Keynote

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Youth development in time: the pasts, presents and futures of an evolving practice

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Before starting I would like to thank Professor Henry Rozario and Dr Maria Charles, and the organising committee, for inviting me to this wonderful event; my colleague Vinnarasan Aruldoss, an alumni of Sacred Heart College, for making the connection in the first place; and Father Andrew, Nirmal, Sunita and everyone else who has taken such good care of me since my arrival in Chennai a couple of days ago.

I am really delighted to be at this event where I have learnt so much already from all of you about what 'youth development' looks like and how it is sometimes practised here in India. And I have also found reasons to be hopeful about youth development, something which, in the political climate that currently prevails across a substantial part of the Northern Hemisphere, is often quite difficult to do.

So, for the invitation, and for the gift of hope, I really thank you very much indeed.

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Before launching into my talk, it is helpful to position myself a little bit.

I am not a practitioner; I am a researcher and have been since the early 2000s. In disciplinary terms, I describe myself as a critical social psychologist although I feel most comfortable in interdisciplinary research that draws on insights from across the social sciences.

My original training taught me to focus on group and community dynamics. I was also trained in theories of knowledge, in the analysis of power dynamics between lay and expert knowledge, and in the value of understanding the knowledge and experiences of those more vulnerable. My main areas of interest, as will become clear, is on understanding the configurations and dynamics of children and young people’s participation in society.

Most recently I have been leading a comparative ethnography of the relationship between childhood and public life, which is also what bought me to India three years ago as one of our study cities is Hyderabad; my colleague Vinnarasan leads the research in Hyderabad and I, for the most part, experience India vicariously through him.

So, I’m approaching the topic of youth development from this position and with an interest in unpacking the meaning of youth development as it circulates in some policy and practice discourses and in understanding youth development from young people’s lived experience and what makes sense to them.

My talk today is focused on youth development in time.
The keynote invitation has given me an opportunity to reflect on earlier research I carried out on youth development.

What I’m offering today is not so much best practice, but a story, maybe a cautionary tale, about how easy it can be for best practice to destroy what is good enough practice from a young person’s perspective.

I’m approaching this endeavour from the assumption that the formation of selves, of who we are, because that is at the core of youth development, is an emergent and dynamic process (Fine and Sirin, 2007) that is embedded in biographical and historical times and cultural and political places.

To illustrate this assumption, I am going to start biographically and remember the life and work of a man who I am sure many of you will know and who has inspired much critical action and thinking around young people’s lives.

**Pasts**

The life and work of Paolo Freire, an educator first and foremost who mixed scholarly analysis with political action, serves as a beautiful example illustrating the inter-connections between biographical and historical time and the mixing of culture and politics in place.

Freire’s well-known and much travelled methodology for personal and social transformation – ‘conscientisation’, as well as being intellectually indebted to a particular reading of Marxism and psychoanalysis, had as much to do with Freire’s own experiences as a young man, as it did with the political configurations of his times.

In *The Pedagogy of Hope* Freire (1994) reflects on the events, encounters and conversations that lead him to formulate the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Amongst other things, Freire reflects on his own psychological and mental health and the bouts of depression that he would periodically suffer as a young man. He shares with the reader the process he went through (‘the archaeology of [his] pain’) in order to pin-point the origin of his depression. “The unmasking of the ‘why’ of my experience of suffering was all that was needed to overcome it” (Freire, 1994:22-23), Freire confides to the reader.

Freire talks of this unmasking as a ‘revelation’; this revelation, together with his experiences as an educator and researcher, is the seed of what will later become the methodology of ‘conscientization’: “the gradual awakening to the full determinants of one’s psychological and social circumstances” (Jovchelovitch, 2007:153).

His educational and political project, ‘a life-time of commitment’ (Andrews, 1991) to social justice in Brazil and around the world, was shaped, it could be argued, by his repeated experiences of encountering poverty in his country, as a young man and well into his adulthood, and the impact that world economic events had on him, and his family, growing up. Freire was born in the city of Recife, in the northeastern most tip of Brazil that juts into the Atlantic Ocean, to middle class parents in what was, and remains, Brazil’s poorest area (Gerhardt, 2000). The Great Depression years (1928-1932) coincided with Freire’s primary school years (7-11), and resulted in him missing two years of school when his family moved from Recife to a more affordable town. In the *Pedagogy of Hope* Freire recounts his
transition from being a lawyer to becoming an ‘educator’: a move motivated by a commitment to social justice.

