

**Young people, 'Community Cohesion' and
the role of Youth Work in building Social
Capital**

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Introduction

The summer of 2001 saw the most serious scenes of violent disorder in British towns since the inner-city riots of 1981. Bradford, Burnley, Leeds and Oldham all witnessed rioting involving multiple arrests, damage to property and injury to both members of the public and police officers.

Two themes dominated discussions of the events, both during and since. The first theme is youth. Young people under the age of 25 were the main protagonists in all these riots (Denham, 2001; Cattle, 2001). Many were subsequently arrested and imprisoned. The second and dominant theme is race. All these disturbances involved young people of south Asian origin fighting with white young people and or the police. In Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, explicitly racist campaigning by the neo-nazi BNP was a clear factor.

This paper aims to explore both these themes, placing them within the context of 'Community Cohesion', a concept that was rapidly developed as the dominant parameter of discussion in the numerous subsequent central/local government reports. Alongside these themes of youth and race, this paper examines Putnam's (2000) concept of 'social capital', arguing that youth work can play an unique role in promoting genuine 'community cohesion' through the creation of what Putnam terms 'Bridging Social Capital'

All the evidence suggests that the disturbances were not an accident or a one-off. The Government certainly did not think so as it hurriedly

commissioned a series of detailed reports (Cantle, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; CRE, 2001)), and issued its own statement (Denham, 2001). The common theme of all these reports was a perceived lack of 'community cohesion' and the need to increase it. As a direct response and armed with new streams of funding, 'Community Cohesion Co-ordinators' have been appointed, the Local Government Association (2002) has issued guidance as to how Local Authorities should promote 'Cohesion', and individual authorities have been identified as 'Pathfinders'.

So, what does 'community cohesion' mean to the young people who were caught up in the disturbances? This paper aims to explore this through analysis of group discussions with Asian and white young people in areas of Oldham, where race continues to be a highly defining factor in young peoples' experiences.

The nature of 'racism' and 'community cohesion' is debated here in relation to young peoples' experiences. The Government's 'Cantle Report' (Cantle, 2001:31) identified a unique and vital role for Youth Work in building 'Community Cohesion' nationally, as did Ritchie (2001) in relation to Oldham in particular. However, the understanding of youth work and of the ways in which young people experience their lives in areas perceived to lack 'cohesion', presented in these reports is highly questionable, in the view of the author.

This led the author to interview groups of Asian and white young people who are regular users of Youth Work provision in Oldham, as well Asian and white youth workers who work with them. The senior officer In Oldham MBC's Youth Service was also interviewed. The aim in all cases was to investigate how all concerned view 'community cohesion', and their view of how youth work can contribute to increased peace, cohesion, and stronger 'social capital'.

'Community Cohesion' - its context and meaning

Throughout this paper 'Community Cohesion' is in inverted commas because it is a highly contested term, raising controversial issues around race, racism and responsibility.

The Government's 'Denham Report', the report of the Community Cohesion Review Team (Denham, 2001) identified the key term in this way:

Community Cohesion requires that there is a shared sense of belonging based on common goals and core social values, respect for differences (ethnic, cultural and religious) and acceptance of the reciprocal rights and obligations of community members working together for the common good (Denham, 2001:18).

The Local Government Association, in its advice to member authorities (LGA, 2002), says, 'Community cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of race equality and social inclusion' (LGA, 2002:6).

The lack of such 'Cohesion' is identified by all the numerous reports into the disturbances. The 'Ritchie Report' of the Oldham Independent Review Panel (2001) was frank about the town: 'Housing segregation has led to a substantial degree of educational segregation and in turn to a very low level of contact between most white people and most Pakistanis and Bangladeshis within the town' (Ritchie, sec. 3.22:10-11). The causes of this housing segregation are complex and disputed. The Commission for Racial Equality's report, *A Place for us All- Learning from Bradford, Oldham and Burnley*' (CRE, 2001:22/3) highlights the CRE's own formal investigations into the discriminatory practices of Oldham estate agents in 1990, and allocations by Oldham MBC Housing Department in 1993. National statistics and research around racial harassment have illustrated the impact on ethnic minority individuals and the resulting limitations on their housing choices.

However, there is a clear implication in the various reports that segregation has not simply been forced on one ethnic minority community by the racism of another, white, community. The CRE report acknowledges that while forced segregation is illegal, 'congregation' or self-segregation is not. Peoples' decisions are determined by economic and social circumstances, as well as racism in the case of ethnic minority communities. 'Together with an understandable desire to live among people of the same background, faith and language, these factors have led to ethnic clustering in some towns and cities, particularly in the North of England'. (CRE, 2001:6)

This theme is more explicit in the Cattle Report's *Themes and Proposals*. 'Successful change will require a greater collective and individual effort on behalf of all sections of the community...and for the minority, largely non-white community to develop a greater acceptance of, and engagement with, the principle national institutions (Rec 5.1.10:19). It goes on to state, 'we would expect the new values to contain statements about expectation that the use of the English language, which is already a pre-condition of citizenship, will become more vigorously pursued' (Rec 5.1.11:16)

This apparent emphasis on 'Cultural' explanations for separate Asian housing areas in Oldham and other affected Northern towns is challenged by recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the University of Leeds, which identifies racism as a key factor in limiting housing choices. Tariq Madood et al (PSI, 1997) identify Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities as particularly economically disadvantaged, suggesting class and poverty also limit the housing choices of these communities.

