

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis is a critical ethnographic study of the Stoneleigh Group and the programme of informal education that it piloted for young people. The programme, which took place between 2000 and 2004, was called the Stoneleigh Project. It was a pilot programme of experiential approaches to what the Stoneleigh Group called informal education. It was designed to support what was referred to by the Stoneleigh Group as the 'spiritual development' of marginalised young people volunteering as youth workers. Its aim was to help them become agents of social change in their communities. The Stoneleigh Group considered the approach and the outcomes of the programme to be radical both pedagogically and politically.

The Stoneleigh Group was a partnership between a number of voluntary youth work organisations and educational charities. It was founded by Endeavour Training and the Rank Foundation specifically to develop the Stoneleigh Project. The Stoneleigh Group had the aims of developing best practice for spiritual development using the outdoors, disseminating this practice to other youth work organisations, and advocating for spiritual development as a part of the youth work curriculum. The Stoneleigh Group operated from 2000 to 2004 and advocacy work on behalf of the Group continued until 2006.

I have been involved in outdoor education for 34 years. One of my longstanding interests concerns programmes designed to use the outdoors for the personal development of marginalised young people. More recently, I have taken an interest in outdoor programmes that make claims to take a radical approach by addressing what are thought of as the causes of marginalisation as well as helping those who are perceived as marginalised. My interest in radical practices led me to undertake evaluative studies of two organisations that became members of the Stoneleigh Group. This in turn led to an invitation to evaluate the Stoneleigh Project. From this work I became interested in conducting a critical sociological

inquiry of the processes and outcomes of the Stoneleigh Project. This is the basis for the research study described in this thesis.

The Aims of the Research

The aims of this research are to examine the claims made by the Stoneleigh Group that they would support the development of young people as agents of social change and that their programme was a radical approach with radical outcomes. The Stoneleigh Group used terms such as 'empowerment' and 'transformation' to describe the outcomes they were seeking. This in itself was a departure from the conventional term of 'development' more widely used in the modern youth service and in informal education out of doors. These terms imply a radical approach to education and so this research set out to examine the pedagogy and curriculum of the programme in depth in order to explore these claims. In particular, I was interested in the knowledge and values developed through the Stoneleigh Project and how these were understood to support young people in transcending their marginalised circumstances. I was also curious about the educational process and what aspects of this were thought to help the young people to transform their own circumstances and contribute to the transformation of the social circumstances that had led to their marginalisation.

The term 'informal education' is used to define the practice of the Stoneleigh Project. Increasingly, this term is used to describe unplanned learning wherever it occurs, commonly in the context of the private and social lives of learners but also the informal learning that occurs around educational activities, rather than as an intended aspect of a planned educational intervention. It is increasingly suggested that the appropriate term for planned interventions with clear purposes that is applied throughout Europe and increasingly adopted in the UK for projects such as the Stoneleigh Project is 'non-formal education' (Colley et al., 2003; Festeu and Humberstone, 2006). However, the members of the Stoneleigh Group, along with a number of authors on youth work widely referred to by members of the Group especially Jeffs and Smith (1999), use the former term. So, in spite of the criticisms to the theoretical ideas of Jeffs and Smith (for example Ord, 2007) 'informal education' is adopted in the thesis for the sake of coherence.

This thesis inquires into a number of themes. It begins by examining the pedagogic practices of the pilot programme and especially the outdoor retreat element of the Stoneleigh Project. The Stoneleigh Group partner involved in the initial piloting of the retreats held radical views socially and politically and these, it was claimed, also underpinned the values of the community that the Stoneleigh Project joined on retreat. I wanted to examine the claims made by this part of the programme and the impact that it had on the young people involved.

