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Editorial

“Youth studies” is defined by those who over many years established and fostered international academic interest in all facets of the youth experience. My friend and colleague Andy Furlong played a foundational role in its development as Editor of the Journal of Youth Studies. Andy is now gone, but his legacy remains in the form of vibrant multidisciplinary research and scholarship on every aspect of young people’s lives, from every part of the globe.

“Applied youth studies” likewise covers a wide range of youth-relevant issues, but from the perspective of the intersections of research–policy–practice. It is oriented toward practitioner experiences, and the ways in which workers with young people do what they do and why. The “applied” refers to grounded intervention, again across many spheres of youth experience and institutional interaction.

As we view it at JAYS, applied youth studies also needs to embody certain core values. Foremost among these is the notion of social justice. See, judge, act – like many others, this is our informal motto. This only makes sense, however, in the context of an ethical framework that liberates and empowers young people.

For us, social justice reflects a series of interconnected principles and ideals. These include:

- a commitment to dignity and respect for the person and protection of human rights;
- economic egalitarianism and social equality, such that each person enjoys the same rights, opportunities and services as all other citizens and residents; and
- active engagement in social institutions and in decision-making that affects individuals and the groups or collectives of which they are a part.

Social inequality is viewed as a major hurdle in the attainment of social justice.

An applied youth studies that matters recognises that social justice matters. In practical terms, these principles translate into a participatory ethos involving the state, community, family and individuals. Social justice is oriented toward problem-solving approaches to social problems, rather than person-blaming or group scapegoating. It seeks remedies that will bring about social peace rather than sow community discord. It sees responsibility as lying in both the person and the society. It is militant in its defence of the vulnerable and the less powerful.
The personal is indeed political (who we are and how we act, counts), but it is the political that sets the context for the personal (who we are and how we act is shaped by forces beyond our personal control). The continuum of research–policy–practice is important since each contributes to the whole. Bad policy produces bad outcomes. Good practices lead to enhanced opportunities. Our role and our commitment is to assess and make judgement as to “what works”, why and under what circumstances. This, too, is the essence of applied youth studies.

The point of applied youth studies, as always, is not only to understand the world – but also to make a difference in the world. The conscious intention, therefore, is to change the world, for the better.

Rob White
Academic Editor
Obituary

Professor Andy Furlong

Johanna Wyn*

Professor Andy Furlong, who died on Monday 30 January 2017, will be especially missed by youth researchers in Australia, which Andy considered to be his ‘second home’. He leaves a lasting legacy through his engagement with Australian youth studies academics at many levels. He examined over 15 Australian PhDs; Australians feature strongly in the editorial board of the UK-based *Journal of Youth Studies*; are well represented in the four-volume major reference work *Youth and young adulthood: Critical concepts in sociology*; and in the Routledge Youth series he edited. Andy held honorary Professorships with the University of Melbourne, the University of Newcastle, Deakin University and Monash University. He collaborated on many journal articles with Australian scholars, winning the award for the best paper in the *Journal of Sociology* 2011/2012. He was a Partner Investigator on the most recent Life Patterns longitudinal study ARC (Discovery) grant (2016–2020) with Dan Woodman, Helen Cahill and myself at the University of Melbourne. More than this, he was a principled and professional colleague and a friend who could be counted on to always keep things in perspective.

A University of Glasgow obituary published in the week after Andy’s death mentions a colleague of Andy’s who said that, in an academic career spanning over 30 years, he had never worked with anyone like Andy, who could inspire critical thought across various social science disciplines and yet could do so in a way that was typified by modesty and humility. Andy didn’t draw attention to himself but had a notable presence that made a lasting impact on those around him.

From early in his career Andy was at the forefront of youth studies in the UK and internationally. He was a fine scholar who set conceptual and research agendas for a generation of youth researchers in Australia since the publication of his book *Young people and social change: Individualization and risk in late modernity* in 1997. This

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widely cited book is regarded as being the most influential work in a 2013 survey of youth studies scholars. Furlong’s research modelled conceptually-driven, empirically-based scholarship that has informed Australian youth studies for two decades, and will no doubt continue to do so. He initiated the Journal of Youth studies in 1998, building it to become a major driver of the field of youth studies, with ten issues per year.

Andy held academic posts at the Universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde before joining the Sociology Department at the University of Glasgow in 1995. As the Head of the Department, he created a collegiate and productive environment in which Sociology thrived. He was appointed Professor of Social Inclusion and Education at the University of Glasgow in recognition of his broader work on social class and social inclusion. In 2014 he was appointed Dean of Research in the College of Social Sciences.

His outstanding scholarship was recognised by his appointment as an Academician of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and a member of the Research Methods and Infrastructure Committee of the ESRC, as well as being nominated as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (Australia). Despite his achievements, Andy never lost sight of his own background. He was born in Liverpool and came to academic life via a non-traditional route, a heritage that he was extremely proud of. This underpinned his commitment to the practicalities of supporting disadvantaged young people into employment as well as his capacity to engage with a range of audiences.

Having initially worked for the embryonic Virgin records company in the early 1980s, Andy went on to study Sociology at Leicester University, obtaining his doctorate in 1988 under the supervision of Professor David Ashton. His PhD on Young Adults in the Labour Market provided the springboard from which Andy moved forward to create a reputation as the leading authority on youth transitions from school to work, the youth labour market and youth studies, both nationally and internationally. It is so poignant that, at the time of his untimely death, he was in the process of publishing, with his close colleagues from Leicester, a re-analysis of the data from the 1980s study of the young adults in the city.

Away from his professional life, Andy was a highly committed parent to his five children and husband to Professor Gerda Reith and was equally at home in the kitchen as in the lecture hall. Andy has left a significant gap in the personal and academic lives of all those who knew him and one that cannot be filled. Those who knew him were enriched by the experience, touched by his humility, warmed by his compassion and deeply mourn his passing. He will be sorely missed by friends and colleagues around the world.

Acknowledgement: this tribute draws on the obituary for Professor Andy Furlong that appeared in the University of Glasgow Campus e-news on Saturday 4 February 2017.
We are what we teach
Teaching youth work on the Thai-Burma Border

Jen Couch*

Young people who live in protracted refugee settings such as those on the Thai-Burma border face circumstances that substantially alter their lives and prospects. The prolonged conflict in Burma has had a particularly devastating effect on young people who have been victims of forced labour, and recruited into both fighting and trafficking. Many more are displaced in refugee camps, sometimes separated from their families, or orphaned, and must undertake a long, painstaking process to rebuild their lives. This makes education in these contexts both challenging and vital. Since 2008, the Australian Catholic University has attempted to meet this need by providing a Diploma of Liberal Arts on the Thai-Burma border. This paper explores the experience of teaching in the diploma and, in particular, teaching a youth work subject in adolescent development.

Key words: youth work, refugees, tertiary education

A multitude of challenges arise in teaching a subject within a discipline where there has been virtually no dialogue between the Global North and Global South, despite the majority of the world’s young people living in the latter. Nor has youth work scholarship really engaged with different ways of thinking about the physical and social worlds of young people who are living in these locations. Drawing on Connell’s (2007) conception of ‘Southern theory’, this paper highlights power/knowledge relations in teaching youth work on the border and illustrates my attempt to incorporate pedagogy of Southern theory within the class. I argue that in order to take into account marginalised forms of knowledge, such as those on the border, the field of youth studies will need to think differently about what youth work education looks like in locations other than our own.

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Background: Burmese refugees and education on the border

For decades Burma’s population of approximately 50 million has struggled for democracy and human rights against a brutal military regime (Allden 2015, p.4). With over one hundred ethnic groups, Burma is said to have the richest ethnic diversity in Asia. The largest ethnic minorities typically live in mountainous frontier regions. Minority group demands for autonomy and self-determination, often in the form of militant insurgency, have been brutally suppressed by the Burmese military. Civilians in these ethnic areas suffer the most, and thousands have been forcibly relocated and their land confiscated. Increasing campaigns against ethnic groups have driven an estimated 500,000 people from their homes into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) areas inside Burma or across the border to refugee camps in Thailand (Allden 2015, p.5).

The conflict has resulted in over 3,000 ethnic villages being razed to the ground, poor farmers being killed or abducted, and educational, health and social services being destroyed. While the inhabitants of the camps have mostly fled violence and oppression in their homeland, an increasing number are leaving for reasons of poverty and educational opportunities (Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) 2009).

Zeus (2011) estimates that around 150,000 refugees live in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, and have done so for a quarter of a century (p.257). Until 1995, refugees on the border lived in village-type settlements and were allowed to travel outside the camps to get food and shelter materials. Camp life changed dramatically in 1995 after attacks by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the village-type settlements were merged into large, sprawling camps that became increasingly dependent on outside aid as residents became more and more restricted in space and movement (The Border Consortium (TBC) 2004). Due to this restriction on movement, there has been a “whole generation who have been born and raised in the artificial environment of a refugee camp” (Zeus 2011, p.257). This is what is known as a protracted refugee situation (PRS), and one in which the typical response is a process of encampment, where refugees are contained in isolated camps, mostly in border regions (Zeus 2011, p.257).

Worldwide, two-thirds of all refugees now live in protracted refugee situations (PRS), defined by UNHCR as “25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries” (Maclaren 2010, p.105). Such situations “involve large refugee populations that are long-standing, chronic or recurring, and for which there are no immediate prospects for a solution” (p.105), a description that perfectly fits the plight of Burmese refugees in Thailand. This “trend”, recently termed the “warehousing” of refugees (Loescher et al. 2007, p.3), has existed along the Thai-Burma border for about a quarter of a century. Having spent much or all of their lives in confinement, young people
ambiiously progress through the basic camp education system only to find themselves with few opportunities to further their studies. Although higher education has been made available to a select number of refugees through various modes, increased student demand exceeds current provision.

Higher education in protracted refugee situations (HEPRS) might seem paradoxical, a contradiction in terms, or a venture that seems impossible or extremely difficult to achieve, for the term contains two opposite characteristics or social meanings. The most obvious might be that universities are generally associated with freedom, be it academic freedom or freedom of thought and speech more broadly. Refugees, however, are deemed to be “unfree”, for many spend much of their time in exile in camps where restrictions are placed on their basic rights and freedoms. Moreover, higher education institutes are considered long-term, sustainable institutions, whereas refugee camps, although having in many cases existed for several decades, still carry a connotation of temporariness (Zeus 2011).

Crossing educational borders – the ACU diploma

One way of addressing this need for education is the diploma offered through the Australian Catholic University (ACU), the first tertiary institution to offer accredited university education to refugees and migrants in protracted refugee situations. The program is funded solely by ACU as part of its community engagement program and is offered in western Thailand in Mae Sot, and in southern Thailand in Ranong.

Since 2008, the diploma has offered units that adhered to what the Burmese community itself regarded as useful. Lecturers progressively changed the content of their units to be of more relevance to the Burmese or refugee context. The diploma is taught in mixed mode – online and face-to-face teaching by ACU lecturers. The first unit of the Diploma in Liberal Studies is ‘English Communication Skills’, which covers academic English and academic practices such as proper referencing. Students then study ‘Global Environmental Change’, ‘Introduction to Development’, ‘Introduction to Management’, ‘An Introduction to International Human Rights Law and Practice’, ‘Issues in Global Health’, ‘Adolescent Development and Wellbeing’ and ‘Education for Sustainability’.

Initially, ACU elicited the assistance of some community-based organisations in identifying potential students who had the commitment to remain on the border. In addition, only students who had been through post-Year-10 secondary education, had passed a written and oral English test, and had not applied for resettlement at the time of application for the course were accepted. More recently, the Memorandum of Understanding between ACU and the students asks them to devote at least two years of
their time after graduating to the refugee or migrant community. Whereas all students in the past belonged to the majority ethnic group, the Karen, a deliberate attempt was made to include students from as many ethnic groups as possible. In the current diploma program, there are eight Burmese ethnicities represented. There was also an attempt to maintain gender equality, and in the current program there are 36 females and 25 males undertaking the course. Students must have completed Year 12 – within the camps or in Burma – and must pass the English language test, which is administered by ACU staff within the camps. Each year applications well exceed the number of places offered. Once the students are offered a place they are able to stay in the group houses funded by ACU for the duration of their course.

Each diploma course begins with an orientation session lasting at least a week on topics such as introducing the participating university, dealing with expectations of the students as well as the university’s expectation of them, critical thinking, peace-building exercises and guides to study. There are resident tutors who work with students to improve their academic English and assist them with assignments. In addition, a resident tutor is on hand to guide the students on a day-to-day basis, and a local Burmese coordinator looks after the students’ wellbeing and security, liaison with the local authorities and logistical matters.

Looking for a theoretical framework

While I have engaged with the epistemologies of Western youth work in doing my own teaching, research and writing, their limitations have been evident to me for some time. Little is documented about the practice of youth work in the non-industrialised world. This article, however, is concerned with exactly that – teaching youth work well by recognising the majority World/Global South distinction and including in our thinking, our practice and our politics the millions of young people who live in these regions. It is for this reason that in teaching on the border I draw upon Raewyn Connell and her ‘Southern theory’ which developed in response to the fact that most of the social theory that informs higher (and in this case youth work) education is produced in, and from the perspective of, the Global North. Despite claims of universality, these theories are essentially Eurocentric as they fail to account for voices and knowledge from non-dominant peoples, and a youth experience different from that within Western society. In Southern theory, Connell (2007, p.vii) argues that universal theories and expert knowledge are driven by “men, capitalists, educated and the affluent” with indigenous knowledge often considered to be the periphery and lay knowledge. Southern theory represents Connell’s attempt to acknowledge that a variety of knowledges and ways of knowing have been denied voice in social theory, and that they have their own contributions to make. Southern theory therefore challenges the social theories
developed in the northern hemisphere, which embed the viewpoints, perspectives and problems of the “metropole” (2007, pp.vi-viii). In preparing to teach on the border, I knew I wanted to unsettle “the centre–periphery relations in the realm of knowledge” (Connell 2007, p.viii), and propose and attempt a counterhegemonic or Southern theory of youth work education.

Although I used Southern theory as my theoretical basis, I also drew on ‘critical pedagogy’, the general name given to theoretical perspectives and oppositional pedagogies that promote educational experiences that are transformative, empowering and transgressive (Giroux 2004; Kincheloe 2005; McLaren 2003). It is a “way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relationships of the wider community, society, and nation-state” (McLaren 1999, p.454). Critical pedagogy is drawn from many theoretical streams (Darder, Baltodano & Torres 2003), including liberation theology, Freirian pedagogy, the sociology of knowledge, the Frankfurt school of critical theory, feminist theory, neo-Marxist cultural criticism and, more recently, postmodern social theory. It is influenced greatly by the work of Freire (1974) and seeks to expose and deconstruct conceptions of truth that privilege those in power and perpetuate injustice (Darder, Baltodano & Torres 2003).

Critical pedagogy also views education as a form of cultural politics and as a means to achieve social justice and change (Giroux 1992, 1994), since education always involves an introduction to, preparation for and legitimisation of, certain ways of seeing and behaving in the world. Education always involves power relationships and the privileging of certain forms of knowledge. Invariably, these forms of knowledge serve to reproduce social inequalities linked to racism, sexism, class discrimination and ethnocentrism. Therefore critical pedagogy aims to engage teachers and students in a critical, dialectical examination of how existing curriculum, resources and approaches to teaching offer students a perspective on the world that serves to marginalise certain voices and ways of life. The task of critical pedagogy is for teachers and students to make explicit the socially constructed character of knowledge and to ask whose interests particular “knowledges” serve. Armed with such awareness, students and teachers should be able to challenge unequal and undemocratic structures (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991; Giroux 1992, 1994, 1996; McLaren 1995, 1999).

**Implementing a Southern theory in the Thai-Burma classroom – unsettling universality**

Taking off my shoes and walking into the wooden house that serves as the ACU classroom on the border, I was aware I would be teaching in a context of “unprecedented
historical trauma” (Worsham 2006 p.170) and must adapt my teaching – both for myself and my students – to the “posttraumatic cultural moments” which would infiltrate my classroom (Zembylas 2013). I was mindful of the work of Zembylas who uses a concept of “troubled knowledge” (knowledge coming from the “profound feeling of loss, shame, resentment, or defeat that one carries from his or her participation in a traumatised society”) and argues that there is a need to acknowledge the consequences of the emotional complexity or “difficult knowledge” in conflict and post-conflict situations in order to enrich the radical potential in creating transformative classrooms (p.177).

