Uncomfortable knowledge and the ethics of good practice in Australia's offshore refugee detention centers

Bessant, Judith; Watts, Rob

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Uncomfortable knowledge and the ethics of good practice in Australia's offshore refugee detention centres

There is a widely-shared view that youth work is essentially a 'practical' job. From this perspective wanting to help young people is the basis of good youth work requiring only the addition of some basic technical or vocational training. According to proponents of this view, university-based education of practitioners promotes an imbalance between theory and practice such that the excessively theoretical character of youth work education leads graduates and employers alike to complain that they do not have the relevant 'practical' skills (Brooker, 2014). This becomes part of a case for removing youth work education from universities.

We are not so sure about this. The question of what youth workers need to know, if they are to engage in good practice is a challenge. Good practice involves the idea that we do the right thing for the right reasons. Yet like most simple things it is difficult to achieve.

While it is one of a number of considerations, the emergent field of 'ignorance studies' suggests that professional knowledge is always shadowed by various forms of ignorance which can frustrate or prevent good practice. This is the case if we opt for 'preferred ignorance' which occurs when we choose not to know things which are difficult or painful, or 'presumed knowledge' which relies on unwarranted confidence in what we think we know (Gross & McGoey, 2015). We argue that good practice involves the capacity of professionals to untangle the relationship between knowledge and different forms of ignorance.

The need to do this arises especially when professionals encounter 'uncomfortable knowledge' (Flyvbjerg 2013). Uncomfortable knowledge involves eg., the discovery by youth workers that young people are being treated poorly or that other professionals are engaging in bad practice like bullying, corruption, harassment, and other harmful actions. We argue that recognizing and responding to uncomfortable knowledge is critical for securing the well-being of young people and constitutes good practice implied in the fiduciary responsibility all youth work practitioners have for the young people they work with (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Engaging with good practice necessarily raises difficult questions about what we know and how we are to provide good answers to practical, i.e., ethical questions.

The need to address these issues is highlighted by what happened when Save the Children Australia, a major non-government organisation took on a tender to work in Australia's asylum-seeker detention camps on Nauru in 2013 and 2014. In a classic example of preferred ignorance, managers in the organisation entered into a contract with a major private security company to supply child protection and youth work services to 'help' the children and young people detained

on Nauru. They did this knowing the camps breached international legal and human rights conventions. Its youth work employees were forced to face the horrors of the camp and opted to act as ‘whistle-blowers’ which led them to being forcibly removed from Nauru, some of them facing criminal prosecution. Faced with ‘uncomfortable knowledge’ of an extreme set of circumstances these youth workers opted for good practice.

We begin by outlining the case study before considering some of the implications of this for work curriculum which might help prepare youth workers to think about difficult practice issues as they arise in the field.

AUSTRALIAN ASYLUM SEEKER POLICY: 1989-2016

Since the late 1980s every Australian government regarded all asylum-seekers arriving on Australian shores without appropriate documentation as illegal entrants. Even though they have a right to seek asylum under international law and should not be penalised for their mode of entry, those asylum-seekers arriving in Australia by boat are treated as “unlawful non-citizens” (Phillips, 2015, p.1) and are detained in high security institutions. The policy of mandatory detention involves the incarceration of men, women and children in high-security camps originally in locations around the Australian mainland for the period that their application for refugee status was being processed. It has become one of the most contentious issues in Australia’s political history.

As many commentators observe, the establishment of these camps and the arbitrary detention of asylum-seekers without trial or due legal process constitutes a serious contravention of international human rights law, especially of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the Australian Human Rights Commission noted, “no other country mandates the closed and indefinite detention of children when they arrive on our shores” (AHRC, 2014, p.11). Australia’s asylum-seeker policy operates against a backdrop of a long history of states engaging in illegal detention of selected populations in camps deemed ‘sites of legal exception’ (Agamben, 1998). This notwithstanding the High Court has repeatedly upheld the power of the Executive to be allowed to place its asylum-seeker legislation beyond the ambit of judicial review and without regard for international law. In the case of *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004), for example the High Court of Australia ruled that Al-Kateb, a stateless asylum seeker, could be detained indefinitely and that this indefinite detention was deemed to be lawful because it was simply an ‘administrative’ process.