The Stoneleigh Group believed that marginalised young people were seeking a degree of agency in constructing their adult identities and that they would then use this agency to confront what they considered to be some of the inequitable features of modern society. The research therefore also studies the perceived effect of this programme on the identities and transitions to adulthood of the young people involved. It then examines the claim made by the Stoneleigh Group that the programme enhanced the sense of agency of the young people and asks whether this agency was directed at the reproduction or transformation of their personal and social situations. That is, I wanted to know whether the programme did in fact support these young people in becoming agents of personal and social change. Keeping in mind the radical claims of the Stoneleigh Group for the programme's approach, it was likely that knowledge and values would be co-constructed from various sources, specific to each individual and made meaningful in diverse ways, the questions I set out to answer were:

What knowledge and values were considered significant by the participants in the Stoneleigh Project?

In what way was that knowledge gained and given voice?

Who exactly did this empower, on whose behalf, and to what end?

As the work of the Stoneleigh Group entered the dissemination and advocacy stages I argue that a second site of pedagogic activity was created. This second pedagogic site concerned the partners in the Stoneleigh Group developing their knowledge and values of

the way in which the Stoneleigh Project influenced the young people and advocating this approach amongst the partner organisations and the youth work field. This site became a site of struggle involving organisations both internal and external to the Stoneleigh Group. At first, the struggle concerned the meaning and application of the programme and, later, involved a struggle for the control of the understanding of the Stoneleigh Project and its use in influencing youth work policy. This led to a fourth question:

How did the struggle for the control of the Stoneleigh Project illuminate the politics of radical curriculum development that was aimed at social transformation?

The outcomes of these analyses are discussed in the context of the role of education in maintaining and transforming the social order in society. To help with this critical approach I draw on the concept of power. Power was important in the pedagogic relationships of the programme and the development and ownership of knowledge and values. It was therefore a central concept with which to explore the dynamics of the programme. I also use power to explore the young people's experiences of empowerment and agency and their impact upon the young people's efforts to transform their marginalised circumstances and to construct adult identities. Power was also significant in relation to the development of the political voices of the young people in the construction of an adult identity congruent with their emerging values, and, in particular, when their values were at odds with the established values of the institutions of society. Lastly, power was central to the struggle that took place over the meaning and application of the pilot programme in relation to wider recommendations made for radical pedagogic approaches for spiritual development in youth work.

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5: Contexts for the Research

The Stoneleigh Project was an example of what the Stoneleigh Group termed 'informal education' for young people. It sought to develop a programme that could address some of the problems of transition from youth to adult for marginalised young people in British society. Outdoor retreats and voluntary work opportunities were central to this programme. As such, this research study sits in a number of different contexts. These include aspects of youth work, concepts of youth in society, and approaches to what was called by the Stoneleigh Group informal and outdoor education. A discussion of current thinking

concerning these areas provides a framework for understanding the Stoneleigh Project. It will also enable the research findings to be considered in the context of the historical and cultural influences on the field.

The first of these contexts is what in this thesis is referred to as informal education out of doors, which I review in Chapter 3. Outdoor Education is a relatively new profession and research in this field is still rather patchy. A recent meta-study concluded that future research could usefully focus on a number of these unexplored areas (Rickinson et al., 2004). This, the authors suggested, would include studies that paid attention to the outdoor experience from the point of view of the participants and that examined the pedagogic processes that take place in the outdoors by the in-depth study of practice. Since Rickinson *et al's* study, research has been published that has begun to consider the processes involved in outdoor education. A number of these have taken an ethnographic approach and, in particular, have examined the meaning of the experiences to the participants. Other studies have begun a critical examination of outdoor education in its cultural and historical contexts.

The second context, considered in Chapter 4, is that of theories about youth, youth transition, and youth agency. Ideas about youth in modern society suggest that the increasingly diverse nature of this society and its rate of change have increased the discontinuity between one generation and the next. It is argued that this, combined with the liberal values of the culture, has led to an increased emphasis on the role of the individual in constructing an identity and managing the transition from youth to adult (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Roche and Tucker, 1997). At the same time a number of factors have led to what is called the 'risk society' in which people are aware of risks that they face on a global scale, for example nuclear war, but have little or no opportunity as they perceive it to control these risks. On a personal scale, Raffo and Reeves (2000) suggest that the risks involved in constructing an identity are also increasingly out of the control of some individuals. An extended period of youth, now considered by some including the Stoneleigh Group partners to last until twenty five years of age, has created a space within which it is claimed that more young people, especially those marginalised by social and educational factors, struggle to find a pathway to adulthood. Chapter 4 reviews this literature further. Critics claim that the Youth Service has yet to respond coherently with

effective policies and programmes to support young people during this stage in their lives (ESRC Youth Research Programme; 2002; Griffin, 1997; Jeffs and Smith, 2002).

