Youth: Responding to Lives

An International Reader

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This book draws from various fields of knowledge, in an effort to theorise, create new and innovative conceptual platforms and develop further the hybrid idea of discourses around social inclusion and youth (from policy, practice and research perspectives).

Youth: Responding to lives – An international handbook attempts to fill the persistent gap in the problematisation and understanding of inclusion, communalism, citizenship – that are intertwined within the complex youth debate. It writhes and wriggles to highlight the interconnections between the encounters, events and endeavors in young people’s lives.

The focus of this edited work is also intended to help us understand how young people shape their development, involvement, and visibility as socio-political actors within their communities. It is this speckled experience of youth that remains one of the most electrifying stages in a community’s lifecycle.

Contributors to this text have engaged with notions around identity and change, involvement, social behavior, community cohesion, politics and social activism. The chapters offer an array of critical perspectives on social policies and the broad realm of social inclusion/exclusion and how it affects young people.

This book essentially analyses equal opportunities and its allied concepts, including inequality, inequity, disadvantage and diversity that have been studied extensively across all disciplines of social sciences and humanities but now need a youth studies ‘application’.
Youth: Responding to Lives
STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Volume 25

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Scope
This series addresses the many different forms of exclusion that occur in schooling across a range of international contexts and considers strategies for increasing the inclusion and success of all students. In many school jurisdictions the most reliable predictors of educational failure include poverty, Aboriginality and disability. Traditionally schools have not been pressed to deal with exclusion and failure. Failing students were blamed for their lack of attainment and were either placed in segregated educational settings or encouraged to leave and enter the unskilled labour market. The crisis in the labor market and the call by parents for the inclusion of their children in their neighborhood school has made visible the failure of schools to include all children.

Drawing from a range of researchers and educators from around the world, Studies in Inclusive Education will demonstrate the ways in which schools contribute to the failure of different student identities on the basis of gender, race, language, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status and geographic isolation. This series differs from existing work in inclusive education by expanding the focus from a narrow consideration of what has been traditionally referred to as special educational needs to understand school failure and exclusion in all its forms. Moreover, the series will consider exclusion and inclusion across all sectors of education: early years, elementary and secondary schooling, and higher education.
'To whom it may concern'
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ANDREW AZZOPARDI

INTRODUCTION

Scope and Background

If children and young people are to develop a notion of citizenship as inclusive, it is crucial that issues of identity and diversity are addressed explicitly – but getting the pedagogical approach right will be critical: the process of dialogue and communication must be central to pedagogical strategies for Citizenship.

Young people remain one of the most contested populations that navigate in our communities. Within all the discourses that engage the notion of inclusion, youth present an interesting challenge that merits our academic rendezvous within a range of contexts. What we conceptualise as “youth” differs in altered theoretical positions, schools of thought and socio-cultural experiences but is partly defined in diverse scenarios as a rational, responsible, free, conscious, choosing, autonomous, self-regulatory with a contestable social position.

This text draws from various fields of knowledge, in an effort to theorise, create new and innovative conceptual platforms and develop further the hybrid idea of discourses around social inclusion and youth (from policy, practice and research perspectives). This rich edition brings together academics and activists to fill the persistent gap in the problematisation of these issues and in the process pushing towards the understanding of inclusion, communalism, citizenship intertwined with complex youth debates.

This international reader is noteworthy because the contributors of these chapters manage to highlight the interconnections between the exclusionary experiences of young people’s lives. The focus of this text is intended to help us understand how young people shape their development, involvement, and visibility as socio-political actors within their communities. The thinking around this book is to link the speckled experiences of youth that remains one of the most electrifying stages in a community’s lifecycle. There is engagement with notions of identity and change, involvement and anti-social behavior, community cohesion or absence of, politics and social activism.

The manuscripts in this anthology offer a critical and methodical perspective on social policies and the broad realm of social inclusion/exclusion and how it affects the way young people will be looked upon favorably. The inter-disciplinary notion remains shrouded in epistemological darkness, conveniently endorsed but often
Little understood and insufficiently theorized and developed. This reader analyses equal opportunities and its allied concepts, including inequality, inequity, disadvantage and diversity that have been studied extensively across all disciplines of social sciences and humanities but now need a youth studies ‘application.’ This text indicates an across-cutting engagement. What is important in *Youth: Responding to lives – An international reader* is not the systematic presentation of a theme but the critical underpinnings of that theme, the politicisation of the issues and the focus on transformations.

**LAYOUT OF THE BOOK**

*Chapter 1: Re-vitalising the youth subculture concept: Albert Bell*

The ‘youth subculture’ concept has had a long and tumultuous history, undergoing considerable re-working and revamping through manifold attempts by sociologists to engage with the ever-changing landscape of youth culture. This chapter traces the origins of the subculture concept, focusing critically on the classic contribution of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) for the concept’s development and application. The author argues the death-knell of the subculture concept has been sounded somewhat prematurely and that it may still facilitate the process of understanding how young people construct their identities and carve their own niche in their social milieu. To this effect, the author proposes conceptual refinements to youth subculture theory informed by the understanding that steadfast a priori theoretical dichotomies such as those that marked the Neo-Marxist application of the concept limit its analytical prowess. The author posits that attempts to re-vitalise youth subcultural analysis should rest upon inter alia the importance of unravelling the day-to-day mundane realities of subculturalists and the conceptualisation of involvement in subcultures as a dynamic trajectory in social worlds characterised by markers of distinction and commitment.

*Chapter 2: Serv(ice)ing the Country? Critical reflections on youth development and citizenship education from India: Arun Kumar*

Development programmes working with youth have gained tremendous popularity in the last decade in India and are being supported and implemented variously by the State, non-governmental organisations, institutional donors and corporate-sponsored foundations. Historically, youth development in the country has been closely associated with nation-building in post-colonial India, though this seems to have receded with most contemporary programmes claiming to focus on youth themselves, and arguing against their ‘instrumentalisation.’ Using textual analyses of official programme documents of eighteen youth development programmes run by various organisations, this chapter maps the underlying conceptualisations of youth and citizenship, which in turn shape the objectives, content, methods and thus outcomes of citizenship education. It argues that such programmes are manifestations of neoliberalism, which has established itself firmly as the dominant
INTRODUCTION

framework for development in India. And further, that the notion of ‘serving’ the
country, inspired by Gandhian principles of volunteerism and service, is rapidly
being replaced by ideas of ‘servicing’ the modern nation-state, in which the youth
are implicated. The chapter closes with a call to engage with more critical,
substantive and plural discourses on/of youth and citizenship.

Chapter 3: Youth activism: Social movements in the making or in the taking?:
Andrew Azzopardi

This chapter will attempt to map out the varied notions surrounding social
movements and young people’s activism. The role, method and processes of
activism and its applicability to governance and community development will be
debated. It is a society where the shape and make of communities is constantly
evolving. A number of ingredients constitute discourses around social movements
whatever the agenda being buoyed. This chapter will evaluate the form and format
of such activism, its justification, morality, ethics and value within a historical,
social and factual paradigm.

Chapter 4: Spatio-temporal concepts and the socio-physical realities impinging on
the rehabilitation of incarcerated youth: Janice Formosa Pace & Saviour Formosa

Youth interact in a dynamic ecology defined by the social and physical boundaries
within which they operate. The realities experienced by youth span across
recognised requirements for cohesive political, religious, educational, familial and
economic structures. In their attempt to engage in society, some youth venture into
more criminogenic realities as posited by the theoretical approaches as are urban
ecology, social disorganization and structuration. Incarcerated youth experience
realities that bind them within the boundaries set by their background which may
be pivotal in rehabilitation or in turn lead to further recidivism. In order to
understand how the youths’ realities are structured, a number of relationships are
investigated, inclusive of those between poverty and residential locations, urban
structures, health, unemployment, population and dwelling densities, proximity to
other youth offenders and journey to crime as well as the concept of youths’ mental
maps. The provenance of offence-offender relationships at NUTS 5 (Local
Council) and more detailed levels are analysed in order to elicit the spatial
correlations which show that space has a direct impact on delinquency and
recidivism. Using a geo-statistical approach this study shows the relationships
between the incidence of crime and the social and physical structures within which
youth operate.

Chapter 5: Playing grown-up: Using critical disability perspectives to rethink
youth: Jenny Slater

This chapter begins with my own story; how, as a 22-year-old, new to the world of
research, I felt the need to ‘play grown-up’ and beginning my PhD. In order to
interrogate this story, I use critical readings of social scientific literature to consider discourses of ‘youth’ and ‘adulthood.’ I justify my reasons for considering constructions of adulthood within any theorisations of youth, arguing that considering youth as a time of incomplete-adulthood results in contradictory discourses of youth, dangerous to those ‘not-fitting-in.’ The transdisciplinary field of critical disability studies then becomes my conceptual lens to begin unpicking confusing and contradictory representations of and responses to youth. I ask where disabled youth fit in, and outline a framework which considers constructs of youth under the following headings; youth as active, youth for sale and youth as passive. I argue around the impossibility of embodying adulthood normativity, suggesting an end to ‘playing grown-up,’ in favour of cultures of ‘critical youth.’

Chapter 6: Schools promoting community involvement for inclusion: The impact of learning for future generations: Suzanne Gatt and Laura Sue Armeni

The challenge of educating future generations is becoming more difficult, particularly when resources are scarce and funding is being cut. Complexities such as cultural and socio-economic background, parenting and social integration require that schools collaborate with other organizations within the community to ensure better social cohesion as well as improved quality of life of individuals (Elliot et al., 1999; Collins et al., 2000). Education is becoming a shared responsibility of the whole community: parents, teachers, community associations or organizations; and other professionals working in the locality. This chapter presents research outcomes on how community involvement can become a model for primary schools in the future. This research has shown how community involvement had an impact, not only on the students’ academic results, but also on the children’s and parents’ expectations. The five year longitudinal research, in six European primary schools, identifies ways in which assisting students and their families at an early stage in their education affect educational aspects such as aspirations to continue studying beyond compulsory education as well as attending tertiary education. Early action helps overcome exclusionary practices and systems faced by children later on as youth, thus having an impact on future generations.

Chapter 7: Inclusion is ...: Musing and conversations about the meaning of inclusion: Margo Allison Shuttleworth

Inclusion has different meanings to different people. A person’s definition of what effective inclusion is and what it means to be included can be shaped by experience. The language used to express this experience creates an understanding of inclusion alongside diversity. The language of inclusion encapsulates both disability and difference drawing from gender, culture and social and economical circumstances. The impetus for this chapter has come from the many conversations that I had with education professionals, colleagues within the disability field and parents who have differing opinions of what inclusion is. This chapter attempts to paint a portrait of the diversity of opinion that exists within the inclusion/diversity
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debate. It will draw focus on a narrative that gives an experienced view of how inclusion can be interpreted and identify and expand upon three key points:

– The importance of diversity that inherently exists within the classroom and how the language of inclusion must compliment the celebration of this multiplicity;
– The collaboration that exists between special schools and mainstream environment;
– The Universal Design for Learning and Universal Instructional Design and how they can contribute in achieving a more accessible learning environment.

