From Vocationalist Needs to New Welfare Concerns: Conceptualising the school-to-work transition among marginalized rural youth

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Introduction

In a recent contribution to the study of barriers to labour market participation in rural areas, Hodge et al (2002, p.471) note

> "The concentration of disadvantage amongst a minority of the local population and the decreasing significance of space as a barrier to the majority indicate the need for policy to become more specifically focused on the particular requirements of individuals within particular contexts. Thus the attention of policy should be turned to extending individual capabilities".

This paper is concerned principally with this challenge of the interface between individual capabilities and policy in the promotion of labour market inclusion for those most at risk of social exclusion. This paper advocates the importance of an individualisation approach to generating labour market inclusion for many contemporary youth and looks at a particular policy intervention that seeks to promote 'active individualisation' ("the process of self-determined decision-making between occupational goals and in the choice of pathways to enter them", Evans and Heinz, 1994, p.xiv-xv) among young educationally excluded youth.[1] The programme addressed is that of Youthreach, a second chance education and training intervention in Ireland, established in the early 1990s primarily as a vocational training programme. In the context of rural restructuring, it appears that the orientation of this policy intervention has altered from a vocational training provision to one more concerned with 'active welfare' where the approach is having to consciously build on actors' knowledgeability resources and their 'individualised systems of social capital' (Raffo and Reeves, 2002). The central argument here is that in order to promote longer term labour market inclusion for the most vulnerable, attention within policy must be given to these 'individualised' needs of young people. In the context of ongoing rural restructuring and the uncertainty posed by risk society, vulnerable youth or those most at risk of labour market exclusion need supportive institutional structures that build 'lateral connectivity' with their life contexts.

The paper is structured as follows. First, an overview is presented of the changing nature of education and training in terms of vocationalism and lifelong learning and the concern for broader welfare considerations. The second part of the paper provides empirical evidence from a case in Ireland where precisely this process is occurring. It documents the meaning of this institution in their lives and its role in preparing for

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[1] In contrast to passive individualisation, "in which goals are weakly defined and strategies to achieve them uncertain", which is more commonplace in the experience of youth in relation to school

labour market inclusion. The paper is based on biographical sociological research with fourteen participants, whose average age is 19 years.

Education and training – vocationalism, lifelong learning or what?
The inability of the general mainstream education arena to create substantive linkages between youth and labour markets prompted many governments throughout the latter part of the twentieth century to seek solutions, again through institutional provisions with such titles as: 'post-compulsory education and training', 'vocational training', 'new vocationalism', 'further education and training', 'Active Labour Market Policies' or 'lifelong learning' (e.g. Pollard *et al*, 1988; Coles, 1995; Walther and Stauber, 1999). Vocationalism, in its various educational and training guises throughout the decades (see Coles, 1995), has been invoked as key to offsetting the worst effects of youth unemployment and the restructuring of labour markets generally. Given the vulnerabilities and exclusions generated through the institutions of individualisation, and the debate surrounding education for individual self-development or as serving the needs of the economy (Finch, 1984), we can legitimately question the implications this poses for contemporary welfare policy.

Within EU policy documents, discourses of 'hard times' and 'competition' are fused in terms of academic humanism (lifelong learning as 'stimulating') and workplace meritocracy (for individuals to get on as well as promoting nationally efficient economies one needs skills and qualifications). Within the lexicon of policy makers, the notion of 'lifelong learning', according to Walther and Stauber (1999), tends to be treated within the literature as part of the 'democratisation of learning' or, alternatively, as part of the discourse of human capital which sees it as raising the efficiency levels of education and training. This debate is an ongoing one and has been waged with considerable intensity in the UK context in relation to 'new vocationalism' (see Coles, 1995; this intensity of debate is not at all apparent in the Irish case). There, it is argued that the vocationalism which emerged from a liberal education agenda (encapsulated in the Newsom Report of 1963) – with its philosophical concern for wider educational programmes to reflect student needs rather than the needs of industry – has given way, in its contemporary form, to the anti-humanist agenda of economic liberalism in New Right discourse (Moore and Hickox, 1999) and New Deal policy.