The biographical note compiled by Heinz-Peter Gerhardt for UNESCO (2000) also documents the influences of Catholicism and leftist politics on his thinking, the experiences of educational experimentation writ-large to address illiteracy in Brazil (he was in charge of the implementation of a national literacy programme which he created), and his subsequent encounters while in exile from Brazil, with the politics of the emerging field of international development in Latin America during the Cold War.

Reflecting on Freire’s own processes of ‘youth development’ now, the emergence of Freire the educator, Freire the policy maker, and Freire the activist, we find many of the themes that pre-occupy youth development programmes today: character, contribution, education, skills, strength, spirituality, resilience, hope and belief in the future. There are also a number of themes in Freire’s biography that are conspicuously absent in the way we talk about youth development today in the mainstream. Most notably issues of class, gender, race, politics and state repression.

In reflecting on Freire’s life experiences, as reported by him and his biographers, and thinking about youth development programming today we can start to think about the ways in which history and biography, the public and the private, politics and culture, are all implicated and fold into the emergence of present and future selves.

Freire’s biography, as much as his life’s work, also provide us with a critical orientation and questioning stance for playing a role in others’ youth development. In the Pedagogy of Hope Freire reflects that he has “always been more interested in understanding process in and by which things come about than in the product in itself” (1994, p. 10). Reflecting on youth development processes across time is what I turn to next.

**Presents**

I would now like to turn to the present and think about how we talk about youth development programming.

By programming I mean the intentional intervention into young people’s lives to shape their present and future selves. I have a very specific version of youth development in mind in what follows and what I have learnt over the last day, especially from the practice examples we heard during the morning panel yesterday, is that the meaning of youth development is more plural than some of the models I have been analysing. And that’s really helpful to bear in mind, and hopeful.

*Youth.gov*, for example, an American inter-federal agency website that pools resources for effective youth programmes, describes youth development mathematically as ‘positive experiences + positive relationships + positive environments = positive youth development’. The UK Government’s *Positive For Youth* cross-government approach for young people aged 13 to 19, elaborates on the mathematical formula and describes youth development as ‘a strong sense of belonging, and the supportive relationships, strong ambitions, and good opportunities [young people] need to realise their potential’.

The model of youth development that I have mostly focused on often goes by the name of
Positive Youth Development (PYD) and has its roots in the US policy, practice and research traditions of youth intervention that focus especially on providing young people with structured activities.

PYD is described as an ecological, strengths-based approach to understanding and working with young people which challenges the view of ‘broken’ young people in need of psychosocial repair (Larson, 2000; Lerner et al. 2005). Youth development programming emphasizes young people’s physical and psychological safety; the provision of appropriate structures, supporting relationships and positive role models; opportunities to develop self-efficacy, to build skills, to form positive associations and to make societal contributions (Eccles and Gootman, 2002, p.19).

Youth development programmes tend to be instrumental in their focus and are often ‘deployed’ in addressing a range of youth problems including low educational attainment, substance misuse, ‘delinquent’ and ‘promiscuous’ behaviour, ill-health, and civic orientation. Furthermore, youth development purports to draw on the latest, by-and-large, psychological research on adolescent development in order to shape its meanings and practices.

This is the model of youth development that I am familiar with and which is in circulation in a US/UK contexts. Now I want to look at how youth development came about historically and where in the world the term and set of practices are most used.

Although far from exhaustive, Google’s Ngram Viewer provides a useful visual representation of the number of books published (which have been digitised, or partially so, and which are in the English language) over the last 100 years that deal with the topic of youth development. I have contrasted youth development with two other search terms, youth work and youth participation, and I will return to these later, to give an idea of how youth development, as a set of meanings and practices, sits alongside other traditions of engaging young people.

The graph provides a rough indication that scholarly and policy interest in youth development took off in the early 1990s and reached a peak around 2006 at which point interest, measured here in terms of publication on the topic, dropped and then started to level off.
A different Google search, of trending searches using their search engine, provides a vivid visual representation of what we know from the literature about the cultural specificity of positive youth development; namely that it is a set of meanings and practices that originate in the United States in response to policy challenges and developments there.

Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock (2011) in the *Journal of Youth Studies* provide a critical history of the emergence of the positive youth development movement in the United States. They argue that the promotion of a ‘youth-as-asset’ perspective is closely related to a broader neo-liberal project of further vocational education and the increased privatization and commodification of education, previously considered a public good. According to Sukarieh and Tannock new youth development philosophies contribute to the individualisation of
society and social problems by shifting analysis and support to individual young people as opposed to focusing on social issues. Finally, their critique raises questions about the role of youth development in the ‘de-secularisation’ of North American society and the academy there, and argue that the promotion of spirituality in youth development reinforced the neo-liberal project of individualisation and erosion of a welfare state. Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) conclude that “the mobilization of positive and negative images of youth is always linked to particular political projects and visions in the context of changing social and economic structures” (p. 688).

Sukarieh and Tannock’s analysis makes for insightful reading but only partially addresses one of the main challenges of youth development, and its structural critiques, as it is understood and practiced today. One of the challenges with youth development is that it positions itself as a (well-meaning) strength-based response to the long-standing deficit view of human development—that is the model that sees the person in terms of a catalogue of problems that need fixing and maintains that such problems can be fixed through appropriate intervention.

In positioning themselves against a deficit view of young people, the proponents of Positive Youth Development inadvertently set up an unhelpful, in my view, binary distinction between, in this case, deficit and surplus views of human development; an uncannily *homo economicus* perspective on personhood as a series of profits and losses, successes and failures. At the same time, purely critical analyses of these models serve to reinforce the dichotomies. Not addressed in either perspective is what constitutes success and failure, who gets to define these terms, and what understandings of personhood most resonate with young people themselves.

There is a long tradition across the social sciences that views people as agentic, relational and meaning-making life forces (Brown and Stenner, 2009; de Certeau, 1984; Ortner, 1984; Sayer, 2011). From this perspective, the economic view of personhood—whether one takes a deficit or surplus view—is limiting at best, violent at worst. Such a view ultimately fails to engage with youth development from young people’s perspectives.

What does being a young woman or a young man in Chicago, in London, in Tirrupatur, in Chennai, in Bengaluru mean for the young people themselves?

This is the questions that Paolo Freire was asking himself when he embarked on ‘the unmasking of the ‘why’ of [his] experience’ and which eventually led to his much-embraced methodologies of critical inquiry for social change. Oppression for Freire meant exclusion through poverty and illiteracy, it could equally be any other psychologically, economically and/or politically limiting experience.

With this question in mind I want to move on to share with you some research and analysis that colleagues and I, together and separately, have carried out on various aspects of youth development between 2004-2006. I am going to draw on learning from the evaluation of a national youth inclusion programme that ran in England between 2000-2006 (Humphreys, Nolas and Olmos 2004). I am also going draw on published analyses of the programme and its evaluation that I have developed since (Nolas, 2011a, 2011b; 2014a; 2014b).

The Positive Futures programme started off as a crime-reduction and drug prevention programme aimed at young people not in education, employment or training. It worked in
some of the 20% most deprived wards (small administrative areas) in the country and started off as a sports programme using sport to engage marginalised and excluded youth. As the policy environment evolved the crime-reduction and drug prevention focus give way to a more generalised focus on social inclusion, and some of the local projects that ran the programme also evolved with these policy changes. From the local projects delivering the programme some were new, some were reinventions or extension of past projects provided by local agencies, and in one case a few were longstanding commitments to the local areas. A number of these projects continue to be in existence today. Those of you in practice will recognise these organisational transformations that occur in the pursuit of funding.

The programme evolved in other ways too. Feedback from young people, collected through early evaluation, also contributed to the expansion of the initially rather gendered approach of using football as a ‘hook’ to get young men involved with the programme, expanding to include more diverse activities that would appeal to both girls and boys. My colleagues and I were involved in the intensive national evaluation of the programme between 2002 and 2004. In particular, our team was embedded within six case studies of selected areas across the country focusing specifically on young people’s views and experiences of participating in the programme.

Participatory video, followed by group discussions, was our key research method. We provided a small number of young people from each project digital video cameras and supported them in making short documentaries of their ‘areas’. We asked young people to tell us what was good about their areas and what they felt could be improved, as well as where they saw themselves in 5-10 years’ time. We also spoke to the staff who worked with the young people in the various youth development programmes in order to get an understanding of the practice context.