A pedagogy influenced by Southern theory in these contexts, could not simply rest on questioning, but it should also be “the people there, the bodies in the classroom, who carry knowledge within themselves, that must be engaged, interrupted and transformed” (Jansen 2009, p.258).

The claims of universality and that it is possible to “know” any given practice and experience on the basis of generalisations from previous research (Connell 2007) drew me to critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is based on the idea that there is no one methodology or universality in approach that can work for all populations (Degener 2001). As Bartolome (1996) also maintains, there is no set curriculum or program because all decisions related to curriculum and material to be studied are based on the needs and interests of students (Giroux 1997; Shor 1992). In developing the curriculum for this unit, I was reminded of how both the content and form of the curriculum are ideological in nature (Giroux 1988). This means that both the knowledge that informs the subject and the way it is taught also affirm the values, interests and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society (McLaren 2003). The lack of dialogue between the Global North and the Global South in youth studies has resulted in the dominant interpretive paradigms describing most accurately young people in the nations and cultures where these paradigms are produced, rendering them useful only to nations such as Australia (Nilan 2011, p.21). Youth work literature “almost never cites non-metropolitan thinkers and almost never builds on social theory formulated outside the metropole” (Connell 2007, p.379). Historically, in the West, the term “youth” has been variously constructed as a category of people who are not children, yet neither are they adults. This definition has to be re-contextualised in the Thai-Burma context where young people have faced the lived experience of trafficking, war, work and early marriage, often at a time of life that we would consider in the West to still be childhood. Thus, the curriculum needed to be framed through the use of student experiences and the realities of their lives (Degener 2001).

Although armed with ideas, I deliberately left deciding on the topic sequence and assigned readings until I got to the border. On our first day together, the students and
I discussed forms of knowledge and information that reflect the experience of young people on the border. It was agreed by the class that experience is an essential part of knowledge and that we would draw on our experiences to explore the issues surrounding wellbeing for young Burmese adolescents. Following the suggestion of Keesing-Styles (2003), the lesson plans were based on materials from Burmese writers and popular culture which are representative of the realities on the border and within Burma and which would serve as the basis for discussion and critical reflection of the culture (Ohara, Safte & Crookes 2000). The texts and their themes were provided by both myself and the students, who would bring their experiences to the classroom, and place that knowledge with the context in which it took place (Kincheloe 2005).

**Reading from the centre**

Teaching methodology can be a source of educational hegemony. Freire (1974) refers to the “banking model” of education whereby the student functions as an open repository for whatever knowledge the teacher chooses to deposit that day. This methodology further supports the dominant educational ideology that silences and marginalises students’ voices and experience.

One method to counter the “banking model” of education is the problem-posing (liberatory) method of education espoused by Freire (1974). Within this practice, dialogue is employed as a pedagogical method in juxtaposition to the oppressive monological methods of knowledge transmission. Problem-posing education counters the hierarchical nature of “banking” education by suggesting that education should be co-intentional, involving both teachers and students as subjects. Through dialogue, new relationships emerge, those of teacher-student and student-teacher (Freire 1974). Within this context, there is opportunity for moving beyond some of the limiting factors of banking education.

The Thai-Burma classroom is not a homogenous environment with a common understanding of oppression, but in fact a deeply divided space of several ethnicities all of whom have their own experience of living in and escaping from Burma. It was critical at the start of the class that I constructed a safe space to enable critical and productive dialogue. This space was not intended as a therapeutic intervention, but rather a space of “critical emotional praxis” (Zembylas 2013, p.203). Zembylas describes this as a space where pedagogical opportunities are created for critical inquiry and where a restoration of humanity, healing and reconciliation can take place. When a class is a safe place, and common feelings of vulnerability and empathy emerge, and we can relate our stories, we set up better conditions for new relations. As Zembylas (2013, p.177) notes, this occurs as it “offers opportunities for transformation because teachers and students translate emotional understandings into new ways of living with others”.
As a starting point, I moved students into a circle and we began a process of collectively establishing classroom “expectations”. I reminded the students that we had all agreed that experience was important knowledge and we would be drawing on our own experience and therefore confidentiality was important. There was some discussion as we translated the concept of confidentiality into Burmese and Kareni – the closest words to confidentiality in Burmese are Liu wak and teb dot the er, which translate to “secret” (Erikson, Bart & Aung 2015, p.141). Being mindful of the impact of secrecy and silence perpetrated by the Burmese regime, we discussed this more in terms of not “gossiping” outside the classroom, and that “what is said in here stays in here”. One student referred to the Buddhist concepts of sanctuary and refuge as a living space within the class. At this point I also told students that the content of this subject may cause students worry or sou: jeinde and reminded them that they had the choice whether to talk or not and they should weigh up the risk and consequences of doing so, but that I was here for them to talk to should they need to.

My aim from that point on was to create a student–teacher-led classroom process in which we “read from the centre” (Connell 2007). To start with I asked the class what music young people like to listen to on the border. Students were keen to tell me about a Burmese band called Iron Cross – the most popular band in Burma. They play Western-style music with Burmese lyrics that first have to be approved by a board of censors. Students all comment that Lay Phyu, the group’s lead singer, is the most admired celebrity in the country because he taunts the government at every opportunity. In class we listened to songs from an album called Power 54. Students told me that apparently it was on the shelves and people were buying it before the government realised 54 is Aung San Suu Kyi’s street address. Another time, Lay Phyu’s hair was down to his waist and the government told him to cut it. So he shaved his head. And then a military officer asked him to perform at the wedding of his son and Lay Phyu said, “These are not our people”. Using this as a starting point allowed a discussion around young people and rebellion, resistance and disaffection, and on some of the issues Frymer (2005, p.1) would suggest are symbolic of this disaffection – drugs, gangs, suicide and violence.

Another song, ‘Yoo Shin The BarWah’, is about obtaining a “simple, happy life” and so I asked the students “what does a happy life” or wellbeing look like for a young person in Burma and on the border, and, much to my surprise, there were many overlaps with young people in the West – friends, belonging, family, protection, good mental health and freedom. There were also vast differences, as students described a life free of trafficking, working, being recruited as a soldier, early marriage and a myriad of health and
trauma-related issues. This was how the class started each morning, and when the song concluded I asked the students to summarise the major themes discussed in the lyrics and relate these to the lecture or discussion topics. Students were asked to make connections with their own lives and experiences. Did they have any personal experiences that would support or undermine the situations described in the songs? This created a powerful setting for presenting and reviewing material and making connections between their own experiences and the larger social, economic and political context.

The songs students chose are also important for another reason. Building a classroom community was one of the central features of the critical praxis employed. It has been questioned that such collaborative learning may motivate students, but can it bring about a more socially just world? Students told me that they feel ethnic reconciliation among the Burmese is essential for the future of their country. This does not mean “social forgetting and silent sufferings and grievances” (Gravers 2007, cited in Costello 2008, p.112), but building a community of trust. The breakdowns in interpersonal relations in Burma and the border region have inhibited the formation of, and trust in, friendship and support networks. Aung San Suu Kyi (2004) has written that “the greatest obstacle in the way of peace and progress in Burma is the lack of trust: trust between the government and the people, between different ethnic groups, between the military and civilian forces. Trust is a precious commodity that is easily lost, but hard indeed to take root” (cited in Skidmore 2004, p.51). In one song, by Zae Win Htut, ‘Si Lone Chin Atwet Tha Chin Ta Pote’, each of the main ethnicities of Burma is represented. When this song was played, the students from each of the ethnic groups stood up and did the particular cultural dance to their part of the song; it was done with great pride and their fellow students listened, clapped and smiled and encouraged them. We then talked about what the unity of Burma would mean to them and the role young people can play in achieving this. The creation of this democratic space through such constructivist-oriented classroom practices was in many ways an act of social justice itself (Dewey 1938).

I generally used a mixed methods approach with most classes, including experiential activities, small-group work, student presentations, discussion and creative expression. I would begin by identifying a clear purpose to the lesson and proposing related readings. I then moved on to incorporate a mini-lecture, guided discussion or small group work, and an experiential activity. To initiate dialogue, I included dialogue “triggers” – photos, cartoons, comics, poems, digital material and stories – all with a focus on young people in Burma.

I also followed Wallerstein and Bernstein’s (1988) “SHOWED” technique to respond to such triggers (cited in Peterson 2009, p.313):
S what do you See?
H what’s Happening to your feelings?
O relate it to your Own lives
W Why do we face these problems?
E
D what can we Do about it?

As Peterson (2009) describes, what is most useful about this method is that it directs students away from “spontaneous conversation to a progression that moves from personal realities to social analysis to consideration of action” (2009, p.13). I often took this task further in asking students to identify two or more opinions on an issue and then talk about the evidence that supports what they believe. For example, in one class I showed a photo of a young punk in Burma. There were various reactions to this, but mainly laughter, ridicule and shock. We then read several newspaper articles about the rise of punk in Burma. Using print media in this way can be particularly useful if the teacher can assist students to unpack the ways in which unequal social relations are “reinforced by those institutionally empowered to do so” (Kelly 2006, p.27). As youth subcultures attract considerable news coverage and are often over sensationalised, this presented a good opportunity to examine theories of “moral panic”. I then showed the students blogs written from within Burma about how young punks were feeding the poor and had started a chapter of ‘Food not Bombs’1 in Yangon. This enabled a good discussion about whose ideological interests stigmatised images serve and what impact such reports about young people may have and any subsequent coercive measures. This exercise also enabled students to differentiate between opinion and evidence. Students were then asked to write a small report on the issue of punks in Burma from different perspectives.

**Assessment – reversing exclusion**

If multiple “ways of knowing” and multiple sources of knowledge are valued, then multiple methods of assessment must also be considered. As I had initiated a Southern theory learning model from the start of the class, I felt that bringing in a standardised assessment from the outside, or designed by me separate from the class, would only “contradict the emergence of students as subjects” (Shor 1980, p.112). Assessment was developed so that in their assignments students were able to pick up the themes that were most meaningful and most relevant to their own lives and the context in which they work (Keesing-Styles 2003). In this way assessment became part of the learning activities that are consistent with the democratic processes of the classroom. I had been warned that such processes take some time to establish as they often challenge all the preconceived notions of education and teacher power that students enter with
from their previous experiences; however, I was surprised at how quickly students engaged with this process. Two of the themes that had emerged throughout the class were how adolescence was experienced differently on the border and what programs could be developed for young people in a border context. The class therefore decided the two main forms of assessment would be the development of a five-minute digital narrative on adolescence, and a youth community program. Because these were both group projects, students worked together in groups to define criteria for assessing their practice and learning. Here, the dialogue, mentioned by Freire (1974) as being an essential part of critical pedagogy, is again enacted, with students interpreting the assessment criteria in their own context. Once the groups had developed criteria, we together selected those that were most appropriate to their practice and context, thereby increasing the possibility of engagement in a “transformative critique of their everyday lives” (Simon 1992, p.60).

### Conclusion

Adolescence, by its very nature, is a time of rapid transformation, involving some degree of confusion and risk-taking as young people try on new roles and responsibilities. In the midst of conflict, or in its aftermath, such confusion is multiplied; the social fabric is torn, expected pathways toward adult status are lost, and emergency needs take precedence. While young people find themselves heading households, unemployment is rampant and traditional livelihoods are disrupted. Young people who experience war often lose the time, support and opportunities typically available to their age group in non-conflict settings, such as attending school, feeling part of a community, and growing into adult responsibilities gradually. In protracted refugee settings young people often feel that they want to roll back the clock and make up for what they missed.

The Thai-Burma classroom taught me the importance of recognising the validity of such non-metropolitan experiences of being young and to challenge the terms in which dominant youth studies theory is currently constituted. By reflecting upon this experience one conclusion that can be reached is that it is the duty of youth work educators and scholars to understand and enact a decolonised youth work that is grounded in theory, possible in practice and shaped by the realities of young people’s lives in locations such as the Thai-Burma border. This does not mean transferring Western youth work knowledge to the periphery, as this would reproduce a Western professional imperialism in youth work. Rather, this youth work pedagogy would be grounded in the diversity of everyday life and interrogate young people’s experience in the context of power, privilege and oppression to provoke action and dialogue toward humanisation and liberation for all young people regardless of location.
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“Choking on the smoke”
Young Indonesian environmentalists

Pam Nilan*
Gregorius Ragil Wibawanto**

This research sought the views of university student environmentalists in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. Due to the illegal expansion of palm oil plantations nearby, fires in peatland fill the air for months with smoke so thick it is hard to breathe. Yet despite this choking reminder of environmental destruction close to home, the young activists did not often prioritise the smoke when asked in interviews about key environmental problems. When they did try and explain the smoke, they used particular discourses to talk about it, discourses that reflect the graduate labour market choices they will make later in life.

Key words: Indonesia, environment, student activism, palm oil

In ancient times the city of Palembang was a river-based hub of maritime trade. Under Dutch occupation the surrounding countryside was cleared for plantations and mining. In post-independence Indonesia, Palembang became a key player in national exports. Now rubber production has declined in favour of oil palm plantations which require much more extensive acreage. Indonesia provides over half the world’s palm oil (Purnomo et al. 2017), exporting 26.48 million tons of palm oil products in 2016 (Ribka 2017). Every year more forestland is illegally burnt to expand crops. Slow-burning fires in peatland fill the air for months with smoke so thick that people throughout the region struggle to breathe. This paper is about the environmental views of young people who are university student environmentalists in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. Their interview responses revealed a number of key discourses about the environment.

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We interviewed 20 student environmentalists at the local Sriwijaya University in late 2014. Each day Palembang was so shrouded in smoke that visibility was less than 25 metres. Our informants frequently coughed and choked as they spoke. Yet despite this intense physical reminder of environmental destruction, the young activists did not often prioritise the smoke when asked about key environmental problems. That apparent contradiction is explored here using a framework of interpretation drawn from the work of Michel Foucault on discourse and regimes of truth.

According to Foucault (1984, p.72), “each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth”. A regime of truth is the strategic field within which large-scale claims about society are routinely produced and accepted. Thus any society’s regime of truth consists of important distinguishing elements about what is generally taken to be true by the majority of constituents, even though the apparent factuality of those elements is culturally and historically constructed rather than empirically “true”. These longstanding elements, or truth claims, are understood by Foucault as “discourses” that maintain the status quo of any given society.

Discourses are specific sets of propositions that point to the assumed “reality” of a society and the people, ideas and things that inhabit it. A discourse is an institutionalised way of speaking or writing about reality that shapes what can be legitimately thought and said about that society and what cannot. “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it” (Foucault 1998, p.101). Yet, at the same time, any discourse carries within itself the seeds of its own subversion; “a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1998, pp.100-01). For the young environmentalists in Palembang, our interpretive focus is on “the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth” by them, given that they are not “those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault 1984, p.73) because they are young and still at university. The fact that they often ignored the smoke in interview responses points to a specific regime of truth and so do some of the discourses they used (when pressed) to explain the smoke haze.

**The young environmentalists**

The 20 young environmentalists, students at Sriwijaya University (henceforth UNSRI), were enrolled in degrees from engineering to accounting and teacher education. They seemed very much like other upwardly mobile youth in Indonesia – modern Muslims aiming for prosperous lives. They were smartly dressed and forever checking their phone messages and social media links. Universities are “spaces of hope” (Harvey 2000) that provide favourable conditions for young people’s expression of pro-social activism. Unsurprisingly, environmentalism has long been associated with universities in Indonesia.
(Nomura & Suyono 2014) and important for raising “environmental awareness” (Setiawan & Hadi 2007, p.75). On-campus pro-environmental groups are popular, focusing their campaigns on anti-littering, animal preservation and forest protection (Crosby 2013).