Chapter 8: Acceptance or acceptability: Youth inclusion in today’s schools: Valerie L. Karr & Stephen Meyers

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the opinions and experiences young people with disabilities in the United States have with inclusion, socially and within the school system. Through the qualitative study of the National Youth Inclusion Summit (NYIS), we examined the opinion of youth themselves regarding what changes society should make to become more inclusive. This chapter will explore the dichotomy between the traditional model of awareness-raising, which promotes the acceptance of persons with disabilities, and the current situation in schools today, where students express the need to fit a colloquial “acceptability” standard. Current practices promote an ideal that through raising the consciousness of others, young people with disabilities will be accepted. The reality suggests that this issue is lacking and must be explored in greater depth and consider within theories of social role valorization. This chapter will ponder, through the voice of its participants, the barriers that teachers, administrators and parents create or simply fail to address when including children with disabilities. It will also explore opportunities for designing institutional practices and programs that promote inclusion as defined by youth themselves.

Chapter 9: Constructing a modern disability identity: Dilemmas of inclusive schooling in Zambia: Matthew J. Schuelka

Disability is a complex phenomenon that is deeply embedded, both historically and culturally, in all societies. The dialectic of ‘modern,’ urban Zambian life in Lusaka and communitarian village life in the rural areas highlight this complexity very clearly. In this chapter, the lives of two Zambian youth are described: one adolescent with autism who lives in a small village, and another young adult with an intellectual disability who lives in a large city. Both stories are compared with different disabling mechanisms in society, namely the economic and educational institutions. Three main issues will be explored in this chapter: What do schools do? How do schools disable? And how does the economy disable? Through these explorations, the dilemmas of providing an inclusive education for children with disability are exposed and questions are raised as to the efficacy of schooling for future employment outcomes once they become adults in Zambia. The findings point to the these complexities and dilemmas by comparing the general
inclusiveness of agrarian and communitarian villages but with limited understanding of disability to the progressive disability thinking of urban areas, but with limited economic opportunities.

Chapter 10: The power of imagination in the lives of young people with significant disabilities: Janet Story Sauer

Opportunities to create stories, whether in a young child’s play area, or in older students’ conversations, are an important part of developing literacy and self-empowerment (Cazden, 2001; Gajdamaschko & Egan, 2003; Gallas, 2003; Paley, 2004; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). This chapter attempts to honor students’ unique narratives and affirm their membership within positive social contexts. Based on a year-long qualitative study about the communication and lived experiences of three young people with disabilities, the author asserts that people labeled with significant disabilities are imaginative and our failure to recognize this is perhaps more reflective of our own limited imaginations than theirs. Educators and families might pay attention to the imaginative capabilities of young people considered to have significant disabilities and capitalize on these skills and interests as part of supporting the students’ literacy development.

Chapter 11: The world according to Sofie: Endless search for participation: Elisabeth De Schauwer, Hanne Vandenbussche, Sofie De Schryver & Geert Van Hove

This chapter is an attempt to present the work of Deleuze and Guattari as a means of finding original ways to conceptualize the participation of children with severe difficulties in inclusive education. Through the study of the daily life experiences of Sofie, we follow her in her struggle against fixity and unity. Deleuze and Guattari offer new ways of acknowledging her involvement in connection with a diversity of ideas, people, materials, amongst other. She is attempting to act outside, against and beyond her pre-given position as a girl labeled with ‘serious disabilities’ in the striated and hierarchical space of school/society. Taking a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective transforms our understandings of children and their labels in ways that avoid the same old beaten track and create exciting, new opportunities.

Chapter 12: WARNING: Labels may cause serious side effects: Nancy La Monica & Vera Chouinard

This chapter explores the ways in which labels shape disabled students’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion in academia. I illustrate some of the ways in which students bear the stigma of these labels in order to be eligible for disability support within spaces of academia. By demonstrating how students internalize these negative stereotypes, we can understand the contradictory and sometimes harmful effects that labeling, for purposes of accommodations, has on disabled
students’ access to inclusionary spaces, compromising their full participation in learning. I use a critical narrative approach influenced by the work of Valorie-Lee Chapman (2005) to illuminate not only facets of my own experiences of labeling but also those of students whose experiences are recounted in the literature. I draw conclusions about the implications that acquiescence and resistance to labeling has for the inclusion and exclusion of students negotiating disability-related barriers to learning in academia. Both may result in disabled students not (fully) using their entitled accommodations (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Olney & Brockelman, 2003). This chapter offers suggestions for more inclusionary spaces that are not stigmatizing despite their diagnostic labels.

Chapter 13: Youth LEAD: Reflections on a leadership program for youth with developmental disabilities: Alexis N. Petri, Ronda J. Jenson, Arden D. Day & Carl F. Calkins

In October 2007, the Youth LEAD project was funded by the United States Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Projects of National Significance. The Youth LEAD project was designed to inspire youth with disabilities to learn, explore, practice, and experience community leadership. Youth LEAD participants were youth from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds within the urban area of Kansas City. From this program, participants reported personal development in the areas of communication skills, self-confidence, self-advocacy, ability to navigate their communities and the world, social and community connections, and goal-focused aspirations. Having programs that connect and involve youth with disabilities in community settings is important. Equally important is giving participants voice in program decisions, taking time to build community, and have social events. Youth Lead helps participants resist the formidable influences of a society set up to exclude them. It is this result of the project that has made the most lasting difference in the lives of teen-aged youth with disabilities. This chapter describes the successes and lessons learned and offer insights into further leadership development programs for youth with disabilities.

Chapter 14: How thinking against the grain teaches you to love what school hates: Naomi Folb

Dyslexia research often examines the deficits of an individual, or a group of people, and focuses either on the cause of the problem or its effects. This study takes a social model perspective, and assumes that thinking about dyslexia as an individual problem is the wrong kind of explanation. By talking with adult dyslexics about their school experiences and their perceptions of dyslexia it invited participants to discuss the social barriers they encountered. It revealed that dyslexics felt themselves to be negatively influenced by the regulative discourses at school, through which they came to see themselves as ‘flawed’ and ‘outsiders.’ They also discussed how they had learnt to view dyslexia as a way of thinking.
rather than a limitation. Nevertheless dyslexia’s abjectness sometimes resulted in dyslexics dis-identifying with other dyslexics. This suggests that through identification with a dominant subjective position dyslexics come to discriminate against, or respond to, other dyslexics in the same way that they have experienced life. The findings of this study indicate that new ways of thinking about dyslexia, in which the educational goals which dyslexics are subjected to needs to be reevaluated. We also need to reevaluate how to respond to differences, rather than automatically assuming dyslexia is an individual problem with a negative impact on lives.

Chapter 15: How can I lose my shyness ...? The exploration of self-knowledge through peer mediated articulations: Joanne Cassar

This chapter presents an ethnographic study conducted in a post-secondary school in Malta. It discusses the fears, sense of anguish, insecurity and lack of self-esteem of numerous adolescent girls, as they have emerged from a corpus of graffiti writings written on the female toilet doors of the school. The perceived feelings of inadequacy enmeshed with their accounts of personal experiences related to dating, sexual attraction and desire, body image and sexual encounters are counteracted by other graffiti writings, which promote positive ways of thinking and a sense of empowerment. Through these writings the female students form a sense of community, inclusion and belonging, as they seek to bond with each other in discreet and anonymous ways. Their attempts at destabilising a school system, which gives priority to academic performance and achievement, leads them to explore new ways of thinking about themselves.

Chapter 16: Developmental denial: How the attitudes of parents and professionals shape sexuality education for youth with intellectual disabilities: Trina Balanoff & Matthew Wappett

The “normal” development of the body, its sexual drive, and reproductive capacities in youth with intellectual disabilities provides an interesting challenge to traditional assumptions about disability and embodiment. This challenge lies in the fact that an individual who may never function cognitively above the level of a two or three year old can, at the same time, have a fully developed and sexually capable body. The notion that sexuality can only be exercised and understood by the “normal” members of society, denies the fact that sexuality may be the most common innate drive among the human species regardless of race, class, gender, ability or intelligence; but, as Foucault illustrates in his History of Sexuality, it also happens to be one of the most highly regulated and rule-bound aspects of embodiment and citizenship. This qualitative case study illustrates how the attitudes of parents and educators influence and limit sexuality/relationship education for a fourteen year old young woman with autism. This study also reviews some of the important legal barriers in the United States that further limit access to sexuality/relationship education for youth with disabilities.
Chapter 17: Conceptualizing students with significant intellectual disabilities: Analyzing the textbook discourse: Karen D. Schwartz

Notwithstanding the prominent focus on inclusion in the discourse of special education, students with significant intellectual disabilities in North America continue to receive a part of their education in segregated contexts. This situation creates an interesting and perplexing anomaly that I attempt to reconcile through an examination of the discursive conceptualizations of these students in Canadian introductory special education textbooks. My study is framed within (a) the academic field of disability studies, which re-imagines disability using new perspectives, and (b) new philosophical concepts of “personhood,” which critique traditional definitions based on intellectual ability. Situated within social constructionism and discourse theory, this analysis examines how students with significant intellectual disabilities are depicted in these textbooks. The language used in portraying these students suggests a discourse of individual pathology, medicalization and professionalization, distancing students with significant intellectual disabilities from other students because of their perceived lack of abilities, needs and behaviours. This discourse relies heavily on traditional understandings of people with significant intellectual disabilities as lacking in value. There is little discursive evidence to suggest that these students are presented in ways that challenge either historical or modern conceptualizations.
1. RE-VITALISING THE YOUTH SUBCULTURE CONCEPT

INTRODUCTION

The idea of ‘youth subculture’ (broadly defined as meaning and action systems created by young people sharing similar interests, preferences and life-chances) has long fashioned the sociology of youth while undergoing considerable evolution and re-articulation. Youth subcultures have been described in manifold and often contrasting ways bringing into question the validity of the youth subculture concept and its value as an analytical tool. This chapter examines developments in the application of the subculture concept to the study of young people, focusing on how the concept was defined and shaped by the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). The central line of argumentation posited in the following pages is that the way forward for subcultural studies lays within a conceptual framework that takes cognisance of the limitations of CCCS subculture theory. It is contended that the concept can still hold relevance if it accounts for the multiple referents of power in contemporary society and the diffuse, complex and non-linear ways that youth subcultures produce to respond to such realities. Although, contrary to the postmodern idea of a depoliticised youth, youth radical subcultures persist, subcultures must not be seen as inherently oppositional or incorporated as expounded by the CCCS. Subcultures are not essentially proto-political and may entail a commodity-based dimension that cannot be simply dismissed as a form of incorporation or co-optation. By drawing on various works on commodity-based subcultures, a case is made for theorising youth subcultures as complex, sometimes paradoxical contexts in constant interplay with their wider social milieu.

‘YOUTH SUBCULTURE’: FROM DELINQUENCY TO SEMIOTIC TERRORISM

Inspired by Durkheim’s classic anomie theory and Robert Merton’s ideas on how society responds to the means-end imbalance, the US cultural deviance tradition in criminology may be credited with the earliest applications of the subculture concept (Bell, 2009, 2010). In the foundational works of A. K. Cohen (1955), Cloward and Ohlin (1961) and other cultural deviance theorists the concept was used to explain youth delinquent behaviour and youth gangs in the United States as shared responses to social strain and developed by delinquent working class adolescents to over-ride (albeit only symbolically) the inaccessibility to middle class success goals that restrains their life chances. The cultural deviance model of subculture was the first to explain youth subcultures, why these emerge, why
young people are attracted to them, and the needs that subcultures respond to. In A. K. Cohen’s (1955) “Delinquent Boys” for example working class delinquent subcultures emerge as meaning systems that provide a strong sense of belonging and shelter from cultural estrangement and isolation to members who converge around a code of conduct that repudiates and shuns middle-class respectability. The extent of the subculturalist’s internalisation and identification with the subculture’s value and behavioural blue-print determines status and esteem within the group. For Cohen the longing and search for acceptability and status within the subculture is key to understand the motivations for subcultural affiliation.

