

Bolton Data for Inclusion

The Action Research Centre for Inclusion

(Sponsored by: The Barrow Cadbury Trust)

at

Bolton Institute of Higher Education.

Data No 28 :

November 1999

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Title :

Bolton Youth Challenge Project : Evaluating the effectiveness of a 'suitable' education for excluded pupils

Abstract :

This paper evaluates the effectiveness of Bolton Youth Challenge Project (BYCP) in offering a 'suitable' education to meet the educational needs of excluded pupils. The paper begins by describing the educational changes that followed from the Education Act of 1996, the primary legislation about the duty on Local Education Authorities to arrange suitable education for children (or young people) out of school. The focus will be on how these changes have operated in practice and how they have affected the lives of young people excluded from school.

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank all those who responded to the questionnaire, and those who participated in the interviews. I would also like to thank Karen and Carol for transcribing hours of taped interviews. I would also like to thank (Prof.) J. Whittaker for his support and guidance and also Jeff Hope for his support and access to materials. My thanks to Pippa, family and my circle of friends for their unconditional support. Most of all I would like to thank the young people who attended Bolton Youth Challenge who participated in sharing their experiences and views about exclusion.

Abstract

This paper evaluates the effectiveness of Bolton Youth Challenge Project (BYCP) in offering a 'suitable' education to meet the educational needs of excluded pupils. The paper begins by describing the educational changes that followed from the Education Act of 1996, the primary legislation about the duty on Local Education Authorities to arrange suitable education for children (or young people) out of school. The focus will be on how these changes have operated in practice and how they have affected the lives of young people excluded from school.

Introduction

This paper examines the increasing concern about the exclusion of young people from mainstream schools. Exclusion from school, or being sent home temporarily or permanently or being asked to stand outside the class, is not a new phenomenon, yet the recording of pupils permanently excluded was almost unheard of until the 1990s. Prior to the 1990s the terms commonly in use were '*suspension*' and '*expulsion*.' The term '*exclusion*' is relatively new and has since become increasingly common. There is firm evidence of exclusions increasing in the period of 1990 - 96, (Parsons,1999). This paper reviews recent data on exclusion and places this research study within the national context. The paper examines the effectiveness of a 'suitable' education by encouraging young people to participate in the research and by encouraging young people to express *their* voices, views and opinions, rather than accepting the exclusion without comment. As one individual from BYCP stated when asked what was needed to prevent more exclusions, "*More ideas from pupils.*" The paper concludes by referring to the research findings and highlights the concerns about exclusions.

Policy and Legislation

It has been the case that only head teachers can exclude a young person from school. Since 1 September 1998 head teachers have been able to exclude a pupil permanently, or for a fixed period or periods which do not in total exceed 45 days in a school year. The Education (No.2) Act 1986 and the Education Act 1993 are primarily about how to manage the process of exclusion. Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 is the primary legislation about the duty on LEAs to arrange suitable education for children out of school. Section 19(1) now states that :

“Each local education authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them.”

‘*Suitable*’ education is defined as efficient education suitable to that age, ability, aptitude, and to any special needs the child (or young person) may have. The Education Act 1998 (s.1) now states that schools can now exclude a pupil for forty-five days of fixed term exclusions, the full year’s allocation in one term. Fixed term exclusions are carried out in the intention that the young person will return to the school from which she or he was excluded. The fixed term exclusion can be on disciplinary grounds only, (s.68 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998). Permanent exclusions are made with the knowledge that the young person will not return from which she or he was excluded. Hayden (1997) and Parsons (1999) make plain the legitimisation of exclusion and argue the point that the law has become an instrument for exclusion.

In a recent report for the Commission for Racial Equality titled ‘Exclusion from School and Racial Equality,’ Osler (1997, p.17) points out the growing concern that : **“Schools are required by statute to supply information on permanent exclusions to the LEA and Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), but they are not required to supply records of fixed term exclusions,”** fixed term exclusions being defined as those between 5 and 15 days per term. To tackle this growing concern the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report on ‘Truancy and School Exclusion,’ (May 1998) reported that a series of targets should be set out in the LEAs Educational Development Plans to reduce exclusion by one-third by the year 2002, these targets should be set out by LEAs and apply from, **“September 1999 for permanent exclusions and September 2000 for fixed-term exclusions,”** (SEU, s5.4). However, Parsons (1999, pp.24-25) *et*

al suggest that fixed term exclusions are about eight times more numerous than permanent exclusions and excluded boys at secondary level outnumber girls by approximately four to one. His suggested figures for fixed term exclusion tallies with that of Office For Standards in Education, (OFSTED), (as cited in 'Truancy and School Exclusion', 1998) which is estimated to be 100,000 a year.