Young people shared many stories about their lives and local areas (cf. Humphreys, Nolas and Olmos 2004). Common concerns for young people across the 6 case study areas were: drugs, policing, racism, money and gangs. Young people also spoke about how they navigated their concerns, what they felt could be improved in their local areas, and what their aspirations were for the future. The most common response to what could be made better from the young people’s perspective had to do with local youth provision – of activities and spaces, things for young people to do and places to do these things in. On this basis, the young people we spoke to, positively evaluated the youth development programme because it provided them with something to do and somewhere to do it.

Young people also spoke about wanting to ‘give back’ to their communities and be part of making their communities better places to live in. This aspiration for more services and youth ‘offer’ reflected the until recently, at the time, lack of a national youth policy and the declining investment in youth service since the early 1980s. Young people’s narratives captured the legacy of chronic underinvestment in youth services in England and the absence of any coordinated youth policy during the Thatcher years in the 80s & 90s. It was the New Labour government from 1997 until 2010 that created the first comprehensive cross-government youth policy that focused on inclusion and provided services and opportunities for education, leisure and employment, and supporting the most vulnerable young people.

The research took place just before the emergence of the Youth Development Sector Fund, a large, national, coordinated investment in youth provision which was subsequently cut under the Coalition government (2010-2015). As well as being the first such investment of its kind
the Youth Development Sector Fund was the national programme to usher in the new language of ‘youth development’ and to draw explicitly in its documentation on the US youth development literature.

The programme also drew on a particular retrospective analysis of longitudinal cohort data (the 1970s British Cohort Study) (Feinstein, Bynner and Duckworth, 2006; cf. Mahoney, Stattin, and Lord 2004) which argued that ‘unstructured’ leisure spaces, in particular those provided in youth work settings, seemed to contribute to adult social exclusion. Despite the methodological limitations of the research and the very tight timeframe researchers were given by policy-makers to carry out their analysis and the strong note of caution researchers sounded about their secondary analysis, all of which were publically acknowledged by researchers themselves, their analysis was taken up by the then central government Strategy Unit and fed into the design of subsequent Youth Matters White Paper.

The uptake of positive youth development ideas in England marked an ongoing trend of moving away from open-access and open-ended youth provision to targeted services (cf. National Youth Agency, 2014). The new policies of youth development embody the belief that structured activities are good for youth development (cf. National Citizenship Service; DFID’s International Citizen Service) and provide a solution to a range of youth problems.

Our evaluation research, and my subsequent analyses, highlighted the changing nature and precarity of youth development infrastructures in practice, and the heart-breaking paradox of the continued devaluation of young people in English society at the same time as those young people talked about their visions to give back to their communities and to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

“The negative side is that all the rubbish [inaudiable] and stuff. Kids, teenagers getting accused of stuff they ain’t done like. Everybody gets stereotyped. If one teenager done something then everyone gonna think that all the teenagers around here do all the bad stuff” (video, Haven Youth Centre; young man describing the negative aspects of his area) (Nolas, 2014a)

“In five years’ time I will be 21 and (16.26) and would be old enough to make a change to, and I will be hopefully be able to make a change to the community […] I have to think about giving back to the community […] I have to think about the youth … I have got nephews and nieces in there I have to think about how they are going to feel…” (video, Haven Youth Centre; young man describing his aspirations for the future) (Nolas, 2014a)

In amongst the precarity and paradox, however, there was one youth club in our sample which seemed to buck the trend towards the brave new world of youth development. I call it Haven Youth Centre.

Haven Youth Centre was set up by a Christian mission 25 years ago. The Centre was located on the outskirts of a notoriously ‘rough’ estate in the area, and tried, as much as was feasible, to maintain its organizational independence by only partially receiving funds from the local government and by taking on the delivery of programmes (like the national youth development programme we were evaluating) if it suited the Centre’s vision and trajectory. At the time of the research the Centre continued to double as a place of worship on Sundays,
although its religious roots were only noticeable in the messages emerging out of young people’s artwork displayed on the walls.

The centre provided a community space open to young people of all ages, with a large hall upstairs for events, sports, presentations, and theatre. Trips were also organised by Centre staff to take young people to the countryside. Haven Youth Centre played a central role in the lives of the young people who ‘hung out’ there.