Anti-racism campaigners are much more explicit in their criticism of this 'community cohesion' (and the lack of it) explanation:

The popular press first blamed 'outside agitators'...then it was the inherent separatism of Islamic culture that was to blame – these people did not want to integrate, they were 'self-segregating'. A people that had been systematically cut off, shunned, dispossessed and left to rot, was now blamed for refusing to mix (Kundhani, 2001)

The causes of this housing segregation are outside the scope of this paper but the reality of it cannot be denied. The impact of this segregation, plus parental choice in school allocation, on many young people is clearly identified in the Ritchie Report: 'Whether in school or out of school, there are too few opportunities for young people from across the communal boundaries to mix within Oldham...this has led to ignorance, misunderstanding and fear'. (Ritchie, 2001:9)

John Denham, Home Office Minister, commented that 'ignorance of others is an obvious source of conflict. It feeds the territorial instincts of young men and makes it easier for myths and jealousies to flourish' (Denham, 2001, Ch. 2, 10:12). Ritchie is more explicit about the effect on Oldham Youth,

In both Asian and white communities the step to racism has been a short one. Coupled with the residential segregation in the town, it has also led to a strong sense of territoriality amongst young men: 'this is our area and I don't want to go there because it is theirs', which has exacerbated tensions. (Ritchie, 2001:14)

Apportioning responsibility for this tension, and the violence which has followed it, depends on the responsibility for the lack of 'Community Cohesion' in the first place. To anti-racism campaigners, such as the Institute of Race Relations and CARF, this is straightforward:

In fact there are parts of Oldham which are no-go areas. If a group of Asian boys walk through the shopping centre in town, a security guard or police officer is likely to tell them to disperse. In the white areas of

town you will see the words 'Pakis Out' painted on road signs. (CARF, 2001)

CARF highlight the long history of racial harassment and institutional racism which Oldham's ethnic minority communities have suffered, including the petrol bombing of the home of Riaz Ahmed, Oldham's then deputy mayor, shortly after the disturbances. The Institute of Race Relations and CARF see 'community cohesion', and its inherent criticism of 'self-segregation' amongst some Asian communities as a diversion from the reality of racism.

However, the official statistics for racial harassment in Oldham tell a more complex story, and have themselves become a political battleground. The CRE report (2001) details the 1998/99 figures compiled by the Oldham division of Greater Manchester Police. Of 290 'racial incidents' in Oldham during that year, 142 of the victims were white; 52 of these white victims said that they were attacked by a group of a different ethnicity. A very high proportion of the racial incidents in Oldham happened in the street, perpetrated by people unknown to the victim (CRE, 2001:39/40). 'Since 1994, police annual reports in Oldham have shown more white people than people from ethnic minorities are reporting racist incidents' (CRE, 2001:41), a fact also true for the Bradford police area in the year to March 2001.

This clearly links to the ongoing wider debate around the problematic nature of the definition of a 'racial incident' offered by the Macpherson Enquiry into the Murder of Stephen Lawrence, and now used nationally by police forces.

Given the established fact that young people are over-represented as the perpetrators and victims of racial incidents (CRE 2003), this is central to this paper's debate around young people's understanding of 'Community Cohesion' in Oldham, and of possible youth work responses to these understandings.

In the author's view, the term 'community cohesion' is more questionable for its lack of clarity and meaning, rather than the rejection of anti-racism that IRR see within it. In Appendix C of the Cantle Report, Dr. Rosalyn Leach of the Home Office attempts to analyse the concept: 'Community cohesion is about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole. These divided communities would need to develop common goals and a shared vision' (Cantle, 2001:70). This analysis quickly moves onto bemoan the residential and school segregation in towns like Oldham, but stops short of the radical measures that would be needed to change it. As a result, the suggestions as to how to actually build community cohesion are bland in the extreme: 'Developing and promulgating an ethos which residents recognise and accept; securing harmonious social relations; promoting community interests' (Cantle, 2001:74).

This appears to be the apolitical and even-handed multiculturalism which dominated policy for so long, and whose failure to tackle the causes and results of racism has clearly been exposed (Chauhan, 1990). However, the various 'Community cohesion' reports are explicit about the need to tackle racism, as well as fumbling towards an open dialogue about monocultural

instincts within some Asian communities, and the negative reactions of some whites to those instincts. In starting to engage positively with the reality of the 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 1996), as well as with tensions internal to Asian communities, the 'Community cohesion' agenda seems to be edging towards what Popple (1997) describes as 'cultural/political' approaches to tackling the root causes of racial tension. It is the contention of this paper that Youth Work has a special, and possibly unique, role to play in promoting a 'community cohesion' that works with the cultural/political realities of racism and of young peoples' lives.

