

***Shiny sophisticated  
new tools....***

***This is the last thing  
we need!***

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## Introduction

Shiny sophisticated new tools....it really is the last thing we need! Before I explain why I believe this let me first set out my stall – a set of disclaimers as it were.

What this written piece is not is a criticism of Creativity, Imagination, Innovation, or the Entrepreneurial Spirit. Humans would not have evolved had we not have any of these and contrary to any suggestion implied by the title, I positively embrace these things. Creativity and Imagination are two things I value most – especially imagination.

What it is however is an argument that we now focus so much on all these things that we have lost sight of what I believe – especially in this current era - is our primary purpose, particularly in a post Covid 19 context, which is to create spaces for conversations because if there is one thing we do not have enough of in the modern era, is conversation - basic meaningful conversation, the kind of just sitting over a 'cuppa' and chatting - this of course alongside discussion, debate and dialogue which are still an absolute necessity.

My belief is that we have become stuck on a constant journey of exploring, designing, and producing endless shiny, sophisticated new tools, not only those of a physical kind, but tools of all varieties, e.g., methodologies, approaches, and models of practice, that we overlook the more important things in life, i.e., conversing, being present, listening, supporting, reaching out and 'just being there.'

I will argue that in a broader sense we humans have what I call, *Forgotten the Fundamentals*, and in relation to our sector, that being the non-formal education sector, or youth work as I still prefer to call it, we have lost sight (somewhat) of some of our priorities. I believe we have reached a point in our evolution where we are, to a large extent, re-inventing the wheel.

I will come to the fundamentals later, but first, a word or two on Erasmus+. I am a big fan of Erasmus+, and an advocate of International Youth Work, but I think that Erasmus+ has actually contributed to the 'problem' I now see as infecting our sector.

There is no doubting that Erasmus+ has encouraged and nurtured the Creativity, Imagination, Innovation, and Entrepreneurial Spirit of the wider youth work community across Europe. It has done so in abundance most recently by putting a much greater emphasis on what has become commonly referred to as outputs, particularly noticeable in the last cycle of the programme, i.e., things, products, tools, etc.

Events like the annual Tool Fairs contribute to this way of thinking. This of course is a little bit risky my saying this, as I had most recently been invited to speak at Tool Fair XV and made exactly this point. Taxi for Barr! It could quite possibly be the first and last invite I ever receive to a Tool Fair, or at least to speak!

It might sound like stating the obvious, but Tool Fair would of course not exist without tools, and I can't imagine anyone would keep coming back to see the same tools over and over again, so to give the Tool Fair validity, it is by its very nature, reliant on new tools being 'rolled-out' or developed or re-imagined, and of course, has to keep profiling new tools in order to have a reason for its existence.

Now I must hold my hands up – I'm not adverse to creating tools myself. Back in 1999 I hosted my first International Youth Programme – young leaders - Israeli, Palestinian, Greek and Turkish Cypriot, German (from both eastern and western parts), and Northern Irish took part.

Not only did I organise / host the programme but produced a video documentary about it. In fact, over the next four to five years, first under the then YOUTH programme, and then Youth in Action, I hosted a number of Training Programmes, documenting several of these on video, some of which

were also accompanied by activity packs to support learning. I made (I think) around seven videos accompanied by three or four activity packs during this time. Therefore, I'm not new to the idea of developing tools myself. But this all before it became regular or common place.

So why might I claim that we focus too much on Creativity, Imagination, Innovation, and the Entrepreneurial Spirit? And what makes me qualified to say that?

Well, the first thing I'd like to say is that I'm not an expert – not in anything – not even an expert on myself, so what I express is merely opinion. I am however, at a stage in my life when I have noticed emerging or rather re-emerging patterns – things that are re-forming, things re-emerging, things repeating themselves, a recycling of previous ideas, and so on. That of course is something that just comes with age. And no, this is not my being cynical as often is the perception that comes with being a particular age.

I am however at that particular age (now) where I feel that I can make statements with confidence, and I now truly believe that our efforts to create new tools is not where our priorities should lie. I believe we are mistakenly putting energy into 'products' much more than facilitating what is for me the most important element of any of these programmes, i.e., 'the experience.' Of course, tools can contribute to 'the experience' – of this I have no doubt, but I believe the emphasis is now moving in the wrong direction.

I will go on to demonstrate what I believe is evidence of this but before I do that, I want to take a moment to reflect on how far we have come as a species (note I say species and not race) so that we not only remind ourselves of the progress we have made but also to appreciate that we have built upon the accomplishments of all who have come before us.

I always have to pinch myself about the amazing journey that humans have travelled, how we have evolved (or not as the case seems so often to be going by modern world events) and not just accept that we are here through some fluke event, and by doing so we have a much greater perspective on what is possible, but equally what is or should really be our priorities.

## Our evolution – let's take a moment to consider where we are

As humans we often get so busy, we forget some of the important things that have come to pass and it's good to be reminded or to even learn about them for the first time.

We are so often focused on creating the future we forget the journey we have travelled and how unique we (actually) are, or at least to this planet in any case, not necessarily in terms of the wider universe, or as some would argue, multiverse.

By taking time to reflect on some elements of our story, I think we can better appreciate what we have the potential for, as well as acknowledge the capacity we possess to make a difference, and where we should really concentrate those efforts on in terms of trying to make a difference.

- **we are a species** - and I use the word species as opposed to race, which is in part to challenge us to appreciate that we are just one of the many species that occupy this comparatively small planet and that we should know and remind ourselves of our place in it
- **we live on a planet spinning at 67, 000 miles an hour** - *in a solar system that is spinning around the centre of the Milky Way at 530, 000 mph<sup>i</sup>*
- **we are over seven billion people** – *and it's estimated that by 2050 there will be 9.6 billion of us<sup>ii</sup> (more than a one-third increase)*
- **our galaxy is made up of between 200 and 400 billion stars** – *and there are an estimated 100 billion galaxies in our universe<sup>iii</sup>*
- **the universe is an estimated 17.5 billion years old, and our planet a relatively young 4.5 billion years** – just think about that, covid has been with us for almost (but only) 2 years – try for a moment to imagine 4.5 billion years
- **we branched off from chimps and bonobos about 6 million years ago** – *our first ancestor appeared about 4.4 million years ago<sup>iv</sup>*
- **two million years ago, early humanoids (Homo habilis) first appeared on earth** with a brain capacity of 650-700cc; followed by Homo Erectus and Neanderthals and finally Homo Sapiens - today our brain capacity is around 1500cc<sup>v</sup>
- **1.2 millions years ago, it's estimated that there were 18, 500 homini's on earth**, not humans but homini's, i.e., our descendants ... *it's estimated that there have been around 700 billion mutations since<sup>vi</sup>*
- **thirty-one percent of our genes can be found in yeast, forty percent in worms, 50 percent in fruit flies and all but 1.5% in chimpanzees** – *we are as it were 98.5% chimpanzee<sup>vii</sup>*
- **only in the last 10, 000 years that the world has begun to truly transform** dramatically with the development of crops, livestock, villages, cities, global trade and financial markets
- **human beings are 99.9 per cent identical** – genetically speaking, yet we almost entirely focus on the 0.1% of difference
- **6.4 billion letters make up our DNA** and *we are an estimated 50 to 100 letters different from our parents<sup>viii</sup>* – anyone who thinks there are completely free this should temper that belief with that thought – we are more like our parents than we can possibly imagine

- **microbes make up 80% of all biomass...***in 1/5 of a teaspoon of sea water, there are a million bacteria (and 10 million viruses)...the human microbiome in our gut, mouth, skin and elsewhere, harbour three thousand kinds of bacteria with 3 billion distinct genes<sup>x</sup>*
- **viruses are champions of DNA mutation....***A single sneeze propels 40, 000 droplets, each containing up to 200 million individual viruses, across the room exceeding speeds of 200mph<sup>x</sup>*

This is all pretty amazing when you take time to think about this but here are a couple of interesting thoughts which increases our perspective on things even further.