A growing concern is the disproportional representation of social and racial groups who are excluded. It was recorded (OFSTED, 1996) that there were; ***“disproportionate numbers of minority ethnic pupils, in particular boys of Caribbean and African heritage (but increasingly also of boys of Pakistani heritage), being excluded.”*** It was also recorded that, ***“the permanent exclusion rate among children in care is 10 times higher than the average,”*** and young people who are labelled as having 'Special Educational Needs' are said to be ***“six times more likely”*** to be excluded, and young people who experience and live in areas of social and economic deprivation tend to have higher rates of exclusion, (Social Exclusion Unit, Truancy and School Exclusion, 1998). It is clear that this evidence alone not only supports the case that there is racist response to 'difficult' behaviour which lies behind the exclusion, but increasingly other socio-economic factors have been linked to exclusion from school, (Bourne, 1994, Osler, 1997, Parsons, 1999). The Government has decided that ***“since the problem of exclusion of ethnic minorities is so serious,”*** that published performance on exclusion should be broken down by ethnic group, (SEU, p.23). It is doubtful that this approach will tackle issues of racism and other forms of oppression, but will no doubt be used for 'administration' purposes, only to 'monitor' the situation.

A further growing concern is the rise in lunchtime exclusions where arrangements for the young person are made to go home. The school can set in motion the mechanism to exclude the young person for the duration of the lunchtime, placing the legal responsibility on the parent or carer. This mechanism draws into question the potential consequences of such actions. It may encourage truancy, it may compound issues of isolation, rejection and distress, wherever the responsibility lies it does not seek to engage the individual in creating a way of overcoming the problems of exclusion. Further, it can be argued that there are issues with parents, main care givers, or any other resources not being available. If not, what are schools saying? Young people are being put onto the streets were the current political and social concern is about anti-social behaviour. Is it possible that schools are putting young people and their 'parents' at risk of the measures contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, concerning anti-social behaviour,

(Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, c.37, s1: Anti-social behaviour, s.8: Parenting orders, s.11: Child safety orders).

Yet another concern is the increasing amount of bullying that young people are experiencing. Recently bullying was recorded, at 30.1 per cent, as the most common reason for school exclusion, (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, p.10). A recent survey in the North West of England; 500 primary and secondary schools from which 2527 pupils responded commented that bullying made them unhappy; recorded at 33.5% the largest percentage, (Whittaker, Kenworthy, Crabtree, 1998). As of from 1 September 1999 the law stated that, ***“The governing body of a maintained school shall ensure that policies designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of its pupils are pursued at the school,”*** this is to ensure that every maintained school has a clear behaviour policy within which effective anti-bullying strategies should form a central part of the policy. The Act continues and outlines the responsibility of the head teacher with a view to, ***“preventing all forms of bullying among pupils,”*** (s.61, The School Standards and Framework Act, 1998).

Trends, Figures and Targets

When considering the trend of exclusion in England, Parsons (1999) states the figures for the years 1994 to 1998 to be :

Year	Total N ^o of Permanent Exclusions	Increase / Decrease %
1994 / 95	12458	
1995 / 96	13581	+ 9.0 %
1996 / 97	13453	- 0.9 %
1997 / 98	13041	- 3.1 %

When making a comparison of the exclusion of Bolton LEA then the trends are :

Year	Total N ^o of Permanent Exclusion	Increase / Decrease %
1994 / 95	95	
1995 / 96	88	- 7.3 %
1996 / 97	91	+ 3.4 %
1997 / 98	92	+ 1.1 %

Source : Bolton LEA - Behaviour Support Plan 1999 / 2001 (p.3)

Rates of permanent exclusion change from one year to another in LEAs. In 1995/96 exclusion overall rose by 9 per cent. In the same year pupils permanently excluded in Bolton showed a decrease of 7.3 per cent. In the year 1996/97 the trend for England shows a decrease of 0.9 per cent. Pupils excluded in Bolton LEA rose by 3.4 per cent. In the data that was gathered for the overall exclusions in 1996/97 Parsons (1999) writes that out of ***“seventy-seven LEAs for which there were also figures for the previous year, five LEAs experienced a rise of more than 25 per cent and four a decrease of more than 25 per cent.”*** In the years 1997/98 permanent exclusions overall decreased by 3.1 per cent. In the same year exclusion rose in Bolton LEA by 1.1 per cent. In a recent article in the Bolton Evening News titled *‘Fewer pupils are expelled,’* the total number of permanent exclusions figures for 1998/99 was 86, this equates to a decrease of 6.5 percent from the previous year. These are tabulated as :