Methodology

To explore young people's experiences and understandings of 'Community Cohesion' (or the lack of it), focus group interviews were held with two groups of young people. One group consisted of seven white young men and women aged 13-16. The other group consisted of six Asian young men and women aged 16-21. In each case, the young people were already known to each other, as they were regular users of the youth work provision that provided the venue for the discussion. The young people at both venues had accepted an open invitation from their youth workers to take part in discussions with a researcher about how they saw their area after the Oldham riots. The groups were interviewed in two adjoining housing areas in Oldham, areas that are viewed as ethnically different and with tensions between them, Chadderton and Werneth. In Chadderton, the interview took place at a local authority maintained youth club; in Werneth it took place at the base of the voluntary

sector Werneth and Freehold Community Development Project. The aim was to explore the young peoples' experiences and understandings of both their own area and of the adjoining ethnically different area.

This was discussed in each case via a group interview, facilitated by the author. The author is a 41 year old white man, with a professional qualification in, and experience of, youth and community work in general, and anti-racist work specifically. This has included work with white football fans, and a role as Regional Youth Policy Officer for the Commission for Racial Equality in the north of England. This professional experience was helpful in guiding conversation with young people, especially around race, but was problematic also. At a number of points, individuals within the group of white young people appeared to make provocative racist comments to 'test' the author, to see whether there would be acceptance or connivance with their views. This clearly raised difficulties, given that the research approach was a largely non-directional one, which allowed young people to lead the discussion as much as possible. What the author's ethnic background did enable with this group was some frank discussion and reflection.

Similarly, the young people within the Asian group were initially wary, and extremely guarded in their comments. Given that they were being asked, in the context described above, to discuss racial conflict, and their reaction to it, with a strange white man (with very short hair!), this wariness is hardly surprising.

For these reasons, the youth workers known to the young people concerned also took part in the group discussions. At each venue, this involved three youth workers. In both cases the young people were given the option of being interviewed on their own, or allowing their youth workers to take part as equals, and in both cases the young people asked the workers to take part, and to give their own, personal views. This was helpful to the author, as in each discussion the presence of the known workers gave the young people the confidence to share their views and experiences. With the white group in particular, the workers were able to challenge some of the wilder stories and claims which young people put forward as 'fact', something which young people also did to each other as the discussion progressed.

In carrying out group interviews, the author was well aware of the potential dangers of peer pressure and conformity, and of the possibility of exaggeration. Indeed such factors were evident at times during both group interviews. During the session with white young people, the tensions around the long and complex discussions of their experiences of race and conflict (see below) seemed to be relieved by a bout of overt racism, where several young people egged each other on to be more and more extreme. For example:

WMYP: *I'd like to take a boat to Pakistan and take over their country.*

WFYP: *When Asians are in hospital they have to have sex every day.*

However, the process of group and individual interactions that produce such views, and the more considered ones reported below, are precisely the focus

of the paper. Frey and Fontana (1993) comment that 'Group interviewing will provide data on group interactions, on realities as defined in a group context, and on interpretation of events that reflect group input' (1993:20-21).

Frey and Fontana also view group or 'multiple respondent' interviews as 'effective in settings where the relationships among respondents are complex and the views are diverse' (1993:25). They indicate that groups create their own structure and meaning, and 'a group interview provides access to the level of meaning in addition to clarifying argument and revealing diversity in views and opinions'. (1993:25)

This group interview approach also helps to address post-modern criticisms of sociological research, which have focussed on the 'overly authoritative voice of the ethnographer, the tendency to report the subjective interpretation of the ethnographer'. (Frey and Fontana, 1993:26) Group interviews are more 'polyphonic', as more subjects participate and the interviewer's influence is reduced. The author would argue that this tendency was strengthened by the involvement of known and trusted youth workers in the group interviews. Additionally, the author himself is an experienced and qualified youth and community worker.

The author adopted the role Frey and Fontana identify as 'passive/non-directive'. This 'calls for a rather passive, non-directive approach where the interviewer/observer only asks enough questions or probes on a limited basis or offers re-enforcement to keep a discussion going' (Frey and Fontana,

1993:27). It has to be acknowledged that this role, which included listening to overt and sustained articulations of racism, was far from easy to play for a researcher whose own professional practice has focussed heavily on challenging racism. However, the passive/ non-directional approach to the group interviews was strengthened by them being carried out in youth work settings familiar to and regularly used by the groups, and the involvement of their own workers.

There were clearly dangers here that Albrecht et al (1993) identify as 'compliance' and 'identification' (1993:55). Identification is related to the situation in which a respondent's position on an issue is similar to the position held by someone the respondent admires, or with who he or she seeks solidarity' (Albrecht, 1993:55). Also, 'internalisation is related to the report of opinions that are deeply ingrained and personal...these opinions are potentially the most valuable yet the most difficult data to obtain by researchers using a focus group methodology' (Albrecht, 1993:55).