These early theories influenced the rise of a substantial amount of theorisation and empirical work and the onset of rival perspectives on youth subcultures that put A.K. Cohen and his followers to task on myriad fronts as we shall see shortly below. However, in their zeal to supplant them, later works often lost sight of the important insights that the US subculture tradition (in spite of its failings) provided on the factors contingent upon involvement in subcultures and the systems of gradation that characterise youth subcultural formations. If anything, US post-war subculture theory laid emphasis on the idea that subcultures, while attempting to etch their own little niche away from the dominant society mirror the structural processes that permeate that same society – a discerning focus that became increasingly side-stepped with the ascent of the CCCS’ understanding of youth subcultures as fundamentally symptomatic of socio-cultural conflict.

As the 1970s ushered in the rise of myriad spectacular youth subcultural styles, the use of youth subculture as an analytical concept was revamped in the United Kingdom by the CCCS (Bell, 2009; Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004b; Brake, 1985; S. Cohen, 1993; Jenks, 2005; Weinzierl & Muggelton, 2004). Marxist leaning and more radical, the CCCS found A. K. Cohen’s and Cloward and Ohlin’s work on youth subcultures unconvincing. For the CCCS (see for example Clarke et al., 2000), early subculture theory entailed a constraining psychogenic and individualistic thrust. The Birmingham scholars also claimed that these formative works rested upon conservative US sociology’s flawed idea of consensus-based and all-pervasive cultural goals with working-class youth forming subcultures to circumvent and cope with the blocked opportunities they experience in the process of striving for the American dream. The reality of divergent and often directly contrasting class value systems and the use of ideological forces by the establishment to subordinate dissenting worldviews and focal concerns was thus completely sidestepped. The CCCS contended that these limitations proscribed the analytic prowess of A. K. Cohen et al.’s subculture theory. Moreover, the Birmingham school also put the US cultural deviance perspective to task for inexcorably connecting youth subcultures (and youth in general) with crime and delinquency, thereby criminalising and problematising them (Brake, 1985) and undermining their “importance as legitimate expression” (Leonard, 1997, p. 241).

The dislocation of the youth subculture concept from its roots in cultural deviance theory was thus requisite for the Birmingham School. The CCCS’ “new wave subculture theory” posited a more critical and elaborate explanation of youth subcultures that took stock of their active and transformative role (Callouri, 1985).
This helped to supplant the subculture concept from its ties to delinquent, antisocial behaviour. Youth subcultures came to be seen as class-bound collective systems of meaning and action developed by disaffected and disenfranchised working-class youth. For the CCCS, rather than rooted in problems of status frustration and adjustment or generational differences, youth (and still essentially working class) subcultures were linked directly to class and power relations in society (Callouri, 1985; Macdonald, 2001). Politicising the concept away from the functionalist consensus-based conception of society that inspired early subculture theory, in the eyes of the CCCS youth subcultures articulated political dissent (Jenks, 2005) and ideologically resisted the contradictions that were symptomatic of the class structure within modern capitalist society (Brown, 2003).

The contextualisation of youth subcultures within an understanding of society as underpinned by class conflict also offered an alternative to the non-political and reductive notion of ‘teenage youth culture’ that dominated the post-war sociology of youth in Britain and in the US. The CCCS (see for example Clarke et al., 2000; P. Cohen, 1997; Corrighan & Frith, 2000) held that youth culture theory advanced the myth that widespread social and political consensus, working class affluence and embourgeoisement had created a classless society and a classless youth culture. As the dominant culture ideology propelled the idea of the bourgeosification of the British working class, age rather than class became the arena for social and cultural conflict. The rise of a classless and autonomous culture characterised by flagrant commitment to style, music, leisure and consumption, was thus perceived to be directly related to the new life conditions experienced by the masses and youth in particular (Clarke et al., 2000). In contrast the CCCS held that the working class and the struggle between the classes had refused to disappear. Poverty and rampant inequalities in wealth, blocked opportunities, widening divisions between occupational groups and escalating unemployment in post-welfare state Britain made up the bitter context in which the CCCS’ subculture theory was wrought (S.Cohen, 1993). The CCCS argued that young people constituting youth subcultures inherited the same problematic and cultural orientation of their parent class (Clarke et al., 2000). Despite their distinctiveness and specificity, working class youth subcultures remained confronted with the same material conditions and fate of their parent class (P. Cohen, 1997; Clarke et al., 2000). Phil Cohen (1997, p. 94) for example viewed the late 1960s skinhead subculture as arising to respond to the deterioration in the working class’ sense of community and cohesiveness by reclaiming dislocated traditional working class values through symbolic forms. Cohen (ibid., pp. 95-96) maintains that the skinheads’ music (reggae, used by West Indians as a form of protest music) and blue-collar uniform were reactions to the working class’ acquiescence to liberal middle class values and hedonism. Skinheads embraced a puritanical and macho, chauvinistic ethos (thereby reasserting working class cultural values) while vehemently rejecting middle-class bohemianism (as most emphatically evinced in the deplorable incidents of ‘queer-bashing’ by skinheads in the late sixties and beyond).

However for Cohen and the CCCS, the skinheads and other working class youth subcultures’ efforts to resist dominant class ideology were only illusory solutions
to the wider contradictions in their milieu. Cohen defined working class youth subcultures as tightly bounded systems that could not be unchained from the contradictions inherited from and permeated their parent class culture (ibid., p. 96). The CCCS contended that the function that youth subcultures performed was to transfer the problematic of the wider macro culture to the micro, subcultural level and to attempt to resolve it on an imaginary, magical plane (ibid.). Youth subcultures thus did not entail the potential for real change in the life-chances and prospects of working class youth. The latter remain bound to share the same fates and experiences of others in the same subordinate, class position. It is within this context that the CCCS posited that youth subcultures have a clear class base. For the CCCS the understanding of youth subcultures essentially required the exploration of their relationship to class. Youth subcultures entailed processes of class socialisation and continual exchange and negotiation with their parent class culture (Clarke et al., 2000).

In the process of revising the concept of subculture, not only did the CCCS put the notion of youth as the new leisure class or a class in itself to task; the more general term ‘culture’ also undertook different meaning. The concept shed the idealism and utopic qualities it possessed in the functionalist, cultural deviance perspective and youth culture theory. Drawing from Gramsci’s theories on hegemony, the CCCS re-defined ‘culture’ as the battleground between competing, oppositional world views each striving to ascertain their legitimacy and primacy over each other. Youth subcultures were symptomatic of this struggle (S. Cohen, 1993). Gramsci’s works on hegemony were highly influential on the Birmingham School. The CCCS distanced itself from the historical materialism and economic determinism of orthodox Marxism. It embraced Gramsci’s contentions that ideological forces (which permeate the superstructure in an attempt to emasculate dissent and engender the status quo) sustain class and power differentials. For Gramsci, the primacy of the ruling class over the working subject class is ascertained and propagated through hegemony, that is, “the moment when the ruling class is able not merely to coerce its subordinates to conform, but to exercise the sort of power which wins and shapes consent, which frames alternatives and structural agendas in such a way as to appear natural” (S. Cohen, 1993, p. xxiv). By propagating the illusion or myth that capitalist society is based on egalitarian principles, hegemony makes the ideology, culture and morality of the ruling elite appear as the natural order of things. It thrives and creates a belief system that pervades common sense and popular consciousness and maintains the status quo in power relations. For the CCCS youth subcultures were thus important signifiers of an on-going, hegemonic struggle between dominant and subordinate class cultures. Subcultures were seen as possessing counter-hegemonic potential, that is, they constitute modes of resistance to dominant ideologies that reproduce prevailing structural arrangements, thereby allowing disaffected subordinate groupings to symbolically and momentarily re-negotiate their position within the context of spurious structural conditions.

Dick Hebdige’s “Subculture: The meaning of style” (1979) – a cornerstone of the CCCS’ subculture tradition – epitomises how the CCCS explained the symbolic
dimensions and functions of youth subcultures within the wider discourse of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggle. In Hebdige’s work, by engaging in “semiotic guerrilla warfare” tactics (p.105), spectacular youth subcultures (that is, those that are most visible and which thus provoke histrionic societal reaction) create symbolic disorder and emerge as sites of political resistance toward dominant ideologies. Hebdige argued that such subcultures violated the established, normative codes of social organization and experience. For Hebdige, glam, punk and other spectacular subcultural styles articulated tabooed concerns through symbolic, aesthetical and behavioural transgression marking clear-cut lines of distinction between subculturalists and moral entrepreneurs. Hebdige contended that the counter-hegemonic potential of youth subcultures can be traced to their style. It is through style (subcultural commodities, gestures, speech or argot) that subcultures are able to disturb and challenge the normative and dominant social order. Style is thus for Hebdige the pre-eminent and most important characteristic of subcultures and that which necessitates study and analysis – a requisite that Hebdige found lacking in previous studies on subculture.

Hebdige (1979) argued that coded meanings reside in the style, rituals and exchanges of spectacular youth subcultures. These require semiotic disentanglement to be fully unravelled. According to Hebdige without the application of semiotic tools and a robust theoretical framework, efforts to explain subcultures will not distance themselves from the prevalent ideologies on subcultures that reside in popular consciousness and are fuelled by hegemonic forces. Like other CCCS theorists before him, Hebdige believed that the youth culture theories that explained youth subcultures as simply indicative of generational conflict fell victim to such mystification as they failed to explore the vital dimension of class and power relations in subcultural formations and their styles. Hebdige described Phil Cohen’s earlier class-based subculture theory, which examined the ideological, economic and cultural forces at play in the creation of youth subcultures through an ethnographic lens as an adequate beacon for the study and analysis of subcultural style (ibid.) Like Phil Cohen, Hebdige holds that while expressing tension with ruling class ideologies and the structure of inequality that such ideologies support, subcultures and the members constituting them ultimately cannot overcome their subordinate position in society. However, Hebdige critiques Cohen’s subcultural analysis for lacking the methods for semiotic disentanglement requisite for more profound appraisal of subcultural forms. Hebdige holds that Cohen’s shortcomings in this regard led him to over-emphasise the nexus between working class youth subcultures and their parent, adult working class culture (ibid.) Hebdige contends that the post-war generational consciousness gave rise to differing experiences between parents and their children. Phil Cohen’s work did not acknowledge and take cognisance of these disparate experiences of social reality. Thus, for Hebdige, efforts to trace marginal subcultural styles to their parent class context must be treated and undertaken with caution. For example Hebdige held that in the process of re-asserting and re-claiming traditional working class values, the skinheads did so because they perceived that these values were repudiated and considered outmoded by their parent culture. For Hebdige,
youth subcultures often expressed disjuncture and dissent rather than congruity and conformity to their parent culture as demonstrated by the punk subculture, whose subcultural style was pregnant with parodies and mockery of traditional working class values.