In my analyses (Nolas, 2014a), the case of Haven Youth Centre provided an opportunity to raise two questions not addressed in the youth development literature. Namely, why, from young people’s perspectives, might anyone want to engage in a ‘youth development’ space, and to think about the relationship between old and new practices for supporting young people in the emergence of their present and future selves. What was really rather striking, spending some time at the club and hearing the young people in the study talk about it, was the ways in which they referred to the club using the metaphors of home and family.

The Centre provided them with a safe place to ‘socialise’ with one another, away from oppressive community experiences – such as regularly being pulled up by the police for being young, wearing hoodies, and in the case of these two young men, also for being black.

Young man 1: It’s a good place where I get together with my boys, social innit?
And socialize.

Young man 2: It’s better than being on the road so the police can accuse you of stuff, innit? It’s better to be in a youth club.

Young man 1: We’ve got Haven though . . .

Young man 2: Yeah, Haven, home of the (trails off)...You get me? That’s the home. Only place looking out for man, Haven. But otherwise that’s it really. (video, Haven Youth Centre; two young men being interviewed by another young person) (Nolas, 2014a)

Also striking were the intergenerational relationships that had been created through the club.

Some of the young people who participated in the evaluation reported having parents or siblings who had attended the club before them, and a couple of the youth workers who were working at the club at the time of the study had attended the club in their younger years.

Haven Centre that’s a main one where everyone goes to especially on Thursday night to link up, that’s been going on for years, I’m 18 now, and that’s been going on since I was born, before I was even born, since my mum was born and she’s even getting a bit old right now, it’s really good, a mix of all cultures, despite their ages they are all big men like 30 old some used to go to Have Youth Centre themselves as kids, but they all relate to the kids, we’re all on a level, there’s obviously a boundary of ages but we’re all talk on a level where we can understand each other, so it’s nice, you haven’t got this overpowering feeling, everyone is uniting as a family basically. (video, Haven Youth Centre; a young person being interviewed by a friend about the youth centre) (Nolas, 2014a).
As I have argued elsewhere (Nolas, 2014a) young people’s descriptions of the centre and what they got out of it contrasted starkly with the way they described their areas. Instead of a language of social division and conflict, the emphasis when speaking about Haven Youth Centre was on safety and protection. The space provided by the centre allowed them to engage in those more subaltern activities that researchers identify as typical adolescent occupations: ‘talking to friends’, ‘hanging about’, or ‘being alone to think’ (Hendry et al. 1993).

These spaces were not unstructured per-se, as much as they were informal and developed their own temporal and normative rhythms over time and through being responsive to young people’s needs and interest:

Youth worker: We don’t have any written rules but the assumption [...] the assumption here would be you don’t smoke and you don’t bring any drugs into the place and mmm, [pause], you don’t steal anything, you don’t damage property, you won’t, you know, trouble other people. It’s just basic getting on with people . . .
(interview, Haven Youth Centre) (Nolas, 2014a)

Listening to young people’s views and experiences of what critics have called ‘unstructured’ leisure time, with all the negative connotations that are encoded in that, paints a very different picture of youth development and why a young person might engage with it. Such spaces offer young people the opportunity for identity development and the crafting of narratives of self as old identities are shed and new ones were adopted through conversations and encounters with peers and adults. Far from being damaging, the informality and voluntary nature of such youth spaces, and of youth work in particular, has a lot to offer young people’s ‘identity work’ (Hall, Coffey, and Williamson, 1999).

Researchers have argued for the role played by youth work in fostering personal change, a prerequisite for positional change, and have looked at the role played by urban spaces, such as the Haven Youth Centre, in providing ‘sanctuary’ and ‘hope’ in the inner city (Williamson n.d., 2011; Merton, Payne, and Smith 2004; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994). I argue that the youth centre, as a place of congregation and commensality for the generations, provided young people, workers and the community alike, with biographical continuity (Nolas, 2014a).

Future(s)

So, what do we learn from listening to young people about youth development and what could that mean for the provision of youth development that resonated with young people?

What we learn from listening to what matters to young people is that young people’s ‘doing something’ is a far cry from the meaning of ‘activity’ encoded in youth development programmes. Yes, young people may play football or pool at times, and indeed they told us as much about their time at the youth centre, but when it came to describing what they value most about the youth centre it was the subaltern: ‘chilling out’, ‘hanging out’, ‘catching a joke’:

‘chill, catch a joke, play pool, socialise, play a bit of football, table tennis, snooker,
that’s it really’ (two young men interviewed by another young person video, Haven Youth Centre, March 2005) (Nolas, 2014a)

Young people themselves were far less preoccupied with the activities on offer at the club and more interested in the opportunities offered by these activities to relate to themselves, each other, and the youth workers.