Several authors have been somewhat sceptical and pessimistic about the impact of further education and training schemes in countering the deeply embedded systemic problems associated with social exclusion. Many of the education/training, lifelong programmes, it is argued, are shaped within the context of politico-economic discourses and policies that intensify rather than alleviate social exclusion. The underlying discourse of 'neo-Durkheimian hegemony' is concerned primarily with economic insertion as social integration (Levitas, 1996, 1998).

There is a growing body of policy research, however, which concerns itself with the more humanist, developmental aspects of welfare policy. Such work acknowledges the importance of agency in reframing welfare policy in ways that activate the personal and relational resources of the most vulnerable and socially excluded (Titterton, 1992; Coles, 1995; Deacon and Mann, 1999; Williams and Popay, 1999; Schoon and Bynner, 2002; Steinert and Pilgram, 2003). Wessels and Miedema (2003) suggest that what is

important is to understand *situations* of social exclusion and how these are activated through the breakdown of belonging, trust and accessibility to resources, at the individual, social (neighbourhood, group or network) and societal levels. This calls for welfare as a form of resources management, which recognises the power of support structures to enable actors to access those resources for coping with the difficulties of social exclusion (Pelikan et al, 2003). The following section analyses the growing emphasis on welfare concerns within a programme that initially started out with specific vocational considerations in mind. It represents an intervention in the humanist, developmental end of welfare policy.

From vocational considerations to welfare concern - the case of Youthreach in Ireland
The Youthreach Programme, located in Letterfrack in North West Connemara, began as the 'Youthskills' Programme in November 1989. It began with sixteen participants, all males of between 15 and 17 years of age, from farming backgrounds. The centre has a current capacity of 45 participants. There is a full-time staff of three, which includes the female coordinator and two male tutors. The coordinator has been in that position since the beginning while the two tutors began work soon after, around 1990.

At that time when it first appeared, there was particular concern about youth unemployment and building the skill base of those whose backgrounds were oriented towards vocational skills. While the initial years had a strong presence of young men, from manual and farming backgrounds and with strong work ethic, in more recent times participants are quite diverse in their motivation, commitment and general participation. The original type of participant is described by the coordinator as follows:

> "They just wanted to be in the woodwork or metalwork room and that is what they wanted to do, they wanted to be making gates and they wanted to be fixing trailers, they were very much that kind. If they were late in the morning, it was because there would be a cow calving or they would take a week off to do the turf, this kind of stuff. There is absolutely nothing like that today at all."

The main vocational modules that continue to be offered are woodwork, metalwork, engineering, arts and crafts and in recent years, Information Technology. Those young people entering the FETAC-NCVA Foundation level are typically aged 15 and 16 years. There is an induction period during which time they sample all modules and decide which core vocational ones they wish to continue. This group is offered compulsory modules in Information Technology (IT), personal development, maths and English, as well as one to one supports in literacy and numeracy. They have a choice of four additional modules in order to attain a certificate: typically, woodwork, metalwork, engineering, art/design, aquaculture. Depending on the participants' interests, modules can be adapted and oriented towards the learner. The centre offers the progression to FETAC-NCVA levels 1 and 2.

One of the ways in which the Programme is responding to the credentialist practices of employers is its provision quite recently of the Leaving Cert Applied Programme which includes subjects taught in schools in addition to labour market preparation courses: Maths, Irish, English, Social Education, Vocational Preparation and Guidance (including work experience), a choice of two 'specialisms' (IT, Graphic and

Construction Studies, Childcare and Community care, Engineering) and non-examination 'electives' (art and drama). Work experience of ten days duration within the year is advised and adopted by the centre within the Foundation and LCA routes. Within the LCA, assessment is part continuous assessment, part attendance and part examination. Participants must have a 90 per cent attendance record and the results are awarded as pass, merit and distinction. At the time of fieldwork, there were six students in Year 1 and nine in Year 2 of the Leaving Certificate Applied; five were undertaking courses in ECDL, Business and Enterprise and Childcare at FETAC-NCVA Level 2, having acquired level 1 previously; and twenty participants were in the Foundation and Level 1 programmes.

