NOTES ON THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

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Introduction

As Australia has a markedly different cultural heritage and markedly different patterns of socio-economic development from most of its near neighbours, it does not seem very useful merely to describe aspects of our youth programmes. Most of them would be quite irrelevant to the needs of other countries within the Asian-Pacific region. Accordingly, I have decided to deal with a topic of central interest, making use of the extent to which my experience (which is mainly Australian) enables me to set down some analytic ideas which may be useful for further discussion. I have chosen what is generally termed "leadership" as this is a matter of central concern and interest whenever youth programmes are examined. The previous regional seminars of the Commonwealth Secretariat were no exception to this, and so I think I can safely assume that the participants in the present programme will also be interested.

It seems to be universally accepted that "leadership" is fundamental to the success of any youth programme. Unfortunately, the term "leadership" is used in a bewildering variety of different ways in the youth field, and many programmes have failed simply because the organisers and planners had not thought clearly enough about just what they meant by the term, and what the implications of this were for planning.

Before entering into this theme, perhaps I should make one of my basic assumptions clear. I believe that in any country which values individual freedom there must be a diversity of different kinds of youth programme, and that each young person should have a number of options open to him or her between which he or she may make a choice. I believe that unless we can offer such a choice, we are failing to provide our young people with an adequate basis for citizenship in a free society. There are many reasons why we may lose sight of this ideal. We may be facing immense youth populations with a great shortage of leadership or other resources; we may feel that it will be more efficient to direct our efforts through a single organisation; or we may feel that a society is not yet ready for

freedom of choice. I am prepared to accept that at a particular time in a specific situation arguments of this kind are valid, but only if we design programmes which will at a later stage lead to diversity of opportunity and freedom of choice.

Perhaps it is also useful at this stage to draw attention to the rather peculiar popularity of emphases in youth programming. Let me illustrate this by referring to two major conferences on youth in the Asian region held under the auspices of ECAFE. One such conference, held in 1966, focused upon the "protection and development" of children and youth and emphasised programmes in which the adult generation might provide for the "care" of young people. The second, held last year, focused upon the contribution of young people to national development and emphasised programmes in which young people might participate significantly in decision-making and action. I think we all recognise that this kind of polarity is but a reflection of the rather ambiguous status of youth in any complex society, but I do suggest we need to try to achieve a more effective meeting and integration of these two quite different approaches.

Workers and leaders

As a starting point for clarification, let us distinguish between the two major categories of persons who are called "youth leaders". The first are those who could be much more accurately described by the term "youth workers" who act to organise or to guide programmes for young people. They may be salaried or volunteer workers; they may be any age, but are generally accorded "adult" status relative to the population with whom they work; they may be specifically trained for this role or may operate without any formalised training. If we subscribe to my assumption above about the importance of diversity, they will comprise a wide variety of types of person undertaking a wide variety of separate tasks.

The second major category are those young people who assume (or are given) particular responsibility among and as one of their peers. These young people may be formally appointed or elected by their fellows and the office which they fill may have a formal title. However, many of them will undertake such a task or role without any formal recognition. Similarly, they may or may not have opportunities of formal training for these roles.

Of course, many of those who become particularly effective "youth workers" have been young people with a background of experience in taking responsibility among their peers. My two major categories above are therefore not exclusive ones, and there will inevitably be movement of people from one to the other. However, I would suggest that we must not confuse these two very different kinds of role in our programme planning. Further, we must not stultify our programmes by relying only upon young people with experience in "peer leadership" to fill the "youth worker" ranks, nor should we limit the growth potential of our "peer leaders" by trying to direct them towards becoming "youth workers".

Who are the policy makers?