Year	Total N ^o of Permanent Exclusion	Increase / Decrease %
1997 / 98	92	+ 3.4 %
1998 / 99	86	- 6.5 %

In a recent document by the DfEE; Draft Guidance on Social Inclusion : Pupil Support (s.6.2) the government has set targets to ***“reduce the number of school exclusions by one third by 2002, and each LEA has its own target designed to deliver this national objective.”*** The total number of pupils in Bolton LEA and grant maintained schools is 44,000 (Behaviour Support Plan for Bolton, 1998). Given the figures by Bolton LEA of permanent exclusions in 1997/98, there are 0.21% (or 2.1 for every 1000) of the school population permanently excluded. The LEA will have to reduce all permanent exclusions by 30 by the year 2002. As stated in the Behaviour Support Plan for Bolton (p.78) the target figures will need to be :

80 permanent exclusions in 1999 - 2000
 70 permanent exclusions in 2000 - 2001
 60 permanent exclusions in 2001 - 2002

These targets will be used by the government to monitor the LEAs progress for the three years and the LEAs will be asked to report each year on its progress. The government will publish data on schools performance on exclusion in the same way as performance on attainment targets. We have yet to see the consequences on schools with this approach. It may be seen as an indicator that school and LEAs are not tackling issues of exclusion and interpreted as a way of '*naming and shaming*' excluding schools. The contrary issue to this approach is to tackle schools excluding young people who are in the run up to GCSEs, which are the peak years for exclusion, (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, p.24). Whatever the interpretation, it will put increasing pressures on schools to construct mechanisms to keep young people in; young people caught up in this situation may soon be followed by a '*deficit label*' and consequently find themselves excluded '*officially*.' It would seem more constructive to challenge the support mechanisms that are set in place lying dormant rather than constructing an environment of confrontation.

Research Methodology

The purpose of any methodology is to map out the processes that were followed so that other researchers understand and if desired are able to carry out and replicate the procedure, Anderson and Arsenault, (1998). Recently there have been many debates about the methodological approaches to research with respect to quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methods are primarily concerned with emphasising measurement of behaviour and predication of future measurements, the underlying assumption is that mathematical models exist which need to be uncovered. Qualitative methods are primarily concerned with understanding through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions. Two of the concerns that are drawn to qualitative research is; the reliability of informants that may colour the interpretation of data, and secondly, that this method of research has more than one valid view of any social situation. However, these concerns often originate from the scientific community who often explain phenomena by instruments such as surveys and statistical tests. The validity of qualitative research in contrast, comes from keeping records of all sources of information used, using transcripts and taking field notes of all communications during the research process.

In order to identify the effectiveness or what might be considered 'good practise' in the context of school exclusion I collated and analysed three types of data. These were:

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- Secondary source material produced by Bolton LEA through the Behaviour Support Plan,
- Primary source material through questionnaires to parents, staff, carers and young people who had attended BYCP, and
- Transcripts from interviews with parents, staff, carers and young people.

In this study a qualitative and quantitative approach was used to allow the respondents to express their feelings and thoughts about the BYCP. In using a qualitative approach, the intention is that it will provide the opportunity to explore phenomena and to understand, explain and bring meaning and insight to the investigation. The approach was to obtain information through two questionnaires; the first for young people and the second designed for parents or carers. The questionnaire designed for young people contained seven questions, these were :

1. How did you come to hear about The Youth Challenge Project?
2. Name one thing you liked about Youth Challenge?
3. Name one thing you disliked about Youth Challenge?
4. Name one thing you liked about staff at Youth Challenge?
5. Name one thing you did not like about staff at Youth Challenge?
6. Name one thing that would improve Youth Challenge?
7. Name one difference between your school experience and the experience you had at Youth Challenge.

Any other comments.

The questionnaire designed for parents or carers was similar except for question numbers, 6 and 7 which were:

6. Name one thing that happened for your son/daughter after they attended Youth Challenge?
7. Name one thing that would improve Youth Challenge?

Both questionnaires give the opportunity for respondents to be interviewed if desired. This was carried out by asking whether the respondent wished to talk about their views on the BYCP. The individual chooses Yes/No as appropriate and was asked to give their name and contact telephone number. The total number of questionnaires sent out was 50 from which there was 19

responses. A total of thirteen respondents chose to be interviewed. In carrying out the interview process the meetings took place either at Bolton Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), the respondents home settings or at BYCP. The interviews followed the framework of the questionnaire allowing the interviewee to explore and expand on issues or comments. During the interviewing process it was fundamentally important to state the aim, nature and purpose of the research and to ensure anonymity and consent to the use of recording equipment. It was also made clear that if direct quotations from the interview transcripts are used the identity of the individual will remain anonymous.