The staff are finding that a greater proportion of young people appear to be attracted to the programme by virtue of the financial gains to be made through the allowance, while a growing number are engaging in illicit use of 'soft drugs', such as hashish smoking. The coordinator and tutors see these youth as having the least motivation and the poorest prospects for advancement. This seems to be a predominantly male dimension. The gender profile is currently almost evenly divided between males and females. In recent years the age profile has shifted towards an older group, from 17 years onwards, sometimes involving youth in the early twenties. While Youthreach was the only training provision for 15 to 18 year olds, there was a level of flexibility for the participation of those outside the official target age. This has changed in recent years with the provision of a new programme, VTOS, for those over 20 years of age.

Connecting with Youth Welfare
The following discussion is based on the biographical research with the fourteen participants, evenly divided in gender terms. What unifies all participants having arrived at Youthreach is the disillusionment and disconnection experienced, albeit in varying degrees, with the mainstream educational system. Most of the young people left school early, sometimes without the basic qualifications, and a small number completed school but participated in less than optimal ways. The participants' lives vary in terms of the contextual factors impinging on them:
Most of the young people (twelve) come from unskilled or semi-skilled manual backgrounds with some farming activity taking place – two are from lower professional backgrounds;
Most are from small to medium sized families, where the size of sibship is three or less (10 with no more than three brothers and sisters). The size of sibship ranges from none to nine;
Most (nine) have relative stability in terms of intact family - four were from non-intact family backgrounds where their parents had separated or divorced and one is from a lone parent background;
Most (twelve) went to the local community school, except one who went to a boarding school and another went to an all-female school;
Most left with either no qualifications (three) or the Junior certificate only (eight) – three had a Leaving Certificate (one of which is regarded as a 'fail'); and
Most (ten) were born and reared in the area with the exception of four who came to the area either in childhood or during early teenage years.

Assessment

As an 'authoritative resource' in Giddens's terminology (1984) in which chances of self-development and expression are paramount, we now look at how Youthreach might be considered relationally resourceful to youth in the sense that the interactions and social relationships help to mobilise aspects of young people's 'knowledgeability' and their 'individualised systems of social capital' (relational resources). By knowledgeability I refer to Giddens's definition as "all that actors know and believe about the circumstances of their situations and those of others". It recognises that actors' bring a certain meaning and normative dimension to the activities in which they find themselves. It incorporates psychosocial processes of 'self-efficacy' and having 'identity capital', that is having the agentic capacities to achieve well-being and a sense of secure living. An individualized system of social capital is defined as:

> "a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation and which provides authentic opportunities for everyday learning" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.148).

Young people differ in terms of the nature and strength of their system of social capital. An important typology identified is that of the 'strong individualized systems of social capital', whereby young people are able to take advantage of their networks to develop informal and practical knowledge, enabling them to cope with the constraints of the local youth labour market. While being constrained by a similar set of circumstances to those with weak systems, the vignettes of the two male youths in their study demonstrates how they were able to obtain work – albeit casualized, insecure and often times illegal – through family, friends and older youth connections. Much of the contact was made through pubs and other networks. In all, the locality features strongly within the network of social capital, in terms of locating work as well as everyday leisure consumption.

A separate analysis of the structures of engagement within the Youthreach centre suggests that what unanimously appeals to young people, irrespective of their attraction to the programme on the basis of the training allowance, are the structures of communication between tutors and participants, which is consciously based on group inclusion, fostering relations of trust and promoting a sense of ontological security; key elements missing from the participants' schooling experiences. There are several features upon which the Youthreach programme resonates with young people's lives, contributing towards changes in their knowledgeability and outlook towards learning and potential labour market inclusion. For this period in their lives and for some time after participation, Youthreach effectively becomes a key ingredient in these young people's 'individualised systems of social capital'. For many young people, the relationships developed in Youthreach become important compensatory elements of their systems of social capital, which in its absence would generate considerable vulnerability for this set of young people. Analysis of young people's narratives show that what is most appealing about the Programme's connection with them is: the adult status experienced; sense of independence and responsibility; freedom to communicate. In the remainder of this section, I explore the ways in which this 'connectivity' emerges within young people's lives in terms of real knowledge, not only about the world of work but their wider social selves.