The case study also foregrounds time as this applies to place and to relationship building. The youth centre had managed to exist on the edge of a problematic housing estate for at least a generation. This physical permanence afforded it a permanence and stability for both the community and its individual members, young people and youth workers alike. In so doing, and over time, the sorts of relationships that may lead to personal and/or social change came to flourish and a common language developed between young people and youth workers. What this suggests is that creating a culture of participation, like the one I encountered at the youth centre, requires above all both time and place in order to come about (Nolas, 2014a).

Finally, listening to young people reminds us to think about the pleasure involved in congregation and commensality. Young people enjoyed ‘chilling out’, ‘hanging out’, ‘catching a joke’ not because it got them off the streets or made them better at school, but because these are pleasurable experiences and moments to share with others. What’s more being able to freely enjoy these ‘activities’ also contributed to their repeated return to the centre, and their participation in a youth space across generations.

These meanings and practices of youth development have always been at the heart of the social pedagogical model of youth work that has been prominent in the U.K. and across much of Europe (Coussée 2008), especially the more radical versions of it, a value- and relationship-based practice that relies on young people’s voluntary engagement in such relationships (Davies 2005), as well as the shaping of any ‘youth offer’ by the young people themselves. As such, what we also learn by taking a more historical and sociological approach to thinking about youth development in time and across cultures is to take notice of what’s there already.

Globalisation has a troublesome habit of uncritically imposing others’ values on local lived experiences. No doubt we respond to this imposition: we are critical, we resist where it doesn’t suit, but perhaps before we even go down those routes we ought to be asking young people about their relationships of concern and what matters to them, as well as reflecting on what local cultural models of youth development are already in circulation, and asking ourselves the question of what is gained and what is lost in the adoption of new approaches.

In the English context, the introduction of the new language of youth development has brought with it a new focus on research and on creating an evidence base for ‘what works’. The emphasis on research is to be celebrated for sure, even more so in this newly emerging ‘post-truth’ era. However, the scope of the research needs to be expanded and to become more critical and more reflexive. It was research that contributed to creating this false dichotomy between structured-unstructured activities, which fed into policy-making in England resulting in the provision of more instrumental forms of working with young people (HM Treasury 2007). The most recent results of the only qualitative systematic review of the outcomes of evaluated youth development programmes, paints a mixed picture of those outcomes and calls for a better understanding of the processes and contexts of youth development (Morton and Montgomery 2011).
To understand young people’s formations of their past, present and future selves, a more nuanced, reflexive and longitudinal analysis of young people’s experiences of their everyday lives, of their spaces of development and the pleasures derived from participation in those, as well as their choices to abscond, is timely and necessary. There is also a need for adults – researchers and practitioners alike, to find ways to genuinely put young people at the heart of knowledge and practice creation and to re-think our roles in a way that facilitates the emergence of youth spaces that are responsive to young people’s needs and desires. In so doing it may be that we do find some young people take a purely economic view of their lives, in terms of successes and/or failures, profits and losses. More likely the picture will be far messier, both coherent and contradictory, certain and ambiguous, sure and ambivalent.

**Coda**

I prepared this keynote last week in London. At the time, I had in mind that I was going to conclude my presentation by saying something along the following lines, “that we don’t entirely know what that messier picture of growing up and forging present and futures selves looks like from young people’s perspectives, or, more accurately, that we know a bit but that this knowledge is still a minority perspective”. And I was going to finish by saying “that I was curious to know what a world, in which the graph I showed you earlier was reversed, and in which youth participation played a more central role in shaping our understanding and practices of the emergence of young people’s selves, looked like”.

Arriving in Chennai two days ago to the Jallikattu youth protests, and having made an argument about listening and understanding the meaning of young people’s experiences and practices, I am going to conclude with the following.

I’m delighted that the young people sitting across the road from us since Wednesday, and on the beach in Chennai and elsewhere, have disrupted my rather banal and unimaginative concluding thoughts and offered one response to the question I posed earlier about what matters to young people in Tirupattur and Chennai. We can agree with them. We can disagree with them. What matters from our side is that we listen and we learn from them.

Thank you.
References


