

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND DEVIANCE: SOME PROBLEMS OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

J.M. Whetton
University of the West Indies

Introduction

1. The main aim of this paper is to examine "crime preventive" aspects of youth development programmes. This end is reached by a roundabout route, in that some general limitations of such programmes are first suggested. In particular, it is emphasised that the great majority of young people are not involved in youth development programmes, (1) and some possible reasons for resistance to involvement are examined.

2. Youth development programmes are often supported on the grounds, *inter alia*, that they will help to reduce crime and delinquency. (2) It is suggested that they have little chance of succeeding in this goal as they are constituted at present, since they rarely "reach" potential offenders. Furthermore, they may even have a counter-tendency to increase rebelliousness among the "unreached".

3. Finally, some possible ways of involving more young people, and especially potential deviants, are put forward. It is hoped that, in focusing on ways of dealing with more extreme problems, some insights may be given into ways of solving more general difficulties of youth development.

Aims and Assumptions of Youth Development

4. Youth development programmes are intended to combat "youth problems", which are more typically seen as "in" young people rather than "facing" young people. The early philosophy of youth development emphasised a need for training in employment skills over and above that provided by schools and employers, together with training in and facilities for constructive use of leisure time. Special emphasis was given to "character training", the moulding of attitudes and values according to idealised conventional standards.

5. Methods borrowed indirectly from English public, (that is, exclusive, private) schools focused on disciplined, highly structured activities, and both aims and methods were determined by adult perceptions of youth needs. The number of young people influenced was not especially important, but "leadership" was stressed with the intention of developing an elite.

6. The very idealistic nature of this early philosophy is exemplified in the charter of the Jamaica Youth Corps, which was intended to encourage :

"the virtues of industry, honesty, responsibility, loyalty, dignity, perseverance, courage, purity and usefulness..." (3)

7. These initial aims and assumptions have changed somewhat in the 1960's. In the midst of rapid social changes and increased awareness of young people's vocal criticisms of the modern world, "youth problems" have been reanalysed and aims and methods of youth development modified. In a recent address to the Commonwealth African Youth Seminar, A. Smith said :

"...everywhere the root of the problem appears to be in the understandable dissatisfaction of the rising generation with the established social and economic order. In developing countries, this dissatisfaction takes on particular overtones because of its close link with the problems faced by the increasing numbers of young people who are emerging from a traditional way of life, but who find that the modern economy has not developed sufficiently to receive them, and offer them the opportunities to use their talents creatively and satisfyingly". (4)

8. New emphasis is given to problems as faced by and defined by young people. This emphasis has been accompanied by increased recognition of the need for involvement of many more young people in youth development, and in decision-making about its content. (5) Rather than "discipline" and highly structured activities defined by adults, concepts such as involvement, participation, communication and democracy are now integral to youth development. Stress on conformity to established values has tended to give way to some tolerance of dissent and efforts to listen to criticisms voiced by young people.

(6) There is new (and desirable) uncertainty about aims and programmes, and the youth view that "we must make our own mistakes" (7) is increasingly recognised.

Aims and Assumptions in Practice

9. The over-riding problem of youth development, of course, is that its programmes cannot solve the real and material problems faced by young people. There is no implicit solution in Smith's description of "the understandable dissatisfaction of the younger generation with the established social and economic order". (8)

10. In fact, there is a danger that youth development may be seen as a sufficient substitute for solution of problems faced. Yet training people for employment is of little value if it does not go hand-in-hand with expansion of job opportunities. Teaching the virtues of agriculture is unlikely to be effective without massive improvements in rural life.

11. Given the overwhelming difficulties of creating opportunities to match exploding aspirations, there is likely to be a regression in practice from the new emphasis on listening to and involving young people, to the former emphasis on changing people by disciplined, structured activities. Such a regression is especially likely in the West Indies, for a number of reasons.

12. First, West Indian youths are a "post-modern" generation, (9) in the sense that their parents were "modern" participants in the revolutionary Independence movement begun in 1938. The parent, proud of involvement in this movement, wants his offspring to continue nation-building along the recently established guide-lines.

13. But the fact that the present-day adult was personally involved makes it especially difficult for him to tolerate criticism of "his" movement. Suggestions that fundamental problems remain unchanged, that "more of the same" is getting nowhere but to "neo-colonialism", are taken as personal attacks.