Recently we have seen an increasing concern with ethical issues when young people are involved in research. Alderson (1995, p40) states that :

“Most research on children is devoted to measuring them, using the model of animal research to measure their growth, disease or behaviour. Such research can bring great benefits to the children's health and education. Yet it is largely impersonal. If children's views are collected, this is usually in order to atomise and process them through the grid of adult-designed research, from ticking boxes to producing graphs.”

Therefore, in carrying out research with the participation of young people it is fundamentally important to ensure that children have the same rights to confidentiality as any other person and to ensure that their views will be respected. By including *their* views and experiences the paper respects the rights of the young person and illustrates the crucial contribution that young people bring to our overall understanding of the consequences of school exclusions.

In gaining empirical data I had arranged to visit BYCP for young people wishing to be interviewed on the premises. I had previously sought permission and arranged these interviews through the young people and the project leader. One young person had expressed their desire to be interviewed even though they did not wish to fill in the questionnaire.

With respect to the transcripts fictional names have been used to conceal the participants identity. The transcripts include two parents, two carers and five young people.

Bolton Youth Challenge Project (BYCP)

BYCP was established in September 1996 by Bolton Local Education Authority. The project is funded through the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme and by the Local Education Authority and supported by the Youth Service. It continues to cater for young people between 14 and 16 years of age (Years 10 and 11) who are excluded from school. BYCP facilities include a garage with welding apparatus, woodwork and craft area, two small group workrooms and a social area with a pool table.

The aim of BYCP is to meet the educational needs of excluded young people and to provide an environment in which they can continue and complete their compulsory schooling years. The mission statement as set out by Bolton LEA states :

“Youth Challenge is committed to providing a fresh start for young persons who have been unable to take advantage of formal school education, by providing opportunities to develop the social, vocational, numeracy, literacy and IT skills that will enable them to participate in adult life as employees, trainees, students, family members and citizens.”

(Behaviour Support Plan For Bolton, p67)

BYCP create in partnership with the young person an individual educational plan with a core curriculum covering mathematics, information technology and literacy including vocational subjects. Students negotiate their learning programme with staff and are guided by ‘*Lifetime Careers.*’ The careers advisers are responsive to individual client needs with the aim of aiding the transition into further education or training. In Year 11 it is expected that students gain work experience, a partnership with Rathbones Trust is able to provide monitored work placements linked to post-16 training provision.

Class sizes are less than eight to allow for intensive support. Tutorial support and counselling are also available from within BYCP. Working with parents and carers is an integral feature of the work.

Unfortunately in order to be considered for a placement at BYCP a young person has to be excluded from two or more schools, as stated in Bolton LEA Behaviour Support Plan: ***“At Key Stage 4 permanent exclusion from two schools can lead to consideration of Youth Challenge***

placement or short term home tuition if no place is available at Youth Challenge. At Key Stage 3 there is currently only short-term home tuition,” (p.65, s.5.1,(2)). It seems an irony and a nonsense that young people and their families have to experience the whole process of permanent exclusion at least twice before they find themselves receiving support constructively.

Summary of Data

Responses from 50 questionnaires.

	Responses	Interview
Young People using Youth Challenge	9	4
Parents or Carers	10	9
	19	13

Question 1 : **How did you first come to hear about The Youth Challenge Project ?**

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
Education Department	6	3	9
^a Educational Social Worker	2	3	5
Headmaster	1		1
Parent		1	1
Can't Remember		1	1
Young Person in Care	1		1
Previous to Scheme	1		1

a) The response Educational Social Worker made reference to 'Wag Man'.

Question 2 : **Name one thing you liked about Youth Challenge ?**

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
^a Openness – Attitude	2	2	4
^b Staff	2	2	4
^c Communication	2		2
Activities		4	4
Individual Needs	4	1	5

- a) Parents and Young People in expressing Openness - Attitude have made reference to : Environment, Friendly, Structured Setting, Sociable
- b) In response to Staff key words included : Dedication
- c) In response to Communication Parents / Carers expressed the availability of staff, being able to ring up.

Question 3 : **Name one thing you did not like about Youth Challenge ?**

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
No Complaints	8	2	10
^a College		3	3
^b No Discipline	2	1	3
Named Individual		1	1
Lack of Exam Opportunities		1	1
Meals		1	1

- a) During 1996-97 pupils also attended a local FE college
- b) The response No Discipline included the response; letting children out at dinner time.