PUNKS, MODS, BRICOLEURS AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF SUBCULTURES

Hebdige viewed subcultures as representative of the changes in working class lifestyles and in the broader social totality. They articulate both tabooed interpretations of working class life and class experiences (that is, those excluded from popular consciousness) and the preferred, official meanings attributed to the subculture by the dominant culture. As in the case of punk, these preferred meanings may be simultaneously embraced and contested by members of the subculture. For Hebdige, it is thus the semiotician, armed with the explanatory concepts of “bricolage” and “homology” who is most capable of identifying the latent meanings and significations of subcultural styles and how meanings are constructed and interpreted within the subculture. According to Hebdige subcultural styles are created through the process of bricolage. This entails the appropriation of elements, insignia and commodities from other cultures that are given disparate and subversive meanings by subcultural “bricoleurs.” Hebdige (ibid., p. 104) exemplifies this by the mods’ appropriation of the motor-scooter and prescription drugs. Pills prescribed for the treatment of neurosis and other mental health conditions became the preferred recreational drug in mod subculture. The motor-scooter, originally and once a respectable means of transportation was usurped by mods and recoded as an important signifier of mod identity whose very sight instilled fear among outsiders. Once assembled and transformed within the subculture’s style, for Hebdige these objects come to signify life within the subculture - the subculture’s worldview, ideology, practices and collective identity. Such subcultural artefacts are thus imbued with meaning – they become, so to speak, the embodiment of the values held by subculturalists.

Hebdige used the concept of homology to describe the symbolic fit (agreement) between subcultural style, values and ideology and the subjective experiences within the group. It is through this fit that the individual member of the subculture is able to make sense and interpret his/her milieu. The hippy counterculture’s cohering lifestyle based essentially upon a radical worldview, alternative values, acid rock and a congruent use of hallucinogenic drugs is cited by Hebdige (p. 113) as an example of a homologous subculture. When this homology is ruptured, it is unlikely that the subculture will continue to cohere with the lifestyle of its adherents. For Hebdige the capability of subcultural style to ascertain such homology and counter-hegemonic potential is mitigated by the inevitability of co-optation. Subcultures go through cycles of resistance and defusion. As a subculture’s style becomes more overt and discernable, the propensity for the demise of style’s authenticity through incorporation and commodification by the dominant culture becomes more likely. Influenced by Lefebvreian ideas on the commodification of culturally-subversive aesthetics, Hebdige asserted that while
subcultural styles are reviled by the moral guardians of society, at the same time they also attract fascination and even become celebrated in some parts of the mass media. Thus the moral panic the subculture draws from conventional forces and the marketability of its sartorial codes have an amplification effect on the subculture. Yet as the subculture becomes more diffuse, it becomes incorporated within the dominant order, which is thus able to recoup from the initial fracture caused by subversive subcultural aesthetics to re-emerge whole and intact.

Hebdige (ibid., pp. 92-99) held that this incorporation (or recuperation) process may take two forms:

“The commodity form” whereby subcultural signs (such as, dress codes and music) are re-fabricated as mass-produced objects.

“The ideological form,” that is, where subcultural behaviour is labelled and re-defined as deviant by the minders of the normative order (the judiciary, the media, the police etc.) and subjected to efforts at normalisation.

For example, Hebdige holds that he commodification of punk rock music and fashion by corporate forces epitomises the breakdown of the structural homology of punk subculture and its domestication. In its pure, untouched form the subculture subverted existing codes. However, gradually, powerful market forces seeped in, divesting the style from its counter-hegemonic potential and reducing it to a malleable product ready for mass consumption.

The influence of the CCCS and Hebdige on subculture studies remained pervasive well after Hebdige’s “Subculture” (1979). For example, both Laing’s (1985) and McDonald’s (1987) work on punk rock music resonated the CCCS’ ideas on spectacular subcultures. These authors argued that punk’s test of authenticity rested on the music’s independence, if not outright hostility to commercial markets. This takes the form of commitment to DIY attitudes, continual challenges to orthodox definitions of musical propriety and taboo-breaking lyrical content. DeMott’s (1988) interpretation of English punk rock subculture as an attempt by working-class young people to overcome and detach themselves from the ambiguities of their parent class draws from Hebdige’s earlier works.

Traces of Hebdige’s authenticity-defusion dyad may also be located in a number of post-Y2K works. Pratt (1993) for example contends that while oppositional subcultures do create fracture in dominant mythologies, their impact is only temporary. The inroads made by the subversive are eventually sucked into the “matrices of power relations” (p. 7), engendering a renewed hegemonic order and new cycles of conflict. For Pratt, oppositional subcultures are symptomatic of the battleground between rival ideologies and worldviews. However, the resistance of subordinate forces to dominant ones is ephemeral at best and mostly ineffectual. Hebdige also resurfaces in Malott and Peña’s (2004) appraisal of US punk rock subculture as both subverting and accommodating capitalist values and interests and Halnon (2006) also seems to draw on Hebdigean theory in her explanation of the carnivalesque spectacle of heavy metal as a site for resisting corporate music
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markets. Similarly, while sceptical of the CCCS’ subculture theory and its applicability to underground or alternative music cultures, Szemere’s (2001) “Up from the underground” (a study on rock counterculture in Hungary) revisits the CCCS ideas on accommodation and defusion. Szemere explains how the initial dissident and subversive value of radical music cultures was transformed and depoliticized by wide-sweeping socio-economic changes in 1990s post-socialist Hungary, with the bonds in the country’s underground music counterculture eventually falling victim to internal acrimony and fragmentation. The CCCS’ ideas on the inevitable domestication of subcultural style re-appear in Dylan Clark’s (2004) study on Seattle’s ‘anarcho-punks.’ Clark notes that the wave upon wave of commodified subcultural styles over recent decades have made subcultural style worthless and obsolete. The power to transgress, shock and create moral panic through style has been rendered ineffectual. Subcultural styles are now for Clark merely “new marketing opportunities” (ibid., p. 229). Interestingly for Clark, however, the cooptation of style has freed subculturalists like Seattle’s anarchic punk rockers to redefine themselves through radical political action thereby shifting opposition and resistance from the cultural and symbolic to the political – making the threat of radical subcultures to the dominant order ever more real.

THE RISE OF THE ‘NEO-TRIBE’ AND THE POSTMODERN ALTERNATIVE TO ‘SUBCULTURE’

Despite these continuities, the CCCS subculture paradigm has not been left unchallenged. The large part of this critique has stemmed from post-modern or ‘post-subculture theory,’ which emerged in the 1990s. The crux of the post-modern attack on the CCCS was that the term ‘subculture’ and the arsenal of analytic concepts that the Birmingham scholars tied to it (like bricolage, homology, commitment, distinction, resistance and co-optation/defusion) did not make sense in the fluid and ephemeral world that young people today are immersed – a world which offers an endless stream of disposable stylistic opportunities that celebrate individuality versus collective or group identity. For post-modern theory, subcultural styles today are nothing more than market assembled and hybrid constructions from past styles. For example, Muggleton (1997) posits that the post-modern hypermarkets of pastiche have reduced subcultural styles to simulacra – imitated images where stylistic innovation is no longer possible. Young people pick and chose from the vast array of styles at their disposal without committing themselves to a particular style. Thus for postmodern sociology terms like “fashion tourists” (Muggleton, 1997), “neo-tribes” (Bennet, 1990; Maffesoli, 1988, 1996; Hetherington, 1998), “transitory tribes” (Malbon, 1998), “temporary substream networks” (Weinzierl, 2000), Winge’s (2004) “modern primitives” – all emphasising the consumption based propulsion and unbound, nomadic ways of young people today – came to possess more analytical power than the youth subculture concept.

Like ‘subculture’ however these rival concepts have also met their fair share of justifiable criticism. Sweetman (2004), for example, calls for a more qualified use
of the Maffesolian concept of ‘neo-tribe,’ particularly in the light of the enduring applicability of ‘subculture’ to describe important present-day youth practices. Such calls come more emphatically to the fore in St. John’s (2004) work on post-rave dance cultures. St John (p. 78) explains post-ravers as “style tourists” and “technotribes.” These are networked through a DIY ethos and have emerged within the post-Y2K context of evolving “digital communications technologies” and “decentralised social movements” (ibid.). The consumption of technology in today’s subcultures is imbued with activism, meaning and purpose. Technotribes are not vacuous stylistic ensembles without meaning. Rather they possess the potential for social critique (ibid.) All this for St John necessitates the need for the development of “differential subcultural modelling” (p. 77) and approaching the Maffesolian neo-tribe concept with caution (p. 65). Neo-tribe theory does not exhaust “the life-strategies of contemporary youth” and the “sea of conscientious youth” (p. 69) as epitomised in “movement nuclei” committed to a search for authenticity, and expressing shared grievances and belonging while attempting to forge political changes (p. 70).

St. John’s reflections point to a crucial consideration. The concepts that postmodernist sociology has attempted to introduce to supplant subculture have not offered an effective alternative to the concept. Like Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson (2004, pp. 76-77) I contend that the study of subcultures remains “an important sociological task” with important implications for both social theory and youth policy making alike. The alternatives to the subculture concept do not offer “new analytic insight” and do not resolve the “complex methodological and theoretical dilemmas” that subculture theorists encountered (ibid.). Subcultures are still important social reference points in the creation of youth identities. The postmodern discourse on transcience, simulacra and hybridity does not explain the reality of on-going and passionate commitment by young people to subcultures and people who age while retaining adherence to their subcultural style. Rather than disappearing in hyper-reality (as post-modern subculture theory proclaims), the forces propelling subcultural identities have mutated into “disputes over tastes and sensibilities” in a stratified global economy where social groups battle over scarce economic resources. Power differentials such as class, age, gender and ethnicity determine accessibility to translocally mediated subcultural styles. While the economic, cultural and political dynamics of present-day subcultural formations cannot be explained by the CCCS subcultures model, “an uncritical, reconstituted post-modernism” is equally unsatisfactory (ibid.). The Birmingham school over-politicised subcultures. At the other end of the subculture theory continuum, however, post-subcultural theory falls prey to under-politicizing them. As demonstrated by Clark’s (2004) anarcho-punks, St. John’s (2004) post-ravers, and oppositional subcultural formations such as Reclaim the streets and Disobbedienti (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2004, p. 15), contemporary youth contains radical political elements which demonstrate that radicalism and resistance are very much alive, and which merit sociological scrutiny.
However, it is not only in such radical groups that hold ongoing relevance. Commodity-based youth subcultures also present us with insightful case studies that can assist the process of remodelling subculture theory and to alleviate some crucial difficulties arising from the CCCS’ understanding and application of the concept. In the CCCS’ analysis of the relationship between subcultures and the entertainment industry, cultural communication and cultural commodities are seen as sources of domination. Subculturalists re-use these commodities in novel ways, through bricolage, “re-signification,” “semiotic alteration” or what Brown (ibid.) terms as “delinquent” consumption. At this juncture for the CCCS, subculturalists are engaging in active commodity stylisation, whereby subculturalists resist corporate capitalism by giving consumer items different meaning and actively using them to affirm their class identity (ibid.). However, when a subcultural commodity is co-opted by market forces, the CCCS contended that the object is de-homologised, that is, it becomes unrecognisable to the subculture; the subculture is unable to see itself in it. This led to what Brown (2007:15) describes as “the anti-market perspective” of the CCCS.