14. In these circumstances, the psychological mechanisms which are widely described in studies of prejudice are likely to operate. (10) The prejudiced individual is often unable to blame himself or the groups with which he identifies for problem

situations, and finds a substitute, scapegoat target for his aggression. This substitute, ("youth" in the present case), is then perceived as having various unfavourable, stereotyped attributes which are used to justify the aggression directed against him.

15. Second, as many commentators have indicated, (11), West Indian societies are still rigidly stratified along class-colour lines, even though there are some increases in social mobility. Furthermore, relationships between classes and between adults and young people are highly authoritarian, (characterised by insistent demands for obedience on the one hand, a strong need for dependence on the other). Faced by widespread encouragement to develop new aspirations, and aware of international demands by young people for social change, West Indian youths are rapidly casting off psychological dependence and passive obedience to adults, while adults themselves remain caught in an authoritarian frame of reference. (12)

16. As Argyris has shown in studies of industrial organisations, and Cohen with reference to delinquent gangs, an escalating cycle of rebelliousness-conformity is likely to take place in such circumstances. That is, rebelliousness against demands for conformity is likely to be met by increased demands, which in turn give rise to increased rebelliousness. (13)

17. The good intentions of youth development planners in the West Indies have to cope with strong tendencies towards such a cycle which are built into the societies. Potential solutions are again suggested by studies of industry. (14) The adult has to make a positive effort to allow youths to "make their own mistakes" - an extremely difficult and unnatural thing to do - and operate on the assumption that young people are more willing, talented and responsible than they may appear to be.

18. Third, the fact that West Indian societies are strongly Christian, laying great stress on abstract moral values, is liable to contribute to the rebellion-conformity cycle. Young West Indians are constantly reminded of moral precepts, which constitute aims of "character training" in youth development programmes. But such precepts are empty slogans unless translated into practical examples, and youths are constantly faced by examples of adult hypocrisy, bending and redefining abstract principles in practice. To stress such abstract values as aims of youth development is likely to be seen as confusing or

practically meaningless at best, akin to the well-known problem in West Indian education of asking children to write essays about 'A day in the snow'. At worst, it may be seen as thoroughly dishonest and leading to rejection of adults.

19. Fourth, it is suggested that techniques such as "involvement, participation, communication and democracy" are not by any means widely practised in the West Indies. Referring to political development in Jamaica, Munroe has pointed out that casting a vote does not, in itself, constitute participation in politics. It gives a representative the right to think for you between elections, while other essential mechanisms for public involvement in the political process are extremely limited. (15)

20. In fact, it is always extremely difficult to carry through intentions such as involving, participating and communicating. (16) To talk is easy, to listen difficult. Human relations are often "pseudo-human relations." (17) Others may become involved in our terms, but we do not like it if they want to set the terms. These difficulties are greatly intensified in highly authoritarian and stratified societies, with abnormal difficulties of communicating across class or generational groups. Again, there is a constant, built-in tendency to give up the attempt in the face of severe difficulties, to regress to demanding conformity and obedience.

21. Finally, it should be noted that traditional styles of leadership in the West Indies, authoritarian rather than democratic, are likely to be limited in effectiveness. Research findings indicate that authoritarian leadership may be effective in dealing with routine or well-understood problems, but it limits creativity and is inefficient in providing either solutions to new problems or the motivation to persist in efforts without supervision. (18) Thus, in youth development, the tendency to find leaders who conform to and enforce existing values is unlikely to be effective in circumstances in which new solutions to new problems are essential.

22. The sum of these arguments is that, despite good intentions to adapt youth development to new definitions of "youth problems", there are strong resistors to change. The criticisms and "styles" of young people (19) are more likely to be seen as objectionable than in many other societies, and conformity and obedience are likely to be demanded in the absence of other solutions.

23. In turn, participation of young people in youth development programmes is likely to continue to be limited, unless great emphasis is paid to reducing resistance. Youth leaders, like social workers generally (20), will be able to convince themselves that their work is more effective than it is, while really working in a situation of "preaching only to the converted minority".

Youth and Crime

24. These general arguments provide a lengthy introduction to the conclusion that youth development programmes, as at present constituted, are likely to have very little impact on deviant behaviour. Potential offenders belong almost exclusively to the "unreached", who are not involved in youth development programmes. In the present section it will be argued that adults contribute principally to deviant and "damaging" acts, while tending to use "youth" as a "scapegoat" group. Young people perceive this and both more and less rebellious tend to reject adult-directed youth development programmes.