Question 4 : **Name one thing you liked about staff at Youth challenge ?**

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
^a Friendly	2	5	7
^b Helpful	4	3	7
^c Dedication	2		2
Listen / Explain	1	1	2
Everything	1		1

- a) Responses for Friendly included key words such as : loving, treated as adults, honesty, sense of belonging, informal, forgiveness - "forgive people when we had done something wrong."
- b) Response to Helpful mentioned : issues of behaviour, non-judgemental, supportive, politeness.
- c) Responses to Dedication included named individuals.

Question 5 : **Name one thing you did not like about staff at Youth Challenge ?**

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
N/A	5	3	8
No Complaints	5	2	7
I Liked Everything		2	2
Over Protected		1	1
Named Individual		1	1

Question 6 (Young Person), Question 7 (Parents) :

Name one thing that would improve Youth Challenge ?

Responses	Parents / Carers	Young Person	Total
^a More Academic Study	2	4	6
^b No comment	3	1	4
Publicity	2		2
^c Premises - Facilities	1	1	2
Funding	2		2
More Pupils		1	1
More Staff		1	1
More Ideas from Pupils		1	1

- a) Respondents expressed in More Academic Study : more exam opportunities, more emphasis on academic qualifications - English, Maths GCSE.
 b) Responses included : blank entries
 c) Responses to Premises - Facilities made specific reference to : bigger craft room and wood room, better facilities for academic study.

Question 6 (Parents or Carers) :

Name one good thing that happened for your son/daughter after they attended Youth Challenge ?

Responses	Parents / Carers
Employment	5
Self Esteem	3
Went to College	2

Question 7 (Young Person) :

Name one difference between your school experience and the experience you had at Youth Challenge ?

Responses	Young Person
More Opportunities	1
Help to get Employment	1
Treated as Adult	2
Freedom	2
Workshop	1
Friendlier	1
One to One	1

Any Other Comments ? (Young Person)

In this section there were three no responses and other comments as documented below :

“Glad I went to Youth Challenge”

“Glad I got expelled”

“I found Youth Challenge very helpful”

“We was equal”

“Youth Challenge was the best thing in my life”

“Thank You”

Any Other Comments ? (Parents or Carers) :

In this section there was one no response,

three responses were :

“Youth Challenge was a success”

two responses :

“I only have admiration”

and other comments:

“I just wish my daughter had spent 5 years at Youth Challenge rather than 3 years at secondary school and 2 at Youth Challenge. Those 2 years have been brilliant.”

“My son achieved more in twelve months at the Youth Challenge, than he did in all his school years.”

“Staff work really hard and are very child-centred.”

Research Findings and Discussion

On examining the data through the questionnaires, it is interesting and significant that the majority of people gained information about BYCP through the Local Education Authority or the Educational Social Worker. It is interesting to note that one of the carers came to hear of BYCP through a young person in care. Within the research field there is little evidence about the effects of exclusion on young people, families and carers. Parsons (1999) describes the process as very distressing for the family and very damaging to the young person. It is clear from the transcripts the lengths at which young people and parents have journeyed and the amount of stress and anxiety the exclusion process creates. As one parent describes the effects on her son when he was expelled ;

“When he was actually expelled. Within 5 minutes of walking out, he actually walked away from me in tears and said, “Mum you hate me”. To which I said, “I don’t hate you, I’m not very happy with you at the moment, but it isn’t all your fault.” But he did actually begin to think that I hated him because he’d been expelled from school.”

(Jackson-Parent, p.8)

“At 14 I thought I’d lost him I really did...I actually phoned up to cancel my job. I was going to give up my job...I got a phone call back from someone...who said, don’t be silly...but I felt so low I was blaming myself for everything.”

(Jackson-Parent, p.10)

“...he wanted to go to a school. He was really upset when they finished him at [school 2]. Even though he was truanting and everything and all this was going on. He was still very upset. He still wanted to learn. He knew it was important to him, he just couldn't cope with everything. When he went to [school 3] as well, he tried at [school 3] but he, it was the same thing.”

(Wilkinson-Grandparent, p.2)

Parsons (*ibid*) *et al* goes on to describe the lack of intervention, support and planning which precede the event of exclusion.

In defining the term ‘effective’ within the context of education one standard mode of measure would be via league tables or what may be regarded as the attainment of academic credentials. Within the context of young people excluded from school, as well as considering academic

credentials, numerous modes of measure may be considered such as; whether a young person liked or disliked courses and activities, relationships with peers, families and staff, self esteem and so on.