UNSRRI has a postgraduate campus in inner-city Palembang and an undergraduate campus at Indralaya about 32 km west. The Indralaya campus is a poorly designed, dilapidated set of far-flung buildings located in a university-owned oil palm plantation. The student environmentalists were located at the Indralaya campus. Many belonged to a Student Nature Lovers Club – MAPALA (Mahasiswa Pecinta Alam). MAPALA is the dominant pro-environmental student organisation with at least one MAPALA club in each faculty. Some were members of Palembang Berkebun, a group that promotes inner-city green space. Others had joined Friends of the Earth (Sobat Bumi). By definition, environmental activism aims to protect and preserve the environment (Wray-Lake, Flanagan & Osgood 2010). Yet in youth culture, joining an environmental group is one way to create a bonded – perhaps daring – “project identity” (Castells 1997, p.8) with like-minded peers (Dono, Webb & Richardson 2010). So sometimes there is a gap between environmental talk and action (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002).

Data

We first illustrate the overall pattern of responses to questions that asked informants to name the most important environmental problems – in their view.

Table 1: Identification of important environmental problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Global problem</th>
<th>National/Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adi</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agus</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
<td>Illegal logging wild forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enjang</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>Results of mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reza</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>Burning forest land*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Naful</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Smoke haze*</td>
<td>Burning land*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Land rights conflict</td>
<td>Land tenure injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rani</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Agrarian conflict</td>
<td>Greed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yuni</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>Forest fires*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Istiqomah</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Smoke*</td>
<td>Smoke*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Febri</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Air pollution/smoke*</td>
<td>Smoke*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ichsan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sari</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Forest loss</td>
<td>Forests not protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Annisa</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Lack urban green space</td>
<td>Forest burning*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table (translated into English) shows that in naming key environmental problems (global and local/national) the choking smoke (asterisked) was mentioned only 13 times in all. This perhaps indicates that the smoke from illegal forest fires – implicitly signalling the expansion of the palm oil industry – is not considered by all of them to be an environmental issue per se. It is not that the smoke does not matter to them, but as a phenomenon it does not necessarily fit well with the normative discourse of environmental activism that circulates in their student groups.

**What about the smoke?**

Given that smoke was so thick in the room yet little mentioned, the interviewer (second author) asked for more explanation about local environmental problems. While two informants never mentioned the smoke at all, even when pressed, others demonstrated strong feelings. For example:

> I feel really very emotional about the smoke.
> Adit, male, 21, accounting, *Palembang Berkebun*.

> People here are really distressed by the smoke. When you go out of the house you can’t breathe. Also the reputation of Indonesia is tarnished because it is one of the worst countries for producing smoke.
> Istiqomah, female, 21, sociology, *Komunitas 3R*, a campus group dedicated to Reduce, Re-use, Recycle.

> We often ride our motorcycles from Indralaya to Palembang. We get tears in our eyes, it’s really painful. More pain than peeling onion.
> Ichsan, male, 21, mining engineering, *MAPALA*.

Yet these comments are not explanations of the problem. Other responses yielded insights into the discourses the young environmentalists used to understand the smoke.

**Discourse 1: The fires are natural**

One young man had reached the conviction that forest fires just happened:
Forest fires are natural, although some are not. Like here in Indralaya it’s such flammable peatland. Yesterday I was having a discussion with students from agriculture. They said that most fires are natural because the peatlands are so flammable and to stop it happening would need huge [government] funds … 80% natural, 20% human causes.

Agus, male, 22, sociology, MAPALA.

The discourse here is that the fires are primarily a natural phenomenon. Yet this is not the case. These are “anthropogenic fires” (Purnomo et al. 2017, p.21). Canals are dug to drain and dry peatlands. They are then more easily cleared by fire, ready for oil palm seedlings. Farmers and villagers carry out the draining and burning, but village elites organise the labour and administer land documents. Regional elites liaise directly with the transnational companies who pay money for the land. When the payoff comes, “local elites receive 68% of the revenue while individuals who burn land get 22%.

Village elites who administer land documents obtain 10%” (Purnomo et al. 2017, p.22). The initial value of land cleared by fire is “USD$665 per hectare, which increases to USD$856 per hectare when it is burnt, and USD$3,800 per hectare for land planted with oil palm” (Purnomo et al. 2017, p.29). The Indonesian government declared a Peatland Conversion Moratorium in October 2015, but it has had little effect. It seems that “patronage networks, profits and high market demand for oil palm incentivise the use of fire and will result in fires and haze continuing to occur every year” (Purnomo et al. 2017, p.29).

It is not surprising that UNSRI agriculture students are invested in the discourse that such fires could be “natural” since their future careers in agri-business will largely depend on the established patronage networks that support the palm oil industry. In that respect, they are already part of the culture of silence practised by local and regional elites in the illegal practice of forest clearing (see Cronin et al. 2016). It is more surprising that Agus, a campus environmentalist, puts any faith in this discourse. However, he was not alone:

Related to the smoke issue, dry conditions are the main cause. In terms of actual data we do not yet know why no-one has been caught in the case of forest fires. These hotspots could be intentionally or unintentionally created. Because of the heat of the sun they catch fire. So far no individual or institution has been charged for causing the fires. What I do know is that the forest on the outskirts of Indralaya–Palembang always burns whether intentionally or seasonal. It may in fact be just like that. This is just presumption, since there is no firm data on the cause.

Febri, male, 21, chemical engineering, Friends of the Earth.
Febri employs a similar discourse of “natural burning” to that of Agus. Febri claims that:
a) no-one has been caught for creating forest fires (wrong), and b) there is no firm data on
the cause (wrong). In fact companies and individuals have been convicted (Purnomo et
al. 2017). Moreover, much data is available in the Indonesian language on anthropogenic
(profit-seeking) fire causes. This is primarily contained in government reports, regional
NGO reports and serious journalism. So why are some young environmentalists at
UNSRRI apparently not reading that information?

The answer perhaps lies in their dependence on social media accessed through mobile
phones. Indonesia’s mobile phone market is vast. “SIM subscriptions in Indonesia
stand at 326.3 million, way more than its population.” Moreover, “most of Indonesia
now access the internet using their mobile devices” (Balea 2016). If someone is using
their mobile phone to get specific information on an issue from the internet, then it is
expensive to download a lengthy report. It is easier to rely on brief summary messages
on Facebook and Twitter. We observed that the young environmentalists at UNSRI
seemed to rely greatly on the social media-distributed information they got from
MAPALA or Friends of the Earth or Palembang Berkebun. For example, when asked
about his main source of environmental information, Agus said, “the quickest is the
internet. Facebook friends often post environmental problems”. Ichsan gave a similar
answer about his source of environmental information, “directly from the internet and
new mass media … the smoke is still a trending topic”. This finding matches research
reports from other quarters on the issue of “online firestorms” where a particular topic
creates a sharp trend of messaging to which many pay attention (for example, Pfeffer,
Zorbach & Carley 2014).

It seems they trust the environmental messages disseminated by group members about
the causes of smoke to be accurate and well informed. Yet even the group leaders are
in no better financial position than the student members, so they are no more likely
to have read detailed scientific information in the form of a large downloaded report.
There is only limited online computer access at Indralaya campus, with long queues
outside computer laboratories as students try to complete assessment tasks. It may
save face for a group leader to tweet that there “is no firm data on the cause” of forest
fires, for example, rather than admit a lack of background knowledge. However,
the statement is still wrong. It is a minor example of the problem of social media
disseminating berita palsu (false news), a phenomenon that plagues Indonesia today
(Otto & Rachman 2016).

There were numerous other examples of the dissemination of berita palsu about the
prevailing smoke, for example:
Once I read in material from Earth Hour that cigarette smoke is more dangerous than the smoke that is all around us now. So I almost quit smoking for a week after I read that.

Andri, 21, male, electrical engineering, Earth Hour.

This raises the question of why someone from the pro-environmentalist Earth Hour group would send around misleading material of that kind. Cigarette smoke is certainly dangerous. Yet according to Purnomo et al. (2017, p.21), “anthropogenic fires and hazes caused the death of 19 people and half a million of cases of acute respiratory infections” in 2015. Other reports go further. One study estimated that the 2015 smoke may have caused upwards of 100,000 premature deaths across Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Koplitz et al. 2016, p.6). The berita palsu message that cigarette smoke is “worse” deflects attention from a core local environmental issue by provoking outrage around an entirely different matter.

Discourse 2: Farmers are irresponsible in lighting fires

The second discourse about smoke acknowledged the anthropogenic cause, but blamed the bad behaviour of landowners, for example:

It’s actually those people who own land burning their land but they don’t take responsibility for the smoke, they just burn and create smoke everywhere and it’s harmful to others ... They want to plant new crops because the older land is not productive, that’s what happens when you burn the forest. Yeah, they don’t take responsibility. The smoke goes everywhere, but they don’t take responsibility for it, they’re selfish.

Annissa, female 21, English teaching, Palembang Berkebun.

Notably, WALHI, the Indonesian Forum for the Environment and the most significant environmental organisation in Indonesia, claims that it is not small farmers but national and transnational plantation owners who are primarily responsible for the extensive fires in Indonesia each year. Yet the discourse of blaming small landowners remains popular in preference to foregrounding the role of more significant social actors allied to the palm oil industry (Tacconi 2016; Purnomo et al. 2017). Once again it seems curious that these student environmentalists would not look at the bigger picture of the annual fires. As Greenpeace Sumatra forest campaigner Yuyu Indradi has stated publicly, “This is industrial-scale burning. It is easy to find out who is behind it” (McIntyre 2013, p.45).

An allied discourse was to blame people in general (ill-defined) for their selfishness:
Lately our environmental group has been discussing burning, the fires, the smoke. The discussion is about the cause of fires. It seems there are many people not far away who think alike. They drain the land, burn it, and then it is all clear to be planted. That topic keeps coming up, the root of the problem. Usually, it is done by people who do not care about the effects; they put their own interests first.

Adi, male, 21, public administration, Komunitas 3R.

There is far more accuracy about process in this account. Yet it does not give a full picture because it misses the key elements of the palm oil industry and local elites, as explained by Purnomo et al. (2017). In that regard, Adi’s account once again falls back on blaming the irresponsible behaviour of small landowners.

Another informant based her blame of farmers on local experience:

*Often here at Indralaya there are forest fires. Here the peat fields burn in the dry season. To date, there has not been a single month without haze ... illiterate people.*

Yuni, female, 21, sociology, Komunitas 3R.

Yuni’s view is that the smoke on Indralaya campus is caused by nearby farmers burning their land annually. She implies they do not know better because they are “illiterate”. Her explanation is flawed in two ways. First, the adult literacy rate in Indonesia is 95.44% and 96.65% in South Sumatra (UNESCO 2016). Farming people living so close to the capital Palembang are simply unlikely to be illiterate. Second, the amount of smoke generated by minor local agricultural burning could not possibly produce the extent of thick, choking haze on campus day after day. In fact, the whole Palembang area is seasonally affected by smoke from extensive forest fires because of the “typical south-westerly wind flow during the burning season” (Marlier et al. 2015, p.7).

**Discourse 3: The government does nothing to prevent the fires**

The final discourse about the smoke admitted the human factor and sometimes also the role of business interests and local elites, but ultimately blamed the government. For example:

*The smoke haze is driven by fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan. If the cabinet was really working right now the Ministry of the Environment would be held responsible, especially the portfolio of forestry. It should be monitoring the tree cover in Kalimantan and Sumatra.*

Naufal, male, 21, chemical engineering, Friends of the Earth.
This is far more accurate than some of the other explanations but still falls short of acknowledging the complex interplay of power between the government, the companies, local elites and farmers. Another account gave a more nuanced view of the role of the government in relation to palm oil companies:

*It’s all sides, the government, the companies, the people, right? There is a division of responsibility. The role of government as an institution is to wield authority to integrate the interests of the company and the community... The role of government is to be fair... [otherwise] the company will just take the land to be made productive. They use the term lahan mati – dead land – that’s the category used by the company.*

Istiqomah, female, 21, sociology, *Komunitas 3R.*

Istiqomah is referring to the practice of companies annexing land traditionally used by forest farming communities for slash-and-burn agriculture. After an area of land is slashed, burned and cropped, it is left fallow for a few years to regrow so the cycle can be repeated. This prevents the exhaustion of the soil. However, since the fallow land then appears to be unused – lahan mati – a palm oil company can annex the land by legally disputing traditional ownership claims which are usually established through proof of continuous agricultural use. Village heads and local government officers are sometimes bribed by companies to give evidence that the land has not been used agriculturally and so is not “owned” by the community (see Colchester et al. 2006). As a final indignity, local dispossessed people may then be paid by the company to burn and clear the land they once owned for oil palm planting.

The Indonesian government has implemented laws and policies to prevent that kind of land annexation, but in the provinces there is little local government oversight of unlawful land practices because there is so much profit to be made (Purnomo et al. 2017). In a vast and diverse country like Indonesia, it would indeed cost the government a great deal to create that kind of oversight in the palm oil industry. There was a view that little can be done to prevent the annual burning, “there has been no proper problem-solving of burning because, like I said earlier, it needs huge funds, and the government cannot support such a large budget” (Agus, male, 22, sociology, *MAPALA*). It seems that once the shortfalls of government are mentioned, there is the accompanying assumption that little or nothing can be done about the smoke. Agus added, “the mindset of most people is one of resignation”.

As a *MAPALA* leader, Enjang feels he is up against a lot of student resistance:

*WALHI advised us to raise the issue of smoke. Yes, so we did that with MAPALA members... [and] yesterday we gave a talk about forest burning*
and that is a significant issue, but the masses are out there and we are just giving information at UNSRI. There are 6,000 students at UNSRI but hardly anyone cares. Just a little maybe for some, but most couldn’t care less.

Enjang, male, 22, mechanical engineering, MAPALA.

Adi held a similar view:

[They say] wooo, this incredible smoke! Recently they’ve been complaining, but where is the solution? Well they think they are stuck with it, so there is no other solution than wearing a mask. Everyone has a blocked nose; they feel like they are going crazy every day. There is pain, there is coughing, they contract respiratory diseases … yes the air is bad, and yes I inhale it, but that’s just ordinary life. They are already immune to it and the factors that cause it because they have become accustomed to the unfamiliar environment. The smoke is considered ordinary and normal.

Adi, male, 21, public administration, Komunitas 3R.

As another young activist said, the smoke haze lasts for so many months now that not only is Indralaya campus like a “land in the clouds”, but South Sumatra itself “has become like another world altogether” (Mona, female, 21, criminal law, Friends of the Earth). In short, the smoke has become normalised. It’s seen much less as an environmental problem and much more as a deplorable status quo that must be painfully endured.

**Discussion**

When it comes to “the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth” (Foucault 1984, p.73) about the smoke, the young UNSRI environmentalists primarily named their major source of information to be the internet (in general) and social media postings by environmental group members. Yet in disseminating potentially influential messages, none of the group members are “those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault 1984, p.73) in any formal sense. Not only are they all young and still at university, but they seem to lack the resources, and perhaps the inclination, to download serious sources of factual information about the causes of the smoke, to the extent that activists such as Agus and Febri had come to believe the fires were “natural”. The discourse of “natural” fires in peatland is a particularly pernicious one because it reinforces the idea that nobody is responsible and there is nothing for young environmentalists to do. Not only is it factually incorrect, but the discourse of “natural” fires transmits and reproduces the relations of power that permit the illegal expansion of the palm oil industry in South Sumatra.
The discourse of blaming farmers and local people also “transmits and produces power; it reinforces it” (Foucault 1998, p.101). This discourse points to what can be legitimately thought and said in Palembang about the smoke and what cannot. For university students to blame the ignorance, greed, selfishness and illiteracy of small farmers is to keep the poor semantically in their place while rendering invisible the forces that motivate their burning practices – local elites, transnational palm oil companies and corrupt officials – even before we get to the matter of land annexation. In contrast, the discourse of blaming the government for lack of oversight, inadequate funding and weak rule of law at least lifts the level of accountability above the poor and struggling farmers, but once again leaves out the vital element of the palm oil companies themselves. The palm oil companies that operate in South Sumatra were not named by any of the young environmentalists, even though their names are well known, prominently displayed on the trucks that use the Trans-Sumatran Highway that runs by the campus. In a small way, criticism of the government over the smoke issue perhaps signifies as a discourse of resistance that could possibly be “a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1998, p.101). However, this did not seem to be readily translated into action. There was only one account of direct government pressure about the smoke:

Just yesterday we made a demonstration along with our friends about smoke-related problems. Other students came along to the demo. In Palembang maybe you didn’t hear about it, we demonstrated in front of the Ogan Ilir district government office. It was filmed by Metro TV I think.