- **If you spend half an hour in a regular shopping mall,** you will pass more people than our ancestors saw during their entire lifetime
- **did you know that there almost no examples of Neanderthal cavities?<sup>xi</sup>** It's an incredible thought – for all the perceptions in our minds of Neanderthals as violent creatures lacking the capacity to think, at least their teeth were in great shape as compared with humans, which begs the question what the hell have we done (as an apparently the intelligent humanoid) since then?

## Context - Key events in the last few decades

Our evolution has been quite distinctive and of course the events that have influenced it, but we now live in a world where our failure to fully appreciate who we are and the journey we have travelled, or to take the opportunity to reflect on where we are at in this moment is costing us.

Let's consider some key moments from the last 70 years which gives us an indication of where we have gone wrong and some idea of the challenges we face and how we need to re-think our priorities:

- between 1950 & 2000, the global population increased 2.5 times, but food production has more than tripled<sup>xii</sup>
- globally, obesity has almost doubled between 1980 and 2014<sup>xiii</sup>
- the rise in obesity in recent decades also mirrors the fall in sleep duration and quality<sup>xiv</sup>
- since 1990, the gap between rich and poor has increased exponentially
- the share of wealth controlled by the top 0.1% grew from 7% in the 1970s to 22% in 2012<sup>xv</sup>
- the top one-tenth of the richest 1% own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%<sup>xvi</sup>
- three-quarters of all border walls and fences that currently exist were erected after the year 2000<sup>xvii</sup>
- incredible developments in IT and Social Media - launch of eBay (1997), the first wifi-enabled laptop (a Mac, 1999), broadband (2000), expansion of 3G (2001), MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004) Twitter (2006); iPhone & Kindle (2007), notebook sales overtook Desktop sales (2008), Samsung's first Android phone (2009) iPad (2010), Tumblr, Instagram (2010) and Snapchat (2011) - has seen an vast increase of the speed of life and with it our inability to keep pace with it
- As of 2008, humanity was consuming 30% more per year than the planet sustainably produces<sup>xviii</sup>
- By 2008, \$4 to \$5 of debt was required to create \$1 of growth<sup>xix</sup>
- 70% of the developed world have experienced stagnation between 2005 and 2014<sup>xx</sup>
- today there are 28 cities with a population of more than 10 million people - by 2030, the UN predicts that there will be 41 – and more than half will be in Asia<sup>xxi</sup>

We are now in an era, often referred to as the Anthropocene, where we are no longer shaped by our planet, but rather we are shaping the planet. And this brings me to one of the key arguments - Creativity, Imagination, Innovation, and the Entrepreneurial Spirit has brought us to this point – it's a double-edged sword. And there is no sign of us stopping or that it is slowing down, or that we will be discouraged from pursuing such.

And with the likes of India, Brazil and China endeavouring to catch up with and in some respects overtake the west, it's not going to stop anytime soon. The GFN [Global Footprint Network] for example has calculated that the total amount of productive land and water on Earth amounts to 12 billion global hectares. With roughly 7 billion people on earth, this equates to 1.72 global hectares per person. In 1961 human demand accounted for 0.7 planet's worth of biocapacity.<sup>xxii</sup>

In 2008, GFN said, we needed 1.5 planets to sustain us, something that is clearly unsustainable but worryingly, it is estimated that there are less than 60 harvests left as the Earth's topsoil has been slowly eroded over time due to industrial farming

If we wanted to get an idea of what some of our priorities might be then these offer some indication. Perhaps we - the wider Youth Work Community - need to consider abandoning the idea of being so creative, imaginative, innovative, and entrepreneurial, and become much more political around these issues.

I believe it is now time to be much more up front about the state of the world we live in as opposed to constantly creating and innovating tools to address the symptoms of these issues and adopt a much more pro-active approach to these issues.

## The Result

The last half century (and perhaps more particularly the last 10-20 years) has witnessed a vast increase in the speed and evolution of almost everything, which has resulted in among other things the following:

- failure of trickle-down economics and a growing inequality
- emergence of developing economies trying to catch up with west
- junk food, obesity, food additives and toxic pollutants
- climate change
- increased levels of stress, anxiety and suicide countered by the emergence of the self-help industry
- endless consumption
- the loss of free play and unsupervised risk-taking
- changes in parenting practices
- changes in the make-up of the traditional family
- re-emergence of East vs West divide
- the dilution of existing democratic states vs growth in authoritarian states
- increasing civil and political strife across numerous countries
- growing political polarization
- growing division between liberal and conservative, urban and rural, college-educated and non-college-educated
- increase in the number of border walls
- increased immigration and fleeing of refugees
- growing levels of protectionism
- corruption and the loss of trust in traditional institutions
- increasing campaigns for justice and social justice, as contrasted with social justice vs dilution of human rights
- greater visibility of minorities viz a viz persecution of minorities
- increase in the number of democratic states versus dilution of the rights of citizens in established democratic states
- renewed emergence of nationalism and populist politics
- terrorism and new forms of extremism
- battle for the hearts and minds of academia
- exploration of outer space
- mapping of the human genome
- genetic manipulation and cloning
- growth in geo-politics
- pervasive technology: 'artificial' intelligence, robotics, drones, ebooks, audio books, digital books, virtual libraries, blogs, vlogs, microblogs, podcasts, videocasts, file-sharing, video-sharing, social networks, forums, MOOCs, on-line courses, virtual classrooms, and even virtual universities.

If ever there was an argument to 'abandon' somewhat our commitment to creating various tools and methodologies, then the above list of issues is clear evidence. I do not make such a suggestion lightly, and later on in this paper I demonstrate evidence to suggest, that most of the tools we create in our sector are not only not being accessed by the vast majority of practitioners in the sector, but not even very often.

## Impact

The impact from all this progress can I believe can be best described in the following nine ways. It might appear that I choose to concentrate on the negative as it were, but I suggest it is more a case of identifying the issues that I believe we now face, or rather we should face up to, and adopt a much more pro-active stance towards.