Between 2001-2008 and again since 2012 Australia moved to redefine its migration zone, and signed memorandums of understanding with Nauru and Papua-New Guinea to establish off-shore detention camps. In August 2012, the Gillard Labor government reopened three camps in Nauru. As has become common in the era of neo-liberal governance, the operation of these detention camps was outsourced to a private asset-management business. The policy of outsourcing the detention and processing of asylum-seekers to a third-country has had the effect of thwarting detailed judicial or public scrutiny of the camps (Dastyari 2015).

The policy and practice of detaining young asylum-seekers, and particularly children and young people, has been repeatedly condemned by human rights experts, medical practitioners, lawyers, and by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

(2012) has expressed its deep concern about the mandatory detention policy while both the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Human Rights Committee have recommended that Australia abolish mandatory detention (United Nations Committee Against Torture, 2008; United Nations Human Rights Committee, 2009). The Australian Human Rights Commission (2006, 2014) laid out the grounds for its concern. While Section 4AA of the Commonwealth Migration Act states that “a minor shall only be detained as a measure of last resort”, in practice the detention of young asylum-seekers had become a defining feature of Australian Government policy. By requiring the mandatory detention of all ‘non-citizen children’ in Australia without a valid visa, Australia’s asylum seeker policy did the opposite of what was required. While successive governments promised repeatedly that children and young people would be removed from the camps this had not happened: in March 2016 over a hundred people under 18 were still detained in Nauru alone. Australia’s asylum-seeker policies reveal the truth of Schattschneider’s point that “the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power” (1975, p. 66).

Save the Children Australia

What is happening in these sites is an important issue in a book devoted to youth work. This is because in October 2012, Save The Children Australia, (henceforth, Save the Children) the Australian arm of a global aid and development agency dedicated to working with children and young people, tendered successfully to Transfield Services, a publicly listed company that specialises in the provision of industrial infrastructure services and that successfully tendered to provide services for Australia’s offshore immigration centres. In 2012, Transfield subcontracted Save the Children to deliver child protection and youth work services on Manus Island.

While Save the Children had strongly and publicly objected to the policy of mandatory detention, especially of children in offshore immigration detention camps, in 2012 it tendered to provide education, recreation and child-protection services to unaccompanied children, children in families, childless couples and single mothers in the camps. The decision to tender for a contract to provide these services was justified on grounds frequently adduced by those working in the human services, namely that the children and young people in offshore centers ‘need our help’. It also justified its action claiming it would take every step to ensure ‘that the environment was fit for a child’ (Save the Children, 2016c). It claimed the beneficent mantle of professional altruists when it said that its child protection staff and youth workers were all ‘well-qualified workers’ possessing degrees in social work, human services or psychology, or else had TAFE Certificate IVs in Child Services or Youth Work. While it had agreed to sign off on government-imposed confidentiality clauses and other forms of intellectual property, Save the Children claimed it would still be able to advocate on behalf of children.

This convergence of philanthropic altruism on the part of an NGO and Hobbesian misanthropy on the part of the state began to unravel in 2014 when a number of the nine or so child protection workers employed by Save the Children in Nauru became whistleblowers. Through 2014 the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) had been running an inquiry into the approximately 800 children and young people held in mandatory detention. The youth workers on Nauru made an anonymous submission to that inquiry outlining their serious concerns about

what was taking place in the camps. The AHRC report subsequently identified ‘Submission no.183’ as a submission made by employees of Save the Children.

Once it became clear who the whistleblowers were, the Australian (Abbott) government relying on a security report provided by Wilsons Security (sub-contracted by Transfield to provide security in detention centers on Manus and Nauru), claimed that not only had the workers engaged in whistleblowing, they had also actively fomented strife among the detainees by encouraging them to self-harm. The Abbott government ordered the forced removal of those workers from Nauru. Soon after, the government’s Department of Immigration and Border Protection referred the matter to the federal police for investigation of possible breaches of Section 70 of the Crimes Act. A subsequent review found the claims that the child protection workers had encouraged detainees on Nauru to self-harm as part of a political campaign to embarrass the government to be groundless (Doogan, 2015). The contract with Save the Children was not renewed.

