it’s entrepreneurship that is going to make this agenda work.” (Cameron, 2011)
Enterprise cultures in youth work

- Youth workers must be 'entrepreneurial and responsive' (Education Select C’ttee 2011)
- Youth services encouraged to ‘spin out’ into independent enterprises
- 'If someone is not a success in life it's their own fault’ (From NCS evaluation – see bit.ly/1IcS087)
“Are you an entrepreneurial, commercially-minded service provider who understands young people and is interested in working with them to create exciting, new and innovative out-of-school opportunities to support their journey through adolescence and into successful adult life? Are you able to re-imagine the use of high quality, inspirational youth buildings for other commercial purposes...? ... The council will make available leases on its flagship buildings and will make available initial revenue funding for the provision of an offer for young people.”

(Islington Council, 2014, my emphasis)
Research methodology

- Qualitative research
- Approach informed by activist scholarship and practitioner research
- 35 participants, all part-time / volunteer youth workers
- In-depth interviews
- Focus groups
- Youth work practice

(See de St Croix, 2013; 2015)
The social enterprise dream...

“Because we see these things all the time and we see so much bad practice... we want to show that there can be a good organisation there that really cares about young people. We're not all about, you know, money and targets, like other organisations are.” (Keiran)
“We moved into a centre for start-up organisations, and the local small business centre jumped on board and went “Yep, we'll help you with business plan, market strategy and financial strategies,” and we was like [uncertainly] “Okaaay, great” [laughs]. So we kind of fell into it. And then we got the local recognition, we got the business awards. But at the back of my mind it was niggling me that we're going down a business route, we're going down a business route, we're losing our grassroots” (Sarah)
The social enterprise reality?

‘We've been cutting our hours down ... We managed to pay ourselves last week for May ... We're getting paid shit (laughs). Rubbish. ... I probably get paid about 800 a month. ... I've gone back to basics, that's what I've done. ... My children are going through that stage though ... They want the things, I suppose.’ (Zandra)
Changing who we are?

Policy neoliberalises us: “... by making us enterprising and responsible, by offering us the opportunity to succeed, and by making us guilty if we do not”

(Ball, 2012, p.145)
Concluding questions

• How do we manage the tensions inherent in the social enterprise agenda?
• How do we talk with young people about enterprise / entrepreneurialism?
• Is it possible to be ‘critical entrepreneurs’?

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References


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