1. **Degenerative Approach to life and those around us** – Individualism, Competition, Lack of Solidarity, Endless Targets, Growing Distrust, Managed Exploitation, a ‘Fix You’ Mentality, Imbalanced Lifestyle, Pointless Priorities, Constant Measurements, Misplaced Ambitions, Misogyny and ‘The Binary Mindset’
2. **Growing Isolation and Disconnect with one another** – disconnection, loneliness and ‘safetyism’
3. **Increasing Acceleration and our inability to keep up** – erosion of the ‘Four second rule,’ adaptation and invasiveness
4. **A Pervasive Collective Narcissism** – growth in the ‘Attention Economy’ and Insecure Narcissism
5. **Increasing levels of Stress** – Fragility, Decreasing Resilience and Pervasive Technology
6. **Addiction to Screens** – ‘Screen Time’ and ‘Magical Promises’
7. **Dilution of our Mental Capacity** – lack of Critical Thinking, Information Overload and Fixed Mindset
8. **Decreasing levels of meaningful engagement with others** – Restricted Childhoods and Modern Disorders
9. **Illusion Vs Reality** – Sexualisation of Young People

### Degenerative Approach to life and those around us

- **Individualism:** the emergence of ‘the individual’ - *the more advanced and industrialised an economy, the more individualistic the culture - and thus the faster the country’s speed.*<sup>xxiii</sup>
- **Competition:** life is dominated by competition rather than co-operation – we have been led to believe that we are naturally competitive rather than our true self which through extensive research has revealed that we are actually co-operative beings.
- **Lack of Solidarity:** the loss of the idea that we should care for, or support people in a way that put their needs first or at least on an equal footing with ours – *Our tendency is to stop seeing ourselves as people striving together to overcome our common problems - and to view ourselves instead as people striving against each other to overcome our individual problems.*<sup>xxiv</sup>
- **Endless Targets:** we focus much more on results than efforts – we have been convinced that outcomes are more important than process or experience even though research has shown, particularly in terms of outcomes for young people, that process is more important than results.
- **Growing Distrust:** breakdown of trust in traditional institutions, e.g., churches, politics, media, etc – the result has been a lack of faith in experts and in the era, we are now in, we have seen how this is hampering efforts to deal with many of the real challenges all our species face – health and climate change only being two of the most prominent in recent years.

- **Managed Exploitation:** viewing humans as a commodity in the shape of data to be manipulated - *'the more we see the human being as a technology to be enhanced, the greater the danger of applying this same market ethos to people and extending our utility value at the expense of others.'*<sup>xxxv</sup>
- **'Fix You' Mentality:** the popularity of alternative medicines and treatments, e.g., back to nature living, various niche organic foods, homeopathies, vitamin therapies, detoxifications, etc grows year after year, even when scientific studies fail to support them.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- **Imbalanced Lifestyle:** living to work, rather than working to live – we are harder workers, shorter sleepers, and faster thinkers.<sup>xxxvii</sup>
- **Pointless Priorities:** expending energy on things that don't meet our expectations - people are prepared to sacrifice their personal happiness today in order to invest in potential happiness in the future.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- **Constant Measurements:** setting ourselves up for disappointments by choosing the wrong measures to judge success by - most people tend to measure their life in terms of success or failures, and their successes and failures in terms of possessions and wealth....[yet] most people rate their relationships with their family and friends as the most important things to them.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- **Misplaced Ambitions:** not every solution has to be technological - the computer power needed to create one bitcoin consumes at least as much electricity as the average American household burns through in two years.<sup>xxx</sup>
- **Misogyny:** our collective failure to address why we blame women for everything and continue to deny them equality of opportunity - A 2015 McKinsey Report entitled *The Power of Poverty*, found that by closing the gender pay gap and unleashing the full power of women, an additional \$12 trillion could be added to the global GSP.
- **The 'binary mindset':** - the internet does not entertain conversation, discussion or negotiation...it merely offers an either / or approach where polarisation has grown.

### Growing Isolation and Disconnect with one another

- **Disconnection:** we are at our most connected we have ever been, yet we have an epidemic of loneliness - according to the WHO [World Health Organisation], depression has even become the biggest health problem among teens and will be the number one cause of illness worldwide by 2030.<sup>xxxxi</sup>
- **Loneliness:** has led to major health issues - *loneliness (involuntary isolation)...[it] is strongly associated with depression, paranoia, anxiety, insomnia, fear and health, partly because it enhances production of the stress hormone cortisol, which suppresses the immune system.*<sup>xxxii</sup>
- **'Safetyism':** in today's culture intent no longer matters - only perceived impact matters now and very little consideration is given to intention when one person aggrieves another.

### Increasing Acceleration and our inability to keep up

- **'Four second rule':** (drawn from a study in 2006 by Akamai Technologies) where people were prepared to wait for up to four seconds for information to download has now been reduced to a quarter of a second<sup>xxxiii</sup> – impatience has become the dominant feature and whereas in the past, people were prepared to wait up to four seconds for info to download this is no longer the case –

this is an illustration of where we are prepared to wait much less for things than in days gone by and is reflective of a growing impatience from people in general.

- **Adaptation:** technology is moving faster than we can adapt to it – we do not have (what Rutger Bregman calls) the ‘mental bandwidth’ to keep pace with it.
- **Invasiveness:** Amazon has patented a technology that detects who is speaking at any moment, and gradually develops a profile of their personality and tastes..... this is known as ‘voice-sniffing’ technology. In her book *Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshanna Zuboff writes extensively of how there is a growing invasive nature in our everyday lives from technology. She makes the broad point that whilst we can’t reverse the gains that technology has made, we do not have to accept all elements of it, particularly those that gather much of our personal information for the purposes of selling it to third parties in order to exploit us.

### A Pervasive Collective Narcissism

- **‘Attention economy’:** where everything we put online is designed to get a reaction – but with it, outrage has seemingly become its most potent currency.
- **Insecure narcissism:** – as opposed to a rise in genuine self-esteem caused by an increase in what has been called ‘Social Evaluative Threat.’<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### Increasing levels of Stress

- **Fragility:** The ‘iGeneration’ (those born between 1995 and 2012) suffers from far higher rates of anxiety and depression than did Millennials at the same age-and higher rates of suicide.<sup>xxxv</sup>
- **Decreasing Resilience:** The average student is now more anxious now at the end of their study than at the beginning - *by the late 1980s the average American child was more anxious than child psychiatric patients in the 1950s.*<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- **Pervasive Technology:** *Twenge [Jean] believes that the rapid spread of smartphones and social media into the lives of teenagers, beginning around 2007, is the main cause of the mental health crisis that began around 2011.*<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### Addiction to Screens

- **‘Screen Time’:** Children and young people now spend much more of their lives in front of a screen – studies have shown that more than 2 hours screen time per day can be damaging.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- **‘Magical Promises’:** screens mean kids can always be in control – this raises their level of expectation (about things going their way) but reduces their ability to manage responses that counter this.

### Dilution of our Mental Capacity

- **Critical thinking:** and the ability to source and critique evidence - *the general trend has moved away from acquiring deep knowledge...at a time when there is unprecedented capability for finding the explanation.*<sup>xxxix</sup>
- **Information Overload:** we now digest much more information than our parents and grandparents but as Herbert Simpson describes, *a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention*<sup>xl</sup>- it’s estimated that we create 1.7mb of information per second.<sup>xli</sup>

- **Fixed Mindset:** Those unable to contemplate a change in their thinking are locked into a process of proving themselves even against overwhelming evidence.<sup>xlii</sup>

### Decreasing levels of meaningful engagement with others

- **Restricted childhoods:** - *younger Millennials and especially members of iGen (born in and after 1995) have been deprived of unsupervised time for play and exploration.*<sup>xliii xliiv</sup>
- **Modern disorders:** **Growth in disorders that reduce the capacity to engage with others effectively:** *are markedly anti-social traits: ADD, ADHD, PDD (Pervasive Development Disorder), AS, SID (Sensory Integration Dysfunction) and ASD....studies have shown that students who spend time alone are less likely to be empathetic.*<sup>xlv</sup>

### Illusion Vs Reality

- **Sexualisation of Young People:** **The 'removal' or perhaps the reduction in the length of adolescence as children and young people jump from childhood into an adult world** - *In the years between 2009 and 2012, 4562 minors committed 5, 028 sex offences in Britain. The children, some of whom were as young as 5, 'mimicked' behaviour seen in porn, often viewed online....1/2 of sex offences committed against juveniles in the US are by other children*<sup>xlvi</sup> - we like to think that our children and young people are still innocent and/or naive but the reality is that even at a young age, our children and adolescents are being slowly sexualised.