GOOD PRACTICE

Good practice involves the idea that when we relate to other people in our capacity as teachers, doctors, parents or strangers we do the right thing for the right reasons. In short, good practice involves three dimensions. Firstly it requires knowing the truth of what is happening which entails thinking and knowing. Secondly, good judgments are required about what is the good thing to do. Finally, will and courage are needed to act in ways that are in accord with that judgment. Good practice is different from today’s verbiage of ‘best practice,’ derived from the rational technical model of practice. The origins of ‘best practice’ are found in business environments and management textbooks and rely heavily on compliance with rules and criteria used as part of accredited management standards.

Human service professions like youth work, social work, psychology, teaching and counseling have long assumed that professional practice can and should emulate the relationship between theory and practice found in professions like medicine and engineering (Schon, 1983). It is a relationship described variously as a binary in which scientific theory is constructed by academic researchers and models of practice by professional educators (Ord, 2007). According to this account, practice emerges from and is dependent on theory (Buchroth & Parkin, 2010). In this way there is tendency to see practice as technical-rational action in which practice involves following rules and protocols.

This account of theory and practice has been durable in spite of warnings from writers like Schon (1983) about the fragile assumptions it relies on. Others like Bourdieu (1977) likewise reject the model of objective and technical practice informed by a scientific body of theory because its advocates fail to acknowledge the power of the state or the way fields of practice are implicated in reproducing fundamental asymmetries of social and economic power. Salkever (1991) and Flyvbjerg (2001) argued against the application of scientific method used in the physical sciences to social relations and practices. Both argue that human service professionals require practical wisdom (phronesis); it is this kind of knowledge that underpins good practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

To appreciate this point it helps to see why and how practical wisdom is different from the other two kinds of Aristotelian knowing namely, episteme (theoretical science) and techne (technical know-how). Episteme refers to abstracted generalised knowledge consisting of timeless scientific and mathematical truths or theories about the natural world and the cosmos. These are often expressed as mathematical equations like Pythagoras' theorem or as laws about the physical world like Newton's law of gravity. The second kind of knowledge is poesis, which relies on techne (skills) used to make 'useful' or 'beautiful' things like clothing, houses, furniture, poetry or medicine. Each of these kinds of knowing and doing are important and valuable. Yet the best use of them depends on understanding their end purpose. If we want to establish how to best live with and engage with other people then it is important to cultivate a capacity for phronesis or practical wisdom.

As Schwartz and Sharpe (2011) argue practical wisdom is a way of thinking and knowing that does not rely on rules or generalised abstract laws. Unlike episteme, practical wisdom does not seek timeless or eternal truth, nor does it pursue technical knowledge: it is context sensitive and for this reason inquires into the problem of good practice on a case-by-case basis. This requires thinking about each situation and establishing what is actually happening and then working out the best thing to do. It relies on an ethnographic sensibility that involves straddling the local and the global. It relies on having clarity of purpose (telos) about our practice framed by an interest in promoting the relevant human goods without which our lives become less valuable. It entails asking questions like: What are our choices? What are the costs? Are they desirable? Who wins? Who loses? In short, practical wisdom is central to good practice. And as we now argue, it requires an ability to recognise the complex relation between knowledge and various kinds of ignorance generated in the face uncomfortable knowledge.

Knowing and Ignorance

In her discussion of the 'banality of evil,' Arendt (1963) drew our attention to the disposition of 'ordinary people' to do bad things to other people. Midgley (2001) likewise accepts the ubiquity of ordinary 'wickedness'. Observing that ordinary "people often do treat each other abominably" Midgley asks why this happen (p. 2). She says there are no simple answers, but that it has something to do with whether we know what is happening or what the consequences of our choices might be. This insight raises the question of what we think we know.

Some continue to bear witness to the Enlightenment idea that "knowledge when systematically produced through adherence to reliable methods of data collection or extraction will inevitably trump superstition" (Gross & McGoey, 2015, p. 8). As recent developments in the field of ignorance studies suggests, there are good reasons to reconsider this. As Gross and McGoey (2015) observe, "what is not known is often a challenging and unpopular field of research and teaching" (p. 7). Yet this is precisely what Haas and Vogt (2015) suggest when they point to the many kinds of ignorance, each involving the absence of knowledge. While lies and deception matter, we are more interested in two other kinds of ignorance because they both obstruct good practice. The first is 'preferred ignorance,' which is based on a choice or preference not to know such as when people do bad things because they have not thought about the principles at stake or the consequences of what they are doing. In effect they chose or expressed a preference for ignorance over knowing (Midgley, 2001). The other kind of ignorance is 'presumed knowledge'

(Haas & Vogt, 2015). This is a widespread form of ignorance masked by ‘a certainty’ that we know. It may be based on processes that have us think that the wrong we are doing is a good deed. This is the ignorance of presumed knowledge.