The author believes that the real dangers were overcome by both groups' experiences of youth work-based group work that explores controversial issues, and by their trust in the workers. The fact that this overcame 'compliance' and 'identification' is shown by the extreme, racist comments made at times by some of the white young people. These comments surprised their full time youth worker:

WFYW1: *I was surprised by some of the young people because they have been involved in some of the work around inter-community conflict, and displayed very non-racist behaviour in the past.*

The group was also prepared to argue with each other over their attitudes to race and difference:

FWYP1: *My mate is going out with an Asian lad, so no one likes her here. X was calling her, you [FWYP2] were calling her.*

FWYP2: *I wasn't calling her.*

FWYP1: *You **were** calling her.*

These group interviews were followed by interviews with their youth workers; to gauge their reactions and to explore the possible youth work responses to their views. This involved a one to one semi-structured interview with the full time white female youth worker at South Chadderton (WFYW1); and a semi-structured group interview with the white male full time co-ordinator (WMYW), Asian male part time youth worker (AMYW) and white female part time youth worker (WFYW2) at the Werneth and Freehold Community Project. In addition, a semi-structured, one to one interview was held with the female, Head of Oldham Youth Service (PYO), herself a member of an ethnic minority group.

Young Peoples' Experiences of 'Community Cohesion'

Both group interviews started with a request to hear about the areas the young people lived in and what they liked about them, as well as information about any areas the young people did not go to and why.

The racialised nature of young peoples' experiences became immediately apparent. Although the interviewer only made vague references to 'the trouble' and 'making Oldham a better place for young people', both groups immediately responded in racial terms:

WFYP: It's gone a lot more violent round here...there's a lot of fighting between Asians and whites.

AMYP: Any whites come round here, they'll get no trouble.

Both groups were apparently positive about their own areas, although only in relation to the adjoining area:

AMYP: It's chilling...it's alright.

WFYP: It's not so bad round here, it's worse up towards Werneth and Oldham because more Asians are up there.

Both groups quickly emphasised that they have their own area, which is defined and limited by a universally accepted border. When the Asian group were asked where 'their' area started, they chorused in unison, 'The Bridges, you know, the railway bridges.'

Similarly the white group drew at the author's suggestion, a map of the local area. 'The border is here,' said one young woman, putting a cross by the railway bridge.

WFYP: *Asians don't come past the bridges really, at least they don't walk past.*

WFYP: *Soon as you start walking under there, all the Asians are under there.*

The perception by each group of the other's area and of their safety if they ventured into it, was clear:

AMYP: *It's not our turf, we'd get jumped or something.*

PT: *Why?*

AMYP: *Because they are all racist down there!*

AMYP: *We'd get jumped, not actually jumped because we can fight our battles, but what's the point of fighting? They'd think that we'd gone down there for a fight.*

AFYP: *We'd get battered by all them white people. They don't like us do they?*

PT: *Would the white lads go up to Werneth? What would happen?*

WFYP: *No, they'd get battered.*

PT: *Battered?*

WMYP: *Because we're white. They don't like white people.*

WFYP: *I do go up there but only on a bus!*

The implications for the 'other' group venturing into the group's area were clear:

PT: *So, if Asian lads came down here, would they get jumped?*

WMYP: *Yeah! They'll get bricks at the cars.*

WFYP: *Not necessarily...if people have had a few drinks.*

PT: *If white lads from Chadderton walk through Werneth, will they be safe?*

AMYP: *If they look down, yeah, but if they are going to give us dirties (looks) and that, then no.*

AMYP: *Just look down and walk, that's obvious. If they are looking at you, they're looking for trouble...dirties, dirties! (Laughs)*

AMYP: *We wouldn't attack them, but others would!*

AMYP: *They'd do them man.*

AMYP: *This is how it goes, you be right with them, they'll be right with you, that's it, but if they are going to be bastards...*

PT: *Is that what white lads are to you?*

AMYP: *Right, yeah, it is.*

Whilst racism is clearly a key factor in the creation of such a posture of defiance and active 'defence' amongst Asian young men (Webster 1995, 1996), gender and poverty also have to be seen as factors. At what point does (to many, legitimate) self-defence become unprovoked aggression by bored young men? Should race be seen as the primary force shaping the life experience of those young men? Modood's (1997) important work stresses the interplay between racism and poverty that influences the experiences of

young people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, whilst Din's (2002), soon to be published, large-scale survey of the experiences of Pakistani-origin young people in Bradford suggests that internal community restrictions and controls are the main factor in limiting the young peoples' engagement in 'mainstream' society.

Those perspectives badly need to be debated more openly and honestly, as both the Cantle and Denham reports call for, but their primacy will remain fiercely contested in the face of overt white racism:

PT: Are there any Asian families in Chadderton?

WFYP: Only a shopkeeper...he's Indian.

PT: What would happen if a Pakistani family moved in?

WFYP: There used to be one. They used to get bricked all the time, every time they stepped out the door.

WMYP: They'd definitely get terrorised out.

WFYP: They don't like us, well people from Chaddy, coming up to Werneth and we don't like them, we don't like them coming down.

WFYP: It's like territories, it's been white round here for ages.

In spite of some of the bravado of some of the language, the regret and the fear stemming from these limitations was clear:

WMYP: We should be able to walk up past the bridges, it's our country.

WFYP: It scares me. You think that if one of them is racist, they all are.