In our respective profession we have become somewhat blindsided I would contend. We are so busy creating, innovating, developing, initiating, re-inventing, re-imagining, marketing, promoting, assessing and analysing shiny, sophisticated new tools, that we have forgotten the fundamentals which I will come to later.

Our approach is underpinned by a collective mindset of competition as it were, fueled by the need to have purpose. This of course exists within our sector. So for example, every time there is 'a call' out from SALTO, the NAs (National Agencies) or similar, for a Facilitator, Trainer, Editor, Co-ordinator, etc 'we all' apply, and of course only a small few can be successful, usually a very limited number of people get 'the gigs,' and so most of us reflect on this, and we then think we have to improve and thus we endeavour to find better ways of selling or marketing ourselves (or as I know from conversations with some colleagues, they just withdraw from such processes), and that might be through the development and delivery of more 'products.'

I would argue that competition is now so embedded in our systems that govern Erasmus+ and the International Youth Work Community (or at least across Europe) that we truly lack the imagination to come up with a more effective way to allocate work in a fairer and more equitable manner. This of course is a different issue (not to be distracted from the main point of my paper), but as we have become more 'professionalised' (and in some circumstances more corporate), and expectations of our sector grow within a more closely co-ordinated, consistent and complementary approach to learning across the EU, the space for having unique, distinctive and somewhat more distinguishable approaches to lessen a growing competition within the sector is in my opinion reduced.

The irony of this is that we as a community, would never truly advocate competition among our young people, choosing instead to 'preach' about the benefits of co-operation, teamwork, collective decision-making and so on, yet the only way we seem to allocate work emerging from national calls is through open competition and the impact of this is that we have to keep 're-purposing' ourselves.

If I am wrong in this assertion, then I welcome the opportunity to hear about it or to be challenged, but I do not know of any truly open and democratic processes within Erasmus+ that uses a collective approach to the allocation of work as opposed to appointment through selection panels.

## We are driven by a need to have purpose

It might be stating the obvious, but we are driven by the need to have purpose, including the feeling (even if it goes against our own instinct) that we must compete with our peers, friends, family and colleagues in order to achieve. There is plenty of evidence to support this:

- *we have been induced [or is it seduced] ....to accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition, a case of winner takes all<sup>xlvii</sup>*
- *most of us are wired to want continually to level up, to score higher than others<sup>xlviii</sup>*
- *we've been conditioned to believe in the myth that evolution is about competition<sup>xlix</sup>*
- *a moral and spiritual vacuum is yet again filled with anarchic expressions of individuality, and mad quests for substituted religions and modes of transcendence<sup>l</sup>, i.e., everybody is creating new things or ways of working or living or surviving or fixing yourself)*
- *we communicate through our purchases, the facades on our homes, or the numbers in our bank accounts<sup>li</sup>, i.e., 'keeping up with the Joneses' (and when we don't have the money to do this way, we do it through our Social Media posts)*
- *our whole society is set on "transmit" and "compete" all the time, seldom on "receive" or "cooperate"*
- *there is a reason that feedback and recognition are so highly prized by the new power set....their lives are punctuated (perhaps even defined) by the validation and engagement of others. Every text, every image, every post is a call designed for a response: the drip-drip-drip of dopamine-reward they receive from every heart-shaped like<sup>lii</sup>*
- *it seems that despite all the inclinations towards being sociable and friendly our brain is so concerned with preserving a sense of identity and peace of mind that it makes us willing to screen anyone and anything that could endanger this<sup>liii</sup>*
- *the belief that competition and individualism are humanity's defining features did not arise spontaneously...it was refined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by neoliberalism....It defines us as competitors guided above all other impulses by the urge to get ahead of our fellows<sup>liv</sup>*
- *the just-world fallacy helps you to build a false sense of security. You want to feel in control, so you assume as long as you avoid bad behaviour, you won't be harmed....Deep down, you want to believe hard work and virtue will lead to success, and evil and manipulation will lead to ruin, so you go ahead and edit the world to match those expectations<sup>lv</sup>*
- *all the progress that the human race has achieved in the last few hundred years has been due to people trading and cooperating with one another<sup>lvi</sup>*

As a community, we are not immune from this. I would suggest that because we occupy a sector which is laden with values, values that are seen to be positive, some of which I have referenced above, we tend to think of ourselves as co-operative, open-minded and non-judgemental, but our thinking has become a little bit infected by this sense of always having to prove ourselves, and thus inevitably competition creeps in and this has inadvertently been nurtured somewhat by Erasmus+.

We are now so focused on creating, developing, innovating, changing, amending, re-creating, re-imagining so as to have purpose that whether or not we are fulfilling our main role as practitioners is open to question. I offer evidence of this overleaf.

## How Erasmus+ has affected our thinking

Between the beginning of October 2020 and 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021, there was approximately 292 calls from SALTO – 25 of which have been what I would classify as national calls for things like Trainers, Facilitators, Authors, etc.

Leaving these to one side, there have been 267 calls made by groups / organisations, etc including NA's (National Agencies) for the likes of what I would call the 'usual suspects', i.e., YOCOMO (5), APPETISER (1), ESC (TOSCA) (4), FOCUS Learning (1), Euro Academy of Youth Work (1), BiTriMulti (4), The Quality Bonus (1), IMPACT+ (1), Connector (1), Spotlight on SALTO (1), Quality Label (10), TICTAC (1) ToT (3) EYE LINER (2), ATOQ (1) and Tool Fair XV of course.

If you take these out of the equation, it leaves 229 calls made by organisations right across Europe – this of course does not of course reflect the total number of actual programmes funded under E+ as some are not publicised through SALTO, but those that are offer a snapshot of themes addressed.

What I attempted to do with the remaining calls was to categorise them under common themes, e.g., Sport, Democracy, Citizenship, and so on.

If you subtract 'the Usual Suspects', i.e., YOCOMO, APPETISER, etc – it leaves 90 themes that I have identified across the remaining 229 programmes, which equates to every theme having on average 2.54 programmes.

What can we conclude about this? A thriving sector perhaps? Lots of diversity? Plenty of imagination and creativity? Yes, all of this and more.

On the flip side however, what else can we conclude? Youth work is all things to everyone? Youth Work is now stretched across every possible avenue? Two of the calls were geared towards business – is this what working with young people is now about?

Including calls from NAs and SALTO, from the 267 issued, 46 were geared towards Youth Work (17%). But from the 229 calls issued by organisations, only seven were actually geared towards youth work – Non-Formal Education (4), MOOC (1), Intro to International Youth Work (1) and Centre-Based Youth Work (1). This equates to 3.1%.

Now of course, it might be reasonable to assume from the remaining 97% of programmes all are delivered using NFE (Non-Formal Education) methods. You could also argue that most likely youth workers, young leaders and young people are participants, therefore preserving a youth work focus.

Aside from my being in receipt of all SALTO calls by e-mail, I'm also a member of countless Erasmus+ Facebook groups, and just anecdotally, my observations are that I really don't see a lot of youth work oriented programmes these days.