In analysing the response to one thing that people liked about BYCP the majority of parents expressed the ability to work with and cater for individual needs. The majority response expressed by young people was activities, these included; swimming, motor vehicle, woodwork, rock climbing and canoeing. In expressing a young person's response via the transcripts it is clear the enthusiasm for activities and motor vehicle;

**"I enjoyed the activities, because its what I've always done. Its what I love to do."
(Adam, p.2)**

**"Yes, I prefer doing motor vehicle because I don't mind getting my hands dirty, cars and bikes...[I] did tyres, used to fit an exhaust how to drain oil. I used to drain out the radiator, put clean water [in]. Take a steering wheel off and put it back on, put all the wires back on... I used to do everything really...I did part of the electric's. I like putting the battery in and connected up the battery. Disconnect it keep it safe. I had to charge it up. There's loads of stuff to learn. It's excellent."
(Natasha, pp.1-2)**

In response to the reciprocal question of one thing that people did not like about Youth Challenge a total of 8 parents or carers and 2 young people had no complaints. It was interesting that 3 young people had expressed college as their dislike. Young people who had since left BYCP and attended a local FE college recorded this response. There were also 2 responses that expressed no discipline as their dislike of BYCP.

In the response to one thing that people liked about staff at Youth Challenge 5 young people replied 'friendly' which included key words such as; loving, treated as adults, honesty, sense of belonging, informal and forgiveness. The responses by young people through the transcripts expressed a variety of qualities;

**"Yes, they're always prepared to put themselves out for you if you need to do something."
(Brian, p.2)**

**“She wasn’t like a teacher...She was just a person, that’s what I see her like. I was there for a purpose. I didn’t see her as a yes miss, it was [Breda].”
(Adam, p.3)**

**“They’re always tops. If you respect them, they’ll respect you. They’re relaxed. You can have a laugh and a joke with them.”
(Natasha, p.3)**

**“They’re like more your friends instead of your teacher.”
(Mathew, p.2)**

In considering the responses to one thing that people did not like about staff at Youth Challenge 10 parents/carers and 5 young people made no comment or wrote N/A (not applicable). Two responses stated ‘I like everything,’ one stated ‘over protected’ and one made reference to a named individual. Reflecting on the transcripts various comments were made:

**“No. I’ve got nothing bad to say about this place. It’s given me a lot of confidence. More than what I need actually.”
(Brian, p.3)**

**“Mainly moaning at you constantly for not doing your maths and English, and telling you how important it is for when you leave. That’s what bugs you more than anything. They don’t really pick on you.”
(Natasha, p.4)**

**“They were decent people. One of the best was [Robert] who taught art. He came in once a week and taught art, and I liked [James] who did the woodwork. The only one I didn’t get on very well all the time with was [Simon]. At one point I ended up having an argument with him.”
(Philip, p.4)**

In response to name one thing that would improve Youth Challenge, the majority response through the questionnaire was ‘more academic study’. Within this response specific reference was made to; exam opportunities at GCSE level. During the interviewing process various themes arose. The views made by young people made reference to; computer equipment, books, room size and lockers for the safe keeping of personal belongings, their views were:

“If they could get a grant for more computers...We could do with more books and that.”

(Brian, p.3)

“We do a lot of craft and a lot wood and every body does it and make a lot of nice things and everything. So people nick them. So people spend time making stuff and people just go and tax it, it's out of order. So to stop that have a locker and at the end of the year hand in the key.”

(Natasha, p.4)

“Bigger rooms because woodworks only small and you've got art and craft in there as well on some days.”

(Mathew, p.3)

The views concerning academic study also arose:

“I think they do a wonderful job...but, sometimes I think our young people are missing out, because I sort of look at my sons Record of Achievement, I see; geography, art, and all the rest of the curriculum and I'll look at this young ladies work and what she's done is very good but there's isn't that much. There isn't that many subjects...Well she's done IT, childcare, metalwork and woodwork. They're practical courses. But what she's done is wonderful considering two years ago she wouldn't go to school at all, so it is wonderful. But the thing that got to me was when I opened my sons and I thought, Oh [Martin's] done all this and I felt a little bit sorry.”

(Catherine-Support Worker, pp.3-4)

This response draws connections to the debate about the value of vocational as opposed to traditional academic courses. This view is so entrenched that we continue to be rank-ordered in terms of intelligence, as Gardner (1993, p.6) argues, *“So entrenched is this way of thinking - and talking - that most of us lapse into rankings of individuals as more or less ‘smart,’ ‘bright,’ ‘clever,’ or ‘intelligent.’”* Handy (1990) and Gardner (1993) argue that we need to move away from intellectual constraints of the schooling system and begin to value other forms of intelligence. Handy (*ibid*) goes on to state that schools only, *“use one sieve, that of intellectual achievement as measured by examinations.”*

In the question directed at parents or carers; name one thing that happened for the young person after they attended Youth Challenge, 5 responses referred to employment, 2 responses to college and 3 responses mentioned self-esteem.