The learning content – "It's all about the real world"
In many respects, Youthreach can be seen as a competence-based approach to learning, albeit it takes place primarily in a non-work setting. In typical usage of the term:

> "Competence-based education tends to be a form of education that derives a curriculum from an *analysis of prospective or actual role* in modern society and that attempts to certify student progress on the *basis of demonstrated performance* in some or all aspects of that role" (Grant et al, 1979, cited in Bates, 1999, p.102).

There is some debate, especially in the UK, about the underlying ethos and approach to competence based learning in the workplace, particularly between those concerned with behavioural outcomes and those in the 'interactionist' camp (see Bates, 1999). Youthreach perhaps fits the 'interactionist' end of competence learning which emphasises the "importance of individual agency in the construction of meanings and the need for education to treat learning as a creative process in which the outcomes are to some extent unpredictable" (Bates, 1999, p.112-3). This is perhaps most evident in the orientation to learning in the Leaving Cert Applied programme, where assessment is primarily based on the completion of tasks or group project work and assignments rather than examination alone. In the following extract, Sharon describes the hands-on nature of the work:

> SHARON: I think it is because they let us go off and do our own thing, if we wanted stuff, we had to get it. We had to do 'mini-companies'. It wasn't Teresa or John or anybody like that, we had to ring up and order it ourselves.

Ciara spoke about this issue and the feeling of achievement she gained in being able to research an issue that bears directly on her identity and those significant others in her life. What the following extract demonstrates is the opportunity for Ciara to pursue a project with direct 'lateral connectivity' with her own life. Through this curricular approach Ciara was enabled to select and engage with a project that would help change her discursive consciousness:

> **So the tasks that you do, you have to write them up?**
> CIARA: Yeah, you have to write a report. For example this year, we had a personal achievement task which I done on the elderly 'cos I worked with the elderly. I got my work experience with the elderly. And we had a contemporary issue and I done it on single parents, so it kind of relates to me and it relates to my mum and a lot of friends who are single parents, so that was brilliant. That went really well. You had to stand and present – you had a board and you had figures on single parents, you had figures on social welfare payments, like Cura, different organizations that single parents can go to.

Likewise, Catríona, who wants to be a social worker, undertook research about the child abuse that took place in the Letterfrack industrial school, interviewing an abuse counsellor as part of her study. She chose the topic because of her interest in it and the topic seemed a neglected one.

In discussion with the woodwork tutor who is also involved with teaching the Leaving Cert Applied groups, he describes how aspects of the programme help to orientate the young people's perspectives in more agentic ways. He describes that part of students'

learning is their reflection on how well a particular assignment was completed, including the pitfalls, and that this process helps them take charge of their learning and prevent ongoing mistakes being made:

> It does broaden, - you can't teach anything and anyone without broadening them - but it's more about life and project work. They are reflecting all the time on what they do and how they did it and what went wrong and why it went wrong. If you looked at the reports you can see at the beginning "well that went wrong because she did this and he did that". By the end of it, its like, "*I should have done it this way*". You can actually see them take responsibility. A lot of them without that would never think about what they had done in terms of how they could have changed it, what they done is gone and they keep making the same mistakes.
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> … they have to review the whole thing and they actually ask you "what went right and what went wrong", not on the paper itself, but as a teacher of the leaving cert. you are encouraged to say – "put down what went wrong for you; what went right". They don't want to write what went wrong, because they think that is going to lose them marks, but they get their marks for the report, not for the piece, that is one of the hardest things to get across to them.