25. In Jamaica, as in all societies, recorded rates of law-breaking are higher in youth than in adult groups. On the other hand, as in other "developing" countries, juvenile delinquency and youth crime represent comparatively small proportions of all law-breaking, as compared with more "developed" countries. For example, approximately 45% of all persons proceeded against for offences (including "cautions" or police warnings) in England and Wales are juveniles; proportions exceeding 50% are found in some parts of the U.S.A., whereas in Jamaica, which has no official warning system, only 8% of convicted persons are juveniles. (21)

Table 1 Age distribution of male offenders convicted in 1965-66 in Jamaica

<u>Age group</u>	<u>Offences</u>					Percentage of all convictions
	Violence against person	Robbery with violence	Breaking & entering	Damage to property	Other (not traffic)	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
8-16	8	6	17	13	6	8
17-19	12	27	26	22	24	21
20-24	17	13	31	26	31	28
25+	63	54	27	39	39	43
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100
% of all convictions	18	1	3	17	61	100

26. As the number of persons aged over 25 is greater than the numbers aged 8-24, of course, the rate of convictions overall is greater in the younger group. But it may be seen in Table 1 that both violence generally and robbery with violence, which arouse so much public concern at the present time, are predominantly adult offences. Children and youths are most commonly convicted of property offences, taking items of small value, and of miscellaneous, relatively minor offences such as disorderly conduct, indecent language, stone throwing and offences under the vagrancy law.

27. These data, of course, refer only to convicted law-breakers rather than all law-breakers. In thinking about crime, we tend to overlook the fact that the great bulk of law-breaking is not detected. Studies of unreported crime indicate, in fact, that the startling proportion of four-fifths of the adult population have committed offences at some time in their lives for which they could have been sentenced to imprisonment. Social class groups vary in the types of offence committed, rather than in frequency of offences. (22)

28. In other words, law-breaking of the kind carried out by the great majority of convicted persons is widely distributed throughout society. It is a major error of fact to attribute it to any minority group, least of all "youth". Even the major crimes which, individually, create most public concern are predominantly adult activities.

29. A large number of research studies have failed to produce anything more than fragmentary, often conflicting information on causes of crime, (23), but one thing is clear. Rather than seeing it in terms of individual or sub-group abnormality, we will only learn how to control crime in the long run by seeking its roots in the wider social structure. Enormous variations in crime rates between societies are only marginally related to factors often put forward as "causes", (or, for that matter, to the efficiency of the major controlling machinery, the police force).

30. In fact, what acts are "damaging", as opposed to "criminal"? It has often been noted that young people, unblinded by experience, see mankind with great clarity. A primary "youth value" suggested by Keniston (24) is that "the ultimate measure of man's life is the quality of his personal relationships". This re-definition, which does not conflict with religious or other moral codes, leads to some broadening of the usual

concepts. For example, the concept of "violence" is broadened to include waging war, or doing damage to another by racial or class or political discrimination. Likewise, stealing becomes a no more suitable candidate for rigorous state control than profiteering or various forms of "crookedness".

31. From such a "youth" perspective, demands by adults for obedience and conformity, together with complaints about "hooliganism", tend to receive little recognition. In fact, it seems especially true in the West Indies that complaints about "problem youth" are based primarily on day-to-day evidence of "rudeness" and disobedience. Although more serious forms of youth deviance have tended to increase from a very low baseline, they have not done so by any means as much as has adult concern.

32. This adult concern appears to stem from the fact that youthful behaviour has departed from the extreme passivity which has frequently been commented on in the West Indies. Adolescent rebellion has not been characteristic, and the early teens in the West Indies are still different in many respects from the turbulent years described in the literature on adolescence in more "developed" countries. (25)

33. A "self-fulfilling prophecy" is clearly at work in relation to youth and crime. That is, adult views that young people are more troublesome leads to legal "capturing" of a greater proportion of all young deviants. Recent delinquency statistics in Jamaica illustrate this tendency. The proportion of male juveniles brought before the Court increased from 8.5 per thousand to 10.7 per thousand over the three years 1963-4 to 1966-7. Closer inspection of this increase, however, shows that it consisted almost entirely of greater reporting of minor larcenies and miscellaneous minor offences in the urban area of Kingston and St. Andrew. (26)

34. In summary, it makes little sense to see increased crime as stemming primarily from "problem youth", or to see youth development as crime preventive, when crime is so pervasive throughout society. It makes little sense to demand idealised standards from young people, and to insist on obedience for the sake of obedience, when the "subterranean values" of the society reshape conventional values, to define an enormous variety of circumstances in which these "rules are justifiably" broken. (27)

35. It is in the nature of human values that they are not absolutes; we have to weigh up conflicting values in practice and allocate weights according to our narrow group interests. This process provides "justification" for all kinds of acts which depend on seeing members of other groups as deserving "victimisation". (28) To demand absolutes from young people is to demand the impossible. To demand one thing of them while behaving differently oneself is only to invite rejection.