Febri, male, 21, chemical engineering, Friends of the Earth.

To grasp the discursive formations identified above, it is necessary to consider once again how these young people understand themselves as environmentalists.

First, they are not activists on the same scale as, for example, Greenpeace Sumatra forest campaigner Yuyu Indradi, who is older and holds a formal position in an influential NGO. Second, the normative discourse of environmental activism in their student groups is to do something on campus, such as “pasting up flyers” (Martha, female, 21, economics, MAPALA), “write an article” for a newsletter (Agus), or give out “brochures” and “free face masks” to raise smoke awareness (Enjang). Moreover, it seems that one of the principal meanings of group membership is social, the creation of a compelling “project identity” (Castells 1997, p.8) as an environmentalist with exciting new friends. For instance, much of the MAPALA group activities are focused on camping, caving and trekking in national parks during the semester.
Conclusion

Despite their environmental affiliations, these young people are university students who are expected by their families to graduate and make lucrative careers. The labour market in the region remains, as always, driven by trade and export enterprises. Returning to Foucault (1984), the discourses identified above suggest that the “regime of truth” about the smoke (for UNSRI students) might be subtly located in the field of regional growth and prosperity, which inflects graduate prospects. From our fieldwork research, it seems most of the well-educated greater Palembang population strongly believe their increasing prosperity comes from the mining and palm oil industries, either directly or indirectly, and they are proud of it. The idea that the region depends almost exclusively on these industries and their subsidiary enterprises is generally taken to be true, in part because of local media hype and political rhetoric, and in part due to the historical origins of the city in trade and export. The discourses about smoke that emerged from our interviews with young environmentalists mirror the intransigent “politics of truth” constructed in Palembang public rhetoric about the smoke, which conceal the power relations of the palm oil industry as a source of local wealth.

Rather like Singaporeans who accept authoritarian rule as the “price” for living in prosperity compared to the rest of the region, so too the citizens of Palembang seem to implicitly accept months of smoke as the price to be paid for enjoying prosperity. This regime of truth is not likely to be escaped by UNSRI young people who join an environmental group on campus for the period of their study.

Notes
1. Data comes from a broader project: Australian Research Council Discovery Grant DP130100051.

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“It’s a proper site so you can trust it”:

Students’ perceptions and use of online sources of information regarding recreational drugs

Claire Meehan*

This paper reports on a study that investigated teenagers’ use of online sources of information about recreational drug use (including legal highs). It explores their reasons for seeking drug information online, the sources they use, how they are using them, and the potential risks in doing so. Three drug forums and the social media platform Facebook were thematically analysed and 11 focus groups were conducted with 66 young people aged 14 to 16 in Northern Ireland in 2011. Focus groups discussed participants’ knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about drugs, their online behaviours and awareness of risk. The majority of participants went online to find out information about drugs, purchase legal highs, engage in discussions and/or to disseminate information. Young people often try to mitigate the risks of their drug use by seeking information from reliable online sources. However, unsupervised online information-seeking may actually increase risky behaviour as, in general, young people are unable to judge the accuracy and reliability of online sources. Harm reduction advocates should consider ways to mitigate the risks of teenagers’ unsupervised seeking of drug information online.

As studies to date have tended to focus on adults, this paper fills a gap in the empirical qualitative research on young people’s views and behaviour regarding online sources of information about drugs.

Key words: drugs, internet, social media, young people, risk

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Introduction

Internet use has increased exponentially in recent years and cyberspace has become a place for the young to shop, socialise and communicate with numerous communities and groups, including recreational drug users (Lavorgna 2014). As a consequence of the advent of networked digital technologies, the way in which young people are learning about and beginning to use illicit drugs has changed. The internet is now a significant means of communication and information gathering, especially for those aged 11 to 18. Drug-related information resources aimed at teenagers vary from government-funded sources such as the UK program FRANK, which provides a harm reduction message about drugs, to forums and blogs. Young people’s online behaviours regarding accessing and using drug information remain under-investigated. This paper uses the narratives of young people themselves to explore how teenagers use the internet to gather information on drugs and drug use, and to assess their understanding of the risks involved.

This study is innovative in two aspects. First, it elicits the views and understandings of young people on the internet as a source of information about drug use and its influence on their own drug use behaviours. Young adults (aged 18 to 30) are usually surveyed about drug use via a web-based questionnaire (see for example Bauermeister et al. 2015; Ramo & Prochaska 2012; Stevens et al. 2015). Such an approach is limited, however, as it fails to elicit in-depth understandings of the processes and practices of the young, and the age range ignores those under 18. By drawing on qualitative methods, this research was able to elicit the views and experiences of 66 Northern Irish school students, giving a unique insight into how and why young people use forums and social media platforms on the web to find information about drugs. The research provides new insights into our understanding of the nexus of young people, the internet and drugs. Second, this research demonstrates and reinforces the view that young people are going online more and more to find information about drugs in an attempt to minimise their risk. However, in doing so they may be inadvertently increasing their risk of potential harms, as they are generally unable to assess or evaluate the quality of the information they find online.

The internet is a considerable source of information about drug trends, drug uses and where to buy drugs. Hillebrand, Olszewski and Sedefov (2010), in a survey of Europeans aged 15 to 24, found that the internet was the most popular source of information about illicit drugs, with the majority of respondents reporting they would use the internet to find out more about drugs generally. This suggests young people, in particular, may be highly receptive to ideas and information revealed on the internet (Norman, Grace & Lloyd 2014). In using the internet as a source of information, young people are more likely to be exposed to favourable messages about drugs, than if they were using different sources.
The internet may also facilitate the purchase of drugs without appropriate information on potential dangers (Vardakou, Pistos & Spiliopoulou 2011). Walsh (2011), for example, notes that the internet contains flourishing online drug markets, and drug forums, which provide members the opportunity to rate distributors. In addition, the internet provides a sense of community to like-minded individuals interested in drugs. This paper furthers the existing research by investigating why young people are going online to find out information about drugs, how they are processing this information, how they are using it and the potential risks that accrue in doing so.

**The internet and framing of drug use**

Some societal framing of (particularly illicit) drug use depicts drug use as problematic, and drug users as deficient (Fitzgerald 2015). This discourse portrays the drug user as addicted, weak and experiencing a lack of agency, while the drug seller is portrayed as an immoral individual intent of making a profit at any cost (Dwyer & Moore 2010). Often public discussion centres on vulnerable young people who are being encouraged by the seller to use drugs. Young people are said to respond to this encouragement because they are uneducated or unaware of the risks involved. Alternative drug narratives, however, including engagement with, rather than denial of, the pleasures associated with drug use, are also being produced online (Race 2009, as cited in Barratt, Allen & Lenton 2014). Reasons for these new discourses may include a rebellion against the unfavourable mainstream drugs message or a rejection of the supposed lack of agency afforded to drug users. They also service a need for information and empowerment, and engender a sense of community among drug users (Barratt, Lenton & Allen 2013).

Barratt, Lenton and Allen (2013) argue that “subjugated knowledges” are produced by people who use drugs and that they provide an alternative, and often more nuanced, discourse than the mainstream. Traditionally, these dialogues have not been available in the mainstream literature for consumption by the general population; however, with the increase in social media and general internet usage, they are becoming more accessible. These discourses can take many forms and are enabled by the internet’s empowerment of users (Schmidt & Cohen 2013). This means that people, including drug users, can now engage in “asymmetrical, non-transparent information gathering” practices (Andrejevic 2006, as cited in Goldsmith & Brewer 2015), for example by typing various terms into a search engine and considering the results to be factual information.

A significant concern is that online communities, such as those comprising drug users, coalesce around these alternative narratives and enable significantly expanded social networks in which young people may engage with drug users whose opinions, ordinarily, would not be available to them (Wells, Elliott & Johnson 2009). Thus both low- and
higher-risk users, who may be segregated in their actual social networks, now have easy access to one another. These new and extended networks may provide a platform for the accelerated use of new substances such as legal highs (Tupper 2008; Vardakou, Pistos & Spiliopoulou 2011), while facilitating knowledge of the skills and language necessary to find drug dealers, or indeed eliminating the need to personally interact with dealers, thereby minimising the possibility of being ridiculed for incompetent use or being ripped off (Norman, Grace & Lloyd 2014).

**Methods**

The research methods of this study entailed a thematic analysis of the social media platform Facebook and three drug forums, as well as focus group interviews with 66 teenagers aged 14 to 16 from 10 secondary schools in Northern Ireland in 2010 and 2011. Within each of the schools, a sample of two classes, one in Year 11 and one in Year 12, was identified by a school staff member to participate in the research. Students from these classes were then asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group discussions. In groups of six, students were asked about their views on drugs and drug education. Fundamentally, the use of focus groups provided an opportunity to uncover teenagers’ attitudes about drugs, their drug use behaviours, their online activities, and also to establish whether their internet use influenced either drug attitudes or behaviours. All focus groups were conducted at the participant schools by the author. They were each approximately 45 minutes in duration; questions were open-ended and worded simply to allow respondents to determine the direction of the response. All focus group discussions were professionally transcribed. Ethical protocols were established and ethical permission was granted by the University of Ulster Filter Ethics Committee and University of Ulster Research Ethics Committee (UUREC) in 2010.

Thematic content analysis of websites, including Facebook and drug forums, was undertaken to inform and verify the qualitative data and to provide context for the study. This method was useful to triangulate the information gained through the focus groups and enabled cross-validation of data. Four websites were analysed in 2011 after these sites had been identified by participants as locations they had visited to obtain information about drugs: three popular forums and one social media site (Facebook). Social media and forums facilitate text-based communications, which often allow the user to adopt a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. This anonymity may encourage people to come together to discuss sensitive topics such as drug use. Content on these forums is usually organised as threads, and searches within a forum can retrieve all posts by an individual author. Some, but not all, forums are moderated. It is important when conducting internet-based research to be aware of the context within which the posts take place and the potential blurring between “the online” and “the offline”. Taking this into
account, this research was undertaken across several online sources, rather than limiting the scope to just one.

**Findings**
The focus group participants in this study used the internet in several ways: to find information; for social interaction; to buy and sell goods; to help them with their homework; and to play games, watch movies and download movies and music. All participants used the internet daily and most had sole use of at least one smart device such as a smartphone or tablet. Smartphones have become a critical and central tool in internet accessibility. They provide more discreet access than communally held devices (such as computers) as they can be used at school and at home without teachers or parents observing. Often parental restrictions were placed on devices, sites or amount of time spent online; however, many of the participants were able to circumnavigate this, for example by using the internet at night after “lights out” or in school (so long as they connected through their data provider and not the school’s WiFi, which had restrictions). Use of the internet commonly occurred at home, school, friends’ houses and public spaces (for example, a library, café or shopping centre).

Most participants stated that they went online regularly or semi-regularly to find out about drugs, and most sought this information in various locations, including search engines (e.g. Bing or Google), social media sites and drug forums. When participants were asked how they searched for information about drugs, common responses included “just Google the drugs you want to know about” (male), “Wikipedia” or “searching in Facebook” (male). An internet search by the author on 24 November 2016, for “information about drugs”, yielded 373,000,000 results on Google and 235,000,000 results on Bing. Suggested sites included a range of material reflecting differing perspectives from sources such as the UK National Health Service, harm reduction sites, Wikipedia, online pharmacies and “head shops”. Facebook often acted as a vehicle through which the students met virtual peers and linked through to drugs forums, blogs and head shops.

Analysis of the websites yielded conversations about drugs, drug use, purchase, quantity, quality, experience of use and legality. To give an idea of scale, one particular forum accessed in November 2016 reported 3.7 million visitors per month, 220,000 members, 150,000 newsletter subscribers and 5,418 active contributors, of which 56 were members and 5,362 guests. When you click through to “all threads”, you are presented with 1,233 pages of approximately 100 threads per page.

While online, participants were able to visit head shops directly or visit sites that linked through to them. Most of the young people felt confident that they knew where and how
to buy legal highs online. A cursory search of Google yielded a multitude of head shops selling legal highs, often eliminating the need for a street dealer. Some participants were able to describe how they joined different pages on social media and were able to link through to various drug forums, chat rooms and head shops. Some signed up to the forums. When asked about this process, their message was consistent: “you just type in whatever you want to know, go on to their page and add them” (female); “if you go through to one of these sites, sometimes they make you sign up. But that’s okay; you only have to give your email address” (male). When asked about age restrictions, a common response was “yeah, you just tick the box to say you’re over 18. No one checks” (male). While the majority of participants did not have access to a required credit or debit card for payment, they reported asking an older friend, acquaintance or even older sibling for the use of their card and they would “throw in” (combine their money).

While we often think of young people as passive recipients of online drug information, a small minority of students discussed using the forums to post comments and ask questions. Some disclosed their own drug use; while others discussed that of a friend. Not all students engaged in online forums, but among those who did, frequently asked questions included: “how bad is the comedown?” (female); “how to get rid of a bad comedown” (male); and “where’s the best place to buy?” (male). Regarding dissemination of their own information, one participant disclosed that they had recommended buying from a site called Discofood; another reported posting about “loyalist blues” (a locally available drug thought to be a synthesis of ecstasy and ketamine) because “there was nothing on about them” (male); and another had posted about the “drought” in West Belfast and their experiences while taking legal highs, cannabis and alcohol.

Search engine algorithms have biases that affect search engine personalisation (Diakopoulos 2014). Thus, if a young person has looked at several pro-drug forums, when they enter the search term “drugs” or something similar into a search engine, they are likely to generate results including similar pro-drug websites. Here it is evident that digital media can format the way young people think and act in relation to issues, as well as potentially acting as a barrier to them receiving reputable or accurate information. When asked, the majority of participants were not aware that algorithms existed. Even within Facebook, a quick search by the author for “buy drugs” yielded results reflecting the wider internet – Facebook pages on buying drugs, some on harm reduction, and others such as “Christians Against Drugs”. Facebook retains form data, which essentially works the same way as an algorithm, so students are more likely to be directed to the same type of page each time they search. This study, in agreement with Norman, Grace and Lloyd (2014) and Walsh (2011), found that people access drug pages via Facebook as a source
of information/research and to communicate or gain reassurance from like-minded, non-judgemental people. Norman, Grace and Lloyd’s (2014) youngest participants were 16 years old; the present research demonstrates that even younger people are seeking drug information online.

In pursuit of drug-related information, young people sometimes came across “e-psychonauts”; that is, users who are educated and informed about particular drugs and who are willing to disseminate information relating to the latest psychoactive substances. Orsolini and colleagues (2015) in their study of e-psychonauts found that 15–21% of their sample were educated to postgraduate degree/PhD level. E-psychonauts direct users to various head shops and online pharmacies to buy both licit and illicit drugs. This is a burgeoning grey market where drugs are sold without the need for a genuine prescription (Walsh 2011). Here, the primary concern is that the often-nuanced information imparted by an e-psychonaut could be incompletely understood by young people, meaning they are more at risk of harm.

The various participant-identified sites selling legal highs were found to contain information about drugs or acted as a discussion forum for people to chat about their experiences of taking various drugs. This revealed a spectrum of information about drugs ranging from abstinence-promoting to pleasure-seeking perspectives. Disturbingly, harm reduction messages were often absent or only very brief. Emotive abstinence-promoting examples included words and phrases such as “rip the heart out of society” and “rob youth of their future”. These contrasted with pleasure-seeking examples calling on users to “vote for their favourite legal high”. The young people reported these types of messages to be “pro-drugs”, whereas analysis of the forums demonstrated that many posts were detailed and did in fact provide balanced information. Participants interpreting these quotes out of context is concerning, but unfortunately the context and nuances within this message could become lost within individual members’ postings. When young people seeking information visit such sites in combination with drug forums and official-looking Wikipedia pages, distinguishing between fact and fiction could prove difficult.

While there are some credible drug information sites, such as FRANK (www.talktofrank.com), search engines do not distinguish between what is reputable and what is not, and participants had difficulty in making the distinction themselves.