The CCCS’ unilinear resistance-defusion model over-politicised youth subcultures and youth leisure consumption patterns (Frith, 1980; Gelder, 1997; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2004; Stratton, 1985; Thornton, 2001). Brown (ibid.) argues that the antipathy of the CCCS towards commodity subcultures hampered the CCCS and its supporters from recognising that “plastic” cultural commodities typical of the music industry (records, magazines, t-shirts and so forth) can “carry actual and potential ideas for subculture; or that they are ‘expressions’ of subculture” (p. 18). Brown contends that the CCCS intentionally suppressed this dimension of commodity-based subcultures as it would invalidate its whole rationale. For Brown this is evinced in how the CCCS sought to distance itself from Phil Cohen’s original ideas on the relationship between subcultures’ “plastic” or “external” (including music) and “infrastructural” forms. For Cohen, the two are important elements of the symbolic structure and distinctive style of subcultures. As Brown notes (2007, p. 17), Phil Cohen’s work emphasised the idea that such plastic elements can be important resources for meaning for those subcultures that are more dependent on external forms. In later and most CCCS work this potentiality is totally unaccounted for as are various subcultures like heavy metal which are heavily dependant on commodity consumption (ibid.). This critique follows Fiske’s (1991), Bennett and Kahn-Harris’ (2004), Middleton’s (1990), Thornton’s (1997, 2001) and Ueno’s (2004) contentions that the CCCS downplayed the understanding of music subcultures as potent vehicles for the construction, expression and presentation of self.

Revisiting our ideas on such commodity-based, “plastic” forms can help remodel the subculture concept in a way that it can become a more watertight ideal type and reflective of contemporary youth practices. Gelder (1997, pp. 145-146) contends that the CCCS’ emphasis on subcultural style as resistance downplayed the important role consumption plays in the formation of subculture styles and in
RE-VITALISING THE YOUTH SUBCULTURE CONCEPT

processes of subcultural identification. Similarly, for Stratton (1985), the CCCS’ emphasis on “authentic,” market-free subcultures, foregoes the existence of commodity-oriented subcultures based and founded upon the dominant capitalist ideology of consumption. According to Stratton, youth subcultures do not necessarily possess a political specificity or use aspects of their parent culture to mark a problematic relationship with the dominant culture only to be inevitably subject to co-optation and demise. The enduring and self-contained, commodity-centred “surfie” and “bikie” subcultures (originating in post-war America and hitherto gaining ground in diverse cultural contexts worldwide) epitomise such commodity-based subcultures (ibid.). Stratton argues that commodity-oriented subcultures (rather than destined to incorporation and defusion) possess transcultural values and a wide appeal that ensures their longevity. For Stratton commodity-oriented subcultures are capable of cultural transferability, particularly between cultures sharing the same capitalist economic structure, and even more so as such subcultures become appropriated and spectacularised by the mass media. In the same vein Muggleton and Weinzierl (2004, p. 8) argue that by tying consumption to commodification and defusion, the CCCS downplayed the centrality of purchase, exchange and economics in subculture. This critique echoes McRobbie’s (1988) attempts to provide redress to the missing link of subcultural entrepreneurship in the CCCS model. McRobbie contends that subcultures offer the prospect of a career through commodity exchange. Subcultural entrepreneurship is crucial for the process of constructing and re-inforcing subcultures and subcultural identities. For McRobbie, the CCCS ignored this important aspect and simply interpreted subcultural entrepreneurship and participation in subcultural economics as indicators of a weakening resistance. The subculture remodelling that is being proposed takes stock of such crucial considerations. It centres on the notion that as Carrington and Wilson (2001) also posit – young people’s cultural consumption and production involve a strong degree of agency. Young people create music cultures centred on DIY practices (such as participating, supporting and setting up independent record labels) despite the influence and pervasiveness of mass, homogenising and global economic forces. Such consumption and production practices should not simply be dismissed as symptoms of cultural reproduction and subculturalists as “cultural dupes” (as the CCCS tends to do).

The realisation of “consumerist ambitions” is intrinsic to commodity-oriented subcultures and underpins their origins, escalation and evolution (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2004). Moreover, far from resisting capitalist incorporation, contemporary subcultures partake in “marketing their own identities” (ibid.) and play an important role in devising new stylistic innovations within mass culture industries. The exploration of the meaning of these market niches for the trajectories of “unspectacular” young people should be a pivotal concern for the remodelling of the subculture concept. Frith (2004, pp. 175-176) argues that the CCCS interpreted youth subcultures through a theoretical position that anatomised subcultures from “the outside” rather than explaining them “from within.” For Frith (ibid.) the CCCS abstracted class, youth and subculture from how they are
experienced in day-to-day social practice and thus presented only a “distanced discursive reading” of the phenomena it studied. Muggleton (2000) explains the CCCS’ exscription of the subjective meanings of subculturalists as the result of a macro theoretical framework based on the totalising concepts of “materialism” (that is, the notion that material or objective reality is autonomous and detached from subjective experience and that economic forces act as the foundations of power relations and the motor of structural development and change) and “totality” (that is, the synthesis emanating from the clash of two opposing forces). Thus the CCCS over-emphasised wider structural contradictions and then proceeded to interpret subcultural meanings through this pre-emptive framework.

Furthermore, for Carrington and Wilson (2001) the CCCS’ focus on spectacular subcultures dislodged the importance of looking at the mundane, day-to-day practices of what Frith (2004, p. 174) and Huq (2006, p. 15) term as “unspectacular” and “conformist” youth respectively. Similarly, Thornton contends that the CCCS’ over-emphasis on “the conspicuous and the bizarre” (2001, p. 94) versus the “routine” and the “mundane” (ibid.) spectacularises the difference and otherness between youth cultures, depicts the ‘mainstream’ as negative and thus as a result fails to account for the bulk of young people who pertain to “conventional” youth subcultures. For Thornton Birmingham authors like Hebdige attributed difference or dissidence hallowed status and regulated conformity to imply complacency and submission to the dominant culture.

As alluded by Brown (2004, 2007) the remodelling of subculture thus necessitates that we look beyond radical subcultural forms. The relationship between the youth culture industry and youth subcultures must not be simply seen as exploitative, shifting from moral panic to incorporation. ‘Authenticity’ cannot only be attributed to youth subcultures that exist in a market/media free plane. As we have seen through Halnon’s ‘surfies’ and ‘bikies,’ Brown’s ‘metalheads’ and inter alia in Hodkinson’s prolific work on ‘goths’ (2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2011), various youth subcultures do not necessarily possess proto-political radical qualities. The style of these subcultures has persisted and remained attractive to neophytes by a strong supporting market. Such youth subcultures have neither resisted neo-liberal ideology nor subverted consumer culture. On the other hand, they embrace it, particularly when it serves to engender themselves. The reworking of the subculture concept, to include commodity-centred forms and activities, is thus essential for its continued application. Youth subculture studies need to take into account consumption practices among subculturalists to present a more thorough account of the complexity of meaning that subcultural involvement entails. Such practices are not only pivotal to the longevity of such subcultures and hence hold “high subcultural value” (Brown, 2007, p. 63) but they also impact significantly on the intensification of subcultural involvement and commitment and the self-conception as a subculturalist – all crucial domains for a form of subcultural analysis that is not subservient to an a priori theoretical framework, but one that rests primarily on the understanding of subcultures as a form of lived experience.
We must also understand subcultures as complex, hierarchical social worlds characterised by markers of distinction and subcultural capital. Seen thus, subcultures reproduce the hierarchical structure of society however using specific subcultural referents for distinction and prestige. Like Thornton (2001) I argue that subcultural capital entails moral dualisms through which distinctions between the “in-group” and “out-group” are made. The notion of ‘mainstream’ must be thus understood in so far as it informs how subculturalists distinguish and discriminate between themselves and the outside world rather than through an a priori theoretical framework that rests on a mainstream (or dominant/mass) culture versus subculture dichotomy. In the case of heavy metal subculture for example the subculturalists’ periodic immersion in the fantastical, mythical world of heavy metal offers the possibility for temporarily ‘resisting’ the routine, everyday world; only to return to it as metalheads resume their workaday lives.

The above reference to subcultural immersion brings me to elaborate another crucial feature of the subculture remodelling that I am proposing – namely the view of subcultural engagement as a dynamic trajectory. This entails fusing Thornton’s work on subculture capital with classic US subculture theory. If shed from its determinism and linkage of subculture to social strain, role ambiguity, status frustration, delinquency, non-conformity and opposition, classic US subcultural theory provides useful analytic tools. Albert K. Cohen’s (building on Merton’s earlier reference group theory) “anticipatory socialisation,” “reference models” and “shared frames of reference” provide insight on the different stages of immersion in subcultures, how status hierarchies within subcultures are structured and determined and the motivations for subcultural affiliation. I contend that these aspects of ‘trajectory’ and ‘career’ have been neglected in both CCCS and post-CCCS work and moreover, in subculture studies in general. This author’s ethnographic work on heavy metal subculture in Malta revealed how comparative reference groups cohere around a shared preference for heavy metal music, impact the onset of preference for the music and the development of the self-conception/categorization as ‘metalhead,’ ‘metaller’ or ‘headbanger.’ Participants’ biographies revealed that their affinity to the music and its supporting subculture is in part due to anticipatory socialisation processes propelled by the need to belong to peer groups or cliques where preference for metal is strongly valorised. Further into the typical Maltese metalhead trajectory, the subculture’s reference models establish moral dualisms through which metalheads distinguish between themselves and gradations of subcultural prestige and standing are formed. The extent of perceived internalisation and encapsulation of shared reference models is one such important criterion. Within the subculture the independence of the music from outside forces is strongly valued. The subculture maintained its relative autonomy through social networking and entrepreneurship. Hence, this integrative model valorises the notion of participants as “subcultural entrepreneurs” (as understood by McRobbie, 1988, and others) while referring to social networking, rationality and entrepreneurship theory to help interpret and explain related subcultural practices.
Divested from its problematic aspects, ‘subculture’ can still be a resilient analytic tool. Subcultures are not essentially opposed to dominant, conventional and/or mass culture forces. On the other hand, as Matza (1957, 1961, 1964) holds, subculturalists drift between conventional and subterranean worlds at will. Rather than at the opposite end of the cultural continuum, subcultures are in continual inter-play with the wider, social milieu. The plastic forms of such subcultures, including music, are crucial for meaning-making and subcultural convergence. They are important rallying points around which young people coalesce and converge on a daily basis. Subculture studies must thus endeavour to describe the everyday, mundane (vs. Spectacular) experiences of subculturalists. While using the subculture concept to inform the research agenda at stake, the interpretation that ensues should be one that privileges the narratives of lived experience in the subculture. In this sense, subculture emerges as a referent to explain the social world under scrutiny, rather than the totalising, a priori interpretative framework it is in most CCCS works. Making sense of subcultures thus entails ethnographic work in the form undertaken by the classic Chicago studies. What ‘subculture’ does is to provide the ethnographer with the necessary sociological framework that was lacking in the Chicago school. In this way the study of subcultures remains a sociological task rather than simply “a disembodied phenomenology” (S. Cohen, 1993).

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Before the general elections in 2009 in India, a leading, now global, Indian tea company launched an initiative targeting youth, by encouraging them to register and vote, appealing people to ‘wake up,’ thus, inviting wider political participation. This was followed by a second campaign from the same company which sought to tap into the popular sentiment against corruption by urging citizens to stop bribing and switching to drinking tea (with tea cups emblazoned with the company’s logo being drunk by young men leading the change). Both the advertisements were targeted at urban, educated, middle-class youth, mostly young men, in its representation and characterisation. The first appealed to people on the streets: urban and educated youth to start voting, and there were no rural representations in the advertisement. The second presented young men telling older, balding men not to give or accept bribes (representing the older, corrupt order). The dominant representations in the two advertisements involved college-going youth from urban areas with fashionable satchels slung across their shoulders leading the change. Such initiatives which aim at arresting indifference to politics and encourage direct social action have become increasingly popular in the recent years. Underpinning such representation are popular ideas that political participation is more common among the educated youth, and among men as compared to women, findings which have been corroborated by large scale sample survey studies conducted in India (deSouza et al., 2009).