WMYP: *My mum has to always take me to the doctors, because I can't go on my own...it's in Werneth...I'm going to get beaten up.*

(WFYP: *Where x is on about, it's all white!*)

The tone of some these comments from the white young people echoes the concept of the 'white backlash' (Back, 1993;Hewitt, 1996). Contrary to some assertions (CARF, 1997), this is characterised by an uncertainty and a growing lack of confidence, rather than a dominant triumphalism. Anoop Nayak, in his thoughtful investigation into young peoples perceptions of race, space and place (1999) quotes a study of 248 young (14-18 year old) Londoners. In that study, 92% of Black and 77% of dual heritage young people claimed to be proud of their ethnicity/colour, whilst only 34% of white young people shared this feeling. Nayak also quotes another piece of research, which claims that, 'The majority of young whites don't feel that they have an "ethnicity"'(Nayak, 1999:185).

This supports Hewitt's research amongst young white people in Greenwich, the London Borough that saw the racist murders of Stephen Lawrence, Rolan Adams, and Rohit Duggal. In spite of the clear reality of racial harassment and violence perpetrated by whites, Hewitt's research found that it is whites that feel that they have been victimised and marginalized by recent local and national government policies of equality and inclusivity. This leads Nayak (1999) to conclude that, 'This needs to be remedied. As such, there is a paucity of detailed qualitative research concerning why young white people

may view their racial identities as problematic, and even less regarding the issue of what can be done about this'(Nayak, 1999:185).

This suggests that youth work/ educational strategies that aim to engage with the racism of white young people need to acknowledge and work with issues of self-identity and perception, as advocated by a number of writers (Hewitt, 1996; Dadzie, 1997; CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002).

Similarly, the Asian young people interviewed had ambivalent feelings towards cross-community contact.

AMYP: I've got a few white friends from Chadderton and they all come up here, no problem.

AMYP: I used to go to South Chadderton Youth Centre (for a music project)...but everyone started to get really funny, so I just stopped.

PT: Funny?

AMYP: Dirty looks, that sort of thing.

AMYP: It could get better if we work on it. We're working on it, just older people aren't working on it.

The grim realities of this statement were apparent, with the Asian young people recounting conflicts with BNP leafleters and racist attacks. White young people described a local BNP activist 'Johnny', who had attempted to pass racist literature, which focused on 'figures' about immigration and unfairness to whites, on to them. Such influence should probably not be overplayed:

PT: *What figures?*

WFYP: *Wasn't really listening, he was boring me after a while!*

However, the latter story prompted a number of crass racist statements. For example:

WFYP: *They get all the money. We wait ages for something to be done up in Werneth. If they need something done, they get it done straight away.*

The influence of family and community pressure was also apparent:

PT: *Would you go out with an Asian lad?*

WFYP: *My mum and dad told me if I went out with an Asian, they'd batter me; I'd get kicked out.*

WFYP: *It's dirty, well, I think it is, but I've been brought up in a racist family all my life.*

WFYP: *I'd get called and bullied.*

In spite of this, the above discussion included a lot of reflection and discussion of female friends who were in mixed relationships:

WFYP: *Some of them are racist but some of them aren't...some of them you can get along with.*

The positive viewpoints and questioning of racially defined territory within the interviews stemmed entirely from youth work activities and initiatives. The

Werneth project had organised the Asian young men into a cricket team to play in the Saddleworth under-17 Cricket League.

AMYP: *It was good, no problem at all.*

The Asian young women described how females from the project had gone to a mixed, Youth Service organised conference and enjoyed the ethnically mixed sessions but experienced tensions in the lunch break:

AMYW: *When you mix people up, they are ok, but then when they go back to their own group, they are part of a group, a different group.*

The Asian young men were very positive about the mixing that had taken place on a Youth Service exchange and residential in Germany, including their contact with a non-Asian group from Liverpool.

Youth work activities have had a similar, positive impact on some of the white young people. Some of the white young women had taken part in a multi-racial summer drama project, organised by Oldham Youth Service and Oldham Youth Theatre:

WFYP: *We do talk to Asian people; we did drama with them. You do get a couple of nice ones.*

WFYP: *People I know, Asian people, are nice to me, but it's the lads...*

WFYP [to WFYW1 (full time youth worker)]: *We were racist before we met you, solidly racist.*

WFYW1: *Why have you changed?*

WFYP: *You've taught us to look at different ways and opinions, and to socialise with other people.*

WFYP: *Yeah, the drama project with the Asian girls was really good.*

WFYP: *They (Asian young women) were really nice, we got on along with them as well.*

WFYP: *They were willing to work with us and give us a chance, so we should be the same towards them...just because they're a different colour, doesn't mean they haven't got the same feelings as us.*

What this suggests is a potentially unique role for Youth Work in developing what Putnam (2000) calls 'social capital'. Putnam's account of the breakdown in the USA of 'social capital', the social links and cohesiveness that comes from active and collective participation in organisations of all types, has rightly received praise. In charting so carefully when and why social capital declined, Putnam offers hope not only in *how* social capital can be rebuilt, but also *why* it is so vital. The concept of 'social capital' in general offers great hope and clarity to all youth and community workers, but Putnam's stress on the different types of social capital has great relevance to community cohesion, and to the potential role of youth work.