36. It is suggested that this process underlies much youth-adult conflict at the present time, and creates major difficulties for youth development programmes. Despite good intentions, these programmes are liable to be rejected by many ordinary young people in practice, on the grounds that they require conformity for the sake of conformity.

37. Youth development cannot, of course, influence those whom it does not "reach," whether they are more or less extreme deviants. It follows, then, that the first and most difficult problem of youth development at the present time is not simply to provide more programmes, but to find ways of attracting and involving the alienated. Some ways of doing this will be suggested in the following section.

Means of Involving Deviants

38. The general implication of previous arguments is that, as far as possible, young people themselves must be fully involved in decisions about the nature of youth programmes. This does not refer only to a highly selected group who lead participation at present, but to the "current unreached". To use the industrial model referred to earlier (29), limits of control must be set as wide as possible, even though participants may, through adult eyes, be likely to make many mistakes.

39. To say this is not to go to the extreme of suggesting that young people should run the world and need no guidance. They want and ask for guidance, but when it is given should be, as far as possible, up to them. Imposition of control, whether legal or other-wise, should be a last resort.

40. Some years ago, the writer assisted in a youth development project which was, on the surface, a very large jazz club on an island in the river Thames. It had a membership of several thousand, was very successful as a jazz club which

appealed to young people from all sectors of society, who were non-joiners of conventional educational or youth organisations.

41. The club operator was a detached social worker, who was approached by members from time to time to co-operate in arranging projects which they themselves initiated. Inter alia, the members raised funds regularly to provide scholarships for further education of school "dropouts", and financed and assisted in running old people's homes.

42. This illustration is based first on the principle of attracting young people. To transfer the example to the West Indies, it would first be necessary to identify activities which attracted deviants, such as the early steel bands or current small discotheques, and seek to assist youth development projects emanating from them.

43. The illustration also shows that young people seek out solutions to practical problems in their immediate environment. (30) This alternative to broader social planning has been chosen by youth in many countries, and suggests that youth development could be especially attractive and effective if it greatly emphasised the principle of practical community service, (which is, of course, already practised in youth development, though given less emphasis than it might be). (31)

44. The use of "detached" or "street" workers to make contact with deviant groups has proved an effective technique of reducing more serious deviance. Workers must, first and foremost, be able to "make contact" and prove acceptable to youth gangs. (They are often recruited from ex-gang members). By setting low, undemanding standards initially, they may obtain better results in the long run. S. Adams, in comparing costs of two delinquent gangs in California, one contacted by a detached worker, concludes that:

"The 43 boy gang cost about 140,000 dollars less in a three-year period under service from the detached worker than it would have cost had correctional expenditures accumulated at the same rate as for the comparable gang that received no service." (32)

45. As a final example, schemes based on non-prosecution of first youth offenders seem worthy of introduction. Informally, of course, many youth offenders are not prosecuted by the police, though the evidence cited earlier for Jamaica (33) is that

concern about youth has led to more frequent legal prosecution. On the contrary, it appears desirable to maintain and formally extend "pre-Court" methods, by giving first minor offenders warnings and entering into informal "agreements" with them, (rather than legal orders), that they will, for example, attend a youth organisation, or repair damage done, or keep a voluntary curfew for a period. (Prosecution of juveniles has now been discarded in England and Wales under the new Children and Young Persons Act).

46. The first effect of such schemes is to increase enormously the numbers of officially known deviants, as shop-keepers, teachers, neighbours and even parents seek assistance in dealing with "problem youths". Only when this contact is made, of course, does it become possible to guide the individual into more constructive channels. At the same time, the damaging effects of legal, public and self-identification as a convicted offender are avoided.

Conclusions

47. Youth development per se can be little more than a stop-gap activity, waiting for improved vocational and educational programmes, and it must not be seen as a substitute for other forms of development. Nevertheless, it has a useful role to play in the meantime in involving far more young people in constructive activities, while reducing numbers involved in largely destructive activities. It is emphasised, however, that both aims will only be successful if strong, built-in tendencies towards programmes informally based on conformity and obedience are counteracted. Teaching must be a genuine two-way process between youths and adults. Often we claim that it is, while actual practices deny this. Conflicts of views, far from being undesirable, are likely to produce better answers to society's problems in the long run.