Participants are also encouraged to help one another by sharing their understandings of course material and explaining subject matter to one another wherever there is difficulty in comprehension. Project work tends to be undertaken in groups, which in itself can create tensions but also learning experiences if treated as experimental. Sharon describes an incident that took place in her group task and how Theresa managed to smooth the issue and turn what seemed a divisive event into a positive learning opportunity:

> **Has that happened [problems between participants]?**
> SHARON: Well, in the course we had to do an Enterprise task and you had to set up our own business and we did wooden clocks. One of the girls and one of fellas had a bit of row and I was the only other one with them, so I was stuck in the middle. Theresa came down and she said 'I'm glad it happened, because it just goes to show that if you are setting up your own business that things don't run smoothly, so it's a good experience for the both of you as well'. At the end of her talk everybody was talking and laughing again. It's all just to prepare you for work and show that everything just won't run the way you think it will.

For those who are particularly oriented to vocational skills and engage better with hands-on work, Youthreach provides a meaningful curriculum and point of connection. This was particularly mentioned by Finbar and Brendan, who are both in the 'foundation' skills course. Finbar enjoys the artistic metal work he is able to do while Brendan likes being able to spend a considerable length of time trying out metalwork and woodwork and the choice of making something substantial or spending time fixing his motor bike.[23] He contrasts his experience to school where he says "there was more maths, English paper work; you never really learned anything. If you were going to

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[2] Generally, those in the foundation year spend an entire day on one vocational module, e.g. Mondays are spent on metalwork, Tuesdays – woodwork, Wednesday – Technical Drawing and PE in the afternoon, Thursday – Mechanics and Friday – computers, maths, English, communication, and woodwork in the afternoon.

make anything it was just a toy or something small". Likewise, Paul speaks about the differences in what his brother is able to achieve at Youthreach and how it has tapped what appears as a natural talent:

> PAUL: Its different, it's better. It's all about the real world instead of the 'make believe' world over there [school] … He's [brother] got into carpentry and he's very good. All the furniture in his room is made by himself. He's gifted. In school in woodwork he never made a thing. Never came home with anything. He's over there a few months and he's loving it. Never knew the lad could do what he's doing..

For Cathy and Ciara, who both had difficulties comprehending the abstract instruction of school, the staff affirm that there are alternative ways of demonstrating meaning and alternative means of expressing oneself:

> ***Even the ones you did at school, and didn't like, do you find it different now?***
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> CATHY: Everything is different here, even I am doing maths now and God I hate maths but, I don't mind doing it here, because even the maths that you learn at school, its turned around to be a more practical way of looking at it. It is the same maths but in a different way. In a better way really, you do Y's and X's at school, what are Ys and Xs going to do for you. They put practical things like measuring, its totally different they put it more practical, that you know what you are looking at instead of X's and Y's Ps and Qs. So it's not too bad.
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> CIARA: I felt that for say English for example I couldn't … what I was thinking in my head I couldn't put it down on paper if you know what I mean, as in Youthreach I would tell Theresa and she was "there's other ways of getting around it, put it down in another way then". You know, you can get around not being able to spell a word. I was always in trouble at school. I was always on detention. I had no interest.

Within the 'social education' and 'vocational preparation' modules, there is particular emphasis in bringing into young people's discursive consciousness an awareness of issues that have 'lateral connectivity' with their lives. Sharon talks emphatically about the benefits in the knowledge gained within these modules about practical, everyday realities such as knowing about her employment rights, tenancy rights, as well as advice on budgeting and so on. On the same subject, Alan notes how the content concerned "ways to look after yourself … it looks at all the dangers and all the opportunities as well for life". David, who, at the first interview, demonstrated a fairly open masculinist attitude in some respects, spoke about his changed views at the follow up interview:

> DAVID: "Social education does smarten you up if you know what I mean. It makes you wise to what's going on, the contemporary issues class opened my eyes to an awful lot that's going on in the world. Before I went to Youthreach I wasn't that open minded, didn't give a shit about it, that's growing up as well."