Finally, youth work in the voluntary sector in the UK has a long history rooted in social initiatives to address the perceived social, economic and moral problems of the time. Many of these early social reformers were motivated by political or religious convictions. This history, which includes a longstanding tradition of outdoor youth work, is reviewed in Chapter 5. It provides a context for examining ideological influences on the voluntary organisations of the Stoneleigh Group later in the study.

Chapters 6 and 7: The Research Approach

I followed the Stoneleigh Project from its first pilot in 2000 through to the recent advocacy work conducted in 2006 after the Stoneleigh Project ended. As I have indicated above, I claim that two pedagogic processes were at work. As outlined above, the first concerned the young people and the support they received in constructing their identities in the transition from youth to adult. The second concerned the evaluation and advocacy work of the partners. Both involved experiential and social processes that led to the construction of meaning and attempts to encourage a discourse with the everyday world with the intention of bringing about change. Methodologically, the research study was a hermeneutic inquiry focussed on education and power.

For this research I adopted an ethnographic approach to the Stoneleigh Group. This allowed me to participate in the Stoneleigh Project in order to collect the evidence. It also provided a framework that allowed for a wide range of techniques in collecting data. A critical stance then enabled me to analyse this evidence in the context of the claims made by the Stoneleigh Group for radical social outcomes.

The methodological approach I have taken is explored in Chapter 6 and the details of the methods used in this study are reviewed in Chapter 7. Appendix 3 provides a reflexive biographical account of my personal and professional experiences outdoors so that readers will be aware of the perspective from which I have approached this study.

Chapter 8: A Theoretical Framework

The educational theories of Bernstein are used to explore the pedagogy of the Stoneleigh Project in the context of power and knowledge in society (Bernstein, 1996). Bernstein was concerned with the role of education within a democracy in providing an equitable distribution of power and resources in society. He understood the process by which education contributes to the construction of an adult identity as central to this. He was also sceptical of the degree to which education was fulfilling its ideals. He developed theories to help in the analysis of curricula and pedagogic practices so that the ways in which the distribution of power were maintained or changed by educational practices could be explored. These theories provide useful tools with which to analyse the Stoneleigh Project.

Bernstein used the term 'knowledge' in a generic sense. As the Stoneleigh Project focussed on values as well as knowledge I have supplemented Bernstein's ideas with the theories offered by Joas (2000) about the development of values in society. Both authors explore their subjects from the point of view of the processes by which individuals construct an adult identity. They are both concerned with the development of the citizen as an active agent in the reproduction and transformation of society and both share a concern for processes that marginalise people from engaging in this process. Also, they share the view that society is in need of transformation. The relevant theories of both authors are outlined in Chapter 8.

Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13: Discussion

Those members of the Stoneleigh Group with an interest in 'spiritual development' in youth work claimed that inequalities and injustices in British society and beyond require the transformation of our social values and practices. Some went further, arguing for political and economic transformations. They saw this as a time of great threats but also of great opportunities for individuals to act. 'Agency' then had two meanings for these members of the Stoneleigh Group. First, they believed agency concerns the way in which young people can be encouraged to take responsibility for constructing their own identities in a plural and rapidly changing world. In the case of marginalised young people this was thought to involve supporting the young people in restoring themselves to constructive paths to work and to adulthood.