I see a multitude of themes that brings young people, young leaders, youth workers, practitioners with a remit for young people, other professionals, academics, policy personnel and so on together. Now, don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with that at all.

It is, however, well known that quite a few participants in programmes are coming from what could be loosely described as a non-youth work background. In some respects, there is nothing actually wrong with this, as Erasmus+ is designed to reach out to as many young people, and if that means introducing people to non-formal education, then this is a good thing. I would contend though that the sector is some ways now becoming almost all things to everyone and therefore begs the question if we are in danger of collectively diluting the very sector we profess to love?

There is something not entirely right, if only 3% of E+ programmes are actually about youth work. If 229 programmes that are advertised are stretched out across 90 themes, it does raise the question of whether or not youth work is being a 'something for everyone' sector.

If I remember correctly, the last cycle of the Erasmus Programme focused on three key themes – Employment, Education and Enterprise. It also opened up opportunities to forge cross-sectoral relationships. It was of course no longer strictly the youth work that we had come to know as unique to Youth for Europe, YOUTH and Youth in Action.

Another significant difference with Erasmus+ was a much stronger emphasis on creating products, be those new tools in the form of games and activity packs, or guides, reports, etc.

Now there is a benefit to this, it makes us think more about physical manifestations or visible and tangible results – in the past, we often brought people together, with the focus much more on what I simply call ‘the experience.’

With a focus on products, it also forces us to try and offer more value for money to demonstrate that the opportunities we offer are just not about bringing people together, like a kind of holiday as it were, which I think was certainly a perception among some policy makers previously, who didn’t fully understand the benefits of just bringing people together for a sustained period of time.

As a result, we now seemingly just keep producing things – which begs the question, do we just now produce stuff to tick a box? Of course, many good things have been produced, but as someone who (somewhat ‘sadly’) collects all the tools that are circulated through SALTO, I can tell you that some of the documents and tools produced fall into the ‘we just had to produce something’ category.

The SALTO toolbox has 2,195 tools – brilliant but how often do people access these tools? How many people here have accessed the SALTO toolbox in the last 6 months? How many people have accessed the SALTO toolbox more than once in the last 6 months? More than twice? More than 5 times in the last number of years? More than 10 times ever?

Statistics on the SALTO website are somewhat revealing – at the time of writing (beginning of October 2021) 1426 users have visited 702 tools which equates to 32% so effectively two-thirds of tools have never been looked at. An inference, or at least a question can be posed from these figures, i.e., do we really need more tools?

If we assume that most of these tools have been developed during training programmes, or specifically for the purposes of being used in training programmes (which is the most likely destination), and if as we know most training programmes have in and around 20 or more participants per programmes, might the inference be that only those attending training are accessing the tools produced?

Now it is only an inference of course, but I certainly believe there is merit in it, but in any case, what is clear is that two-thirds of tools are not being accessed. If producing tools was a business, it would not have survived, or would have been closed down.

Something else I’ve seen in recent times, and it is very evident throughout social media, is that the focus on creativity, imagination, innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit has seeped into the thinking of individuals – we are no longer just doing youth work - be that you are professionally qualified, a volunteer, a young leader or a fulltime professional that works with young people. I have touched upon this above with reference to our having to constantly re-purpose ourselves.

We are all now trainers, facilitators, moderators, mentors, coaches, project managers, writers, graphic facilitators, digital facilitators, consultants, editors, authors, experts, content creators, and so on.

But there is an external context that has helped shaped this – we are no longer merely one profession anymore, we have to be all things to everyone, we have to constantly re-invent ourselves, to be multi-faceted, to have a wide skillset.

The focus on producing things combined with such a wide and diverse range of themes has in my opinion taken us away from the fundamentals of non-formal education, which I will come to, I promise.

Question for you – have you posted something on social media in the last hour or so? Last few days? Imagine how it might have been years ago before social media. As I’m about to get into the car to travel to the youth centre, I stand in the street and shout out loud, ‘It’s a beautiful day, going to work, hashtag love my work.’

You arrive at work – you announce to everyone you have arrived. You then shout out randomly reports that have been completed, and during lunch you suddenly declare ‘beautiful lunch with exceptional colleagues’ and so on. You get the drift. Like why? What has happened to us? Why do we do it? Why do we feel the need to do so?

Let me reiterate – there is nothing wrong whatsoever with creativity, imagination, innovation, or the entrepreneurial spirit, it is how we have evolved and made progress.

However, the emphasis on these is at the risk of missing out on what I think is the important stuff. The emphasis on creating, innovating, imagining and being entrepreneurial means that we think in terms of how we can fix things, develop responses, produce outcomes, respond to need in a re-active way as opposed to focusing, in a pro-active way what’s in front of us, the people around us and the situations that we are in.

If Covid 19 has taught us anything, it has demonstrated what is really important – we need to be in the company of others, we need connection, that we are not alone; we need to know people care for us, that people are interested in us, that people value us and vice versa.

## Thinking about the future

The planet we occupy is beset with challenges, and as a community we need to think more sharply about the priorities we choose to focus on rather than our need to produce tools, especially if as it seems so few of us are accessing them, and so few are being accessed, and if as is seems likely, those accessing the tools only do so because they were party to their development. Here are some thoughts to consider about what we really need to be focusing our minds on. You will note that producing tools and methodologies is not one of them!

### PROJECTIONS:

**POPULATION:** out of the 9 billion people expected to be alive when the Earth's population peaks in 2050, the World Health Organization expects 2 billion - more than one person in five-to suffer from dementia.<sup>lvii</sup>

**URBANISATION:** *A stunning half of all the projected population growth between now and 2050 will take place in just eight countries, six of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. To find jobs, people from the population-boom countries will migrate to the cities.*<sup>lviii</sup>

**AUTOMATION:** *because semi-skilled jobs will become automated, leaving only high- and low-paid ones, it is estimated global inequality will rise by 40 per cent<sup>lix</sup> Robots and artificial intelligence will render many of the jobs we do today redundant, changes that are only hinted at with the automated answering services and supermarket auto-checkout machines that have already become part of everyday life.*<sup>lx</sup>

**CARBON:** global oil and gas companies have declared the existence of 2.8 trillion tonnes of carbon reserves, and their shares are valued as if those as if those reserves are burnable.<sup>lxi</sup>

**ATMOSPHERE:** *industrial capitalism has, in the space of 200 years, made the climate 0.8 degrees Celsius hotter, and is certain to push it two degrees higher than the pre-industrial average by 2050.*<sup>lxii</sup>

**LIVING LONGER:** *health specialists discuss the expected huge increases in cases of "grey" diseases – chronic noncommunicable ailments like heart and lung problems, stroke, diabetes, and kidney failure....*<sup>lxiii</sup>

**BIRTHRATE:** *each generation produces fewer offspring....the picture for the latter half of this century will look this: Increasing technology, cool stuff that extends human life, more older people who will live longer, millions of robots, but few young people.*<sup>lxiv</sup>

**ACCESS TO EDUCATION:** *according the UNICEF, 40 per cent of the world's teenagers have no access to secondary-school education. The percentage of teenage girls who lack this access is much higher, yet there is strong evidence that the education of girls in developing countries has many significant benefits for family health, population growth rates, child mortality rates, and HIV rates, as well as for women's self-esteem and quality of life.*<sup>lxv</sup>

**'SOCIAL EVALUATIVE THREAT':** *At the core of our interactions with strangers is our concern at the social judgements and evaluations....this vulnerability is part of the modern psychological condition and feeds directly into consumerism.*<sup>lxvi</sup>

**GAMING:** *The problem with the new gaming technology is that it has become so realistic that with enough time and with little competition from the child's environment (which tends to be safe, boring, and predictable), it can erase the distinction between virtual and real....*<sup>lxvii</sup>

**SPEED:** *We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want.*<sup>lxviii</sup>

## EXPERIENCES

**PLAY:** Kids not only need to play more but need more time for unrestricted play (without adult supervision) and without screens – this will help to better equip them to deal with life, i.e., address anxiety and stress which will lessen the potential for depression and suicide.