These popular representations, a heady cocktail of business interests and targeted youth participation, are manifestations of neoliberalism and its altered, narrow, and thin conception of citizenship. It very systematically and specifically targets urban, educated, glamourous, masculine youth for wider political participation on a specific set of issues. It focuses on the individual, with a solitary, courageous leader, and does not encourage collective representation of resistance, on diverse issues, and continues to maintain its disengagement with more substantive, structural causes of poverty and inequality, which remain closed to any contestation and dialogue.

* Some data described in this chapter are also discussed in a previous article ‘Educating the neo-liberal citizen: Reflections from India,’ published in Development in Practice, 2012 ©Taylor & Francis, available online at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09614524.2012.664628
Another significant extension of such neoliberal conceptions of development programmes for young people are the large and far more popular employment and enterprise-training programmes, which have emerged over the last decade or so in the country. These programmes are increasingly funded, often on a state-wide scale, by multilateral donor institutions, and implemented in close collaboration with the state governments and local NGOs. The programmes are delivered variously through independent special-purpose vehicles, companies, missions, societies or trusts, but governed by state-level bureaucrats, leading industrialists and representatives of multilateral institutions. Such programmes typically target youth from rural areas, with lower levels of skills, limited education and no access to formal vocational training programmes and work with the primary objective of creating and training individuals for wider economic participation for poverty reduction in India. While the citizenship education programmes for youth, particularly those organised through the civil society, are commonly assumed to be premised in plural, more subjective and substantive terrains of political and social participation, I argue that they are not dissimilar from the employment and enterprise training programmes discussed above. In doing so, I refer to neoliberalism not just as a set of economic principles and policies but as an oppressive ideology and governmentality (Brown, 2005; Larner, 2000). It is within this context of significantly altered terrain of neoliberal conception of citizenship, that I attempt to further demonstrate the impact of neoliberalism in the intent and content of citizenship education programmes for youth in India, and provide, hopefully substantive, criticisms of it, both from the perspective of inclusive citizenship and youth development.

The chapter is organised as follows: I present a brief overview of the experiences of neoliberalism in India, followed a discussion on the neoliberal conceptions of citizenship and youth and youth development. This is followed by a brief discussion on the analytical approach and an overview of the selected programmes. In the following section, I discuss in detail the readings emerging from the field. In the end, I attempt to locate the neoliberal influences on citizenship and youth development as a field of practice, within the context and objectives of nation-building. I close with a call for delving into more substantial and plural discourses on/of youth development and citizenship education.

NEOLIBERALISM: RECASTING YOUTH CITIZENSHIP

With the adoption of neoliberal policies which included and led to greater privatisation; greater capital investment and accumulation of wealth; and deregulation of financial markets, licenses and domestic industries, it was expected to lead India to its emergence “… as a major economic power in the world …” (Government of India, 1991). However, the outcomes of neoliberal economic policies in the country, with its untenable emphasis on market-based productivity and efficiency over redistribution of resources for social justice, include among others; increasing income disparities among rural and urban areas and among states, stagnation in employment generation and increasing casualisation of labour,
reduction of capital investment in social security and welfare programmes (Pal & Ghosh, 2007); issues in accessing basic services for the poor (Bhaduri, 2008), particularly for persons with disabilities who have been excluded from the gains, whatever they maybe, of neoliberalism (Hiranandani & Sonpal, 2010); loss of existing employment opportunities without creation of new ones particularly for poor women in unskilled or low skilled jobs, loss of wages and lower wages for women as compared to men due to mechanisation, and informalisation of work (Sinha & Jhabvala, 2002), and so forth. However, the outcomes and effects of neoliberalism are not restricted to the economic domain alone, but extend deep into domains of governance, public activity and political culture, since it is not only an economic doctrine but one which involves “… extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action” (Brown, 2005). Having firmly established itself as the dominant framework of development and growth, neoliberalism involves reconfiguring governmentality to suit its ends and undermines law and the public sphere itself, outmoding certain forms of social action and resistance (Brown, 2005). The choice and outcomes of neoliberalism, with its market-based political rationality, is typically considered ‘normative’ and ‘achieved’ (Brown, 2006); and one that is increasingly less open to questioning, critiquing and resistance having successfully dislodged the relevance of a plural, critical public sphere and social action, in all its variegated meanings.

Given this nature of neoliberalism as a political rationality, and its outcomes on the ground, neoliberalism has significantly altered the discourse around and the content of the term Citizenship, as well. Some of the significant points of inflection and conflation include: the reduction of citizenship to a singular, individual from its more collectivised meanings which emerged as a result of various social movements; and where the individual makes rational social and political choices on their own and is not one who questions the available choices or seeks to alter them; the emphasis on the integration of the individual citizen with the Market through employment or enterprise; replacement of objectives of social justice and equality with those of productivity and efficiency; the explicit focus on self-care and the dismantling of social policies for poverty and inequality by rationalising entitlements to specific needs of individuals; and the explicit demand on citizens to earn their rights in exchange of discharge of responsibilities, largely in the form of a productive contribution to the economy and self-care (Brown, 2005; Dagnino, 2003, 2007; Kabeer, 2005). These changes in the content and construct of citizenship have also altered the ways in which youth and youth-hood is conceived.

In discussing the effects of globalisation and neoliberalism on young people in India, Rajendran and Paul (2006) cite the reinforcement of social inequality, wider poverty and unemployment, inequality in and its reproduction through the education system, the absence of youth-hood in the lives of the dalit youth in the country who are directly forced from childhood into adulthood, changes in the patterns and forms of consumption and its linkages with indices of marginalisation, wider youth action particularly on issues of global concern. Thus, the dominant conceptualisation of neoliberal citizenship has also seeped into the space of citizenship education programmes for youth, or youth development programmes, in
general, as well. Such programmes are typically premised in encouraging the wider social and political participation of young people, through training and education and providing structured spaces for action. The programmes aim at building the competencies and resilience among young people, commonly identified as the key objectives of youth development (Ruth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). However, this focus on the building of competencies is often applicable at the level of the individual. Thus, individualisation has become a key feature of engaging young people in neoliberalism. It entails greater independence, self-determination and self-realisation, accompanied by insecurity and having to deal with it themselves (Miles, 2000). It means having to negotiate their life choices themselves, as individuals and not as collectives (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997); and having to contend with multiple cultures and communities (Melucci, 1992).

More specifically with regard to citizenship education programmes and its points of conflation with neoliberalism, Biesta, Lawy and Kelly (2009) identify its obsession with training and educating the individual young person to become a ‘good,’ ‘active’ and ‘contributing’ citizen, an idea not inconsistent with neoliberalism’s emphasis on the individual. The programmes on citizenship education for youth typically formulate citizenship as an outcome of education and development, thus instrumentalising youth and without adequate emphasis on content of education itself (Hall et al., 2000). The focus on structured training and education and the dominant focus on acquisition of skills, mostly those relevant to the market, is linked to alignment with corporate values and is frequently reinforced by the market and its agents (Urciuoli, 2008). Typically, these agents would include corporate sponsored foundations, and/or non-governmental organisations as its partners.

MAPPING THE FIELD

In identifying the pervasive influences of neoliberalism, I critically ‘read’ four main types of texts, which include: content available online on the internet, programme proposals, mid-term reviews and end term impact assessment documents of eighteen large scale citizenship education programmes being implemented in the country. These texts are used to map ways in which dominant discourses (neoliberalism in this chapter) are operationalised.

The selection of sixteen out of eighteen programmes is convenience-based for easy access to programme proposals and review and impact assessment reports, documents which are often not available publicly. These sixteen programmes are implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGO) and funded extensively by institutional donors (development aid organisations). Apart from the online texts discussed in the chapter, I have used programme proposal documents which were appraised by various donors before sponsoring it; review reports were drafted typically during the mid-term review involving brief field visits; and evaluation or impact assessment reports which were drafted at the end of the project period involving more extensive field visits. The reviews and end-term evaluations were usually undertaken with the objective of checking progress against proposed
milestones, coverage, assess programme interventions for effectiveness and provide feedback for re-conceptualising a programme. During the field visits, data was collected using interviews where possible, or focus group discussions, separately with young men and women where possible. The data was later transcribed before drafting the review reports. The names of all the organisations and programmes have been suitably coded given their active status of funding and to prevent any fallout as a result of such critical discussion. The codes have been assigned as follows: the programmes and partners were listed and serial numbers assigned in alphabetical order, and so run from 1 to 18. The second letter (p/r/i/e) denotes the source of information; with p denoting programme proposal, r for programme review report, i for impact assessment report and e for content available online. In certain cases, where more than one review or impact were conducted, the letter r is suffixed by a 1 or 2, indicating the chronological order of the review. So for example, 8/r2 would refer to the second review report of organisation number 8. It is essential to point out that the reluctance to disclose names is, in part, also a manifestation of the lack of dialogue amongst donors and NGO and their disinterest and disengagement with criticism, of any sort. From among the selected programmes, sixteen programmes are implemented by leading NGO from the fields of youth development, gender, education, including higher education, and rural livelihoods in the country. The organisations themselves represent considerable diversity, in terms of organisational life-cycle, size, in terms of financial resources and number of people employed, scale of operation, ranging from one neighbourhood slum in Mumbai to programmes with national level participation. They work variously with youth from tribal villages migrating to the urban areas, out of school adolescents and youth from rural areas of Rajasthan, young women and men from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education, youth from the squatter settlements in Mumbai, and so forth. The range of issues and themes covered by the programmes include livelihood, mental health, gender orientation and training on gender issues, street-based violence against women, liberal economics and development, primary education, communalism, and leadership development. The sixteen programmes largely follow an education-action based programme, where the initial period of varying durations is used for equipping young people with various skills, in all its diversity; and the later part is used for organising community-based social action.

The remaining two programmes (coded as 11 and 12) are formulated and implemented by the State itself, through its own resources. The first of these is a government funded volunteer programme which is run in colleges across the country targeting the students with the objective of training youth for “… a sense of involvement in the tasks of national development” (11/e). The programme has been functional since 1969 and has so far involved more than 2.4 million volunteers. The second such programme works with nearly eight million rural, non-student youth through more than 220,000 village level voluntary groups, since 1972, to involve them in “nation building activities, and develop such skills and values in them with which they become responsible and productive citizens” (12/e).
In reading the texts, I present three main points of criticism of neoliberalism. The first relates to the narrow ways in which youth development and citizenship education programmes conceive citizenship, a stark manifestation of neoliberal governmentality. The second relates to the re-configured identities and subjectivities of youth as disciplined workers and volunteers, which are further reinforced through the programmes. The third point of criticism relates to the pressures from sponsoring donors and young people themselves which further constrain the substantive imaginaries of youth development.