Second, the partners in the Stoneleigh Group understood agency as part of the process of being actively involved in contributing to the construction of a society that is based on a different set of values and practices. This, they thought, would involve the development of different identities in work and civic society as well as new forms of work and civic action that challenged the inequities in that society. In addition, the idea of agency was conflated with ideas of spirituality by combining the ability to act with a moral centre from which to judge these actions. The five chapters critiquing the practices and consequences of the Stoneleigh Group and the Stoneleigh Project are outlined below.

Chapter 9: The Ideologies of the Stoneleigh Group Partners

The purpose of Chapter 9 is to clarify the ideologies and philosophies of the Stoneleigh Group and its partners. This will help with the understanding in later chapters of how these beliefs interacted; both between the partners in the Stoneleigh Group and with other youth work institutions. To help clarify the thinking of the Stoneleigh Group partner organisations and how these compared with the Stoneleigh Group itself, the discussion in this chapter is arranged into three themes. These were central to the discussions held by the Stoneleigh Group as the Stoneleigh Project was being developed. The first concerns the various ways in which the partners in the Stoneleigh Group and the Group itself understood the terms 'youth' and 'transition'. The different ideas held by each partner in relation to the ideas of youth transition also influenced their practice and thinking in relation to the two other themes of 'marginalisation' and 'the meaning of work'.

The various ideologies of the partners in the Stoneleigh Group emerge from this analysis. This helps with the understanding of what constituted radical practices and outcomes to each of them and to what degree their positions were congruent with the more radical aims of the Stoneleigh Group to which they belonged.

Chapter 10: Analysing the Pedagogy of the Retreats

Chapter 10 examines the nature of the pedagogy and curriculum of the retreat programme. The Stoneleigh Group thought that the retreats were significant aspects of an approach to what they called informal education that they considered as radical in terms of both the process and the outcome. This research study is concerned with this claim for a radical

approach and so an ethnographic study of power and knowledge within the retreat experience is analysed in detail using Bernstein's (1996) theoretical tools.

I will argue that the retreats were indeed radical in their approach and transformative in their effect upon the trajectories of the young people. In relation to this aspect of the programme the Stoneleigh Group did what it claimed to be doing.

Chapter 11: The Significance of Narrative as a Pedagogic Tool

In Chapter 11 I consider the way in which narrative worked as a pedagogic device during and after the retreat programme. I argue that learning how to construct and tell stories about their experiences and aspirations was a critical skill in helping some of the young people to escape the causes of their marginalisation and to transform the opportunities available to them. I suggest it gave some of them a perception of power over what experiences meant to them, how they understood themselves, and how others understood them. I also suggest that the skill of narrative had an impact on the actions that some were able to take and the degree of agency they felt that they had in their transitions to adulthood.

Chapter 12: The Influence of the Stoneleigh Project on the Trajectories of the Young People

The nature and degree of transformation attributed to the Stoneleigh Project by the young people is discussed in Chapter 12. The Stoneleigh Project intended to facilitate young people in finding pathways to adulthood that fulfilled their aspirations personally, socially and politically. As has been outlined above, the purpose of the programme was to help transform the marginalised situations of the young people and then, through them, contribute to a transformation of society. This chapter examines how, in practice, the young people used the experience to support their transitions to adulthood.

In many cases the lives of the young people were transformed as they became more socially mobile, escaped marginalising circumstances, and sought adult roles in their communities. These young people attributed these outcomes to the Stoneleigh Project. Most adopted conventional pathways to adult identities in their work and social lives.

Some set out to become youth workers and so tackle the consequences of marginalisation on others. A few set out to transform the community that they belonged to, the community's attitudes to young people and the work that was available to them. In chapter 12 I examine the influences on the pathways that the young people followed and the degree to which these various pathways to adulthood were affected by the Stoneleigh Project and were congruent with its aims.