**NATURE:** *The average American youth now spends seven to ten hours per day staring at screens, compared to a mere handful of minutes in any “natural” setting - the result of this indoor migration is a runaway health crisis, both for children (obesity, ADHD, stress, etc) and the places where they live. We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well-for we will not fight to save what we do not love.*<sup>lxxix</sup>

**STORY TELLING:** *We do not know what we are capable of until we hear other people’s stories.*<sup>lxxx</sup> We need to focus on experiences – studies prove it makes people happier (*To do or to have?* 2003, Gilarich, T. & Van Boven, L.). Every person has a story but all too often we dismiss people without really hearing their story. If we approached every person from the perspective that they have a story we would be more inclined to accept them.

## LEARNING

**ANTI-FRAGILITY:** *Most psychologists believe that the ability to blend uncertainties, and our emotions, so that we are flexible and multi-faceted is key to our well-being....*<sup>lxxxi</sup> There is seemingly a growing fragility among our populations, particularly our children and young people, that everyone has become sensitive, whilst ironically on the flipside we have become desensitised. There is a need for us to encourage and support children and young people’s developing their anti-fragility.

**COMPETENCES:** *Success is no longer just about learning facts, it’s about more human skills like empathy, self-regulation, conscientiousness, teamwork, resilience, problem-solving, innovation and critical thinking-skills that will give children a platform on which to build a successful happy life.*<sup>lxxxii</sup> We really need to move away from the idea what has been traditionally viewed as making us successful, especially in Western culture, and put more emphasis on skills that allows us to engage and interact successfully with people.

**CRITICAL THINKING:** We have to ensure young people are fit to evaluate the hordes of information that are out there, to discern what is true and what is not. We need to possess the ability to change, to know it’s ok to change and be resilient in the face of criticism that comes with it.

**FORMATIVE YEARS:** By the time we are adults and doing adult things our ability to change our behaviour is weakened. Therefore, the importance of possessing the capacity to change and be ok with it from an early age is absolutely vital. The skills we need to set up us to be able to function successfully as adults cannot be underestimated. Having positive influential adults in our lives from an early age is fundamental to our sense of being and having a sense of balance in our lives.

## ATTITUDE

**CONTENTMENT:** *once a certain level of prosperity had been achieved, additional income furnished no further joy.... more than 10, 000 academic papers have been written on the subject....*<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

**HAPPINESS:** The determinants of happiness are not what we have been led to believe, i.e., the cars, the holidays, the homes, etc. *Using data from the World Values Survey, which has been carried out since 1981, he [Layard] singles out seven main determinants of happiness. These are: family relationships, financial situation, work, friends, health, personal freedom and personal values.*<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

**MUSIC, LAUGHTER & DANCE:** *We need to listen to more music, laugh more and get up and move more.*<sup>lxxxv</sup> The evidence that the benefits that all three bring to us is overwhelming. This of course has taken a major hit during covid but rather than just viewing these often as leisure pursuits, i.e., going to

concerts or gigs involving musicians and comedians for example, we need to encourage this more in settings such as formal education or even through approaches such as Social Prescribing, where GPs recommend partaking in these rather than just resorting to medication.

**YOUTH WORKER AS PRACTITIONER:** in our relationship with young people, we need to preserve our role which in terms of supporting young people in making decisions is to be balanced, to present information and let young people make choices and only intervene when individuals are at risk of harm or in danger.

**YOUTH WORKER AS POLITICIAN:** In our role outside the sector, we need to be more overtly political to bring attention to the challenges we face. I no longer believe that we can try and achieve a balance where we try to be all things to everyone and end up being non-committal so as not to 'show our colours' when important issues need our attention. I'm not talking about standing for election or joining political parties, more so it's about advocating on behalf of young people, representing their interests, taking positions and acknowledging those positions, and but being ok with them. For example, if government policies contribute to the very thing we are trying to address, then we need to name it and challenge it, albeit not in a violent or aggressive manner, but through raising awareness and highlighting the challenge we face and the position it puts us in.

**INTERDEPENDENCE:** *human success depends on cooperation. We enter trade agreements, build collective works, form treaties, establish enduring social bonds, farm together and raise kids together.*<sup>lxxvi</sup> We now live in an era where it is not really possible to live alone and independent of others even if we wanted to. We are connected in so many ways – from the mobile phone in our pocket to the food we buy which, more often than not has been imported from abroad. Many of us believe we can say and do things with impunity, even if it is just offering a comment on-line, but people say this and that, and it leaves an impression and can influence the decisions of others. It really is very difficult these days to say or do much without having some form of impact on another person.

**CONSCIENTIOUSNESS:** *This is the personality trait that helps longevity.*<sup>lxxvii</sup> According to research the more conscientious you are the better it is for your health and the longer you live. It often feels like people are less conscientious - whether it's a deliberate act of not caring or just simply not being aware of those around you enough or not really thinking through the impact of actions or words on others, there is most certainly a need to make more of an effort to consider others. Conscientiousness is something that could be taught in schools, not as a mere thought or just about how anyone interacts with others, but as a module in the curriculum.

## **POLITICAL**

**POLITICAL:** We need to challenge anti-science ideologies – the end result could be disastrous if we don't. Because we believe in the idea that people should make informed decisions based on their needs and information presented to them, 'fundamentalists' of all hue can take advantage of our impartiality, and therefore we need to be more pro-active in opposing that.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

**ADDRESS CONSUMPTION:** *if everyone alive today were to adopt the current lifestyles of North Americans, Western Europeans, Japanese and Australians, global resource consumption would rise eleven-fold. It would be as if the world population suddenly rose from 7 billion to 72 billion*<sup>lxxix</sup>

**DEMOCRACY:** we need to protect democracy – democracy whilst not perfect has proven beneficial in that disputes between nations – these are shown to decrease by half if they are fully democratic<sup>lxxx</sup>

**WEALTH GAP:** the globalized wealth gap is widening dangerously, and looks set to continue to do so due to increased automation, which puts the already low paid out of work<sup>lxxxii</sup>

**FIND THE OTHERS:** *Find the others. Restore the social connections that make us fully functioning humans, and oppose all conventions, institutions, technologies, and mindsets that keep us apart. Challenging the overt methods of separation is straightforward: reject the hate speech of racists, the zero-sum economics of oppression, and the warmongering of both tyrants and neoliberal hawks. Our*

*internalised obstacles to connection, however, are more embedded and pernicious. And they all tend to have something to do with shame.*<sup>lxxxii</sup>

**WE NEED TO BECOME KIND(ER) AGAIN:** There is a growing need for us to renew what I would describe as our 'contract' with kindness. As Charlie Chaplin describes in his final speech from *The Great Dictator* (1940), *our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness.* Whilst of course the film is fictional, the sentiments expressed in the speech are uncannily eerie and echo the thoughts of many writers in the modern era and feel somehow as relevant today as they were then, almost 100 years ago.