Save the Children and Ignorance

We argue that Save the Children began delivering child protection and other welfare services on Nauru in a state of ‘preferred ignorance’. The main justification offered by the organization for the decision to work in the camps on Nauru was that they would provide services to children in offshore camps because ‘they need our help’. Moreover, they would take every step to ensure ‘the environment was fit for a child’. We ask: what kind of ignorance informed such a statement?

We know that months before Save the Children arrived in Nauru in 2013, an Amnesty International team visited the camps in Nauru and reported how “conditions were far worse than anything we’d seen in our tour of Australia’s detention centers this year” (Amnesty, 2012). They also pointed to: “... a toxic mix of uncertainty, unlawful detention and inhumane conditions that are creating an increasingly volatile situation, with the Australian Government failing spectacularly in its duty of care to asylum seekers (Amnesty, 2012). They reported how human rights were ‘completely sidelined’ and provided a graphic account of the living conditions:

Asylum seekers are staying in army tents. The standard of life under rough tents (leaky and hot) is even not suitable for cattle. These tents offer absolutely no privacy, and barely have any room between the stretcher beds. In the camp temperature reaches over 40 degrees in the compound and 80 percent humidity. The heat means people can’t stay in their tents during the day. Most find it hard to sleep in the tents - either because of the extreme heat, the dampness, or because of men crying during the night. This all exacerbates the deterioration of their mental health (ibid).

What did Save the Children know or not know that enabled it to think that it could ‘help the children’ or that they could make a detention center into a place that was fit for a child or a young person? The Australian Human Rights Commission had also made it clear that mandatory immigration detention has always contravened Australia’s international legal obligations. The AHRC and respective Presidents and Commissioners over the last 25 years have been unanimous in reporting that such detention, especially of children, breaches the right not to be detained arbitrarily (AHRC, 2014).

What kind of ignorance might allow people in an organization to ignore what placing a child or a young person into a high security camp would do to those young people? More worrying ‘as the medical evidence ... mounted over the last eight months of the Inquiry’ (AHRC, 2014) was the inability of the Human Rights Commission to understand the policy of either the Labor or Coalition Governments: Both the Hon Chris Bowen MP, as a former Minister for Immigration, and the Hon Scott Morrison MP, the current Minister for Immigration, agreed on oath before the Inquiry that holding children in detention does not deter either asylum seekers or people

smugglers. No satisfactory rationale for the prolonged detention of children seeking asylum in Australia has been offered (AHRC, 2014).

While raising these questions it is not currently possible to say how or why those responsible for tendering for the Transfield contract came to their decision to work in Nauru. What is clear is that decision subverted everything Save the Children says it stands for: “our policies, procedures and guidelines ensure we uphold the integrity of our work and that we are always working in the best interests of children” (Save the Children Australia, 2016a). Elaborating that position Save the Children says it is a rights-based organisation. Those who work for Save the Children endorse the concept of human rights in general and particularly children’s rights and to respect those rights in all our positions, decisions and actions. It also argues that its work is “underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children and young people should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse” (Save the Children Australia, 2016a). They declare a commitment to child protection based on the following principles: promoting and protecting the best interests of children at all times; zero tolerance of child abuse; and child protection is a shared responsibility between the organisation, all personnel and associates, its partners and the communities in which it works (STC, 2016 a).

It remains unclear why or how an organization that says it is committed to these principles can knowingly enter a space of ‘legal exception’ with well known conditions (like extreme climate and a high security regime), and run by a government that ignores human rights obligations as part of a commitment to ‘detering’ asylum seekers by making clear to all would-be asylum-seekers the harshness of the regime they would encounter. We accept up to a point that the management of Save the Children may have sincerely believed they could ‘make a difference’, just as we might accept that many youth workers go into homes where they know children are being abused by their parents and choose to remove them and put them into poorly funded and managed child-welfare facilities where they are further neglected or abused. However this decision by Save the Children is difficult to understand given their acknowledgement that its own ‘experience shows that sending people to offshore detention centers threatens their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing’ (Save the Children, 2016c).