When asked about the value of Wikipedia, common responses were: “yes, it’s a proper site so you can trust it” (male); “it’s written by scientists” (female); “it has all of the information” (female); and “they use the proper language so you know it’s official” (female). A search by the author revealed that one of the most popular Facebook pages mentioned, with 36,553 “likes” as of November 2016, was an information-based page,
with most of its content imported from Wikipedia. The main information on this page concerned why people use drugs and how to administer drugs; there was also a link to the Wikipedia portal “Pharmacy and Pharmacology”. Wikipedia can be altered by any user, and as such, even with measures in place such as the ability to “flag” suspect entries, it is not always clear who has updated the site or whether their update is accurate. The investigation of the accuracy of drug information on Wikipedia conducted by Clauson et al. (2008) found that the online encyclopaedia was not authoritative and “should only be a supplemental source of drug information” (p.1814). While it is important to note that this study was published eight years ago, its findings contrast with the views of the young people participating in this research. When asked, most students stated that they felt Wikipedia was a credible source. It appears that only savvy Wikipedia users (excluding the participants who were unaware that Wikipedia could be modified by any user) follow up information they are unsure of and make their own judgement of the source.

In terms of drug forums, participants who read or took part in discussions around drugs and drug use (known as “drug threads”) believed the other users were credible sources of information. These threads are often misleading and provide incomplete information or limited context. Many threads had lengthy and frequent contributions from users (site users and those identifying themselves as drug users). The more posts a contributor has made, the higher their status in the forum. Such contributors are designated “expert users”. One such contributor for example, a male from the Republic of Ireland, was credited with 10,419 posts on one forum, which was not uncommon for that particular site. If you are a member of the site, you can access all posts by users.

Most of the forum users indicated they consumed drugs in nightclubs or before and after parties. The majority of school-aged young people are excluded from this night-time economy, and all of the participants lived with their parents, as did the vast majority of their friends. Thus there is a clear disparity between adult users’ and school-aged young people’s drug-taking environments. For example, if an adult experiences difficulties while using a drug at a club, there will be someone on hand, such as a member of staff who can call an ambulance if necessary. In addition, the quantities stated on forum posts were not always safe for all ages/body types. One participant disclosed following advice given on a thread only to take too much of the drug and collapse.

While seasoned drug users are able to interpret what other forum users contribute, school-aged young people may not have the same experience or knowledge to draw upon. When asked about the validity of the information that they had come across in their own searches, some students had reservations as some users were unknown to them, but a significant number felt the information was reliable because the forum user had
“obviously taken the drugs before so they know what to do” (female). Often the young people placed a lot more emphasis on a reliable source having experiential knowledge rather than information or education “you learn more on Facebook than you do in school” (female), “it needs to be useful, rather than the same old shit” (female). A crude measure of this experience was the user’s number of forum contributions.

Discussion
The variety of information about drugs available online, on a multitude of different websites, is often presented without context and may create an illusion for young people of safe drug-taking behaviour, which can inadvertently exacerbate their risk of harm. Information is disseminated on the internet via social media, chat rooms, forums and blogs to which the young participants in this study had ready access. It has been argued that some of these websites rarely provide accurate information about the active ingredients, recommended dosages or potential side effects of any of these drugs (Schmidt et al. 2011; Vardakou, Pistos & Spiliopoulou 2011). While some specialist online drug forums do use informed and harm-reduction-focused moderators, it is easy for young people to misinterpret these messages, or for the harm reduction messages to get lost in the noise of the internet.

In recent years the relationships between drugs users, drugs dealers and even drugs themselves have been reconstituted (Grabosky 2001). The internet and social media platforms have created space for new and alternative narratives and depictions of drug use, which stray from traditional prevention or harm reduction messages. Social media allows young people to come into contact with others they would not normally have access to. Crucially, inquiries into online communities record important differences between online and offline peer groups. A key difference is the element of choice or homophily in online communities as opposed to geographical proximity offline (Lehdonvirta & Räsänen 2011; Steinkuehler & Williams 2006). The former may afford credibility to the opinions of other group members: students seek them specifically because they seem “expert”. As was evident in this study, the internet has significantly reshaped the notion of peer influence.

Experienced drug users, who possess knowledge of drug use, often use the internet as an instrument of dissemination of this knowledge to their peers (Norman, Grace & Lloyd 2014). School-aged young people, like the participants in this study, may be affected by this dissemination. They are less likely to be able to distinguish good information from bad, and may attempt to translate what information they find into their own, very different, drug-taking contexts.
Relatively recently in Australia there was a move towards censoring drug-related information online (Barratt, Lenton & Allen 2013). Instead of attempting to censor the internet, those wishing to promote harm reduction must engage with these narratives. The present research demonstrates that, rather than being passive receptors of information, young people are active in seeking out, evaluating and assessing evidence based on a range of knowledges and influences. They make decisions in the social context of their own lives about how this information relates to them. There need to be safe spaces online where the young can be better informed about risks and dangers; otherwise, we risk ostracising those who are already using drugs and potentially disseminating this information to their peers. While there are undoubtedly reliable sources of information online, it is key to the safety of young people that they are made aware of these sources, especially within the highly competitive internet environment outlined above.

It is increasingly important that policymakers become familiar with the various ways in which drugs and their use are constructed and framed online. Young people make choices based on a range of observations and interactions with these narratives.

**Conclusion**

This paper has investigated the role of the internet in informing teenagers about drugs. The majority of focus group participants stated that they received most of their drug information through their peers and the internet, including social media. A new drugs discourse is produced and framed within this setting. The blurring of boundaries and the spectrum of information online creates space for new drug narratives to emerge and manifest. The impact of this can be twofold: first, the advent of new drug trends, for example, young people trying new drugs they have read about online; and second, a potential increase in harm for young people who are receiving this information. While it is realised that young people are not necessarily the target of such information, their risk of harm is potentially increased by the slippage between the experience of the source and that of the audience.

**Notes**

1. Online retailers selling substances marketed as legal highs and drug paraphernalia often used for consumption of cannabis and tobacco.
2. This ranged from misuse of over-the-counter or prescription drugs, legal highs and illicit drugs such as cannabis and cocaine. The most common route of administration was orally or nasally. None of the young people had injected drugs.

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Youth work education
A look at international youth work education programs from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA

Jennifer Brooker*

Youth work graduates, upon the completion of their studies, should have acquired a sound knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic and political factors which impact upon the daily lives of the young people in their care. An investigation of 14 higher education youth work qualifications in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA highlighted a number of similarities and differences between the programs. Reflecting local practice and professional and educational expectations, similarities are noted in the courses offered in each program, with research being the only subject all students will take. The main difference observed is the emphasis placed upon the practical component of programs, with a range of 5% to 50% of scheduled time dedicated to this important aspect of a student’s learning.

Key words: Youth work, youth sector, higher education, training, research subjects

Numerous job titles in every country highlight the complexity and variety of youth work roles now available, whether as a youth therapist, family care manager or youth alcohol and other drugs worker. The common element of all these roles is working with young people, although each has different settings, work hours and program outcomes (Smith 2013).

This complexity, in turn, has implications for the education and training of those working in the youth sector. What youth work graduates require in order to be successful in their working roles upon the completion of their studies is essentially the same around the world, that is the ability to successfully address the multitude of scenarios of daily

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practice. How this is achieved varies across the world depending upon a number of factors, including practice frameworks and professional and educational expectations.

An investigation of youth work practice and corresponding higher education programs in Australia (4) against a selection of similar programs in Canada (4), New Zealand (1), the United Kingdom (4) and the USA (1) provided an overview of the articulation/pathway possibilities, assessment, curriculum content and rationale, delivery (distance, face-to-face or recognised prior learning – RPL), duration of each course, number of hours dedicated to the practicum aspect of each course and, finally, selection processes.

Outside influences on youth work programs

Five outside influences impact upon every youth work program: 1) local practice frameworks, 2) professional associations, 3) government policies, 4) the age range of clients, and 5) professionalism and certification of youth workers. Each is important in shaping the knowledge, skills and attributes a graduate must possess on completion of their studies, and in meeting the expectations of the youth work sector.

1. Local practice frameworks

Three predominant frameworks of practice are evident across the sites of this research:

- Informal education (United Kingdom) – education that occurs outside the formal school setting and is used to build relationships with vulnerable young people through informal educational practices.

- Positive youth development (Australia, New Zealand, USA) – a strengths-based approach engaging youth with all aspects of their communities and shifting the focus away from seeing young people as a problem (youth.gov 2016)

- Therapeutic care (Canada) – helping the child or young person to form meaningful relationships within their integrated environments (home, school, youth centre, institutional setting etc.) and so actively including the family and all other key people in the child and young person’s life (Whitwell 2002).

The primary influences on which the associated curriculum of all youth work programs is delivered provide the basis of the knowledge, skills and attributes an effective youth worker must possess in their respective settings. For example, in England and Wales, each program investigated includes the subjects ‘Formal and Informal Education’ (Coventry University) and ‘Critical Analysis of Informal Education’ (Glyndwr University), which reflects the importance of youth work as an equal partner to formal education. In New Zealand, where every program has been written against the national Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA), the emphasis in youth development
practice is evident throughout. In Canada, subjects in therapeutic care practice are spread throughout each program. Working with those aged from four years onwards is included across all years of study in every program. Studying the family is also evident, emphasising that contemporary youth work practice in Canada “… meets the needs of children, youth and families within the space and time of their daily lives” (Stuart 2009, p.47). The importance of family also features in New Zealand, with undergraduate subjects such as ‘Promoting Family, Whanau and Community Cohesion’.

In Australia, subjects about community work are more likely, with students learning how to create programs involving young people in activities run for or by community partners. Ensuring that the “individual child and their social and family context” are located within practice (Department of Human Services (DHS) 2007, p.5) has not been a focus of pre-service training in Australia to date and no current pre-service youth worker education program in Australia incorporates “the family” as a named core subject at any level.

2. Professionalism and certification of workers

The need to hold a relevant youth work qualification before gaining employment within the youth sector is required only in the United Kingdom where professional youth workers must hold a BHons in youth work. In Australia and New Zealand the industry self-regulates with a diploma being the most often accepted qualification to determine a youth worker’s professional status.

Although a degree is preferable in Canada and the USA, an official certification process has been jointly formulated over many years to support those working in the sector. With the intention of improving the professional standing of youth workers generally, it was first put forward as early as 1980, when the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP) responded to safety concerns for clients, high staff turnovers and poor career development opportunities. In 2017, this is particularly important, as each American state sets its own standards, and within each state county welfare departments nominate their own standards based on guidance from the state (Curry et al. 2010; Schnieder-Munoz 2015).

In 2017, an increasing number of youth workers across North America are voluntarily participating in the certification process conducted by the Child and Youth Care Certification Board consisting of a written exam, an application with supporting documentation regarding education and experience, two written peer references, a supervisor’s written assessment and an evidence portfolio. This process references the 2010 North American Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners (Child and Youth Care Certification Board (CYCCB) 2015).
3. Government policies

Policy provides a strong focus in Australian higher education programs; each of the four available undergraduate degrees in Australia offers this subject in the last year of study. In New Zealand, however, the previously mentioned YDSA (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002), the central government’s youth strategy, is the basis of all qualification levels. Integrating holistic services from a strengths-based approach, the New Zealand policy reflects the local, indigenous youth development practices of the Maori people (National Youth Workers Network Aotearoa (NYWNA) 2011).

In the United Kingdom, the current push towards devolution has meant that each of the four nations has been charged by Westminster with the responsibility of delivering its own youth policy. In England, the current policy is Positive for youth: A new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13–19 and supplementary supporting documents (HM Government 2011). Bringing together nine ministerial departments, including Education, Criminal Justice and Health, the policy is billed as “A new approach to cross-government policy for the 4.5 million young people aged 13–19” to become productive and successful adult members of their communities (Youth.gov 2016).

The latest Welsh youth policy, The National Youth Service Strategy for Wales 2014–2018, informs government policy and youth work practitioners on how to best support young people in Wales. Built around the Welsh Government’s rights-based approach, the policy aims to help young people realise their potential by supporting them to develop life skills and resilience, by capitalising on informal and non-formal education practices (Welsh Government 2014).

The Scottish Executive acknowledges that “a strong, responsive and imaginative youth work sector that supports and empowers young people is vital in our drive to improve their wellbeing and life chances” (Education Scotland 2014, p.2). Our ambitions for improving the life chances of young people in Scotland: National Youth Work Strategy 2014–2019 was written in partnership with YouthLink Scotland, the national youth work agency, and Education Scotland (2014).

In Northern Ireland, youth work has, until recently, held a unique position when compared to the other examples in this study in that it received legislated government support. The current Northern Ireland youth strategy, Priorities for youth: Improving young people’s lives through youth work (Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) 2013) emphasises those services which relate to education alone and therefore does not acknowledge the full breadth of current youth work practice.
In Canada, each of the 10 provinces and three territories is responsible for its own social welfare sector. Consequently each has its own youth policy, similar to the situation in the United Kingdom. Major cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, also write policies that address specific concerns and areas of priority for their youth.

Australia does not have a national youth policy. However, each state government does, and various state youth advisory councils have produced documents, such as the Youth Advisory Council of Victoria’s (YACvic) *Code of ethical practice – a first step for the Victorian youth sector* (2007). Developed by the sector to support workers, the *Code of ethical practice* greatly influences youth work curricula and is taught to all Victorian youth work students as the basis of their ethical practice with young people.

The United States is unique in that the care of youth is not a national concern. Rather, the many responsibilities are given directly to each of the 50 states and 3,000 counties, which have their own complex systems related to jurisdiction and youth work expectations. A coherent understanding of the American youth work sector is almost unattainable (Eckles 2015). A draft policy published in 2013 by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, *Pathways for youth*, it is yet to be adopted. Created through public consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, it is global in its focus and provides “… a vision that acknowledges the importance of pathways to opportunity for youth that include meaningful connections and safe, healthy, and stable places to live, learn and work” (US Department of State 2015).

4. The age range of clients

An important practice difference evident globally is the age range of clients. Although the United Nations defines youth as those aged between 15 and 24, there is no global consistency as to what “youth” is. Rather, this “… age-bound state in life … commonly seen as socially significant and psychologically complex” (Kehily 2007, pp.15-16) varies around the world across a moving scale of 0 to 39 years of age.

In New Zealand, Wales and most of Australia, this translates to engaging with 12- to 25-year-olds, while English youth workers employ practices suitable for 13- to 19-year-olds. Youth workers in Scotland interact with 11- to 25-year-olds. In Northern Ireland, youth workers are required to know how to work with the greatest age range, 4 to 25 years, further divided into five distinct age cohorts of 4 to 8 years, 9 to 13 years, 14 to 18 years, 19 to 21 years and 22 to 25 years. Priority there is given to groups and individuals aged between 9 and 18 years (DENI 2013, pp.14-15, 17-18). Canadian child and youth care practitioners are also broadly based, working with those aged 4 to 18 years.
Currently, there is a movement in the majority of American states to mandate that services continue to the age of 21, up from the current age of 18 years, with some states increasing the upper limit to 23 years (Schneider-Munoz 2015). For youth work students this obviously impacts upon the curriculum required for working with various age ranges.

5. The influence of professional bodies

Professional bodies, together with the youth sector in many of the sites, have identified and implemented the required competencies (Canada, New Zealand and the USA) or standards (New Zealand/United Kingdom) deemed necessary for youth workers in the respective countries to successfully undertake their roles. These standards, regulated by a professionally approved body, are deemed to be the crux of good practice, integral to the education of new workers, and are delivered at all levels of education.

For example, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), employers, practitioners and other stakeholders from across the United Kingdom created the National Occupational Standards (NOS) in 2002. Identifying competencies, skills, knowledge and understanding that underpin the values all youth workers require, these standards are used by all levels of academia to shape course and training content, and by the youth industry to determine the duties and responsibilities of employees. Consisting of a total of 41 youth work standards, each standard has a number of associated performance criteria that an individual should be able to demonstrate if they are to be deemed competent in the sector.