**SITUATIONISM:** *Although it seems obvious that there is a single "you" inside your head, research from several sub-disciplines of psychology suggests that this is an illusion. The "You" who makes a seemingly rational and self-interested decision...is not the same as "You" who makes very different calculations about, a son, a lover, or a business partner.*<sup>lxxxiii</sup> This is often referred to as situationism, i.e., responses vary from situation to situation. We need a greater appreciation and acceptance of this concept. We are guilty of thinking that we (and others) are or should be consistent and thus often end up being surprised, disappointed and angry at others when they behave in a way not in accordance with how we imagine or expect people to behave. If we accept situationism, we will of course be less inclined to be surprised and perhaps can become more understanding of the situation we find ourselves in (or others for that matter), and this will most likely influence our behaviour more positively.

### **Some thoughts**

Whilst the above refers to what I believe are issues we need to think much more about and address in a much more pro-active way, overleaf I focus on what I believe we have lost sight off, i.e., The Fundamentals. This ultimately is the main point of this paper – we spend too much time on developing tools when the evidence does not support that they are required, accessed, or used by the broad youth work community, and that we as a community of practitioners have fallen into a kind of 'trap' of continuously 're-purposing' ourselves in order to meet what we think is the needs or expectations of the community.

After 30 years of working in a wide variety of roles, in a vast array of settings – local, regional, national and international – and across a number of sectors – voluntary, community and statutory, I am of the belief that the needs of young people change very little, and that our commitment to Creativity, Imagination, Innovation and the Entrepreneurial Spirit, whilst of course brings many benefits, has steered us away from ultimately what we need to do service young people. There are some fundamentals that rarely if ever change. Overleaf I outline what I believe these to be.

## ***The Forgotten Fundamentals – The 6 R's***

As mentioned, I have been involved in Youth Work for over 30 years. I graduated with a professional qualification in Youth Work in 1995. I have managed youth organisations, youth projects and delivered a range of youth services to a wide variety of young people, across a multitude of settings and age groups. I don't say that to 'big myself up' but as a demonstration of my experience in this area and to offer some credibility to my central argument.

I have reflected on my experiences, and I have come to a clear conclusion – no matter what tool, methodology, practice or gimmick we develop, there are certain things that young people require and look for. And it's this I believe is what we need to re-focus on, and within the wider context of the challenges we face in the future.

Below is what I refer to as the *Forgotten Fundamentals*, or as I affectionately refer to, 'The 6 R's.'

**Reception:** the need to be heard, that you have a voice.....

Young people need to be heard. They have much to say but often cannot find the words to express what it is they are thinking or feeling in a particular moment. Perhaps they do not possess the ability to articulate their feelings or thoughts in ways that truly represent the message they wish or need to convey to those that most need to hear it. Irrespective of this, and more importantly is that someone is listening, that someone is picking up the message, that there is a reception for the signal emanating from them. We need to be that receiver that picks up the signal, no matter how distant or feint it is.

**Recognition:** the need to be visible, that you exist.....

It's nice to be recognised. I'm not necessarily talking about someone that you know recognises you and even addresses you by name, but rather that people see you – you are there, you are visible, you are not forgotten, and you have merit in the eyes of the person or people that see or hear you. Everyone needs to be seen - even if someone forgets your name, which of course isn't so nice but just to know that people know you are there, that you are not ignored, overlooked or forgotten, cannot be underestimated. Just having recognition opens up so many possibilities and provides a way in.

**Reassurance:** the need to know someone is with you, that someone cares.....

If you feel that no-one cares, it can be a pretty lonely place, so letting someone know you care is nothing short of reassuring – for some it can be the difference between life and death. It can simply be a 'check-in,' a phone call, a message, an e-mail. Humans are vulnerable and susceptible often to their own thoughts and if no-one is taking an interest in you, or pays you little or no regard, and doesn't take a moment to 'check-in,' then unless you are eternally confident, and able to function without fear, by yourself, then this can be a very lonely existence. Young people need supportive adults in their life, and research has shown that if a young person has even one supportive adult in their life, it can have such a positive impact. Young people are trying to 'find themselves' so to speak and to also learn how to navigate many of life's challenges in their adolescent years and therefore having the reassurance of that one solid person in their life is worth its weight in gold.

**Reputation:** the need to be 'known for something,' that you have value.....

It's not really possible to go through life without having some sort of purpose – just in the way that you might draw, sing or write, most need to have something in their lives beyond the usual suspects, i.e., education, work, family or partner. Every human wants to be known for something – it gives them a sense of purpose, a sense of identity and of sense of worth and a feeling of value, and brings with it recognition, credibility and ultimately, reputation. Everyone needs this - no more than young people - who often need to feel they have something to give, something to get up for and to live for. Especially

in this modern era where young people are under more pressure 'to perform' than they have ever been - be that in education, work or through a new additional pressure that is of course, Social Media, they need people to find that 'something' gives them purpose and helps them achieve reputation among others.

**Reflection:** the need to be able to change course, that you can think and feel differently....

Young people are well known for getting themselves stuck in the proverbial corner or taking a position that they feel they can't change or appear unwilling to change, for all sorts of reasons, even sometimes for what seems like ludicrous reasons, where no end of reasoning can persuade them otherwise. As is often the case, people feel they can't change, that they have gone too far, because to do so will appear to be contradictory, hypocritical, or inconsistent.

Young people often grow up learning that they can't (or are not supposed to) hold two differing opinions. They can't 'sit on the fence' or rather can't be 'neutral' or assume an impartial stance, that they have to choose, that it's either/or, one way or the other, this or that, and feel that they can't shift, or rather as is often the case, they can't find the words to articulate a change in position and remain aligned to a position they might not support, or end up becoming stuck, and feel they can't move, even when they might want to.

It's an imperative, and the onus is on us as adults, to let young people know it's ok to change, that you can hold two differing opinions, that things don't have to be fixed, but with our encouragement and support they can indeed reflect on the ideas, thoughts, opinions and positions they hold on a whole range of matters and can shift their focus or change their mind. We have to ensure young people know it's ok to reflect and reach a different conclusion.

**Recourse:** the need to know that there is a way back, that you can save face.....

Because young people often haven't worked out their position on a whole range of matters, they often take decisions only to discover that it was the wrong one, or that it certainly wasn't one that proved correct or brought them any kind of real benefit. For different reasons, they then feel they must stick with it, often afraid to change their mind because it might appear to be a sign of weakness.

Just as it's important that we assure young people they can change their mind through a process of reflection it's also vital that they can 'find a way back,' that when the decision they have made isn't to their benefit, that they can 'save face' and have the confidence and ability to articulate a route back. This perhaps means having the capacity for humility, or to acknowledge when they might have been in the wrong or can reconcile with those they might have been in conflict with.

Equally, and more importantly, it also means that they know that whomever they have been in conflict with can also reciprocate towards them and help them to find a way back. If a young person decides they want to change their mind and articulate as much, they need to know that their efforts will not be rejected or spurned. If they take the risk, they must know they have a way to 'save face' - they need to know we are there for them, that we can help smooth the way, and that we do not judge them, nor use their way back as a means to point out their error(s) or to gain any kind of 'one-upmanship.' Young people need to know there is a way back – they need to know there is recourse – and that it is safe recourse.