Putnam identifies two types of social capital, 'bonding' and 'bridging'.

'Bonding' social capital is the type that is familiar to most people, a term interchangeable with 'community', and it focuses on strengthening the links between people who live, work and play together every day. This is clearly vital, the everyday work of youth and community workers. However, Oldham

is a classic study in the limitations of 'bonding' social capital – two communities with strong internal structures and cultures, but who have little contact with, or respect for, each other. This is where 'bridging' social capital is relevant. Putnam comments that, 'Bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrow selves (Putnam, 2000:23).

This concept of 'Bridging' social capital has a strong relation to the concept of 'community cohesion', and the same problems – how do you build it and promote it between different ethnic groups when those communities live and, increasingly, study separately? This is where youth work can, and does, come in, as Putnam identifies, 'Examples of Bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organisations' (Putnam, 2000:22).

The potential role of Youth Work in promoting community cohesion and social capital

The research material presented from Oldham, in relation to segregation, and mutual suspicion and aggression based on that segregation, mirrors many of the comments made in the plethora of reports. Analysing the lack of 'Community Cohesion' is one thing, developing approaches that effectively meet the needs of the young people interviewed and others in similar positions, is less clear-cut. What is clear is that the Government's 'Community

Cohesion' agenda and the resources flowing from this, pose major opportunities and challenges to youth work.

The recommendations of the Cattle Report (Cattle, 2001:48) seem to provide a clear opening for youth work: 'This should include promotion of cross-cultural contact between different communities at all levels, foster understanding and respect to break down barriers.' This is particularly so because of the contested nature of 'cross-cultural contact', and hence 'Community Cohesion'. The reports, including Cattle, hint at the fundamental problems of mono-cultural housing and education: 'A significant problem is posed by existing and future mono-cultural schools, which can add significantly to the separation of communities' (Cattle, 2001:33).

Cattle suggests a limit of 75% of one culture or ethnicity in every school, but any recommendations are directed at schools, not the Government which is encouraging more faith schools rather than questioning the existing ones that are acknowledged to be a problem in the context of 'Community Cohesion'.

Asian writer and broadcaster Farrukh Dhondy is scathing of the 75% target, 'Enforcing it will deepen the resentments of both the white and Asian communities of Bradford, Burnley, Oldham and wherever else' (2002:5).

Instead, Dhondy argues for liberal, distinctly British, Islamic Schools that will counter fundamentalist Islamic messages currently attractive to young British Muslims. Memories of the 'bussing' of Asian children to Bradford schools in the 70's are still painful. Similarly, any attempts to force, or socially engineer,

ethnically mixed housing are likely to create resentful backlashes in both Asian and white communities.

So, accepting the reality that housing and schools can make little or no short-term contribution to increased peace and 'Cohesion', what is the nature of the lack of 'Cohesion' amongst young people in Oldham at the moment and what can youth work do about it?

The reality of racially segregated housing and education and the effects on young peoples' perceptions of space and place have been well documented (Back, 1996; Webster, 1995; Hewitt, 1997). Colin Webster (2001)) could easily be discussing 'the Bridges' border line between Werneth and Chadderton when commenting:

Racist violence and abuse is spatially patterned in ways that 'colour-code' areas racially and ethnically producing 'neighbourhood nationalism'. This means that racist attacks are most likely to take place in symbolic locations that define the boundaries or borders of 'colour-coded' areas and neighbourhoods that then become defended from perceived and real threats from without whilst reinforcing ethnic and racial identity within. Borders define for each group 'us' and 'them'. (Webster, 2001:2).

Comments from the group interviews back this up:

WFYP: When the riots were on further up here by the Bridge they (Asians) started chasing the white lads who were standing on the

streets, chasing them with weapons, and white lads were jumping into gardens to get away.

Webster draws on his long-term research work in Keighley, West Yorkshire, to discuss the perception in many Northern English towns of no-go areas for both white and Asian communities, although his work clearly shows that the reality of racism produces a lack of mobility and movement for Asian young people compared to white young people (Webster, 1995). It creates what Webster terms a 'geography of fear'. 'These subjective or imaginary geographies of fear form the everyday perspectives of young people, and confirm the more 'objective' data about concentration and segregation.' (Webster, 2001:13)

Webster sees perceptions of territory as central to understandings of racial harassment and violence in towns such as Oldham. This perspective challenges what he views as the 'one-off, random incident' nature of criminal justice responses to racially motivated crime, and 'furthermore, the political anti-racism movement mirrors the "official" policy view in encouraging a blanket labelling of all incidents in which the parties are from different races as well as racially motivated because all whites are essentially racist' (Webster, 1996:15).

The discussion above already highlights the potentially unique role that youth work can play in Oldham, and other locations. Youth work takes place with young people who voluntarily choose to participate, in their own areas, and it

works with friendship and peer groups, rather than just individuals (Smith, 2003). The various 'Community Cohesion' reports seem to acknowledge the need for enhanced youth work.