Child Protection Workers and uncomfortable knowledge

The case of the practitioners employed on Nauru raises the problem of ‘uncomfortable knowledge’. Uncomfortable knowledge refers to knowledge of bad things going on that requires some remedial action (Rayner, 2012). For Flyvbjerg (2013) uncomfortable knowledge includes knowledge of corruption, lying, socially harmful practices, poor management and malfeasance. It may include corrupt or illegal conduct including bribery, fraud, sexual assault, manslaughter or culpable negligence leading to death or injury committed by organisations and the state.

Flyvbjerg (2013) argues that when people in organizations come to know certain things like this they typically pursue four options: denial, dismissal, diversion or displacement. These can be treated as modalities of ‘preferred ignorance’. The standard approaches to ‘uncomfortable knowledge’ according to Cohen (2001) include either outright denial that there is a problem or

else dismissing or rejecting evidence that there is something wrong. All this diverts attention from the ‘uncomfortable knowledge’ to some other factor. There are also strategies like diversion i.e., paying attention to some other issue or some kind of displacement by claiming the problem is really something else, which is then addressed (Cohen 2001). In the case presented here we see two kinds of responses: In the camps the youth workers paid attention to what they thought they could do by contacting their managers to express their concerns (diversion); those managers in turn responded by dismissing their concerns, telling their workers not to bother as any “advocacy will not make a difference and will be a waste of time” (dismissal) (Submission 183, 2015 p.18).

What did the workers employed by Save the Children on Nauru experience? We know something about this because they summarised their experience and the evidence they had of many basic breaches of the UNCRC as well as Australian child protection protocols in their Submission No 183 to the Australian Human Right Commission. The submission provides evidence of their distress in almost every aspect of their workplace. It began with government-imposed ignorance that is produced when states require by law secrecy about their activities: “Unfortunately, due to confidentiality clauses that have been imposed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, we are unable to provide our full names and previous/current titles with this submission and will remain anonymous” (Submission 183, 2014, p.1).

That did not prevent the practitioners from making a comprehensive submission detailing the conditions operating on Nauru including the extreme heat, substandard housing, the lack of resources and details about the way the detention camp was operated. Their submission was that the “children on Nauru had been subjected to multiple violations of their human rights and wrong doing from multiple parties” (Submission 183, 2014, p.1) As Paul Ronalds, CEO of Save the Children, acknowledged after the event: “we know from two years on Nauru about the shocking impact that prolonged incarceration has on people seeking asylum. It is unquestioningly harmful to their mental and physical wellbeing must end” (STC, 2016).

The general environment served as a constant source of emotional stress. Inmates reported that uniformed security guards were constantly shouting, yelling, running towards incidents, sometimes in riot gear attending frequent emergencies. This ‘serves as triggers for previous trauma that children have experienced, as well as exacerbat[ing] distress and mental health issues, delay recovery, and creat[ing] additional mental health concerns (ibid, p.5).

The indefinite length of detention caused despair, a sense of hopelessness and depression, which effects school attendance leading in some cases to self-harm. As the workers pointed out, families who had been in the camp since September 2013 had not seen one application for asylum processed by May 2014. These include young people who fled Syria already traumatised by war, torture killings, unjust treatment at the hands of security forces and others. Seeing the deterioration of their parents’ physical and mental health also harmed already traumatized young people. Each day they remain in detention “exposes them to witnessing additional traumatic situations ... which serves as triggers to past traumatic events and delays their ability to recover from previous trauma” (ibid, p.9).

The workers were concerned about the dehumanization of the children and inadequacy of educational services. They reported the practice of referring to young people and children by their 'numbers' instead of their name and noted how even the young people came to "identify themselves as a number more than by their name" (ibid, p.53). There were inadequate supplies of books, paper, pens and pencils; there was no specialist curriculum to assist English Language learning or special needs, and inadequate access to recreation, education and social engagement. The children and young people experienced high levels of stress fatigue and found concentrating hard which in turn effects their capacity to study and effects their mental health. They described the cramped living conditions, with 12 to 15 families living in one-room tents and no air-conditioning. This lead to a lack of privacy to discuss issues of safety, abuse, and health concerns which makes people reluctant to raise issues because they are embarrassed for fear retribution or retaliation or stigmatization.