In the question directed at young people, name one difference between your school experience and the experience you had at Youth Challenge, the key themes made references to; more opportunities, help to get employment, treated as adult, freedom, workshop, friendlier and one to one. The interview transcripts also made references to these themes;

“You get more one to one.”

(Natasha, p.4)

“This is just better here. It’s not as strict as schools, got a rule for everything. But here there’s not. You’ve not got a uniform here so you don’t feel caged, if you know what I mean...You can basically chill out here...It’s a better atmosphere really, altogether.”

(Mathew, p.3)

“At my other school...it was as though they weren’t giving you confidence they were taking your confidence away from you, because they didn’t want to say all the good things about you, they were thinking all the bad things about you. But when I came here its the opposite way around. They want to leave the bad stuff behind you, and all the positive things give you certificates for and praise you for them.”

(Brian, p.4)

“I liked the way he spoke to me. He treated me as a person. I was another human being to him not just some kid. I was 15 - 16 at the time and he recognised that I was growing up. Everyone at the youth workshop treated me with the amount of respect that they treated him with...Well at school, teachers are there to teach, once they’ve finished teaching that’s it. But in the dinner hour at Youth Challenge there’s always somebody in...If you went and knocked on the door they’d listen to you even if it had nothing to do with Youth Challenge, even if its something to do with your home life. If you wanted to talk a shoulder to cry on there is always somebody there.”

(Philip, pp.1-6)

Conclusion

It is clear that through the views of young people, BYCP has sought to engage and accept young people by listening to their views about the way forward. This sense of belonging and unity has been expressed by M.Forest:

“Integration is traditionally seen as the amount of time a learner spends in a situation with learners who do not have disabilities....the deep meaning of integration is expressed by the terms 'inclusion,' 'belonging,' 'unity.' It is not a placement. It is a philosophy that says classrooms - and communities - are not complete unless all learners are welcome.”
(Marsha Forest, The Centre for Inclusive Education in Canada)

Young people at Youth Challenge have also expressed their relationships made with staff which seems to have been built upon rights, mutual respect and responsibility. It was also apparent through the views of young people that their self-esteem had been rejuvenated rather than being negated through the process of exclusion. Overall young people have enjoyed their experience at Bolton Youth Challenge yet as we have seen there are wider implications. This paper has highlighted the concerns that have affected the lives of young people excluded from school.

As we have seen, over recent years, levels of exclusion in England have risen rapidly and it is generally acknowledged that current levels of exclusion are too high. It has been seen that the government wish to set the level at a reduction of one third by the year 2002. If we were to take the number of permanent exclusion of 13041 for the year 1997/98 as stated by Parsons (1999) and reduce the figure by one third. This leaves 8694 pupils who are expected to be excluded in the year 2002 of which 60 will be in Bolton, (Behaviour Support Plan, p.78). Parsons (1999) *et al* make reference to the social cost of exclusion and also goes on to argue that the financial costs far outweighs the cost of inclusion:

“...the additional cost to the public purse of permanently excluding a pupil from school equals the cost of managing the exclusion process plus the cost of replacement education plus the cost of other services called upon as a result of exclusion minus the cost of the pupil's place in a mainstream school...A sum of £77 million, was spent in 1997/98 on all services to cater for permanently excluded children. The provision made for them is generally considered to be inadequate in

quantity and quality. It is clear that the costs arising from permanent exclusion fall not just on education but also on Social Services and the criminal justice system.”

(Parsons, 1999, pp.91-104)

It would seem more appropriate to advocate a no exclusion policy as we have seen at various schools both internationally and in England. One of several examples in England, is of an East London Comprehensive School with 1,800 pupils, alleged to be one of the economically and socially deprived areas of the country, has now gone three years *“without permanently expelling any pupil,”* (Coughlan, 1999). The head teacher says that,

“...the introduction of a policy of inclusion, rather than exclusion, has seen a radical shift of emphasis, with much creative effort being put into finding alternatives to simply throwing disruptive pupils out...Instead the school has developed a range of support services that seek to prevent behavioural problems escalating into confrontation, threats and removal from classes...in practice pupils find the complex process of corrective measures, involving the school, parents and support agencies, much harder than the threat of exclusion.”

Further, the school has been supported by the local authority, which has since adopted the policy of inclusion, (Coughlan.S, *Education school that stopped exclusions*: reported Tuesday 2 March 1999).

The exclusion of young people from school runs contrary to the philosophy and practice of inclusion. The information gathered suggests and highlights the lack of understanding about inclusion - inclusion is not about excluding the individual for the benefit of others. Inclusion benefits everyone. Within the context of excluded pupils inclusion is about the collaboration with the individual, the family, school, LEA and all those that will have an influence on the young persons life. As we have seen the process of exclusion creates a great deal of stress and anxiety for the individual and the family and carers because of the lack of support mechanisms in place. The lack of support draws into question the schools and LEAs procedures and support mechanisms.