In North America, a professional Child and Youth Care practitioner is an established worker who is competent across all practice settings (Eckles 2015). In 2010, the CYCCB published North American competencies for professional child and youth work practitioners – a meta-analysis of 87 competency documents identified by American and Canadian workers as most valued within the field, including the best practice standards a worker should value, know and do in their daily work practice. These were then sorted into five work-focused domains: professionalism, cultural and human diversity, applied human development, relationship and communication, and developmental practice methods (CYCCB 2015; Curry, Richardson & Pallock 2011).

Kent State University mapped its Bachelor of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) – Child and Youth Development against the meta-analysis of 87 sets of competency documents from North America. Identifying significant gaps in some areas, two new courses – Positive Youth Development and Professional CYC Practice – were created while others were noted to require only minor adjustments to become competency focused. The team also worked with instructors in other programs, such as Recreation and Program Planning, so that their programs could also become more relevant to students.
In Australia, there is no formally recognised professional, regulating body. Consequently, each higher education program has been written by the staff of the educational institution concerned in consultation with the youth industry. As a result, each qualification is unique, and the curriculum does not follow any formal formula regarding requirements to be a successful youth work practitioner.

**Youth work programs**

Fourteen higher education programs in Australia (4), Canada (4), New Zealand (1), the United Kingdom (4) and the USA (1) provided an overview of the articulation/pathway possibilities, assessment, curriculum content and rationale, delivery – distance, face-to-face or RPL, duration, practicum requirements and selection processes. All 14 aim to ensure that students graduate with the expected standards, requirements and training deemed necessary for youth workers.

**Qualifications: Bachelor vs. BHons.**

Only the United Kingdom offers a Bachelor degree with Honours, upgraded from the Higher Education (HE) Diploma in 2010, the previous professional qualification. All other HE programs surveyed for this study are bachelor degrees, whether a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Science or Bachelor of Youth Work combination, with the possibilities of subsequent postgraduate studies.

The title of each qualification reflects the youth industry practice framework pursued in each country. For example, in the United Kingdom all but three of the 39 undergraduate degrees on offer included “Youth and Community” in their title, which reflects the strong links of working with the community. New Zealand’s Bachelor of Youth Development was written against the national youth strategy, YDSA, to ensure that graduates are well grounded in integrated holistic services from a strengths-based approach. In Canada, students work towards a Bachelor of Child and Youth Care, reflecting that their practice will be with children, youth and families in a variety of settings, providing therapeutic programs that use everyday life events to facilitate change (Stuart 2009). Australian graduates will, for the most part, obtain a Bachelor of Youth Work, focusing their practice on those aged 10–12 to 25 years of age in a range of settings.

**Selection and screening processes**

In Australia, a continued reliance upon the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score that final-year secondary school students achieve each year is a practice that has not changed in over 20 years. As a result, Australian students are less likely to have an understanding of what the sector involves when they enter their various programs. This contrasts significantly with methods employed in the United Kingdom, which include
rigorous interviewing and the expectation that those applying have significant prior working experience within the sector. Applicants without two years’ previous youth sector experience can be asked to reapply the following year once they have gained the necessary additional experience within the sector. In New Zealand, the selection process is equally intense. In Canada, the interview process for the programs investigated for this study has ceased, and the associated staff are no longer part of the selection process, leading to issues of student suitability and retention.

**Program duration and delivery**

In 2017, HE students in Australia, England, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and Wales complete their various degrees in three years; in Canada, Scotland and the USA they undergo four years of study to gain an undergraduate degree in youth work. Students will complete, on average, four courses each semester, except in Canada where students take a minimum of five courses per semester. Only Canada offers accelerated programs for those with previous experience or a relevant and related previous study history.

The majority of the programs investigated for this study are delivered by universities through the traditional face-to-face options of lectures and tutorials, which also include group discussions, group work, practical exercises, mentoring, case studies, reading articles and media reports, journal preparation, supervision sessions with tutors and support staff, assignment preparation and agency placements. Class size ranges from 25 students per cohort at Ulster University to 500-plus each year at Kent State University. The final number is determined by the deliverer.

In New Zealand, conscious that many students are not able to relocate for study purposes due to family and work commitments, WelTec initially delivered the Bachelor of Youth Development in short teaching blocks of 36 hours of face-to-face delivery per subject. Whether studying at the Auckland or Wellington site, an online tutor provides support to students throughout the year.

Kent State University in Ohio offers a mix of face-to-face and online courses to their students. Preference is given to the former format because being in front of a class is seen as a safety issue and more personal and relevant when teaching about an industry that works with people, a sentiment echoed by others interviewed for this study.

Recognised Prior Learning (RPL), including significant previous work experience in the youth sector, is offered by most program providers and is especially obvious in North America where Community College graduates are able to enter an associated undergraduate degree in the third year. In New Zealand, those holding a National Diploma in Youth Work (Level 6) are eligible for the cross-credited courses in the
undergraduate degree, leading to fewer timetabled courses in the first and second years of study (WelTec 2011).

**Curriculum content and rationale**

Based on programs delivered in the 2014/2015 academic year at each site, the curriculum content and rationale for each program can be divided into four categories:

1. Theoretical studies
   a. Academic studies
   b. Professional studies
2. Practical studies
3. Academic support studies

The overall curriculum content of each program, other than in Australia, strongly reflects the local practice in the sector of each country, which can be directly attributed to strong connections with the associated youth work professions and the youth sector.

**Theoretical studies**

Emphasising the theoretical aspects of youth work, a graduate requires a full understanding of why they will work in particular ways with young people; this category can be split further into two subcategories: academic studies and professional studies.

**Academic studies**

Only basic research methodology could be deemed as universal across every Higher Education program examined for this study. Most often introduced in the second semester of second year, the research units continue until the end of each program, giving the majority of students the ability to learn the theory and skills necessary to create a final product of either a dissertation or a project centred on youth work practice. The skills learned are seen as essential for various aspects of a student’s future employment opportunities and provide additional research for the sector.

The number of specifically youth-focused courses is important to note as it is these which, in theory, distinguish a youth work program from any other program delivered within a university or similar site. Most often beginning with an introductory subject such as ‘What is Youth Work?’ (RMIT University) or ‘The Context of Youth Work’ (Ulster University), Australian programs have the greatest number of subjects with Youth in the title. With an average of seven subjects per program, students complete subjects such as ‘Australian Youth Cultures’ (ACU) and ‘Youth Issues’ (ECU). This is not a usual
occurrence elsewhere and implies that every other program investigated could be seen as any community-focused program if it were not for the qualification title.

Health subjects are included in some programs under a range of headings. In 2014, Coventry University added ‘Supporting the Health Needs of Children and Adolescents’ in their fourth semester because it was identified as a missing area of necessary study by the staff and their industry partners. Australian undergraduate programs do not appear to place any prominence on this area; only ACU offers a subject which could be seen to fit this category, ‘Wellbeing and Young People’, taken in the second semester of study. Canadian programs are more likely to include health subjects with ‘Human Sexuality’ (George Brown College), ‘Mental Health Interventions’ (Mount Royal University) and ‘Psychology of Mental Health and Mental Illness’ (Humber College) reflecting a holistic therapeutic care approach.

Classes addressing alcohol and other drugs were most often nominated by recent graduates as the area of study they would have benefitted most from; yet this topic was most often covered through training opportunities provided by employers. Graduates stated this was too late for such important information and called for related subjects to be incorporated into undergraduate degrees. The only core subject on this topic was offered at Mount Royal University in Canada where students take ‘Mental Health and Substance Abuse’ as a core subject in their first semester.

The legal aspects of youth work are a common thread of study in many programs, although emphasis varies greatly. For example, students at Humber College undertake ‘Legislation, Advocacy and Community Resources’ in their first semester. RMIT students study ‘Legal and Justice Issues for Young People’ in third semester. The importance of understanding relevant legislation pertaining to young people enables workers to support clients in understanding the legal system, including the relevant terms, Acts, court outcomes and the impact of sentences on a young person’s life.

The opportunity to choose an elective in an area of personal interest is offered to about half of all undergraduate youth work students. The number of times this is offered during a program varies greatly between universities, ranging between one at Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne through to six at Humber College in Toronto, where students choose an elective every semester except semesters one and five. Australian Catholic University (ACU) is the only university that allows students the opportunity to choose an elective in their first semester.

A key area of difference between programs is the emphasis given to indigenous studies. New Zealand is the outstanding example, requiring all who work with Maori, the local
indigenous group, to have a proven working knowledge of the community’s culture and language before being allowed to work with the indigenous community. Australia and Canada also have significant indigenous populations; however, no prior knowledge is required before beginning work with the respective communities. In Australia, only ACU and VU offer indigenous studies, in the first and third semesters of study respectively. These were not evident in the United Kingdom or the USA programs investigated.

**Updating program content for the 21st century**

The likelihood of coming into contact with a young person who is a refugee or recent immigrant with a limited command of the English language and limited literacy and numeracy skills has increased over the past decade. Current youth worker education provides training within any HE program that prepares youth workers to work with members of the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community.

Many youth workers practice within an educational setting, and the age of the client cohort suggests that the vast majority of those to be supported are engaged in some form of education. Yet none of the investigated programs had timetabled a specific subject about interacting with young people within formal educational settings.

Digital literacy is another area not apparent in the offerings for youth worker students, and yet IT skills are necessary to gain employment and undertake further study. An IT skills subject might possibly be offered as an elective; however, a full electives list for each program could not be accessed to confirm this.

VU’s Bachelor of Youth Work in Melbourne is the only program that continues the strong emphasis on sport and recreation, a feature of all youth worker training in Australia before the late 1990s. This is an important area of potential study for graduates who may have a strong empathy for this line of work, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) showed that many young people are involved in sport and music outside of school.

Prior to 1976, sociology and psychology featured as year-long subjects in Australia. In 2017, sociology is still offered but not as obviously named other than at George Brown College, Toronto, which offers ‘Introduction to Sociology’ in the last semester of the Advanced Diploma: Child and Youth Care Program. ACU is unique as students complete ‘Introduction to Sociology’ and ‘Sociology of Gender’ and six offerings of ‘Any Advanced Sociology’.

Psychology is not taught specifically in any Australian youth work undergraduate degree in 2017. This differs from Canadian programs where students take on a minimum of two dedicated psychology subjects during their four years of study.
Professional studies

Professional aspects of youth work are delivered as theoretical and/or practical subjects that may feed directly into work-integrated learning opportunities. Increasing in emphasis each year, subjects specifically supporting students in their field placements vary across the programs and again reflect the practice framework pertaining to each country, although common topics emerge upon closer inspection.

An integral part of a youth worker’s employment, these subjects are directly related to the practical element of each course. Most often known as ‘Principles and Practices of Youth Work’, it includes topics such as CV writing, applying for a job, ethical behaviour and dressing appropriately.

Specific skills relating to communication, counselling and ethical studies are far fewer in proportion compared to the theoretical subjects offered in each timetable. This shows a significant shift in delivery focus since the programs were first delivered, which historically placed a greater emphasis on activities a youth worker would be engaged in during their working time, including arts, crafts, hobbies, sport and recreational activities such as camping.

Creating, delivering and evaluating programs is taught to all students, for both group and individual settings. Group work, for example, is evident in almost every program – ‘Working with Groups’ (Coventry, ECU and WelTec) or ‘Group Dynamics I and II’ (George Brown College). Classes about case management are not as common but can be categorised with subjects that focus on supporting young people to set goals and working with children and young people deemed to be at risk.

In contemporary practice, understanding the differences between leadership and management helps workers understand their own working styles and what to expect in the workplace. Subjects which look at governance, organisational structure and policy are available to only a few students. RMIT University students study ‘Power and Governance’ in their first semester and ‘Organisational Studies’ in semester five, which is unusual as this type of subject is timetabled only once in any other program.

Practical studies

Every youth work program examined for this study included a practical element (working directly with young people in a youth organisation) as part of their program. Timetabled to occur each year of study in every country other than Australia, the emphasis placed upon this aspect of a program was often determined by outside factors, primarily a professional body responsible for determining what is appropriate for
students to complete so they can be deemed competent and work-ready upon completion of their studies.

In Australia, HE youth work programs dedicate less than 10% of their scheduled study time to this important aspect of study. The introduction of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) into Australian HE courses highlights educational institutions’ awareness of their inability to provide all of the necessary experiences that represent modern learning in the 21st century. Placing a greater emphasis on undertaking authentic practice has led to HE incorporating what has been a central premise of vocational education and practice, that is the use of the workplace as a major centre of learning (Billet 2009; Costley 2007).

All other programs timetabled between 33% and 50% of a student’s undergraduate degree to working directly within the youth sector. For example, the National Youth Agency (NYA), responsible for monitoring and evaluating all youth work programs throughout England, determined that students must complete a minimum of 800 hours of practicum during their Honours degree.

In England, all first-year HE programs follow a similar format – a combination of observation and minimal duties, depending on the arrangements each university has with their local youth organisations. By the second year, students are embarking on field placements in a variety of settings, including residential homes, council settings and health services, in local and overseas placements.

The final-year placements are built around a dissertation presented before the end of the academic year. Bringing together their research skills in an area of interest that students have negotiated with the lecturers and tutors, the aim of the dissertation is to provide students with the practical and theoretical perspectives that will make them grounded practitioners in the youth sector.

Students undertaking Humber College’s Bachelor of Child and Youth Care (Toronto, Canada) complete a field placement in seven of their eight semesters, and a 14-week internship over the summer vacation between years three and four, completing a total of 1,000 hours of practicum.

Students in New Zealand are expected to spend 12 to 14 hours per week in their placement for 34 weeks over three years, a total of more than 1,200 hours.

Most students access field placements through a dedicated staff member, though some programs leave it entirely to the student. Work experience “expos” or fairs created for the purpose of showcasing what is available to students new to the sector, such as at Glyndwr
University (Wales), are held early in the program. Serving a dual purpose, they directly connect students with youth organisations.

**Academic support studies**

Supporting incoming students to succeed in their studies from their first day on campus was seen to be important by all interviewed for this study. This acknowledgement that a different set of skills is required of students as they enter tertiary studies reflects an educational institution’s overall commitment to their students. In 2015, however, only three of the programs offered formal, timetabled programs. Different from professional classes, this support is designed to teach students how to read academic texts, write an essay and other relevant documents so they will succeed as tertiary students.

Always offered in the first semester, Mount Royal in Alberta, has timetabled ‘General Education Requirement (English Cluster 4)’ as one of their first five courses, while students at George Brown College, Toronto, take ‘College English’. Coventry University is the only United Kingdom university selected in this study to offer such a course, ‘Academic Skills and Reflective Practice’, which is the students’ first timetabled class.

The remaining qualifications offer orientation programs and ongoing tutor support.

**Assessment**

Students complete a range of tasks, including essays, case studies and reports related to tasks they will undertake in their daily work lives, as well as presentation work, both as individuals and in groups, field placement and the associated assigned tasks, which vary between sites.

Differences relate back to the emphasis placed on the overall focus of each program, with Australian HE youth work degrees emphasising a greater academic focus and minimal time in the field during each program when compared to other qualifications.

**Conclusion**

A comparison of 14 HE youth work education programs from across Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA highlights the similarities and differences related to delivery of each and the influencing factors. Similar methods of delivery and assessment appear but with differences regarding the final curriculum content and selection processes. There is a concern that some of the more pertinent issues relating to young people in the 21st century, such as alcohol and other drugs awareness, mental health, working with refugees and immigrants, and IT, are not included in the current curriculum taught to youth work students. The balance between the theory and
practice aspects of programs, for the most part, is consistent, but Australian and American qualifications have a way to go in addressing this balance on the practice side.

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Youth Action Network of Glenorchy (YANG)

Elisa Ryan*

With an estimated population well over 43,000 and situated in the north of greater Hobart, Glenorchy City is the fourth largest of the 29 Local Government areas in the state of Tasmania. Young people aged between 12 and 25 years make up a significant proportion – over 18% – of Glenorchy’s population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

The Glenorchy City Council has a strategic and facilitative approach to the provision of programs for that significant population. The role of the programs involves promoting youth participation, identifying youth needs and issues and bringing various stakeholders together to address these issues through a collaborative approach. This way of working acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of many social issues and the important roles to be played by agencies and levels of government in addressing them (Glenorchy City Council (GCC) 2014).