Substantive or 'Tangible' resources
Depending on one's set of life circumstances, the provision of substantive ('tangible') resources can become foregrounded in actors' baggage of needs. One substantive

resource recently provided through Youthreach is the crèche facility which has had significant implications for young mothers as a group of participants. All mothers agree that the constraints of childrearing are such that without the crèche being available to them, they could not participate either in further education or the labour market in a full-time capacity. The crèche caters for fourteen children at a cost of ten euro per week to the participants. It is staffed by two full-time childcare workers, one of whom is a lone parent who completed level 2 NCVA qualifications at Youthreach several years ago and level 3 in childcare in a post-Leaving cert school in Galway city.

Young mothers group: A particularly notable initiative specifically geared towards inclusion was the formation of the young mothers group in the centre. This initiative was established in 2001-2002 and had eight young mothers undertaking various modules which would enhance their practical knowledge in key everyday tasks. Four of the five young mothers interviewed had participated in the group. Theresa describes the specifically designed programme as a 'parenting skills course' with a blend of 'taster' modules in personal development, maths, communication skills, childcare and computers. One specifically designed module involved preparing the mothers in solving practical tasks geared towards independent living, such as how to change tyres, put together shelves, change electrical plugs or work an electrical drill. Many of the young mothers were living alone with their child(ren) at the time of this initiative and stood to benefit where they may not have had the support or experience dealing with practical problems. Emma explains other elements of the course to show the 'lateral connectivity' (Bloomer, 2001) of the course, that is where learning is linked to what is happening in young people's lives outside of formal learning institutions:

> It was good, we used to come about 11 o'clock in the day, sit down and do a few different things, it was nothing like work, just more or less a get together, to talk about things and work out budgets for yourself and manage your money. We talked about banks and loans, the best one to go for and about bank and credit union interest rates. We also did some childcare.

While Emma says that she was aware of many of the issues covered in childcare, because she comes from a large family, Patricia valued what we can see as the advancement of her discursive knowledge about children's welfare:

> PATRICIA: I know the childcare helped me a lot, because I hadn't coped with that area before … I had no idea about anything about kids at all, [unclear] the learning stages, the talking and all that kind of stuff. We used to sit down for about an hour and everyone would talk about their own experiences and I thought "Oh God, I am not the only one who has this problem" or I would be able to help someone else with their problem. Whereas before if I would ask my mother, she would say "well, you shouldn't be doing that". It's kind of hard to ask parents for advice too sometimes.

Patricia identifies the possibilities of gaining support and validation outside her family, suggesting the importance to her of the need for group inclusion from those who shared a similar set of circumstances to her own. She is appreciative of the reciprocity and mutual support generated through group membership at Youthreach. She found comfort in being able to talk to friends who, in relation to rearing children, could say what childrearing practices worked and didn't work for them. Emma also expresses the

consensus of the mothers surrounding group connection: "[BMG: overall would you say it was useful, did other parents find it good?] Oh yes definitely, it got everybody together and we got to know one another and it took us out of the house and the kids were in the crèche, so they were well looked after too". Patricia also mentions that she was quite paranoid early on in her new role as a mother because of what others might have been gossiping about her but found that this dissipated when she started attending Youthreach.

Importantly, the young mothers group constituted a stepping stone towards further qualification after the first year. Cathy and Emma continued on to undertake the Leaving Cert Applied Programme (as well as Ciara, who was not in the young mothers group), while Patricia and Pauline both undertook level two FETAC modules in Business, the European Computer Driving Licence, Communications and Childcare. A critical resource for the young mothers in progressing through the various courses was the availability of the crèche facility (discussed below).

At the first interview stage, Cathy was anxious about undertaking the Leaving Cert Applied programme because of its ninety per cent attendance rule. Her experience was that she could often miss an entire week if her children were ill. Ciara also shares a similar dependence on the crèche facility: "If I didn't have the crèche, I wouldn't have been able to join. My mum would not have been able to cope with the two babies, one would have been fine, not two". When Ciara first had her twin daughters there was no crèche in existence in the area but she was enabled to participate because Theresa arranged, through funding from the local VEC, for a paid childminder for two days per week. As discussed in the previous chapter, her resilience resources to care more effectively for her children were enabled through the support of a 'mother figure' who could offer practical advice and guidance in her vulnerable situation.

