Innovative psychoeducation interventions for ‘at-risk’ and socially excluded young people
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Young people in urban areas in the UK, and in London in particular, are suffering from an epidemic of poor mental health that arguably cannot be accommodated by conventional mental health services. To make the problem worse, those who may get referred to Child and Adolescent Health Services (CAMHS) often find the experience uncomfortable and difficult, or even alienating. This has led us to develop more engaging and inclusive psychoeducational interventions, through applying the participatory and co-production approach of Paolo Freire (1970), to support the co-creation of participatory internet radio (RadioActive101). We are also currently exploring how and whether an established, and arguably the most successful, treatment for schizophrenia and psychosis called Open Dialogue can be adapted to this sort of psychoeducation with at-risk young people. This work is building upon previous and ongoing work into orchestrating thinking dialogues amongst groups, and fostering emancipatory learning with marginalised and ‘at-risk’ young people, because this has potentially some interesting similarities with Open Dialogue. We came across this serendipitously on our project called RadioActive101 (Ravenscroft et al., 2018), where we found that using participatory radio to express the “voices that are usually unheard” became a form of democratic and youth-led psychosocial intervention, or, a sort of ‘accidental group therapy’ that supported the development of confidence, communication skills, motivation, self-esteem, self-efficacy and a more ‘critical consciousness’ amongst socially excluded young people. Echoing the famous words of Paulo Freire, whose co-production methods we followed:

“Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning”

This has led to a current collaboration between psychologists, music performance teachers, youth organisations and mental health services in London to explore how youth-led radio can be a form of authentic psychoeducation and early mental health intervention, where the crises, and perhaps psychosis, are not so much in the individual but all around them: poverty, excessive drug use, violence, knife-crime, gun-crime, austerity, school exclusion, political uncertainty, etc. etc. A pilot study adopting this approach has led to two radio shows have been co-created by young people associated with Child and Adolescent Health Services (CAMHS) in East London. A follow up study is being performed.

This presentation will discuss these projects and their resulting radio shows, and use this to stimulate discussion about “What is Therapy” and “What can be Therapy?” for young people who experience, often, as part of their everyday experience – ongoing stress, anxiety and a sort of localised ‘societal psychosis’.

References