Conceptions of Youth Citizenship: Between Deficiency and Responsibility

The definitions of youth remain deeply contestable and contextual. The foremost point of difference relates to the age-related definitions of youth. While the global conventions and declaration use the age category of 12-24 or 15-24 to define youth (The World, Bank, 2007), the country’s central policy have been using the markers of 13-35 and 13-30 years to define youth (Government of India, 2003; RGNIYD, 2010). These definitions are further complexified by their interaction with questions of gender, caste, class, religion, rural or urban residence and disabilities, with some people arguing that young people from certain backgrounds do not experience youth-hood at all, developing directly from childhood to adulthood (V. Kumar, 2006 and pers. comm. with leaders of many youth development organisations). Despite this diversity in the contexts of young people and what constitutes youth-hood, the conceptions of youth within the various programmes are not entirely dissimilar from each other. Some of these include: “youth typically gather near a pan vendor or chai vendor and socialise, chew tobacco, and/or drink alcohol during the minimal free time they have” (1/p); “… are only interested in films, songs and fun, but do not have any social commitment” (10/r2); “… need emotional and psychological support” (15/p); “… passive objects to be taught to act for the other and behave responsibly” (10/r2). In describing the rationale of their work, the programmes discuss citizenship for youth as the need for being “trained into active citizenship” (14/p); “building their citizenship” (10/p); in preparation for future citizenship roles” (13/p) and further as “… active citizens as a species to thrive” (5/p).

The first point of inflection relates to the frequent and all pervasive conception of citizenship with responsibility and action. In discussing the content of citizenship for young people, the programmes describe citizenship in/as: “… the notion of responsibility and concern for the other” (10/r1 and 7/r); “become responsible and productive citizens” (12/e); “doing something for the other” (17/r1); “… rather than just complaining about the present situation,” NGOs advise individuals to “talk about things that would change the circumstances; and … what their contribution could be” (7/r). The programmes are thus built around the notion of responsibility and action as the centre piece of citizenship. There is little or no discussion on the rights or violation of it in the lives of young people, most of
whom belong to socially and economically marginalised households. Rights are formulated as privileges to be earned after discharging key, pre-determined functions, demonstrated through evident action. Young people are discouraged from asking questions which engage with the structural nature of poverty and inequality, either in the form of building an understanding around it or acting for it. Instead, there is a heavy focus on solving problems and developing solutions, which are only service-oriented and not structurally transformative either in objective or imagination, a point which is discussed in the next section. The conflation of duties and responsibilities with citizenship, the undermining of the discourse of rights, and the focus on creative problem solving over concerns of building self-reflexivity and interrogating the structural nature of inequality, is in keeping with the neoliberal conception of citizenship, which has become the defining characteristic of similar such citizenship education programmes, including those with adults, implemented by NGO in the country (A. Kumar, 2012).

Young people continue to be stereotyped by their lack of interest in wider social and political processes, their obsession with popular entertainment and the absence of any significant skills and avenues. It is assumed that young people are in significant need for help, which might be a valid assumption; but needs to be backed by an extensive mapping of their present worlds, their existing mechanisms for negotiating their worlds, and programmes must build on this instead of discounting them. Young people are typified into categories which do not account for or take into account the lived experiences of youth, their struggles, coping mechanisms and support structures, and resilience. The programmes are grounded in an ahistorical conception of youth and citizenship characterised by passivity and absence of any significant social/political action.

The use of the words “into” and “building” denote a present state of absence or inadequate state/content of citizenship among youth. The conceptions are thus grounded in the Marshall (1950)-like conception of young people as “citizens in the making,” which remains locked in the deficit model of youth (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). The programmes typically structure themselves around the need to build their citizenship, or in helping them traverse the stages and/or paths from ‘inactivity’ to ‘activity’ through structured training and socialisation, primarily in the form of education and training, and exposure and social action. Criticising this formulation of ‘becoming,’ Young (1990, p. 41) writes that it is “seen as progressing from a state of vulnerability to sophistication” where citizenship, or active citizenship, is frequently characterised as an end-state, to be achieved through the acquisition of certain competencies. There is little focus on knowledge or reflexivity but more on acquiring certain sets of skills only, which are discussed in subsequent sections. There is also a heavy emphasis on the need to demonstrate the skills that young people have acquired by participating ‘actively’ in social action. Discussing the problems with this formulation of ‘becoming,’ Uprichard (2008) points out that the ‘becoming’ discourse is heavily oriented towards one’s future, disregarding one’s present, and secondly, that it assumes an incompetence in the present which can only be acquired later. Similarly, active citizens are considered to be a distinct set of ‘species’ from the other youth, thus introducing
somewhat unnecessary and dysfunctional divisions between those who have been a part of the programme and ‘act,’ and those who don’t.

Engaging Youth: Developing Skilled, Disciplined Workers and Volunteers

The programmes seek to engage with young people from diverse contexts in seemingly distinctive ways for certain specific purposes. Some of these include: “youth groups are taking up projects related to village cleanliness and plantation drives, watch groups for monitoring water supply and electricity supply etc.” (7/r); “basic computers, spoken english and fabric painting” (16/p); “in beautician and sewing courses for women and mobile and auto repairs for men” (10/r1); “tart card reading and developing dog paw sanitisers” and “trading in speculative commodity markets, and … trading street clothes bought in Delhi and sold at higher prices in Kolkata” (6/r); and which “… utilises the community resource in the building of the ‘private’ colleges, through their cleaning, greening, building of playgrounds and gardens etc.” (18/r). In this way, the programmes seek to work with the ‘being’ state of youth. According to Uprichard (2008), this ‘being’ state of involving children and young people as active social agents is one that disregards the past experiences and future possibilities by fixating solely on the present. This works to the advantage of neoliberalist tendencies of emphasising on the present, where young people must engage as active social change agents. In the process, programmes ignore the historic materialist pasts of the youth they work with, which might contain the experiences of subjectification and subjection, as well as their futures which might contain alternate development imaginaries questioning this.

It is evident that programmes typically engage young people for two essential purposes: first, in building their skills to enhance their access to future work opportunities and/or augmenting their present incomes; and secondly, for discharge of development services and governmental functions. I discuss each of these in greater detail next.

The emphatic focus on building the work-related skills of young people is a common and popular area of engagement, particularly among the multi-lateral donors’ sponsored programmes, discussed earlier. Even among the sixteen programmes implemented by non-governmental organisations, with certain claims to representing autonomy, an alternate political imagination, and of being more grounded owing to their smaller scale, the nature of vocational/livelihood training does little to resist the dominant stereotypes of gender, caste and religion: with young women being presumed to be interested in sewing and beautician courses, in mehndi and rangoli-making, and urban women in fabric painting and cake baking (10/r1, 8/r, 16/p and 16/r1); men in automobile and cellphone repair (10/r1 and r2); dalits in finding employment and muslims in accessing credit for setting up their enterprises (10/r1 and r2; 15/p). However, further critical discussion on the implications, choices made available and outcomes of livelihood training programmes remains beyond the scope of this chapter. I argue that the programmes, often without recognising it, have become extensions of such livelihood programmes.
In addition to equipping youth with the necessary vocational skills, the citizenship education programmes have gone further and begun to focus on developing softer skills among young people. These include, among others: confidence, public speaking, discipline, personality development, emotional management, creative problem solving, etc. (8/r, 9/r2, 1/r, 18/r). The development of such skills are grounded in the need for developing more disciplined, confident young people, who better ‘manage’ their emotions and do not display their emotions at their work-places. Thus, the workers are expected to negotiate their work and work-lives as individuals, perform better and are by and large discouraged from operating as unions or collectives. The last point is evident from the complete absence of any discussion or training on labour rights, work-place benefits and access to social security benefits as workers. In effect, the youth development programmes are also churning out workers for the New Economy, with little knowledge regarding their rights as workers, or of past histories of workers’ agitation, and little skills in engaging in collective negotiation to exercise their rights or contest any violation, given the sole emphasis on building the individual’s skills, and not those of collectives (6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16 and 18 follow similar models of training youth for soft-skills related to work and work-places, without naming them so).

The second point relates to the nature of social action initiated by youth. With the privatisation of the State, there are a large range of functions, which have been or are in the process of being privatised: either through contracting to private companies, or through agreements with community-based groups and associations, or left unserved. Young people, implicated by their stereotypes of disengaged, passive and not constructively engaged, are deemed best placed to serve these functions at the local level, with no additional costs attached. As part of the programmes discussed in this chapter, action relates to the second stage of the education-action axis around which the programmes are structured. Social action is typically formulated as the discharge or delivery of certain services. These include, among others, village cleanliness drives, contribution of young people’s labour (mostly men’s labour) in construction of public services and repairs, tutoring their peers and other adolescents in the communities, in clearing play-fields and in running other volunteer functions and services, in responding to disasters and emergencies, among others (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17 engage young people in such roles).

Social action is simplified and reduced to volunteerism in pre-determined fields and pre-defined ways. There is no scope for self-reflexivity and in learning from one’s life experiences, a key characteristic of youth development with its focus on experiential learning. Thus, young people are easily ‘put to use’ in servicing the communities and performing many of the functions earlier performed by the State. In exchange, young people are recruited and typified as volunteers. They are encouraged to serve others, and thus develop a wider social consciousness. Action, therefore, is unhinged from reflexivity and retrospection, and is greatly simplified, with no questions asked, particularly those relating to structural causes of the problems.
The absence or denial of services and resources, and disrepair is often formulated as a problem and the programmes encourage youth to solve these problems locally, seemingly creatively. As part of its workshops with youth, one of the programmes discussed the solution to problems of grazing commons as determining calorific requirements of cows, nutritional properties of fodder, and regulating use (4/r). Thus, the programmes place an unequivocal emphasis on scientific problem solving, the use of technology, excessive regulation, and is characterised by positivism and determinism with little or no focus on the deeply contested histories, access, interests and rights. There is a somewhat simplistic and reductive focus on developing local solutions with no effort at engaging with the questions and concerns critically. There is little space for argument, of presenting reformulations and/or alternates. While discussing reservation for the minorities and the marginalised, there is little investigation of systematic and systemic denial and the facilitators dismissed it as “a bad policy” (4/r), thus foreclosing any space for presenting alternate perspectives and standpoints. This is in complete alignment with neoliberalism, not just because it is a result of wider privatisation of the State, but because it seeks youth to engage within a pre-defined frame, on a pre-determined set of concerns in deterministic ways, without according any space for questioning, either as individuals or as collectives (Brown, 2006).

Caught between Donors’ Priorities and Material Aspirations from Below

Driven by donor pressures to replicate the widely popular employability programmes, as smaller parts of their educational and training programmes (9, 10, 14, 16 and 17) have begun to reformulate their programmes around questions of work and employability. The programmes in themselves engaged with questions of education for out-of-school adolescents and youth (7/p); gender and violence (9/p); countering resistance in Gujarat and Maharashtra post-Godhra riots in 2002 and post-Babri Masjid riots in 1991 (10/p, 10/r2 and 16/p); community-based research production (14/r); and with young rural migrant women who are married off early (17/r2). Without a doubt, concerns of employability and regular income are central for young people, particularly for those from socially and economically marginalised backgrounds who are pushed into the formal and informal labour markets, at ages as low as sixteen. But with the forced weaving in of questions of employability into their programmes, the outcomes have been far from satisfactory. The livelihood components of the programme not only require a significantly different organisational capacity and institutional linkages, but often pull them in directions ideological dissimilar to their own.