Exclusion is not an easy option for young people, on the contrary during the interview transcripts it became apparent that the reasons for exclusions, in some cases, were set in motion for reasons other than on disciplinary grounds. It is a myth that young people wish to be

excluded, on the contrary it was apparent the opposite was true. This paper has highlighted the consequences for the parents and carers and the *“they don't care,”* they quiet clearly do and the consequences for the family can be devastating.

With respect to BYCP mission statement in *“providing a fresh start for young people who have unable to take advantage of formal school education.”* I would argue that in fact BYCP has been effective in providing a fresh approach for young people, who are near the end of their compulsory schooling years and whose formal education has not been in *their* favour. In this respect BYCP may be seen as a safety net where individual needs are met, relationships have the potential to grow and develop, families are constantly informed of all developments, relationships with other agencies are fostered with the interest of the individual in mind.

We have seen a paradigm shift of the responsibility on LEAs to make provision of education in school or otherwise, through the Education Act 1993. As of 1 September 1994 under section 444 if a pupil fails to attend the parent is guilty of an offence, unless the pupil meets certain criteria. On conviction the offence carries a maximum penalty of £5000! It is clear that this strategy will fail to reduce numbers of exclusion and will only add to the distress. We need to move away from *the 'home deficit theories'* if young people are to be accommodated in mainstream schools.

At the heart of the debate about exclusion is the behaviour of children in school and what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a particular school. Some schools can and do provide a valued experience despite the growing competitive climate, unfortunately some resist the move towards inclusion, as we have seen through the experiences of the young people at Bolton Youth Challenge. These views were clearly expressed by one of the support workers, when asked about advocating for the rights of young people and whether steps are being taken to challenge schools and the authorities;

“To be honest with you I don't think they are and I think this has been an issue for social services. We've just sat back and thought oh well that's how it is. In all the time I've worked in social services I've not known people kick up a fuss about it. I think that's changing. We're getting into saying to people right what are you doing about it. This is not ok. But it's only just starting. We've never got involved in educational law. We're starting to get to know about it now. What the acts about, what the kids rights are...How it's all managed

is down to the individuals. Individual schools, individual social workers, individual head teachers...They set kids up to fail. There's no two ways about that...They know when they're not wanted. They know when they're not wanted there. They get that message very clear...Whether you want them or not you've got to have them. I try and keep in the back of my mind the reason that they're there and what's happened to them. No matter what they're throwing out underneath that's not how they are. They're not evil kids and they're not bad...I just think it's about being dead honest, brutally honest with some kids. And keep being there really, just being positive.”
(Harwood, pp.14-15)

The 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* document gives nations the opportunity to define human rights standards for children. The fifty-four Articles cover a range of children's rights. With respect to provision the convention states that children have the right to life, state care, education, health services and social security. The convention also states that children should be informed about decisions that affect them, and they should be assured that they have the right to express their views freely. Article 12 states that their views ***'being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'*** However, the idea that young people themselves should be consulted often comes as a surprise to some *'professionals.'* Some teachers may find the change of role towards equal negotiation difficult or threatening. Moreover, Circular 10/94 *'Exclusion from School'* makes no reference to the rights of the young person in the decision-making processes of the school.

The Children Act 1989 places a statutory duty on LEAs to co-operate in the provision of services for young people and families who are undergoing serious disruption or disadvantage. The Act places responsibility on agencies to work together and that assessments of need should be carried out by different agencies at the same time rather than in isolation.

Schools need to foster safer and tolerant environments so that young people participate alongside their peers. Training in collaboration with other agencies is required at the initial stages to provide a broader contribution of experiences. It is crucial that the curriculum is modified to suit individuals and vitally important that schools liaise with families and other agencies where there are concerns about individual pupils. Moreover it is critical that schools adopt the philosophy and practice of inclusion and take into account the rights to education if schools are to foster positive experiences for every young person.

Concerning what young people would say if a young person was going to be excluded, it is appropriate to conclude with *their* views:

**“Don't do it.”
(Natasha, p.6)**

**“Treat us as people and not statistics. We know at the end of the week when they go home that's all we are. Someone they're trying to teach, who just don't give a damn, but we do, but the teachers at those schools don't realise this. Whether we're there or not they still get paid. To them it's just a job but to us it's our lives, it's our future, but they don't seem to realise it's our future.”
(Philip, p.11)**

**“I'd say think of the poor kids future for Christ sake.”
(Adam, p.8)**

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