One of the somewhat vexing questions which is beginning to be raised in regard to youth programmes is concerned with the proper structures and patterns of involvement for policy-making purposes. We have all seen "youth policy" determined solely by adults, at either government or voluntary levels of organisation; we know there are conflicts about the question of the extent to which the professional worker should be involved in policy-making about his own area of expertise; we have seen young people acting as a pressure group to try and effect change in policies which concern them; we have seen young persons appointed or elected to policy-making bodies so that they may "represent the young people". It seems important to me to develop machinery for policy-making about young people which can involve in an effective partnership people of all ages, and which can make good use of the professional expertise available. I am not convinced that we have yet succeeded in doing this effectively, and the evidence available to me suggests that other countries have also failed to find satisfactory patterns in this.

I have spent a few words on this area because one finds a tendency to look towards certain categories of persons as "the policy makers", and in our field of concern they are also seen as being "leaders" of young people. This concerns me, because I feel that when we can point to specific individuals as policy-makers, then our policy-making procedures have failed to be thoroughly democratic. We need to develop procedures to which we may look for evolution of policy, and these procedures need to involve many people, rather than,as is our present tendency, to vest policy-making functions in specific sets of persons.

Kinds of youth workers

The most significant youth workers are, to my mind, those who work in direct contact and relationship with young people. There are many ways in which these might be classified, but for present purposes I would suggest these fall into three broad but quite distinctive areas of function. The first are those who work with children, developing and helping to operate programmes which meet the social and developmental needs of those children. The second perform a similar function in regard to adolescents. The third are those whose focus of work is not upon the total needs of the young people with whom they work, but rather upon a specific task, e.g. the teaching of a skill.

Some people may be surprised at this division into three kinds of front-line worker, but I believe that it is an important division if we are to attain our optimum effectiveness. The psycho-social needs of children are so markedly different from those of adolescents that a completely different orientation is demanded of the youth worker. Similarly, there are important differences in the orientation of a worker who is concerned with the achievement of a specific task in contrast to one who is asked to be sensitive to the needs of a specific target population and to assist that population to meet its needs, whatever they may be. The kinds of section and training programmes which we establish for each of the major reasons for the failure and irrelevance of most youth programmes aimed at the adolescent group is that youth workers have been inadequately selected and trained for work with this stage of human growth.

Perhaps I should also add some comment upon the dominance which the task-oriented youth worker has enjoyed in many youth programmes. In many places and in many agencies, youth work is essentially activity-centred and transmissive in character. It is often important that this be done, and programmes of this kind will probably always have a place. The current emphasis upon youth work as "out-of-school education" can readily lead to an excessive emphasis upon this of programme. Where it does do so, I concur with the recently published comment of Salter Davies, a leading British educationalist, that it "tends to limit the full educational opportunities of the youth service". We must remember that learning occurs in many other ways than being taught, and that some of the most important of our learning cannot be taught.

I would further suggest that as many as possible of these front-line youth workers should be volunteers. I would justify this belief in two ways: first, that youth programmes should be a demonstration of community concern and responsibility in a very practical and personal way, and secondly that any programme dependent upon professional workers in the front line will either be inordinately expensive or will leave enormous areas of unmet need. I have been told by colleagues from many new countries that this is difficult in their society because they do not have people willing to volunteer "like they do in Australia". Let me assure you that there is no over-supply of volunteers in Australia, and that there are difficulties in any adequate volunteer programme. I suspect, for a variety of reasons, that most new countries, given a properly designed programme, would find many more volunteers than we do in Australia. My suspicion of this is, admittedly, based upon limited contact, but I know many new countries where I would be far more confident of success in the development of volunteers than my own.

Backing and supporting these frontline workers, any sound youth programme will have a group of workers acting as trainers, planners, administrators, consultants and researchers. Hopefully, most of these will be drawn from those who have front-line experience. Although some may well be volunteer workers, it is quite essential that there be a solid core of professionals (in the full sense of the word - I do not just mean salaried) who will take the continuing responsibility for these vital functions.