They described the lack of appropriate clothing and footwear where inadequate underclothes has meant they expose themselves and place them at "risk of sexual exploitation, shame and social isolation" (ibid, p.19). One boy "had his private parts showing in public because the only clothes he was given were two pair of shorts, one of which was badly torn ... he was not provided with any underwear..." (ibid, p. 46- 47). A 13 year old male who bed wets despite several requests "from the torture and trauma team regarding the need for extra linen and cleaning detergent, the things requested were not forthcoming" (ibid, p.46). Another 13-year-old female had only two pairs of underwear and only one she could use while she had her period.

Workers also became aware of criminal and sexual assaults and multiple violations of the human rights of children and young people. They supplied evidence concerning 12 cases of sexual and physical assault affecting children and young people. One young female was "put at risk of serious sexual assault after one of her relatives made complaints about bullying. Several adult males in the camp were overheard making plans to assault this teenage female. Some of her relatives also received death threats" (ibid, p.13). The absence of child protection laws in Nauru means it is very difficult to prosecute crimes against children and young people. Many of those victimised in the camp do not report abuse because they know 'nothing will be done' (ibid, p.10). They were equally concerned about their inability to remove children from situations of abuse within the camp or worse, from within their own families. In this respect the framework of government policy and the operating procedures adopted by Transfield and Wilson Security meant that Save the Children were not able to implement anything like 'normal' child protection practices.

Nauru and prospects for good practice

We know that Save the Children workers on Nauru raised their concerns with Transfield and Wilson Security, the people responsible for running the camps. We can infer from their submission to the AHRC that they repeatedly attempted to bring their concerns to the attention of company officials. We assume they did so in the light of a clear frame of ethical practice developed by Save the Children Australia.

Save the Children Australia has constructed its organisational identity on the basis of its declared commitment to ensuring all its activities are conducted legally, ethically and in accordance with

high standards of integrity. Board members, employees and volunteers are required to signify acceptance of, and compliance with, the organisation's Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct, revised in 2013. All employees are also required to sign a statement that includes the following affirmation: I understand that it is my responsibility, as a person employed/engaged by Save the Children Australia, to use common sense and avoid actions that are abusive or exploitative of children and young people, or could be construed as such (STC, 201).

In addition, its own code of conduct outlines a clear process for reporting suspected cases of child abuse. It makes it mandatory that in the reporting of alleged or suspected cases of child abuse – “all personnel, associates and representatives of Save the Children must report any concerns they have for the safety or wellbeing of a child. Reports will be handled professionally, confidentially and as quickly as possible and will meet country, state or territory specific legislative requirements” (ibid, p.6). Save the Children further stipulate that such allegations are to be made to their own Child Protection Technical Unit (CPTU). In addition: Save the Children must immediately notify the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Child Protection Compliance Section if any DFAT- Australian Aid funded personnel, or DFAT-Australian Aid partner personnel, are accused of, charged with, arrested for, or convicted of criminal offences relating to child exploitation and abuse. Yet, the organization's claim to uphold child protection principles was put in a new light as workers reported they were “actively discouraged from advocating for the removal of children by SCA management” (Submission 183, 2015, p.18). They were also frustrated by the absence of mechanisms like the use of police checks on people working with children in Nauru and weak or non-existent Nauruan child protection legislation.

We do not know all the details of how or when workers decided to make the disclosures once it became evident that the two corporations, Transfield and Wilson Security, were not going to address their concerns. What was at stake in this Nauru case is reflected in the following two pieces of research, which ought to have a role in youth work curriculum.

Obedience and conscience

Firstly there is a body of social science research indicating what many of us will do when confronted by uncomfortable knowledge. Milgram's (1974) research designed to test people's ethical values in a social setting obliging them to obey authority still makes for uncomfortable reading. There is no evidence suggesting that human service professionals do any better than other 'ordinary people'.

In the late 1960s Milgram ran experiments at Yale University's Interaction Laboratories to establish the extent to which people would obey a legitimate authority figure requiring them to inflict pain, even lethal force on an innocent person. Those who volunteered to be research subjects were briefed on the experiment before entering the laboratory where they met a 'scientific figure in a white coat' and the 'experimental subject'. The 'experimental subject' was wired to an instrument panel and the volunteer was asked to sit behind it. Under instruction from the 'scientist' the volunteer was required to administer a series of electric punishments said to assist the subject's memory. The findings of the research were that volunteers complied with the instructions even though they believed they were inflicting pain. Unbeknown to the volunteer at

the time, the equipment, the 'experimental subject', the scientist, and the electric shocks were all fake (Milgram, 1974).