Young men and women who had completed their secondary education, from the rural areas of a valley in the north of the country were sent off to a large southern metropolis in India to work as low-skilled workers in entry level jobs, on unfavourable contracts, with no social security benefits and no job stability. Within a month, all but four of the 23 youth participants of the programme withdrew and returned home citing non- or lower-payments than promised, poor quality of food provided for, and lack of accommodation despite initial promises (4/r). This, when
the organisation implementing the programme is committed to struggling against entrenched systems of patriarchy, feudalism, class based exploitation, casualisation of work and feminisation of poverty (4/c). The programme was built as part of the youth development portfolio of a donor and livelihood intervention added only owing to the pressures of the donor (evident from the absence of the livelihood component in its programme proposal, 4/p, but included later on), and subsequently abandoned by the partner organisation given the outcomes. The pushing of donor agendas and priorities in the field of development are commonly understood as extension of global capitalism and neoliberalism and its agendas which not only undermine organisational autonomy but also compromise the development objectives set out by the organisations themselves.

The second set of pressures are those exerted from below, where driven by the desire to secure jobs for themselves, young people reformulate their engagement within citizenship education programmes as the means/opportunities for acquiring the necessary skills for enhancing their skill-sets and future employment opportunities, thus subverting the objectives of the programme itself. 8/r, for example, works with young students in from socially marginalised backgrounds in higher education by equipping them with the necessary technological skills, to enhance their learning outcomes but also integrate questions of social justice into the curricula and pedagogy, across disciplines and their campuses and its activities. However, young men and women see this as an opportunity to access computer training at no cost: including in fields unrelated to the programme such as hardware networking, Java and C++. Given the organisational emphasis on determining the workshop’s agenda in a participatory way, questions of social justice are de-emphasised and the acquisition of software and hardware skills, particularly those which are marketable, gains considerable emphasis. Similarly, youth participants while sharing the expectations from their engagement often shared that they wanted to work in situations where they would dress up in suits (6/r); or learn to speak a certain way (6/r, 10/r2); and present themselves confidently publicly (7/r, 9/r2, 18/r).

Despite the evident and heavy emphasis on the individual; youth participants while discussing social action, cite the need to “aware others” (sic), or make others aware of the insights gained from the programme (2/r, 8/r, 9/r2). This expressed or latent need for ‘acting’ should be seen in the context of two key points: first the emphasis of the programme is no longer on the self, but fixated on the other. Even if the participants are from similar backgrounds, they assume themselves to be privileged in some ways, and thus, need to act for or on behalf of others. Framed in this way, the problem is no longer one that afflicts ‘me’ or ‘us,’ but one that afflicts the ‘other,’ for which ‘I’ can act. Thus, the focus of the problem is no longer with the participant youth, but dispersed in their immediate worlds. And action is framed as ‘fixing’ the other, who is broken in one way or the other and therefore, incapable of helping themselves. The second point of inflection relates to the wider effects of neoliberalism which provides only limited opportunities for political participation, and the participants’ desire for action is their latent desire for meaningful engagement with the worlds around them.
Thus, neoliberalism is affecting the content and outcomes of the programmes, not just because all the implementing organisations believe in it and accept it as the dominant and singular framework for development, but also because donors pressurise partners into accepting it. At the same time the subjectivities of young people, altered by neoliberalism, and objectified and typified into singular, apolitical aspirations, have come to make certain kinds of demands on the programmes. This is evidenced in the expressed aspirations for jobs and only a certain kind of work, with little or no critical examination of work and work-related question. Often times, the implementing organisation also pays no attention to such questions (6/r and 18/r) or unwittingly (14/r2) or grudgingly (7/r, 9/p and 9/r) accepts it. With regard to nature of social action, there is the reluctance to present and represent the self, and conveniently fix the ‘other’ as the problem, and solutions for fixing the other as ‘development.’

BEYOND SERV(IC)ING THE COUNTRY?

Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy. (Mahatama Gandhi)

In India, the idea of involving students in the task of national service dates back to the times of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. The central theme which he tried to impress upon the student audience … was that they should always keep before them, their social responsibility. The first duty of the students should be, not to treat their period of study as one of the opportunities for indulgence in intellectual luxury, but for preparing themselves for final dedication in the service of those who provided the sinews of the nation with the national goods & services so essential to society. Advising them to form a living contact with the community in whose midst their institution is located, he suggested that instead of undertaking academic research about economic and social disability, the students should do “something positive so that the life of the villagers might be raised to a higher material and moral level.” (From 11/e, quotation marks as in original; & as in original)

Following in the Gandhian tradition of service and volunteerism, the two national programmes implemented by the central government in the country, encourage young people to engage in activities of nation-building: for “... a sense of involvement in the tasks of national development” and to “practice social integration and national harmony” (11/e, 12/e). During the development of the national voluntary based scheme for students in higher education, the National Service Committee (1959) recommended that a compulsory programme involving military service, social work, manual labour and general education be implemented for all high school students interested in pursuing college education, which was later revised to voluntary involvement (11/e). It was determined at a conference of students’ representatives in 1969 that “national service could be a powerful
instrument for national integration” (11/e). Thus, the involvement of young people in service for the purpose of nation building has been etched into the imagination of programmes for engaging young people, as they are. In the present times though, neoliberalism had found an excellent ally in the project of widening nationalism, with its emphasis on volunteerism and service, and its focus on shaping the subjectivities of the individual young person.

Revisiting the reading (from) the field, in this section I extend the argument further and interrogate the convergences between the neoliberal development agenda and the nation-building project.

Unlike the Gandhian conception of volunteerism, which placed considerable emphasis on self-reflexivity and on symbolism for wider social transformation and political resistance, there is far less emphasis on building self-reflexivity and critical thinking skills among young people in the present day programmes. The thrust of voluntary involvement is far more on action: of particular kind, preferably manual and labour-intensive and one that equates various forms of services: whether in compulsory encryption or performing local community functions of cleanliness, plantation, spreading literacy, public awareness and rural reconstruction (11/e). This has been carried further by the second central-government sponsored programme which targets rural, non-college going youth and works to “… develop such skills and values in them with which they become responsible and productive citizens of a modern, secular and technological nation” (12/e). The singular notion of the nation: as a modern, developed, secular and technologically advanced nation; and of engaging the young person in its service has shaped and continues to shape the dominant ideas of youth development in the country. The roles of being and trajectories of becoming a citizen, whatever it may mean, are clearly laid out; and education and training on the one hand, and socialisation through community living are the only ways provided for achieving it. This historic conception of objectives and means of engaging youth and ‘making’ or ‘building’ citizens out of them has not only shaped the programmes of the State, but also those of implemented by NGO. Typically, the programmes require young people to undergo structured training programmes, which focus on the acquisition of skills. The unit of skill-building is the individual, with little or no effort at enhancing community’s competencies and resilience. The conceptions of young people remain locked in notions of passivity and deficiency, and are by and large ahistoric in their formulations and fail to account for the daily lived experiences of young people, in the exercise of and struggles for their citizenship. Driven by the neoliberal conception of citizenship, the programmes focus on responsibility towards the ‘other’ and ‘action.’ The need to demonstrate action before laying claim to rights and entitlements, a key characteristic of neoliberal citizenship, is re-emphasised by the programmes.

The essential and typical objective of the programme is to develop productive, skilled workers with awareness and responsibility as the defining characteristic of the social and political lives of young people. The areas of engaging young people, therefore, centre around questions of employability and skill-building, enterprise development, disciplined work, personality development on the one hand, and
servicing and creative problem solving for development of local communities, on the other. The engagement is further restricted in its imagination by the downward pressure exerted by donors in persuading partners to adopt their agendas, and the upward pressure exerted by the young people themselves, as future workers, with their somewhat compromised subjectivities, owing to the pressures of wider globalisation, individualisation and privatisation, in various ways. Not only do these undermine the development objectives and outcomes for the organisation, but often lead to non-fulfilment of the youth development agenda, which is built around questions of autonomy and exercise of one’s agency or building capacities for it. The focus on responsibility and service has become the leitmotif of citizenship education programmes for young people.

Young people continue to be burdened with the task of contributing for national development, owing to an unquestionable emphasis on their ‘being’ state (Uprichard, 2008), but the content of their contribution has undergone a significant change. The notions of service and volunteerism as spaces for auto-didactism, reflexivity, and for social transformation and political resistance, among youth have now been replaced by the need to become a productive, disciplined worker and an aware and responsible citizen who contributes voluntarily. It now entails service for the rural communities, organised through exposure visits, village stays and contribution of manual labour; and acquisition of the necessary skills for employment, the development of enterprise and the widening economic productivity. The political participation of young people in the context of neoliberalism is, thus, emptied of any meaning and significance and morphed into ‘empty’ spaces of debate and discussion without any focus on structural interrogation and transformation, thus freeing them to “consume the nation” (Lukose, 2005), thanks to the all-too-pervasive influences of neoliberalist capitalism. The expected contribution of the individual young person is pre-defined, the outcomes pre-determined and there is little scope for asking questions, resisting against the available choices or dissent.

The urgent need therefore is to disengage young people from the nation-building project, and invest in the plural conceptions of youth and citizenship. There is a need for revitalising imagination and action against the dominant discourse of neoliberal conception of citizenship, and rendering it more substantive by infusing the language of rights into it. Kabeer (2005) discusses rights to Justice, Self-Determination, Recognition and Solidarity as central and universal to questions of citizenship, within which the youth development programmes should be foregrounded. The programmes need to steer away from the notions of passivity and deficiency among youth on the one hand, and for building responsibility as integral to citizenship, on the other. The imagination of social action should be rendered more substantive, beyond the limited ideas of volunteerism as practiced in the field. Their methods need to de-emphasise demonstrated action, and focus instead on auto-didactism and peer-learning models.

Every effort must be made to resist the neoliberalist project of tinkering with the subjectivities of young people, including those which are furthered by the State, and sometimes unwittingly and grudgingly by the NGO.
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NOTES

1 The first campaign presented young people waking up to the specific brand of tea, and re-presented these as politically active, aware and conscientious youth. In its follow-up to the first advertisement which campaigned for voting by young people as their primary form of political participation, the company helped launch an online portal for voter registration. The second advertisement, which campaigned against commonplace corruption in the country, urged people to stop “feeding” (khilana, a colloquial word for bribing in Hindustani), and start drinking for a change.

2 Typical examples of this include Mission Mangalam in Gujarat, Rajasthan Mission on Livelihoods, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society, North-east Rural Livelihoods Project and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission at the national level and so forth. A large number of them are supported extensively by The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, and work closely with the Department of Rural Development with the respective governments either at the state or centre. Among other things, the projects involve human and institutional development; skill development and employment promotion; and project implementation and monitoring support. For more, see World Bank (n.d.); UNDP India (n.d.).

3 The term dalit, literally meaning ‘oppressed’ or ‘broken,’ is commonly used to refer to the people belonging to lowest castes in India, those who are outside the caste system. For a more detailed discussion on the identification, status and dalit politics in India, see for example Shah (2001) and Shah et al. (2006).

4 It is important to mention here that I was directly involved in appraising the project proposals of twelve programmes, drafted either singly or with other co-reviewers the review and impact assessment report for fourteen programmes, and was an observer for the other two.

5 Mehndi refers to the art of applying henna to the hands of young women and girls. Rangoli refers to artistic designs painted on the floor, at the entrance of the house, temples or other communal buildings, using coloured powder and even paints. There is a strong gendered normativity attached with such skills and activities.


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