References

- (1) In Jamaica, approximately 15% of the 15-24 age-group are enrolled in youth groups.
- (2) e.g. J. Bradley. Evaluation of youth camps in Jamaica 1968.
- (3) "Charter of the Jamaica Youth Corps." In: V.H. Lawrence. History and Role of the Jamaica Youth Corps. University of Pittsburg. 1962.

- (4) Youth and Development in Africa. Commonwealth Secretariat. 1969.
- (5) e.g. T. Campbell. "The role of youth clubs in preparing for maturity." In: The adolescent in the changing Caribbean. (Proceedings of third Caribbean Mental Health conference) 1961.
- (6) L. Davidson. "The adolescent's struggle for emancipation." See (5) above.
- (7) P. Anderson, youth delegate to conference. See (5) above.
- (8) Arnold Smith. See (4) above.
- (9) K. Keniston. "Youth, change and violence" In: Social Problems. McDonagh & Simpson. Holt, Rinehart. 1965.
- (10) e.g. G. Allport. The Nature of Prejudice. Doubleday. 1958.
- (11) L. Braithwaite. "Social stratification in Trinidad." Social & Econ. Studies. 1953
 W. Bell. (ed.) The Democratic Revolution in the West Indies. Schenkman. 1967.
 A. Sigham. The Hero and The Crowd in a Colonial Polity. Yale U.P. 1968.
- (12) Fanon suggests that people in former colonies do not cast off dependence and inferiority feelings so readily, but it is only suggested here that young West Indians are in the process of casting them off. c.f. F. Fanon. The Wretched of the Earth. Penguin.
- (13) C. Argyris. Personality in Organisations. Wiley. 1959.
 A. Cohen. Deviance and Control. Prentice Hall. 1966.
- (14) D. McGregor. The Human Side of Enterprise. McGraw Hill. 1960.
- (15) T. Munroe. "Nationalism & democracy." New World Quarterly. Vol.4.No.4
- (16) e.g. Coch & French. "Overcoming resistance to change." In: Proshansky & Siedenberg. Basic Studies in Social Psychology. Holt, Rinehart. 1965.

- (17) C. Argyris. See (13) above.
- (18) Lippitt & White & F. Fiedler. In: Proshansky & Seidenberg,
See (16) above.
- (19) Youth "styles" are discussed by M. Seeman. "The meaning of alienation." In: McDonagh & Simpson, See (9) above. In this interesting discussion, he refers inter alia to the youth value that "the ultimate measure of man's life is the quality of his personal relationships."
- (20) c.f. L.T. Wilkins. Social Deviance. Tavistock. 1964.
- (21) U.K. statistics may be found in annual Criminal Statistics, H.M. Stationery Office.
U.S. statistics are published in Uniform Crime Reports, annual from U.S. Dept. of Justice, Washington D.C.
Jamaican data are calculated from Annual Reports of the Jamaica Constabulary, Jamaica Government Printer, 1965-66, which break down convictions into males and females, juveniles and adults. Proportions within adult sub-groups are estimated from a sub-sample of convicted adults.
- (22) A. Cohen. Deviance and Control. Prentice Hall. 1966. Findings from American and European studies, described in this short but comprehensive book, are also born out generally in Kingston in an unpublished study carried out by the author.
- (23) Cohen. See (22) above.
- (24) Keniston. See (9) above.
- (25) M. Kerr. Personality and Conflict in Jamaica. Liverpool. 1952. V. Rubin. "The adolescent, his expectations and his society," and other papers of Third Caribbean Mental Health Conference. See (5) above.
- (26) J.M. Whetton. "Delinquency prevention in Jamaica." Y.D.A. conference on youth. 1969.
- (27) "Techniques of neutralisation: a theory of delinquency." Sykes & Matza. Amer. Sociol. Rev. Dec. 1957.
H. & J. Schwendinger. "Delinquent stereotypes of probable

victims." In: M.W. Klein. Juvenile Gangs. Prentice Hall. 1967. J.M. Whetton. "Perspectives on violence." Jamaica Journal. 1.2.

- (28) H. & J. Schwendinger. See (27) above.
- (29) D. McGregor, See (14) above.
- (30) Keniston, See (9) above, suggests that old ideologies are seen by young people as exhausted or irrelevant, and "what is demanded is that intelligence be engaged with the world."
- (31) e.g. See (3) and (5) above.
- (32) S. Adams. "The value of research in probation." Federal Probation, Sept. 1965.
- (33) See (26) above.