In many repeated versions of this experiment, 65 to 75 percent of volunteers went through to the end (Blass, 1991). They did so even when they could see their action was causing the 'experiment subject' pain and even when the subject pleaded for the experiment to stop (Blass, 1991). Milgram found that the 'basic structure of the authority situation' constructed in the scientific laboratory meant that actors could decide not to see themselves as personally responsible for the consequences of their actions. This was because they saw themselves as having no choice for their actions: they were doing as instructed and did not feel personally responsible.

On the other hand, Linn's (1996) research reveals how a smaller number of people obey their conscience when told to do something quite bad. Linn's focus was on Israeli troops who refused orders to shoot at young Palestinian protestors in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is research that contrasts with research like Milgram's (1974) and highlights a disposition toward binding authority and the silencing of conscience. The usual approach to conscience sees it as a highly individual and rational process. The practice of conscience takes on a different appearance in Linn's study. Linn's research into the work of listening to and obeying the 'voice of conscience' suggests that we need to approach our ethical practices as emotional practices that reflect and draw on the resources of identity and character. She argues there is a complex play of moral emotions operating on the part of those who reject the call to obey authority. Linn's account of conscientious objection revealed how small numbers of soldiers acted against the dominant moral consensus that existed in their national community and rejected the requirements of obedience to orders.

Linn (1996) did not accept the commonsense Durkheimian account of 'the social' as a moral order in which only two options are possible; namely, conformity or deviance. Linn's idea of the social is different in the ways particular organisations like the army or the police force have their own morally coercive qualities and sanctions. Within that specific social-military context, the capacity for moral action she studied was particularly courageous. Linn offers an understanding of social process in which certain dialogical qualities of ethical practices and self-formation are evident in ways suggested by Charles Taylor when he writes how both 'communities' and 'the self' are dialogically constituted: "We become full human agents capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression ... we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others" (1992, p. 32).

As Linn argues the dialogical qualities of self and community require the questioning of conventional understanding of our conscience as an individual rational process. This requires that we bypass the Kantian idea of conscience as the voice of a completely rational and autonomous individual. A Kantian like Habermas eg., focuses on whether social actors have the cognitive ability to "distance themselves from the controversy" (1990, p. 162). According to Habermas (1990) the conscientious objector exercises their own practical judgment by focusing on their moral principles and disconnecting themselves from their social setting.

Linn agrees that the Israeli soldiers she interviewed distanced themselves from their immediate

social and institutional context where military officers required obedience to orders which they found objectionable. Yet for Linn these narratives of moral separateness are actually examples of 'moral connectedness'. The resistor is better understood as tied to the world not only by principles but also by powerful moral emotions - which are social - and which constitute and are foundational to their sense of self. As Michael Walzer observed, the conscientious objector is not only committed to moral principles, but also to other people "... from whom or with whom the principles have been learned and by whom they are enforced" (1970, p. 5). The resistor's moral commitment emerges from the conviction and understanding that if injustice is done in the resistor's name "... or it is done to my people, I must speak out against it" (Walzer, 1988, p. 23).

For Linn, conscience was central to the soldier's resistance because it provided both the incentive to act as well as the rationale for that action. Her account of how this conscience manifested itself illuminates how this process worked emotionally. She explains there was no lengthy process of deliberation or analysis, but rather a sudden feeling about what the 'right thing to do' was. In the authoritarian settings in which the soldiers lived, the moral resistor did not ask themselves what moral principles were violated. As one soldier explained: "There was no specific reason for my refusal, I just felt I should not be able to do it [reserve service in the occupied territories] to disperse demonstrations of kids and women [where] an old person has been killed ..." (Linn, 1996, p. 102). Another told her: "In the case of refusal you first feel that you have no option but to act in a certain way. It is a very strong feeling and you cannot stay calm unless you do it. Only then does one's moral thought become clear" (ibid, p. 103). We expect this may be close to what some workers on Nauru also experienced.