For Patricia, the crèche facility provided more than just a place to preoccupy her child while she attended Youthreach but rather became a place where the child's cognitive development would advance:

> PATRICIA: It [crèche] has developed her. Her speech compared to other two year olds that are not in a crèche, it is unbelievable. She is really good.

Theresa constitutes a key relational resource in the tangible benefits she tries to initiate for participants, particularly in generating access to further courses. In their descriptions of what horizons of action have opened up for them, she is regarded by the participants as possessing considerable 'social capital' in the world of education and training.

By the second interview stage, ten participants had left Youthreach and most had progressed to further education courses and/or employment. One of the possibilities open to participants if they wish to pursue another further education course following their time at Youthreach, such as a Post-Leaving Cert or Level 3 FETAC course, is the arrangement whereby they continued to receive an allowance through Youthreach, while being monitored and supervised by the coordinator. Ciara and Sharon had undertaken courses with this type of support from Youthreach (Ciara a part-time certificate in social care at the university and Sharon a full-time pre-nursing course in a

further education college), while Brendan was pursuing a fisheries course in Donegal and David was undertaking a FAS course in AutoCad in Galway city. Patricia, Pauline, Paul and Finbar were in full-time employment. Alex was about to start an apprenticeship as an electrician.

From the young people's accounts, Theresa's 'social capital' was instrumental in providing them with tangible results, whether in terms of information or persisting with potential providers to give the young person a chance. All participants agreed that Theresa had demonstrated or could demonstrate the power to initiate outcomes for them through her social capital resources:

> **Do you think the work experience part of it is useful?**
> PAULINE: Yes it is because, you can try different jobs and if you want to get a job in Galway, Teresa will help you get one, if you want to do something different. I know a girl from here two years ago she went to do nursing in Galway, so she was getting funded travel up and down every day. Teresa would get you it, she just rings them up and if they say 'we're sorry' she'd say 'even if you only keep her in for 2 weeks, see how she gets on'. There are a lot of places if you do work experience and if you are finished here, they might even want to keep you on for the winter.

> *I suppose here in youth reach it matches your personality with what you can do?*
> EMMA: Yes, well if you say to Teresa you want to do something, she will find you some work experience on it, if you still really want to do it, she finds out all the information on it and what grant you can get. She will do all of that for you, which is fairly good, she would possibly find out what you couldn't find out for yourself.

Importantly, one of the significant aspects of the coordinator's social capital is her connection with employers in the local economy. This social capital is critically valuable in widening young people's choices and transition beyond Youthreach. However, she maintains a cautious position in relation to this aspect of her social capital and how 'tangible' the resources should be. Quite often, employers contact Theresa looking for potential employees but she insists that "we need to be careful not to be seen as a labour exchange" or as a means through which young people and employers are exploited. In this regard, she discusses her awareness of certain employers she would not send a young person to for experience or sponsorship as an apprentice. Likewise, there are certain young people she would not recommend to employers because of the implications that poor reputation may have for some young person in the future who may be more suitable. One of the changes which she describes having to make was the abolition of work experience for the younger participants, particularly those at Foundational level. A pattern was beginning to occur, whereby young people were acquiring work experience but finding themselves tempted to stay with an employer, particularly in the construction sector where a young person could start earning what might be considered an impressive wage at that age. The decision was taken to confine work experience only to those in the 17 and 18 year age group since the younger ones were more vulnerable to losing out on longer term benefits in the quest to secure immediate tangible resources:

> Maybe the building contractors would have lost their kids they had during the summer - they would have been looking for a little 'go-for', to run around. Fair

enough if they were going to sponsor them, but often times they wouldn't, they just wanted someone to do a bit of labouring and bits like that and at the end the kid had nothing.