With a growing youth population, it was recognised that the establishment of a viable, functioning, interagency youth network would be central to addressing the many issues faced by young people in Glenorchy, and, in 1999, the Youth Action Network of Glenorchy (YANG) was established. Glenorchy City Council was well placed to play a key role in convening and supporting this response to an identified need to improve coordination and networking of youth services in the area.

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Now in its 18th year, YANG draws upon various data sets that guide the group’s direction and actions, including: the Glenorchy Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2014–2019 (a five-year plan based on a robust community engagement process), annual membership surveys, regular meetings with service providers and feedback from young people.

The Network, with a membership of over 100 service provider representatives, provides a valuable, ongoing and formal mechanism for information sharing, collaborative work and identification of youth needs for the Glenorchy community.

YANG has five key objectives in serving Glenorchy’s young people:

1. Identify gaps in service provision for young people.
2. Exchange information on current issues impacting on young people.
3. Work collaboratively on strategies to address issues impacting on young people.
4. Identify sources of funding to meet identified service gaps.
5. Ensure a coordinated approach to the development and provision of youth services.

A 2016 survey found that 63% of members believed that YANG was effective in meeting its key objectives, and 36% believed YANG to be very effective (YANG 2016).

To achieve its objectives, YANG:

- meets on a monthly basis
- establishes working groups/project teams to address identified needs/issues
- ensures that working groups will be action-based and may undertake research, develop strategies and/or develop and implement projects
- takes on recommendations tabled from working groups for endorsement and further action
- ensures that working groups use expertise outside the group members as appropriate.

YANG responds to issues and priorities by: identifying gaps in services and developing programs, campaigns and initiatives; researching and sharing evidence-based practices; skill sharing through working in partnerships; sharing of data and information to inform practice; funding submissions; offering in-kind support to other services; and providing advice and referrals to a wide range of community service and other organisations.
While YANG relies on continuity in engagement to have the best outcomes, there is, at times, specific demand or need for service providers and/or individuals to have intermittent or one-off interactions with the group meetings or events.

YANG has the flexibility to be a formal network and can provide strong united support to campaigns and projects, and, alternatively, has the liberty to lobby for youth rights, influence decision-making at a local or state level, and has the freedom to work by its own self-identified priorities and ethos. YANG can intentionally plan in advance or be reactive to a topical or emerging issue.

Although YANG has had a priority focus on action-based initiatives, the increasing need for YANG to be the link that connects services is evident. Each year YANG plans a number of events that provide opportunities for professional development and knowledge gathering. In 2016, YANG commenced a series of information sessions with relevant presentations. These sessions have proved to be a popular opportunity for sector workers to access information that impacts on their work with young people and families, and these have included information and Q & A sessions with various federal and state government services and departments.

Since 2013 YANG has hosted annual or bi-annual forums with the aim of increasing cross referrals and partnerships between organisations. The connections made through this networking have resulted in a number of new services and resources, including an English conversation group for young people, new legal information presentations at schools and public engagement activities. An evaluation following the most recent forum in March 2017 revealed that attendees believed they were 80% better informed about services in the youth sector as a result of attending the event (YANG 2016).

While we do not have accurate data on how many more referrals and collaborations, and how much more sharing of resources the YANG information sessions and forums produce, all participants report having experienced positive outcomes as a result of their attendance.

YANG often facilitates linkage of services and project partners in the sector; for example, a service provider may have identified a particular program need for young people in the area but does not have the contacts or relationships required to gather the necessary support. Bringing their program idea to YANG instantly opens up a conversation that ultimately produces a quick and positive outcome where services band together to make things happen. Without YANG’s assistance this outcome could have taken days or weeks to achieve.

A high level of trust has been fostered between the networking members, and there is clear evidence that services work better together and have increased opportunities as a
result of being a part of the membership. YANG is considered a reputable and reliable source of skill, advice and action-based initiatives.

Along with professional development opportunities, the YANG network often establishes working groups in response to identified issues. Outcomes from these groups have included positive solutions to several complex issues, resulting in improved service provision and opportunities for young people and agencies in Glenorchy.

Working groups or project teams have the capacity to recruit expertise outside the group. A prime example is ‘Seriously Smashed’, a binge drinking/harm minimisation project developed in 2014. The YANG membership brought in external providers to offer additional skills and develop this unique resource that supported the ideas of young people. A YANG working group met in a more condensed capacity, while the larger membership meetings were used to consult and report back and, more importantly, as an accountability source.

A more recent working group of YANG, established as a response to nuisance motorbike riding and unsafe road use, was successful in obtaining funds for a project called ‘Full Gear’. The advantage of a strong network in this instance was the support it was able to throw behind such an innovative, youth-designed program. Support like this automatically comes with a wide and varied directory of expertise to draw upon when needed.

The membership of the group is integral in the development and planning of initiatives and projects, and, perhaps more importantly, is an invaluable source for constructive criticism, evaluation and benchmarking for continuous improvement.

YANG works in conjunction with the Glenorchy Youth Task Force (GYTF), a special committee of the City Council that takes a strong interest in all issues affecting young people in Glenorchy. GYTF focuses on promoting a positive image of young people in the community, and on issues such as community safety, youth health and wellbeing – including drug and alcohol use – body image and positive mental health. The Task Force has worked with YANG on events such as RUOK Day, National Youth Week, sexual health and diversity forums, and drug and alcohol initiatives. The GYTF provides a valuable insight into the needs and ideas of young people in relation to specific issues concerning them.

The future direction of YANG is fully dependent on the needs of its members and the changing climate that is the community development/services/youth sector. The beauty of a network like YANG is that it can easily adapt as necessary, and needs can be identified by regular evaluation and feedback from its associates. For now, YANG will continue to be a rich and vibrant system of services that support one another to deliver the best
possible outcomes for young people. Although each member organisation concentrates on its own specific domains, all members agree on the same values and priorities.

In the absence of a blanket youth service in Glenorchy, YANG offers wraparound supports for young people and the community by working collaboratively for positive outcomes.

References
SPOTLIGHT

The Star of Malaysia’s R.AGE youth initiative was the top winner in WAN-IFRA’s 2016 World Young Reader Prize competition and offers an example of a structure that creates an ongoing view toward the future, whatever that may bring.

Malaysia case offers a model for innovation in news media engagement of young people

Aralynn Abare McMane*

Malaysia is not an easy country in which to do journalism, so one might be surprised that a model for how to take the next steps in news publishing would emerge there, both for young people and everyone else.

In 2016, Malaysia went up one notch in the World Press Freedom global rankings based on freedom of expression and of news media, but only to number 146 out 180 countries. Historically, Malaysian digital news sites have had more maneuvering room than print and broadcast operations, but that is changing. In March of the same year, the respected online news portal, The Malaysian Insider, closed its editorial operations after the state media regulator blocked local access to its site in reaction to its coverage of a major financial scandal.

However, there is much to learn about how to approach the future from the team at R.AGE, an initiative of The Star Media Group, which publishes the country’s second largest daily (the largest English language daily). In short, the R.AGE team gets it right

when it comes to change that keeps journalism, compelling storytelling and audience involvement at the heart of the work.

Led by Ian Yee, this team was named the 2016 World Young Reader News Publisher of the Year for an inspirational set of innovative actions based on a commitment to journalism.

“I believe many youth teams in newspapers struggle to get any kind of real recognition”, Yee said upon winning the WAN-IFRA award. “We’re often seen as just a bunch of plucky kids in some corner of the newsroom who aren’t quite real journalists, but this award helps us break that stereotype. [This recognition] reminds everyone that young journalists, armed with technology and the freedom to innovate, can be forces to be reckoned with. We can be disruptive to the newsroom – but in the best possible way.”

When they began at R.AGE, team members, mostly in their early and mid-20s, first learned to embrace the basics of serious, professional reporting, taught by veteran editors. Since then, the team has led the way for The Star to explore new digital frontiers. Part of that achievement can be attributed to exceptional success in workplace relations around gender.

The R.AGE team is mostly female, its core values forged by the previous R.AGE editors, Ivy Soon and Tan Ju Eng. In terms of senior management, the R.AGE team now receives its direction from June H.L. Wong, The Star’s chief operating officer of content development; while group chief editor Leanne Goh has also long advocated taking young people seriously.

“I’m probably biased because I work here, but I’m really proud that the company has done so well in allowing gender equality to thrive”, Yee says. “The company didn’t do them any favors or promote them through tokenism. It simply created a fair environment for all genders, but the women themselves worked hard to earn their own success.”

The R.AGE team has also worked hard for its success. In a blog about the 10th anniversary of R.AGE, Yee explained how his older editors insisted he do serious journalism, despite his own skepticism that anyone would care.

“They kept us churning out heavy feature stories on politics, social issues, student rights, and so on – even when the reporters didn’t always enjoy it”, he recalls. “In hindsight, our editors were right all along. Young Malaysians have always cared about social issues – they just never had a platform they were comfortable with to learn about and discuss them. They weren’t being empowered to make a difference. I was getting emails from people telling me how our stories were making a difference, especially with marginalised
communities like young people living in urban poverty, or people living with HIV.”
(http://rage.com.my/a-decade-of-r-age)

When it came time to embrace social media, the skepticism was from other older staff. “The common joke back then was that young people only used social media to tell everyone what they had for lunch”, he wrote. “We weren’t buying it.”

The R.AGE staff was early in taking the brand of serious youth journalism (and some fun) to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram “and pretty much every new platform that came up”.

“It allowed our journalists to send out news to our followers faster than any of our competitors at the time”, Yee wrote. “I remember live tweeting from the slums of India (using an SMS Twitter gateway – anyone remember those?) while other journalists were waiting to get back to the hotel to file their stories. Everyone does it now, but back then, we were streets ahead.”

He said that social media also allowed readers to engage his team directly, adding perspectives to stories. “Our #RAGEchat Twitter Q&A series was almost like a full feature story being written live on our timeline, with young people sharing their stories and expert guests chiming in.”

By 2013, his wisdom about comment moderation was a key element in an international WAN-IFRA publishers conference for the Middle East and another conference on digital reporting in Poland.

Now the innovation is in video. R.AGE began by launching a video campaign to help stagnant participation in an annual cheerleading competition it sponsored by showcasing the raw athleticism, grit, determination and art involved.

The strategy was two-sided. Yee explained in his World Young Reader Prize entry that the campaign also featured celebrity supporters and live broadcasts of competition finals on social media. “Not only would this revitalise the CHEER [competition] brand but it would be a great way for R.AGE brand to show its support for healthy, positive and empowering activities for Malaysian youth”, he explained.

Sponsorship money poured in, though the team stuck to its initial budget of $12,500. Then management allowed the team to reinvent R.AGE as a video-first platform.

R.AGE TV began with five print journalists and some video cameras obtained in exchange for some native advertising. “The R.AGE team is now almost completely self-sustaining”, Yee said. The team of 12 “thoroughly committed multimedia journalists”
does it all: shoots, edits, writes, takes photos, does web design, basic programming, graphic design and organises events.

They specialise in documentaries, accompanied by an in-depth feature package on a website with interactive and social functions for audience engagement and sharing. And the stories revert back to the team’s journalistic origins:

- They spent a week living with an indigenous tribe deep in the Malaysian jungle to investigate claims of child deaths from a mysterious illness. The print edition made it the main front-page feature, and the Malaysian government reacted by sending aid to the tribe.
- An undercover documentary project investigating child sex predators on mobile chat apps. The first episode alone yielded 550,000 video views.
- Stories of World War II survivors on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war that sparked interest from old and young.

The work of the R.AGE team fits The Star’s overall strategy, according to chief editor Leanne Goh. “The success of this campaign and R.AGE’s overall content strategy affirms The Star’s long-standing commitment to empowering young people through journalism and embracing digital media innovations as part of our company’s DNA”, she said. “We believe R.AGE is already inspiring a new generation of multimedia journalists across the country, which can only stand us in good stead in the years to come.”

While the politics of the country make it unlikely that R.AGE team members will ever be able to cover the misdeeds of those in power in Malaysia, they nonetheless offer an example of how innovation can work for news publishers anywhere: teach talented young staff the core values and practice of getting to the bottom of the story, then give them the room to make innovations that will ultimately serve the whole company.

Finally, R.AGE continues to offer inspiration when it comes to working relations, especially around gender. In many organisations, male top managers are comfortable with taking full credit for the work of predominately female teams and gathering for themselves any benefits that accrue from that work. R.AGE is not like that. When it won the top World Young Reader Prize award, the editor got a generous budget to attend the prize ceremony in Washington DC.

Instead of taking a first-class trip alone, the editor managed to bring six members of his team via super-economy tickets and AirBnB lodging in a non-chic neighborhood. R.AGE’s editor had all the women (plus one guy) join him onstage when he accepted
the award (the other male staffer was filming). He then spent most of his allotted time
describing their crucial role in the work for which they were recognised. He didn’t
have to share the spotlight. Most winners don’t. Both gestures speak volumes about the
powerful nature of a working environment that values all members of a team in building
innovation.
BOOK REVIEW

A re-conceptualisation of change, continuity and inequality in young people’s lives

Youth and generation: Rethinking change and inequality in the lives of young people
by Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn

ISBN 9781446259054 (paperback) RRP £26.99
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(e-book also available)

Kitty te Riele*

With Youth and generation Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn exemplify that the capacity to clearly explain, use and argue complex ideas requires a foundation of sophisticated expertise. Grounded in their comprehensive understandings of sociology generally, and youth studies in particular, Woodman and Wyn draw on the work of eminent as well as lesser-known, and local as well as international, scholars for a rich and rigorous analysis. In the process they offer an important overview of theoretical traditions for youth research. The book benefits from the authors’ persistent commitment to empirical and theoretical work focused on young people’s everyday lives, since the early 1990s by Wyn and early 2000s by Woodman. The result is a cumulative body of work that offers deep understandings that are relevant across the broad field of youth studies, and which underpin the core arguments of this book.

Youth and generation is constructed around a re-conceptualisation of change, continuity and inequality in young people’s lives. The introductory chapter sets out both the need for and the nature of this re-conceptualisation. Woodman and Wyn argue that “a conflation
of ‘continuity’ and inequality” (p.4) is common in youth research, usually involving the interpretation of evidence for the ongoing reproduction of social inequality as equating to evidence for the importance of continuity rather than change. This, they argue, is false and “limits the analysis in some youth research from more fully understanding the contemporary dynamics and changing nature of inequality” (p.4).

Outside the field of youth studies it may be puzzling that this false duality exists and requires countering, since the combined existence of both continuing social inequalities and significant social change over the past five decades or so are palpable in many people’s life experiences. The analysis by Woodman and Wyn (briefly in Chapter One and in more detail in Chapter Three) offers evidence that the conflation they argue against is no “straw man”, but is indeed present across too many publications in youth studies.

The overarching theme of the book is against over-simplification and taken-for-granted “tropes”. Woodman and Wyn instead offer re-conceptualisations that highlight complexity and inter-connectededness, enabling a welcome subtlety and richness for youth research. It therefore is a slightly jarring note that Woodman and Wyn adopt the terminology of “Global North” (and its counterpart “Global South”) without much questioning. The term “Global North” has gained wide currency in sociology as a shorthand for the group of relatively rich, predominantly Caucasian countries across Europe and North America together with Australia and New Zealand – but it is as problematic as previously common terms such as “the Western world”. This is not to deny that having a term to refer to a group of countries with shared characteristics is useful – but in a book focused on countering conceptual over-simplifications and false dualisms I would have expected an acknowledgement of the limitations of any such term, and of the reification built around the notions of Global South and North.

One method used by Woodman and Wyn for enabling more nuanced understandings is to combine theoretical insights from several key thinkers, notably Beck, Mannheim and Bourdieu. They demonstrate that they “can legitimately create what for some may seem like an improbable theoretical combination” (p.9). This sounds somewhat defensive, and undoubtedly theoretical purists would be horrified. However, I agree with the authors, and with their reference to Stephen Ball’s arguments, that theory is best used to provide tools for understanding rather than as an a priori commitment to a particular lens. The latter is likely in part responsible for some of the mis-interpretations in youth research that Woodman and Wyn argue against in this book.