Facilities for young people, including those provided under the Youth Service are in a parlous state in many areas...We need a much greater investment...We therefore believe that consideration should be given to placing some aspects of youth provision on a statutory basis, to a given standard (Cantle, 2001:31).

This pledge, sought by youth work advocates since the 1944 Education Act, now seems to be being fulfilled by the Government (DfES, 2002)).

However, the nature and purpose of this enhanced youth work role is contested. Indeed the Ritchie Report (2001) seems to partially blame youth work for the disturbances in the first place:

The falling away of traditional youth activities based on youth clubs has left a particular gap. There has been a change in emphasis within youth provision over recent times. Once youth clubs were run as drop-ins where young people could go and meet informally...this was done in a way in which the young people felt comfortable with. Now the emphasis in youth clubs is on social education, the informal element has been reduced and youth workers act more as teachers giving formal lessons on serious subjects. Young people are expected to be organised and become involved in 'projects', an alienating experience for many after a full day at school (Ritchie, 2001:47).

Ritchie could well be said to be both naïve and over-optimistic in assuming that the young people involved in the riots were attending school, college, or training provision in the first place.

The Ritchie Report's view of Youth Work is clarified further in section 9:13: 'In tackling the problems, we suggest that the move towards detached youth provision without adequate backup facilities has been a serious mistake' (P48), and in section 9:14, where it calls for much closer links between sport and recreation. This 'open access', leisure-based vision of Youth Work is apparently unaware of the historic failings of such provision to attract and hold the 'rough', 'unclubbable' young men likely to become involved in conflict (Davies, 1999); or, the problems youth workers have encountered in effectively tackling racism in such reactive educational environments (CRE 1999, Thomas 2002).

The Principal Youth Officer (PYO), who took over as head of Oldham Youth Service after the 2001 disturbances, sees positive and negative points from the Ritchie report: 'In terms of recognising that as a service we are under-resourced, it was helpful.' The PYO accepts some of the criticism about targeted, project work: 'We didn't enable young people to choose the pace and depth of their involvement...a lot of the targeted work was quite formal.'

In spite of that, open access work *had* already been re-introduced and was being rolled out across Oldham Youth Service, prior to the report's

publication. This was not acknowledged. The PYO felt that some of the conclusions were overly simplistic, naïve and short term; particularly about the association of sport with youth work.

One positive note of the Ritchie Report and other reports was an acceptance that facilities for youth work are inadequate. 'Youth Work needs to be more closely linked to physical facilities and we offer support in principle to a PFI bid to develop 10 new youth and community centres' (Ritchie, 2001, Rec 3.37:14).

The PYO echoes the need for buildings to be a priority in the way that new building for high schools have been over the last few years, and in the way that they were in the wake of the Albemarle Report of 1960 (Ministry of Education, 1960).

PYO: Unless there is a massive capital investment by the Government in plant that can be specifically targeted for use by young people, we will be struggling. There isn't a shortage of facilities but young people are excluded by older people, by transport or other access issues.

The young people and the youth workers in Werneth echoed this lack of facilities:

AMYP: We need a good youth club...to keep the boys off the street...we hang out on the street, smoking, bored because there is no youth club.

WMYW: *There are a lot of young people in Werneth, so there should be a certain (level of) provision for a certain number of young people. The truth is that there should be a sufficient number of facilities that the young people feel are for them.*

There are also issues of access to facilities:

WFYW2: *Even if there are facilities, the timings aren't always right. When you get to 18 as a white young man, you probably go out drinking but they (Asian Young Men) want youth facilities open. If they are open, they tend to close at 9 or 10 at night and that's just when they are coming out.*

Ritchie sees these new youth centres as a key way of building 'Community Cohesion': 'The location of the new facilities is important. They need to be in places which are accessible and welcoming to people of all communities and great care should be taken in planning this' (Ritchie, sec 9:19:49). This certainly challenges the current situation.

PYO: *We have one mixed centre because of the housing. For all the other centres, young people have to cross over visible borders, boundaries and that's a problem.*

History is not encouraging here. The supposedly open-access clubs of Albemarle were soon dominated by white young men (Pople, 1990; Davies, 1999 a & B). Ritchie is also contradicted by the reality described in other reports:

The extent to which youth facilities are segregated in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham has been drawn to our attention by the CRE. In some cases this simply reflects the locality in which the facilities exist but even centres in more racially mixed areas often serve only one community (Denham, 2001:15).

Young people in both focus groups were specifically asked if they would consider attending a new purpose built youth club, right on the border, by the Bridges:

*AMYP: We want a club on our own turf! If we had our own club **then** we could mix with others.*

WFYP: No, it should stay as it is...I don't think it would help if it were mixed.

Workers were also pessimistic:

WFYW1: The first group into it would take ownership of it, it would become a meeting place for violence, a symbol of conflict. Oldham has been segregated for too long, it's got to be small steps, maybe through small scale projects.