I cannot see any rational reason why we should treat professional education and professional development in youth work in any less adequate way than that of other professions. The task of the youth worker is probably as important as that of the engineer and it is certainly much more complex and demanding. Rationality would therefore indicate at least the same attention to the education and role of youth workers as that accorded to engineers. However, we all know that society is not rational, that youth work as a profession is in its infancy, and that we must work at achieving more adequate professional standards. However, one significant question which should be raised is whether it is valid to train youth workers as such, or whether the professional cadre within youth work should be built from those with basic training in a variety of relevant disciplines, e.g. education or social work. Although it now seems clear that my own country has opted for youth worker training, I sometimes wonder if a richer youth service might not have been developed by an inter-disciplinary approach. Unfortunately, the other option of no professional education is all too likely to be adopted if

specific education is not available, and I regret to admit that this has been the general Australian pattern until very recently.

Civic and social responsibility

As I have perhaps foreshadowed in the opening part of this paper, rather than talking about young people undertaking "leadership" of their peers, I find it more useful to talk about responsibility, particularly civic and social responsibility. I think this is what we really mean when we use "leadership" in this context. Moreover, I am sure that if we think in terms of social and civic responsibility, we are much more likely to develop programmes which will foster a more equitable sharing of this responsibility among all young people, and surely that must be our aim. It seems a false concept to develop programmes which aim at concentrating powers of real leadership, which is one aspect of social responsibility, in a few people, rather than spreading some leadership qualities as widely as possible throughout the population.

There seem to be two particular ways in which we can develop this. One, which is appropriate and may even be essential at certain stages of development in specific countries, is the development of a national youth movement, in which all young people are expected to give a period of civic service and training to their own country. Others would be able to comment on this far more adequately than an Australian, but it does seem to me personally that that approach cannot be accepted as a long-term solution in any country which values personal freedom or a democratic form of government.

If we keep in mind the patterns of human psycho-social development, it seems to me that ultimately this development of responsibility in young people can only come about by giving responsibility to young people, and, furthermore, that this must start at a relatively early age in small groups. Moreover, because we need many different patterns of leadership, we must offer a diversity of many different kinds of small groups in which this responsibility can be undertaken and fostered. These should include small groups in schools, in community living, in industry or elsewhere. Some groups might be task-centred ones; some might centre upon personal relationships and working together to improve these; some might be groups entirely of young people, and some might have the guidance (but not direction) of a youth worker of the right type.

Given this pattern, one would see training for this responsibility development as taking place largely within the small group setting, or at least closely related to it. Formal training of this type should surely be intimately related to the context within which the young people are taking responsibility and developing experience in widening this, although at the same time training can have a most important horizon-widening function. Again, if we accept the concept of many different kinds of opportunity for developing social responsibility, we must discard the notion of any unitary training scheme, and plan rather for a thoroughly penetrating pattern of varying kinds of training.

A great deal of attention has been placed upon various schemes of volunteer service by young people, particularly on an international basis. I hope some of the new countries have benefited from the work of our young Australians who have worked under the auspices of our own Australian Volunteers Abroad programme and others which operate from this country. I am certain Australia has benefited, but not because our young people have become "leaders" as a result or because they have learnt about social responsibility as a result of their experience. They entered into this experience because they already had a well-developed sense of social responsibility, and the benefit is that we now have an increasing number of young people who understand much more about other nations and other peoples. My personal view is that the missing component in our present schemes of international voluntary service is that young people from the new countries do not come to Australia as volunteers, and I would hope for the day when this happens. Again as a personal view, I believe we need many young Asians who could come to this country as teachers of their own language.

Conclusion

I feel I must conclude by saying that I do not see leadership as being important for its own sake, but only in terms of what it might do to make this world a happier and more satisfying one in which people may live in peace and security. Again, this demands a great diversity of types of leadership, and certainly it demands programmes which will help each and every person to contribute his or her particular share of responsibility for the common good. The more effective design and development of these programmes will not be easy, but I believe this is one of the urgent social and educational tasks facing all nations.