## **Final Word**

Youth Work is full of great practice, tools, methodologies and ultimately, practitioners. They are among the most passionate, caring, dedicated and inspiring people you could hope to meet. They have proven their worth - initiating and developing responses down the decades to a wide variety of challenges. There is a growing focus on creating, imagining, innovating and the entrepreneurial spirit and as necessary and welcome as it is, in my opinion it has also steered us away from our primary purpose; and in an effort to meet the demands placed upon our sector we have inadvertently, *forgotten the fundamentals*. We have lost sight of what our sector is ultimately renowned for providing, i.e., 'the experience' and have become distracted by the need to create and produce.

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- xxxvii Jean Twenge presents graphs showing that digital media used and mental health problems are correlated: they rose together in recent years
- xxxviii According to the non-profit organization Common Sense Media, teens spend on average nine hours per day on screens, and eight- to twelve-year-olds spend about six hours
- xxxix This will make you smarter, New Scientific Concepts to Improve Your Thinking, John Brockman, Transworld Publishers, 2012; Hunting for Root Cause: The Human Black Box (Eric Topol)
- xl This will make you smarter, New Scientific Concepts to Improve Your Thinking, John Brockman, Transworld Publishers, 2012
- xli [How Much Data Is Created Every Day in 2021? \[You'll be shocked!\] \(techjury.net\)](http://techjury.net)
- xlii Dweck, distinguishes between two mind sets. A fixed mind set [and a] growth mind set...Dweck agrees that those who have a fixed mind set need to constantly prove themselves and confirm to themselves and others their capability
- xliii They have missed out on many of the challenges, negative experiences, and minor risks that help children develop into strong, competent, and independent adults...' - no opportunity to develop their antifragility
- xliv A study by the University of Michigan comparing results from 1981 with 1997 found that play among kids under 13 went down 16% and much of the play had shifted to indoor activities, often involving a computer and no other children
- lv The Organised Mind, Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload, Daniel J. Levitin, Viking 2014
- lxvi More Human, Designing a World Where People Come First, Steve Hilton, W H Allen, 2015
- lxvii Out of the Wreckage, A New Politics For An Age of Crisis, George Monbiot, Verso, 2017
- lxviii Who can you trust? How Technology Brought Us Together and Why it Could Drive Us Apart, Rachel Botsman, Penguin Business, 2018
- lxix Team Human, Douglas Ruskhoff, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019
- l Age of Anger, Pankaj Mishra, Penguin, 2018
- li Team Human, Douglas Ruskhoff, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019
- lii #newpower, Why outsiders are winning, institutions are failing, and how the rest of us can keep up in the age of mass participation, Henry Timms & Jeremy Heimans, Picador , 2019
- liii The Idiot Brain, A Neuroscientist Explains What Your Head Is Really Up To, Dean Burnett, Guardian Books, 2016
- liv Out of the Wreckage, A New Politics For An Age of Crisis, George Monbiot, Verso, 2017
- lv You Are Not So Smart, Why Your Memory is Mostly Fiction, Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook and 46 Other Ways You are Deluding Yourself, David Mc Rainey, One World, 2012
- lvi Total Rethink, Why Entrepreneurs Should Act Like Revolutionaries, David Mc Court, Red Door, 2018
- lvii What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; Global Graying (David Berreby)
- lviii Post Capitalism, A Guide To Our Future, Paul Mason, Penguin Books, 2016
- lix Post Capitalism, A Guide To Our Future, Paul Mason, Penguin Books, 2016
- lx The Growth Delusion, The Wealth and Well-Being of Nations, David Pilling, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019
- lxi Post Capitalism, A Guide To Our Future, Paul Mason, Penguin Books, 2016
- lxii Post Capitalism, A Guide To Our Future, Paul Mason, Penguin Books, 2016
- lxiii The greatest worry about this shift turns on the social safety net..... That promise depends on the pyramid structure of a 20<sup>th</sup>-century society, in which working-age people outnumber the retirees....
- lxiv What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; The Underpopulation Bomb (Kevin Kelly)
- lxv What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; The Teenage Brain (Sarah-Jayne Blakemore)
- lxvi The Spirit Level, Why Equality is Better for Everyone, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Penguin Books, 2010
- lxvii What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; The Triumph of the Virtual (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi)
- lxviii Charlie Chaplin, Final Speech from the Great Dictator, 1940

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- lxix What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; The human/nature divide (Scott Sampson)
- lxx Not Knowing, The Art of Turning Uncertainty Into Opportunity, Steven D'Souza, Dianna Renner, LID Publishing Ltd, 2016
- lxxi The Stupidity Paradox, The Power and Pitfalls of Functional Stupidity at Work, Mats Alvesson & Andre Spicer, Profile Books, 2016
- lxxii More Human, Designing a World Where People Come First, Steve Hilton, W H Allen, 2015
- lxxiii The Growth Delusion, The Wealth and Well-Being of Nations, David Pilling, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019
- lxxiv 'According to the authors of the report, three-quarters of the variation between happy and less happy nations can be explained by six variables. These are income (GDP per capita), healthy years of life expectancy, having people to turn to, trust in others (roughly equated to lack of corruption), perceived freedom to make life decisions (what is sometimes called agency) and generosity (the propensity to donate to charity). Layard's work focuses less on cross-country comparisons and more on what dictates levels of happiness within countries. Using data from the World Values Survey, which has been carried out since 1981, he singles out seven main determinants of happiness. These are: family relationships, financial situation, work, friends, health, personal freedom and personal values.
- lxxv Rising Strong, Brown B., Penguin, 2015
- lxxvi Beyond Human Nature, Jesse J. Prinz, W.W.Norton Company, 2012
- lxxvii On the basis of a famous long-running longitudinal study of 1, 178 high-IQ boys and girls initiated by Lewis Terman in 1921, Howard Friedman and colleagues found that conscientiousness was the personality trait that helped longevity. Contrary to expectation, cheerfulness (optimism and sense of humour) was inversely related to longevity
- lxxviii What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; Armageddon (Timothy Taylor). *The end result could be disastrous - Boko Haram (Nigeria) maintains we inhabit a flat, 6, 000-year-old Earth and that the disk-shaped sun, which is smaller, passes over it daily. Should the defenders of science and rationality mount a more nakedly political defence of their procedures and values, as occurred with the 2017 March for Science, for example?..... The reality is that experts have no choice, given how their monopoly over the means of representation has been disintegrating over time.*
- lxxix What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; Human population, prosperity growth: One I fear, one I don't (Laurence C. Smith)
- lxxx What should we be worried about? Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night, John Brockman, Harper Perennial, 2014; The Is-Ought fallacy of science and morality (Michael Shermer) *Russett and Oneal found that when two countries are fully democratic, disputes between them decrease by 50 percent, (multiple logistic regression model on data from the Correlates of War Project that recorded 2, 300 militarized interstate disputes between 1816 and 2001) but when the less member of a country pair is a full autocracy, it doubles the change of a quarrel between them*
- lxxxi Total Rethink, Why Entrepreneurs Should Act Like Revolutionaries, David Mc Court, Red Door, 2018
- lxxxii Team Human, Douglas Ruskhoff, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019
- lxxxiii This will make you smarter, New Scientific Concepts to Improve Your Thinking, John Brockman, Transworld Publishers, 2012 – 'Subsets & The Modular Mind' (Douglas T. Kendrick)