CONCLUSION

The youth workers on Nauru confronted a particularly difficult version of a widespread problem confronting youth workers and other human service professionals in sites of practice now governed by the sign of the market economy. Brown (2015) argues that neoliberalism is a specific governing rationality through which everything is 'economized'. This extends even to border protection and the decision to award Transfield, a private company, a billion dollar contract to run its offshore detention centers. On this account protecting Australians from asylum seekers was not merely outsourced but thoroughly recast as a private good for individual investment or consumption. At the same time this encourages the idea that companies and governments alike should focus on 'best practice' (Bardach 2011; Bogan & English, 1994). At the least this produces serious incongruity.

In Nauru we saw practitioners working within an incongruent policy frame. The Australian government argued that mandatory detention of young asylum seekers did not hurt them even as it hastened to transfer responsibility for high security detention centers to a multi-billion dollar corporation. Yet it was a transfer that did nothing to protect the government from breaching its own laws. While Section 4AA of the Commonwealth Migration Act states that a minor shall only be detained as a measure of last resort, in practice the detention of children is the first action taken by the Australian Government. A range of respected international agencies including the United Nations' Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2013), and Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2014) concur that Australia's arbitrary and indefinite detention of asylum seekers

including young people children, in appalling conditions, amounts to grievous harm.

From the welfare sector came claims by a professional child protection and youth work service (Save the Children) that it could not only help the young victims of an inhumane and unlawful regime, but also convert a mandatory detention centre into ‘a fit place’ in which those young people might thrive. Some of the professionals who worked at Nauru struggled when faced with ‘uncomfortable knowledge’ like the discovery that the outsourcing of asylum seeker detention centres involved underfunding and mandatory detention that seriously harmed children and young people to the point of exposing them to serious physical abuse, sexual violence and psychological abuse (Submission 183, 2015).

Some practitioners on Nauru exhibited a rare capacity for good practice. They worked out what was actually happening. They listened to and followed their conscience. The only kind of good practice available to those workers in Nauru was to speak out. Exhibiting uncommon courage they did so. The only option for good practice available to them was to express their concern firstly to their own managers in Save the Children. When that failed, they made disclosures about the harms caused to young people in Nauru detention centre and to an official enquiry by Australia’s Human Rights Commission.

We expect many other youth workers, social workers, psychologists and managers will see parallels with this case study and their own experiences as they also struggle to work out what is happening and how to respond to particular local versions of ‘uncomfortable knowledge’. The question that needs asking is: what good practice look like?

A recent intervention by Berger (2016) argues that an appropriate professional response includes public protest, civil disobedience and a boycott on working in those camps. Since the introduction of Australia’s Border Force Act 2015, Brian Owler, president of the Australian Medical Association denounced Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers, describing it as ‘state-sanctioned child abuse’. Other Australian healthcare professionals risked imprisonment to speak out about conditions in Nauru and Manus Island that have been likened to concentration camps. In February 2016, doctors at Brisbane’s Lady Cilento Children’s Hospital refused to discharge a baby so as to prevent her transportation back to Nauru. As Berger (2016) argues, a code of medical ethics helps guide medical practitioners in their responses which includes boycotting employment contracts to deliver medical services in the camps. The Australian Medical Association’s code of ethics ethical practice requires: Refrain[ing] from entering into any contract . . . which may conflict with professional integrity, clinical independence or your primary obligation to the patient (AMA 2006). This means that Australian doctors and healthcare professionals should still offer healthcare to asylum seekers on the condition that the illegal and unacceptable circumstances are ended. Amongst other this requires the government agreeing to open onshore and offshore detention centers to scrutiny. It also requires giving medical and other practitioners and the freedom and resources to deliver adequate care, and it requires professionals being free from the legislation imposing conditions of secrecy. (On 30 September 2016 the Australian government responded to international pressure and exempted ‘health professionals’ from the secrecy and disclosure provisions of the Border Force Act: all other workers including teachers and youth workers still face two years jail if they breach these provision). Ideally it

would involve the closure of such centres and community-based placements for the processing of asylum seeker applications.

The action of medical professionals provides a clear framework for youth work professionals. Given recent efforts invested in developing of ethical codes of practice and professional associations for youth workers it seems appropriate and timely for youth work associations to provide statements that declare their ethical position and that provide guidance and protection for practitioners.

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