

Loynes, Christopher ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9779-7954> (2018)  
Liminal places and communities for youth transformation. In: Transformative  
Youth Work International Conference: Developing and Communicating Impact, 4-  
6 September 2018, Plymouth Marjon University, UK. (Unpublished)

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# Liminal places and communities for youth transformation



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# The dilemma

- The bridge between the institutional frames of youth and of adult is shaky at best
- Young adults (18-25) stuck and seeking support
- No statutory or voluntary agencies with a remit of support



# The Stoneleigh Project

- Stoneleigh Group: network of voluntary youth organisations
- Shared purpose: the development of young people in transition to adulthood through volunteer work
- Collaborated to develop a spiritual development project for young adult volunteers
- Intention: to support the development of their values in order to help them become ‘agents of change’ – active citizens - in their communities
- Idea: to immerse them in a retreat environment and support them in community work initiatives



# The ‘theory of change’

- ‘Those who are marginalised in society are best placed to bring about the necessary changes – they have the least to lose and the most to gain.’

How well does  
it work?

*'It's changed my life!'*





# My question for this presentation

- What are the consequences of this youth development programme in relation to personal and social transformation
  - *what worked?*
- What part did power and control play in the curriculum of the Camas retreat
  - *how did it work?*
- How did participants exercise citizenship?



## ■ Contexts

- The new youth: a ‘car ride’
- New roles for youth work
- New applications of outdoor youth work

## ■ Approach

- Critical ethnography with a participative twist.



# Unpacking the Stoneleigh Project: introducing Bernstein

- Education's purpose to develop citizens with rights and responsibilities
- Collection and integrated curricula
  - Strong and weak 'classification' - power
  - Strong and weak 'framing' - control
  - Shallow and deep knowledge
- Identity and socialisation
  - Society's need for 'conforming and flexible' people requires society to redistribute power and control i.e. weak classification and framing

*Suggests an integrated curriculum approach*



# Bernstein's concerns

## ■ Power over

- Schools maintain the established order through submissive and compliant students (collection curriculum)
  - Old cultural arrangements remain

## However

- New curricula give access to private and social worlds (integrated curriculum)
  - Reduced space for diverse ideologies

*Camas as opportunity and threat*



# Bernstein's hopes

## ■ Power with

- New ways of constructing knowledge that are shared
- New distribution of power and control
- A participatory democracy of citizens
- Transformation of culture

*Camas potential: 'communitas' and  
'liminality'*



# Questions for the ‘integrated curriculum’ of Camas

- The benefits of new power and knowledge relations resulting in new possibilities

Versus the issues of

- Individuals crossing the border from the retreat into the everyday world
- Institutions crossing the border into the everyday world of the participants



Camas



# A participant's view

- The Camas Centre is situated on the North West coastline of the island enjoying unforgettable views of Staffa from it's own secluded bay. It is a row of remote ex-fishing cottages with no electricity, central heating or running hot water in fact... if I were to say an open fire and a cold tap you'd have a better understanding of Camas, oh yeah...almost forgot no flushing toilets! I think you get the picture.

(Mick Wood, [http://www.infed.org/leadership/wood\\_spirituality.htm](http://www.infed.org/leadership/wood_spirituality.htm))



*How it works:  
the people*



Camas  
**Camas**



# How it works: the people

- Volunteer - trust
- intergenerational community - many options for different power relationships
- Simple lifestyle - domestic work
- Mutuality - being valued, reciprocity
- Facilitated conflict resolution

*Communitas*



*How it works:  
the place*

Camas  
**Camas**



# How it works: the place

- Unfamiliar and remote - possibility
- Wild and natural - agency
- Dramatic and beautiful - the other
- Storied and meaningful - narrative

*A landscape of liminality*



*How it works:  
the experiences*

Camas  
**Camas**



# How it works: the experiences

- An emergent and negotiated day
- Creative
- Values oriented
- Reflective - narrative base
- Experience is more than activity

*Emergent and diverse personal narratives*



Camas  
**Camas**



# Camas unpacked

- Integrated curricula with weak classification and framing
- The shock of something radically new held by the community and stimulated by the vitality of the landscape
- ‘Self-assessment’ through emergent and diverse personal narratives
- Spirituality - wary
- Formal outdoor pursuits - rejected!



# *Communitas*

- An integrated system of egalitarian power relations and knowledge construction
  - New possibilities for self expression and relationships in action
  - Trust, mutuality, reciprocity
  - Co-creation



# *Liminality*

- A stimulating landscape
- A landscape of possibility
- Onto which to tentatively map new identities and relations



# *Citizenship*

- Most transformed themselves
  - belief in 'progress' and 'individual agency' led to reproduction of established institutional concepts of adult selves
  - Status quo - Bernstein's worst fears!
- Some then transformed others
  - valuing of rights and responsibilities
  - Tackling the problems of society but not the causes
- A few transformed the culture of their community depending on the ideology of the voluntary organisation - the more local the more radical!
  - radical political change.
  - Tackling the cultural roots of social problems.
  - Bernstein's best hope!



Camas  
Camas



# Conclusions

- *What worked?* Most young adults crossed the ‘border’ and sustained constructive development (95%: n = 165)
- *How did it work?* A retreat based approach offers an ‘integrated curriculum’ and does restore young adults to healthy life paths.
  - Environmental *liminality* and social *communitas* were significant elements in this experience.
- *Citizenship* The framing of the host youth organisation determined whether the participant reproduced or transformed the norms of adult identity or the social world in which these norms were embedded.



# Dissemination

## Cae Mabon

### Gillerthwaite