In addition, Woodman and Wyn take the important approach of going back to original sources (especially in relation to Beck’s work on individualisation); of recognising changes in the position of key thinkers over time (especially for Bourdieu); and of tracing
the history of key ideas in youth studies. An example of the latter is their insightful analysis of the emergence of the concept of “choice biography”, and the ways in which this only indirectly reflects the writings by Beck and his colleagues on individualisation.

Chapter Two sets out key social changes, focusing on mobility and inequality (both of these in relation to education, employment and urbanisation) and the impact of neoliberalism. Although much of this is familiar territory for social researchers, it is necessary to sketch this global landscape for the book. Moreover, Woodman and Wyn create added interest through their particular attention to the experiences of young people in the Asia-Pacific region, including a case study of Australia. Australian youth research is positioned both as part of the experiences of this region, and of theoretical traditions originating in Western Europe. Woodman and Wyn are right to suggest that Australian researchers increasingly will need to orient more towards Asian scholarship. Nevertheless, the geographic, empirical and theoretical juxtaposition present in Youth and generation is one of its points of distinction and strength.

Comprising nine chapters, the book is organised around key concepts, bookended by the introductory (Chapters One and Two) and concluding (Chapter Nine) chapters. Within each conceptual chapter, Woodman and Wyn combine analysis of relevant theoretical lenses with examination of evidence from empirical research. For the latter, they draw on their own highly regarded longitudinal Life Patterns research (following a cohort of young people who had completed secondary education in 1991, and a second cohort who left school in 2005–06) as well as rich examples of research from around the globe.

The key concept tackled in Chapter Three is individualisation. Woodman and Wyn’s analysis of Beck’s individualisation thesis and, importantly, of the ways in which this has commonly been interpreted in youth research, offer a useful introduction to these debates as well as underpinning the major conceptual contributions made by this book. They argue that individualisation is more usefully interpreted “not as a theory of agency but of changing social institutions” and demonstrate what this means for “how social position shapes young lives” (p.42, original emphasis).

In Chapter Four Woodman and Wyn explain how the concept of social generation can provide a framework for youth research that avoids the pitfalls of the misinterpretation of individualisation they outlined in the previous chapter. Social generation, as developed here, is internally differentiated, incorporating both young people’s shifting subjectivities and changing social conditions. Importantly, it is not about “typologies of generations across time” (p.71) such as “Gen Y”. Revisiting the work of Karl Mannheim and adding to this complementary theoretical contributions, especially by Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter provides (as Woodman and Wyn put it) “a conceptual anchor for investigating the
complex intertwining of change and continuity in the production of inequality in the lives of contemporary young people” (p.57). This “anchor” is then put to use in the subsequent four chapters.

Chapters Five and Six examine, in turn, the two major traditions in youth studies, focused on transitions and on youth culture. In relation to transition, in Chapter Five, Woodman and Wyn highlight the limitations of using transition as a metaphor and show how not only “pathways” but also “destinations” are transformed within social generations. This chapter draws on insights from the Life Patterns study in Australia, complemented with international research, to show how the “post 1970” generation commonly experienced “no clear break, or no clear criteria, that separated their lives as young people and their arrival as adults” (p.85), with both “life stages” characterised by fluidity and insecurity.

In Chapter Six, Woodman and Wyn trace the history of youth culture research, from subcultures and the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies to post-subcultures, as well as critiques, for example, of an over-emphasis on “the spectacular” or on consumption as defining elements of youth culture. They then examine and propose biographical and intergenerational lenses to generate more nuanced research on youth cultures. Within the broad field of youth studies, the traditions of transition and youth culture research have developed as largely distinct streams, with few researchers working across both. The social generation framework, Woodman and Wyn suggest, is not only useful within each tradition, but also as a bridge to bring together insights from transitions and youth culture research.

Chapters Seven and Eight move on to time and place as not only central components of young people’s experiences but also as key conceptual tools for youth studies. Drawing on the biographical approach outlined in Chapter Six, in Chapter Seven Woodman and Wyn show how attention to temporal structures assists in understanding both change and inequality in young people’s everyday lives. This is illustrated by research on how the rise of the 24/7 economy and insecure working conditions lead to increasingly individualised and fragmented timetables. Since only some young people have access to (material or social) resources that enable them to “control or escape the types of work conditions that lead to this temporal individualisation” (p.140), social inequalities are in part re-shaped as time-based inequalities.

In Chapter Eight, Woodman and Wyn query the invisibility and under-theorisation of place in youth research. They discuss research on mobilities of people and ideas and on the experiences of youth in rural and regional areas in different parts of the world to demonstrate the relevance of place for youth studies not merely as a “backdrop” but as “a force that mediates social life” (p.162). As they acknowledge, the field of
human geography, including geography of childhood and youth, has a long tradition of incorporating place and space and has much to offer here for youth researchers.

In their concluding chapter, Woodman and Wyn re-visit their aim “to contribute to the sociological project of understanding young people’s lives in contemporary conditions” based on both “a range of empirical studies of young people’s lives” and an “analysis of the legacies of youth sociology to build a forward-looking and robust youth studies” (p.165). Inevitably, in a book of less than 200 pages, the authors made choices about which elements to foreground. As a result, some key research topics and debates in youth studies and elements of young people’s lives – for example, in relation to belonging, risk, trauma and youth voice – are less visible. In terms of its core focus on social change and inequality, however, this book makes a significant and timely contribution to the canon and deserves to have a strong influence on future youth research and scholarship. In their introductory chapter, Woodman and Wyn refer to Young people and social change by Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997/2007) as “arguably the most influential youth studies text of the past two decades” (p.3). Youth and generation is a strong candidate for taking over the baton as the next must-read text in youth studies.

References
BOOK REVIEW

What happened to the activists?

Activist archives: Youth culture and the political past in Indonesia
by Doreen Lee
ISBN 9780822361527 (hardcover) RRP US$89.95
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Kharisma Nugroho*

It is Doreen Lee’s contention that the world of “everyday life” is often overlooked in mainstream Indonesian political historiography. For Lee, the everyday life of the frontline historical actors (the activists) is a potential repository of “historical raw material” that is indivisible from the larger national issues in post-Reform Indonesia such as decentralisation, political and legal reforms, the transformation of civil society organisation, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and so on. In her book Activist archives: Youth culture and the political past in Indonesia she attempts to redress the balance of Indonesian historiography by analysing the activist subject through the material and ideational elements that characterised everyday activist life in Indonesia in the 1980s and 1990s. Lee’s fresh approach may be distinguished from mainstream Indonesian historiography in that by writing Indonesian history from activists’ everyday life materials, she marks an important contribution to the Indonesian historiography, which has long tended to concentrate on high-level politics and “post-truth political discourse”, elections, and the lives of great statespersons.

Lee’s triangulation analysis of diverse types, sources, forms and cultural dimensions of activists’ archives has embraced an interdisciplinary, materialist approach that looks

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to the social sciences for inspiration, helping us to understand Indonesian cultural and political dynamics and the ways in which societies change. Her analytical approach is powerful in explaining the long break in student activism between 1978 and 1998; many historians attribute this break to the New Order state’s “successful” depoliticisation of youth. By analysing everyday historical materials, Lee shifts mainstream historiography’s attention away from major events and powerful individuals to underlying structural forces, mentalities and the masses. Turning the attention to the lives and struggles of young people, the forefront activists, her analysis focuses on forefront activism dynamics at the grass roots of everyday struggle, popular forms of protest, everyday activities such as work and leisure, as well as attitudes, beliefs, practices and behaviour. This approach provides another “reality check” on Indonesian history, using a historiographical approach that became known in the 1960s as “history from below” (Brecher 1986).

Lee begins in a compelling, descriptive storytelling style, contextualising the student movement and activism “from below”, analysing the search for an alternative repository of political change from everyday life undertaken by Indonesian young people across generations and showing their connections. She sketches out the trajectory of their thinking, pointing out their opposition to the disenchantment of everyday life. This functions as an important precursor to the later chapters of the book that feature non-dogmatic reformulations of leftist activism and isolate them from “conspiracy theories” about political changes during the New Order era. Lee’s stories of everyday moments and materials in Chapter One successfully set the landscape of the (historical and social) story of ordinary Indonesian young people in time and space, with special historical tasks in breaking up the malignant calm of an authoritarian regime in small and massive ways (preface, p.ix). Chapter One is a must-read section as it establishes the context as well as the conceptual framework for reading the repository of “trash of democracy” (p.40) or “souvenirs of the [Indonesian] democracy movement” (p.21) discussed in the remaining chapters. Lee’s “history from the bottom” approach is compelling because her description of personal-everyday life and the relationship between archives, documentation and historicity helps us to isolate the conspiracy mindset to the historiography of the student movement in Indonesia – a slippery trap in historiography when we put much emphasis on high-level political or event analysis.

Chapter Two describes how student activists contributed to a new term in Indonesian democracy – “street parliamentarian” or, as it is called in Indonesia, “DPR jalanan”. Lee names “the street” as the home of the activists, as Indonesian folk singer Iwan Fals sings in a legendary Reformasi song titled ‘Bongkar’, “on the street I rely on my aspirations”. The street was an empiric battle zone of experimentation, a training ground for new activists and a melting pot for community groups. Lee’s analysis of street dokumentasi
has added the fifth arena in political analysis, in addition to: 1) the electoral arena, 2) the legislature, 3) the judiciary and 4) the media. Lee’s data and analysis show that the street was often a central point of contention in competitive authoritarian regimes – regimes that control the first and fourth arenas. By contrast, the street served as an alternative outlet, not legal but often quite influential, and the forefront activists – though frequently threatened and periodically attacked – often emerged as important opposition figures, stronger than opposition leaders.

Chapter Three shows the genuine influence of the student movement in creating a multi-currency of political identity. This includes political and cultural building and rebuilding in an authoritarian regime through analysis of the counter-regime’s cultural sites, structure, style, process and products; and how these were communicated to became a popular access point to experiencing and desiring political youth identity. This approach is an important step to understanding the continuity and discontinuity between one generation of pemuda (youth) and another. Periods of serious democratic contestation sometimes bring out the inherent contradictions, so focusing the analysis on cultural sites and notions is a brilliant approach.

In the fourth chapter, entitled ‘Violence’, Lee discusses a sort of irony of the student resistance as a moral movement. The irony is in the manifestation of violence in the student demonstrations. Lee recounts how in 1998 a number of students had planned acts of violence as part of the resistance to state violence. The violence, according to Lee’s investigation, continues to this day, where student demonstrations are often identified with improper acts that gradually invite antipathy from the public at large. Although not explicit, Lee suspects that violence in current youth movements can be traced back to the moral dilemma experienced in the attempt to overthrow the authoritarian government of Suharto in 1998. With that came the disturbing question: To what extent can the student or youth movement still be considered a moral, anti-violence movement if, in practice, violence is used or at least tolerated?

Lee cites Wimhofer’s (2001) study, among others, on how this sort of violence can be seen as a form of reactive radicalisation against the military and authoritarian government. However, Lee notes that the existing studies do not explain how a change in attitude toward the use of violence occurred. Lee then uses the term “retaliatory violence” (p.138) to express her opinion that the youth violence was a response to the violence experienced by both the youth and the people they defended. In more plain language, people commit violence because they experience or become victims of violence. From the original form of self-defence, people become more permissive or accustomed to the use of violence. However, Lee also points out that radical reactions are the output of
each person’s personal struggles that converge with the struggles of others to produce a reaction that is not really singular either. In the youth movement itself, not everyone approves the use of violence. Even those who experience violence do not necessarily respond violently. In that sense, Lee seems to let the question of the morality of the youth movement remain open to interpretation not only from academics but also from activists especially. The latter is a kind of challenge to reflect on the morality of the youth movement itself.

One of the most important contributions of this book is to show the human facets of activist movements against authoritarianism. In Chapter Five, entitled ‘Home’, Lee argues that activists are also common human beings, as most young people are children of parents who are concerned about them, who in their time also lived in boarding houses (kos-kosan) and dealt with the issues of daily living. The activists have an inferior dimension in their lives – their private lives – as the springs of the exteriorism of their activism, from which they gain energy to fight against the military and government.

Lee explores the idea that these activists are ultimately individuals living in families, in communities, (whether physical or imagined), in “intense socialization” with each other, who are soldiers and therefore never feel that they fight alone. They fight together, united by a belief in the significance and nobleness of their movement, and how the outcome of that movement will bring good to the people. This is “home” for activists, which they leave and return to every day during their fight. Lee wants to answer why and how this activist community can be strengthened under conditions of impermanent domiciliation, a situation in which activists must live in places with limited facilities (p.142).

After making history in 1998, what happened to the activists? Lee answers the question in Chapter Six, ‘Democracy’. She traces the life of Generation 98, with particular regard to the electoral process of 2004. A number of activists tried to enter the political system by becoming political candidates, members of political parties, or brokers for established political elites. These moves were considered embarrassing by some activists because they are no different from those of their former opponents. Some activists even showed special affinities with the generals of the New Order and took up similarly luxurious lifestyles.

Finally, Lee expresses a real concern that the objectives of Reformasi 98 that have not yet been fully achieved have failed, since both the activists and the next generation have lost their way and lost their moral legitimacy. While some of the activists chose to be part of a system that had been damaged, the successors of the student movement had difficulty in uniting the movement to insist on the full realisation of the objectives of the Reformation. Student movements are even suspected to have been co-opted by the political elite through the mediation of a number of activists from 98 who became their
accomplices. Lee diligently followed several attempts by a number of activists to revive the spirit of Reformasi 98, which wilted before they could bloom. Each of these activists became busy thinking of her/his own affairs, lulled by the comforts of life that they failed to experience, or abandoned, during their college years. There are still activists who care, but they do not know what to do. Slowly but surely, the relevance of Generasi 98 dims with the reality of the times.

Lee examines how the Generasi 98 dream to become a new generation of leaders through the 2004 election failed. The movement could not be institutionalised. Reformasi activism, Lee says, continues to be a movement in “emergency” settings, where activists will only act together again when big crises arise (p.207). Lee’s analysis, if true, certainly holds a serious implication for the democratic movement. Does that mean that the democratic movement will ultimately lead to a dead end every time it attempts to become institutionalised, and therefore the status quo actually survives, where the most distant change is only a self-adjustment of the old system? This crucial question, in my opinion, is left by Lee to be answered by researchers and activists of the democratic movement in the present and future.

While the greatest strength of this book is the analytical framework established for reading the student movement materials, Lee’s access to activists’ archives or “dokumentasi” presented in this book is another significant contribution to Indonesian historiography. With this analytical framework – for example the concept of the reproducibility and circulatory power of activist messages – we can also analytically revisit the role of non-democratic factors that have contributed to key political changes in Indonesia, such as riots and factions among military elites. By using the same framework, we will be able to provide a fresh empirical analysis of the genuine role of non-student-movement factors, as the counterfactual analysis in challenging the mainstream theses of the role of student movement in key political changes in Indonesia. The other key methodological contribution of this book to Indonesian historiography is how Lee treats the artefacts of everyday activist life, such as print and other materials of activism (or as she called it, “the trash of democracy”) as a repository and resource for public and political cultural analysis. We can use the same analytical approach to analyse the “trash” of authoritarianism (such as mandatory Pancasila orientation for new students) to compliment the analysis of political changes from inside the authoritarian regime as a counterfactual analysis against her premises on the role of the student movement in key political changes in Indonesia during the New Order and post Reformasi.

Overall, Lee has produced an exemplary study of the under-researched field of the everyday life of Indonesian politics and its forefront agent of change, and has attempted
a salutary radicalisation of the historiography of Indonesian politics. The main criticism of this book is that the exposure of everyday materials is sometimes used as an alibi of the social; her contention is that it never really existed. In a society circumscribed by the political economy of the sign, everyday life ceases to exist, if it ever indeed did. For Lee, a commitment to “the real event” constitutes the core of the ideological process, problematising the whole concept of everyday life. Perhaps this could provide the theme for a later work.

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The Centre for Applied Youth Research (CAYR) co-produces JAYS with the Asia Institute Tasmania (AIT) and the University of Tasmania. CAYR’s principal communication medium is the Journal of Applied Youth Studies (JAYS), an online interdisciplinary, research-based, peer-reviewed resource with information and analysis on issues affecting young people as they prepare for the responsibilities of adulthood and citizenship.