In fact the Werneth group have used the south Chadderton Youth Centre, visiting it in a mini-bus for pre-planned, short term project using the music and DJ equipment. This suggests ways forward in which youth work can promote real 'Community Cohesion'; carefully planned projects that bring young people together in circumstances shaped by appropriately trained staff, would seem

the most realistic and feasible way forward. The small-scale projects that WFYW1 calls for are precisely the sort of targeted, project work that the Ritchie report criticises.

The dangers of even such a carefully planned piece of work are all too real in such a racialised environment. Soon after the Werneth group had been interviewed, a group of Asian young people from another local Youth Work project has their minibus attacked outside the South Chadderton youth centre, after finishing a planned piece of project work. Only a police escort out of the area ensured their safety. The large group of white people, a mixture of adults and young people asking 'Why are Pakis using our centre?' had gathered rapidly, mobilised by British National Party activists who had recently moved into the area. This heightened tension has included overt threats to WFYW1, and damage to her property.

The PYO, head of Oldham Youth Service, comments:

Mixed access to provision is possible but requires a lot of work.

Oldham is an incredibly parochial town and in a way that's nothing to do with culture, race or origin. It's about different estates and even different ends of the same village! We have to start working separately, and then move towards joint activities.

This perspective is shared by AMYW:

Overall, the town doesn't encourage mixing...for young people, the town centre is a no-go area. What's there for them? It's not just a lack of youth facilities but also a lack of leisure facilities generally.

Two points stem from this professional consensus on practical ways forward, a consensus backed up by the positive responses of both groups of young people interviewed, to carefully planned, mixed projects that they have taken part in. Firstly, there is the issue of the skills and confidence of the youth workers planning such work. The PYO echoes the findings of research (CRE, 1999, Thomas 2002) around some youth workers' lack of confidence and clarity:

PYO: Some workers don't understand what a value is or the links between what values are and how they impact on attitudes. You can change behaviour without changing attitudes. If you don't touch the value base, any change will only be short term. We need to be challenging the value base in order to formulate new attitudes that will result in self-regulation of behaviour. At present, young people simply learn not to come out with (certain) comments in front of us.

This may seem like overt social engineering but the young people themselves expressed the need for it:

WFYP: We need teaching or something because some kids grow up with their parents being really, really racist, so they take it on.

Their youth worker has a strong relationship with them and comments:

WFYW1: The majority of them are struggling. They're from a very white area. Parents have very strong opinions...people aren't embarrassed to say that they are racist. Their only positive influence is here which is limited.

The second point stems directly from the limiting impact of resources and timescales. New money is coming into Youth Work, for crime diversion and 'Community Cohesion' but what type of money? WFYW1 comments: 'Bits of money have been available for holidays, not for longer term work'. Workers in Werneth echo this experience:

WFYW2: There seems to be a lot of quick fix things like organising a trip to Alton Towers for different groups. I do resent that. You can't just throw young people from different areas together on to a bus. It's like you've got three days to get your bid in! There needs to be money there to do substantial work, it can't be patchy.

This frustration is shared with the head of the service.

PYO: Summer programmes have helped but it's not a short-term problem! Funding is not there for long-term relationship and trust building. We can change a lot of people a little or a few a lot. We need more intensive work with young people.

The youth workers in Oldham know what sort of long-term confidence and 'Community Cohesion' building work they could do if the resources were there.

WFYW1: *I'd like to look at centre-twinning, small activities in each centre, then outdoor activities on mutual territory, that might culminate in an international exchange. It could work; I have seen it work elsewhere.*

AMYW says:

If there's a common interest, they see things happening to benefit them all, some common benefit.

This sort of 'twinning' approach is already being used to create positive links between different Oldham primary schools under the 'Unity in the Community' scheme.

Conclusion

'Community Cohesion' is a highly contested term but the realities of an uncohesive community are stark. This is borne out with all the limitations of the current lives, and future ambitions, of young people in Oldham, as shown by this illustrative research data, which hopefully offers insights relevant to policy makers in practitioners in a variety of segregated areas.

Communities segregated on ethnic/social lines will be a reality in Oldham and other towns for years to come – the rose-tinted vision in the 'Community cohesion reports of peaceful, integrated communities will remain just that in

the short term in a society lacking the political will or desire to impose 'integration'. This will leave young people living in monocultural areas, strong in social capital, but painfully ignorant and fearful of difference. This paper argues that properly resourced and targeted youth work, can bridge those gaps. Planned programmes of youth work (CRE, 1999), based on young peoples' voluntary participation, can create 'Bridging social capital' whilst tackling the roots of racist attitudes and actions, so genuinely promoting 'community cohesion'

The various Government reports rightly highlight the potentially unique role of youth work in promoting 'Community Cohesion', given the segregated realities of housing and education. However, for youth work to fulfil this potential, the superficial and contradictory conclusions of the Ritchie Report need to be challenged. What is needed is long term funding in *both* open access facilities *and* in carefully planned and managed cross-community projects. For these projects to succeed, long term funding that trusts the skills and judgements of youth workers is vital; funding that helps to develop their anti-racist skills and competencies, rather than creating inhibiting official doctrines (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002). The Government is starting to trust and fund youth work generally, but will it trust youth work enough to take a vanguard role in promoting 'Community Cohesion'?

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