Chapter 13: Examining the Ideological Struggles for the Meaning of the Stoneleigh Project

Whatever the outcomes were in practice, the Stoneleigh Group made claims for both a radical practice and radical outcomes. In Chapter 13 I examine the politics of advocacy for radical pedagogic practice within the voluntary organisation of the Stoneleigh Group and between the Group and the youth work world. The pedagogic site of the Stoneleigh Project became a site of struggle amongst the Stoneleigh Group for the control of the concepts being developed. This had a significant effect on the dissemination of the emerging practice. In addition, a struggle occurred between those members of the Stoneleigh Group who undertook the advocacy work and some of the organisations outside of the Stoneleigh Group that these people were seeking to influence. Nevertheless, the Stoneleigh Group claim to have influenced the published findings of the National Youth Agency review (Green, 2006) exploring spirituality in youth work towards a more radical stance.

Chapter 14: Conclusions

Chapter 14 draws my findings together by addressing the four questions outlined above that framed the research study. This includes findings from the study that consider the meaning of marginalisation from the perspective of young people and the Stoneleigh Group, a review of the outcomes from the study concerning the questions related to personal and social transformation, and a summary of the study's arguments discussing the nature and degree of radicalism of the work of the Stoneleigh Group. I conclude that many aspects of the Stoneleigh Project, and especially the retreats, were radical and did have a transformative effect on the identities of many of the young people. However, I will also suggest that, whilst the Stoneleigh Group did support many instances of personal transformation, it did not always achieve its aim of supporting the young people to become agents of social change. Most young people helped to reproduce rather than transform the established power structures of society. I consider why this was so and why some young

people did make a political difference and were able to disrupt some of the processes in their community that led to the marginalisation of young people.

The Multiple Roles of the Researcher

My involvement with the Stoneleigh Group began as the evaluator of the Stoneleigh Project. Shortly after beginning this task I asked if it was acceptable to the Stoneleigh Group if I also used the evaluative data and extended my study for the research purposes of this thesis. The dual roles involved in taking this approach added a level of complexity to the study that is discussed further in Chapter 7. The data for the evaluative study involved an interpretation of the pedagogic processes of the programme and the learning outcomes for the young participants as understood by all the participants in the Stoneleigh Project. The findings of this study are published in the evaluation report (Loynes, 2004b). This evidence was then incorporated into the research data for a critical analysis of the pedagogy of the Stoneleigh Project and the Stoneleigh Group partners, the life stories of the young participants and the advocacy work of the Stoneleigh Group.

The Use of Pseudonyms for the Participants

The names of all participants who are not associated with work that is in the public domain are given pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality. These pseudonyms are linked to the backgrounds of the participants and their roles in the Stoneleigh Group as explained in Appendix 1. The different roles held by participants in the conduct of the work of the Stoneleigh Group and the terms used to identify these roles are outlined in the first part of Chapter 2 and, in particular, in Table 2. The term 'participants' is used in this study to refer to everyone who participated in this research. Most were initially involved in the co-operative inquiry linked to the evaluation of the Stoneleigh Project. The remainder of the people involved as subjects in this research were participants in the last year of the piloting and people involved in the wider network of the Stoneleigh Group not previously observed or interviewed. Everyone was aware that they were the subjects of this research study and gave their consent for the evidence presented in this thesis to be used.

Coding the Evidence

Evidence used in this study comes from a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Some is quoted. Most is summarised or interpreted in the text. To maintain the flow of the

text for the reader the sources of the evidence used are coded. These codes are given in the text when a quotation is introduced. The codes are explained in Appendix 2.

Conclusion

By taking an ethnographic approach to examining the pedagogy of the Stoneleigh Project this thesis will identify a number of aspects of the programme, and especially the outdoor retreats, that can be considered radical approaches to the transformation of marginalised young people. In considering the claims made by the Stoneleigh Group I will argue that the Stoneleigh Project not only had radical elements in its pedagogic practice but that, with the support of one of the partner organisations, it did support some young people in becoming agents of social change. However, I will claim that the evidence indicates that most young people, having transformed their personal circumstances, reproduced conventional pathways to adulthood.

In relation to the advocacy work, the Stoneleigh Group aspired to influence the emerging curriculum for spirituality in youth work and for the Stoneleigh Project to become a benchmark of good practice. I will argue that, with regard to these aims, there are grounds for thinking that they were successful.