Although participants may officially finish with Youthreach in a full-time capacity, there continues to exist a point of connection between the participants and tutors. Most of those who had left had returned on different occasions for advice or information and here the social capital and relational resource element of Youthreach continues to maintain its meaning in the young person's life. David found that the course he began in catering was not for him, so decided to change track and undertake an course in 'AutoCad' design. Before beginning this six-month course with FAS, David went back to Theresa who arranged for him to undertake a month long course at Youthreach in basic technical drawing skills as part of his portfolio preparation prior to sitting an entrance exam. Ciara describes the help she continued to receive when she found herself in difficulty with the demands of the course:

> CIARA: Some of the essays now, I could write it down but then trying to get into it, trying to get it down on paper, tidy it up and stuff. Theresa gave me a lot of help with it, she was brilliant and others. Jimmy with the English spellings and stuff. Everyone kind of gave me a hand. It was okay, it was interesting, ya know. I was still getting paid through Youthreach.

In discussion with Theresa and the woodwork tutor, a number of points were mentioned which we can consider intrinsic to the social capital resources deployed between the youth and staff. Theresa is conscious of the need to secure local skilled actors as tutors within the programme, particularly since they have a better insight into the life of a young person from the area and are more dependable in turning up at the centre than someone who needs to travel from somewhere such as Galway city. There is less likelihood of 'letting the young person down'. Her experience on this issue is recounted as follows:

> We found it very much with the vocational skills, with the wood and the engineering or motor bike repairs and things like that, that they know where the tutors live and they will build up a rapport with the tutor. They can go and say or ring them up and say, well I have this problem what can I do about it.

Finbar mentions specifically this point and knows that he is able to draw on the skills of the metalwork tutor to assist him in ways that have a 'real-life' connection for him: "If I got breakdowns with my tractor, I would bring it in and Johnny would give you a hand no problem. If I wanted wires or lights put on it, we have mechanics on a Thursday too here, and he would help you with that work." According to the woodwork tutor, there is a different willingness of engagement with those who come back for a specific purpose, such as for advice or to convey the news of a new job or course, and those who sometimes show up almost on a daily basis to visit other trainees, which has a distracting effect on the participants and tutors.

In Patricia's case, her work experience with a local community organisation (next door to Youthreach) and the qualifications gained in business and computer skills led to her securing a full-time job as a receptionist with the organisation. She counts herself as 'lucky' to have a job that matches her skills and interests, especially given the lack of

choice in the local economy. She appears very content with her occupation: "It might not be other people's cup of tea, but I love the dealing with people and that side of it. I think I am good at it". For Patricia, Youthreach helped activate (as 'active welfare' would imply) a new set of opportunities that enabled her to stay and work in the area, to raise her child and be close to her family; opportunities that enabled a greater sense of security.

Conclusion

In summary, as an 'authoritative resource', it is evident that young people find enhanced means of self-expression and self-development, which is most apparent in their knowledgeability towards learning and educational engagement. Young people articulate this in different ways, but clusters primarily in the sense of adult status experienced, the freedom of expression, the responsibility towards their lives and as explored in this paper, the connection with a more real world of knowledge (lateral connectivity). In this paper the connection with the learning content is focused on and incorporates elements of these issues. Youth find that the resources acquired are not just at the level of knowledgeability but also more tangibly in the immediate resources they gain through participation, namely access to employment and further education. In this sense, actors gain from the social capital generated within the programme.

At the level of knowledgeability some actors attain a learner identity, which they had never experienced in authentic ways within the institution of schooling. Depending on actors' circumstances and vulnerability disposition, Youthreach assumes different meaning and importance. This is especially evident in the case of the young mothers group. The final point is that in order to promote labour market inclusion among those experiencing social exclusion there is a need for policy to become sensitised to the individualised, biographical contexts of young people. It is argued here that a programme such as Youthreach has responded to the contemporary challenge of social exclusion by its ethos and approach to active welfare and its quest to articulate a process of 'active individualisation' in the face of wider structural constraints surrounding labour markets.

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